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# Belief in a Secular Age: Charles Taylor, John Henry Newman, and the New Evangelization

David C. Paternostro

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**Belief in a Secular Age:  
Charles Taylor, John Henry Newman, and the New Evangelization**

A thesis by

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Presented to the Faculty of the

Jesuit School of Theology

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24 April 2018

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*Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*

## Abstract

We are currently living in what has been dubbed “a secular age.” Religious affiliation has gone down, leading to a phenomenon in the West known as “the rise of the Nones.” At the same time, from the time of the Gospels, the Church understands herself to be charged by Jesus Christ with the obligation to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19). Recent popes have likewise affirmed that we are obliged to go out and propose faith in Jesus to the world. Beginning with John Paul II, a “new evangelization” has been proposed, where the Church evangelizes and makes disciples in places where Christian belief once was common, but has now waned. This work seeks first of all to advance the project of the New Evangelization.

Evangelization cannot happen in a vacuum, however, and we must be mindful of what people find credible. Just as Jesus did not berate Thomas for his doubt, but rather gave Thomas what he needed for belief, so too the Church cannot merely berate the modern world for unbelief, but give it what it needs for belief. Thus, it is necessary that we first ask what people need to believe in general. In the first chapter, drawing heavily from Charles Taylor’s work *A Secular Age*, we will get a feel for the conditions of belief in the contemporary world, and then flesh out our notions by drawing upon various sociological and historical studies of current unbelief, especially Cristal Manning’s book *Losing our Religion*.

In the second chapter, we once again begin with Taylor, focusing on the excarnate trend in knowing, where starting in the Enlightenment our senses, feelings, and experiences were obstacles to knowing. We will then contrast this with the approach of 19<sup>th</sup> century British thinker John Henry Newman, whose work *Grammar of Assent* sought

to push back against these excarnating trends, especially in the concept of the Illative Sense that he developed in the book.

Finally, we will explore how Newman's Personalism—his grasp of the dignity of the whole person—can be seen in how he proposes Christianity for belief to others. Newman prioritizes reality over ideas, and so will stress Biblical images, saints, sacraments, liturgy, and history—all as a way of gaining an image of the person of Jesus. From these images and experiences had by the whole person, we may propose Christianity in a credible manner, and the Church may continue to be faithful to her mandate from Jesus to introduce Him to all peoples.

## Introduction

By nearly any standard, atheism and non-belief are on the rise.<sup>1</sup> Sociologist of Religion Jerome Baggett has noted that, with a proliferation of atheism, there is likewise a proliferation of atheist organizations.<sup>2</sup> Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has written an entire book, aptly titled *A Secular Age*, seeking to answer the question, “why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”<sup>3</sup> Books of all sorts have sprung up on the question of non-belief. Most famous among these would have to be those written by the “Four Horsemen” of the New Atheism: Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett.

With religious non-affiliation of all stripes having gone on long enough that there are now multiple generations, books on unaffiliated parents are now coming out, such as Christel Manning’s *Losing Our Religion*. Books like this are also significant because they defy the conventional wisdom that lack of religious practice or affiliation is a youthful experiment, but that once the prospect of raising a family became real, one would turn back to religion.<sup>4</sup> Some of the people Manning interviews in her study do indeed return to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Pew’s “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015, which documents a 6.7% increase from 2007 to 2014 in the number of people who were religiously unaffiliated in the United States. Accessed March 15, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jerome Baggett, *The Varieties of Irreligious Experience: How American Atheists Live (and Thrive) in a Religious Culture* (New York: NYU Press, forthcoming), 4

<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 25

<sup>4</sup> Manning discusses this phenomenon in chapter three of *Losing our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents are Raising their Children*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015), noting that “Surveys conducted in the twentieth century, prior to the recent upsurge in Nones, have consistently shown a life cycle pattern in religious affiliation: young adults disaffiliated with the religion they were raised with and later reaffiliating when they marry and have children.” (p. 54) She goes on to observe that while this held relatively true with the “baby boomer” generation, “the pattern is weaker today.” (*ibid.*)

their religious roots (or find new ones), but plenty of others do not. Baggett notes that groups like Camp Quest, which seeks to cultivate values of secular humanism in the children who attend. Groups like these arguably provide the structure and the transmission of values which were once the sole purview of religious groups. Religion no longer has the market cornered. We can no longer expect that people will come to the Church for its “pearl of great price”—the Church must go to them if it wishes to share the Good News that it has.

Seeing this reality is precisely what inspired St. John Paul II to urge a “new evangelization.” He used this phrase on a number of occasions, but perhaps most clearly in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, where he wrote that there are “countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church” and that, in these situations, “what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization.’”<sup>5</sup> John Paul II’s call has been taken up by hierarchy and laity alike, and re-emphasized by both of his successors. Pope Francis stressed the importance of the New Evangelization in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, quoting John Paul II’s words and then declaring, “What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*.”<sup>6</sup> Re-evangelizing the post-Christian West is

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<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio, On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), no. 33. Accessed March 16, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html)

<sup>6</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium, On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World*, Vatican Website, no. 15. (emphasis original) Accessed April 21, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) It is perhaps worth noting that this exhortation is the fruit of a synod



not simply something the Church does in order to have a higher membership roll. It is something it does because Christians have been commanded by Christ to “go out to the whole world and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19). As Vatican II declares, “the Pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature.”<sup>7</sup> We are obliged to go and welcome as many as we can into fellowship with Jesus.

If we are to go out and welcome others, it may be helpful first to see what they would find welcoming. This does not mean that we must change the substance of our faith, but a good host is attentive to how to make a guest feel at home. Here, Charles Taylor may be helpful, as he sketches out the sort of world people today are at home in.

Taylor’s *A Secular Age* provides a helpful alternative to a strict “history of ideas.” While such histories certainly have a value, and it is good to see how one idea emerges from another, Taylor’s approach helps us to see not just the genealogy of an idea, but how it caught on. This is partly because of what Taylor calls a “social imaginary”—ways that we imagine society, the world, and our place in each. Ways of acting and ways of thinking mutually reinforce one another, and a shift in one makes plausible a shift in the other. For instance, Taylor notes that as economic experience shifts (and an economy becomes seen as something that can be shaped), the Lockean way of conceiving Providence becomes more acceptable, so that “God’s design is one of interlocking causes, not of harmonized meanings.”<sup>8</sup> People in different eras are more disposed to

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of bishops which Francis called in order to discuss the New Evangelization, further emphasizing the importance he gives it

<sup>7</sup> Vatican II, decree *Ad Gentes, On the Missionary Nature of the Church*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), no. 2. Accessed April 5, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html). The document then cites Matthew 28:19 and the equivalent text in Mark 16:15ff to note “the duty that lies on the Church of spreading the faith and salvation of Christ.” (no. 5)

<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 177

some kinds of truths than others, or some ways of presenting the truth than others, and so if we wish to preach truth in a way that it can be received, we would do well to be attentive to such matters.

As Taylor looks at the present age, what he dubs the “age of authenticity,” he sees at the heart of the age “a wider critique of the buffered, disciplined self, concerned above all with rational impulse control.”<sup>9</sup> The age draws inspiration from the emphasis on emotive self-expression from the Romantic period—we may think of how in *Dead Poets’ Society*, Robin Williams’ character taught his students to rebel against 1950’s conformity by exposing them to the Romantic and Transcendentalist poets. There has also been “the growth of a rich vocabulary of interiority, an inner realm of thought and feeling to be explored. [...] we now conceive of ourselves as having inner depths.”<sup>10</sup> The enchantment which we formerly attributed to the cosmos we now bestow upon the psyche. This new enchantment leads to an equivalent reverence. While before there was a hushed solemnity surrounding certain times, places, or objects, now we have reverence for the psyche, and not upsetting the order of it. It must be allowed to express itself.

The age of authenticity is an age which seeks depth (perhaps to varying degrees of success). This changes the conditions of belief across the board. Not only will people not hold religious beliefs because something fails to resonate with them, but those who do believe do so because they do find an inner agreement between the belief and themselves. We may think of how people feel free to dissent from teachings of the magisterium on the basis of conscience to see an example of this at work.<sup>11</sup> Robert Bolt, a playwright who

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 476

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 539-540

<sup>11</sup> My claim at present is not that people are right or wrong in dissent on the basis of conscience, which would be beyond the scope of the present work. My claim is merely that this dissent on these grounds does

repeatedly explored issues of the individual conscience in the face of large-scale opposition, gave voice to this mindset in his classic work *A Man for All Seasons*, when Sir Thomas More declares to Norfolk “what matters to me is not whether it is true or not, but that I believe it to be true—or rather not that I *believe* it, but that *I believe* it.”<sup>12</sup>

Personal assent is the supreme law of belief.

Taylor sees going along with the emphasis on personal assent an emphasis on personal responsibility for knowledge, and a narrative of courage in accepting the results of the search for knowledge. Among the more famous advocates of this view is Kant, who characterized the spirit of Enlightenment with the slogan *sapere aude!* (Dare to know!) As Taylor observes, “growth of knowledge was essential to come to this stage, but this was inseparable from a new form of courage, which allows us to take responsibility for our own take on reality and our place in it.”<sup>13</sup> Kant proclaimed a “Copernican revolution” of knowledge. While for a Medieval like Aquinas, truth was defined by a fitting of the mind to the thing, Kant now proclaims that truth is defined by fitting the thing into the mind.<sup>14</sup> The mind works to assimilate reality into its pre-set categories. Knowledge is now a much more active process than previously envisioned. As a result, the person must be active, not passive, in coming to know. Kant envisioned

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in fact occur, that little to no guilt is felt in the dissent (many would claim that if anything should change, it is the institution being dissented against), and that this phenomenon is indicative of present conditions for religious belief in the West.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Bolt, *A Man for all Seasons: A Play in Two Acts* (London: Samuel French, 1960), 49 (emphasis original). It should be noted that this is not a quote from the historical Thomas More, but does reflect the views of Bolt

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 575

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas’s views on truth may be found in *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate: Questions 1-9*, tr. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regenry Company, 1952), I.i, especially in his *Respondeo*. Kant describes his “Copernican revolution” approach in the preface to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*

the virtue of courage as being necessary to this process. People may have to travel a long and lonely road in order to come to knowledge.

As Taylor observes the various facets of the Age of Authenticity, one particular feature he sees is the “spirituality of quest.”<sup>15</sup> This spirituality emerges out of “moving steadily over half a millennium towards more personal, committed forms of religious devotion and practice.”<sup>16</sup> With Vatican II, we see an admonition that “pastors of souls must [...] ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.”<sup>17</sup> I cannot simply go through the motions—I must be fully aware, I must be engaged, I must be enriched. It is worth noting that when Vatican II laid out this requirement, it also specifically noted that “something more is required than mere observation of the laws concerning valid and licit celebration.”<sup>18</sup> We can no longer simply say “the baptism was valid, Johnny is saved.” The sacrament must now bear palpable fruit. If I am going to be in a position to know fully what is going on, and really appreciate it, I need to prepare myself. Thus people in the current age are drawn to pilgrimages such as World Youth Day, “which wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves.”<sup>19</sup> These “wrenching” moments give us experiences that we can associate with religious practices, and so feel enriched. Thus Taylor notes that daily religious practice is more likely to be a result of pilgrimage than its cause—an inversion from the pattern that existed 500 years ago. The Age of Authenticity is an age of searching.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 532

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 11. Accessed March 10, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 516-517

In the searching we have seen, the figure of Cardinal Newman may be a helpful figure. If Augustine's *Confessions* was the story of a restless heart, Newman's *Apologia* was the story of a restless mind—though a mind engaged with a heart. Like Augustine, Newman wants rest, and therefore he wants certitude. His *Grammar of Assent* is a study of that. Newman was searching for certitude throughout the period he recounts in his *Apologia*. By the time of the *Grammar of Assent*, he holds that without real assent—which is at the heart of certitude—"in spite of a full apprehension and assent in the field of notions, we have no intellectual moorings, and are at the mercy of impulses, fancies, and wandering lights, whether as regards personal conduct, social and political action, or religion."<sup>20</sup> Philosopher John F. Crosby has written that Newman's real assent and apprehension "is experienced as the work of the whole human being," and sees in Newman's real assent a forerunner to the Personalism that would come to flourish starting in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. By *Personalism*, we mean a stance that recognizes each human person "as subject, not just as object [...] as someone, not just as something."<sup>21</sup> Because of the interior dimension of the person that goes along with the outer, objective dimension, there is a unique and unrepeatable element to each human person. Real assent engages the whole person, and so helps bring certitude and rootedness to the whole person.

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<sup>20</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, ed. with notes by Ian Ker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 88. (n.b. Ker provides the pagination of the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of 1889, the last published in Newman's life, in the margins. For ease of reference, we will use that pagination, rather than the actual pagination of Ker's critical edition)

<sup>21</sup> John F. Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), xx. We should note here that Personalism may also deal with higher levels of personal being (i.e., angels and God), as with W. Norris Clarke on *Person and Being* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press), 33. However, Personalism does not require a belief in angels, or even God.

Newman's desire to provide moorings and roots can speak to the current era. Baggett notes that "[attempts] to root the self within a meaningful past or future have become especially critical in light of the seeming rootlessness of modern life."<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that Newman will close off future thoughts or explorations. Newman has no such interest. But he does provide moorings and a harbor that we can be certain of as we move out to explore more and more of reality, and in this he may have common cause with people today.

Because of this common cause, Newman is an ideal figure for us to draw from as we seek to articulate the Catholic faith to contemporary individuals in the New Evangelization. More specifically, because of his Personalist tendencies, Newman's theological epistemology offers a valuable resource to articulate Christian belief in a credible manner to contemporary individuals. Especially in *A Secular Age*, Taylor identifies a number of conditions of belief that exist in the current era, and Newman can help us show how Catholicism can work in these conditions to speak in a credible way.

Our plan of proceeding will be as follows: in the first chapter, we will simply get a deeper sense of the current era. We will look at the conditions of belief in the Age of Authenticity, drawing primarily from Taylor's observations, sketching them out in light of the characteristics of the age we have presented already. To give these characteristics flesh, towards the end of the chapter we will draw upon several works, especially Manning's *Losing Our Religion*, to make sure that we truly understand those we seek to evangelize. In the second chapter, we will focus on a particular strand in Taylor's account of secularization—the tendency towards excarnation, especially in how we come to

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<sup>22</sup> Jerome Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64.

know—and then contrast this with Newman’s incarnate way of knowing. In this, we will see Newman give a fuller (and more appealing) way of knowing, and one that can give us further guidance as we seek to present Catholicism in a way that others can know and believe. In the third chapter, we will further explore Newman’s Personalist turn, and see ways in which this allows him to address the concerns of the contemporary era. Finally, in the conclusion, we will briefly sketch out ways to evangelize in light of Newman. Ultimately, our work seeks to help the Church in its work of evangelization and equip ministers of the gospel (both ordained and lay) to reach the hearts of contemporary individuals, putting them in touch with the heart of Jesus.

## Chapter One: The Heart of the Secular Age

### I. CONDITIONS OF COMTEMPORARY BELIEF

Evangelization cannot simply be a battle of ideas. Examining Newman's motto as a cardinal, *cor ad cor loquitur* ("heart speaks to heart"), Crosby notes that with this, "Newman means that he does not want to speak only out of his intellect or address people only intellectually."<sup>23</sup> Certainly, Newman was adept at intellectual discourse, but he also recognized that there was a deeper level that needed to be engaged beyond what is explicitly enunciated. If we are to apply Newman's thought to the present day, we must first gain a sense not only of the ideas which are espoused in this Age of Authenticity, but the social imaginary which makes these ideas plausible. For the moment, if heart is truly to speak to heart, in the spirit of Newman we must first simply get to know the heart with which we wish to speak.

In understanding the conditions of belief in the unbeliever, we are likewise understanding the conditions of belief within ourselves. These conditions, Taylor claims, apply to all individuals. Philosopher James K.A. Smith wrote *How (Not) to Be Secular* as "a field guide" to Taylor's "much larger tome."<sup>24</sup> Smith sees Taylor's secular age and notes that even with religious believers like himself, "we don't believe instead of doubting, we believe *while* doubting. We're all Thomas now."<sup>25</sup> To some extent, this may be regarded as dramatic flourish. But even if one comes to rest in certitude regarding

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<sup>23</sup> John F. Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 66

<sup>24</sup> James James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), viii

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4



belief, Newman also holds that certitude (unlike simple assent) is reflective. Reflecting on the various options, and thus coming to certitude, looks different in the years 2000 and 1500. Unbelief in the West is a live option, one which the assenting mind must pass through in order to come to certitude.<sup>26</sup> In a very real way, therefore, to describe the heart of the non-believer is also to describe the heart of the believer. So we turn not only to the ideas which are currently being debated, but to the hearts and minds which hold them.

People today are searching. This searching might lead to traditional religion, but not necessarily. So what would lead an individual to believe in a given religion? For that, we should ask how and why we believe today. First of all, belief is *personal*. By this, we mean that the individual sees belief as the result of his or her own agency, rather than satisfying the needs or request of a community. Taylor notes that this is partly a reaction against the “one-sided pre-eminence of reason” that is not quite describing the whole person.<sup>27</sup> Feeling and bodily goodness are absent. As a result, any rational account on the current model for why one ought to believe in or do something is likely to seem like it is missing something. With a dissatisfaction with “our current definitions of social and individual success” and accounts of fullness, a search for new definitions occurs. If the social order is seen as part of the cause of dissatisfaction, then the social order will be disregarded in this search for fullness, and so the quest becomes “a personal search, and can easily be coded in the language of authenticity: I am trying to find my path, or find

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 507

myself.”<sup>28</sup> One’s own self may be the only trustworthy guide to fullness, and so fullness and self-discovery are linked.

Partly because belief is something taken on by the individual, but partly also because of the larger spirituality of quest, a further condition of belief is that it be *open-ended*. By this, we mean that beliefs that seem to close down avenues of exploration are more likely to be rejected, while those that open up further questions are more likely to be accepted. There is a conviction that belief should not be exclusive—either of other persons or of other ideas. Definitive answers or propositions tend to run afoul of this conviction. Taylor notes that the modern spiritual life is “a quest which can’t start with a priori exclusions or inescapable starting points, which could pre-empt this experience.”<sup>29</sup> Quest itself does not demand that there be no “inescapable starting points,” but because authenticity chafes at anything which narrows personal experience, these set points are likewise balked at. The form of reasoning which leaves out so much of personal experience would likewise leave too much out from any quest.

When Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, introspection of that level was relatively uncommon in Western literature. Now, the introspective autobiography is a genre unto itself. In mental health, there is a growing trend of seeing the self not only as a thing with depth, but potentially limitless depth. Humanistic Psychologist Donald Polkinghorne holds that what stifles the self are “conceptual schemes” that “lead people to understand their selves as static and unchangeable things.”<sup>30</sup> However, “if one’s conceptual schemes

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* We should note that Taylor defines authenticity on page 299 of *A Secular Age* as “expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, ‘do their own thing.’” For our purposes, that is basically the definition we will be using here.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 508

<sup>30</sup> Donald E. Polkinghorne, “The Self and Humanistic Psychology,” in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kirk J. Schneider, James F.T. Bugental, and J. Frasier Pierson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 83. Here, Polkinghorne is following

are open enough, then they can allow the real self beneath the distorting understandings to be directly felt.”<sup>31</sup> The key in this view is for ideas to be sufficiently “open” and not to conceive of the self or reality as something static. The feel of something definitive or unchanging can be perceived as stifling or suffocating. Because we perceive depth which cannot be adequately captured by current schemes, for these to be plausible, they need to acknowledge their limitations. While what we have said has mostly applied to the inner world, it applies just as easily to more cosmic questions such as religion. Reality is not being adequately captured by the Modern conception of reason and the principles it enumerates.

Just as something tends to be believed today if the concept is open-ended, so too it is more believable if it acknowledges reality to be *multi-faceted*. These two conditions are in many ways two sides of one coin. If we acknowledge the limitations of our own conceptual schemes, then we are going to allow that multiple conceptual schemes may be valid paths to reality. The psychologist David Elkins, for instance, notes that within psychology “the humanistic movement has provided an open arena for discussions about spirituality, refusing to institutionalize any particular points of view,” and further holds that “this open attitude is one of the movement’s greatest contributions to the study of spirituality.”<sup>32</sup> Spirituality and religious searching are universal phenomena, and so many (and perhaps any) views of spirituality and religion are accepted. From an institutional point of view, we might say that the humanistic psychology movement has a multi-

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psychologist Carl Rogers, who saw therapy as a way to create a space for the patients to communicate who they truly are, and thus integrate themselves. Today, there is an entire field of “Rogerian” psychotherapy which uses Rogers’ theories.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 84

<sup>32</sup> David N. Elkins, “Beyond Religion: Toward a Humanistic Spirituality,” in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology*, 201

faceted approach to spirituality, and that its spirituality itself is multi-faceted—bringing together multiple approaches and giving them roughly equal weight.<sup>33</sup>

## II. THE IMMANENT FRAME OF BELIEF

Taylor places the conditions of belief within the constellation of a larger Immanent Frame. This framework is how we tend to experience and assess reality. Anything that is believed is believed more or less through this framework. Thus, we should turn our attention to the Immanent Frame of the age and its makeup—particularly the disenchanted world, the buffered self, and its individualism. Taylor saw the Immanent Frame as highly bound up with disenchantment, perhaps its most important facet. Taylor is clear that while a “common ‘subtraction’ story attributes everything to disenchantment,” this leaves out crucial details.<sup>34</sup> For one thing, he notes that disenchantment was not exclusively the purview of scientists, but that Christian clergy sometimes had motives for disenchantment as well—in arguments against superstition, for instance. Moreover, disenchantment is not simply a mechanization of the world around us, though that is part of it. As Smith observes, “Taylor’s account of disenchantment has a different accent, suggesting that this is primarily a shift in the *location* of meaning.”<sup>35</sup> Rather than significance being found in the thing itself, it is found in our understanding of the thing. As this shift in location happens, other shifts occur along with it.

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<sup>33</sup> The APA-sponsored Society for Humanistic Psychology (APA Division 32) describes humanistic psychology as a discipline which “aims to be faithful to the full range of human experience. Its foundations include humanism, existentialism, and phenomenology.” From the “About Us” page of the Society for Humanistic Psychology. Accessed March 18, 2018, <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-32/about/index.aspx>

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 28

The first shift, that of the order of the world, may be thought of as the shift from “cosmos” to “universe.” The cosmos “testified to divine purpose and action.”<sup>36</sup> Beyond the order of the cosmos testifying to an orderer, there was also the fact that certain events were seen as being caused by God, or at the very least by some higher spiritual being (such as some of the demons Jesus cast out in the New Testament which caused infirmities such as epilepsy). We see this in various ways. While there were once particular places that one made pilgrimage to or times that one prayed, such particulars have become less and less important. Monday is just as good a day to pray for one’s dead relatives as Tuesday, even if Tuesday is All Saint’s Day. Taylor is very careful here not to place the whole responsibility at the feet of science, though scientists do make up part of the story. Instead, much of the engine of change has been the increasingly disciplined notion of the self, the view of time as “a precious resource, not to be ‘wasted,’” and the desire to make the most of time.<sup>37</sup> We did not get smarter or more enlightened about what makes up a day or a year—we got more utilitarian.

Along with a utilitarian notion of time and place comes a utilitarian notion of existence. As Taylor notes, the pre-modern conception of the cosmos involves “a hierarchy of being,” which “points to eternity as the locus of its principle of cohesion.”<sup>38</sup> Some forms of existence are nobler than others—especially those which are more tightly organized. Rocks or sand, for instance, are merely “heaps” for Aristotle. But a tree has more parts and order, and an animal even more parts and order than that. For pre-moderns such as Aristotle, but moreso for Christians such as Augustine or Aquinas,

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 59

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

humans occupy a unique place in the visible order, as intellectual beings who are self-directing and able to contemplate unchanging truths.<sup>39</sup> Above this are celestial beings and God—multiple levels of existence in a “great chain” or “great circle” of being.<sup>40</sup> Now, being is flattened, and the order of things is expressed in “exceptionless natural laws.”<sup>41</sup> The hierarchy is gone, and all are equal—distinguished only by their use or assigned value.

With the loss of metaphysical hierarchy comes the loss of social hierarchy. Here is the second shift that Taylor sees—the shift from polis to society. The fabric of human communities in this view was divinely ordained. We see something of this in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. When Macbeth kills Duncan, there is a triple violation of nature—the kinsman kills his kin, the host murders his guest, and the subject slays his king. This grave subversion of the natural order ripples out into the rest of the world. An owl killed a falcon, and Duncan’s horses ate each other. Worst of all (but unknown to all but Macbeth and his wife), just after Macbeth murders Duncan, a steward wakes up and asks for Macbeth’s blessing, but Macbeth finds he cannot say the word “amen.” He wonders after “wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?/ I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'/ Stuck in my throat.”<sup>42</sup> The order of nature is so violated that he physically cannot even lift his voice in prayer. To kill a ruler (or, as we would say now, a leader—a shift equal to the move from cosmos to universe) in the modern era would still be grave, but the only crime beyond the murder of any other human is merely because it upsets the

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, *City of God* XIX.12-13 (describing the peace which all things are ordered to) or *Summa Theologiae* I.xlvii.1 (describing the reason for the variety of creatures)

<sup>40</sup> W. Norris Clarke describes the “Great Circle of Being” well in *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), esp. pp. 305-307

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

<sup>42</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act II, scene ii, lines 42-44

proper routine of governance. To commit regicide for Shakespeare is to do violence against the embodiment of the body politic. As with the shift from cosmos to universe, we have a general flattening of community. Rather than a mountain which points upward—perhaps all the way up to heaven—we have a great flat field. Our eyes may go to the horizon, but our vision is firmly horizontal. Only outwards, never upwards.

The first two shifts deal with the outer world. But in shifting to a world that has no particular order we fit into, and that we might even re-order based on our own desires, we likewise see an inner shift: the rise of what Taylor calls the “buffered self,” in contrast to the porous self. The porous self is embedded into the larger fabric of the cosmos, and is generally at the mercy of this fabric. The buffered self is able to take a clinical distance from anything in the universe. Something like “the power of positive thinking” makes no sense for a porous self. Forces both malignant and benevolent stand ready to impact you, whether you are in a positive frame of mind or not. Other people have power over you whether you have a good self-esteem or not. These are simply metaphysical realities. Only in the utilitarian shift, where things have the value I give them, and objects have no purpose beyond what I can use them for, can the buffered self arise.

Taylor sees the buffered self as the inner side of disenchantment because when “it comes to seem axiomatic that all thought, feeling and purpose, all the features we normally can ascribe to agents, must be in minds” then we begin “to find the idea of spirits, moral forces, causal powers with a purposive bent, close to incomprehensible.”<sup>43</sup> The concept of the buffered self has given rise to a variety of terms and expectations. If we are convinced that there is no origin for our success or failure beyond our own

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<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 539

thoughts and inner status, we are going to be much more attentive to this status. Thus we have what Taylor calls the “disciplined self”—the desire to maintain proper self-control, “particularly in the areas of sex and anger.”<sup>44</sup> Emerson in particular shows this tendency, declaring that “whoso would be a man would be a non-conformist.”<sup>45</sup> His entire essay on self-reliance is a paean to taking mastery of one’s inner world and standing apart from outside influences. True adulthood is learning to rise above all influences, and deigning to be influenced only insofar as it pleases you. We may think also of the child’s rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” In this simple phrase, we see a declaration that the only power another has over one’s own self is the power allowed by one’s own self. Children on the playground are saying a rhyme that could only be true for a buffered self.

Along with a new emphasis on self-control, the buffered self also has a new “intimacy/distance” distinction.<sup>46</sup> This stands in contrast to an era of more “promiscuous contact,” where nobles and common retainers were in constant, often unregulated, contact with one another. When St. Ignatius of Loyola was starting the Jesuits, he and the other first Jesuits decided that they would go directly to the pope and seek direction from him on how they might best serve the Church. It would be almost laughable now for a group of nine people with few accomplishments and little power to go to a capital city and expect to meet with a world leader shortly thereafter. Even the most populist of leaders is generally well-insulated from the rest of the people. We spend our time and share our

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 540

<sup>45</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edna H.L. Turpin (New York: Charles E. Merrill Co., 1907), 83

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 540



thoughts only with a select few others. We wish to control our social fabric, and in a sense construct our communities.

Groups, on this view, are constructed, not inherited. This is also important because our roles and identities within these groups are therefore constructed, not inherited. Moreover, my good (defined as I see fit) is not necessarily linked to the group's good. Aristotle would struggle to describe a good human without also describing whether this human is a good parent, a good community member (citizen or otherwise), a good butcher, baker, or candlestick maker. Having the qualities to fulfill one's roles was part of what made one good. With the buffered self, goodness has no necessary reference to a larger social order. Aristotle declared that "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either be a beast or a god."<sup>47</sup> The human was a "political animal" in the same way a fish was an aquatic animal—outside of their respective mediums (polis or water), the animal will die. For Emerson and others who laud the buffered self, flourishing outside the community is a sign of true greatness.

As Taylor notes, this new separation of self from community follows upon "the atrophy of earlier ideas of a cosmic order."<sup>48</sup> Lacking this conception of cosmic order, we have the final facet of the Immanent frame: its individualism. With the shift from a metaphysical reality to a utilitarian one, society has no intrinsic value. It is what you wish it to be, and it does to you what you wish it to do to you. There was an inherent purpose to society and an inherent purpose to human life, and the two were inseparably mixed. But without inherent purpose—*telos*, as the ancients would say—there is no inherent

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<sup>47</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), I.ii, 1253a28-29

<sup>48</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 541

mixture of personal and social. It is this lack of *inherent* mixture of personal and social that defines individualism. They do often mix, and the mixture is usually seen as beneficial, but it is not seen as necessary or inherent in the nature of anything. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre wrote *After Virtue*, where he examines contemporary ethics. In this book, he compares ideas of justice held by both Rawls (a classical liberal position) and Nozick (a libertarian position) and notes that in both cases it is “as though we had been shipwrecked on an uninhabited island with a group of other individuals, each of whom is a stranger to me and to all the others.”<sup>49</sup> While classical conceptions of justice generally would not make sense outside of a community, modern conceptions involve individuals—either one at a time, or taken as a bundle—but always individuals. As with other shifts into the modern age, Taylor identifies one of the engines moving us towards individualism to include Catholicism—in encouraging practices such as private confession, people see their responsibility for an action apart from any communal guilt or honor.

This is the framework of the current age—disenchanted, with buffered selves leading individual lives. For something to be believed, it must resonate with a person—“trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.”<sup>50</sup> It must strike a person in a total way, it must present itself as having depth (usually known by being open-ended), and it must allow for a multi-faceted reality. Taylor notes that there are dilemmas and cross-pressures for all concerned. Believers and nonbelievers alike must acknowledge that a variety of positions beyond their own are at least plausible. Believers, of course, are made

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<sup>49</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 250

<sup>50</sup> Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 81

more aware of their perilous situation by the presence of nonbelievers. Unbelief becomes a plausible option. Because of how the world and our experience of the world is now set up, we now have “the possibility of exclusive humanism as a viable social imaginary.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, it is now possible on a wide scale to imagine what fulfillment might look like without God. Historian James Turner’s book *Without God, Without Creed*, explores how nonbelief arose in the United States, and shows us that social imaginary at work. Turner notes that in the 1800s, “[something] very like a Religion of Culture flourished in the latter part of the century,” with “museums and concert-halls” serving as “temples of culture.”<sup>52</sup> This reverence was especially pronounced among Agnostics, since “[lacking] the Holy Spirit, they needed all the more the human spirit, idealized in art.”<sup>53</sup> Where holy icons might show Christians images of saints as something to strive for, great paintings now lionize human existence and show us what we may become. In both cases, beauty is meant to inspire humans to something great. This again underscores Taylor’s point that non-belief is not a subtraction (belief was an optional extra that was later sloughed off) but a shift (belief became one option for fulfillment among several).

Taylor also notes that within the Immanent Frame, nonbelievers can find themselves in moments of fullness which make them more open to theism, or perhaps even have what Taylor calls a “Peggy Lee” moment, referring to the song where she asks “Is that all there is?” There is a “hope for wholeness and the rescue of the body” that

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 26

<sup>52</sup> James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 252

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Taylor sees underlying much conflict between religion and secularity (as each offers their version of how to get these things), but there is no clear victor.<sup>54</sup>

The cross-pressures that drive these dilemmas for Taylor all revolve around questions of agency, ethics, and aesthetics—the sense that we have control over our actions, the question of why we act as we do (or should), and the question of why experiences of nature and beauty move us. Ultimately, the question is “what real fullness consists in”—or, as Aristotle would put it, it is a debate over *telos*.<sup>55</sup> Within this debate are a number of “spiritual hungers and tensions” which arise in the current era.<sup>56</sup>

Among the greatest problems that the desire for meaning is wrestling with is the problem of evil—which Taylor distinguishes from theodicy, as nonbelievers likewise struggle with this issue. There is still suffering, there is still struggle, there is still hardship. Even if we do not cause another’s suffering directly (and we very often do), we may still take pleasure in their pain. The believer must square this with the existence of God. The nonbeliever must square this with the non-existence of any place better. You either have the charge that your deity could make things better but doesn’t, or feel the malaise that the world you are living in is as good as it gets. This is the struggle with evil in the Immanent Frame.

Among the other dilemmas is “how to understand powerful desires, sometimes even to the point of frenzy: wild sexuality, berserker rage, love of battle, slaughter?”<sup>57</sup> As much as we assert that we can overcome ourselves and train in virtue, we still have impulses that eclipse reason—some of which are rather dark. Not only do we have dark

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<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 616

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 600. Smith likewise provides an excellent account in *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 104

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 657

impulses, we can feel great rushes of euphoria from acting on these impulses—as secular as our age might be, the term “forbidden fruit” has stuck around for a very good reason. Augustine struggled with the thrill he got from stealing pears as a teenager. As much as we may scoff at his confusion, the song “Folsom Prison Blues,” with its line “I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die” remains a much-listened to classic. We still must deal with our darker sides in the modern age, and so “we swap submission to the priest for submission to the therapist.”<sup>58</sup> Whichever one you go with, you must still make a choice as you face the darkness.

### III. FLESHING OUT THE FRAME

We see the world that nonbelievers inhabit, but just who are these nonbelievers? Christel Manning’s recent work *Losing our Religion*, which surveys parents who identify as “Nones” in some way and explores how they parent, and Baggett’s forthcoming *Varieties of Nonreligious Experience* may be of some help here as we strive to know these individuals. Baggett writes that “[as] with becoming an atheist, *being* an atheist also tends to be unduly simplified.”<sup>59</sup> For some, atheism is integral to their identity, for others it is not. How atheism plays into their identity also varies—e.g., whether they relate to religion in a hostile or friendly way. They (and we) have ways of imagining the world and conceiving of goodness which cannot be dismissed out of hand or with a simple formula. And while “atheist” is a particular type of nonbeliever, the same can be said of Nones in general.

Variety and choice is highly valued in our world today, and nonbelievers are no exception. Given how our view of the world has shifted from something imbued with

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 107

<sup>59</sup> Baggett, *The Varieties of Nonreligious Experience*, 12

meaning and order to something we can use as we think best, the stress on choice and agency makes sense. Manning speaks of “choice narratives”—stories told by parents raising their children which stress how they are helping the children choose for themselves what religious beliefs they ought to hold. She observes that “celebration of personal choice in religion is, of course, not limited to Nones; indeed, the majority of Americans claim to affirm personal choice.”<sup>60</sup> While Nones take a variety of paths in the particulars of exposing their children to religion (some go back to their church of origin, some go to a new place of worship, some stay away, to give but a few examples), “the decision is always framed as a way to help the child make his or her own choices.”<sup>61</sup> Manning noted absolutely no exceptions among those she interviewed in this framing. While many participants recognized that exposing their children to some religious traditions and not others (even in the name of thoroughness, none were exposed to fundamentalist Christianity, for instance), they all spoke of their hope that what they did would ultimately lead to their children being free to choose a tradition for themselves, acknowledging the tension of choice and limited options. One mother called what she was doing a certain form of “brainwashing,” even though she is passing on what she believes to be true.<sup>62</sup> In the book of Samuel, a well-meaning Uzzah was stricken dead by God for touching the Ark of the Covenant, because he was not a priest (2 Sam. 6:1-7). One gets the sense parents fear that touching their child’s autonomy, even if well-meaning, might likewise see them struck dead by the powers that be.

