

## MORAL IMAGINATION IN THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND CHURCH TRADITION: JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

GERARD MAGILL

*Saint Louis University*

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN was one of the greatest English prose writers whose works spanned the nineteenth century. His penchant for figurative language revealed a literary talent that was rhetorically exciting and highly imaginative. In the wake of Romanticism he used the imagination in his theological method to portray the intellectual depth of religious belief. He understood the imagination as a mental instrument for reasonable discernment: that is a working definition that I expand upon. With the imagination he brought to theology a personal dynamism that provided insight into the disclosures of language, especially when inquiring into the meaning of religious doctrine. By integrating the imagination with his theological method and recovery of church tradition Newman maintained an even keel in a century of religious and political turmoil.

One illustration of turning to the imagination for theological balance appears in his 1877 Preface to the *Via Media*,<sup>1</sup> where he outlined his Catholic ecclesiology. In the earlier editions (1836, 1837) Newman attempted to formulate a "via media" between what he perceived (as an Anglican) to be the excesses of Roman Catholicism and of popular Protestantism. His strategy was to recover the treasures of tradition by examining the doctrines of the early Church, as he did previously in his study on Arianism in 1833. By 1839 he realized that his search for a "via media" was implausible. Nonetheless, in his 1877 Preface he reiterated the basic insight that enabled him to develop his moderate Anglican views as a Roman Catholic. That insight was to strike a balance between apparent extremes by a nuanced mode of reasonable discernment. Metaphorically he described this approach as seeking "a possible road, lying between a mountain and a morass" (xxii), requiring an "appeal to the imagination" (xxi).

I argue that the imagination inspired Newman's theological method and understanding of church tradition. I expand my definition of the imagination in his thought in a systematic account that analyzes some of his most important texts. In the first section I explain that his

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Newman, *The VIA MEDIA of the Anglican Church* (1836), ed. H. D. Weidner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) (hereafter: *Via Media*).

philosophy of liberal education illumines three basic characteristics (dynamic, holistic, and subjective) of mental discernment as constitutive of intellectual knowledge that provides the philosophical foundation of his turn to the imagination. Then I show that Newman construed the combination of these three characteristics of discernment as an “appeal to the imagination” in his theological method (section two) and in his recovery of church tradition (section three). I argue that the term *moral imagination* expresses the constructive tension between the secular and religious realms of discourse that accompany his use of the imagination. In conclusion, I assess the contribution of his thought to theology today as a vigorous stimulus for creative, intellectual inquiry.

#### LIBERAL EDUCATION

Newman’s university experience, both as scholar and as rector, enabled him to articulate his quest for balance by holding diverse views in creative tension. Although college and university education has changed since the times of the English industrial revolution, Newman’s approach to two basic issues in higher learning remains relevant today: connecting knowledge rather than merely accruing information, and relating the secular and the religious realms. In this first section I explain how Newman’s experience in Oxford and Dublin shaped these two concerns in his philosophy of education.

#### *Oxford and Dublin*

Newman began his Anglican university career as a tutor at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1822. Though he had performed poorly in his formal examinations in Mathematics and Classics only five months previously, he won the prestigious competition for an Oriel Fellowship, an event which he described as “the turning point of his life, and of all days most memorable.”<sup>2</sup> Another turning point, his conversion to Catholicism in 1845, would result in departure from his beloved Oxford. Long before this crisis, however, as an Oriel Fellow he appreciated the close relation between the secular and religious realms of education. As a university Fellow he accepted a curacy in St. Clement’s in May 1824, being ordained to the Anglican priesthood in May 1825, and in April 1828 he became the Vicar of St. Mary’s, Oxford. There he preached his famous University Sermons (1826–43)<sup>3</sup> with a rhetorical

<sup>2</sup> *John Henry Newman: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Henry Tristram (London: Sheed and Ward, 1957) 63 (see 47); and Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Newman’s University Sermons: Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of*

mastery that Sheridan Gilley, his recent Anglican biographer, describes as a quiet grace and a buried fire within.<sup>4</sup> Later, Newman vibrantly recalled the appointment at St. Mary's: "It was to me like the feeling of spring weather after winter."<sup>5</sup> This became for him a revealing metaphor that would encapsulate a life principle: "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."<sup>6</sup> After his conversion, he reiterated the metaphor to rejoice in the revival of Catholicism, due to the Emancipation Bill of 1829 and the restoration of the English hierarchy in 1850. In 1852 he eloquently celebrated this renewal, again metaphorically, as "the spring-time of the Church" in his moving sermon, "The Second Spring."<sup>7</sup> This propensity for using metaphors to convey images that were replete with meaning was the literary counterpart of his appeal to the imagination process first in his philosophy and then in his theology.

