

Newman's Theology of Faith: A Guiding Light in a Secular Age

1. Theological Implications of Secularisation in Western Society

From the onset, one must state that this article seeks to be of help in an anthropologically endangered landscape and to suggest ways in which the present age's characteristic forgetfulness of God might be wisely addressed for the benefit of humanity. John Henry Newman's theology of faith is thus engaged with this specific motive well-kept in view.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century and during the years following the dawn of the new millennium, the phenomenon of secularisation has been one among the most debated. Starting with a simple and direct definition of the "promiscuous concept"¹ represented by the term "secularisation," Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor affirmed that the concept traditionally conveyed "two different meanings: a) the decline of religious belief and practice; b) the retreat of religion from the public space."² Furthermore, Sommerville contended that the term "[s]ecularism' should be differentiated from the more general

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¹ Callum G. Brown – Michael Snape, "Introduction: Conceptualising Secularisation 1974-2010: The Influence of Hugh McLeod," in *Secularisation in the Christian World. Essays in honour of Hugh McLeod*, eds. Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (Farnham – Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 1.

² Francisco Lombo de León – Bart van Leeuwen, "Charles Taylor on Secularization. Introduction and Interview," *Ethical Perspectives* 10 (2003): 78.

theme of secularization. The term secularism was coined around 1852 to describe an ideology organized to counter religious loyalties.”³

From the theological, sociological and philosophical points of view, a “stock-taking” and interpretation of the phenomenon of secularisation, especially when considered in the context of Western society, is far from being a straightforward enterprise. Theologians such as Karl Rahner and Johannes Baptist Metz, had initially sought to interpret it in a theologically sympathetic light. Rahner upheld the claim “that the dynamism inherent in Christianity itself gives rise to a justifiable process slowly working itself out in history by which the world becomes worldly.”⁴ The German theologian maintained that the process of secularisation favoured the emancipation of the “worldliness of the world which has been brought about in a long process of development by Christianity itself, a de-numinization and de-sacralization of the world which is in accordance with the nature of Christianity itself.”⁵

Johannes Baptist Metz decidedly backed the same line of thought, suggesting that “the worldliness of the world is not to be the undialectic expression of the fact that the divine acceptance of the world is protested against and rejected by the world, but should itself emerge as the occasion of the manifestation in history of the fact that God has ‘accepted’ it.”⁶ The central thesis posited by Metz is that:

The secularity of the world, as it has emerged in the modern process of secularisation and as we see it today in a globally heightened form, has fundamentally, though not in its individual historical forms, arisen not against Christianity but through it. It is originally a Christian event and hence testifies in our world situation to the power of the “hour of Christ” at work within history.⁷

According to Metz, in some way, the world’s acceptance of its own condition through its unfettering from a magical conception of creation enabled it to be “universally given over to what the Incarnation bestows upon it in a supreme way: secularity.”⁸ Nevertheless, according to Metz’s thought, the process of

³ C.J. Sommerville, “Secular Society/Religious Population: Our Tacit Rules for Using the Term ‘Secularization,’” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 251.

⁴ Karl Rahner, “Theological Reflections on the Problem of Secularisation,” in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, X, Writings of 1965-67 II* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), 321.

⁵ Karl Rahner, “Theological Considerations on Secularisation and Atheism,” in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, XI, Confrontations I* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 168.

⁶ Johannes Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-20. The original text is italicised.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

secularisation is not to be uncritically or ingenuously considered, without the necessary admission that it bears significant potential dangers alongside the salutary promises it carries. Metz confessed:

The historical course of this process is many-layered and by no means easy to give an account of. It is not free of wrong turns and the perversities of a hybrid secularism. As new heights in the understanding of the world are attained, the abysses of possible error and corruption become deeper, and the danger of falling into them becomes greater. The reservations and protests of the Church against this modern passage of the world into its own worldliness must be seen against the background of these *concrete* dangers and aberrations.⁹

The perils pointed out by Metz have not been always kept alive in the memory of contemporary Western society including the Church. This seems to be the judgment so clearly communicated through the words of Pope Benedict XVI. The Bishop of Rome stated:

Secularisation, which presents itself in cultures by imposing a world and humanity without reference to Transcendence, is invading every aspect of daily life and developing a mentality in which God is effectively absent, wholly or partially, from human life and awareness. This secularisation is not only an external threat to believers, but has been manifest for some time in the heart of the Church herself. It profoundly distorts the Christian faith from within, and consequently, the lifestyle and daily behaviour of believers. They live in the world and are often marked, if not conditioned, by the cultural imagery that impresses contradictory and impelling models regarding the practical denial of God: there is no longer any need for God, to think of him or to return to him. Furthermore, the prevalent hedonistic and consumeristic mindset fosters in the faithful and in Pastors a tendency to superficiality and selfishness that is harmful to ecclesial life.¹⁰

Benedict XVI shared his conception of the West as a hub from which correlative secularising trends are exported to other areas of the world. He affirmed that “through new information technologies, globalization has often also resulted in disseminating in all cultures many of the materialistic and individualistic elements of the West.”¹¹ In a constantly changing scenario, society succumbs to the exclusive dominion of the market while the individual is rated proportionately to his willingness or refusal, ability or incapability, to be swallowed

⁹ Ibid., 35-36.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, “Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture,” 8 March 2008, *AAS* 100 (2008): 245-246.

¹¹ Ibid., 246.

by the globalised market's logic.¹² Following this materialistic urge, society faces "[t]he advent of the pursuit of happiness as the prime engine of human thought and action,"¹³ defined by "the move from the rule of tradition to the 'melting of solids and profaning the sacred' together with "the shift from the satisfaction of needs to the production of desires."¹⁴ Taylor insisted that the historical cosmic de-numinization transformed contemporary individuals into "buffered selves."¹⁵ The Canadian philosopher claimed that society came to "accredit the view that human life is better off without transcendental vision altogether. The development of modern freedom is then identified with the rise of an exclusive humanism."¹⁶

Furthermore, the same consumerist logic has been transposed to the realm of the most intimate human bonds which seem to be regulated by the narcissistic need of self-fulfilment. The human person seeks to satisfy anxiously his immediate needs while at the same time disengaging himself completely from social and inter-personal bonds, in order to purportedly gain and defend his own individual freedom. Indeed, as Pope Francis stated, "[m]odernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds."¹⁷ The prevalent mentality has changed greatly in this "post-revolutionary climate" which "is extremely sensitive to anything that smacks of the *ancien régime*."¹⁸ The contemporary human person's

mindset keeps its distance from a former platonic Christian world, in which there was taken for granted the primacy of truth and values over feelings, of intelligence over the will, of the spirit over the flesh, of unity over pluralism, of asceticism over life, of the eternal over the temporal. In our world there is a spontaneous preference for an arbitrary logic and the search for pleasure over an ascetic and prohibitive morality. This is a world in which sensitivity, emotion and the present moment come first. Human existence, therefore, is a place where there is freedom

¹² See Rossano Zas Friz De Col, *Iniziazione alla vita eterna. Respirare, trascendere e vivere* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2012), 19-20.