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<sup>60</sup> Christel Manning, *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents are Raising Their Children* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 138

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 140

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-142

While this personal emphasis on belief is regularly found throughout the West, it can be particularly present among Nones. Manning notes that “what makes Nones distinctive from churched Americans is their insistence upon *worldview choice*.”<sup>63</sup> The trend we noted above where parents did not want to interfere in the free choice of their children highlights how personal this choice is seen as. From the Old Testament to *Leave it to Beaver*, the parent who is able to give wise advice on how to live and what choices to make in life is a well-established concept within Western society (indeed, this is a concept which can likewise be found in most other societies throughout the world). To be clear, the argument here is not that unchurched parents are abdicating their responsibilities as parents—indeed, Manning documents them showing an extraordinary amount of care in how they talk to their children about religion and worldview. Whatever their motives, it is not apathy or unconcern. They see the discharge of their duties not in the *giving* of advice or the guiding of choice, but in the *withholding* of advice or guidance to their children. This is, at the very least, a testament to how strongly they see the personal dimension of belief. To believe in the Age of Authenticity is to believe in a way that is personal—which is to say that the belief must engage the whole person, and that belief very often (especially among the unchurched) is something taken on by the individual, rather than something handed on by the community.

Naturally, these beliefs take on a variety of concrete forms. Among the Nones, Manning identifies four basic worldviews: Unchurched believer, seeker, philosophical secularist, and indifferent. Unchurched believers have beliefs that line up with an organized religion (Christianity, Judaism, etc.), seekers tend to have an impersonal view

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<sup>63</sup> Manning, *Losing our Religion*, 138 (emphasis original)

of God and draw upon a variety of traditions (and their own ideas) to talk about and practice their beliefs, philosophical secularists deny any sort of higher power, while the indifferent have no self-given religious label and no particular interest or attraction to supernatural topics.<sup>64</sup>

Among nonbelievers, some are hostile towards religion, but many are not. Baggett tells the story of Margaret Daly,<sup>65</sup> who even as a child continually asked people why they believed in God and recounts that “I never found an adult who could answer it.”<sup>66</sup> When she was about to receive Catholic confirmation, she spoke with a priest about why, and he tried to convince her by saying that “if you don’t get confirmed, you can’t get married in the Church.”<sup>67</sup> Belief in God was presented to her as something that one simply does out of propriety, and the sacraments as something one gets in order to abide by the rules and get nice perks like pretty wedding venues. Margaret did not see anything terribly personal about Catholic faith, and she did not notice that there was anything personal about the faith of those she knew. It did not appear to engage them in anything but a superficial level.

For individuals such as Rick Childress, the initial difficulty was that “I never felt it.”<sup>68</sup> Various doctrines did not make sense to him, and when he tried to ask others why they believed, the responses were a range of doubt and anger. Rick did not even get as far as Margaret, who at least got answers, even if they were unsatisfying. As he puts it, “they just wouldn’t even consider what I was saying.”<sup>69</sup> If the people in Rick’s life had active

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 36, table 2.1

<sup>65</sup> All names that Baggett gives in *Varieties* are pseudonyms selected to reflect the person’s gender and ethnic background

<sup>66</sup> Baggett, *Varieties of Nonreligious Experience*, 62

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 63

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 76

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 77



faith, they were not willing to share it with him and help him to understand. Rick wanted to ask questions, but the religious people in his life would not even permit it. He was frustrated by their lack of critical thinking on religion. Rather than opening them up to questions, what Rick saw as their “blind faith” closed them off to inquiry. He recognized that it provided them with morals and rootedness, but did not feel he needed religion to have these things.

When it comes to morals, both Baggett and Manning note that the reason some individuals leave their religious traditions (and sometimes religion in general) is a discomfort with moral and political positions taken by religious groups. Baggett presents Linda Reems, who found Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to have “all the trappings of racism, homophobia, and misogyny.”<sup>70</sup> Manning looks at the Millennial generation (those who reached adulthood around the turn of the Millennium) and notes that “many of these young people [...] may reject religion because they associate it with a politics of intolerance they reject.”<sup>71</sup> The close association of religious groups and conservative moral and political positions is generally a problem for younger nonbelievers. Whether or not certain moral stances should be articulated, at the very least they have not been articulated compellingly for these people.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

<sup>71</sup> Manning, *Losing our Religion*, 52

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Petri, O.P. gives an excellent history helping account for why Catholic moral theology has had difficulty giving compelling moral reasons in his book *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body: The Thomistic Foundations of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016). In the first chapter, he details how after Aquinas, beginning with William of Ockham, an emphasis on creating manuals in moral theology to aid confessors dominated moral theology for several centuries, eschewing any sort of theoretical framework and boiling Catholic moral thought down to clear rules. While practical for a confession manual, this approach left people experiencing morality as a set of external, arbitrary rules. This experience led to dissatisfaction, especially with sexual morality, and erupted with the various battles over sexual morality in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

In some cases, people embrace nonbelief not primarily because of dissatisfaction with religion, but because of how well nonbelievers articulate their worldviews. Baggett tells the story of Doug Simon, who was often bored in church but amazed by his scientific studies. Science itself did not pose a problem for his belief in God. Doug recounts how one day he was reading the works of popular science author Carl Sagan and “was amazed at how he could write so poetically about science.”<sup>73</sup> He found Sagan’s explanation of evolution especially moving, experiencing a newfound connection with other organisms as a result. A felt, perceived connection was now present which he had not experienced before. In the Age of Authenticity, this felt connection is critical.

The autonomy and authenticity prevalent today do require certain virtues to be stressed. Kant trumpeted courage. Manning notes that contemporary Nones “deeply value integrity or ‘being genuine.’”<sup>74</sup> Be it Kant’s courage or Manning’s integrity, the addition of virtues to this stance is no small thing. Turner observes that a major factor which helped the spread of non-belief was when it became possible to put forward a “morality [that] lacked supernatural objects, and it had now become possible to explain and secure it without invoking God.”<sup>75</sup> Atheist and amoral are no longer interchangeable. When godlessness does not equate with immorality, rejecting God may be seen as a moral choice. There is now something attractive or admirable that is part of the package, and not just stark rejection. Courage remains recognized as a cardinal virtue within Christianity, and it would be hard to argue from a theistic stance that integrity (or something like it) should not be sought.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 127

<sup>75</sup> Turner, *Without God, Without Creed*, 232

Manning observes that the Nones have taken this courage and integrity to their logical conclusion, as she cites integrity as the reason why Nones “are unwilling to compromise and simply settle for a community, religious or alternative, that is a less-than-perfect match.”<sup>76</sup> They see the value of being embedded in a community, but they are going to join a community on their terms, not the community’s. The stress on authenticity fuels the spirituality of quest we have noted above. It arises from and reinforces the individualism of the age. Turner rightly sees that “[if] divine purpose does not inhere in the cosmos, then human beings must define their own brief lives amid a pointless vastness.”<sup>77</sup> Belief in God may help with this for some, or it may not. Manning cites the case of Susan, who takes elements from multiple religious traditions, noting that “Susan does not feel she should have to choose; instead, she selects elements based on what meets her subjective needs.”<sup>78</sup> While Susan is interested in (as she puts it) a religion that “has God as its center” she classifies this as something “I do want in a religious tradition” rather than something based on a conviction of monotheism. Manning further notes that Susan is not an isolated case. With the failure of moral and religious systems to provide a compelling account of flourishing, individuals have re-purposed them to help them achieve what they take flourishing to be—a trend dubbed “moral therapeutic deism.” One does not assent to religious or moral statements because they are taken to be true, but because they enable one’s own autonomy and authenticity. Disenchantment and the Immanent Frame turn autonomy and authenticity into moral imperatives. *I must* determine my own purpose, because no one else can do so for me.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 264

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

This likewise leads to one element of the modern malaise that Taylor sees, as from this great burden of determining one's very purpose "arises the distinctively modern angst."<sup>79</sup> This angst may also help account for Smith's observation that therapists have replaced priests. They not only help us account for and respond to evil in the world, they guide us on our quest to attain life's ultimate meaning—hence Elkin's attempt cited above to help his fellow psychologists develop a "humanistic spirituality."<sup>80</sup> Therapists attend to the problem of evil and suffering in the psyche in a generally immanent manner.<sup>81</sup>

Elkin showed us what belief that can be multi-faceted looks like on a group level, and with Manning, we see what it looks like on an individual level. Manning quotes one interviewee, Renee, saying that "[if] I raised them [i.e., her children] in another Christian religion it would probably be okay, too, and I've always felt that way. My sister raised her kids Jewish and that's fine, too."<sup>82</sup> Religion is seen among Nones as useful way to instill a given set of values. As the values are the ultimate goal, the delivery system may be somewhat flexible—though even here, "somewhat" must be stressed. As noted above, the individuals Manning interviewed never considered affiliating with more fundamentalist Christian denominations, presumably because these groups would make insufficient allowance for an open-ended, multi-faceted approach to belief. If these conditions are not met, the proposition will not be believed in or assented to by these groups. At the very least, we can say for now that there is an element of truth in this

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> David N. Elkins, "Beyond Religion: Toward a Humanistic Spirituality," *loc. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> There are of course psychologists who profess religious belief, although as we see in individuals like Elkins, discussion of religion or spirituality within the context of psychology and therapy is less concerned with its objective truth than it is the subjective impact it has on the person in therapy. The transcendent claims are bracketed in favor of the immanent effects.

<sup>82</sup> Manning, *Losing our Religion*, 111-112

impulse. Certainly within Catholicism there is a range of opinions which may be held that are still within the spectrum of orthodoxy—Thomist, Augustinian, and other schools abound. Moreover, there are a range of spiritualities, including Benedictine, Franciscan, and Ignatian approaches to prayer. As with the Nones, it is not a question of “anything goes,” but of a limited flexibility.

Looking at a recent play, we can get a final image of what a person in the Immanent Frame might look like. In the Broadway musical *Avenue Q*, much of the play revolves around the main character, Princeton, trying to figure out his purpose in life, musing in the opening song “what is my life going to be?” He thinks that he can make a difference “to the whole human race,” but has no idea how.<sup>83</sup> The question itself can only be asked in the Age of Authenticity. Not only does it imply a certain freedom of choice regarding the roles he will take on and how he will live them, but it is posed in the singular—*my* life. Aristotle would start by asking “what is the good life for all humans?” Princeton starts by asking about the direction of his own life. Whatever the answer, it needs to be particular to him, and be an organic part of his own life. In a word, it must be *authentic*. By the end, Princeton thinks he has found his purpose in life: to serve as a mentor to someone else. His hopes are dashed by the person rebuffing his offer as patronizing (the play suggesting that the criticism is accurate). As he laments his failure in discovering his purpose, one friend notes that “maybe you’ll never find your purpose,” with another friend getting the finale started by singing “Everyone’s a little bit unsatisfied/ Everyone goes ‘round a little empty inside.” However, it’s all ok, because

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<sup>83</sup> Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, “What do you do with a B.A. in English?,” from *Avenue Q*. Lyrics obtained from C.D. liner notes. (New York: Victor RCA, 2003)

everything—both good and bad—is only “for now.”<sup>84</sup> What is important is not that one’s quest comes to a conclusion, but that one continue seeking, accept the transient nature of things, and accept that fulfillment is unlikely at best. The portrayal of the transient and unfulfilling nature of life would not be out of place in a thinker like St. Augustine, except that Augustine saw the next life as a possible source of permanence and fulfillment, so long as you were with God.

This is the basic state of the Age of Authenticity—seeking, though not necessarily hoping to find; embracing an ethos of individuality, where spiritual practice and personal identity are strongly linked; wanting more than what life is offering without denigrating the good already present in life; troubled by the evil witnessed in all its forms, especially those that seem to come from human impulses that we cannot quite control. There are both “Closed World Structures” and “Open World Structures” within the Immanent Frame. The former shuts one out to the possibility of transcendence, while the latter may still have a sense that there is more to fullness than what is around us. But one of the problems in a Closed World Structure is that over time they begin to seem less obvious—the more time you spend in a closed world, the less closed it seems. This is key to Taylor’s account of secularity and secularization, because “Taylor has been contesting such self-congratulatory stories all along.”<sup>85</sup> The Immanent Frame is not the only possible choice. Part of the key here as we look at evangelization is to see how we know and come to certitude in our present age, and how our ideas of knowing shifted to bring us to the Immanent Frame.

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<sup>84</sup> Lopez and Marx, “For Now,” *Ibid*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 99



## Chapter 2: Incarnate Knowing

### I. TAYLOR AND EXCARNATION

When Taylor speaks of excarnation, he notes that “[modern] enlightened culture is very theory-oriented. We tend to live in our heads, trusting in our disengaged understandings.”<sup>86</sup> Without using the exact terms, Taylor notes that this privileging of theory extends to the three transcendentals of true, beautiful, and good.<sup>87</sup> To understand our experiences and the world around us, we need an impartial distance. Think for instance of the scientific paradigm. The gold standard of scientific research is an experiment which can be repeated by any individual at any time. Beauty is perhaps the worst off, as it cannot tell us anything “except about our own feelings.”<sup>88</sup> And “the only valid form of ethical self-direction is through rational maxims or understanding.”<sup>89</sup> Unlike an Aristotelian stance, where practice is essential to knowing what is moral, and Aristotle himself would not dream of trying to invent maxims to cover every scenario due to the numerous variables, the Enlightenment stance requires it. One’s moral action must be intelligible in the abstract. We have essentially applied the scientific gold standard to moral reasoning—it must be repeatable by any person, at any time. There is no room for *phronesis*.

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<sup>86</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555

<sup>87</sup> Taylor notes the eclipse of the transcendentals by theory on 555 when he says that “Modern enlightened culture is very theory-oriented. We tend to live in our heads, trusting our disengaged understandings of experience, of beauty (we can’t really accept its telling us anything, unless about our own feelings); even the ethical: we think that the only valid form of ethical self-direction is through rational maxims or understanding. We can’t accept that part of being good is opening ourselves to certain feelings.” This last notion in particular goes against the moral value that Augustine (and others following him such as Aquinas) gave to the passions in *City of God* IX.v

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*



Smith looks at the religious implications of excarnation and notes that it is a “move of disembodiment and abstraction [...] a ‘purified’ religion—purified of rituals and relics, but also of emotion and bodies.”<sup>90</sup> Smith notes first that “Kant’s ‘rational’ religion is the apotheosis” of this move.<sup>91</sup> Kant advocated “religion within the bounds of reason,” and his ethical dictates are universally applicable (famously so, in fact). Kant’s metaphysics placed an unbridgeable gulf between the mind and reality. This includes the reality of our own bodies—even our own physical existence is only known as *phenomenon*, never as *noumenon*. And Smith notes that “[with] the body goes the Body; that is, with the abandonment of material religion we see the diminishment of church as communion.”<sup>92</sup> As the Church replicates the Enlightenment’s excarnation, so too it replicates its individualism.

Kant may have been the height of excarnation, but he was certainly not the origin. While excarnation certainly had grandparents, its parent in the West in Taylor’s view was Descartes, who argued that “we need to distance ourselves from our understanding of things, in order to achieve clear and distinct knowledge.”<sup>93</sup> Descartes’s method was to isolate himself in a winter cabin, doubting everything until he could no longer doubt. Unlike later moderns, his skepticism was a means, rather than an end, but it was a crucial part of his method. He could not trust his eyes because of optical illusions, or because perspective could blur whether a thing was small or just far away. Likewise his other senses. One’s senses can always be deceived. Even beliefs and desires that one has as an

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<sup>90</sup> James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 58

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>93</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 614

adult should be questioned, since many of these thoughts and impulses were developed during childhood, a time when we are particularly open to persuasion—and therefore deception. Because of this, Descartes advocated that at least once in a person’s life, one should examine systematically each individual thought and belief. We should catalog every presupposition and put it to the test.<sup>94</sup>

We might think that an empiricist such as Locke would have an incarnate approach to knowledge, since an empiricist is immersed in the world of sense, and therefore, the world of bodies. Yet Lockean empiricism has a decidedly excarnate streak in it. First, Locke “clearly takes mathematical knowledge as the paradigm of knowledge,” in agreement with Descartes.<sup>95</sup> What Locke calls “the clearest and most certain kind of knowledge” are definitions like “white is not black” and mathematical propositions such as “three is more than two.”<sup>96</sup> The ideal remains mathematical universals, while a Medieval such as Aquinas would stress that knowledge is incomplete if there is not knowledge of both universals and particulars.

In Taylor’s narrative, Locke made two key contributions on the road to excarnation. The most important is the concept of the *tabula rasa*, the “blank slate.” Locke conceives of “the human mind as a *tabula rasa*, waiting to have its habits imprinted on it,” resulting in “a theory of human nature as malleable.”<sup>97</sup> In the same way that a blank slate or an empty page is totally receptive to whatever is put on it, so too our minds can receive anything

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* in *Descartes, Selected Philosophical Writings*, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), p. 160.

<sup>95</sup> Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. V: *Hobbes to Hume* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 109

<sup>96</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. with an introduction by Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996), IV.ii.1, p. 229

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 127

we give to them. And so “it becomes easier to lose the sense that there is a limit in principle to the malleability of people, to the advance of the higher over the lower.”<sup>98</sup> The human mind is infinitely programable, not determined by matter, by environment, by anything embodied. Matter is matter, spirit is spirit. To the extent that there is interplay between mind and spirit, it is solely uni-directional: the exertion of control of mind over body. Body in no way conditions mind—the “lower” has no influence over the “higher.”

In addition, Locke (along with others such as Adam Smith) was crucial in helping to re-cast the notion of divine providence. While older notions of providence were about “a benign *ultimate* plan for the cosmos, with Lock and Smith we see a new emphasis: providence is primarily about ordering *this* world for mutual benefit, particularly *economic* benefit.”<sup>99</sup> And so the inclinations and desires that we have do not necessarily relate to any higher purpose or power. If I have a desire for profit or civic participation or anything else, it is because nature is well-ordered (perhaps by God, but God is not terribly necessary in this conception) to its own fruition. This of course justifies Smith’s *laissez faire* capitalism, but also Locke’s contractual view of morality and government. For Locke, “God gave us our powers of reason and discipline so that we could most effectively go about the business of preserving ourselves.”<sup>100</sup> So long as we act with reason, and use discipline to clamp down on our embodied impulses, we will act with Enlightened self-interest to maintain our lives and property, and therefore we will fulfill God’s will. While there is certainly a place for altruism in Locke’s conception, it is only because it is proper to the sustenance of an economically viable society. But there is no

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 125

<sup>99</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular*, 49, emphasis original

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 167

sense that in so acting, or in reflecting on these moral impulses, we have anything like an experience of God. Just as matter and spirit are quite divorced from one another, so are this world and the next.

