

# Conscience the Path to Holiness



Conscience the Path to Holiness:  
Walking with Newman

Edited with an Introduction by

Edward Jeremy Miller

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P U B L I S H I N G

Conscience the Path to Holiness: Walking with Newman,  
Edited with an Introduction by Edward Jeremy Miller

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The dust jacket's depiction of light emerging from darkness captures the experience  
of Newman's conscience that led him from ambiguity to certainty.

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Gwynedd Mercy University, through released time and financial assistance, has supported my scholarly research over the years. In gratefulness I dedicate this book, the latest of my endeavors, to the University's president, Dr. Kathleen Owens who has ever encouraged me as member of the faculty, to Dr. Robert N. Funk who was Interim Academic Vice President when I began work on this edited project and who prospered my academic life in manifold ways, and to Dr. Carol A. Breslin, Professor Emerita of English, whose deft touch in proofreading brought clarity and attractiveness to whatever I myself wrote for publication.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations and References .....	ix
Introduction .....	1
Edward Jeremy Miller	
Chapter One.....	15
The Role of Conscience in the Adventure of Holiness According to Blessed John Henry Newman	
Fr. Thomas J. Norris	
Chapter Two.....	31
Seeking a Reserved Enthusiasm as Via Media: Newman, Holiness, and the Asceticism of Antony of Egypt	
Nathan A. Lunsford	
Chapter Three .....	50
Newman’s Journey toward Rome: From Willfulness to Holiness Via the Spiritual Exercises	
Dr. Robert C. Christie	
Chapter Four.....	66
The Spiritual Summons to Rome: The Oxford Converts’ Call and Response to Holiness	
Fr. Patrick Manning	
Chapter Five .....	85
Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved? Responses from Newman, Urs von Balthasar, and Pope Benedict XVI	
Dr. John F. Crosby	
Chapter Six.....	97
Conscience and Holiness: Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI’s Reception of John Henry Newman	
Fr. Idahosa Amadasu	

Chapter Seven.....	112
Obedience to Conscience in Newman’s Spirituality: Lessons for Our Times Fr. Emeka Ngwoke	
Chapter Eight.....	134
The Role of Mystery in Experiencing God Dr. Ono Ekeh	
Chapter Nine.....	151
The Analogical Imagination: A Newman Strategy for Holiness Sr. Marie Brinkman, SCL	
Chapter Ten .....	164
Modern Obstacles to Holiness Dr. Jane Rupert	
Epilogue.....	178
Newman’s Decade of Disappointments: 1850-1859 Fr. John T. Ford, CSC	
Contributors.....	191



## ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

This book quotes Newman's words many times, and this presents an immediate challenge for an editor. Several of Newman's books, such as his famous *Idea of a University*, have been reprinted by various editors. The same *Idea* text appears on different pages, depending on who the editor is. If the reader does not possess that editor's version, finding Newman's words becomes a headache. In his own lifetime, Newman oversaw a uniform edition of his books that Longmans, Green & Co. published between 1868 and 1881. Individuals purchased this or that work, and libraries acquired the whole collection. The pagination was set in stone, as it were, and Longmans continued to reprint the books of the "Uniform Edition" as needed. But the "stone" did not endure when the printing plates were destroyed during World War II. This would seem to present a new challenge to consistently paginated Newman texts, and for years after the war it did. Fortunately, all volumes of Newman's Uniform Edition from Longmans can now be accessed on the web at [www.newmanreader.org/works](http://www.newmanreader.org/works). The site is sponsored by the National Institute of Newman Studies, Pittsburgh, PA. Other Newman writings are also found at this site, such as the thirty-two volume collection of *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain *et al.*, (Oxford and London, 1961-2008). The abbreviations below follow the standard Rickaby notations for the Uniform Edition to which are added abbreviations for posthumously published works of Newman's or materials pertaining to him. Newman's spelling of words and style of punctuation are retained as much as possible. Unless otherwise noted by an author, all biblical references are to the New American Bible Revised Edition and to its abbreviations for individual biblical books.

<i>Add.</i>	Addresses to Cardinal Newman and His Replies, ed., W.P. Neville
<i>Apo.</i>	Apologia Pro Vita Sua
<i>Ari.</i>	The Arians of the Fourth Century
<i>Ath.</i> 1, 2	Select Treatises of St. Athanasius, 2 vols.
<i>A.W.</i>	John Henry Newman: Autobiographical Writings, ed., H. Tristram
<i>Call.</i>	Callista: A Tale of the Third Century

- Campaign* My Campaign in Ireland, Part I, ed. W. Neville  
(privately printed)
- Cons.* On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,  
*Rambler*, July 1859
- D.A.* Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects
- Dev.* An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine
- Diff.* 1, 2 Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic  
Teaching, 2 vols.
- Ess.* 1, 2 Essays Critical and Historical, 2 vols.
- G.A.* An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent
- H.S.* 1, 2, 3 Historical Sketches, 3 vols.
- Idea* The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated
- Jfc.* Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification
- L.D.* 1-32 The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, 32 vols.
- L.G.* Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert
- M.D.* Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal  
Newman, ed. W.P. Neville
- Mir.* Two Essays on Biblical and Ecclesiastical Miracles
- Mix.* Discourses addressed to Mixed Congregations
- Moz.* 1, 2 Letters and Correspondence of J.H. Newman during His  
Life in the English Church, ed. Anne Mozley, 2 vols.  
(London: Longmans Green, 1903)
- O.S.* Sermons Preached on Various Occasions
- P.S.* I-VIII Parochial and Plain Sermons, 8 vols.
- S.D.* Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day
- S.E.* Stray Essays on Controversial Points (privately printed,  
1890)
- T.T.* Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical
- U.S.* Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of  
Oxford
- V.M.* 1, 2 The Via Media, 2 vols.
- V.V.* Verses on Various Occasions

# INTRODUCTION

## EDWARD JEREMY MILLER

About twenty years ago the phrase “playing the race card” entered the American vocabulary. It described a lawyer’s strategy, on behalf of defending his black client, of voicing the suggestion that racial prejudice was embedded in the prosecution’s case against his client. In the court of public opinion, who after all listen to the news on famous trials, as well as in the minds of the trial’s jurors, how could the prosecution allow itself even to be suspected of racial prejudice in making its case? And if the lawyer playing the race card was rebutted too strenuously by the other side, in this case the white legal establishment, the response would have seemed insensitive to the socially tender topic of racism. It is as if “playing the card” puts the player, the defense lawyer in this case, in an unchallengeable position.