¹³ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," in *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, eds. C. Taylor et al., Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series VIII, Christian Philosophical Studies 21 (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), 270.

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?," in *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. J.L. Heft (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), n.116.

¹⁸ Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?," 24.

without restraints, where a person exercises, or believes he can exercise, his personal empire and creativity.¹⁹

Hence, the contemporary human being (especially in the West), comes to be defined by his radical quest for a disengaged liberty. Such a radical quest for freedom risks being dramatically transformed into a great tragedy. Romano Guardini stated:

For the existentialist man is man minus any presuppositions – either essential or ethical. Man is simply free. He must determine himself not only in his actions but also in his very being. Thrown into a chaos and without a place therein, man has only himself, and beyond all he is condemned to create his own fate. This bleakness is not true.²⁰

This pervasive disengagement assumes dissimilar forms while it unfolds itself on various levels and spheres of human existence. Gallagher insisted that “postmodernism rejects ‘meta-narratives’ as ‘logocentric,’ that is to say, deceived by the inevitable human urge to find one central meaning for existence and to express this meaning in some story form.”²¹ Man’s mistrust of grand narratives is not one of the effects generated by modernity. Furthermore, according to Bauman, modernity was still “an era which hoped to legislate reason into reality, to reshuffle the stakes in a way that would trigger rational conduct and render all behaviour contrary to reason too costly to contemplate.”²² Somehow, the contemporary human being’s trust in the power of reason still kept alive human faith in some sort of all-encompassing grand existential narrative.

In contrast, postmodernity (not without having the merit of shrugging off its shoulders a certain naiveté inherited from preceding epochs), demolished modernity’s aspiration which sought to find, within illuminated reason, the exclusive and complete explanation of human existence. Consequently, postmodernity has simply denied the existence and the necessity of the quest for metaphysical truth. Ratzinger aptly observed that this characteristic has rapidly leaked into the theological and ecclesial sphere. The theologian affirmed that since

¹⁹ Carlo Maria Martini, “Teaching the Faith in a Postmodern World,” *America* 198, no.16 (2008): 17.

²⁰ Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2001²), 80.

²¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003), 101.

²² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 47-48.

the purely formal treatment of man and his being is just as little possible as the pure self-reflection of praxis, new content slips in unnoticed, the justification of which is just the expected “functioning” of man – who, deprived of truth, can no longer be anything more than the functioning of a system of no particular finality.²³

Some theologians had already signalled the dangers generated by an exclusively secular and immanent interpretation of Christianity by those who professedly sought to raise it to postmodern standards. Balthasar had suggested that “[t]he Enlightenment, which asserted itself first within Anglican and Protestant theology and then more radically in French philosophy, finally penetrated Catholic theology too.”²⁴ According to the theologian

On the one hand, there is an understanding of faith that, in the traditional view, regards the articles of faith as the irreducible object of all Christian theologizing; on the other hand, there is the opposite view, which subjects these very articles – both their content and the act of faith that they elicit – to rationalistic scrutiny and substitutes for most of them a new and essentially reduced content that relies on anthropological plausibility.²⁵

Similarly, Ratzinger warned about the dominant claim “that truth is, in any event, inconceivable and that to believe otherwise is tantamount to an attack on tolerance and pluralism.”²⁶ Ratzinger stated that

In the wake of this form of rationality, Europe has developed a culture which, in a way unknown to humanity heretofore, excludes God from public conscience, whether he is denied altogether, or his existence be judged as unprovable, uncertain, and therefore belonging to the realm of subjective choices, something anyway irrelevant for public life.²⁷

²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 319.

²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory, IV, The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 459.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 318.

²⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Siena: Cantagalli, 2005), 35-36: “E sulla scia di questa forma di razionalità, l'Europa ha sviluppato una cultura che, in un modo sconosciuto prima d'ora all'umanità, esclude Dio dalla coscienza pubblica, sia che venga negato del tutto, sia che la Sua esistenza venga giudicata non dimostrabile, incerta, e dunque appartenente all'ambito delle scelte soggettive, un qualcosa comunque irrilevante per la vita pubblica.” Author's translation.

The exclusion of God from the personal and public horizons is aptly captured by the postmodern tenet “[t]hou shalt not bother about God.”²⁸ Gallagher precisely observed:

The tone has changed radically from argument and confrontation over religion to a vague acknowledgement that occasionally we have “immortal longings” as Shakespeare’s Cleopatra would put it. [...] But beware of the illusory notion of “presence”: absence is all. Hence no transforming word of revelation can speak to us.²⁹

Postmodernity arrived progressively at this point, gaining gradually but steadily its momentum. According to the positivist French philosopher “Comte, acknowledged widely as the father of sociology, the theological age of superstition had given way to the metaphysical age of abstract theorizing about religion, but this, in turn, was giving way in his own generation to the triumph of positivism and the elimination of traditional religion.”³⁰

Newman had already been convinced that an aggressive secularism had invaded Europe during his own lifetime. He emphatically declared: “You may persist in calling Europe Catholic, though it is not.”³¹ Nonetheless, Newman was not discouraged since he believed that “Truth can entrench itself carefully, and define its own profession severely, and display its colours unequivocally, by occasion of that very unbelief which so shamelessly vaunts itself.”³²

The apparently innocuous but insidious anti-religious nature of the liberal direction taken by Western society had been highlighted by Newman in his famous *Biglietto Speech* (1879). He argued “that there is much in the liberalistic theory which is good and true; for example, not to say more, the precepts of justice, truthfulness, sobriety, self-command, benevolence [...] are among its avowed principles, and the natural laws of society.”³³ The problem arises when these are taken to an extreme. As Newman commented: “It is not till we find that

²⁸ Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 102.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁰ Rob Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents* (London - New York: Continuum, 2010), 20.

³¹ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*. Edited with introduction and notes by I.T. Ker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 311.

³² *Ibid.*, 311.