From Locke, of course, comes Hume—the person Taylor sees as the main rival of Kant for incarnate knowing. Hume does “have a place for feeling in ethics, the reaction of sympathy, but accords this no power to discern its good or bad uses. This a calculating reason must determine.”<sup>101</sup> Taylor is quite correct that Hume’s mistrust of emotion in ethics is a move towards excarnation. However, here is part of where Taylor does not go quite far enough in recognizing how incarnate Hume is. Hume mistrusts the emotions, but he also mistrusts a great many other things. He mistrusts anything which is not plainly evident before his own eyes—though this is likewise up for debate. Even generalizations such as “the sun will rise tomorrow” cannot be settled upon with certitude. Hume mistrusts emotion, he mistrusts reason, he mistrusts the testimony of people who say “a miracle has happened.” Everything about our embodied existence—senses, brain, emotions, living with other people—has a certain air of unreliability for Hume. Taylor is right that Hume represents an incarnate way of knowing—in fact, he is more right than he realizes.

As Taylor tells his tale, he shows how these figures, as part of the larger drive for reform that turns the Western engine, have helped us think in increasingly incarnate ways. These thinkers have all tapped into a cultural desire for greater knowledge, for social change, for integrating scientific thought into our lives, and in doing so have (perhaps inadvertently) encouraged ways of thinking about self, society, and world which

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 554

tends to disregard the bodily. This has severe ethical implications. When Pope Francis laments how we treat the world in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, he places a fair share of the blame at the feet of the “technocratic paradigm,” which he describes as a way of thinking that “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.”<sup>102</sup> As James K.A. Smith observed, this framework of domination of rationality over matter—even to the point of disdain—is very much at the heart of excarnate thinking.<sup>103</sup>

## II. NEWMAN AND THE ILLATIVE SENSE

While the full significance of the move of excarnation is only now being realized, as we have seen, the pieces have been in place for some time, and the trend itself has been around since Descartes. John Henry Newman was certainly exposed to it. Born in 1801, Newman was raised as an Anglican. He attended Oxford University, where he was studied the early Christian thinkers known as the Church Fathers, and would maintain a scholarly interest in the Fathers until his death in 1890. He became an Anglican priest in 1825, but in 1845, increasingly convinced of the Catholic Church’s historical claims, he converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism and became a Catholic priest. As a priest, he engaged in pastoral ministry, took on administrative duties, and was constantly writing both scholarly pieces and more popular works.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 106. Accessed November 28, 2017, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular*, who notes that “excarnation is a move of disembodiment and abstraction, an aversion of and flight from the particularities of embodiment.” (p. 58)

<sup>104</sup> My biographical information here chiefly comes from Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)s

The excarnation exhibited by the Enlightenment both inside and outside of the Church was a worrying trend for Newman. Theologian Brian Daley notes that by “the end of the nineteenth century [...] other voices were increasingly heard, critical of the scholastic model for being overly conceptual, even rationalistic in its understanding of how humans come to know God.”<sup>105</sup> Newman was not formed in the scholastic method common in Catholic seminaries common at the time, and so is able to provide an alternative for Catholic thought.

The great historian of philosophy Etienne Gilson sees the patristic formation of Newman, with their pastoral concern and their emphasis on the Incarnation and the lived mysteries of salvation, and sees that because of Newman “the great theological style of the Fathers has been worthily revived in the nineteenth century.”<sup>106</sup> Newman takes the style and emphasis of the Fathers and brings it to bear on the Enlightenment trends (both in and out of the Church), and so helps us to grapple with excarnation wherever it may be found. Above all, Newman’s incarnate way of knowing may be found in his *Grammar of Assent*, where we will now turn our attention.

When Newman wrote the *Grammar of Assent*, he saw a variety of camps advocating ideal ways of knowing things, but none which actually matched up with how actual humans thought. Various thinkers were taking one or another valid way that humans know (through sense-data, through careful reasoning, through considering ideas, etc.) and holding it as the only or the primary way in which one comes to know. Newman was not

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<sup>105</sup> Brian E. Daley, S.J., “Knowing God in History and in the Church: *Dei Verbum* and ‘*Nouvelle Théologie*,’ in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 336

<sup>106</sup> Etienne Gilson, “Introduction,” in John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Doubleday: New York, 1955), 18.

a professional academic, but rather a pastor. His main worry was how these trends would influence Christian belief. For Newman, “[so] far as religious belief was concerned, he was convinced that the serious intellectual threat came from hard-headed logicians.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, wading into these debates was, for Newman, a pastoral necessity. Newman himself wrote in a letter that “[an] evil time is before us. Principles are being adopted as starting points which contradict what we know to be axioms. It follows that the only controversy which is likely to do good is philosophical.”<sup>108</sup> The *Grammar of Assent* is that philosophical work. Yet as Newman biographer Ian Ker notes, it is not a metaphysical work, but also not a psychological study. “Rather, it is a philosophical analysis of that state of mind which we ordinarily call certitude or certainty and of the cognitive acts associated with it.”<sup>109</sup> Certitude was, in many ways, the project of Newman’s life, with the *Grammar* as its culmination.

Newman looks at certitude in practical terms, in the context of human life and the mind’s operations. To be able to say “yes, this is the case,” and then reflect upon that statement and affirm “I am correct in saying thus” is a natural state of mind, one which is necessary in order to live one’s life. Even the most practical decisions such as one’s politics are influenced by the ability to say “I am certain.” To be sure, Newman does not hold that only certitude is natural to the mind. Early on in the *Grammar*, Newman holds that “these three acts [i.e., doubt, inference, and assent] are all natural to the mind.”<sup>110</sup> Further, Newman clarifies what he means by calling these acts “natural” when he says

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<sup>107</sup> Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 624

<sup>108</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman XXIV*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 74

<sup>109</sup> Ker, *Newman*, 649

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

that “in exercising them, we are not violating the laws of our nature, as if they were in themselves an extravagance or weakness, but are acting according to it, according to its legitimate constitution.”<sup>111</sup> This is part of what makes Newman’s way of knowing so incarnate—he is able to accept the mind as it is, and its natural functions as something to be accepted, rather than something to be disciplined out of the thinker.

Moreover, each of the three activities— refusing to hold to something, holding to something conditionally, and holding to something unconditionally—are all equally acceptable. Newman will not say that we ought to always assent or always doubt. We should assent when we have cause to assent, and doubt when we have cause to doubt. As we will see, he does favor a basic stance of credulity over one of skepticism, but this does not mean that skepticism and doubt have no place in the life of the mind. Newman asserts that “[we] do but fulfil our nature in doubting, inferring, and assenting; and our duty is, not to abstain from the exercise of any function of our nature, but to do what is in itself right rightly.”<sup>112</sup> Each of these three acts is good *in theory*. What will make the act good *in fact* depends on the context and the way in which the act is carried out. In direct contrast to the early Modern thinkers, Newman is not searching for an Archimedean point to grasp all truth. He does not have the Kantian categories, the Cartesian *cogito*, the Lockean sense impressions, or the Humean skepticism. Newman has the human mind, with all its various functions, and the world we inhabit, with all its various contexts. The human knower is fully embodied, and the human knower is fully embedded. Newman will not proceed forward any other way.

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 25



We do not need to be perfect calculating machines in order to have any sort of knowledge. Theologian and Newman scholar Martin Moleski notes that even the “structure of the *Grammar* indicates the major misunderstanding that Newman wanted to clear up: that perfect comprehension and complete proof are required for enduring certitude.”<sup>113</sup> Newman’s concern here is quite pastoral, and thus quite human. For Newman, “[certitude] then is essential to the Christian; and if he is to persevere to the end, his certitude must include in it a principle of persistence.”<sup>114</sup> In certitude, there is freedom. If I am certain that the floor beneath me can bear my weight, I will happily run and jump all over it. If, however, I think that the floor is rotten, I will be very cautious, perhaps not even wanting to put even a little weight on it. This freedom of certitude “increases one’s freedom to act upon faith.”<sup>115</sup> The freedom to act and the freedom to move forward in faith are not things that Newman wants to restrict to the intelligentsia. Not every person has Descartes’s luxury of sitting in a cabin all winter. But Newman wants every person to be able to come to Christian faith, and act in freedom. So rather than force everyone to become a philosopher, “[one] makes the best of what one has been given in human nature, even if it is not the ‘best’ from an idealistic or a priori standpoint.”<sup>116</sup> Newman will spend no time quibbling over better ways to come to an ideal certitude—he wants to explore what actual certitude in actual people looks like, to open up the floodgates of reasonable certitude to all without requiring doctoral seminars in Kant.

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<sup>113</sup> Martin X. Moleski, S.J., *Personal Catholicism: The Theological Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2000), 17

<sup>114</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 220

<sup>115</sup> Moleski *Personal Catholicism*, 17

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 19

This move, and Newman's general stress on the goodness of human nature, help shed light on why Newman does not deal with the problem of sense perception and common misunderstandings. Verbeke observes that "Newman, like Aristotle, attaches a very positive value to what people commonly accept and believe to be true."<sup>117</sup> The senses do sometimes lead us astray, but they are reliable far more often than not. We do certainly have errors in logic and make poor decisions. But, on a practical, level most people have sufficient judgment to get through the day alive. Our emotions can lead us astray; but, all things being equal, they can be powerful indicators of when something does or does not sit right with our values—someone experiencing horror and revulsion at the sight of a racist gathering need not ask whether they are right to be horrified (though someone experiencing joy at such a sight should be self-critical).

Because of this, Newman has an incarnate way of knowing, though some of what he has said would seem to be at odds with Taylor. Admirand notes that for Taylor "any dominant reliance upon reason to the detriment and repression of the body, emotions, and passions will have severe negative consequences."<sup>118</sup> Newman has been speaking of reason, and how we are at the whims of our feelings without assent and certitude. Is this not the reliance upon reason and repression of emotion that Taylor speaks of? Not necessarily.

The key is that Newman will never say that feelings have no place in moral reasoning. If, to use Taylor's example, I feel revulsion at infanticide, Newman will applaud this. He will see such a feeling as an example of the person quickly apprehending

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<sup>117</sup> Gérard Verbeke, "Aristotelian Roots of Newman's Illative Sense," in *Newman and Gladstone: Centennial Essays* ed. James D. Bastable (Dublin: Veritas Publishers, 1978), 188

<sup>118</sup> Admirand, "Embodying an 'Age of Doubt, Solitude, and Revolt,'" 440

the evil taking place and having the appropriate physical response. Newman places the same value as Aristotle on such common perceptions. Aristotle, of course, holds that one “who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.”<sup>119</sup> In the system of Aristotle and Newman, anger (and other emotions) are never repressed by reason, but they are ordered by them. If I feel anger at seeing film of the Birmingham police turning fire hoses on civil rights activists, this is righteous. If I feel anger at watching King’s “I Have a Dream” speech,” this is evidence of a malformed conscience. In both cases, the anger depends upon what I have assented to—certain ideas of race and justice, in this case. At the heart of right feeling is assent, at the heart of assent is the Illative Sense.

As we have seen, Newman distinguishes three basic stances we can take to a statement. We can question or deny it, which is a stance of *doubt*. We can affirm it conditionally, which is a stance of *inference*. Or we can affirm it unconditionally, which is a stance of *assent*. Doubt is fairly straightforward. With inference, Newman sees three basic types: formal, informal, and natural. *Formal inference* is precise logical reasoning. The logical systems devised by Aristotle or Peter Abelard, or the scientific method, would be examples of formal inference. *Informal inference* is the less precise way in which we evaluate large amounts of evidence—especially propositions—and make our conclusions based on the probability suggested by the evidence. The person who asserts “Great Britain is an island,” even though that person has never actually walked the whole coastline, but has enough testimonies and reasons for thinking so that the conclusion is deemed probable based on the evidence has made an informal inference. *Natural*

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<sup>119</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* tr. W.D. Ross in *Aristotle: Basic Works* ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), IV.v, 1125b31-32

*inference* is so-called because “our most natural mode of reasoning is, not from propositions to propositions, but from things to things, from concrete to concrete.”<sup>120</sup> The farmer who looks around and knows quite accurately what tomorrow’s weather will be is one who engages in natural inference. He has gone from thing (sensible environment right now) to thing (weather tomorrow), even though he might not be able to show his work.

Assent comes in two forms: real and notional. *Notional assent* is when we grasp unconditionally an abstract or general statement (e.g. “all humans are mortal”). *Real assent* is when we grasp unconditionally a particular or concrete statement (e.g. “I am mortal.”) as particular or concrete. This last qualification is important, as it helps us see what Newman is getting at with real assent. Newman holds, for instance, that the exact same statement can be notional at one point in my life and real in another. If as a boy I recognize on a theoretical level that I am going to die eventually, I do have notional assent to the proposition, but until I actually grasp how I really am mortal, it is not real assent, even though the statement itself is particular. When I reflect upon something I assent to, and accept unconditionally this assent, then I am in a state of *certitude*. As Newman puts it, certitude is “the perception of a truth with the perception that it is a truth.”<sup>121</sup> To be certain is a natural state of mind, which is to say that it is something which minds tend to, something which is agreeable to human nature, and something which may be considered good. But it is not automatic. Newman notes that “great numbers of men must be considered to pass through life with neither doubt nor, on the

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<sup>120</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 330

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 197

other hand, certitude [...] but with only a simple assent.”<sup>122</sup> Any mind can come to truth and assent to it, but certitude (or doubt) will require a level of reflection that not all people engage in. Newman is attentive to the reality of the knowing subject, and so freely acknowledges that the same statement is notional assent for one person and real assent for another, or even inference for one person and assent for another. Moreover, this difference between subjects does not seem to distress Newman. The state of the knower—including the maturity level—partly impacts how we classify that which is known. Within the knower, the main variable that impacts how we know what we know, and that guides us from start to finish in the knowing process, is the Illative Sense.

The Illative Sense comes towards the end of Newman’s *Grammar*, but it is very much the key to the rest of the work. The Illative Sense is what makes this type of human reasoning possible. Newman observes that “in no class of concrete reasonings, whether in experimental science, historical research, or theology, is there any ultimate test of truth or error in our inferences besides the trustworthiness of the Illative Sense that gives them its sanction.”<sup>123</sup> When Newman is speaking of concrete reasonings, he is speaking in contrast to abstract reasoning. An abstract statement may be “all humans will die.” A statement becomes concrete once a person apprehends the truth of the statement not only in the abstract, but in particular instances. So in the sciences a medical doctor may be aware of various symptoms and diseases, but if her scientific knowledge is to be of any practical value, she is going to need to know how to tell a malignant or benign tumor not just in the abstract, but in the patient in front of her. Tom Wolfe recounts a historical incident in *The Right Stuff* where Chuck Yeager and Neil Armstrong are debating suitable

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 210-211

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 359

weather conditions for landing a test-aircraft. “Armstrong said the meteorological data, considering the wind and temperature factors, indicated the surface would be satisfactory.” However Yeager, who had far more experience than Armstrong at this point, replied to their superiors at NASA that ““I’ve been flying over these lakes for fifteen years, and I know it’s muddy.””<sup>124</sup> Just as Yeager predicted, the ground at the landing strip was muddy, damaging the landing gear of the aircraft. Armstrong was able to engage in abstract reasoning—given the weather and meteorological calculations, the ground ought to be dry enough. Yeager was able to engage in concrete reasoning, and bring both his considerable knowledge of aircraft and his long experience in the area to bear upon the question of suitable weather conditions. Just as Newman said, Yeager was ultimately unable to appeal to anything beyond his own judgment. Had Newman been in the room with Armstrong and Yeager in April 1962, he would have been unsurprised both at the disagreement and Yeager’s ultimate vindication, and he and Yeager likely would have been in agreement from the start. That particular judgment born of both experience and excellence in a field, which pilots such as Yeager called “the right stuff,” is precisely what Newman has in mind when he speaks of the Illative Sense. Even something as seemingly objective as scientific knowledge requires judgment in how it is applied, and for this one needs the Illative Sense. When Yeager tried to explain why he was right, he did not give a chain of logic to back himself up, he simply pointed to his experience of the area and his judgment. His argument was, essentially, “this is true, and you are going to have to trust me.”

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<sup>124</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Bantam, 1980), 332

Newman affirms that “[such] ratiocination [...] is found in the uneducated—nay, in all men.”<sup>125</sup> Inference and logic is universal. As noted above, inference—along with doubt and assent—are one of the three basic states of mind. It has its proper place in the life of the mind, and is good when in that proper place. Formal inference and logic can help clear up misconceptions and straighten out our thinking, and can bring us together. If I present the steps of my formal reasoning one at a time, another person can follow it and perhaps come to the same conclusion, or help me if I am mistaken. Yeager was correct, but one disadvantage was that he was unable to share his thoughts with Armstrong or their superiors at NASA. Logic “enables the intellects of many, acting and re-acting on each other, to bring their collective force to bear upon one and the same subject-matter.”<sup>126</sup> There is a universality to logic. With the scientific method, many scientists can collaborate on one project. The fruits of this speak for themselves—as they did even in Newman’s day, when the Industrial Revolution had already made its mark. Newman sees that in logic and science, their “very perfection lies in [their] incompetency to settle particulars and details.”<sup>127</sup> We need the universal view. Without the ability to go beyond the particular and tie the whole together, we would simply have a collection of facts and trivia.

Herein lies Newman’s genius, and what differentiates him from the excarnate knowers—he is able to see that the way for knowing some kinds of truth is not the way for knowing others. Logic is wonderful at being impersonal and universal. But in logic, “its chain of conclusions hangs loose at both ends; both the point at which the proof

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 260

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 285

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 284

should start, and the points at which it should arrive, are beyond its reach.”<sup>128</sup> We begin with principles, beliefs, and experiences that shape the way we are going to think. Moreover, some of our experiences are going to shape us and make us more capable of thinking in some ways than in others. Someone who has been through military training, for instance, is likely going to be able to think well in a crisis situation, and to do so rapidly. Some people—through experience, natural talent, or some combination—have an ability to simply tinker with engines or machines and make them work. Someone whose job is quiet may be more accustomed to thinking slowly and deliberately through abstract problems. How we begin our thinking, and how we apply the results of our thinking, require the judgment and experience of a person.

When speaking of the Illative Sense, Newman is clear that “it is the mind that reasons, and that controls its own reasonings, not any technical apparatus of words and propositions.”<sup>129</sup> For all the assistance in logic and formal inference that others may provide, ultimately, I am responsible for my own reasoning. As I think about principles and applications and everything in between, it is my intellect which processes everything, not a truth table or any formula of symbolic logic. Newman is going to resist wherever possible the ceding of human thought to an impersonal system, or the Archimedean points which so many Enlightenment figures sought after. The Illative Sense “supplies no common measure between mind and mind.”<sup>130</sup> This is the unique gift of logic, of formal inference. But in other areas of the mind—in informal and natural inference, in assent, and in doubt, the Illative Sense will be at work. The skill and experience one builds up

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 353

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 362



over time helps one to see how to proceed in a given line of reasoning, and gives a sense of when a thing is true or an argument sound.