I am interested in the somewhat analogous situation of “playing the conscience card” where the *card player* comes to enjoy an unassailable position. Here is a little conversation that shows how it goes. A person does something which strikes others, maybe many, as being reprehensible. Say a parent withholds certain pediatric vaccinations from her young child and the child contracts a serious infection and dies. Listen to the authorities who want to arrest her and charge her with a crime: “Why did you withhold needed injections?” The mother: “I am against all injections.” “But they are needed to stave off fatal illnesses.” “It goes against my conscience to allow it.” “How did you ever arrive at this manner of thinking about medicine?” “It is the way I think God talks to us in the Bible. It is about trust and believing that God is sufficient to protect you from all evils.” The authority figure might say, “Well, I believe in the Bible, too, and I don’t see where it mandates this fear of medicine.” “That’s your conscience, and you need to follow it, but my conscience, my sense of God’s voice to me, differs. And I must follow my conscience or sin gravely.” The inviolability of conscience seems as sacrosanct in today’s culture as avoiding racial prejudice.

There is something about the American character, as distinct from the British character for instance, that causes these conscience situations to

arise with unsurprising frequency on our shores. It seems ingrained in our heritage. The United States is the only country of which I am aware that saw fit, even felt impelled, to insert a statement of individual rights immediately after formulating the Constitution that regulated the social and political life of the original thirteen States in 1789. Following immediately after the Federal Constitution hammered out by the nation's founders, there are ten Amendments shielding and enshrining individual rights from incursions by the new federal government. The first is famous and here is a portion of it: "The Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This is where the mother above sees her right to her own biblically-driven conscience as protected by that most sacred of American political documents. Although many similar appeals to religious conscience continue to occur, America has no exclusive claim to playing the conscience card in the name of religion. The Taliban of eastern Asia do it. "It is clear to us from the Qur'an that Western influences are Satanic and must be annihilated with whatever force." In sixteenth-century England, the case is easily made that the Dissenters to the Established Church claimed the inviolable rights of conscience, first in fleeing to the Netherlands to avoid compulsory Anglicanism and then, in returning, eventually taking over Parliament under Cromwell. The first time I viewed the western façade of Wells Cathedral, my Catholic imagination was so saddened to see all those medieval statues ripped from their niches, but then I had to recall the conscience-driven Puritans who defaced the cathedral. Could they, at that moment in time, have been persuaded by any kind of argument, made by any churchmen or by any royals, to cease and desist? Playing the conscience card is a powerful move and unimpeachable motive, seemingly.

Even when the excesses of conscience and the wrongfulness of playing the conscience card are recognized, or at last suspected, it is not always clear how to argue the counterpoint or to strike the balance. The Second Vatican Council offered a case in point when it came to formulate its Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*. The preceding church tradition was clearly wrong and needed changing. It took the following form: When Catholics constituted the majority in a nation, Spain for example, Catholicism ought to be the officially recognized religion, and other religions ought to have curtailments placed upon them, because they, after all, were false religions. When Catholics were a minority in a nation, Catholics ought to have the full, free, exercise of their religion. Such a doctrine, still existing in the 1960s, was disgraceful to Protestants and an embarrassment to most of the Catholic bishops at the Council.

The majority was determined to change the teaching. These bishops wanted Catholic teaching to espouse religious liberty for all religions, not just for Catholicism. But the challenge was how to make the argument to change a long-standing position. How does one best make the case? I take the phrase, “making the case,” from the Jesuit Council expert, John Courtney Murray, who led the bishops through the thicket. Before Murray became involved in the document’s working committee, it had been attempting to argue from the rights of conscience. There were two problems with this approach that the drafting committee could not solve. First, a church teaching *tradition* on the rights of conscience was lacking. There were not older theologians and older church synods treating the topic. (One must remember that it is a Catholic instinct to seek warrants from its Church tradition of teachings for any proposed doctrine). The second was the ambiguity of the phrase *rights of conscience*. People could claim rights of conscience to do just about anything they chose. Thus, without ever knowing the phrase, the bishops were fearful of “playing the conscience card” mentality.

Enter Murray. He proposed that religious liberty ought to be based on the ancient church teaching on the dignity of the human person. Going back to its foundation in *Genesis* 1, that men and women are created in God’s very likeness, there is abundant church teaching on human dignity, not only from Jesus and the New Testament but also from the Fathers of the Church and from their great medieval commentators. And notice that the topic lends itself to analysis and argument. What are the dimensions of human dignity? What are its rights and responsibilities? Answers are based on the nature of human nature. A case can be made on such grounds. On the other hand, “following one’s conscience” is a topic that is too individualistic; it is too idiosyncratic. It is based on an individual’s claim, or a group’s claim in the name of the individuals in the group, that freedom to follow one’s conscience cannot be *abridged*, to use another word from the American First Amendment.

Enter Newman. He was quite alert to the difficulties that simply following one’s conscience brought with it. Let me quote at some length a famous passage in his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*.