³³ John Henry Newman, *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with His Replies etc. 1879-81*, ed. W.P. Neville (New York - London - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905), 68.

this array of principles is intended to supersede, to block out, religion, that we pronounce it to be evil.”³⁴

The supreme paradox of this situation in post-Christian Europe³⁵ is the fact that “secularity is being transformed into a new faith, a new anthropology, a new moral inspiration, giving rise to secularism.”³⁶ Moreover, the frustration caused by the failed project of modernity has given rise to the new postmodern or “to the hyper-modern phenomenon, to be understood as a further attempt to fulfil the modern desires of total and definitive colonization of the human.”³⁷ Through the technical and scientific dominion of reality, the human being dreams about the possibility of becoming the perfect product of himself. In this regard, Pope Francis argued that “the process of secularisation, by rendering absolute the concepts of self-determination and autonomy, has led to the growth of the demand for euthanasia in many countries as an ideological affirmation of man’s will to power over life.”³⁸ One might contend that human beings were never so close to accomplishing fully the destructive project of dehumanization. Looking back provocatively to recent history, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion asked:

What is the point of the humanity of humans, the naturalness of nature, the justice of the city and the truth of knowledge? Why not rather their opposites, the dehumanization of humans for improving humanity, the systematic bleeding of nature in order to develop the economy, injustice so as to render society more efficient, the absolute empire of information-distraction in order to escape the constraints of the true? These counter-possibilities are no longer fantasy or prediction, because the ideologies that have dominated history since

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Flavio Placida, *La catechesi missionaria e la nuova evangelizzazione nell’Europa post-cristiana. La trasmissione della fede in un mondo complesso* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2013), 57, note 14.

³⁶ José da Cruz Policarpo, “La conversione missionaria della catechesi,” *Catechesi* 78, no.3 (2008-2009): 22: “si fa della secolarità una nuova fede, una nuova antropologia, una nuova ispirazione morale, dando origine al secolarismo.” Author’s translation.

³⁷ Rossano Sala, “La presenza della Chiesa nell’ambito educativo: la scuola,” in *Evangelizzazione e educazione*. Nuova Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 32, eds. A. Bozzolo – R. Carelli (Roma: LAS, 2011), 153: “al fenomeno dell’iper-moderno, da intendersi come un ulteriore tentativo di compiere i desideri moderni di colonizzazione totale e definitiva dell’umano.” Author’s translation.

³⁸ Pope Francis, “Address to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith”, 26 January 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco_20180126_plenaria-cfaith.html [Accessed 2 February 2021].

the beginning of the last century have had no other plan than to turn them into reality.³⁹

The dehumanisation of the human person is evidently related to the global ethical crisis of society. Radical postmodernism beholds indifferently morality and the pursuit of virtue in life. Perennial moral norms are spurned and the claim that every human being is a free and responsible agent whose choices fundamentally shape his own life, is rejected.⁴⁰ “[A] growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism” have been identified as effects of “[t]he process of secularisation”⁴¹ by Pope Francis. Likewise, as some have observed, the trust in institutions has been also undermined so much that although there are signs of growing interest and thirst for the sacred, there seems to be a conversion towards spirituality but not towards institutional forms of religion. This trend is motivated by the prevalent belief that the

Spirit is felt to be spontaneous, freely available and democratically structured, whereas religion is perceived to be doctrinal, regulated and authoritarian. Spirit is felt to be holistic and urging us towards wholeness and completion, whereas religion is perceived to be promoting perfection, one-sidedness and imbalance.⁴²

One must not be deceived by the claims of a generic renewed religious interest which does not sufficiently prove a global reappraisal of the centrality of transcendence in Western society. Nevertheless, the absolute negation of transcendence which at times might even assume the semblance of counterfeit self-gratifying religion, has encountered what Taylor called “the immanent revolt”⁴³ which sought to face squarely the ultimate problem of suffering and death proving the human being’s “inability to be content simply with an affirmation of life.”⁴⁴ Contemporary people, through their choices and their reactions to the effects caused by them, signal, even if not always intentionally, that they sense the need to open once again “the transcendent window”⁴⁵ whose closure brought them to suffocate themselves and the others.

³⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *Believing in Order to See. On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 9.

⁴⁰ See Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 102.

⁴¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), n.64.

⁴² David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution. The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Hove, New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 31.

⁴³ Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?,” 26. See *Evangelii gaudium*, n.63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

In the light of what has been stated, it seems that ultimately the question of God's existence and his relevance for human beings remains the one capable of connecting the various elements emerging out of an attentive reflection upon the situation in which the contemporary human person finds himself. Recalling Metz's theological contribution, Ratzinger exposed with remarkable acumen the inner core of the contemporary crisis of faith. He claimed that

In his conference when leaving the University of Münster, the theologian J.B. Metz said some unexpected things for him. In the past, Metz taught us anthropocentrism – the true occurrence of Christianity was the anthropological turning point, the secularisation, the discovery of the secularity of the world. Then he taught us political theology – the political characteristic of faith; then the “dangerous memory”; and finally narrative theology. After this long and difficult path, today he tells us: The true problem of our times is the “Crisis of God”, the absence of God, disguised by an empty religiosity. Theology must go back to being truly theo-logy, speaking about and with God. Metz is right: the *unum necessarium* to man is God. Everything changes, whether God exists or not.⁴⁶

2. Newman's Theology of Faith

2.1 *The Crisis of Faith*

Being a prophet capable of deciphering not only the perils of his age but also those of the future, Newman insisted that at the root of the process (as he experienced it in his own country) which today we characterize as aggressive secularism, one could identify a crisis of faith. He strongly argued that “[t]he special peril of the time before us is the spread of that plague of infidelity, that the Apostles and our Lord Himself have predicted as the worst calamity of the last times of the Church.”⁴⁷ Certainly, the British thinker realized that the epoch

⁴⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers on the Occasion of the Jubilee of Catechists”, 12 December 2000, <https://www.cmvic.net/documents/2014/0/ADDRESS%20TO%20CATECHISTS%20AND%20RELIGION%20TEACHERS.pdf>, II, 2 [Accessed 17 May 2021]. See Benedict XVI, “Address to the Members of the Roman Curia at the Traditional Exchange of Christmas Greetings”, 22 December 2006, *AAS* 99 (2007) 31: “Moreover, the great problem of the West is forgetfulness of God. This forgetfulness is spreading. In short, all the individual problems can be traced back to this question, I am sure of it.”