Since different people have different skills and experiences, the Illative Sense will be built up differently for different people, based either on “personal gift or acquisition.”<sup>131</sup> Most people will reason badly in some fields, but well in others. Newman was amazed at “Newton’s perception of truths mathematical and physical, though proof was absent,” calling the Illative Sense he had in this area “nothing short of genius.”<sup>132</sup> But, of course, Newman also was aware that “we should betake ourselves to Newton for physical, not for theological conclusions.”<sup>133</sup> Newton may have launched a new era of physics, but his Biblical commentaries were downright bizarre. Few people may be competent in nearly every field of reasoning, but no one will be totally incompetent at thinking. Newman has committed himself to an incarnate way of knowing, and one of the consequences of this is that, in allowing space for the particular, he allows that knowledge itself will be particular—that certain things will be known only by certain people.

Given that the Illative Sense is something which is fostered and developed, and that not every person has it equally well in every subject, is there any way in which we can develop a sense? Yes. Newman’s studies of the Church Fathers was not about to lead him into Gnosticism. He is quite clear that while in some cases the Illative Sense is an inborn talent, sometimes it is developed more through cultivation. Some people have a natural ear for music, while others acquire a talent for music after many years of study. The best

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 333

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 341

way to cultivate an ear for music is to listen. To dive into music wholeheartedly, to absorb pitch and rhythm and tone until it becomes like a second—or even first—language. The best way to cultivate a mind for truth is to assent. Newman says that if we are to begin anywhere, he “would rather maintain that we ought to begin with believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, than it is our duty to doubt everything.”<sup>134</sup> As we dive into reality, we begin to separate truth from falsehood, we recognize what is flatly contradictory, and we gain a taste for truth and coherence. The more truth we learn, the more truth we are equipped to process.

By throwing ourselves into the world and accepting whatever we can, we are able to learn and know the truth. Descartes, Locke, and Hume wanted to keep the world, or at least parts of it, at arm’s length, at least until certain elements of it could be further studied. Newman wishes to embrace the whole world, not reducing it to what will fit in a rational schema. Part of accepting the embodied knower is accepting the world around the knower, and accepting that knower and known can co-exist, perhaps even fit together. The most that Kant would admit is that the world can be known by forcing it into our mental categories. It is not made to be known, but we do force it to be known. Aristotle or Aquinas, by contrast, would hold that knowledge is unlocking potency and turning it into act. Newman is going to take this path, and encourage a stance of trust towards the world as it presents itself, rather than suspicion or dominance.

Newman is so confident in this stance that he trusts completely what happens afterwards if a person adopts it. He points to numerous individuals who have become Catholic because they have continually trusted the world around them, and continually desired to

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 377

affirm and accept more truth. Catholicism in particular, and truth in general, “is reached [...] by inquires from all points of the compass, as if it mattered not where a man began, so that he had an eye and a heart for the truth.”<sup>135</sup> Newman trusts the world and affirms the world, and so too with our embodied existence, so that he is confident enough to allow a person to start from anywhere and come to the truth, so long as she really is seeking truth.

In his characterization, Newman is drawing heavily (and explicitly) from Aristotle and his sense of *phronesis*. Newman appreciates Aristotle’s observation that “[in] old times the mason’s rule which was in use at Lesbos was [...] not of wood or iron, but of lead, so as to allow of its adjustment to the uneven surface of the stones brought together for the work.”<sup>136</sup> This is how Aristotle wished to develop his own system of ethics, and in turn how Newman wishes to develop his entire way of knowing. *Phronesis* in morals is developed over time. A person becomes just in part by having just friends who model and encourage justice in a given situation, and regularly engaging in acts of justice. Eventually, regularly engaging in justice transforms into habitually engaging in justice. As the musician has developed an ear for music after long hours of practice and exposure, so too the virtuous person. Through the development of this habit, *phronesis* is able to guide the person in the best way to carry out a virtue in concrete situations—the rule is able to adjust based on the particulars, just as the mason’s rule in Lesbos could.

*Phronesis*, like the Illative sense, is judgment born of experience and excellence. Both the virtue itself and sufficient experience practicing the virtue are needed for *phronesis* to fully flourish. Yeager was able to judge the suitability of the ground for

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 377

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 355

landing an aircraft because he was a well-trained pilot who had long experience in such matters. Armstrong was certainly well-trained, but had not yet developed the needed experience. Experience, of course, comes in all sorts of ways. MacIntyre notes that “reflective agents [...] become self-aware by learning from their mistakes.”<sup>137</sup> Armstrong’s experience in mis-judging the weather and the suitability of the airstrip for making a landing was able to aid his ability as a pilot. A clear experience of falsehood can help us gain a sense of truth, just as a clear experience of poor pitch can aid the musician in hitting the right pitch. Reflecting on for why something went wrong, we are able to see concretely the difference between good and bad practices. In these moments, rational agents are able to “change, developing and strengthening some traits while losing others, so that there is a story to be told about how their desires and their reasons for desiring what they desire became whatever it is that they now finally are.”<sup>138</sup> The poor landing of a test aircraft can enable the pilot to drop bad habits—Armstrong had the opportunity to reflect on how his calculations were technically correct, but practically wrong, and adjust accordingly. MacIntyre draws out the fact that the development of *phronesis* is the project of a lifetime, and one of the key elements of a life story. As with the Illative Sense, *phronesis* gathers momentum over time, becoming more and more honed in the practitioner. While Newman would allow that in other areas of practical judgment, some people succeed and others fail, moral judgment was the one area where he held that all were capable of right perception. In considering how Newman thinks we

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<sup>137</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 74

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 314

know truth, we should consider how he sees us knowing moral truth, and therefore his views on conscience, before we develop our conclusions for this chapter.

### III. ILLATIVE SENSE AND CONSCIENCE

Conscience is the pre-eminent way of knowledge for Newman. He observed that “I am as little able to think by any mind but my own as to breathe with another’s lungs.”<sup>139</sup> Here we can see why Newman was so endeared to Aristotle’s ethics, and why he was at the same time so wary of the totally objective systems proposed by Enlightenment thinkers. Hughes looks at Newman’s other great work on conscience, his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, where Newman reminds the duke that “conscience is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor State convenience [...] nor a desire to be consistent with oneself.”<sup>140</sup> Hughes notes that Newman in this “scathing passage obviously expresses a total disdain for a great deal of what he took to be the academic fashions of the time [...] Hobbesian egoism, utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, Darwinian selection, and the rest.”<sup>141</sup> As Newman lays out his contempt for these various systems of ethics, his final complaint, that conscience is not the same as being “consistent with oneself” is worth highlighting.

Newman does not think that conscience, or abiding by one’s conscience, is the same thing as a sort of subjective authenticity. This view is something we may find, for instance, in President Obama. When he was running for the U.S. Senate, he gave an interview with Cathleen Falsani of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, where he answered the

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<sup>139</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 389

<sup>140</sup> John Henry Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, vol. II (London: Longman’s, Green, and Co., 1900), 249

<sup>141</sup> Gerald J. Hughes, “Conscience,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, ed. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 191.

question “What is sin?” with the answer “Being out of alignment with my values.”<sup>142</sup> In this, Obama likely represents how many Westerners think about morality. While Newman would certainly agree with Obama that one ought not do what one thinks is wrong or values as being immoral, conscience is more than a personal estimation of right and wrong. Dulles notes that for Newman, “conscience refers us to a sanction higher than the self and implies the existence of One to whom we are responsible, and before whom we stand guilty and ashamed when we have acted against its bidding.”<sup>143</sup> When understood rightly, conscience—and the concept of primacy of conscience—is not a self-referential system of morality, but a process that places the knowing subject in touch with creation and the Creator in order to ascertain how best to act to bring about the flourishing of the actor. Because of this, and because flourishing has an objective dimension to it, others are able to help me and comment upon my moral judgments. Throughout MacIntyre’s work, he has stressed a recovery of the importance of friendship in Aristotle’s ethics. With Newman’s understanding of conscience, we can see how friendship is critical to moral growth. One of the reasons why MacIntyre stresses friendship (and urges us to recover Aristotle’s understanding of friendship) is because “it is only through such shared deliberation that we are able to overcome the partiality and one-sidedness of our own initial judgments and to correct our prejudices.”<sup>144</sup> Friendship is not only helpful to the moral life, but essential. What holds true for conscience likewise holds true for knowledge in general. Because different people have an Illative Sense built

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<sup>142</sup> Barack Obama, “Barack Obama and the God Factor Interview,” interview with Cathleen Falsani. Originally released through the *Chicago Sun-Times* on April 5, 2004. Re-published with an introduction by Falsani for *Sojourners* online magazine on February 21, 2012. Accessed December 3, 2017, <https://sojo.net/articles/transcript-barack-obama-and-god-factor-interview>

<sup>143</sup> Avery Dulles, S.J. *John Henry Newman* (London: Continuum, 2002), 50.

<sup>144</sup> MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 52

up for different fields, a community made up of diverse knowers is vital in the search for truth. In the Cartesian or Kantian systems, a brain in a vat could know truth sufficiently, given enough time. For Aristotle, Newman, and MacIntyre, only a communion of persons working in concert can ever hope to advance in knowledge—moral or otherwise.

Within conscience, Newman distinguishes two aspects: “a judgment of the reason and a magisterial dictate.”<sup>145</sup> The former is what we may call the *judging function* of conscience, while the latter is the *commanding function*. The commanding function is the part which makes us feel within ourselves not just that “x is right” but that “I ought to do x.” It provides the imperative force of our moral judgments. Moreover, it is this experience of conscience which “impresses upon the imagination the idea of a sovereign lawgiver [...] It discloses God as a personal being.”<sup>146</sup> Even if our judging functions are off-base, the commanding function will still urge us to obey, and to do good rather than evil. While Newman does not say as much, this part of conscience, which is the part we may describe as the voice of God in each heart, is clearly based upon the concept of *synderesis*, that part of conscience which can never be corrupted.<sup>147</sup>

But what of the rest of the conscience? Admittedly, this part is less the focus of Newman’s writing. In *Grammar of Assent*, he mainly wants to show that conscience can provide us with a personal knowledge of God. However, based on what we have said about the Illative Sense and *phronesis*, we can supplement what Newman himself has

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<sup>145</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 105-106

<sup>146</sup> Dulles, *Newman*, 50

<sup>147</sup> Aquinas, for instance, discusses *synderesis* in *Summa Theologiae* I.lxxix.12, holding it to be the natural habit that “is said to incite to good, and murmur at evil, inasmuch as through first principles we proceed to discover, and judge of what we have discovered.” In the following article (I.lxxix.13), he discusses conscience, which he sees as an act arising (to varying degrees of success) from the habit of *synderesis*. As he describes the concrete acts of conscience—“to witness, to bind, or incite, and also to accuse, torment, or rebuke”—he does so in terms that Newman would find quite familiar.

said. First, Newman is convinced that “Conscience [...] considered as our guide, is fully furnished for its office.”<sup>148</sup> The structure of conscience is such that “if obeyed, it becomes clearer and clearer in its injunctions, and wider in their range, and corrects and completes the accidental feebleness of its initial teachings.”<sup>149</sup> Newman holds, as MacIntyre will 136 years later, that the development of conscience is a journey. It is not a moment captured in a single photograph, but a long and sometimes arduous epic. What Newman is saying here is not that if we always follow our consciences we will always be doing what is objectively moral, but that if we do so, our consciences will eventually become reliable. As with the Illative Sense or the musician’s ear, conscience is developed through use, practice, and correction.

So why is the judging function of conscience able to be developed by all individuals, while the Illative Sense in various other fields is not? This is because conscience “is nearer to me than any other means of knowledge.”<sup>150</sup> Conscience touches more directly and more fully on one’s life and existence than any other form of knowledge. Newman here shares Aristotle’s presumption that “the good has rightly been declared as that which all things aim.”<sup>151</sup> It is natural—and thus good—for humans to deliberate about their flourishing, and to generally attempt to make choices which enable that flourishing. Newman is not only affirming purpose to bodily existence, but reliability in attaining that purpose. Our thoughts, our feelings, our inclinations—all of these things Newman will take as potentially pointing us in the right direction. Not every human must deliberate about questions of physics or music—but every human must deliberate about

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<sup>148</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 390

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 389

<sup>151</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.i, 1094a3



morality. Every husband who has asked “will I be faithful to my wife?” and every vendor who has asked “will I be fair in my transactions?” has wrestled with substantial moral questions.

Just because we all engage in moral thinking, of course, does not mean that we do so with the proper beliefs. Hughes notes that in writing to the Duke of Norfolk, “conscience [...] is not, in Newman’s view, widely fostered by academics. But he does not believe the correct view is widely spread among the people, either.”<sup>152</sup> Given Taylor’s observations about how academic and popular discourse are influenced by each other throughout history, this should not be surprising. Indeed, we have seen that this is why Newman decided to write a work of philosophy. Helping foster the correct view of conscience among the people is no small task, and we can perhaps sketch out a few trajectories as we draw our conclusions.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Newman’s thought was a remarkably fresh breath of air in his time. His attentiveness to history, to the Church Fathers, and to Classical thought allowed him to take a critical eye towards the intellectual trends prevalent both in and out of the Church. It is perhaps on account of this freshness that while most of the scholastic arguments against major Enlightenment figures have faded more or less into obscurity, Newman’s legacy remains strong. What Newman gives us is a reversal of the trend codified by Descartes of removing oneself from the world to discover truth. He does not necessarily spend great amounts of time arguing directly against early Modern thinkers, but instead presents an alternative vision. He acknowledges the legitimacy of their questions—how

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<sup>152</sup> Hughes, “Conscience,” 192

do we know and come to certitude, how can we decide what we ought to do—but provides an alternate solution. Newman’s solution is plausible, as he cites specific figures and examples. His knowledge of history is helpful without ever being overwhelming. Newman does not simply argue “Locke is wrong, the Church is right, and here’s why.” His argument is much subtler. Newman’s argument in *Grammar of Assent* is, effectively, “Locke has a point, but I can address his concern better than he did.” Yet while Newman places great value on empirical data, he is able to go much farther than the Empiricists in what truths we are able to draw from our senses.

Because Newman places such a high value on the experiences and judgment at the particular level, he offers a way of knowing that any person can live up to and live out. His way of knowing is one where we acknowledge and affirm nature as it presents itself to us. We affirm the use of our senses, of our general habits of reason, of our inclinations (particularly our inclinations towards flourishing). We affirm our experiences of the world as basically revelatory of the world, though we must engage in some reflection before we realize what exactly has been revealed. Because of the nature of truth, this stance of affirmation and assent will more quickly lead us to the knowledge and certitude that the Enlightenment thinkers were trying to attain with their methods of doubt, skepticism, and objective distance. And because Newman’s method involves being present in the world, it is a method which any person can carry out. Not all people can remain in a winter cabin to meticulously go through all their beliefs, or cultivate skepticism to all things. But anyone can experience the world and think about those experiences. Newman wishes to trust nature and the world we live in. As that trust is

engendered in people more and more, perhaps our need to use technology to dominate the world in fear, a need which Francis decries forcefully in *Laudato si*, will lessen.

Moreover, this trust in nature and the processes of nature can help us form consciences. The moral implications of incarnation were certainly concerning to Taylor. Newman clearly wants to make sure that all individuals are able to come to moral knowledge. Just as Taylor wishes to affirm “that part of being good is opening ourselves to certain feelings; either the horror at infanticide, or agape as gut feeling.”<sup>153</sup> Newman will indeed attach moral weight to feelings, and holds that conscience “has an intimate bearing on our affections and emotions.”<sup>154</sup> Moreover, conscience “is always emotional.”<sup>155</sup> It is through the urging of emotions that conscience exercises its function of commanding. Newman, like Taylor, wishes to see us mind our moral sentiments as much as our moral reasonings, and Newman explicitly roots these feelings in the impulse from God that we are to do good and avoid evil. Attentiveness to our moral feelings will give us a personal experience of God.

While this function of conscience would seem to be at odds with the judging function, as the judging function can be in error (as Newman himself points out), they really are two elements of one mental faculty. If we trust the commanding function of conscience as the voice of God, then we must ask—what does God ultimately want of us? Does God wish us to grow, or to remain the same? Surely we must say, as Newman would, that in this life God wishes us to grow. The only time when God might want us to remain where we are is when we have achieved our final ends—the ultimate good of

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<sup>153</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555

<sup>154</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 108

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 109

human life. MacIntyre notes that for the Aristotelian reflecting on her life, the story will ideally “exhibit an increasing directedness, an increasing success in integrating her pursuits of the various individual and common goods that she values into a unified pursuit of her final good.”<sup>156</sup> Increasing success and growth is a hallmark of Aristotelian ethics. As Aristotle’s ethics are rooted in a notion of repeated and constantly improving practice, moving from good to good in pursuit of one’s end, they help to remind us to constantly be improving. Kantian ethics, by contrast, are timeless rules. You do them or you don’t. There is not the sense of gradual improvement or directedness in these purely objective accounts of morality. But Aristotle and Newman hold out for improvement in following one’s moral sense. Newman will urge obedience to one’s conscience, but through that obedience conscience should grow. If one’s moral sentiments remain utterly unchanged through life, and there is no more integration or directedness at 30 than there is at 25, we may legitimately wonder whether the person is giving wholehearted obedience to conscience, or simply obeying moral sentiments selectively so as to remain “true to one’s self” in a way that cuts off growth. MacIntyre even sees a transcendent pattern to moral growth. For MacIntyre “completion of a life consists in an agent’s having persisted towards and moving beyond the best goods of which she or he knows.”<sup>157</sup> This movement towards completion indicates “an object of desire beyond all particular and finite goods.”<sup>158</sup> MacIntyre sees this moment of recognizing the boundless desire of one’s final good as the moment of transition from ethics to natural theology. The story must always be kept going, because our wills cannot be satisfied.

