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## Via Veritatis: Learning to Trust with John Henry Newman

Via Veritatis: nauka zaufania z Johnem Henrym Newmanem

**ABSTRACT:** This work summarizes the moments in which John Henry Newman experienced a personal conversion, which led him to a greater trust in Providence. As he writes, these moments became a kind of manifestation of God's truth in his life. The first moment occurred when, at the age of fifteen, he came to know that God was constantly with him. He grew aware of a second conversion, when he experiences the weakness and death of his sister, which compelled him to move away from the intellectual perfectionism of the evangelical faith he professed. The third moment came after the rejection of the Oxford Movement, when Newman arrived at the conclusion that it was not the Anglican Church, but the Catholic Church, that possessed all of Christian truth and tradition. Finally, the fourth moment of conversion emerged in Newman's Catholic period, when he was confronted with the definition of papal infallibility and showed himself to be in some contradiction with the authority of the Church. These moments allowed us to define the concept of trust in Newman's teachings and life. We follow this author in his itinerary of reflection to underline that, although in the Catholic Church trust is related to faith and is observed in pastors, this trust is never contrary nor subjected to reason.

**KEY WORDS:** John Henry Newman, Conscience, Conversion, Trust, Truth, Oxford Movement, Anglican Church, Catholic Church

**АБСТРАКТ:** Артыкул прадставіа найважнішыя дошвядчэння асобістага навірчэння Джона Хенры'а Ньюмана, якія дзаводзілі го да вякшэга заўфання Опатрншці. Як сам піше, дошвядчэння те стаыі шы свашчю маніфестачю Божэй правды в яго жыці. Піршы дошвядчэнне мшало мейсце, гды в віку піятнасту лат усшадоміл собіе, же Бóg jest stale пры ншм. Другш момент навірчэння насташіл, гды дошвядчыл слашбшці і шмшрці свашей сшстры, ко змшусло го до одейсчя од інтэктуалнаго перфекцшншзму вызнаваней вшыры евангелшчнэй. Тречш важны момент появля шы по одрзученш руху оxfordзкшго, кшды Ньюман доходш до wniosку, же то не Кошціл англіканшскш, лещ Кошціл катошцкш пашада цалшщ хрешчшяншскш

prawdy i tradycji. Wreszcie czwarte doświadczenie przychodzi w okresie katolickim Newmana, kiedy po konfrontacji z definicją nieomyślności papieskiej odkrywa, że stoi w pewnej sprzeczności z autorytetem Kościoła. Wymienione doświadczenia pozwoliły zdefiniować pojęcie zaufania w nauczaniu i życiu Newmana. Podążamy za tym autorem na trasie jego refleksji, aby podkreślić, że chociaż w Kościele katolickim zaufanie jest związane z wiarą i postawą pasterzy, to jednak nigdy nie jest ono ani sprzeczne z rozumem, ani mu podporządkowane.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: John Henry Newman, sumienie, nawrócenie, zaufanie, prawda, ruch oksfordzki, Kościół anglikański, Kościół katolicki

## Introduction

When Homer had to tell the story of his life, he decided to write an account of a long journey. The *Odyssey* is a tale of a long journey through Homer's life written in 24 books. He wanted to tell the world about the cities he visited and the adventures he had had in his life to encourage us on our own life's journey. It is remarkable that to tell the story of his life, Homer needed to sing. If we wanted to give account of the life of John Henry Newman, we would need more than twenty-four books. Most of the books already exist, thanks to Newman himself. What is interesting, however, is that, to recount the life of this saint, we would not need to sing, but rather think and pray.

Cardinal Newman was a man endowed with many talents. Someone who received from God a brilliant intelligence and endless patience. He was joyful in his own way and able to transmit to others a kind of peace and serenity that is the fruit of feeling elevated in the presence of God. John Henry Newman's conversion did not only occur in one moment of his life, although on the night of October 8, 1845, Newman experienced a great moment of grace through a confession at Littlemore, which was decisive.<sup>1</sup> His conversion was an ongoing work of God that manifested itself from time to time in his writings. In the metaphor of maritime navigation, Newman's conversion is like a hidden and powerful water current that constantly pushes him towards the truth, and which from time to time we can observe in specific events.