⁴⁷ John Henry Newman, *Faith and Prejudice and Other Unpublished Sermons of Cardinal Newman* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 117. See M. Marchetto, “Religious Education and John Henry Newman's Idea of a University,” *Italian Journal of Sociology of Religion* 7, no.3 (2015): 188-189. I am indebted to Marchetto for his reference to Newman's important sermon titled *The Infidelity of the Future* (1873).

he was living in, "had the evil prerogative of being like that more terrible season, when it is said that the elect themselves will be in danger of falling away."⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Newman acutely observed that the crisis which we consider to have been extended to our own time, has not been entirely unbeneficial for the Church since in this new situation which certainly does not lack its own peculiarities, "she gains in intensity what she loses in extent."⁴⁹

Newman sought to outline the principal causes which he believed to be at the basis of the raging crisis of faith. He emphatically denounced the prevalent idea maintained by many that "[y]ou may have opinions in religion, you may have theories, you may have arguments, you may have probabilities; you may have anything but demonstration, and therefore you cannot have science."⁵⁰ In contemporary Western society and still more among its intellectual classes there still seems to thrive the conviction "that in all things we must go by reason, in nothing by faith, that things are known and are to be received so far as they can be proved."⁵¹ The widely embraced secularist counter-religion has also "its fundamental dogma" which holds "that nothing can be known for certain about the unseen world."⁵² The promoters of this well-diffused view affirm that "[t]here is no revelation from above. There is no exercise of faith. Seeing and proving is the only ground for believing."⁵³ At the center of the crisis Newman claimed, one encountered the propensity for the denial of the possibility of holding an absolute faith in God. Newman affirmed:

They do not believe either the *object* – a God personal, a Providence and a moral Governor; and secondly, what they *do* believe, viz., that there is some first cause or other, they do not believe with faith, absolutely, but as a probability. You will say that their theories have been in the world and are no new thing. No. Individuals have put them forth, but they have not been current and popular ideas. Christianity has never yet had experience of a world simply irreligious.⁵⁴

Besides being the outcome of the above-described principles, perhaps more aptly definable as prejudices of an epistemological nature, Newman suggested that unbelief was also the result of discrepancies of a spiritual nature. Individuals who embraced the faith and lived it within the Catholic "system" found it

⁴⁸ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 313.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 314.

⁵¹ Ibid., 123.

⁵² Ibid., 319.

⁵³ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 124-125.

difficult to give an effective account of it (see 1Pt 3:15) to those who stood outside of their system of faith and consequently moved along a decidedly different wavelength. Newman compellingly emphasized that “there is many a man who has ground enough to believe, who wishes to believe, but who cannot believe”⁵⁵ and “whose doubts are moral ones.”⁵⁶ Given that in all probability, as Charles Taylor has suggested, “in Western modernity [i.e. the category by which he referred to contemporary Western society] the obstacles to belief are primarily moral and spiritual rather than epistemic,”⁵⁷ the incidence of possible misunderstandings between the insiders and outsiders of the religious system, as Newman had wisely described it, will probably become ever more cogent.

The moral and spiritual nature of the current crisis of faith in Western society partly finds its roots in the practical infidelity which has been exposed by Newman through his unrivalled critical insight. He had sagely alerted his contemporaries to the fact that the reduction of Christianity to the form of a merely charitable praxis was only one among the worst modes in which the pragmatic infidelity of the day expressed itself. Regarding this infidelity, he affirmed that “men of the world,”⁵⁸ and often “men of great intellect, who have long and intently and exclusively given themselves to the study or investigation of some one particular branch of secular knowledge,”⁵⁹ avoid making an outright negation of God or religion.⁶⁰ They would rather affirm “that there are other beings in the world besides the Supreme Being; their business is with them.”⁶¹ The same kind of individuals likewise insist that “the best kind of religion is ‘to do their duty in this world,’ that this is the true worship of God; in other words, that the pursuit of money, of credit, of power, that the gratification of self, and the worship of self, is doing their duty”⁶² and that “[a]fter all, the creation is not the Creator, nor things secular religious.”⁶³

These erroneous notions, embraced and put into practice by purportedly Christian faithful, are tantamount to the dethronement of God and his usurpation

⁵⁵ John Henry Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906), 224.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁵⁷ Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?,” 25.

⁵⁸ John Henry Newman, *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), 90.

⁵⁹ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 51.

⁶⁰ See Newman, *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*, 90.

⁶¹ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 51.

⁶² Newman, *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*, 90.

⁶³ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 51.

by the human being who seeks to place himself in God's place. Newman realized that the human person's urge to go by evidence instead of faith, which stands contrasted to sight, since it would otherwise cease being faith or "the realizing of things hoped for, the warrant of things not seen,"⁶⁴ was also a consequence of the human being's alleged inability to give his total assent of faith to God due to the erroneous evaluation of difficulties emerging in the process. In his *Grammar of Assent*, Newman stated that "the shreds and tatters of former controversies, and the litter of an argumentative habit, may beset and obstruct the intellect."⁶⁵ For this same reason, while commenting on the apostle St. Thomas and his initial incredulity, Newman claimed: "Being weak in faith, he suspended his judgment, and seemed resolved not to believe anything, till he was told everything."⁶⁶

Many, not only in Newman's times but also in contemporary Western society, like St. Thomas, find the open-ended nature of faith which may be described as an enlightened stepping into the unknown in the reassuring presence of the one loved and known and not "as a leap in the dark, to be taken in the absence of light,"⁶⁷ unsettling. Human beings seem to have lost the capability of relating to mystery and to accept the "darkness" in which the "divine mysteries" unceasingly "remain covered by the veil of faith itself."⁶⁸ The human person is charmed by the mystery which eludes his grasp but the fear of losing control, which he thinks he has over himself and the others, induces him to escape the mystery which he cannot control. Nevertheless, as Maurice Blondel suggested, the human person must inexorably face "a peculiar test of the spirit, this mixture of light and shadow where, for lack of full clarity, it would seem that only full darkness would be possible."⁶⁹ This battle extends itself even today within the Church's confines. Pondering upon the motives of those who professed their belief in Christ, Newman proved that a superficial religious ethic which was depended

⁶⁴ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, IV (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), 303. See Heb 11:1.

⁶⁵ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent. Edited with Introduction and Notes by Ian T. Ker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 142.

⁶⁶ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, II (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 15.

⁶⁷ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei* (29 June 2013), n.3.

⁶⁸ First Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dei Filius*, IV, in Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum. Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd bilingual ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), n.3016 (hereafter DH).