Conscience has rights because it has duties; but in this age, with a large portion of the public, it is the very right and freedom of conscience to dispense with conscience, to ignore a Lawgiver and Judge, to be independent of unseen obligations. It becomes a licence to take up any or no religion, to take up this or that and let it go again, to go to church, to go to chapel, to boast of being above all religions and to be an impartial critic of each of them. Conscience is a stern monitor, but in this century it has

been superseded by a counterfeit, which the eighteen centuries prior to it never heard of, and could not have mistaken for it, if they had. It is the right of self-will.<sup>1</sup>

While Newman identifies one's self will quite accurately as the Achilles' heel of playing the conscience card, he does not develop one's human dignity as the justifying foundation for his teachings on conscience. He discourses on the workings of conscience as such. How does he avoid the impasse that the Vatican II bishops encountered?

It was Newman's writing strategy to assume that ideas are complex and multifaceted. As such, each "idea" has many aspects to it, the idea of a *university*, for example, about which notion he wrote a famous lengthy book. Consequently, each aspect of an idea is to be thought through, to be arranged vis-à-vis other aspects. An idea grasped in its full truth should possess some centering point around which the aspects achieve a harmony and balance. And so it is that there are many aspects to one's quest to understand what the true idea of conscience is, that is to say, to be able to reach adequately what a teaching on the genuine exercise of conscience entails.

Enter this book, this collection of essays about Newman's understanding of conscience. The book is a sort of Newman mosaic. When a mosaic comes from the hand of one artist, the final product has no repetitions or overlaps. This is not quite the case here. There are ten essayists, and a homily-generated epilogue coming from an eleventh contributor. Some Newman texts will be repeated in different essays. But even these are at the service of a different Newmanian aspect that the particular essayist has chosen to elaborate. Besides, when a particular Newman text comes to be repeated in this or that essay, as the text I have just utilized will be, one could conclude, and I hope our readers will conclude, that one is meeting key words from Newman that have achieved a sort of classical status on the topic of conscience; Newman scholars gravitate to them as if to lodestones in order to advance the cases they are making for this or that aspect of the full "idea" of conscience, that is to say, of grasping its balanced totality.

Before introducing the arrangement of the essays, let me say something about the book's title and something about the event that was the occasion for the essays that you are about to meet. Selecting as our title *Conscience the Path to Holiness: Walking with Newman* is meant to achieve a certain ring reminiscent of titles Newman himself chose for his sermons. Some essayists incorporate quite liberally passages from Newman's Anglican

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<sup>1</sup> *Diff.*, 2, 250.

sermons, and our title seeks to echo the rich trove of Newman's thinking in those sermons. Here is one such sermon title, among many of Newman's titles, in the cadence intended: *Obedience to God the Way to Faith in Christ*.<sup>2</sup>

The Annual Conference of the Newman Association of America, August 9-11, 2012, was the occasion for fine scholarly presentations on Newman, and these essays evolved from some of those presentations. The venue was St. Mary of the Lake University in Mundelein, Illinois; the university functions as the seminary of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago. In fact, its archbishop, Cardinal Francis George, is the honorary chairperson of the Newman Association of America. As convention coordinator, I advertised its theme quite simply: *In the Way of Holiness*, inviting presentations on Newman's own holiness, its expressions and causes, its relevance for today, and the challenges to holiness presented by Newman's culture and our own. Finally, I sought presentations on Newman as a guide and teacher of holiness; the latter angle, understandably, became the primary focus in many proposals sent me.

Newman's teachings on holiness are practically synonymous with his teachings on conscience because the path to holiness is, for him, the living of a conscientious life in that full range of its aspects that his idea of conscience entails. Accordingly, the *Walking with Newman* in our title is not only extending the metaphor of a pathway, it underlines also the one-to-one correspondence of conscience and holiness throughout Newman's writings. The overlap of the two topics is akin to someone writing a book entitled *Dieting and Exercise, the Path to Weight Loss*. In both cases, they are the path to get there. The *rightful* nature of conscience leading to holiness must be kept in mind because the mantra of religious fanatics, whether Al-Qaeda or Nigeria's Boko Haram (to whom one of our essayists from Nigeria adverts) sounds the same: "I am wearing this suicide bomb vest, or I am abducting these young Nigerian girls, because God has called me to do it, and if I die doing it, I will go immediately to heaven."

It is time for a few comments on the arrangement of the essays and on their gist. Our collection of essayists has an international flavor. They hail from Northern Europe, Africa and, in the Western Hemisphere, from Canada and the United States. To the elaboration of the aspects of the idea of conscience, they bring a certain cultural diversity.

Thomas Norris's essay is the closest approach to a systematic elaboration of Newman's teachings on the nature of conscience, what German scholarship might call Newman's *Gewissenlehre*. Fr. Norris, a

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<sup>2</sup> *P.S.*, VIII, 202 ff.

well-known theologian and member of the papal International Theological Commission, is the person to undertake it. Among the array of aspects with which Norris illuminates Newman's full idea of conscience is that aspect of the idea that Newman terms the role of real apprehension, as in Newman's contention that the internal testimony of conscience to a Moral Judge provides a real apprehension of God's existence. This internal testimony or voice, at times ambiguous or faint, raises the wonder and even the expectation that God speaks to humanity in a clearer manner, that is, in a supernatural revelation such as Judaism and Christianity came to claim. But regarding Newman's central assertion that the voice of conscience leads to real apprehensions of God, such apprehensions take their vivid life from the work of our imaginations. This feature of imagination other essayists will treat more directly. Accordingly, the Norris contribution serves as the leadoff essay.

