

John Henry Newman –  
Welt Gottes und  
Wahrheit des  
Menschen

Herausgegeben von  
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und Paul Bernhard Wodrazka

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## Vorwort

„Ich habe nichts von einem Heiligen, wie jeder weiß [...]. Ich mag eine hohe Sichtweise von vielen Dingen haben, aber das ist eine Folge von Bildung und einer besonderen Ausprägung des Intellekts – aber das ist sehr verschieden von dem, was ich bewundere. Ich habe keine Neigung dazu, ein Heiliger zu sein – es ist traurig, das zu sagen. Heilige sind keine Literaten, sie lieben nicht die Klassiker, sie schreiben keine Erzählungen. Auf meine Weise mag ich gut genug sein, aber es ist nicht die ‚hohe Form‘.“<sup>1</sup>

Diese Zeilen John Henry Newmans, die an den Humor seines Lieblingsheiligen Philipp Neri erinnern, scheinen heute umso überraschender, als Newman durch seine Kanonisierung am 13. Oktober 2019 durch Papst Franziskus tatsächlich zu einem Heiligen der Kirche erhoben wurde. Nicht nur aufgrund seiner eigenen Demut hätte sich Newman wohl nie vorstellen können, dass sein Porträt einmal die Fassade von St. Peter zieren würde. Bereits seine Ernennung zum Kardinal im Jahr 1879 war keineswegs eine ausgemachte Sache, sondern die Anerkennung seiner Person und seines theologischen Denkens, nach jenen Jahren, die er unter der Wolke des Verdachts verbracht hatte. Dennoch konnte man nach Newmans Tod in der *Times* lesen: „Ob Rom ihn kanonisiert oder nicht – in England wird er im Denken frommer Leute vieler Glaubensbekenntnisse kanonisiert werden.“<sup>2</sup>

Über Heilige sagte Newman selbst: „Ich möchte hören, wie sich ein Heiliger unterhält; es reicht mir nicht, auf ihn wie auf eine Statue zu blicken.“<sup>3</sup> Er war sich dabei sehr wohl über die

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<sup>1</sup> LD XIII, 419.

<sup>2</sup> Peter C. WILCOX, *John Henry Newman – Spiritual director 1845–1890*, Eugene, OR 2013, 31.

<sup>3</sup> HS II, 220.

Ambivalenz der hagiographischen Perspektive im Klaren, gegenüber der er die Beschäftigung mit den Schriften einer Persönlichkeit vorzog. So darf auch Newmans eigene Kanonisierung nicht verengt als ein finales Urteil über den englischen Oratorianer verstanden werden, über den nun bereits „alles gesagt“ ist. Vielmehr ist mit Newmans Glaubens- und Denkweg ein persönlicher Prozess der konsequenten Suche nach der Wahrheit und ihrer Realisierung im eigenen Leben als gelungen und nachahmenswert bestätigt worden. Dieser *Weg*, der Newman in unterschiedliche konfessionelle und geistige Milieus führte, in denen er das Beste zu assimilieren versuchte, erwies sich auch mit seiner Konversion nicht einfach als abgeschlossen, auch wenn ihm sein Übertritt zur katholischen Kirche so erschien, „als hätte [er] nach stürmischer Fahrt den sicheren Hafen erreicht“<sup>4</sup>.

Die christliche Hinwendung (*conversio*) zur Wahrheit und der Offenheit, ihr zu folgen „wohin sie führt“ (Th. Scott), besticht bei Newman durch ihren Wegcharakter. Darüber hinaus inspiriert sein Denken durch die Kapazität, unterschiedliche Pole miteinander in Beziehung und damit in eine fruchtbare Spannung („dynamic unity-in-tension“<sup>5</sup>) zu setzen. In den letzten Jahren wurde dieser Aspekt der geistigen Physiognomie Newmans wiederholt unterstrichen.<sup>6</sup> Newmans Weg findet sich oft wieder als Vermittlung und Ausgleich verschiedener Spannungspunkte, beispielsweise zwischen dem eines gefühlsbetonten Evangelikalismus und dem einer funktionalisierten Zivilreligion, oder zwischen den Bezeugungsorten Gottes im individuellen Gewissen und in der Kirche. Diese Sicht, die weniger im Modus der Opposition als im Modus der Komplementierung denkt, unterscheidet sich von einem billigen Kompromiss

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<sup>4</sup> Apologia (2010) 347.