⁶⁹ Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893). Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 364.

upon by some of them only because it seemed advantageous for various reasons, was not to be mistaken for true faith. Such individuals wrongly assumed that they had faith. To the contrary, Newman claimed that “they *venture* nothing, they risk, they sacrifice, they abandon nothing on the faith of Christ’s word.”⁷⁰

In contrast, those who have the courage to wage “the good fight” (2 Tim 4:7) till the end and strive to preserve the faith, are capable of withstanding the darkness of existence and its challenging trials being truly transformed into “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14) by the only one who is in himself “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). Turning his mind to the “children of light” (Jn 12:36), Newman penned an exhortatory description of the *real* assent of faith given by the primitive martyrs. He affirmed:

we have but to look at the generous and uncalculating energy of faith as exemplified in the primitive Martyrs, in the youths who defied the pagan tyrant, or the maidens who were silent under his tortures. It is assent, pure and simple, which is the motive cause of great achievements; it is a confidence, growing out of instincts rather than arguments, stayed upon a vivid apprehension, and animated by a transcendent logic, more concentrated in will and in deed for the very reason that it has not been subjected to any intellectual development.⁷¹

One must not mistakenly think that Newman wanted to diminish or berate the assent given by martyrs. The martyrs’ assent of faith is an assent which does not violate the sensible demands of reason but transcends them. It is an assent which baffles many since, as Blondel suggested,

To one who has felt a desire for the infinite, to one conscious of the needs of consciousness, but without having entered sincerely into the narrow path of passing through death to life, about which we showed that it is the only road for a logical will, revelation, though perhaps awaited and called for, remains closed, scandalous, detestable from the moment it is not what we would wish it to be.⁷²

2.2 *Faith and Reason*

Newman had been aware that not a few individuals had fallen into the widespread misconception “that Faith is but a moral quality, dependent upon Reason”⁷³ and “that it is the reasoning of a weak mind, whereas it is in truth the

⁷⁰ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, IV, 302.

⁷¹ Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 141-142.

⁷² Blondel, *Action* (1893), 363-364.

⁷³ John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843*. Edited with introduction and notes by James David Earnest and Gerard Tracey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130.

reasoning of a divinely enlightened one.”⁷⁴ Likewise, there existed the common prejudice denounced by Newman that faith might be conceived as “merely to be a believing upon evidence, or a sort of conclusion upon a process of reasoning, a resolve formed upon a calculation.”⁷⁵ Moreover, the development of an erroneous consideration of the connections between faith and reason denoted the transition from an accurate distinction between both to the flawed suggestion of a radical separation subsisting between them. According to Newman, there were those who held “that we make up our minds by Reason without Faith, and then we proceed to adore and to obey by Faith apart from Reason.”⁷⁶ To these misconceptions, Newman replied by affirming that although

Reason has a power of analysis and criticism in all opinion and conduct, and that nothing is true or right but what may be justified, and, in a certain sense, proved by it, and undeniable, in consequence, that, unless the doctrines received by Faith are approvable by Reason, they have no claim to be regarded as true, it does not therefore follow that Faith is actually grounded on Reason in the believing mind itself.⁷⁷

Newman insisted that “Reason may put its sanction upon the acts of Faith, without in consequence being the source from which Faith springs.”⁷⁸ He claimed that “Faith, viewed as an internal habit or act, does not depend upon inquiry and examination, but has its own special basis, whatever that is, as truly as Conscience has.”⁷⁹

His efforts to identify the specific grounding of faith brought Newman to define the particular function of reason in relation to faith. If reason is considered justly as “the faculty of gaining knowledge upon grounds given; and its exercise lies in asserting one thing, because of some other thing,” then “an act or process of Faith, simply considered, is certainly an exercise of Reason.”⁸⁰ In Newman’s view, reason ought to be understood as “an acceptance of things as real, which the senses do not convey, upon certain previous grounds; it is an instrument of indirect knowledge concerning things external to us.”⁸¹ Following this definition, Newman gave a series of examples in which through a specific process, the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

individual is enabled to confess: “I assent to this doctrine as true, because I have been taught it;’ or, ‘because superiors tell me so;’ or, ‘because good men think so.”⁸² These instances exemplify perfectly what Newman meant when he defined “Faith” as “consisting of certain exercises of Reason which proceed mainly on presumption”⁸³ or what he intended by the expression “Faith is an exercise of presumptive reasoning.”⁸⁴ He concluded the significant list of examples he gave by arguing that “[s]ome such exercise of Reason is the act of Faith, considered in its nature.”⁸⁵ Likewise, he affirmed that “in an analogous way, Faith is a process of the Reason, in which so much of the grounds of inference cannot be exhibited.”⁸⁶

Newman sought to safeguard the authentic nature of faith and reason without letting any among both dimensions become detrimental to the other in his theological thought. Echoing St. Augustine’s view who affirmed: “*Multum autem falluntur qui putant nos sine ullis de Christo indiciis credere in Christum*,”⁸⁷ Newman (who evidently disagreed with Locke on the matter),⁸⁸ surely endorsed the claims which suggested “that the obedience of our faith be nevertheless in harmony with

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 156.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁷ Augustine, *De fide rerum quae non videntur* 3, 5 (PL 40, 174). See Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For. A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 211: “In the case of a historical revelation such as Christianity, it will be normal for believers to seek some historical evidence that the reported revelation is from God. Divine signs such as miracles and fulfilled prophecies will be relevant considerations. The testimony of competent witnesses can be an impressive sign, especially if the witnesses exhibit extraordinary joy, peace, energy, conviction, sincerity, and readiness to make sacrifices for their faith”; Henri de Lubac, *La rivelazione divina e il senso dell’uomo. Commento alle Costituzioni conciliari “Dei Verbum” e “Gaudium et spes,”* Sezione quarta: Soprannaturale 14 (Milano: Jaca Book, 1985), 113: “Si deve qui osservare che come non è il caso di opporre ad una fede che sarebbe *cognitiva* un’altra fede che sarebbe *fiduciaria*, così non è nemmeno il caso di opporre l’una o l’altra ad una fede *personale*. [...] L’impegno della fede infatti non è mai al di qua, bensì al di là della conoscenza (almeno di una conoscenza iniziale).”

⁸⁸ See John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), 327: “Now, if he merely means that proofs can be given for Revelation, and that Reason comes in logical order before Faith, such a doctrine is in no sense uncatholic; but he certainly holds that for an individual to act on Faith without proof, or to make Faith a personal principle of conduct for themselves, without waiting till they have got their reasons accurately drawn out and serviceable for controversy, is enthusiastic and absurd.”

reason”⁸⁹ and that “the assent of faith is by no means a blind impulse of the mind.”⁹⁰ It must likewise be pointed out that one must be extremely cautious to avoid any possible misinterpretation of what Newman actually meant when he analogically dwelt on “Faith, considered as an exercise of Reason,”⁹¹ without trying to tamper in any manner with the supernatural character of faith.