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<sup>156</sup> MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 57

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 315

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

Here we have a way of encouraging the right way of thinking about conscience among people. As we encourage individuals to think about the world in affirming ways, and taking a stance of reflective credulity—having a stance of assent that nonetheless reflects upon the assent—we should likewise encourage growth. MacIntyre himself lays out several life stories as historical examples of such growth. As we encourage people to adopt an incarnate way of knowing, we must also encourage them to affirm the urges for growth and goodness that is found in the world. An incarnate way of knowing trusts what is before us, but not unreflexively. To help people rightly understand conscience, we must help them say “my story is not yet finished” and “I can still do better, I can still attain better.” We affirm what is already the case, while encouraging more. A medical doctor must always be going to conferences and improving his skills. A lawyer gets better and better as she argues more cases. In every practice, we find the expectation of improvement over time with experience. Neil Armstrong was a better pilot in July 1969 when he landed on the moon than he was in April 1962 when he landed in the mud. As we show the stories of those who have improved and become more directed over the course of life, and draw upon examples of improvement various practices, we can show individuals how they may come to hold open the possibility for growth in their lives, and hopefully obey more completely the impulses of their consciences. As they place more trust in their embodied existence and the impulses of their consciences, and as they experience more fully how open-ended their desire for goodness in life is, they will hopefully have a greater sense that it God who both personally directs their process of moral growth, and a personal relationship with God which is the end goal and product of this lifelong project.

## Chapter Three: Newman, Personalism, and Contemporary Belief

### I. NEWMAN'S PERSONALIST TURN

What is clear by now is that Newman has an appreciation for the concrete and whole person. *Grammar of Assent* does not give us a way of knowing suited to an angel, or even a university professor, but for any human. Aristotle began his *Metaphysics* with the observation that “all men by nature desire to know.”<sup>159</sup> As we saw in the last chapter, both Aristotle and Newman see this drive for knowledge present in all individuals, affirm that all individuals can come to some level of knowledge, and affirm what knowledge they do have. Aristotle's concerns are mainly philosophical, while Newman's are mainly pastoral. Newman wishes to affirm that the common person can come to sufficient knowledge to believe in Jesus Christ and live a Christian life. If the Christian life were only accessible to those with sufficient knowledge and training, but barred from the vast majority of people, this would essentially be a latter-day form of Gnosticism. Moreover, it would go against the command of Matthew 28 to “make disciples of all nations,” among many others (especially those showing a preference for the poor and lowly) to assert that only a select group will truly understand Christianity. Taylor notes that this is one of the major engines of change is the “deep and growing dissatisfaction” with the various “speeds” of practicing Christianity.<sup>160</sup> If theology truly is “faith seeking understanding,” then the task of the theologian is in some sense to set out in a learned fashion what was taught by a grandmother in a simple fashion. Newman has a keen grasp

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<sup>159</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Collected Works of Aristotle*, tr. W.D. Ross, 980a1 Out of respect for the work of the translator, words such as “man” will be retained in all quotations, even when referring to humans as a group

<sup>160</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 62 Some of the dissatisfaction that Taylor notes is legitimate. That being said, there is a realism which Newman has in accepting that different people can and will practice Christianity at different “speeds,” for reasons discussed in the previous chapter.

of this. As we will see in this chapter, the way in which Newman is attentive to the person who knows—no matter who that person is—has allowed him to develop a way of knowing and presenting Christianity that can resonate with contemporary individuals.

In responding to many of his contemporaries, Newman anticipated the Personalist movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As Taylor looks at the dissatisfaction that exists within the Immanent Frame, much of it was a reaction against precisely the reductive tendencies of the Enlightenment. Talk of authenticity and the rejection of the imposed norms was driven in part by a recognition that the norms being imposed did not account for a substantial part of the person. Thinkers such as Locke were taking humans as he wished them to be, rather than as they are. Crosby puts it well when he says that “Personalism [...] emerges in response to a reductionistic, rationalistic image of man.”<sup>161</sup> Part of this is a reaction against the idea that the natural sciences can explain everything about the human person in strictly mechanistic terms—as a system of chemicals, muscles, and bones. There is likewise a reaction against Hegelian Pantheism, that sees all things as part of God, so that the individual gets lost amidst the larger system.<sup>162</sup> The way in which humans emerge from and return to God—or Spirit—that tends to portray humans as merely a part of something else, and not “a being of its own” is, on the Personalist view, an offense against the unique dignity which each person has.<sup>163</sup> When we speak of Newman’s “Personalist turn,” we are speaking of how he turns to the interior dimension of the person—always in touch with the surrounding world—to emphasize what is unique, unrepeatable, and good about the individual person.

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<sup>161</sup> John F. Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, xix

<sup>162</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, xx. Crosby goes on to explain that “It is abhorrent to personalists to think of persons as parts or moments of God; they know that persons are abolished as persons by becoming parts or moments.”

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, there is a concern within Personalism that with such a reductionist view of the human person, grave moral violations are possible. Not surprisingly, Personalism especially takes off in the wake of World War II, and finds its greatest advocates among German (Scheler and von Hildebrand), French (Levinas and Mounier), and Polish (Karol Wojtyła, the future St. John Paul II) thinkers—individuals who had been most impacted and horrified by the war and by various programs of Nazi eugenics.

Part of how Personalism pushes back against the reductive tendencies is to emphasize the interiority of each individual, “that each of us exists as subject, not just as object.”<sup>164</sup> There are inner depths to each individual that objective reason cannot quite capture. This would certainly apply to scientific assertions about the person, but it would also apply to some philosophical ones, as well. Consider how we saw Newman pushing back against the logicians in the previous chapter. The assertion that “logic is open at both ends” is Newman’s reaction against logicians reducing all valid human thought to precise syllogisms. Newman would have more issues with Descartes’s “clear and distinct ideas” than anything about Darwinian evolution.<sup>165</sup> The Illative Sense, is a faculty which each person possesses yet is unique to each individual, as it is shaped by the individual’s own experiences and excellences.

Newman, like the Personalists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, sees both a depth and a breadth to the individual not captured through pure logic. Merrigan even notes that Newman gives “pride of place to [his] inner life in the determination of [his] attitudes toward the

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Darwin was a contemporary of Newman’s, and Newman expressed tentative support for his ideas cf. *Letters and Diaries* vol. 24, 77



world and [his] place in it.”<sup>166</sup> This does not mean that he ignores the world, but that his Patristic sensibilities have given him an appreciation for how passing the visible world is. Newman is not an Idealist in this regard—it is not that what is in his mind is more real than what he senses. Sense perception and bodily reality matter greatly for Newman, and for how Newman thinks we come to know. What we experience, and how we feel about what we experience, have weight. Newman is a Realist, but a Christian Realist. Thus the spiritual reality that he is able to perceive through conscience anchors his assessment of visible reality.

What Newman provides is a *Personalist turn* in Western thought. It is not exactly a turn to the subject, although we will see in a moment how this fits in to his thought. Descartes provides a turn to the subject, but Newman does not only want this. Newman wants a turn to the whole person. The inner recesses of my intellect are important, but so are the inner recesses of my heart. For that matter, the outer spaces are important, as well. My whole self is important—thinking, feeling, experiencing, acting and interacting. All of it taken together has value. This is significant when we remember the two great critiques of Christianity that Taylor notes: first that Christianity asks us “to ‘transcend reality,’ and this cannot but end up but mutilating us,” while the second is that we “bowdlerize reality” and make things far too simple.<sup>167</sup> In remaining incarnate and engaging in a Personalist turn, Newman is able to avoid these difficulties. First, Newman does not preach transcendence in a mutilating way. In his own *Apologia*, Newman does not see conversion as definitive separation from the world. Newman notes that

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<sup>166</sup> Terrance Merrigan, “Conscience and Selfhood: Thomas More, John Henry Newman, and the Crisis of the Postmodern Subject,” in *Theological Studies* 73 no. 4 (Dec. 2012), 854

<sup>167</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 623-624

“Calvinists make a sharp separation between the elect and the world,” and while he acknowledges that there are certain parallels with Catholic teaching on justification, he still notes that “Catholics, on the other hand shade and soften the awful antagonism between good and evil” and resist a clear delineation between the elect and the damned.<sup>168</sup> His own journey from religious indifference to Anglicanism to Catholicism is shown as organic growth (aided by God’s grace), rather than a total denial of his past or his nature. Reflecting on Catholic ideas of conversion at the end of his work, he states clearly that the Church “does not teach that human nature is irreclaimable [...] not, that it is to be shattered and reversed, but shattered, purified, and restored.”<sup>169</sup> Part of Christianity does involve growing beyond where we are now, but not in a way that necessarily vilifies our current state.<sup>170</sup> Second, Newman does not bowdlerize and wish reality to be something other than it is. As we have seen, Newman distinguishes himself in accepting knowing subjects as they are—which partly involves accepting limits to who will know what.

Newman has above all a desire to engage with reality. His interest in the knowing subject pushes him on in this regard. In his *Lectures on Justification*, Newman holds that we should first and foremost “preach Christ. But the fashion of the day has been [...] to preach conversion; to attempt to convert by insisting on conversion.”<sup>171</sup> Newman does not wish to start with the ideal and then move to the reality—he wishes to start with the

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<sup>168</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. David J. Delaura (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1968), 17-18

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 190

<sup>170</sup> While Western Christianity does acknowledge Original Sin, this doctrine itself holds that our evil tendencies are the result of something foreign to human nature. Human nature is sinful, but not inherently so. In overcoming our sinful state we are therefore healing wounds, and becoming more human, rather than less. As Augustine—the codifier of Original Sin—notes, “If sin is natural, there is no such thing as sin.” *City of God* XI.15

<sup>171</sup> John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), 326

reality. In matters of religion, this means beginning with the person of Jesus Christ.

Newman decried the preachers of his day who would work up in his audience all sorts of feelings—be they of joy or shame—but never spoke of the substance underlying those feelings; or who spoke of conversion, but never of what one is converting to. You may preach Christ the accuser, Christ the consoler, or Christ in any other manner of acting, but you must first and foremost preach Christ. Conversion involves not only a turning, but a “turning-outward,” as Crosby puts it.<sup>172</sup> Newman does not want to mutilate reality or paper it over, but face it head on. The subject must engage with the reality. Indeed, Crosby notes that for Newman “we venerate truth more when we abandon the detachment of a spectator and encounter it with the engagement of a participant.”<sup>173</sup>

Newman recognizes the depths and significance of the knowing subject, but his stress on subjective reality only increases the importance of objective reality. Unlike Descartes’s subjective turn, it is an emphasis on the subject which does not force “clear and distinct ideas” upon every experience of the subject, but embraces the multifaceted and sometimes confusing nature of reality. Unlike a subjectivist approach, the knowing subject does not determine reality or truth, but learns to appropriate it. The subject does not determine reality. Rather, as Merrigan notes, for Newman “[the] self is always being constituted by the ‘other’—the other for whom one is responsible, and the Other before whom one is responsible.”<sup>174</sup> What God bids me to do in conscience helps determine what I do, and what I do helps determine who I am. Because conscience is so near to me—within me, in fact—the call of and response to conscience shapes me like few other

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<sup>172</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 64

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>174</sup> Merrigan, “Conscience and Selfhood,” 868

things. Obedience to conscience grounds and shapes the whole self in a particularly powerful way. Other roles and tasks that come to me can also shape me—sometimes because I accept them, sometimes because I reject them. Knowledge arises not from active domination, nor from a passive imprinting on a Lockean *Tabula Rasa*, but a cooperative activity.

The knowing subject is a participant in the game of knowledge, and so there is also an element of agency involved in knowing as well. We saw in the last chapter how assent to truth is like cultivating a musical ear—it requires practice, attentiveness, and the work of assent. Knowledge for Newman is not a determining act, as with Kantian knowing, but one where known and knower “cooperate” to come to knowledge.<sup>175</sup> One of the conditions of belief in the contemporary age is that belief must be something personal—it must arise from the agency of the individual and engage the whole individual. The way that Newman stresses the knowing subject gives a place for this agency and this personal element to belief. Echoing Kant to a certain degree, Newman writes in a letter from 1846 that “you must consent to think.”<sup>176</sup> Truth takes time and effort to grasp. If Kant stresses courage in his paean to the Enlightenment, Newman stresses agency.

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<sup>175</sup> Aquinas, for instance, sees knowledge occurring when the agent intellect (sometimes also translated as “active intellect”) receives the phantasms and accidental forms of the particular thing and abstracts from it its universal substantial form (e.g., abstracting the form of “humanity” upon seeing a particular human). It is a cooperation because Aquinas holds that particulars are potentially intelligible, and the agent intellect makes them actually intelligible. Moreover, this process begins at all because the thing known is acting upon the knower. Because of how the known acts upon the knower, the knower takes what is latent in the known and makes it explicit—the agent intellect is like a key that turns a lock. This marks a significant difference between Aquinas and Kant, for whom there is no potential knowability in the thing itself—all knowledge is an imposition of the mind’s categories. (cf. *Summa Theologiae* I.Ixxix.4)

<sup>176</sup> Newman, *Letters and Diaries* vol. XI, 46

Knowing for Newman is not simply an act of domination because ideas themselves can, in a sense, be active and living. Verbeke looks at Newman's Aristotelian tendencies and sees that for Newman, "knowledge is not an impersonal act, it bears an individual character: it is closely linked to the experience and practice of the knowing subject."<sup>177</sup> What marks real assent from notional is how personal it is—different people will give real assent to different things, based on their experience and expertise, while notional assent is impersonal enough that it only depends on the meaning of the words being understood.<sup>178</sup>

## II. THE VITAL PRINCIPLE OF RELIGION

Dulles notes that for Newman, a living idea is "an invisible principle that takes hold of the mind and becomes an active force leading to an ever-new contemplation of itself."<sup>179</sup> Ideas can come that strike an individual powerfully, and almost compel the person. In the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, John Nash is depicted as sitting in a bar talking with friends when he has a flash of inspiration leading to his theory of economics, and rushes out of the bar to put it on paper. This account is somewhat fictionalized, but the original "eureka" moment, which drove Archimedes to rush out of his tub naked proclaiming "eureka!" around the city of Athens, likewise illustrates the point—ideas can grab a person. Kant's assertion that knowledge comes when the mind forces what is perceived into an idea was incomplete at best—sometimes an idea comes into the mind which forces the individual to do its bidding, and make it spread.

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<sup>177</sup> Verbeke, "Aristotelian Roots of Newman's Illative Sense," 180

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 83

<sup>179</sup> Avery Dulles, S.J., "From Images to Truth: Newman on Revelation and Faith," in *Theological Studies* 50 no. 2 (June 1989)

Most ideas will run their course and be modified—through paradigm shifts or other corrections, and few will grab hold of more than a few individuals. Wiles dedicated years to proving Fermat’s Last Theorem, but most people will not dedicate such time and effort to high-level mathematics. The ideas are very real for these great thinkers, but they are abstract and notional for the mass of humanity. Newman notes how the Duke of Wellington, the hero of Waterloo, wrote a letter on national defense. At the time he wrote it, the ideas were really apprehended by him (and perhaps other military experts) but only notionally among the general population until about 11 years later when another military crisis emerged and the nation realized the truth of Wellington’s words.<sup>180</sup> The same may be said for theorems and ideas within physics or other disciplines—the experts have a vivid idea of how these concepts play out, but for most of us they are abstract concepts. The ideas are indeed living among those who specialize in them. But Christianity has been and must continue to be a living idea for a much larger group than professional theologians. When Newman thinks of the living idea of Christianity, he is thinking of something much vaster—spanning multiple centuries and cultures.

Dulles sees that “Newman proposes a single cause, the image of Christ [...] His image, as the vivifying idea of Christianity, evokes [...] the exemplary lives of the Christians, their longing for heaven, and their invincible adherence to their faith.”<sup>181</sup> Christianity is something which has captured the imaginations of humans for generations, giving them no less drive than Archimedes as he leapt from his bathtub. What will truly capture the person is a real apprehension, an experience of an idea that engages the whole person. For Christianity, the real apprehension that is at the heart of the living idea is an

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<sup>180</sup> Cf. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 76-77

<sup>181</sup> Avery Dulles, S.J., *Newman*, 58

apprehension of the person of Christ. Moreover, this apprehension is much more vivid and forceful than, say, an American's apprehension of George Washington. There is always a difficulty in saying that one has a personal knowledge of an individual separated at least by time. Part of this difficulty is that this runs the risk of saying that only those who have the temperament to be true historians may have a full access to Jesus. While historical scholarship can enhance our knowledge of Scripture and therefore of Jesus, we again have the balance of wanting to affirm legitimate expertise with also affirming that the uneducated are likewise able to encounter Jesus. One need not be Aquinas to attain salvation. Newman argues against those who "speak of [Christianity] as if it were only a thing of history, with only indirect bearings upon modern times."<sup>182</sup> Christianity has historical roots, and this history is important, but Christianity is not only something that *was*, but something that *is*. Newman "cannot allow that it is a mere historical religion [...] we do not contemplate it in conclusions drawn from dumb documents and dead events."<sup>183</sup> Christianity continues to draw power and inspiration from its Source.

The way in which we continue to encounter Jesus is through the sacraments. The sacraments—especially the Eucharist—carry the image and power of Jesus into the present day. Newman speaks of "rites and ordinances that are this very day" bringing the presence of Jesus into the Church.<sup>184</sup> "First and above all" for Newman "is the Holy Mass, in which He who once died for us upon the Cross, brings back and perpetuates, by His literal presence in it, that one and the same sacrifice."<sup>185</sup> Newman's idea has a long pedigree, and would later be reiterated by Vatican II, affirming that "by [Christ's] power

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<sup>182</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 487

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 488

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 489

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes,” and that of all the ways Jesus is present in the sacraments, it is “most especially in the Eucharist.”<sup>186</sup> There are other ways in which Jesus is made present and really apprehended by Christians, but for Newman it is chiefly in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

Fittingly for someone who is concerned with incarnate knowing, Newman sees the cause of the vivifying idea of Christianity as a concrete person, who is constantly made present to followers throughout history in concrete ways, and sees this bearing fruit in concrete effects. Newman sees Christianity as more than something historical, as noted above, but the testimony of history to Christianity is still quite powerful to him. Newman is amazed at the reality of “this central Image [of Christ] as the vivifying idea both of the Christian body and of individuals in it.”<sup>187</sup> Newman spends roughly the next 20 pages looking at the examples of so many Christians, especially in the early Church, and how they were moved by the image of Jesus. By this time, Newman had already written his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, and explored how the living idea of Christianity had grown and matured over the years. Newman puts forward a “dynamically developing theory of doctrine” which includes a prophetic and an episcopal tradition.<sup>188</sup> The prophetic tradition is unofficial and somewhat amorphous, and includes fables, customs, both sanctioned and “folk” practices.<sup>189</sup> The episcopal tradition is official and relatively clear. It is handed from bishop to bishop and includes things such as

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<sup>186</sup> Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy), no. 7. Accessed February 22, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html)

<sup>187</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 465

<sup>188</sup> Dulles, *Newman*, 67

<sup>189</sup> As an example, the Novena to St. Joseph is a sanctioned practice. Burying a statue of St. Joseph upside-down in your front yard to sell your house quickly is a folk practice.



official statements. The episcopal tradition guides (and occasionally reins in) the prophetic tradition. This prophetic tradition shows clearly for Newman that Christianity is a living idea which takes hold of not just the educated, but “unlettered multitudes,” even in the midst of great persecution.<sup>190</sup> Doctrine develops and is guided because people continue to ponder it over, and Christians act throughout history because their lives have been seized by this living idea.