<sup>5</sup> Terrence MERRIGAN, *Clear heads and holy hearts. The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* (LThPM 7), Louvain 1991, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. neben Merrigan z.B. Keith BEAUMONT, *L'esprit de Newman: le thème du „connectedness“ comme clé de sa pensée*, in: *Études Neumaniennes* 31 (2015), 47–62 und den Beitrag Beaumonts in diesem Band.

oder einer nur oberflächlichen Beschwichtigung, die einander widersprechende Affirmationen aus politischen Gründen nebeneinander stehen lässt – diese Sichtweise hat Newman zusammen mit der Via-Media-Theorie hinter sich gelassen. Newmans Spannungsdenken ist vielmehr von einer „unitive power“ geprägt, die zum eigenen Wachstum – und auf dem Weg der Unterscheidung – Aspekte der Wahrheit aufzugreifen vermag, wo immer sich diese zeigen. Der Primat der Wahrheit, der Newmans Denkweg kennzeichnet, erhält an dieser Stelle eine ganz eigene Stringenz. In einer Gegenwart, die in Europa nicht nur in der Gesellschaft, sondern auch in der Kirche von starken Polarisierungen gekennzeichnet ist, scheint Newman deshalb von besonderer Relevanz. Nicht zuletzt die Tatsache, dass theologische Denker unterschiedlicher Prägung und Herkunft in Newman Ressourcen der Innovation fanden und finden, macht ihn zum Gesprächspartner, der für eine symphonisch verstandene Wahrheit öffnen kann, die beim englischen Denker induktiv aufgespürt wird. Der Gefahr, die von Newman gezogenen Spannungsbögen einseitig aufzulösen, ihn lediglich zur Bestätigung der eigenen Position heranzuziehen, kann dabei durch die Weitung der eigenen Kategorien, zu der der englische Kardinal herausfordert, begegnet werden.<sup>7</sup>

Der Titel dieses Bandes, der die Beiträge sammelt, die auf der internationalen Tagung *John Henry Newman – Welt Gottes und Wahrheit des Menschen* vom 8. bis 10. Oktober an der Universität Wien gehalten wurden, sucht einer fundamentalen Polarisität in Newmans Glaubens- und Denkweg nachzugehen, nämlich der von *Gott* und *Mensch*. Anders als „die Welt“, die von Newman nicht selten ausgesprochen kritisch betrachtet wird, ist Gottes „unsichtbare Welt“, das „Reich Gottes unter uns“, Gottes Vorsehung für jeden Einzelnen, für ihn – und das bereits seit Kindertagen – der eigentliche Fixpunkt, diejenige Welt,

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<sup>7</sup> Vgl. Roman SIEBENROCK, *John Henry Newman (1801–1890): Christsein in der Welt von heute, ein Modell*, in: ThG 53 (2010), 134–149, hier: 147.

welche „realer“ als die sichtbare Welt ist.<sup>8</sup> Jene ist die eigentliche *veritas*, der gegenüber die sinnlich erfasste Welt als Schleier und als „Schatten und Bilder“ erscheint. Als menschlicher Nachvollzug ist sie jedoch immer auch „Wahrheit des Menschen“, „freundliches Licht“, dessen Führung ersehnt und erbeten wird, Weg, den der Mensch unter den ihm eigenen Erkenntnisbedingungen beschreitet.<sup>9</sup>