Newman's conversion in 1845 provided the opportunity to enunciate his philosophy of education. He pursued this goal while upholding a harmonious relation between the secular and religious realms of education, a relation that he had been prevented from pursuing at Oriel. Edward Hawkins, the Provost of Oriel College, resisted Newman's efforts to forge closer intellectual and moral relations with his students in lectures. These contentious debates resulted in the termination of Newman's College Tutorship in 1832, thereby freeing him to channel his energies into the emerging Tractarian Movement, of which he became the unofficial leader.<sup>8</sup> In 1845, Sir Robert Peel, prime minister of the British Whig Government, established a nondenominational "Queen's University" in Ireland as an alternative to the Anglican Trinity College in Dublin. But the Irish Catholics were forbidden by Rome to participate in this move to mixed education. In April 1852 Paul Cullen, Bishop of Armagh, invited Newman to found a Catholic

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*Oxford, 1826-43*, with introductory essays by D. MacKinnon and J. Holmes (London: SPCK, 1970) (hereafter: *Sermons*). On Newman's Anglican sermons see *John Henry Newman: Sermons 1824-1843*, vol. 1, ed. Placid Murray (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and His Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990) 126.

<sup>5</sup> J. H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 27 (hereafter: *Apologia*). For recent studies on Newman's religious development, see *Personality and Belief: Interdisciplinary Essays on John Henry Newman*, ed. Gerard Magill (Scranton, Pa.: University of Scranton, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), foreword by Ian Ker (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1989) 40 (hereafter: *Development*).

<sup>7</sup> J. H. Newman, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (1857) (London: Longmans, Green, 1892) 179; Michael Ffinch, *Newman: Towards the Second Spring* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) ix.

<sup>8</sup> *Autobiographical Writings* 95-96.

university in Dublin. Hence, in 1852 Newman wrote a series of lectures on university education, the first five of which he delivered publicly. With imaginative flair he allowed all ten lectures to be published separately in Dublin lest he be perceived as "Anti-Irish."<sup>9</sup> These ten lectures were then published in the following year (1853) in a volume, *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education*, which, with alterations, became the first part of *The Idea of a University* (1873).<sup>10</sup>

Newman's office as rector lasted from June 1854 until November 1858 when he resigned due to many frustrations, not least the authoritarianism of Cullen, the new Archbishop of Dublin.<sup>11</sup> As rector, Newman continued to study the nature of a university. He wrote several articles for his school's *Catholic University Gazette*,<sup>12</sup> studying tradition by considering types of university education throughout Christian history. This sketch of Newman as scholar and as rector shows the intellectual seriousness that he brought to bear upon his philosophy of education that paved the way for his turn to the imagination.

### *Philosophy of Education*

In the Dublin discourses Newman explains "Liberal Education" (*Idea* 130) by emphasizing learning as a personal process: it is not merely gathering information as a "passive reception" (134) of ideas that would allow students to be "almost passive in the acquisition of knowledge" (128). Rather, liberal education seeks the "cultivation of the intellect" (126) as "the process of enlightenment or enlargement of mind" (130). Although Newman offers no systematic analysis of liberal education, in his Dublin discourses three distinctive dimensions of liberal education emerge that reveal the basic characteristics of discernment as constitutive of intellectual knowledge.

First, liberal education requires a dynamism in learning as "the locomotion, the movement onwards, of that mental centre" (*Idea* 134) of knowledge. Second, liberal education occurs not merely by gathering information but by meaningfully compiling data, making connections and seeing relations between different findings: "A comparison of ideas one with another . . . and a systematizing of them" into not just a

<sup>9</sup> *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, 31 vols., ed. C. S. Dessain: vols. 1–6 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978–84); vols. 11–22 (London: Oxford Univ., 1961–72); vols. 23–31 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973–77) (hereafter: *Letters*). The reference is to *Letters* 15.86.