Two essays follow that treat influences on Newman's understanding of conscience when viewed through the prism of holiness. Nathan Lunsford reaches back to the influence on Newman of the Fathers of the Church, but it is not the well-known and customary treatment of the Apostolic Church so appealing to the Tractarians, and especially to Newman. It was, rather, the Patristic teachings on asceticism that enable Lunsford to describe a *middle path* Newman later walked between a rationalistic approach to religion and a one-sided emotional and over-enthusiastic approach. Newman's study of St. Antony of Egypt, that paradigm desert ascetic of the Patristic Period, led Lunsford to describe a strategy of "reserved enthusiasm," or "elasticity," that portrayed Antony's life as avoiding the dangers of an excess of emotion on one side and an excess of rationalizing on the other side. St. Antony represents a *via media*, and Lunsford reprises Newman's description of the saint's life as Antony's "calm" life of holiness.

Robert Christie, using terminology from earlier research that he developed with the help of Bernard Lonergan and others, undertook to describe the necessary elements for Newman's "unconditional conversion" to Roman Catholicism in 1845. Christie perceives those elements embedded in the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, a retreat and meditation strategy that Newman followed at some length during his last Anglican years at Littlemore just before his conversion. The Ignatian Exercises served to harmonize and promote the contributions of intellect, affections, and the imagination to the molding of Newman's will away from "willfulness" to an unconditional submission to God's will, expressed in a decisive act of faith.



Patrick Manning also examined Anglican conversions to Roman Catholicism at the same time that Newman made his choice to convert. Depicting how painful were the sacrifices that the converts had to endure (loss of respect, loss of an adequate livelihood, immersion into a different religious culture), Manning identifies why converts made such a leap “across the Tiber” in the one and only place the identification could be located that would not make their choice a foolhardy one. That place was in the conscience of the converts, which in turn was driven by their wish for personal holiness that they did not find for themselves in the Church of England. Their wish for personal holiness impelled the consciences, and their consciences impelled their leap. Much testimony about the quest for holiness from Newman’s Anglican sermons is marshalled together, so that the sacrifices involved in the converts’ quest are not foolishly undertaken when viewed within Newman’s teaching.

Continuing with influences, Hans Urs von Balthasar is enlisted as an influence, not on Newman of course, since von Balthasar wrote long after Newman was dead. John Crosby enlists him as an influence on our reading of Newman, particularly on one teaching from Newman that troubled Professor Crosby. “Dare We Hope That All People Be Saved?” is a question that one can pose to Newman, and von Balthasar does it in a small essay of the same title. He thinks Newman is too pessimistic about the number of the saved, too Augustinian in such pessimism, while the number of the damned is quite large. Scripture is not crystal clear on the matter; there are texts that read generously about the number of the saved while other texts seem stingy about it. In line with our book, Crosby is indirectly treating the topics of holiness (saved or not) and conscience (at fault or not) but his direct aim is von Balthasar’s critique of Newman’s seeming pessimism. Nonetheless, von Balthasar detects in Newman the same two accents one finds in the Scriptures: the difficulty of being saved on the one hand, and the power of God’s redemptive generosity on the other. Crosby outlines several points of contact between the two theologians in which he finds von Balthasar attempting to eliminate an unnecessary pessimism in Newman, using Newman’s own words. An encyclical of Benedict XVI is also enlisted to support a larger hope in the number of the saved at world’s end. (Readers will find a refreshing tone in Crosby’s essay that appreciates Newman but refrains from lionizing him.)

Three essays, each in its own manner, look at the tension that comes with any affirmation of conscience much as Newman did in words we have already met: on the one hand, conscience as a “stern monitor,” a divine dictate, and on the other hand, conscience as self-serving “right of self-will.” Fr. Idahosa Amadasu begins with Newman’s fundamental

theme, namely, that a life of faithfulness to conscience leads under God's direction to genuine holiness. But does this work for an aberrant conscience, one that is erroneous in its choices? The teaching from Thomas Aquinas is well known: A person must follow his or her conscience, even if unwittingly it happens to be a conscience in error. Other principles in Aquinas save his position from ever being tantamount to the "right to self-will" that Newman justly criticized. This Thomistic balance Amadasu recognizes, but his major effort is to enlist Joseph Ratzinger's appropriation of Newman's doctrine on conscience. Ratzinger, writing earlier as a theologian and not as pope, presents a common voice with Newman in the matter of "following one's conscience" when rightly understood, with both of them opposed to a subjective and relativistic sense of personal conscience. The key to the harmony between the two of them is to perceive the polarity that operates in the theological systems of both, conscience as a moral sense and a sense of duty in Newman, and Ratzinger's double sense of anamnesis (remembering), that of creation (the internal sense of memory) and that of faith (the external hearing of the word of revelation). Amadasu concludes with the manner that healthy polarities function in the theological systems of Aquinas, Newman, and in Ratzinger's Augustinianism.

Emeka Ngwoke approaches the same fundamental problematic as does Amadasu, but he does so in more concrete fashion. Conscience, enjoying the sovereign nature of a divine dictate, as Newman famously noted, never should become a doctrinaire injunction whose intimations in life's complexities are always clear to us. Accordingly, Ngwoke poses an interesting heuristic question for getting at the matter. If Newman were to be thrust into contemporary complexities calling for conscientious decisions, or calling for judgments about decisions others make, how would he respond? What strategy might he devise to hear God's interior voice (conscience) clearly within these social complexities? One such situation is the hostility between radicalized Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The author was surely prescient when he brought to our awareness at Mundelein in 2012 the tendencies of the Boko Haram then and who, in 2014, appear to outdo earlier atrocities. The author's main contemporary preoccupation, however, is President Obama's Affordable Care Act and certain of its mandates that unsettle the American Catholic bishops and many but not all Catholic laity. This essay, more than any other in the book, is tied to events unfolding at the present time. Rather than parsing multiple texts from Newman's own day and context, save for Newman's argued openness in the 1860s to the loss of the Papal States that was then anathema to conservative ecclesiastics, the author brings a

measure of courage to his effort to present how he thinks Newman would size up the matter, and how Newman might argue to persuade American Catholic opinion, faced as we are today with particular provisions of the Affordable Care Act.