Dulles recalls that “Newman consistently taught that revelation primordially took the form of God’s action in history [...] with facts and deeds that appraise us of the reality and the intentions of God.”<sup>191</sup> What these actions in history show Newman is that the image of Jesus—the vital principle of Christianity—is able to move many, and not just an elite enlightened few (as with Gnosticism). History shows us that Christianity has continued to take hold of people of various times, places, and social groups, above all through the real apprehension of the person of Jesus.

### III. VITAL RELIGION THROUGHOUT HISTORY

We can see this by a consideration of the tapestries in the Los Angeles cathedral. On these tapestries are a wide variety of saints, all positioned so that they face the main altar of the cathedral. There, one may see St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest minds in Christianity, and one may also see St. Juan Diego, who was illiterate. St. Joan of Arc, a great soldier, has a place, as does St. John XXIII, who wrote an encyclical about peace on earth. There are kings, bishops, and scholars, there are peasants, hermits, and social workers. Within Catholicism, there are a wide variety of ways one can be a saint—there are even patron saints of butchers, bakers, and candle-stick makers (St. Anthony, St.

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<sup>190</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 486

<sup>191</sup> Dulles, *Newman*, 69

Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Ambrose of Milan, respectively). Newman had a vivid grasp of history, and is greatly impressed by the variety of saints through the ages.

Several things emerge from this panoply of saints. The first is that it impresses quite clearly how Christianity opens up a variety of choices in life. These choices are not infinite, to be sure, but few people would argue that every path in life is acceptable. In the first chapter, we saw how there was an emphasis on the multi-faceted nature of belief—that accepting one thing did not mean that one had to rule out others. In the tapestry, the closing pages of *Grammar of Assent*, and the history of the Church in general, we may find a truly multi-faceted reality. Manning was clear how parents today (especially those who are not religiously affiliated) are very careful to not limit the life choices that their children might make. The breadth of saints is dizzying. The Catholic Church seems to grasp that providing concrete signs of how many ways there are to draw close to God in Christianity. During his pontificate, St. John Paul II canonized 482 saints, Benedict XVI another 45, and Francis has to date canonized 885. As we continue to promote the great many ways to become a saint—both through creating new saints as well as sharing their stories—we may help allay fears that to become Christian means to march in a lock-step with no variance.

Moreover, Newman’s notion of development of doctrine throughout history gives a sense of how Christian belief is (to a certain degree) open-ended. Newman’s first sermon on development of doctrine is an expounding upon the line from Luke’s gospel that “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).<sup>192</sup> This

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<sup>192</sup> This translation is taken from the King James Version, the version Newman was working from in his sermons. As our primary interest in Scripture here is how Newman was reading and interpreting the text, we will use the KJV unless otherwise noted

action for Newman is at the heart of all doctrinal development. As Newman puts it, “Mary is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and the study of divine truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it [...] not enough to assent, she develops it.”<sup>193</sup> We contemplate God’s actions in history, our experience of God through the sacraments, and the revelation which helps us make sense of it all, just as Mary contemplated and pondered the actions she witnessed as she presented Jesus in the Temple. Doctrines and their development are essentially the fruit of this pondering. Then, usually in response to a crisis or question, the doctrine will be articulated—as, for instance, with the Christological controversies of the early Church, which saw episcopal debates and conciliar definitions in response to questions that had finally reached a flash-point.

As history continues and new events occur, the Church ponders these doctrines in light of these new events (and vice-versa). Dulles rightly notes that “Newman opposes the ‘transformist’ view that Christianity is ever in flux and accommodates itself to the times.”<sup>194</sup> Balancing this statement is his own observation that the “living idea” of Christianity “establishes itself by entering into relations, whether friendly or hostile, with the prevalent opinions, principles, and institutions in which it dwells.”<sup>195</sup> Newman sees throughout history people continuing to ponder the ideas of Christianity, and while these ideas do not necessarily ape the ideas of the prevailing age, they do engage them. Sometimes, it will be positive (as with Aquinas “baptizing” Aristotle) and sometimes negative (as with Pope Francis denouncing the current “throw-away culture”). But this

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<sup>193</sup> John Henry Newman, “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine,” in *Oxford University Sermons* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 313

<sup>194</sup> Dulles, *Newman*, 74

<sup>195</sup> Dulles, “From Images to Truth,” *loc. cit.*

development throughout history means that Christianity will always be in touch with the world, and perhaps more importantly means that the ideas of Christianity do not close off thought. Aquinas did not look at Aristotle's texts, declare that anything valuable was already in Scripture, and walk away. Augustine did not simply declare Pelagius a heretic and refuse to answer—his reaction to Pelagianism helped develop the Church's understanding of Original Sin.<sup>196</sup> Newman sees within Christianity a living idea which can grow organically and lead to new insights and ideas. There is "a perceptible continuity between earlier and later forms of belief [...] rooted in a common experience of the saving mystery of God."<sup>197</sup> Newman's sense of history and doctrine shows clearly and concretely that the Idea of Christianity does not cut off thought. Quite the opposite—it has provided grist for the mill for some 2000 years, with no sign of the mystery being exhausted. Christianity done badly is always possible, but Christianity done well is a constant pondering, an unending consideration over what we believe and Who we believe in.

Moreover, Newman's ideas of development of doctrine are an antidote to primitivism or archeologism. His sense of history makes it clear that the early Church (or the Medieval Church, or the Early Modern Church, or the contemporary Church) is not somehow purer or better than other eras. There is no one paradigmatic age of faith that all are measured against. Taylor opines that "perhaps there is no 'golden age' of Christianity."<sup>198</sup> On this, Newman would agree. As Daley has noted, Newman's interest

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<sup>196</sup> J.N.D. Kelly provides a helpful summary of Augustine's response to Pelagianism and his formulation of Original Sin in *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised edition (New York: Harper One, 1978), 353-374. In particular, he notes on p. 364 that "Others before Augustine had stressed our solidarity with Adam, but none had depicted so vividly our complicity with him in his evil willing."

<sup>197</sup> Brian Daley, S.J., "The Church Fathers," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, ed. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36

<sup>198</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 745

in the Patristic Era was not that it was a better time to be Christian, but that in seeing the legitimate trajectory in the time immediately following the Apostolic Era, we may get a sense of what an appropriate trajectory for development and belief looks like in our own day. We see at the end of *Grammar of Assent* that Newman has a particular admiration for the early Church and the adversities it faced, but it does not follow from this that he thought the era was better.

This, too, adds to the open-ended nature of Christianity, and increases its flexibility. We do not need to re-create Christendom in order to evangelize. The Church does not need to be persecuted as the early Christians were, nor does society need to be organized in quite the same way as Medieval Europe. Catholicism certainly has a body of social teaching, but so long as basic human rights and dignity are being respected, there is a remarkable versatility in what a “Christian society” (or a society in line with Christian values) should look like. Christian society can look like a modern liberal democracy—it could also look more like a feudal society, a tribal society, or a form of society that has not yet composed itself. Taylor sees religious practice as a process of composition, decomposition, and recomposition. Newman’s vision of Christianity and organic development of doctrine would not necessarily challenge this, and it would not require that everything held dear by contemporary individuals be scrapped. The type of world that Nones and others such as Manning wish to see can, in many respects, be affirmed by Christianity, and even what is disagreed with can be taken seriously. As we saw in the first chapter, much of what drives contemporary unbelief is not simply a rejection of Christian beliefs and virtues, but a positive holding of beliefs and virtues. If Christianity is to have anything to say to such people, it cannot dismiss their assertions out of hand,

but must take the time to engage with these assertions—be it through considered affirmation, thoughtful denial, or something in between. Newman sees Christianity as a living idea, and this serious engagement is part of that life.

#### IV. REAL ASSENT AND PERSONALISM

We have seen over the past few pages that Christianity is (or at least can be) a powerful and living idea, and that Newman's Personalist turn and incarnate way of knowing enables this. Now we should take a moment to consider why this is, and what its implications for belief are. As we saw in the last chapter, the basic stances of the mind that Newman identifies are based on the basic kinds of statements we make—questions, unconditional assertions, and conditional assertions, indicating stances of doubt, assent, and inference, respectively. A living idea is going to have a life of its own, rather than being based upon a set of conditions, and so is most properly the subject of assent. At this point, it is likewise helpful to remember that with Newman's attention to the knowing subject, an idea can garner one response from one person and a different one from another. Thus an agnostic might be in a state of doubt regarding God's existence, while a theist would be in a state of assent. Or a proposition might be notionally assented to by one person while being really assented to by another—for that matter, one and the same person might pass from notional to real assent over the course of her life. The stances Newman enumerates reflect not only the object known (it is concrete or abstract) but how the subject knows it (it is *experienced as* concrete or abstract).

Having already distinguished real and notional assent, we should see how they relate to each other, and how they can impact us. This is important because, as Crosby notes, while “the secret of [Newman's] power is to convert notional apprehension into

real apprehension,” it is also true “that notional apprehension plays an important role of its own, and real apprehension is inconceivable apart from it.”<sup>199</sup> We said earlier that Newman’s emphasis on the knowing subject was the difference between knowing as a spectator and knowing as a participant. With real assent, you are able to experience yourself as a participant in the reality you assent to as real. Crosby notes that “in notional apprehension, we pick out some aspect of a thing, or even several aspects of it, even though the full reality is vastly more than these aspects.”<sup>200</sup> Newman himself uses the example of the geography of London—reading a map is notional apprehension, while knowing the streets yourself is real apprehension.<sup>201</sup> A map picks out certain aspects—orientation, particular landmarks, streets, perhaps buildings—while ignoring others. I can study a map of London fairly easily, see how the neighborhoods fit together, and navigate my way from Westminster to Wimbledon with accuracy. What I will miss with the map are the particular sights, smells, sounds, the heritage and history of the place, all the local color that walking the streets provides. With that, London is now real—much more than a map on the page of an atlas.

There is certainly a usefulness in having a notional apprehension of something—if I am trying to navigate the city for the first time, or trying to see how all the various parts fit together, a map is essential. Notional apprehension can situate real apprehension in a larger framework, and so help us tie everything together. Moreover, sometimes that distance is necessary, as so “notional apprehension is perfectly adapted to the surgeons who want to keep a distance from the grim reality of a disease” that they have to treat on

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<sup>199</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 36

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 40

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 129

a regular basis.<sup>202</sup> That professional distance can sometimes be helpful—you might not want a surgeon who weeps with compassion every time he cuts open a patient. But distance prevents any sort of loyalty or warm bond—it can prevent good things such as the formation of close friendships, and enable bad things such as lying or other malicious activities against another (it is much easier to wrong someone you do not care about).

By contrast, real apprehension brings you into the thick of things. London is no longer controlled for distance and landmarks, but is the whole swirling experience. It is a place one can fall in love with (or hate passionately). The surgeon might maintain a professional, notional distance from my death, isolating it into certain clinical realities. But when I really apprehend and assent to the fact that I myself will die, “there is very much about my death that exceeds this limited respect.”<sup>203</sup> Real apprehension and real assent put one into contact with an excess of meaning—there is more to the reality than one could ever take in with one sitting. Anything really apprehended can be overwhelming, or comforting, or disturbing, or joyful. When I have real apprehension of something, and give real assent to it, I take in as much of the thing as I am able, and apprehend and assent with my whole self.

The recognition that there is more to a concrete reality than we will enumerate with exact precision is something that Newman sees, and it is a major part of contemporary belief today. Much of the conditions of belief that we explored in Chapter One revolve around the idea that reality is more complex than our formulas will allow. The rebellion of the Age of Authenticity against the “disciplined self” of earlier times, the attempt to maximize choices among human-created ideas of ultimate meaning, the

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<sup>202</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 41

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 40



conviction that any true thing must spur on more thought rather than close off avenues of thinking—they all point to this reality. The real assent that Newman proposes is incarnate, because it allows (and even relies upon) the role of feeling in knowledge, and it does not lop off elements of reality that do not fit into neatly-defined logical categories. Real apprehension and assent takes into account the wholeness of the person and the complexity of the cosmos.

We have said up to now that real assent is assent to something concrete or particular experienced as concrete or particular. However, it is important to note that “concrete” is not exactly the same as “sensible,” though the two fields may often overlap. Ker rightly points out that “real assent is not tied to the visual sense, or even sense experience at all.”<sup>204</sup> In defense of this, Ker notes that “for Newman, the most important real assent a man is capable of is to the existence of God,” and that God is not something Newman (or most Christians) would regard as perceivable by the senses.<sup>205</sup> Nor would pointing to the person of Jesus resolve the difficulty. Jesus is divine, and so does fully reveal God in sensible ways. However, the image of Jesus helps anchor our assent to *revealed religion*. The real assent to God that Newman thinks all people should make is not first and foremost a matter of revelation—it is part of what Newman classifies as *natural religion*.

Newman holds that real assent and apprehension has to do with “things,” as opposed to “notions.” Newman contrasts real and notional assent by observing how “experiences and their images strike and occupy the mind, as abstractions and their

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<sup>204</sup> Ian Ker, “Recent Critics of *A Grammar of Assent*,” in *Religious Studies* 13, no. 1 (March 1977), 69

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

combinations do not.”<sup>206</sup> We recognize something as real from our experience of it, or from having an image of it impressed on our mind. Note that Newman does not require a direct experience, and the image, while based on previously sensed objects, does not have to be directly derived from a sense perception. Newman fully allows that I can take images from other experiences and recombine them to form the image I really apprehend in the current case (an example he gives later in the *Grammar* is of tropical fruit, which few Britons at the time would have had personal sensory experience of). Personal sense experience is a major way of really apprehending and assenting to a thing—as I look at the desk in front of me, I am really apprehending it—but not the only way.

Newman also holds that I may really apprehend God. While I would not do so through sense experience (not as we normally think of it, anyways), I can have an experience of God without being a full-fledged mystic. This is where conscience comes in. We had mentioned in the previous chapter that conscience is how Newman thinks one gains a personal experience of God. Expanding upon this for a moment, it is because of the emotions that we feel when conscience tells us we should not do something. Newman observes that “[inanimate] things cannot stir our affections; these are correlative with persons.”<sup>207</sup> I act under the dictate of conscience as I would in the presence of a person and feel as I would feel in the presence of a person. Newman allows that other emotions may be stirred by non-personal beings (by an experience of art, for instance), but he sees these experiences as being weaker—he is making a clear distinction between intellectual pleasures and more powerful emotions.

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<sup>206</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 37

<sup>207</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 109

Newman notes that “[what] is concrete exerts a force and makes an impression on the mind which nothing abstract can rival. [...] Because the object is more powerful therefore so is the apprehension of it.”<sup>208</sup> Newman is beginning with an experience—we feel a strong imperative to do what (we think) is good, and feel corresponding shame when we do what (we think) is evil. Our emotions and experiences in conscience line up with the kind of emotions and experiences we only really have in the presence of a person—in this case, a person who is able to legitimately command or forbid behavior. Everything is consistent with the experience of a person who is a supreme lawgiver. From this experience, Newman reasons backward that what we are experiencing is God. What Newman is doing is not unlike what Aquinas does in working backwards from our experience of the fact that things exist, that things are caused, that they are contingent, etc. and from there deducing that there is a source for existence which is uncaused and not contingent. In both cases, because we are working backwards from an experience, the conclusion (God exists) is reasonable, but not inevitable.<sup>209</sup> People have experiences of conscience and do not believe in God. But what Newman holds is that if we reflect on this experience, and consider what must be the case, we will see that we are experiencing God. The difference is that Aquinas’s Five Ways (and approaches like it) lead one to a notional assent—what Newman is aiming for is a real assent. With real assent, one can have certitude. In experiencing God as a felt reality, not just a logical deduction, one can moreover have a personal relationship with God. We experience God acutely not as a

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>209</sup> Aquinas himself would agree with this assertion, as he notes in *Summa Theologiae* I.ii.1 that the phrase “God exists” is not self-evident, as the word “God” does not automatically produce in the human mind the phrase “that which exists.” Likewise the word “conscience” does not automatically produce the phrase “God.”

general principle, but as a particular reality (namely, as Lawgiver), while also being well aware that there is much more to the reality than what we may experience at any one time.

Newman's emphasis on real assent continues in revealed religion, and it is this that he thinks grabs the minds and hearts of so many saints throughout the centuries. Newman was heavily influenced by the Alexandrian tradition, especially Athanasius.<sup>210</sup> Daley notes that "for Newman, the particular genius of the Alexandrian tradition was its unified vision of God's mysterious but dynamic presence."<sup>211</sup> This presence makes itself known in the world through Scripture and human history, and reaches its apex "in the person of Christ [...] and in Christ's continuing, mysterious presence, though the Spirit, in the Church and the individual believer."<sup>212</sup> The way that God is presented in the Alexandrian tradition is something substantial, and potentially appealing to the contemporary person. The fact that God has a mysteriousness and a dynamism about Him makes God more real. Most humans have an experience of other humans as beings with a certain amount of depth, and who are generally on the move. This depth and activity is something we cannot control. If we can see how it is the case that God is likewise beyond our control, rather than something for us to coolly wrap our minds around like Pythagoras' theorem, we may suddenly have a reason to care about God and assent to His existence. Moreover, not only identifying Christ as the culmination of God's activity, but

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<sup>210</sup> Brian Daley, S.J. observes that "of all the Fathers, Athanasius clearly stood closest to Newman's heart." "Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition," in *Newman and Truth*, ed. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2008), 162

<sup>211</sup> Brian Daley, S.J., "Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition," 154

<sup>212</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Newman: An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 288

the Church and individual believer as the locus of the Spirit's activity in history after the Resurrection, we have concrete ways of experiencing the work of the Son.

#### V. PERSONAL REVELATION, PERSONAL ASSENT, PERSONAL BELIEF

Bouyer notes how Newman emphasizes that “it is as a person that God reveals Himself,” and that discovering God is “for Newman to recognize that that revelation is visible to us in His Son [...] It amounts to accepting, not as abstract ideas but as vital truths, the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Redemption, themselves dominated by the revelation of the Trinity.”<sup>213</sup> As with Athanasius, Newman will focus on the Person of the Son as the heart of divine revelation. The Son shows us God, and from this revelation we see the Trinity. In the realm of both natural and revealed religion, Newman sees a path for personal knowledge of God, and real assent—an assent that captures the whole person, so that a response to the reality apprehended can be a response of authenticity.