<sup>10</sup> J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (1873), ed. I. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) (hereafter: *Idea*).

<sup>11</sup> Ker, in Newman's *Idea* xx–xxi.

<sup>12</sup> J. H. Newman, "Rise and Progress of Universities," in *Historical Sketches* 111 (London: Longmans, Green, 1891).

logical coherence, but above all into “the accumulating mass of our acquirements” (134). The term “accumulating” would become a crucial feature of Newman’s epistemology of converging arguments.<sup>13</sup> Third, liberal education also entails a subjective dimension, the personal integration of knowledge, depicted as “a digestion of what we receive” (134). He presents these three characteristics of discernment:

The enlargement . . . is the action of a *formative power*, reducing to *order and meaning* the matter of our acquirements; it is a making the objects of our knowledge *subjectively* our own” (134, emphasis added).

Here the “formative power” constitutes a “movement onwards of knowledge”; this is the *dynamic* characteristic of discernment. Next, “order and meaning” arise from “accumulating” or clustering information together; this is the *accumulative* or *holistic* characteristic of discernment. Then, we render knowledge “subjectively our own” by a metaphorical “digestion” of knowledge; this is the *subjective* characteristic of discernment.

Newman offers a normative account of the interaction between these characteristics of discernment in association with relating the religious and the secular realms of liberal education. Hence he espouses a legitimate place for theology in the university curriculum,<sup>14</sup> thereby laying the foundations for building his theological method. In the Dublin discourses theology is included in the curriculum as a corollary of his philosophy of education. Because all aspects of knowledge are interrelated, higher learning enables the student to develop the connections between different subjects. To show that theology ought to be included among these specialties he introduced the metaphor of a “circle of knowledge” (*Idea* 67): “Theology claims a place among the sciences” (41) because it is a distinct “branch of knowledge” (69). From a philosophical perspective this outlook means that “the loss of Theology . . . is the perversion of other sciences” (78), a loss that denigrates the comprehensiveness of knowledge symbolized by a university.

The image of the “circle of knowledge” is not intended to convey education as piecing together subject-specific units of knowledge (acquiring information) akin to a jigsaw puzzle. Rather, his “circle” metaphor focuses upon the *relation* between specialties to highlight liberal education’s goal of making meaningful connections. His point is not

<sup>13</sup> This epistemology would be articulated later in Newman’s *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), ed. I. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) (hereafter: *Grammar*).

<sup>14</sup> On Newman’s pastoral and educational interest in theology at the university, see Gerard Magill, “Newman’s View of Catechesis: Safeguarding Faith and Morals,” *The Living Light* 27 (1991) 108–9.

that all subjects should be taught, nor that each student should study everything. Hence, A. Dwight Culler explains that, despite the presence of conflicting images in Newman's discourses, the ideal of liberal education in the *Idea* is independent of specific disciplines.<sup>15</sup> Briefly, Newman's ideal emphasizes the personal process of learning. Another metaphor, playing chess, can impart his educational insight. Chess figures, like separate disciplines at the university, are numerically limited, yet their interaction facilitates virtually an infinite range of possible connections. Similarly, by relating aspects of knowledge in education Newman lets meaning abound. And just as playing chess is restricted, but not impossible, if a figure is missing, liberal education is diminished if the secular realm excludes the religious realm, epitomized in the absence of theology from the curriculum.

In sum, Newman's view of liberal education promotes learning as a personal process, defined in terms of making meaningful connections between aspects of knowledge. At the root of this insight there are three characteristics of discernment. In the next section I will show that Newman applied these characteristics to his religious epistemology and theological method. In his theological method he construed the combination of these characteristics as an "appeal to the imagination."

#### THEOLOGICAL METHOD

In his Catholic writings Newman presented an understanding of theology that did not merely explain church doctrine but engaged in critical inquiry to develop doctrine. His theological method integrated his view of education. To trace the growth of his method in theology I explain that the characteristics of discernment that are constitutive of intellectual knowledge in his philosophy of education are anticipated in his discussion of faith and reason in the *University Sermons* and are applied to his justification of religious belief in the *Grammar*.