Outlining Newman's conception of the limits of reason, Elbert explained that “Faith is an act of the whole rational man; and reason, considered as a process, is inadequate to a true representation of the mind's entire rational activity.”⁹² Nevertheless, the apparently “unreasonable”⁹³ faith does not relinquish nor destroy reason but it rises higher. Regarding the transcendent nature of faith, Newman claimed:

Faith, again, by which we get to know divine things, rests on the evidence of testimony, weak in proportion to the excellence of the blessing attested. And as Reason, with its great conclusions, is confessedly a higher instrument than Sense with its secure premisses, so Faith rises above Reason, in its subject-matter, more than it falls below it in the obscurity of its process.⁹⁴

In the light of the equilibrium attained by Newman in his treatment of the interaction between faith and reason, one can justifiably affirm that his theological considerations precede with outstanding prescience the doctrine expressed through the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*. Highlighting the distinctions and complementarity relative to the *duplex ordo cognitionis*, the document of the First Ecumenical Vatican Council stated that “right reason demonstrates the foundations of faith and, illuminated by its light, pursues the science of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold insights.”⁹⁵ Moreover, “though faith is above reason, there can never be a real discrepancy between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind.”⁹⁶

⁸⁹ First Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dei Filius*, III (DH n.3009).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, (DH n.3010).

⁹¹ Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 155.

⁹² John Aloysius Elbert, *Evolution of Newman's Conception of Faith* (Philadelphia: The Dolphin Press, 1933), 15.

⁹³ Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 147.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹⁵ First Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dei Filius*, IV (DH n.3019).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, (DH n.3017).

The supernatural character of faith, sanctioned by the above-cited conciliar dogmatic constitution and by the whole ecclesial living tradition, has never been put into doubt by Newman. Following the scholastic theology of St. Thomas Aquinas whom he cited in his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*⁹⁷ to illustrate a similar point to the one following, Newman insisted that faith sheds a new elevating light upon reality so radically that men ought to go “by faith even as to those things which they know by reason.”⁹⁸ Regarding the “two kinds of religious knowledge,” the “[n]atural” and “supernatural,” Newman explained that “we *cannot* learn what is *above* nature except by faith. On natural religion [one learns] by sight and reason.”⁹⁹

According to Newman, faith manages “to triumph over Reason, to surpass or outstrip Reason, to attain what Reason falls short of, to effect what Reason finds beyond its powers.”¹⁰⁰ The strength through which faith rises higher than reason is not to be found within the human being. Its source is supernatural as Newman explained when he claimed that faith “is a supernatural work, and the fruit of divine grace.”¹⁰¹ Newman firmly confessed that “our Lord Jesus Himself, and He alone, gives us the grace to believe in Him. Hence the Holy Apostle calls Him the author of our faith – and He finishes and perfects it also – from first to last it is altogether from Him.”¹⁰²

2.3 *Faith as Grace*

Faith is a gentle light, which cannot pervade one’s being unless it is deeply desired and sought. Such a claim should not be erroneously interpreted as validating the insinuation that any merits that the human person might acquire can transform him into a worthy receiver of faith conceived as a divine reward. Such a notion was definitely denied by Augustine who taught that

no one believes who is not called. But it is a merciful God who calls, bestowing this [gift] when there are no merits of faith, because the merits of faith follow the call rather than precede it. For *how will they believe him whom they have not*

⁹⁷ See Newman, *An Essay on the Development*, 332.

⁹⁸ John Henry Newman, *Sermon Notes of John Henry Cardinal Newman 1849-1878*, ed. Fathers of the Birmingham Oratory (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), 329. See *ibid.*, 314.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁰⁰ Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, 156.

¹⁰¹ John Henry Newman, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 61.

¹⁰² John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*, ed. William Paine Neville (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), 182.

heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? (Rom 10:14) If God's mercy does not precede by way of a call, therefore, a person cannot believe, so that from this he may begin to be made righteous and to receive the capacity to do good works. Before every merit, then, there is grace, since Christ died for the wicked.¹⁰³

God is the unique initiator of faith in the life of each and every believer, since "the will itself, unless it comes into contact with something that attracts and beckons the soul, can by no means be moved. But that it may come into contact with this is not in a person's power."¹⁰⁴ In accordance with Augustinian theology and the Second Synod of Orange's confutation of the Semi-Pelagian understanding of the *pious credulitatis affectus*,¹⁰⁵ Newman unambiguously declared that "faith is a *grace*"¹⁰⁶ and that it can only "be grafted into a heart that has grace"¹⁰⁷ if through authentic freedom,¹⁰⁸ it seeks to be distinguished from

¹⁰³ Augustine, "Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician," I, 2, 7, in *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*. Part I: XII. Responses to Miscellaneous Questions, trans. B. Ramsey, ed. R. Canning (New York: New York City Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 2, 22.

¹⁰⁵ See Second Synod of Orange, Can. 5 (DH n.375); Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 27-28: "In the second half of the fifth century, Faustus of Riez, a monk of Lerins, struggling against exaggerated predestinarianism, maintained that human nature, even after the Fall, retained the power to make an act of trustful adherence (*credulitatis affectus*) which, fortified by divine grace, could develop into a fully-fledged life of faith. The Augustinians considered that this position gave too much credit to fallen nature. Some time after the death of Faustus, his doctrine on the 'beginning of faith' was condemned by the Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529), a small gathering of bishops led by Bishop Cesarius of Arles, himself a moderate Augustinian"; Massimo Naro, "La natura poetica della verità. Questioni radicali nella scrittura letteraria di J.H. Newman," *Ricerche Teologiche* 22 (2011): 282; Yves Marie-Joseph Congar, "La conversion. Étude théologique et psychologique," *Parole et Mission* 3 (1960): 514, note 33.

¹⁰⁶ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London, New York, Bombay, Calcutta: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), VIII; 188. According to certain scholars, the indispensability of divine grace as the only means enabling the beginning of faith in believers, is attested to by Newman in a number of his writings linked with the theme of conversion. See Naro, "La natura poetica della verità," 282: "Dietro questa concezione trascendentale della conversione, più che l'eco della *capacitas oboedientialis* argomentata dagli scolastici, o l'anticipazione delle riflessioni di Karl Rahner, si può forse indovinare la dottrina anti-semipelagiana del concilio d'Oranges (VI sec.) sul *pious credulitatis affectus*, che Newman avrebbe potuto agevolmente rintracciare nella letteratura patristica di cui era cultore."

¹⁰⁷ John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 254.