At the same time, this authenticity is not something that begins and ends with the individual, but calls the individual to something external. Conscience is a voice that I hear in my depths, but quickly makes me aware of external realities and obligations. Personalism often distinguishes between “environment” and “world,” where *environment* is one's immediate surroundings, especially “those things in my surroundings that promise to fulfill some need or that threaten to block the fulfillment of some need.”<sup>214</sup> *World*, on the other hand, is what lies beyond environment, and what is not just good-for-me but good-in-itself. Levinas spoke of the experience of the face of the Other, and how

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>214</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 21-22 Crosby goes on to note that even going beyond purely biological needs such as food and shelter and talking about religion in terms of human needs still constitutes an “environment-bound” stance, as opposed to the Personalist “world-open” stance. As long as the question is “what does this do for me?” and not “what is this in its own right?” we are still in an environment-bound stance. The key is to look at something as something more than just as need-fulfilling, but as inherently valuable.

the face of the other makes us aware that this other person before me is not just something I may use, but which imposes obligations upon me.<sup>215</sup> In the personal experience of God as Lawgiver, and the personal revelation of Jesus, we can have such an experience. We can be taken beyond ourselves and rooted more firmly in the world, and in the Source of the world. Especially because the dictates of conscience are heard within ourselves (but come from an external Source) the distinction between inner and outer worlds suddenly becomes less intense—the buffered self becomes a bit more porous.

Newman is ultimately trying to bring about a personal relationship with God—to move from an “I-It” relationship to an “I-Thou” relationship with God. At the heart of Newman’s project is imagination. Crosby contrasts Newman’s use of the term “religious imagination” with “theological intellect,” and notes that “Newman often calls real assent ‘imaginative’ assent.”<sup>216</sup> As with Ker, Crosby notes that imagination and real assent “does not mean for Newman ‘visual image,’ it does not even mean ‘sensible image,” providing the example of imagining the mind of Augustine based on reading his works.<sup>217</sup> An image gives a sense of the whole individual—though by no means an exhaustive sense. These are the thoughts that capture both our minds and our hearts. The theological intellect can form the backdrop for the religious imagination and help us make sense of what we imagine, but it can never replace the religious imagination. We recalled at the start of the chapter the classic definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding.”

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<sup>215</sup> See for instance, *Alterity and Transcendence*, tr. Michael B. Smith. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), page 170, where he says that the face of the other is “the bearer of an order, imposing on me [...] a gratuitous and non-transferable responsibility, as if *I* were chosen and unique—and in which the other were absolutely other.” (emphasis original)

<sup>216</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 43

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

Theological reflection does not determine what we believe. Rather, it clarifies our beliefs and explains why we believe. Mary developed the ideas within her heart after assenting to them. According to Newman, doctrinal development in the Church occurs after we give assent, rather than before. Newman, being steeped in the Church Fathers, saw that we did not begin with the Nicene Creed or the Christological Councils, and then come up with a story about Jesus. Rather, our experience of and assent to the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, led us to reflect (and argue) over the meaning of this experience, and from there came the polished doctrinal and theological statements which inform and help us make sense of the person of Jesus.

Newman's Personalist turn has given him an expansive view of the knowing person as well as the cosmos (and God) that is known. On the one hand, Newman clearly has an appreciation for the individual person, as when he affirmed that "every one of all the millions who live or have lived, is as whole and independent a being in himself, as if there were no one else in the world but he."<sup>218</sup> Newman's way of knowing reflects this, as when he holds that real assent and the illative sense is going to look slightly different for various people. Newman anticipates the perspectival emphasis of postmodern thought, and embraces individual distinction. Moreover, as we have seen in Newman's appreciation of the various ways that saints have acted in history, he has an appreciation for individual creativity and action. He wishes for the image of Christ to seize each person's imagination, and is basically open to a wide variety of responses. In his preaching, he is heavily influenced by his study of the Church Fathers—his fundamental concern is not to drill home a theological conclusion, but a religious foundation. Like

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<sup>218</sup> John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* vol. IV (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 80-81

Athanasius, his focus is on putting the individual in touch with the person of Jesus. His motto “heart speaks to heart” is no mere platitude. As Newman said, “we do not affect people by *telling* them to weep or laugh.”<sup>219</sup> We bring what moves us and show it to others, that they may be so moved.

In evangelization, this means that we cannot simply tell people to feel joyful or ashamed—we must present to them an image that encourages joy or shame. Similarly, we cannot simply tell people that they ought to believe—we must present before them One who is worth believing. Abstract concepts and impersonal commands will not suffice. As we have seen, the whole reason for the emphasis on authenticity was a bristling against such impersonal (and limiting) commands. Moreover, if the act of belief is something that comes from a person’s own motivation, the concern that contemporary individuals (especially the Nones which Manning interviewed) might not be free in choosing could be assuaged. If heart speaks to heart, and an image is presented which captures the imagination and motivates the individual, the person can be said to be acting in freedom, to be acting in an authentic manner.

What is presented to the individual above all is an image of God. In *Grammar of Assent*, Newman is convinced that the image of God impressed upon the individual by conscience is “the creative principle of religion.”<sup>220</sup> It does not shut down thought or action, but opens up a new horizon. Newman wishes the person to act in freedom, motivated internally. And yet what motivates the person is not something that begins and ends within oneself. Newman recognizes that within the soul is an “infinite abyss of

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<sup>219</sup> John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1908), 327 (emphasis original)

<sup>220</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 110



existence”—a vast depth which gives the person dignity and individuality in the face of an equally vast cosmos.<sup>221</sup> Yet Crosby notes that “for Newman the abyss of existence in each person awakens not in solitude but vis-à-vis the living God.”<sup>222</sup> It is ultimately what is external to the individual that makes us aware of our interiority. The individual must be grounded in the cosmos, and in God. Now, we must draw our conclusions and sketch out how it is we may awaken the person to God, and so help them develop their inner openness to transcendence. We must ask how we can poke holes in the buffered self, and open up the immanent frame a bit.

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<sup>221</sup> Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* IV, 83

<sup>222</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 161

### Conclusion: Evangelization in the Contemporary World

Up to this point, we have surveyed the contemporary West—its concerns, as well as the conditions of belief people have in society—by way of Taylor. We have likewise examined Newman’s thoughts on knowing and believing, as well as the writings of his contemporary interpreters (especially Crosby), seeing his incarnate way of knowing and his personal way of transmitting belief. What we will do in this brief concluding section is highlight some of the key findings in this survey, and then draw from Newman’s own example in proposing a few ideas for evangelization in the contemporary world.

Among the elements that characterize conditions for belief in the present age are a longing for depth and a desire for authenticity. The emphasis on individualism and free choice largely emerges from these desires. Within the Immanent Frame, there is a tendency to see things as good-for-me (or, perhaps good-for-us) rather than good-in-themselves. As part of the shift to an Immanent Frame, Taylor sees a “striking anthropocentric shift” in how the world is perceived starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, though the groundwork is laid in the late Middle Ages.<sup>223</sup> By contrast, pre-moderns such as Aquinas would see the diversity of creation as being the best way to reflect God’s vast goodness—a theocentric view.<sup>224</sup> As noted in Chapter One, the general habit of thinking has become increasingly utilitarian—or “environment-bound” as Personalists describe it.

Because depth and authenticity are such a part of the current age, for someone to believe something, it needs to have the ring of profundity to it, and to somehow engage the person at the very level of identity. In some ways, past is prologue—humans have always desired greater and greater experience of reality, and to have some certitude about

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<sup>223</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), p. 222

<sup>224</sup> Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.xlvii.1

their beliefs. What is notable here is first that the desire for depth in understanding has gone from the outer world to the inner world. Moreover, there is a conviction that the dispassionate reason of the Enlightenment is unable to describe the inner life of the human person, which can lead to a perceived dichotomy of external authority vs. internal authenticity, as seen with the Romantic movement. On this view, structures imposed or reasons given are confining, fail to see the totality of the person, and therefore fail to assist in the flourishing of the full person. Moreover, we saw in Chapter Two that this view is not without warrant, given the trend of excarnate reason that has been ongoing at least since the Enlightenment.

Putting these trends together—the suspicion of dispassionate reason and external authority on the one hand, and the desire for depth and authenticity on the other, the only way to communicate belief is through personal witness. Pope Francis has encouraged this in *Evangelii Gaudium*, when he sees as the first way of sharing the Gospel “personal dialogue, where the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs.”<sup>225</sup> Newman had a sense of this in his own time, when considering how to deal with the anti-Catholic prejudice still prevalent in England. Personal encounter was the only viable method Newman saw, admonishing others that out-arguing the others would ultimately be a vain effort. As Newman observed, “the great instrument of propagating moral truth is personal knowledge.”<sup>226</sup> Likewise in education Newman held that “no book can convey the special spirit and

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<sup>225</sup> Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), no.128 Accessed March 11 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>226</sup> John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Present Conditions of Catholics in England* (London: Longman and Greens, 1909), 380

delicate peculiarities of its subject with that rapidity and certainty which attend on the sympathy of mind with mind, through the eyes, the look, the accent, and the manner.”<sup>227</sup>

Crosby sees in both of these statements a foreshadowing of the way of knowing he would later develop in *Grammar of Assent*, where “in our reasonings in concrete matters our minds work with for more strands of thought than can be formulated in propositions.”<sup>228</sup>

A century before Levinas, Newman recognizes what the face of a person can do in making me aware of my responsibilities to the other. Unlike Levinas, Newman not only recognizes how the face can stop me from exerting my own will, but how it can make two minds unite.

What this means first of all is the importance of personal encounter in evangelization. Few things will convince an individual that Christianity is at least plausible more than a person living the Christian life well. By contrast, few things will turn an individual away from Christianity quite so completely as one who claims to be Christian but who fails to live in a Christian manner. Christopher Hitchens recalls the dour manner in which people conducted themselves at services he attended and posed “a sincere question. Why does such a belief not make its adherents happy?”<sup>229</sup> There are, as Pope Francis put it, “Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.”<sup>230</sup> No one person, of course, can model Christianity perfectly. First, this need not be an obstacle for anyone. Francis’s image of the Church as “field hospital” is a captivating one. Even in secular society, the image of the imperfect person who is nonetheless striving for holiness

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<sup>227</sup> John Henry Newman, *Historical Sketches* vol. 3 (London: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1909), 9

<sup>228</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 93

<sup>229</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 16

<sup>230</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 6

can be powerful—as with Jules’s declaration of conversion at the end of *Pulp Fiction* “I’m trying real hard to be the shepherd.”<sup>231</sup> Honesty about imperfection can encourage individuals that they, too, have a place in the Church.<sup>232</sup> In an age marked by authenticity, being honest about one’s shortfalls can be taken as a sign of authenticity, and therefore be compelling.

Moreover, our imperfections and limitations in completely showing the Christian life is partly why we have such a wide variety of saints to draw upon. As we noted in Chapter Three, there are a variety of saints to draw upon, some more or less captivating or relevant to a given person. All of them, however, embody in some way the Christian life and show what it means to live virtuously. Christianity and morality are no longer abstract concepts or unattainable goals, but something livable.<sup>233</sup> In keeping with the incarnate thrust of Newman’s way of knowing (and of Christianity in general), pointing to incarnate examples of Christian living may be more appropriate and effective than arguing for the logical coherence of a moral precept.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *Pulp Fiction*, directed by Quentin Tarantino (Miramax Pictures, 1994), DVD, 2002

<sup>232</sup> There is also the story related by Nancy Mitford about the English Catholic author Evelyn Waugh, after seeing him behave in a nasty manner to a fan and admonishing him, received the reply “You have no idea how much nastier I would be if I was not a Catholic.” Clifton Fadiman and Andre Brenard, eds., *Bartlett’s Book of Anecdotes* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 563

<sup>233</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola suggested that beginning with the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, once the person had recognized their sins in the First Week and were now contemplating how to follow Christ, the lives of the saints would be profitable spiritual reading. Ignatius himself was profoundly influenced by reading about the saints as he recovered from wounds received in battle. “For some time after he received the wound he was confined to his bed while his broken leg was set; and while awaiting his slow recovery he read the lives of the saints and of Christ, as these were the books given to him in place of the novels he had asked for, as no others were in the house. In reading the lives of the saints his heart was touched. His eyes were opened to the vanity of life and the reality of eternity compared with the worldliness of the life he had been leading. Inspired with enthusiasm at the lives of the saints, he said, ‘What they have done, I can do.’ The event of his life proved the earnestness of his purpose.” Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. J.F.X. O’Connor (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1900) 148-149 (n.b. St. Ignatius speaks of himself in the third person throughout his autobiography)

<sup>234</sup> Such arguments do have their place of course, just as notional assent has its place in Newman’s thought. But if the goal is real assent, this method seems more effective.

Of course, more than the saints, the image of Jesus can captivate the imagination. Pope Benedict observed at the start of *Deus Caritas Est* that “[being] Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”<sup>235</sup> Benedict, like Newman, has a strong background in Patristics, and so is attentive to how the Church Fathers deployed images—and above all the image of the Person of Jesus—in order to cultivate belief in their listeners. As St. John Paul II noted, “Jesus is the human face of God.”<sup>236</sup> As God Incarnate, Jesus is able to show us God in terms we can understand—to encounter Jesus is to encounter God.

For Newman, not only Jesus, but the Trinity was a favorite way to show God. Crosby notes that “in some of [Newman’s] sermons preached for Trinity Sunday he takes delight in the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity concerns not only the economy of our salvation, but also, and first of all, God.”<sup>237</sup> Newman indeed makes particular note of this, and Crosby sees this as a sign of what he calls Newman’s “theocentric religion.”<sup>238</sup> In encountering the face of Jesus, we encounter the face of an Other, a Person who does not just exist for me, but has an inherently valuable existence. In the case of Jesus, we are forced to acknowledge this of God, as well. The Trinity takes this reality and amplifies it. The face of the person shows us clearly that there is a reality beyond our own needs and

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<sup>235</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est, On Christian Love*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), no 1. Accessed March 11, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html) Pope Francis likewise quotes this passage in *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 7,

<sup>236</sup> St. John Paul II, “Angelus Message for January 11, 2004: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord” Accessed March 11, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/angelus/2004/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_20040111.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/angelus/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_20040111.html)

<sup>237</sup> Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 3

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

desires (and so there is more to the universe than what is useful for me). The face of the person confronts us with mystery.

Likewise, the Trinity confronts us with mystery, and even adds to the reality of God. Newman urges his listeners to “[let] a man consider how hardly he is able and how circuitously he is forced to describe the commonest objects of nature,” and it will be even less surprising that we are able to exhaust the realities of the Trinity in our speech.<sup>239</sup> In the introduction, we noted that concern with depth was characteristic of the present age, and evidence of depth aids in contemporary belief. When Levinas famously reflected on the moral significance of the face, he noted that when we are confronted with the face, we are confronted with a depth and an alterity that our minds cannot fully penetrate, and so we must respect the alterity of this other person. In a sense, to be confronted with the Trinity is to be confronted with the face of God, and to be confronted by God’s depth and alterity.

Whenever we speak of the Trinity, there is going to be a certain mysteriousness and incomprehension. For the preacher, this is perhaps the greatest cause of fear. But Newman showed in his own sermons how this can be turned into a great advantage. In confronting believers with the Trinity’s mysteriousness (without lapsing into utter incoherence), we can confront them with God’s alterity and depth. The mystery of the Trinity can be a powerful refutation of Feuerbach’s charge that God is a human invention. Presenting the image of Jesus and the reality of the Trinity as Newman did may help to shift the anthropocentric shift Taylor has noted back in a theocentric direction. In seeing how beyond us God is, the mystery of the Trinity may shift the

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<sup>239</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, *PPS* IV.19, “The Mysteriousness of our Present Being,” 291

conditions of belief somewhat, as believers begin to realize that religion is more than a matter of identity and authenticity, but rendering what is due to God.

Moreover, as we are challenged in our experience of God, to treat God as “Thou” and not “It,” we may likewise be challenged as we consider our experience of creation. Our experience of existence is one of dependency and contingency—nothing around us simply *must* exist, but has an origin. As we experience our own dependence of God, we may perhaps also come to realize that the creation around us has a dependence on God, and so has a purpose given to it by God, independent of our own desires. This is arguably the point that Pope Francis is trying to make in *Laudato si* as he urges us to think of creation more as a sister to be loved and less as a mechanical system to be dominated.

For Newman, like Athanasius and other Fathers, it is the Son who shows us the Trinity. The terms which the Son gives to us are powerful terms which help us get at the heart of the matter. Newman notes that the “words Father, Son, Spirit, He, One, and the rest, are not abstract terms, but concrete, and adapted to excite images.”<sup>240</sup> These images dwell within the various propositions of the creeds and give them their peculiar force. Athanasius and Newman both had a keen sense of how to deploy imagery to help capture the minds and hearts of believers. Principally, these images are drawn from Scripture. Other images may be used, but care should be taken in those instances that they do not run afoul of Biblical language, and especially the images and language of Jesus. There is real assent possible with the Trinity. The images that Scripture and the great creeds provide allow this real assent, which in turn makes true devotion possible. As we present the mystery of the Trinity (or any other Christian mystery), we should never be afraid of

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<sup>240</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 87



providing things that are only notional assent, any more than we would be afraid of giving a visitor a map of London. These things help organize the experiences and tie them together. But we should always be sure and provide images that can be the object of real assent, what Newman saw as the heart of vital religion.

In addition to images and the Scriptures, we likewise have the rites and the Sacraments. Newman recognized how the Incarnation marked a revolution in how we can know God. Newman also sees how the Sacraments continue the life of Christ, and so continue our ability to know the Triune God throughout history. The liturgical year gives us a vast treasure of rites and occasions to pause and reflect on one or another aspect of our faith. The Sacraments provide us with concrete symbols that we can latch onto. The readings from Scripture provide images that can awaken a real apprehension of a mystery, as well as concepts that can situate us with a notional apprehension—and liturgies provide an opportunity for preaching where a person can weave the two together in a way most suited to the congregation at hand. There are saints and festivals surrounding holy people and occasions that remind us of our great heritage spanning centuries and continents—a humble reminder that while history certainly matters, there is no one perfect Christian era or golden age. The age we live in now may be an age for belief, if we take the opportunity to discern how people find things credible, and how to present Christianity in that credible manner.

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