Die Beiträge des Bandes markieren Begegnungspunkte dieser gott-menschlichen Spannung und führen zugleich in ein Gespräch Newmans mit der Gegenwart, das, wie jedes Gespräch, das von Herz zu Herz geführt wird, von einer wachsenden Erkenntnis der eigenen Bedingtheit, aber auch vom Sinn des eigenen Ortes im heilsgeschichtlichen Rahmen geprägt ist. Mit Newman hat die Kirche keine bestimmte Lehre kanonisiert, sondern eine Person und damit – nach seinen eigenen Worten – „ein aktives Prinzip des Denkens, einen individuellen Charakter, der in die mannigfaltigen Sachverhalte einfließt, die [dieses] diskutiert, und in die unterschiedlichen Geschäfte, in die es sich mischt“<sup>10</sup>. Und trotzdem ist gerade dieser personal-biographisch getragene Wahrheitsweg ein Anreiz zur Entdeckung seiner Schriften in der Gegenwart, wie es Marc Kardinal Ouellet in einem Gruß an die Veranstalter der oben genannten Tagung formulierte: „Die Heiligsprechung Kardinal Newmans war für mich ein willkommener Anlass, sein theologisches Werk, gerade in seiner Bedeutung für die gegenwärtige Stunde, neu zu entdecken. Er ist wirklich *doctor ecclesiae*.“<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Vgl. hierzu Frédéric LIBAUD, *Voir l'invisible. Le surnaturel chez John Henry Newman*, [Le Coudray-Macouard] 2016; Georg MÜLLER, *Die unsichtbare Welt. Der Anspruch des Christentums im Leben und Denken von John Henry Newman* (TThSt 73), Trier 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Vgl. hierzu bspw. Andreas KORITENSKY, *John Henry Newmans Theorie der religiösen Erkenntnis* (MPhS, NF 31), Stuttgart 2011.

<sup>10</sup> HS II, 227.

<sup>11</sup> Brief an Frau Prof. Marianne Schlosser, 8. Juli 2020, Prot. N. 624/2014.

Schließlich sei an dieser Stelle der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Wien, dem Oratorium des hl. Philipp Neri in Wien, der Stadt Wien, der Österreichischen Bischofskonferenz, der Erzdiözese Salzburg und der Internationalen Deutschen Newman-Gesellschaft gedankt, die durch ihre Unterstützung zur Realisierung der Tagung und dieser Publikation beigetragen haben.

*Peter Becker · Marianne Schlosser · Paul Bernhard Wodrazka*



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# A spiritual portrait of Newman

*Keith Beaumont*

I have been asked to present “a spiritual biography” or “spiritual portrait” of Newman. This is a mammoth task, and I can only here present a broad outline of the subject. My aim is to show that at the centre of the life and thought of Newman is *God*. Not just the *idea* of God, but the quest for God, the relationship with God, the love of God.

My exposé will be in five parts, including of course an introduction and a conclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Let me begin with an extract from an Anglican sermon of 1838, “Sincerity and Hypocrisy”, in volume V of the *Parochial and Plain Sermons*. After defining the “true Christian” as “one who has a ruling sense of God’s presence within him”, the sermon concludes with the following exhortation:

“Let us then beg Him to teach us the Mystery of His Presence in us, that, by acknowledging it, we may thereby possess it fruitfully. Let us confess it in faith, that we may possess it unto justification. Let us so own it, as to set Him before us in everything. [...] In all circumstances, of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, let us aim at having Him in our inmost heart [...]. Let us submit ourselves to His guidance and sovereign direction; let us come to Him that He may forgive us, cleanse us, change us, guide us, and save us.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon *Sincerity and Hypocrisy*, PPS V, n° 16, 235–236.

This quotation takes us to the heart of both Newman's spiritual *experience* and his spiritual *teaching*.<sup>2</sup>

And yet far too many academic studies of Newman—especially in the United States—totally fail to take into account the importance of this spiritual dimension. Their authors are concerned exclusively, or almost wholly so, with Newman the *thinker*, the *intellectual*, the man of *ideas*. They fail to take into account the reality and the importance of God in Newman's life: not just the *idea* of God, however important that may be, but the *experience* of God as a living, personal being with whom one can enter into a relationship.<sup>3</sup>

This failure goes hand in hand with the relative neglect, on the part of many Newman scholars, of his *sermons*, or at least the relegation of these to a relatively minor place in a consideration of his work as a whole. Yet even in purely quantitative terms, this neglect of Newman's sermons can scarcely be justified. His 12 volumes of sermons represent nearly a third of the number of volumes he himself published. Why then are they so neglected? Is the sermon merely a minor literary genre, unworthy of serious academic study? Have Newman's sermons really nothing of importance to say to us today regarding our own moral and spiritual lives? Indeed, is "spirituality" of no

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<sup>2</sup> Today the word "spiritual" has taken on a multiplicity of meanings, to the point where one is reminded of the words of Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: "When I use a word, it means exactly what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less". I use it throughout in its etymological and traditional Christian sense, that is, appertaining to the work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> An outstanding example of this is Frank Turner's massive volume, *John Henry Newman. The Challenge to Evangelical Religion*, New Haven – London 2002, which has unfortunately spawned a considerable number of disciples in the United States. In a long essay-review of this book which I wrote shortly after its publication, whilst recognizing that a huge amount of research had gone into it, I stated that I had rarely encountered a work which displayed such animosity towards its subject. And above all I deplored Turner's total failure to take into account the lived experience of God which is at the very centre of Newman's life and thought. This leaves a gaping hole in Turner's argument.

importance in an academic context, is it devoid of academic respectability?