We will speak here of some of these events, which are like an inevitable path to discover the meaning and importance that this kind of continuous conversion had in Newman's life. Before providing a chronological description of these conversion moments, we will define the macro approach to John Henry

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. Meynell, *Cardinal Newman*, chapter 3: *Littlemore and Conversion*, <https://newmanreader.org/biography/meynell/chapter3.html> [access: 9.06.2022].

Newman's conversion.<sup>2</sup> The selected texts on Cardinal Newman's thought correspond to our intention to demonstrate the unity between the search for truth and trust in God. We have chosen them to indicate that it is not possible to build up institutional trust within the Church without first seeking a personal search for truth.

## Newman's Conversion

To convert means to change. The Latin word "convertere" is used to express movement from one place to another and to indicate that we have taken a new route while sailing or riding. The human being naturally changes his route when he finds a path towards the good. What we do not always consider is that the good that human beings naturally seek is not good because it is desired; conversely, it is desired because it is good. So, "water is not good because animals are thirsty, rather animals become thirsty because water is good for them. Nature gives them thirst in order to ensure that they attain this good."<sup>3</sup>

The good that John Henry Newman sought throughout his life was the truth about God and about himself. That desire for truth was not good for him because he desired it, but it is good for everyone because every human being naturally needs truth. St Augustine said that everyone loves the truth because even those who are willing to lie do not want to be lied to. That desire, moreover, increases with the experience of possessing the truth. As Waldstein observes,

before desiring a good, I have to know it in some way. If Tom had never tasted candy, he would never have desired it. If Romeo had never seen Juliette, he never would have desired her. If Socrates had not understood to some extent what wisdom was, he would not have desired it. The good is desirable as known, and therefore as long as it is unknown it is powerless to cause desire.<sup>4</sup>

Newman saw wisdom and truth within himself. We could say that in some way he knew that God was inviting him to understand the meaning of his own

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<sup>2</sup> Two theological dissertations helped us in this paper: T.J. Wratkowski, *Truth, Error and Authority: A Study of Conscience in Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman and its Application in the Writings of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, Rome 2018. The second one is: P. D'Souza, *Elements of Ecclesiology in St. John Henry Newman*, Rome 2020.

<sup>3</sup> E. Waldstein. *The Good, the Highest Good and the Common Good*, <https://thejosias.com/2015/02/03/the-good-the-highest-good-and-the-common-good/> [access: 14.04.2022].

<sup>4</sup> E. Waldstein. *The Good...*, op. cit.

life. This sense of truth was the good that he sought, that he knew, that led him to conversion. To study Newman's conversion means to be part of his life and also of his ideas. As Prof. Morales affirms,

the increasing reception to Newman's religious thought within the sphere of the Church draws the attention again to the events and drama of the life which holds the key to adequately interpreting his thinking. Newman's doctrine is intensely autobiographical, and the author never hides behind his ideas or words.<sup>5</sup>

## Truth

John Henry Newman was born in 1801 to a young banker who would eventually make fortune in London.<sup>6</sup> His father was detached from any religious feeling, being more inclined to practical things. His mother was a pious woman who taught him the truth of the Bible and put in John Henry an inclination towards God. "His religious upbringing was a conventional, non-sacramental middle-class one."<sup>7</sup>

### God is with us, always

The first manifestation of the search for truth in John Henry's life emerged when he was only 16 years old. It was a deep awareness that God was with him, and that he could not exist without God. By his character and upbringing, John Henry was far from being sentimental, so we can say that he grasped this truth rather in a deeply intellectual way. Pope Benedict XVI would describe this conversion in 2010, the year of Newman's beatification, by saying that at that moment Newman became convinced that what is most "real" is not the

<sup>5</sup> J. Morales Marín, *John Henry Newman: La vida (1801–1890)*, Madrid 1990, p. 10. For the biography of John Henry Newman we are following the work of José Morales Marín. There are many other good biographies, for instance: I. Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography*, Oxford 1998; S. Guilley, *Life and Writings*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, I. Ker, T. Merrigan (eds.), Cambridge 2009, pp. 1–28; J.R. Velez, *Passion for Truth: The Life of John Henry Newman*, Charlotte 2014; however we consider this specific one as we think the author overall focuses on the spirit leading Newman to conversion.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Morales, *John Henry Newman*, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> S. Guilley, *Life and Writings*, op. cit., p. 1.