Ono Ekeh is attuned to the difficulties presented by the notion of conscience from a very different perspective than that of the other writers. Recalling that in Newman's scheme the voice of conscience can lead to a real apprehension of the existence of God Creator and Moral Judge, nevertheless the God whom one experiences never ceases to be shrouded in mystery. The very word *mystery* preoccupies Professor Ekeh. Newman, he says, uses the word to refer to our reaching the limits of our expressive capabilities, such that we reach an inability to articulate what we encounter and may even sound linguistically contradictory when we try talking about it. But a cynic might say to a believer in God, "If this is what you mean by saying that God is and remains a mystery, then all your words are simply nonsense. I am just quoting you back to yourself." Ekeh uses insights from Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner to defend the mysteriousness of God from amounting to sheer nonsense. *Mystery* signals our inability to comprehend the whole reality of something, not simply our inability to speak of it meaningfully. (I propose an analogy to help us follow Professor Ekeh's deep thinking. I am a mystery myself. I never comprehend my totality. Yet I can speak about myself, my real self; I can make decisions like "I am in a false position, and I need to remove myself from it.") *Mystery* is our sense that the full reality is beyond our full grasp yet not beyond suggestive language about it that does not mislead. A cluster of statements about God might appear, as statements, to be logically inconsistent, considered merely as language, such as saying that God is both merciful and just. But if statements are expressive of a unified reality, such as about God in God's Oneness, the cluster points to the substrate reality behind the statements. They are not a cluster of nonsense statements shooting aimlessly into the dark. Ekeh's essay provides justification that an unsophisticated believer, without having to be a theologian, can pray and make meaningful statements about the deep mystery of God, and Newman is on that person's side.

The last two essayists share a common background and a common topic. Both of them have their doctorates in English literature. Both of them have chosen to write, not surprisingly, about the imagination. I begin with Sr. Mary Brinkman, SCL. She adopts a more abstract approach to her analysis of imagination, but her treatment is laced with many excerpts from Newman's sermons that show imaginative writing at work. It is not simply the role of imagination but the notion of the analogical imagination

that she contends is Newman's strategy behind his phrase *real apprehension*. She is indebted to David Tracy's book, *Blessed Rage for Order*, for the phrase *analogical imagination* and her understanding of it. An analogical image is no mere metaphor "standing in" for a complex idea. Nor is it a simile, born of a mental comparison. An analogical image evokes the thought of *a relationship* (italics hers). Her thesis is that the analogical image expresses a personal language possessing a force that an analytic statement or figure of speech does not. It depends upon the experience of a relationship between two terms, one person and another, a person and God, or a person and nature. What might have been a more conceptual grasp between two distinct terms sinks into the imagination as a vivid realization joining both of them together. When happening between a person and God, as painted in Newman's sermons, such real apprehension is called faith in God.

Modern culture with its emphasis on a scientific and empirical way of thinking, argues Jane Rupert, presents tough obstacles to the type of thinking most suitable to enabling religious belief. Religion and even the humanities have become "domains imperiled in an empirical era." Religious belief requires reasoning infused with the contributions of imagination. Religious thinking, accordingly, is similar to the thinking used in poetry and other forms of literature. She introduces testimonies from two noted practitioners of empirical thinking who came to confess the truncation of their own minds because they allowed the imaginative side of their lives to atrophy. After presenting Newman's defense of the role of imagination in religious thinking in contrast to the very different sort of thinking going on in the empirical sciences, Dr. Rupert concludes with illustrations of poetic thinking from Newman's study of the Benedictine religious tradition. "The most poetical of religious disciplines" was Newman's arresting phrase for Benedictine life.

This, then, is the arrangement of essays in this book and the tack each essayist takes. In an epilogue, the book contains a reflection from Fr. John Ford, CSC, professor at the Catholic University of America. John Ford can rightly be thought of as the dean of Newman studies in the United States, having been working at it so long and so well. I had invited Fr. Ford to deliver the homily at our concluding Mundelein liturgy. He preached on the manner in which Divine Providence brought forth in Newman's experience unexpected blessings from life's deep disappointments. His reflection at the conclusion of this book is an outgrowth and further development of that homily, and it speaks for itself. (If the reader is unfamiliar with the basic contours of Newman's life, I suggest reading Professor Ford's epilogue after reading this introduction.)

To this introduction I wish to add a personal sort of postscript. Had I not been occupied with what convention people call housekeeping duties, I might have made a convention presentation myself at Mundelein. That was never to be, but I did mull over what I might have delivered were I not heavy laden. It is an aspect of Newman's doctrine on conscience that does not get full treatment by our essayists, though it is certainly implied here and there. It is the required notion of *patience* if God's voice is to be heard clearly, if it is to be discerned rightfully. Mine is a postscript to this Introduction, not an eleventh essay, so I will be very brief. And I will use Newman's own life and words in 1844 and 1845 as an illustration of the role of patience.

When 1845 opened, Newman was living at Littlemore, three miles outside Oxford, in a kind of retreat milieu with other like-minded university men.<sup>3</sup> Newman had two years earlier, in September of 1843, given up Anglican ministry and would be resigning his Oriel Fellowship the following October. From a comment he made in an 1864 newspaper that became part of his *Apologia*, he says that he had begun working on his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* at the beginning of 1845 and was hard at it until October. "As I advanced, my difficulties so cleared away that I ceased to speak of 'the Roman Catholics,' and boldly called them Catholics. Before I got to the end [of my research project], I resolved to be received, and the book remains in the state in which it was then, unfinished."<sup>4</sup>

This statement has led many Newman readers, among whom I include myself when I first began reading him seriously, to conclude that his conversion process was rather intellectual and went something like this: It had already become clear to him that the Anglican Church was in schism from the one divinely-constituted Roman Church. It is more probable, he noted frequently to friends, that Anglican Christianity veered into schism than that recent Roman doctrines have veered from the apostolic teachings. But the latter needed proving. So beginning in early 1845, Newman began researching the history of Roman Catholic doctrines, and he came to identify certain principles that distinguished true doctrinal developments from specious ones. Thus armed with principles, Newman's October 1845 conversion had unfolded in syllogistic fashion. Rome's Tridentine dogmas seem to be novelties. However, they meet the tests for

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these "younger men" of the Movement, as Newman called them, included Dalgairns, Lockhart, Bowles, Bridges, St John, Meyrick, Balston, Walker, and Coffin. Very much against Newman's wishes, Lockhart's early departure from them to become a Roman Catholic unsettled Newman deeply.