A third remark concerns what we might call the “structure” of the mind of Newman. His is a mind which thinks spontaneously not in terms of oppositions or antagonisms but in terms of *relationships* and of *complementarities*. Terrence Merrigan speaks in this regard of a “tensile unity” in Newman’s mind.<sup>4</sup> Newman himself, in his Dublin lectures on university education, declares that the aim of such education lies in the acquisition by the student of what he calls “a connected view or grasp” of things.<sup>5</sup>

This principle applies not just to academic matters but to his very conception of Christianity.

He invites us to avoid the danger of taking a *partial* truth or aspect of reality for the *whole* truth or the *whole* of reality. As he puts it in the *Essay on Development*, “one aspect of revelation must not be allowed to exclude or obscure another; and Christianity is dogmatical, devotional [that is to say, spiritual], practical [that is, moral] all at once; it is esoteric and exoteric; it is indulgent and strict; it is light and dark; it is love, and it is fear”.<sup>6</sup> He urges us to search for the “connections” between the intellectual, the spiritual and the moral dimensions of Christianity.

He is at one and the same time a thinker—theologian, philosopher, historian—, a stern and uncompromising moralist, and a man of deep spirituality, a spirituality far removed from mere sentimental piety. For his spirituality is inseparable from his theology, and vice versa. In my 2014 book, *Dieu intérieur. La théologie spirituelle de Newman*, I studied his “spiritual theology”. I mean by this term a theology which places itself at the *service* of our spiritual lives. In the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman makes a crucial distinction between “notional” and “real” assent.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Terrence MERRIGAN, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts. The Theological and Religious Ideal of John Henry Newman* (LThPM 7), Louvain 1991, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Idea 11.

<sup>6</sup> Dev. 16.

Theology belongs to the domain of the “notional”, spirituality to that of the “real”. Both are necessary, both are interdependent. But the notional must be at the service of, and lead us towards, the real. Theology—a discourse on God—must lead or guide us towards the *real*, that is God himself.

My fourth and final introductory remark concerns the place of Newman in Christian tradition. He is situated in a tradition which goes back to the works of Biblical authors such as St Paul and St John, which runs through the work of the Church Fathers, which is at the root of Christian monasticism, and indeed which penetrates Christian theology up until, roughly, the middle of the seventeenth century. He found in these Biblical authors and in the Fathers the intimate conviction that God is—or can be—present *within* us. He found also a particular conception of the *relationship* between what we know as theology, spirituality, and morality or ethics. For the Fathers *refuse* to separate theology and spirituality. Indeed, the very word theology—*theologia*—which we have intellectualised was more or less synonymous for them with spirituality. Moreover, morality was seen by them as a form of spiritual “training” (Greek *askèsis*, from which come “ascetic” and “asceticism”). There is a marvellous passage illustrating this in a sermon of St Augustine, which I quote from memory, and therefore approximately:

“God wants to dwell in you. If I announced my impending visit, you would hasten to clean and tidy your house. Yet it is God who wishes to enter into you, and you do not bother to cleanse and to put in order your soul.”<sup>7</sup>

During the past three or four centuries, however, we have terribly “intellectualized”, and “moralized”, our conception of Christianity, to the detriment of its spiritual dimension. Newman stands in opposition to this trend. He can help us to re-discover a broader and truer perspective.

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<sup>7</sup> Sermon 261.

## 2. Newman's own spiritual experience. What does he tell us directly about himself?

It must be admitted that Newman is the most secretive of men in this respect. He displays a great reluctance to speak directly of his inner life. This reluctance is in part the result of a natural modesty and a sense of propriety: Newman is in this respect a typical Victorian gentleman. But it derives also from a deep sense of reverence or awe before the "Mystery" of God, and from a kind of "sacred fear" of betraying or somehow diminishing this Mystery.

The starting point for any attempt to sketch a spiritual portrait of Newman must be the experience of 1816 when he was a youth of 15, an experience which he himself describes in the *Apologia* as his first "conversion". Some commentators have interpreted this experience in purely intellectual terms.<sup>8</sup> I am convinced that it was much more than this.