immediately observable or calculable. It is “God and the soul, man’s spiritual identity” that comprise “what is genuinely real, what counts.”<sup>8</sup>

From that moment on it is God who takes central place in his life. That is why the young Newman obeys God in everything that he thinks God commands him to do and seeks to understand *divine rationale*.<sup>9</sup> This conversion experience was so profound in Newman’s life that he would never doubt that God acted in his conscience, or rather, that his own conscience was a sure means to achieve God’s will. Newman tells us in his *Apologia*:

And I hold this still: I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in a God; and if I am asked why I believe in 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>9</sup>

This first conversion marked the course of Newman’s life. From then on, for him, the task was to see where to go (i.e., to know the good of truth at every step of his life) and to make it real (i.e., to act according to his own conscience to fulfil it in the best possible way). Conscience in Newman’s understanding was never a personal taste. He did not decide what to do to fulfil the commandment of conscience based on his own experience. Conscience was the extension of God’s action in him, it was as if Newman constantly asked for God’s guidance before acting.

With that profound conversion experience, the young Newman continued his studies at Oxford and was eventually accepted as a Fellow at Oriel College. By the time he was 24, he was ordained an Anglican priest and began teaching at one of the most famous universities in history.

After careful reflection of the intellectual terrain in which he found himself, Newman identified the pitfalls of Oxford ideas and sought to offer clarity in solving some common problems. One of the most important problems was a kind of anti-dogmatic attitude that reigned in the minds and hearts of students and teachers. The denial of all dogma as if it were not something imposed from above was at the heart of Oxford in the first half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address on the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia* (December 20, 2010), [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121221\\_auguri-curia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html) [access: 14.04.2022].

<sup>9</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, Ian Ker (ed.), London 1994, no. 182.

This intellectual attitude is called “Liberalism” in Newman’s writings. Without intending to describe a political or moral problem, by “Liberalism” he means the idea that each individual must find his own way to believe. Faith becomes nothing more than a series of intellectual arguments that we somehow understand but which have little to do with the knowledge of God.

### God in dialogue with us

While teaching at Oxford, Newman discovered another manifestation of God’s truth in his life. The experience of his sister’s illness and death would leave a deep mark on his soul. Faith and his beliefs could not be called into question, but were to give meaning to life, becoming a source of consolation. The experience of weakness and death, mixed with Oxford ideas, gave rise to a great moment of truth in Newman’s life. To use a metaphor, it was happening in our author what happens to us when we cannot see hydrogen and oxygen in isolation because they are invisible. However, when they mix, they become water and constitute the basic element for life. Similarly, the Oxford ideas and the experience of vulnerability in Newman’s life had been invisible up to that point; but when they came together, they constituted the beginning of the long road to Catholicism undertaken by our future saint.

First, the experience of weakness led Newman to separate his intellectual perfection from his faith. Natural Law was not the same as Religion, God could reveal something beyond what we can perceive intellectually. Newman grasped this reality and his faith moved from an understanding that God was with him, to an understanding that God was personally addressing him. It was at this point in his life, in 1830, that he began to repeat the expression “faith is personal in character, as heart speaks to heart.”<sup>10</sup>

At Oxford, Newman pursued a series of studies that aimed at understanding faith through Tradition, which was in contrast to the Protestant affirmation of “sola scriptura” or the Bible alone. He delved into apostolic succession, that is, the way in which the Apostles transmitted their ministry to their successors in such an order that we can trace the chain of transmission from the episcopal consecration of each bishop up to one of the Apostles. Finally, Newman reflected on the separation of Church and State in society.

<sup>10</sup> S. Guilly, *Life and Writings*, op. cit., p. 5. Cf. J.H. Newman, *The Religion of the Day*, [in:] *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 1, <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume1/sermon24.html> [access: 14.04.2022].

These were three revolutionary themes. Catholic theology would define these areas much later, judging the importance of the interpretation of the Bible and affirming that it must be read in the Tradition of the Church.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Catholic theologians would work toward a better understanding of the relationship between Church and State. From the teachings of Pope Leo XIII (the so-called Leonine Magisterium) Catholic Theology defined the Church as the soul and the State as the body of the same person;<sup>12</sup> which ended up in the modern understanding of the relative autonomy of political and economic affairs.<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to these three fields of theological studies, Newman viewed the Anglican Church as a middle ground between two radical positions. Not a midpoint in the sense of mediocrity, but in the sense of being the highest point rising between two extremes, like an arch. One was represented by the Catholic Church, which – for Newman at that time – demanded the mental subjection of its faithful, with the other being represented by the Reformed Church which had bowed too much to modernity at the expense of the Christian faith. However, the imposition of faith and morals could not be accepted, so since in Oxford the Anglican Church was thought to be the most universal, it was necessary to prove it.