¹⁰⁸ See Congar, "La conversion," 513-514: "Mais si la théologie catholique affirme sans ambiguïté le rôle premier et décisif d'une force venue de Dieu, la grâce – qui prévient l'homme sans mérite de sa part, et de telle sorte que le début même de la conversion soit le fruit de la grâce – elle n'affirme pas moins fortement la réalité et la part de la liberté humaine."

“the devils’ faith” or “despairing faith.”¹⁰⁹ He avowed that “Jesus is the Light of the world, illuminating every man who cometh into it, opening our eyes with the gift of faith, making souls luminous by His Almighty grace.”¹¹⁰ One can rightly suggest that Newman’s theology foreshadowed the doctrine imparted by the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* which affirms that

To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving “joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it.”¹¹¹

Christ is the light which illumines the human being. Having faith implies the acceptance of God’s call to enter into communion with Him through Christ. Faith presupposes the personal surrender to the Lord, the fruit of “the contemplation of our Lord’s character”¹¹² which opens the human person to receive Him worthily as truly God and truly man, fully human and fully divine. As Callista’s story in Newman’s eponymous novel demonstrates, Christ contemplated is

the *motivum credibililatis*, the *objectum materiale*, and the *formale*, all in one; it unites human reason and supernatural faith in one complex act; and it comes home to all men, educated and ignorant, young and old. And it is the point to which, after all and in fact, all religious minds tend, and in which they ultimately rest, even if they do not start from it. Without an intimate apprehension of the personal character of our Saviour, what professes to be faith is little more than an act of ratiocination. If faith is to live, it must love; it must lovingly live in the Author of faith as a true and living Being, *in Deo vivo et vero*; according to the saying of the Samaritans to their townswoman: “We now believe, not for thy saying, for we ourselves have heard Him.” Many doctrines may be held implicitly; but to see Him as if intuitively is the very promise and gift of Him who is the object of the intuition. We are constrained to believe when it is He that speaks to us about Himself.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, 254. See *ibid.*, “The devils cannot have love, humility, meekness, purity, or compassion, — they have faith.”

¹¹⁰ Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*, 265.

¹¹¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dei verbum*, 5 (DH n.4205).

¹¹² John Henry Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), 366; See Ian Ker, *Newman on Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137-138.152-153.

¹¹³ Newman, *Discussions and Arguments*, 367. See Joseph F. Keefe, “The Intellectual Difficulty of Imagining and Realizing Emmanuel: Newman’s Concept of Realizing Christ in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*,” *Newman Studies Journal* 12, no.1 (2015): 38. I am indebted to Keefe for his reference to the above-cited important excerpt of Newman’s *Discussions*.

In this context, one understands Newman's claim that faith is the "sustaining cause"¹¹⁴ of "Justification consisting in the Presence of Christ within us"¹¹⁵ and is "the medium through which the soul sees Christ."¹¹⁶ To oppose the mistaken view "that faith [...] is the only instrument of justification, excluding not only works but also sacraments,"¹¹⁷ Newman argued that

Faith, then, being the appointed representative of Baptism, derives its authority and virtue from that which it represents. It is justifying because of Baptism; it is the faith of the baptized, of the regenerate, that is, of the justified. Justifying faith does not precede justification; but justification precedes faith, and makes it justifying.¹¹⁸

2.4 *The Reception of the Gift of Faith*

There is little doubt that Newman conceived faith as a divine gift (to be freely received) and that he arrived at holding firmly what the contemporary magisterium of the Church teaches authoritatively when it affirms that "[t]he transmission of faith occurs first and foremost in baptism."¹¹⁹ Yet, "[b]ecause faith is born of an encounter which takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age."¹²⁰ Indeed, "Faith's past, that act of Jesus' love which brought new life to the world, comes down to us through the memory of others – witnesses – and is kept alive in that one remembering subject which is the Church."¹²¹ The opening words of the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, according to Benedict XVI, illuminate strongly "a descriptive aspect of the Church: she is a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God. The Church does not live on herself but on the Gospel."¹²²

¹¹⁴ Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, 226.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹¹⁷ Thomas L. Sheridan, "Justification," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, eds. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109.

¹¹⁸ Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, 227. See *ibid.*, 278: "Justification comes through the Sacraments; is received by faith; consists in God's inward presence; and lives in obedience."

¹¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Lumen fidei*, n.41. See Pope Pius X, Encyclical Letter *Acerbo nimis* (15 April 1905), n.16; Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio, *Porta fidei* (11 October 2011), n.1.

¹²⁰ *Lumen fidei*, n.38.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to the International Congress *Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church*", 16 September 2005, *AAS* 97 (2005): 956.

Newman constructed his ecclesiology in the light of the unshakable conviction that faith consists of “trust in His word,”¹²³ confidence in the eternal Word incarnate, or “the absolute acceptance of the divine Word with an internal assent,”¹²⁴ “whether it is spoken by His own mouth, or through His ministers.”¹²⁵ He emphatically claimed that the fundamental mission of the transmission of faith was given to the Church by the Lord who “made faith in a message, on the warrant of the messenger, to be a condition of salvation, and enforced it by the great grant of power which he emphatically conferred on His representatives.”¹²⁶ “Faith, then,” Newman taught, “receives the revealing word of God through the Church.”¹²⁷ Having suggested “that Faith is a ‘Form of sound words,’”¹²⁸ he proved that he had grasped profoundly the conception of faith “as a form of hearing.”¹²⁹ Bishop O’Dwyer confirmed that “Newman held, with the Apostles, *fides ex auditu*, that the Church as a teacher held a Divine commission; that the body of doctrine which Christ revealed to the Apostles, and which, in Catholic theology, is called the *depositum fidei*, was the subject-matter of the Church’s teaching.”¹³⁰

The wholly gratuitous gift of faith is an answer to the deepest needs of the human being (as well as a response ensuing in view of the same needs) considered fully in his nature as “*homo interrogans*.”¹³¹ The human person is truly a being open to completion living in expectation of a redemptive word. Consequently, to the interior acknowledgment of “conscience” recognized “as the echo of God’s voice”, an acknowledgment which moves along the “way” which “is of faith,”¹³² the human being’s capacity for the acceptance of the divine gift of faith is elevated. The acquisition of the proper disposition is vital since “[f]aith is reliance on

¹²³ Newman, *Discussions and Arguments*, 395.

¹²⁴ Newman, *An Essay on the Development*, 325.

¹²⁵ Newman, *Discussions and Arguments*, 395.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 396.

¹²⁷ Newman, *Sermon Notes*, 315.

¹²⁸ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, II, 261.

¹²⁹ *Lumen fidei*, n.29.