#### *Epistemology*

In a sermon at St. Mary's in 1840, in which Newman explores the limits of faith and reason, he describes the enlargement of mind that would become his emblem for liberal education:

It is not the mere addition to our knowledge which is the enlargement, but . . . the *movement onwards*, of that moral centre, . . . *a connected view* . . . the knowledge, not only of things, but of their mutual relations. It is organized, and therefore *living knowledge* (*Sermons* 287, emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> A. Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect: A Study in Newman's Educational Ideal* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1955) 206.

In this sermon at Oxford Newman introduces the term "enlargement" to describe his view of learning: "This enlargement consists in the comparison of the subjects of knowledge" (*Sermons* 287). Here he anticipates his view of education that appears in his university discourses by using the metaphor of enlargement and prescribing the characteristics of discernment. First, "movement onwards" is a precursor of the dynamic characteristic. Next, "a connected view" that discerns "mutual relations" envisions the accumulative characteristic; later he describes knowledge as emerging "by successive combinations, converging one and all to their true centre" (291). Finally, "living knowledge" points to the subjective characteristic, integrating knowledge with subjectivity.

Newman's consistency on these characteristics of discernment extends from his sermon in 1840 to his discourses in 1852 and to his religious epistemology in 1870. In the *Grammar*, each characteristic is present in justifying certitude. "Living knowledge" is a requirement for reaching certitude: "Reasoning by rule should be completed by the *living mind*" (*Grammar* 278, emphasis added). Next, the accumulative characteristic of having "a connected view" is necessary for certitude, the conclusion being "foreseen in the number and direction of *accumulated premisses*, which all converge to it" (321, emphasis added). Finally, the dynamic characteristic, being a "movement onwards," also applies to certitude, albeit elusively: "Our criterion of truth is not so much the manipulation of propositions, as the *intellectual and moral* character of the person maintaining them, and the ultimate silent effect of his arguments or conclusions upon our minds" (302, emphasis added). This third characteristic requires explanation.

An editorial remark in the Dublin discourses (*Idea* 131) intimates Newman's awareness of the reciprocity between his 1840 sermon and his 1852 discourse, using almost identical language. But a shift in the later text is significant for his view of certitude in 1870: he changes "moral centre" (1840) to "mental centre" (1852), to describe the dynamic characteristic. The earlier passage reads: "The movement onwards, of that *moral* centre, to which what we know and what we have been acquiring, the whole mass of our knowledge, as it were, *gravitates*" (*Sermons* 287, emphasis added). The later passage reads: "The movement onwards, of that *mental* centre, to which both what we know, and what we are learning, the accumulating mass of our acquisitions, *gravitates*" (*Idea* 134, emphasis added). These terms express the dynamism of discernment in liberal education as both moral and intellectual. And in 1852 he implicitly combines these two terms: "Education . . . implies an action upon our mental nature, and the formation of a character" (*Idea* 114). It was connecting intellectual and

moral formation that led to the rift in 1832 at Oriel between Newman and Hawkins, the College Provost. In 1870 he applied this connection to certitude.

As liberal education does not result from merely accruing information, so certitude does not arise from what Newman calls "the manipulation of propositions." As liberal education requires the dynamic involvement of the individual, so certitude engages with "the intellectual and moral character of the person" (*Grammar* 302). Here Newman is not arguing that character is a criterion of truth: epistemologically that would be incoherent. Rather, he emphasizes the effect of arguments upon the mind: intellectual and moral character enable the recipient to be alert to converging arguments. He uses the three characteristics of discernment in liberal education to define his understanding of certitude. And he associates these characteristics with the interaction between the secular and religious realms of discourse, particularized by his explanation of theology.

### *Imagination and Theology*

Now I come to the crux of my argument. In a theological paper of 1865, propaedeutic to the *Grammar*, Newman justifies certitude by referring to the imagination: "When I make an act of certitude . . . I am contemplating a fact in itself, as presented to me by my imagination."<sup>16</sup> Then in the *Grammar* he uses the imagination to recover the basic insight of his philosophy of education to bridge his religious epistemology with his theological method. In each area he adopts the three characteristics of discernment whose combination he construes as his "appeal to the imagination." These three characteristics are most apparent when discussing theology in the *Grammar*:

It is otherwise with the theology of a religious imagination. It has a *living hold on truths* . . . It is able to *pronounce by anticipation*, what it takes a long argument to prove . . . It *interprets* what it sees around it (117, emphasis added).