Newman therefore initiated the Oxford Movement “with the object of stressing the Catholic elements in the English religious tradition and of reforming the Church of England.”<sup>14</sup> Maybe also in a way to defend his faith, stressing that it was the Catholic one; Catholic in the original sense, that is to say as he had thought until then: the one not directly referred to the Church of Rome, but the original and universal one. If the Anglican Church was the guardian of truth, liberalism had to be confronted. To confront Liberalism, Newman and his colleagues in the Oxford Movement began to compose anonymous writings which they called *Tractus*. The authorities of the University and some academics who read the publications of the Oxford Movement defined them as papist (an offensive word for a Roman Catholic) statements. It is in 1839, when

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html) [access: 14.04.2022].

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_01111885\\_immortale-dei.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei.html) [access: 14.04.2022].

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) [access: 14.04.2022].

<sup>14</sup> See: W.O. Chadwick, *St. John Henry Newman*, [in:] Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-John-Henry-Newman> [access: 9.06.2022].

Newman was almost forty years old, that he wrote a document in defence of the movement and signed it, showing that he was the author of most of the *Tractus*. Newman does this because he wants to emphasize that intellectual formation cannot take place in the absence of a true sense of morality. The liberal project separates the intellectuals from morality since, as Newman explains, for them: “Where power of intellect is, there need not be virtue; and that where right, and goodness, and moral greatness are, there need not be talent.”<sup>15</sup>

### Truth and Tradition in the Catholic Church

The authorities of the University misinterpreted the theological formation offered by Newman and resolved to prompt him to leave Oxford voluntarily, so as not to fall into a conflict of conscience. Faced with the persecution on the part of the Anglican Church authorities and following the voice of his conscience, Newman decided to go on the mission to continue his studies. He decided to live in Littlemore, where he bought a house to pursue his theological reflections.

Newman had acquired a clear understanding of the Anglican Church as a middle way, but by 1841 he had changed his mind. He confessed that it was thanks to an article by Nicholas Wiseman in which our saint was struck by a phrase of Augustine: *securus judicat orbis terrarum* (the world judges with certainty). With these words in mind, Newman would later write: “By those great words of the ancient Father, interpreting and summing up the long and varied course of ecclesiastical history, the theory of the Via Media was absolutely pulverized.”<sup>16</sup>

It became clear to Newman that the Anglican Church was not the Catholicity that he had been looking for. He came to understand that truth was in the Catholic tradition while he had thought it was in the Anglican Church. He would explain later in the *Apologia* that in the end Rome’s plea “was catholicity while the Anglican was Antiquity.”<sup>17</sup>

Eventually he was confronted with a personal decision to be taken in light of his conscience. For Newman to make a decision in conscience is not a matter of personal taste as we have stressed before. Rather, it means that in his journey of reflection, he considers what he knows in the deepest sense of the concept

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Newman, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, vol. 1: *Intellect, the Instrument of Religious Training*, Westminster 1968, no. 1–14 (see also online: <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/occasions/sermon1.html> [access: 14.04.2022]).

<sup>16</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 116.

<sup>17</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 107.



which is to contemplate what God has shown him as truth. His obligation to truth in conscience is sometimes set against authority, in this case the authorities of Oxford and the Anglican Church. The break with Anglicanism was looming large because Newman understood that what he knew in conscience was not what authority asked him to believe. He would explain this in the *Apology* years later:

But I say clearly, that in the history of Arianism, the pure Arians were the Protestants, the semi-Arians were the Anglicans, and that Rome now was what it was then. The truth lay, not with the *Via Media*, but with what was called 'the extreme party.' As I am not writing a work of controversy, I need not enlarge upon the argument...<sup>18</sup>

It may be worthwhile to consider this moment carefully. The third manifestation of the truth that appears in Newman's conversion happens at this stage of his life, but it will continue until the end of his days. He is already a Fellow at Oriel College, Oxford. As an Anglican priest he chose celibacy under a personal vow. He developed the habit of looking backward to go forward, reading the Fathers of the Church to understand where Tradition would lead us in the future.