<sup>4</sup> *Apo.*, 234.

genuine doctrinal developments. Therefore, this last obstacle to becoming Catholic has now been removed by my just completed essay proving the minor premise.<sup>5</sup>

But Newman's confidential letters to friends in 1844 and especially 1845 present a different picture of what held him back from becoming a Catholic. "As to the Fathers...I do now think, far more than I did, that their study leads to Rome. It has thus wrought in me," he wrote fellow Tractarian leader Edward Pusey at the very end of 1843.<sup>6</sup> But was he deluding himself in so thinking? Why did no other leading lights of the "Movement" see what he was seeing, he wondered? Writing to Henry Edward Manning almost a year later, he says that his salvation depends on joining the Church of Rome, but "what keeps me yet, is what has kept me here long—a fear that I am under a delusion." In this same letter, he tells Manning that he does not see greener grass on the other side; in fact, "I have no existing sympathies with Roman Catholics. I hardly ever, even abroad, was at one of their services—I know none of them. I do not like what I hear of them."<sup>7</sup> Newman had a constant conviction that, as an Anglican, he was in schism. And he had an apprehension he did not want to die in a state of schism. But was it all a delusion? This fear of being deluded is what held him back from going over to Rome.

How was the fear of delusion finally whisked away? The answer is simple: By patience and by obedience to conscience!

Time alone can show whether a view will hold—but then there is this consolation, that, if time has shown the untenableness of one, it will do the like service to another, if it be untenable. Time alone can turn a view into a conviction—It is most unsatisfactory to be acting on a syllogism, or a solitary, naked, external, logical process. But surely it is possible in process of time to have a proposition so wrought into the mind, both ethically and by numberless fine conspiring and ever-recurring considerations as to become part of our mind, to be inseparable from us, and to command our obedience.<sup>8</sup>

As for obedience to one's conscience, "I have always contended that obedience even to an erring conscience was the way to gain light, and that it mattered not where a man began, so that he began on what came to hand

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<sup>5</sup> Some of this description is reprised from my book review of Volume 10 of Newman's *Letters and Diaries* that appeared in *The Thomist* 72/3 (July 2008), 517-23.

<sup>6</sup> *L.D.*, 10:63.

<sup>7</sup> *L.D.*, 10:412.

<sup>8</sup> *L.D.*, 10:190.

and in faith—that any thing might become a divine method of Truth, that to the pure all things are pure, and have a self-correcting virtue and a power of germinating.”<sup>9</sup>

Readers knowing Newman’s famous 1870 *Grammar of Assent* will detect working here in 1845 the same very twin principles, patience and conscience, that galvanize what Newman came to call years later the *illative sense* in making judgments in concrete matters. It is the hard-to-describe mental process that unerringly tells someone, within a discernment process, “enough is enough” and “now is the time to decide and to act.” This is what happened to Newman by late summer, 1845, and his letters then begin to forewarn friends of an imminent move. Newman’s final two years at Littlemore are a sort of existential commentary on his later *Grammar of Assent*.<sup>10</sup>

Although it remains true that overcoming his fear of delusion was the final obstacle to hurdle for what essayist Robert Christie terms Newman’s unconditional conversion, his 1845 research into the history of Christian doctrines was not a nugatory task. Before ever laying down his pen that October on the research that became his famous book on doctrinal development, Newman had already achieved a sense—let us call it an illative sense—that his conscience impelled him to become a Roman Catholic. This is why he wrote friends in the summer of 1845 that he was about to do so. Therefore he already was convinced personally that Tridentine doctrines were not novel additions to the ancient faith. But it remained for the public case to be made that recent Catholic teachings were not novelties. By October he had made the case sufficiently, and then he laid down his pen. I would propose that Newman’s *Essay on Development* is not the cause of his conversion but rather a kind of appendix to what his conscience had reached earlier, after suitable patience. The *Essay on Development* brought to conclusion the making of the case that others could read for themselves. But as for entering into his innermost conscience, that was for God to do, not for others to require.

It is thus evident that Newman’s conversion did not spring from some intellectualized eureka moment in October 1845 when the doctrinal issues were cleaned up. It sprang, rather, from a discernment of God’s will for him, for him personally and not as a paradigm for others such as an intellectual syllogism might serve. It took patience. It involved a period of time that Newman could neither control nor predict. All he could do was pray, mull over issues, and test his feelings, such as coming to a

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

<sup>10</sup> This is an insight I owe to Frank McGrath, the successor to Gerard Tracey as editor of the *Letters and Diaries*.

provisional decision and seeing if peacefulness ensued. At some moment, seemingly in the summer of 1845, his conscience told him that he was not under a delusion thinking that he ought to become a Roman Catholic. And this decision to become a Roman Catholic he then began sharing with friends.