Though brought up from his earliest years to be an avid reader of the Bible, he did not, before the age of 15, he tells us in the *Apologia*, have any "formed religious convictions". Indeed, around the age of fourteen he was briefly tempted by the ideas of men hostile to Christianity such as Thomas Paine, Hume and Voltaire.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere he adds that he thought that he would "like to be virtuous but not religious"; there was something in the latter idea which he "did not like", and nor did he "see the *meaning* of loving God".<sup>10</sup>

Then, during the summer vacation of 1816, alone in his college of Ealing, he experienced the first of "three great illnesses" which he had known during his life. This he describes as "keen, terrible [...] with experiences before and after, awful, and known only to God", and it "made [him] a Christian".<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>8</sup> Taking their cue, for example, from the opening words of the paragraph: "When I was fifteen, (in the autumn of 1816,) a great change of thought took place in me" (Apo 17).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Apo 1, 3.

<sup>10</sup> AWr 169. Newman's italics.

<sup>11</sup> AWr 268.

the *Apologia*, he states that this experience of “inward conversion” of which he was conscious had the effect of “isolating me from the objects which surrounded me”, of “confirming me in my mistrust of material phenomena”, and of “making me rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator”<sup>12</sup>.

I should like to make five points in connection with this account in the *Apologia*:

First of all, the structure of the passage follows that of an *awakening to consciousness*: the boy of fifteen becomes conscious or aware of himself as a *conscious* being; then, in the depths of his consciousness, he becomes aware of the presence of another being, in whom he recognizes God, his Creator. The experience mirrors that of hundreds of mystics and spiritual writers down the ages, beginning with St Paul declaring in Galatians 2:2: “I live, yet not I, it is Christ who lives in me”, or St Augustine declaring in his *Confessions* that God is “closer to me [*interior intimo meo*] than I am to myself”.

Secondly, the words “two and two only *absolute and luminously self-evident* beings” also echo the words of many mystics for whom the experience of the Reality of God is similarly “self-evident”, and infinitely more “real” than that of any created being. In Newman’s case, one finds confirmation of this in a sermon of 1837, “The Invisible World”, in which he declares that “Almighty God [...] exists more really and absolutely than any of those fellow-men whose existence is conveyed to us through the senses”<sup>13</sup>. And the term “self-evident” echoes this statement in one of Newman’s early journals:

“The reality of conversion:—as cutting at the root of doubt, providing a chain between God and the soul (i. e. with every link

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<sup>12</sup> Apo 4.

<sup>13</sup> PS IV, n° 13, 202.

complete). I know I am right. How do you know it? I know I know. How? I know I know I know &c &c.”<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, the words “my Creator” express the recognition by Newman that he is a “creature”, or “creation”, of God—and the recognition of his *dependence* upon God. The same experience is attributed to the protagonist of his first novel, *Loss and Gain*:

“Charles’s characteristic, perhaps above anything else, was an habitual sense of the Divine Presence; a sense which, of course, did not insure uninterrupted conformity of thought and deed to itself, but still there it was—the pillar of the cloud before him and guiding him. He felt himself to be God’s creature, and responsible to Him—God’s possession, and not his own.”<sup>15</sup>

Newman’s words here, “an habitual sense of the Divine Presence”, closely resemble a statement written about the same time, in 1847, during a retreat in preparation for his ordination as a priest in the Catholic Church. In a text not intended for publication, he conducted a lengthy examination of conscience in which he accused himself of numerous faults and failings over a period of many years. Yet in the midst of a long list of such sins and failings, we find this statement: “I have not lost either my intimate sense of the Divine Presence in every place, nor the good conscience and the peace of mind that flows therefrom [...]”<sup>16</sup>.

Fourthly, it is worth noting the existence of a number of parallels in other works by Newman. The most striking of these occurs in a sermon of 1833, “The Immortality of the Soul”. Here too he describes a process of growing in awareness of a reality other than ourselves. We develop a sense of our separation from visible things, and of our non-dependence upon them. Newman then describes the effects of God “visiting” us: as a result of these “visits”, he declares,

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<sup>14</sup> *Early Journals: Book I*, in: AWR 150.

<sup>15</sup> LG 230–231.