He arrives at a certainty proper to faith when he observes that the Catholic Church has maintained Tradition for centuries. To explain this intuition, he writes one of his most important theological works: *On the Development of Christian Doctrine*. As St. Thomas Aquinas shows, no one can advance without knowing in some way the goal for which he is heading. An archer can only shoot his arrow once he has seen the target. Similarly, Newman understood where the truth was and now needed to build a path to lead others there.

It will not be the only time in his life when the authority of the Church will contrast with what he thought to be the truth. At this time in his life this happened with the Anglican Church. Later the same will happen with the Oratory authorities. José Morales observes that the truths learned by Newman as a teenager remained impressed on his heart, with new and growing strength, thanks to the Holy Roman Church. For the saint, the Church had added to the simple Evangelicalism of his early teachers, but it had not obscured, dissolved or weakened any of his original faith, despite the difficulties.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 134.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J.H. Newman, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 31: *The Last Years: January 1885 to August 1890*, Ch.S. Dessain and T. Gornall (eds.), Oxford 1977, p. 189;

Newman is now at Littlemore. Leaving Oxford University behind, he can look back and realize that his thought preserves integrity. The education to which he aspired was an education that would enable the individual to understand the reality of faith in a unified way. Therefore, Theology is an essential part of education in a University. It is at this time that Newman receives a visit from a priest, who had the mission to carry out what we know today as ecumenism. The establishment of the new Catholic hierarchy in England, thanks to Pope Pius IX, is a moment of the rebirth of Catholicism. It happened thanks to the impulse of such characters as the Duke of Norfolk but also thanks to the zeal of some of the Catholic priests who had kept their faith and exercised their capacity for dialogue in this step of history.

The solitude of Littlemore was good food for thought for a soul like Newman. On the one hand, he considered how difficult it would be to become a Catholic. This is because he had considered the Catholic Church too devotional and much less intellectual than the Anglican. He would later explain in the *Apologia*, that “such devotional manifestations in honour of Our Lady had been my great crux as regards Catholicism.”<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the strength of his thought and the sincerity of his reflections created in Newman a growing desire for conversion. He would explain it, “the simply question is, can I (it is personal, not whether another, but can I) be saved in the English Church? Am I in safety, were I to die tonight? Is it a mortal sin in me, not joining another communion?”<sup>21</sup>

Newman was not considering someone else’s situation simply because being a matter of conscience, no one could understand what was going on inside him. No one could explain what he knew. Knowledge is used here in the sense of revelation, of knowing what God is saying to him at this particular moment in his life. So, he asks to enter the Catholic Church and is received by Blessed Dominic Barberi on October 9, 1845.

He came, dripping wet from his journey through torrents of rain. ‘Remember the guard, sir,’ petitioned the streaming guard as the passenger alighted from the coach outside the ‘Mitre.’ ‘Yes,’ said the Father, much edified, ‘I will remember

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J. Morales, *El significado de Newman en la Iglesia*, [in:] *Documentos de Antropología y Ética*, no. 14; see online: <https://www.unav.edu/documents/8871060/8964433/14-Newman+hoy.pdf> [access: 14.11.2022], pp. 14–23.

<sup>20</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 179.

<sup>21</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 208.

you in my Mass.' Newman knelt before him. The Father bade the neophyte rise, 'conscious,' says one of his friends, 'of a great miracle of grace.'<sup>22</sup>

## Conscience and Authority

It is at this moment that his conversion took on its deepest meaning. While Newman was not attracted to Rome, his friends did not understand him. He moved away from St. Mary's where he preached for so many years, lost his Oxford friends and the respect of so many intellectuals of his time. All this detachment to turn towards the truth he found in the Church of Rome. His conversion was not a culture war, as he wrote then: "I have been in perfect peace and contentment; I never have had one doubt."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps that is why he would write years later, thinking about that moment in his life: "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt, as I understand the subject; difficulty and doubt are incommensurate."<sup>24</sup>

Newman is now a Catholic. His conversion was the fruit of the realization that God had been with him since he was sixteen years old. It was also the result of having grasped the need for dialogue with God, occasioned by the experience of the weakness and death of his sister. Now that he opted for the truth and not for the guidance of the Oxford leaders, he attained a great inner peace. His conversion was the result of putting on one of the scales what his conscience told him and on the other what authority asked of him. From this moment on, he would always choose to follow the inspirations of his conscience.