In this passage the imagination embraces all the characteristics of discernment. "A living hold on truths" is the subjective characteristic that reiterates his earlier use of "living knowledge." He uses "real" and "imaginative" equivalently to indicate the importance of making knowledge personal in the imagination, the hallmark of real assent:

<sup>16</sup> *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, ed. H. M. de Achaval and J. D. Holmes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 126 (hereafter: *Papers*).



"Assent to a real proposition is assent to an imagination" (*Grammar* 214).<sup>17</sup>

Second, when the imagination "interprets what it sees around it" the accumulative characteristic comes into play, recalling his previous use of "the accumulating mass of our acquirements" in his Dublin discourse. This association between accumulation and interpretation is not arbitrary. At the heart of the *Grammar* the accumulation of arguments justifies a conclusion as true in the sense that "it is proved *interpretative*" (323). Proof, then, is not primarily demonstrative or logical; rather, "proof is the limit of converging probabilities" (321). Walter Jost identifies interpretation as central to Newman's view of the imagination because it rhetorically highlights the experience of the inquirer and the structure of reason that yields meaning.<sup>18</sup> For example, in a theological paper in 1857 Newman associates the rational nature of the imagination with this cumulative aspect of interpretation: "Reason in the imagination holds views at once per modum unius" (*Papers* 46). That is, he uses the imagination for rational discernment ("reason in the imagination"). The imagination, then, is not merely a mental faculty that generates images that are insufficient for judgment or assent as argued by Jouett Powell.<sup>19</sup> For Newman the imagination is our capacity for reasoning and judging in a particular way.<sup>20</sup>

Third, by explaining that the imagination is "able to pronounce by anticipation" (*Grammar* 117) to precipitate certitude, Newman includes the dynamic characteristic as being "inventive" (27): the conclusion is "foreseen and predicted rather than actually attained." He uses this dynamic characteristic to explain that *certitude* entails "an active recognition of propositions as true" (345), just as *liberal education* implies a formative power that enables us "to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it" (*Idea* 126). For both, that "mental insight into truth" arises from "directing ourselves by our own moral or intellectual judgment" (*Grammar* 342).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On his shift from "imaginative" to "real," see John Coulson, *Religion and Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) 82–83.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Jost, *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina, 1989) 111, 155.

<sup>19</sup> Jouett Powell, *Three Uses of Christian Discourse in John Henry Newman* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975) 143.

<sup>20</sup> On using the imagination for informal inference (reasoning) and assent (judgment) in the *Grammar*, see Gerard Magill, "Imaginative Moral Discernment: Newman on the Tension between Reason and Religion," *Heythrop Journal* 32 (1991) 496–99.

<sup>21</sup> On mediating intellectual and moral orders, see M. Katherine Tillman, "The Tension between Intellectual and Moral Education in the Thought of John Henry Newman," *Thought* 60 (1985) 332.

Newman construed the combination of these characteristics of reasonable discernment as an "appeal to the imagination." His emphasis was reasonable discernment. Hence, his epistemological interest in the imagination's cognitive perception encouraged him to depart from the more literary approach that was common in Romanticism.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, he contributed distinctively to the revived interest in the imagination after the Enlightenment. The post-Enlightenment philosophers extended the ancient Greek and medieval view of the imagination as a reproductive ability to include a productive, creative ability. For example, Immanuel Kant distinguished the reproductive from the productive imagination to highlight its capacity for completing knowledge. Kant's analysis, giving imagination a mediating role between speculative and practical reason, captivated Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>23</sup> In the nineteenth century, especially for Coleridge, this productive or creative ability of the imagination was associated with a mediating role to unify apparent dualisms, for example, mind and heart.<sup>24</sup> Imagination's role of creative perception, especially in religion, in Coleridge's writings had the greatest influence upon Newman. These two features of the imagination in Coleridge's thought, its creative perception and its integration with religion, illumine the originality of Newman's use of the imagination.<sup>25</sup>

Coleridge understood the imagination as perceptive ("It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate") and as crucial for religious belief ("a Symbol . . . is characterized by . . . the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal").<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, for Cole-

<sup>22</sup> William E. Buckler, *The Victorian Imagination* (New York: New York Univ., 1980) 5, 261.