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE ROLE OF CONSCIENCE IN THE ADVENTURE OF HOLINESS ACCORDING TO BLESSED JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

FR. THOMAS J. NORRIS

“There is one archetype of the Christian man, and this model is consecrated by the Church herself. It is the saint.”<sup>1</sup>

—Georges Bernanos

“Certainly, I have always contended that obedience even to an erring conscience was the way to gain light, and that it mattered not where a man began, so that he began on what came to hand, and in faith; and that any thing might become a divine method of Truth.”<sup>2</sup>

—John Henry Newman

### Introduction

As a young man, John Henry Newman chose as the mottos of his life, “Holiness rather than peace,” and “Growth the only evidence of life.”<sup>3</sup> The occasion of his doing so was his reading of Thomas Scott, an Evangelical Anglican clergyman and the man to whom he felt he owed, under God, the salvation of his soul. He describes this great moment in his life in the *Apologia*. From the time of his first conversion at the age of fifteen, this very philosophical teenager aimed at obedience to the Word of God and the following out of the Will of God in the circumstances of life. Since Christianity is the presence of Persons, the goal of Christian life has to consist in looking unto Christ, “the leader and perfecter of faith” (Heb

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<sup>1</sup> George Bernanos, *Lettre aux Anglais* (Paris 1942), 245, quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Bernanos. An Ecclesial Existence* (San Francisco 1996), 313.

<sup>2</sup> *Apo.*, 206. Any exceptions to Newman’s Uniform Edition will be indicated.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

12:2). Obedience, not a frame of mind, is what matters. And since in the Kingdom of God those who have will receive even more and they will become rich (Mt 13:12), Newman's life advances from one degree of insight to another, since he had the grace not to betray the kindly light that led him. Students of Newman identify his three conversions, one as a teenager in 1816, the second as a Fellow of Oriel in 1828 when he started to prefer intellectual to spiritual achievement, and the third in 1845 when he made the ultimate ecclesiological shift in entering the Catholic Church.

From the time of his youth, there was another concern that rose up before him. It was the spectre of an intellectual movement against religion of such depth and magnitude as to challenge all believers and to require an appropriate response. Christians would have to give an account of the hope that was in them (1 Pt 3:15). The response to that challenge is so much the context and *leitmotiv* of Blessed John Henry Newman's life as to constitute a key hermeneutic of his voluminous writing.<sup>4</sup> From the moment he entered Holy Orders, he set before himself a clear ministerial objective: to form Christians.<sup>5</sup> "That goodly framework of society which is the creation of Christianity"<sup>6</sup> was under threat. Accordingly, Newman dedicated much of his long life to proposing and designing a response to this subtle, ongoing and erosive marginalization of Faith. Against the same threat, Pope Benedict XVI voiced more recently similar alarm. The retired pope spoke of a "faith fatigue" affecting much of the West. If an eminent theologian such as Karl Rahner could contend that the first Pentecost was "a communal experience of the Holy Spirit clearly conceived, desired and experienced in a general way" and "not an accidental local gathering of a number of individual mystics, but an experience of the Spirit on the part of a community as such,"<sup>7</sup> then John Henry Newman could be seen as a glowing personification of that principle, especially through the witness of a life spent building up various communities.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Stray Essays on Controversial Points*, privately printed (London 1890), 104; quoted in C. S. Dessain, *John Henry Newman* (London: A. and C. Black Ltd, 1966), 30.

<sup>5</sup> See Christopher Dawson, "Newman and the Modern World" in *The Tablet*, 5 August 1972, 733-4. It is interesting that the title of his very first sermon is "Holiness necessary for Future Blessedness," in *P.S.*, I, 1-14.

<sup>6</sup> Newman's words near the end of his life, in the Biglietto Address. See *Add.*, 65.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Rahner, "Spirituality of the Future" in *The Practice of the Faith* (London 1985), 18-26; see his "The Theology of Mysticism" in Karl Lehmann and L. Raffelt, eds., *The Practice of Faith: a Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York 1986), 70-77; and *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York 1974), 108.

His two great works on faith and belief, the *Oxford University Sermons* and *A Grammar of Assent*, cover almost forty years of reflection and writing between them. There one might expect to find his most mature and explicit thinking on the assimilation and personal appropriation of divine revelation. That expectation is in fact borne out upon reading these seminal texts. Accordingly, it is to these two works we turn, in particular the latter, which has his most mature insight as to how we realize the reality of God and personally appropriate the riches of divine revelation. As with other topics he tackled, Newman goes directly to the core of the matter. The question, in other words, is: “How we gain an image of God and give a real assent to the proposition that He exists.”<sup>8</sup> Newman proposes conscience as the preferable route to such an assent, because conscience is a “first principle” and “we have by nature a conscience.”<sup>9</sup>

### What is Conscience?

In the *Grammar*, and somewhat surprisingly in the chapter concluding the first half of that original work where he is dealing with the *apprehension* of faith, he addresses formally the topic of conscience. Conscience is as real an endowment of our humanity as memory or intellect or will or imagination or the aesthetic sense. Conscience for its part is both a moral sense and a sense of duty, a judgment of reason and a magisterial dictate. In the second volume of the *Philosophical Notebook* he defines conscience in these terms: “By conscience I mean the discrimination of acts as worthy of praise or blame. Now, such praise or blame is a phenomenon of my existence, one of those phenomena through which, as I have said, my existence is brought home to me. But the accuracy of praise or blame in the particular case is a matter not of faith, but of judgment. Here then are two senses of the word *conscience*. It either stands for the act of moral judgment, or for the particular judgment formed. In the former case, it is the foundation of religion, in the latter of

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<sup>8</sup> *G.A.*, 105.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* For further references to conscience in Newman, consult the following: Johannes Artz, *Newman-Lexikon* (Mainz 1975); *Newman-Studien*, volumes IX (1974) and XI (1980) for various articles; S. A. Grave, *Conscience in Newman's Thought* (Oxford 1989); John Finnis, “Conscience in the *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*,” in *Newman after a Hundred Years*, eds., I. Ker and A. Hill, (Oxford 1990), 401-418; Gerard J. Hughes, “Conscience” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, eds., I. Ker and T. Merrigan, (Cambridge 2009), 189-220.

ethics.”<sup>10</sup> Conscience as a moral judgment makes it the source of ethics, while its second dimension makes it the key to the realization of the reality of God and, in a second instance, of realizing the mysteries of divine revelation.