If he had not been so deeply sincere before God, this attitude could have fallen into self-pride. Or, if Newman had not been so intellectually precise, this attitude could also have been an absurd obstinacy. The talents God gave him allowed him to move quietly, according to his own character, creating an atmosphere of peace. Newman's conversion to the Catholic Church was very little noise, but a lot of light.

What does it mean to be Catholic? For Newman it meant to follow the path towards the truth, without denying the holiness of the Church of England, without criticizing the shortcomings he found in the Catholic Church itself. In this spirit he went to Rome, and there he found the affection of the Pope

<sup>22</sup> W. Meynell, *Cardinal Newman*, chapter 3, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 214.

<sup>24</sup> J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, op. cit., no. 239.

and was impressed by the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. He decided then to found the Birmingham Oratory.

It was during these years as a Catholic that Newman was invited to be rector of the Catholic University of Dublin. In the four years that he spent there (1854–1858) he would elaborate on a series of lectures on his understanding of wisdom at a university.

Being a guide to others is, however, not an easy task. It is not even for those who have the ability to lead others towards well-defined organizational goals. Much less for those with an intellectual character and full of prudence, as Newman' was. He was a professor and, therefore, a teacher. He was a deep thinker and so, making decisions means reflecting over and over again on the same subject. Guiding people is even more difficult. Newman enjoyed a sense of order and respect for silence and rules, which may not always be the case for all persons called to live a religious life. The same vocation might involve different talents. Newman would soon discover this and when the Oratory had to split, Newman sent some of his new disciples to London to start the Oratory there. Nor would he return to Dublin, where he spent much of his energies and perhaps also saw some of his dreams fulfilled.

We come to the last manifestation of the truth that we want to examine here. It occurred in the last years of Newman's active life, in the midst of internal difficulties due to the management of the Oratory, and at the height of external difficulties due to the reaction of Anglican intellectuals to the First Vatican Council. Newman was tired and alone. He faced criticism from his former friends of the Anglican era and also within the Catholic Church. It was at this time that he wrote an apologia for his life. In this long *Apologia pro vita sua*, Newman explained the different manifestations of the truth that had led him to conversion. It is as if he wanted to take his readers by the hand and walk through his life with them. In his Apologia, Newman put the same effort as Homer had done writing his Odyssey.

Newman is a Catholic not because he wants to be but because he knows he is. When he understood what it meant to be Catholic, he realized that he was a faithful member of the Catholic Church. The meaning of this catholicity is part of the tradition in which Newman had grown up; it was not about rejecting the Christian principles or holiness of the Church of England; nor was it about rejecting the best of the Anglican tradition. It was simply about discovering the roots of the faith and living in accordance with what the Church had always been.

When Vatican Council I was convoked and Rome asked Newman for his opinion regarding the definition of Papal Infallibility, he stated that it was

“inopportune.”<sup>25</sup> Newman noted that it was inopportune to make the statement perhaps because he realized that papal infallibility in matters of faith and morals was the conclusion of careful reflection. Such reflection had never been done by the majority of the Church’s faithful. Newman’s response was not that papal infallibility is false, nor did he respond with a rejection of the solemn definition. He seems to have observed, however, that it was not the best time to make it clear, since modernity followed liberal sway and would not accept that definition. Which in the end was what happened.

In the end, Newman once again acted in accordance with his conscience, which allowed him to maintain his own peace. Interestingly, the ultimate recognition of his drive for truth came with the honour of being appointed as cardinal. This was an official recognition of his life and his contribution to the Church, something that was perhaps not accepted by all within the Church, but which the Pope wanted. This honour also changed the Anglican Church’s view of Newman. He then became a public intellectual star, and so at Oxford he experienced some of the best, and last, moments of his life. Lecturing again at St Mary’s and Oriel College was remarkable for the former professor who had been called to be a papist.