<sup>23</sup> On the influence of British and German philosophy upon Coleridge, see T. J. Diffey, "The Roots of Imagination: The Philosophical Context," in *The Romantics*, ed. Stephen Prickett (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981) 164–201; and especially, James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1981) 328–66.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Happel, "Imagination, Method in Theology and Rhetoric: On Re-examining Samuel Taylor Coleridge," *Louvain Studies* 8 (1980) 147; "Religious Imagination," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komanchak, et al. (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1987) 503–4; and *Coleridge's Religious Imagination* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1983) 4.

<sup>25</sup> On these two characteristics of the imagination, see J. Robert Barth, "Theological Implications of Coleridge's Theory of Imagination," in *Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today*, ed. Christine Gallant (New York: AMS, 1989) 11. On Newman's knowledge of Coleridge, see John Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 254–55.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), ed. John Shawcross (London: Oxford Univ., 1949) 202; and *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, *Collected Works* (Cambridge: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 6.30.

ridge the imagination was not separate from reason; rather it changed our mental focus and enabled us to reason differently by enlarging and reordering our powers of perception of reality, providing a new unity to our understanding and knowledge. That was the imagination's creative and mediating ability.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Coleridge used images (which become meaningful symbols through the power of the imagination) to structure religious discourse, based upon the analogous relation between poetry (as symbolic utterance) and religious faith. That was the imagination's interaction with religion.<sup>28</sup> Each of these features of the imagination influenced Newman, but he also advanced beyond the thought of Coleridge.

First, Newman addressed more directly than Coleridge the epistemology of the imagination. Coleridge wanted to justify the ontological validity of the imagination whose mediating and creative role provided an integrating principle for the good, the true, and the beautiful as transcendental unities that ground politics, ethics, and aesthetics: metaphysics fascinated the Romantic temper.<sup>29</sup> However, Newman disliked metaphysics. His more empirical outlook led him to concentrate upon the epistemology of the creative and mediating roles of the imagination. Even though he was not a systematic writer, he was less fragmentary and disorganized than Coleridge. The *Grammar* provides Newman's clearest account of the imagination in terms of the characteristics of discernment: the imagination's creative role is the characteristic that *anticipates*; the mediating role is the characteristic that *interprets*.

Second, Newman was more concerned than Coleridge to apply the metaphorical function of religious language to the historical *development* of doctrine and tradition. Coleridge's view of religious language as poetic discourse led him to understand theological language as a type of rhetoric as creative persuasion about the truth of God.<sup>30</sup> Sensitive to this subjectivity and symbolic nature of theological language, Newman, I argue later, extended this use of the imagination to articulate a theological method for understanding the development of doctrine as avoiding disclosures of meaning. However, Newman must be read in light of Coleridge who developed more explicitly the interac-

<sup>27</sup> Happel, *Coleridge's Religious Imagination* 355; and "Imagination, Method in Theology and Rhetoric" 159.

<sup>28</sup> J. Robert Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1977) 12, 19; and Coulson, *Religion and Imagination* 12–13.

<sup>29</sup> Happel, *Coleridge's Religious Imagination* 327, 356; and Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination* 141–42.

<sup>30</sup> Happel, "Imagination, Method in Theology and Rhetoric" 167.

tion between poetic and religious language, especially in terms of the intersubjective and communicative characters of rhetorical language. Yet, like Coleridge, Newman's use of the imagination (especially in articulating a theological method for the development of doctrine) anticipated much of modern literary theory on the interaction between text and reader.<sup>31</sup>

In a recent philosophical study Mary Warnock emphasizes the contribution of Romanticism (mentioning Coleridge but not Newman) to understanding the imagination. She describes the imagination as a "power in the human mind which is at work in our everyday perception of the world," enabling us to see reality as significant by ascribing meaning through interpretation.<sup>32</sup> Newman made the same claim, showing its epistemological worth in the three characteristics of reasonable discernment that he construed as "an appeal to the imagination."