¹³⁰ Edward Thomas O’Dwyer, *Cardinal Newman and the Encyclical Pascendi Dominici Gregis. An Essay* (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 22. See *ibid.*, “All of this is rejected by these Modernists; with them *fides* is not *ex auditu*; its matter is not *ab extra*, it grows in the heart under the influence of various stimuli.”

¹³¹ Gerald O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.

¹³² Newman, *Sermon Notes*, 327. See *Lumen fidei*, n.29: “Knowledge linked to a word is always personal knowledge; it recognizes the voice of the one speaking, opens up to that person in freedom and follows him or her in obedience.”

the word of another.”¹³³ “Faith,” Newman explained, “is the correlative of revelation,”¹³⁴ and the acceptance of revelation through faith cannot be divorced from the embracing of a spirit of “obedience,”¹³⁵ (so strongly embraced by the Virgin Mother of God),¹³⁶ which is “connatural and contemporaneous with”¹³⁷ the same faith. For the British thinker, it is evident that “deeds of obedience, are the life of faith.”¹³⁸

Authentic Christian life is therefore built on the reception of “the Gospel” as “the law of faith” together with “discipleship” conceived as “the obedience of faith”¹³⁹ which cannot be accomplished without “a generous self-surrender” that places totally one’s being “into God’s hands.”¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Newman persistently contended that “the Gospel Faith is a definite deposit, – a treasure, common to all, one and the same in every age, conceived in set words, and such as admits of being received, preserved, transmitted.”¹⁴¹ Holding steadfastly to the notion that “there exists a profound unity between the act by which we believe and the content to which we give our assent,”¹⁴² Newman battled throughout all his life against that false supposition “that all insisting upon precise Articles of Faith is injurious to the cause of spiritual religion, and inconsistent with an enlightened view of it.”¹⁴³ Some among Newman’s contemporaries — who can be identified in a certain sense as the precursors of the latitudinarian and non-institutional forms of contemporary Christianity – suggested erroneously “that Articles of Belief are mere formalities; and that to preach and transmit them is to miss the conversion of the heart in faith and holiness.”¹⁴⁴ Egan¹⁴⁵ pointed out that Newman affirmed that

¹³³ Newman, *Discussions and Arguments*, 252.

¹³⁴ Newman, *Sermon Notes*, 323.

¹³⁵ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, III (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), 81.

¹³⁶ See Newman, *Faith and Prejudice*, 86.

¹³⁷ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, III, 87.

¹³⁸ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, I (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), 171.

¹³⁹ Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*, 237.

¹⁴⁰ Newman, *Faith and Prejudice*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, II, 256. See E. D’Arcy, “The New Catechism and Newman,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 499.

¹⁴² Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, n.10.

¹⁴³ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, II, 259.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴⁵ Philip A. Egan, “John Henry Newman and Bernard Lonergan: A Note on the Development of Christian Doctrine,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 63 (2007): 1119, note 42.

If we believe in the revelation, we believe in what is revealed, in all that is revealed, however it may be brought home to us, by reasoning or in any other way. He who believes that Christ is the Truth, and that the Evangelists are truthful, believes all that He has said through them, though he has only read St. Matthew and has not read St. John. He who believes in the *depositum* of Revelation, believes in all the doctrines of the *depositum*; [...] All that he knows now as revealed, and all that he shall know, and all that there is to know, he embraces it all in his intention by one act of faith.¹⁴⁶

In the light of the above cited statement, one comes to see that it is impossible for one to receive truly the gift of revelation and yet reject the truths of faith (communicated also through doctrine) emerging out of the same gift. Newman argued that the content of faith (*fides quae*) which the faithful receive in faith, is grounded upon and is inseparable from the act of faithful assent to God (*fides qua*) who reveals himself to the human person. He contended that “[t]o believe is to accept as true what we are told. [...] Because it is God’s word.”¹⁴⁷ Likewise, St. Thomas Aquinas explained that “whoever believes assents to the word of another. Hence in every sort of belief the person whose word is taken is, it appears, the principal and like an ultimate end, while the things by holding which one is committed to him are secondary.”¹⁴⁸ Following Aquinas’s path, Newman stated that “faith, in its theological sense, includes a belief, not only in the thing believed, but also in the ground of believing; that is, not only belief in certain doctrines, but belief in them expressly because God has revealed them.”¹⁴⁹ These two dimensions are inextricably connected and any obfuscation of the steadfast custody of the content of faith is only the prelude to an erosion of the fundamental basis and ground of faith. Nevertheless, only those who are willing to open their hearts to God will receive the necessary light to contemplate fruitfully the content of faith since God “reveals His mysteries to the believing.”¹⁵⁰ There is

¹⁴⁶ Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 101-102.

¹⁴⁷ Newman, *Sermon Notes*, 313. See Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-IIae, q. 11, a. 1. See *Ibid.*, q. 1, a. 1: “With regard to faith, then, if we look to its formal objective, it is the first truth, nothing else. The reason: faith as we mean it here assents to anything only because it is revealed by God, and so faith rests upon the divine truth itself as the medium of its assent. But if we look to the content to which faith assents, this includes not only God, but also many other matters. Even so, the assent of faith terminates in such things only in so far as they have some reference to God, i.e. as they are the workings of God that help man in his striving towards joyous rest in God.”

¹⁴⁹ Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 70. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.177.

¹⁵⁰ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, VI (London - New York - Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), 136.

no other way leading to the respectful reception of the revealed truths of faith if not the way exemplified by the adage "*credo ut intelligam*" which Newman seems to embrace fully.¹⁵¹

3. Conclusion

In the light of what has been elucidated above, Newman's theology of faith remains a guiding light in a secular age. For Newman, faith is clearly inseparable from action and is inescapably destined to leave its transforming mark on society. His understanding of faith rescues it from those who would envisage faith as some sort of safe haven which remains closed off to the challenges of contemporary existence. Newman's dynamic understanding of reality, of the complexity of human intelligence and his being firmly rooted in tradition, enable him and his vision of faith to enter into dialogue fearlessly with everyone without harbouring any unspoken assumption that those who bring forward the case on faith's behalf, stand in some manner, at a disadvantage when dealing with the scientifically minded interlocutors of Western contemporary society.

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¹⁵¹ James M. Cameron, "John Henry Newman: Apostle of Common Sense?," *Faith and Reason* 15, no.4 (1989): 62: "We are inclined simply to say that he is in the tradition of Augustine and Anselm. *Credo ut intelligam* is the pervading maxim of his thought and to *love* the truth, and thus to believe or to move towards belief, is to be filled with the Divine love."