## Trust in John Henry Newman

At the beginning of our exposition we said that Newman was a seeker of truth. The great good to which he devoted his whole life was truth. The intense longing for it led Newman to conversion; this desire was a talent he had received and retained to the end of his life. Had he remained simply on high intellectual ground, Newman would only have been a great Christian thinker. His beatification and canonization tell us, that his is an exemplary life leading to heaven. His conviction may be worthy of consideration: to know that God is always with us. To know that God dialogues with us. To know that the truth is in the Catholic tradition that subsists also in other Christian confessions. Finally, to know that authority is like the fire that purifies our conscience.

If conscience is the manifestation of God’s truth in us, then authority acts in a powerful way, cleansing that truth and making it shine. This is what Newman wrote at the end of his life to the Duke of Norfolk:

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. S. Guilley, *Life and Writings*, op. cit., p. 22.

the rule and measure of duty is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor State convenience, nor fitness, order, and the *pulchrum*. Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself; but it is a messenger from Him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives.<sup>26</sup>

With Newman we can understand that the life of one who knows his weakness and knows God's Revelation leads to trust. Seeking truth in Newman's approach is neither self-pride nor obstinacy. It is about trust, not in the representatives of authority themselves, but in the Authority they represent. Trust is never just a concept and Newman, who could never be accused of being sentimental, understood it, taught it and lived it first-hand.

If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world, the Object to which his perception is directed must be Supernatural and Divine; and thus the phenomena of Conscience, as a dictate, avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a Supreme Governor, a Judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing retributive, and is the creative principle of religion, as the Moral Sense is the principle of ethics.<sup>27</sup>

Trust in Newman's thought is a concept anchored in trust in God. Knowing that justice is never complete on earth allows us to be as just as possible to ourselves and others while we live in this world.

## Conclusions

In this article we have traced an itinerary of St John Henry Newman's conversion in three moments: his decision to become an Anglican priest, his passage to the Catholic Church and his active participation as a Catholic intellectual at Oxford, at the University of Dublin and in accepting his title of Cardinal. Our intention in describing each of these steps in the life of this English saint was to show that Newman knew how to combine deep intellectual reflection

<sup>26</sup> J.H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk, on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone's Expostulation of 1874*, [in:] *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, vol. 2, London 1914, p. 248 (see also online: <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/anglicans/volume2/gladstone/index.html> [access: 14.04.2022]).

<sup>27</sup> J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, South Bend 2003, p. 101 (see also online: <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/grammar/index.html> [access: 14.04.2022]).

with an intense spiritual life. This is crystallized in his well-known expression: one heart speaks to another (*cor ad cor loquitur*).

The life of this saint, like that of many other saints in the Church, indicates that the contemplative path leads more directly, almost like a shortcut, to the truth. Theological science – which demands clear reasoning and precise language – reaches the truth, only with more effort and more time. These are not contradictory paths, much less opposing ones, but simply two forces that push the Christian faithful in the same direction, but with different intensities and along different paths.

The way in which our saint promotes his own spiritual life leads him naturally to a more attentive intellectual reflection. This allows us to conclude that, also for Newman, the path to God is given in a connatural way, as St. Thomas Aquinas had pointed out centuries ago. That is to say, saints like Newman know reality under God's way of knowing not because they have a perfect and total knowledge that is proper to God alone, but as one who observes the world with the eyes of a friend: by connaturality. This way of reasoning, which we observe in Newman, discovers in the different opinions of others some elements of truth precisely because it is a dialogue between the human being and the Creator, which goes beyond human reasoning. Arguments about truth can be seen from different perspectives, but if it is seen – as far as possible – from the Creator's point of view, then it is possible to perceive elements of good and truth in all that exists. Newman was a serious seeker of truth who never scorned those who, like him, sincerely sought divine revelation.

We have therefore proposed to underline that the subtle attention to the divine and the respect for the reasoning of others make John Henry Newman a figure of special importance for the dialogue that the Church wishes to maintain with the contemporary world. This would be the third conclusion of our study: Newman has the conviction to live by a truth that he has received, but which he has not mastered, so he tries to purify it and to understand it better and better. Hence, as he became a figure of prominence, his attentive care to preserve the truth leads him to avoid direct confrontation, without renouncing to seriously affirm what has been believed by all, always and in all times. Any faithful of the Church who wishes – from an intellectual perspective – to give reasons for his faith can always turn to the example and writings of St John Henry Newman.

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