<sup>16</sup> AWR 247.

“we begin, by degrees, to perceive that there are but two beings in the whole universe, our own soul, and the God who made it. Sublime, unlooked-for doctrine, yet most true! To every one of us there are but two beings in the whole world, himself and God [...].”<sup>17</sup>

A fifth and final remark concerns the adolescent’s choice of *celibacy*, in order to be more able single-mindedly to serve God. He tells us in the *Apologia* that in the autumn of 1816 a “deep imagination [...] took possession” of him, namely that “it would be the will of God that [he] should lead a single life”. This “anticipation” was “more or less connected in [his] mind with the notion, that [his] calling in life would require such a sacrifice as celibacy involved; as, for instance, missionary work among the heathen”<sup>18</sup>. In the context of the Anglicanism of his time, such a choice of voluntary celibacy was practically unthinkable, and underlines the radical nature of Newman’s experience.

I should like to conclude this second section, however, by quoting three further passages which raise a fundamental theological question. The first is from chapter 4 of the *Apologia*:

“I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in a God; and if I am asked why I believe in a God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I feel it impossible to believe in my own existence (and of that fact I am quite sure) without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being in my conscience.”<sup>19</sup>

The second is from chapter 5 of the same work:

“[T]he being of a God [...] is as certain to me as the certainty of my own existence, though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction [...]. Were it not for this voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I

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<sup>17</sup> Sermon *The Immortality of the Soul*, PS I, n<sup>o</sup> 2, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Apo 7.

<sup>19</sup> Apo 180.

should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world.”<sup>20</sup>

The third passage forms the conclusion of a Catholic sermon entitled “Dispositions for Faith”:

“Be sure, my Brethren, that the best argument, better than all the books in the world, better than all that astronomy, and geology, and physiology, and all other sciences can supply,—an argument intelligible to those who cannot read as well as to those who can,—an argument which is ‘within us,’—an argument intellectually conclusive, and practically persuasive, whether for proving the Being of a God, or for laying the ground for Christianity,—is that which arises out of a careful attention to the teachings of our heart, and a comparison between the claims of conscience and the announcements of the Gospel.”<sup>21</sup>

These statements and others raise a fundamental question: what is their *theological status*? For there exists a huge gap between Newman’s thought and that of the mainstream of Catholic theology over the past four and a half centuries.

In the sixteenth-century debate, initiated by the Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon on the subject of *loci theologici* or the authoritative sources of theology, the classical Catholic position was that formulated by the Spanish Dominican theologian Melchior Cano in his *De locis theologici* published in 1563, in the aftermath of the Council of Trent. Cano distinguished seven such *loci*: Sacred Scripture; apostolic tradition; the teachings of the universal Church; the deliberations of Church councils; the pronouncements of Popes and of the Magisterium; the Church Fathers; and the work of theologians and canonists. Yet a striking absence from this list is that of individual spiritual experience as testified to by a host of Christian mystics and spiritual writers over the previous millennia and a half. There exists a huge gulf between this fundamentally *intellectualist* conception and that of Newman.

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<sup>20</sup> Apo 216.

<sup>21</sup> OS 74.

Where do we stand on this—what weight to we accord to Newman’s claims—today?

### 3. The Testimony of the Sermons

You may be tempted to accuse me here of confusing Newman’s spiritual *teaching* with his spiritual *experience*. However, his sermons, though they never contain directly autobiographical material, are nonetheless intensely personal. It was said of St Dominic that he only ever talked *with* God and *of* God. The same could almost be said of Newman.

All true spiritual masters, moreover, agree that one should only speak *of* God on the basis of personal experience and knowledge. Newman, I believe, fully meets this criterion. The theology which underpins his sermons is no theoretical discourse, but is based on lived experience. It is “real”, in Newman’s sense, and not merely “notional”.

His contemporary hearers and readers were acutely aware of this. They were struck by three features above all of his preaching: the sense of “reality” which permeated every word and every page; their psychological perception and profundity, or Newman’s knowledge of and insight into the human “heart”; the extraordinary *sense of God* which emanated from these sermons. I personally, when reading Newman’s sermons, am struck by these same three features, amongst others. I intend therefore to examine, all too briefly, ten major themes of his sermons which all tell us something—and often a great deal—about the man himself and his spiritual life.