Newman concentrates on the second aspect. Why does he? First, “this is its primary and most authoritative aspect; it is the ordinary sense of the word. Half the world would be puzzled to know what was meant by the moral sense; but every one knows what is meant by a good or bad conscience. Conscience is ever forcing on us by threats and by promises that we must follow the right and avoid the wrong.”<sup>11</sup> A second reason for his preference has to do with his focus on how we reach *real* or *imaginative* apprehension of God, and, specifically, the question, “Can I believe as if I saw?” He will show that this primary sense of conscience is the very place where we access the reality of God initially and later *also* the truths of divine revelation. For in conscience as a sense of duty we encounter “the dictate of an authoritative monitor bearing upon the details of conduct as they come before us.”<sup>12</sup> The whole world, Newman contends, knows what is meant by a good conscience and a bad conscience, whereas only a few would know what the “Moral Sense” is. We speak of conscience as a voice, since the imperative side of the act of conscience enables us realize that *we are being addressed*. “If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear.”<sup>13</sup> Already in the sermon, “Dispositions for Faith,” Newman brought out vividly the theonomous dimension of conscience when he explains that its “very existence carries on our minds to a being exterior to ourselves; for else whence did it come? and to a Being superior to ourselves; else whence its strange troublesome peremptoriness? I say, without going on to the question *what* it says...its very existence throws us out of ourselves, and beyond ourselves, to go and seek for him in the height and depth, whose voice it is.”<sup>14</sup> To the degree that we listen, obey, and act consistently with that voice, our realization of both the being and the attributes of God deepens and sharpens.

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Sillem, ed., *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, vol.2 (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1969-70), 47 (Proof of Theism).

<sup>11</sup> *G.A.*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>14</sup> *O.S.*, 65.

With characteristic pedagogical skill, he sets before us the two sets of “feelings” or “emotions” that accompany the good and bad conscience. These sets of feelings are such as require an “exciting cause.” In that way, “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>15</sup> In that way, conscience in its imperative dimension “is a connecting principle between the creature and his Creator.”<sup>16</sup> This God is holy but demanding. He is perceived as such because conscience as a dictate impresses the picture of a “holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive” Judge. Only with divine revelation shall we encounter the God whose mercy mocks his justice.

Now this process, though “independent of the written records of Revelation,”<sup>17</sup> impresses on the mind the reality of a Supreme Being, a Person, who speaks to us and addresses us. Conscience in that fashion is a discovery of our identity as a *You* before the living God who says to us, “Do this”, and “Do not do that.” In the process, our minds arrive, “not only at a notional, but at an imaginative or real assent to the doctrine that there is One God, that is, an assent made with an apprehension, not only of what the words of the proposition mean, but of the object denoted by them.”<sup>18</sup>

It is ever important to realize the *context* of this exposition on conscience. It comes at the conclusion of the first half of the *Grammar* which deals with our apprehension and access to what is real. In this fifth chapter called “Apprehension and Assent in the Matter of Religion,” he applies the insight gained in the first four chapters. A key distinction worked out at length had been that of notional and real or imaginative apprehensions and assents. They differ from each other in terms of direction of attention and depth of impact. In real apprehension, we focus our attention on the entire object, while in notional apprehension we focus on an aspect of the object. Furthermore, in real apprehension, the object exercises maximum impact on the perceiving subject by engaging the imagination as well as the moral sense.

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<sup>15</sup> *G.A.*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

## “Can I believe as if I saw?”

Newman asks this famous question at a key moment in the *Grammar* as he considers our perception of God and his divine attributes.<sup>19</sup> The imperative side of conscience enables him to follow up his own question vigorously. There is a parallel between the function performed by the mind with regard to the external world and the function performed by conscience with regard to the Supreme Being. The fact is that “from the perceptive power which identifies the intuitions of conscience with the reverberations or echoes (so to say) of an external admonition, we proceed on to the notion of a Supreme Ruler and Judge, and then again we image Him and His attributes in those recurring intuitions, out of which, as mental phenomena, our recognition of his existence was originally gained.”<sup>20</sup> This explains why he identifies conscience as the great internal teacher of religion and as “a connecting principle between the Creator and the creature,” as we have seen.

The implications of this connection should be noted. The objection circulates widely today that conscience disconnects, and so alienates, a person from the true self, setting Another over against the deepest self. This contention is clearly present to Newman, especially in the *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* where, with the hindsight of four further years from the completing of the *Grammar*, he sees the mounting resistance to conscience and, in particular, the tactic of reducing of its primordial sense. He already addressed that contention in the *Grammar* by highlighting the fact that conscience is the voice of God and that this voice constitutes a call to our deepest humanity. “For Newman the encounter with God in conscience is a profoundly religious experience, indeed it is for him the foundational religious experience.”<sup>21</sup> This has to be so since conscience is “a dutiful obedience to what claims to be a divine voice, speaking within us.”<sup>22</sup>

The significance and priority of conscience in the human access to God is a distinctive component in all of Newman’s thinking. It enjoys precedence over the classical proofs of the existence of the Supreme Being. It also operates very powerfully within each person, and so it is not

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>21</sup> John F. Crosby, “What is Anthropocentric and what is Theocentric in Christian Existence? The Challenge of John Henry Newman,” *Communio* 2(1989), 253; see also his “The Encounter of God and Man in Moral Obligation” in *The New Scholasticism* 3(1986), 317-355.

<sup>22</sup> “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk,” in *Diff.*, 2, 255.