#### 3.1. *The role and importance of “dogma”*

The word “dogma” has today taken on a pejorative meaning, especially in secular circles: it is associated with rigid ideas and an attitude of intolerance. But this is a far cry from its meaning in Christian tradition. The “dogmas” of the Church are those

profound insights into the “Mystery” of God, first perceived and formulated by theologians, and then validated and promulgated by the Magisterium. As is well known, Newman conducted his whole life long a battle in defence of “dogma” and against philosophical and theological “liberalism”<sup>22</sup> which he defines, in the *Apologia*, as “the anti-dogmatic principle and its developments”<sup>23</sup>. He declares in the same work that “[f]rom the age of fifteen, dogma has been the fundamental principle of my religion: I know no other religion; I cannot enter into the idea of any other sort of religion”<sup>24</sup>. He has sometimes been accused of being an obsessive and even fanatical hunter of heresies. But there is an intimate connection between his defence of dogma and his spirituality. He fought against the reduction of Christianity to mere “feeling” or emotion. He fought against its reduction to mere morality, or to a mere moral code, devoid of any spiritual dimension. (All non-Trinitarian theologies—such as Arianism, or, in Newman’s own time, Unitarianism—end by reducing Christianity to a simple moral code.) And he fought against the reduction of Christianity to a simple matter of personal and subjective “opinion”, in virtue of the principle of “private judgment”—that is to say, its reduction to a purely *intellectual* phenomenon.

However; his defence of dogma had also a more positive objective. Let me make rapidly three points.

The discovery of “dogma”—which Newman claims came with his first conversion at the age of 15—led to the gradual discovery of the *Church*. For the definition, validation and transmission of dogmas—to which Newman adds the existence of rites and sacraments—*requires* an organising body and a vehicle of transmission.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The term denotes for Newman a philosophical and theological position; its meaning is only marginally related to the modern American and European senses of “liberal” and “liberalism”.

<sup>23</sup> Apo 48.

<sup>24</sup> Apo 49.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. this statement in the *Apologia*: “I was confident in the truth of a certain definite religious teaching, based upon this foundation of dogma;

Secondly, dogma guides and orientates our quest for *God*. To repeat a formula which I often use in teaching: our way of *thinking about* God determines the way in which we pray to Him—or fail, or refuse to pray; it determines the way in which we seek—or fail, or refuse to seek—to enter into a relationship with Him. Thus in an Anglican sermon, Newman declares that the Creeds “draw down, as it were, from heaven, the image of Him who is on God’s right hand”<sup>26</sup>. And in another sermon he asks: “What do we gain from words, however correct and abundant, if they end with themselves, instead of lighting up the image of the Incarnate Son in our hearts”<sup>27</sup>.

Thirdly, paradoxically, whilst insisting upon the necessity of dogma Newman at the same time recognized early on that dogmatic definitions can never be more than *approximations*. I am struck, in reading his sermons, by the number of times he uses expressions such “as it were” or “so to speak”, recognizing the approximate nature of language. I am struck also by the number of times he admits to our *not* fully understanding certain dogmas or doctrines, that is to the fact of “mystery”. Dogmas are indispensable; yet the attempt to totally define them must fail, and end in “mystery”. It is significant of Newman’s thought that the very word “mystery” occurs in the title of *seven* of his sermons, five Anglican and two Catholic.<sup>28</sup> This sense of “mystery” goes hand in hand with a sense of wonder, of reverence and of the attitude expressed by that wonderful old English word, awe.<sup>29</sup>

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viz. that there was a visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are the channel of invisible grace” (Apo 55).

<sup>26</sup> Sermon *The Incarnation*, PS II, n° 3, 29.

<sup>27</sup> Sermon *The Humiliation of the Eternal Son*, PS III, n° 12, 169–170.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sermons *The Christian Mysteries*, PS I, n° 16; *Mysteries in Religion*, PS II, n° 18; *The Mysteriousness of Our Present Being*, PS IV, n° 19; *The Mystery of Godliness*, PS V, n° 7; *The Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, PS VI, n° 24; and *Mysteries of Nature and Grace*, Mix, n° 13; *The Mystery of Divine Condescension*, Mix, n° 14.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sermons *Christian Reverence*, PS I, n° 23; *The Reverence Due to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, PS II, n° 12; *Reverence, a Belief in God’s Presence*, PS V, n° 2; *Reverence in Worship*, PS VIII, n° 1.