Newman integrated the imagination with his theological method. Epistemologically, he used the imagination for reasonable discernment through convergence. Theologically, the imagination's capacity for religious discernment in the *Grammar* is illumined by his Dublin discourses. Hence, Katherine Tillman perceptively refers to Newman's use of the imagination in the *Grammar* "as the internal actualizing principle of the ideal of liberal knowledge."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, David Hammond notes that in the *Grammar* Newman's use of the imagination in theology functions analogously to the "enlargement of mind" in liberal education. Hammond explains that the imagination has an interpretative function in cognition that is dynamic and synthetic, selecting and organizing experience into a meaningful whole. Despite some of Newman's descriptions of theology as deductive, Hammond finds a place for imagination in theology with an interpretative or hermeneutical task as *implicitly* present in the *Grammar*.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, I as-

<sup>31</sup> On Newman and modern literary theory, see the forthcoming studies by Mary Katherine Tillman ("Economies of Reason: Newman and the *Phronesis* Tradition"), Walter Jost ("Philosophic Rhetoric: Newman and Heidegger"), and Alan J. Crowley ("Theory of Discourse: Newman and Ricoeur"), in *Discourse and Context: An Interdisciplinary Study of John Henry Newman*, ed. Gerard Magill (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ., 1993). Also see A. C. Goodson, *Verbal Imagination: Coleridge and the Language of Modern Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1988).

<sup>32</sup> Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) 196, 199, 207. Also see John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Glasgow: Handsel, 1987) 159-76.

<sup>33</sup> M. Katherine Tillman, "Cardinal Newman on Imagination as the Medium of Intellectual Education," *Religious Education* 83 (1988) 604.

<sup>34</sup> David Hammond, "Imagination and Hermeneutical Theology: Newman's Contribution to Theological Method," *Downside Review* 106 (1988) 25, 29; and "Imagination in Newman's Phenomenology of Cognition," *Heythrop Journal* 29 (1988) 23, 25.

sociate the interpretative with the accumulative (for Hammond the synthetic) roles of the imagination. Further, I have identified the subjective and the dynamic characteristics of discernment in the imagination. Hence, Newman's understanding of "the theology of a religious imagination" is *explicitly* the culmination of a methodology for discerning truth that is applied consistently throughout his major works.

Because Newman argues normatively in the *Grammar*, his use of the imagination appears as prescriptive for theological method. He thereby substantially revises his earlier view that "deduction only is the instrument of theology" (*Idea* 223).<sup>35</sup> Just as formal inference (abstract reason) plays an important role in Newman's epistemology, deductive reason has a legitimate place in his theological method. But the main argument in the *Grammar* subordinates formal inference to informal inference. He associates informal inference (as a mode of personal reasoning) with the imagination's mode of reasoning through convergence, as argued by Robert Holyer.<sup>36</sup> This connection is implied clearly in Newman's description of informal inference as "that real ratiocination and present imagination" (*Grammar* 316). His observation is not just a passing remark but is situated within his major eighth chapter on inference. In sum, Newman's views of liberal education, of religious epistemology, and of theological method, combine the three characteristics of discernment which he construed as "an appeal to the imagination." To elucidate upon the title of this essay, it is appropriate to talk of an appeal to the *moral imagination*, though Newman never used that phrase. Several reasons can be adduced for this refinement of terms.

### *Moral Imagination*

Newman ascribes the word *moral* not only to ethical concerns but also to intellectual inference in order to convey the supple quality of the discernment process as "the personal action of the ratiocinative faculty" (*Grammar* 345).<sup>37</sup> In 1864 he talks of "moral demonstration, which is an assemblage of probabilities" (*Letters* 21.146). Six years later, he declares: "I observe that moral evidence and moral certitude are all that we can attain . . . in the case of ethical and spiritual subjects, such as religion" (*Grammar* 318). Here the term *moral* implies

<sup>35</sup> On his deductive and inductive method, see Nicholas Lash, "Was Newman a Theologian?" *Heythrop Journal* 17 (1976) 322-25.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Holyer, "Religious Certainty and the Imagination: An Interpretation of J. H. Newman," *Thomist* 50 (1986) 401.

<sup>37</sup> For a philosophical justification of this process, see M. Jamie Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment: The Role of the Will in Newman's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 62-70.

the use of informal inference to transform “moral evidence” subjectively into “moral certitude.” He portrays “that real ratiocination and present imagination” as a moral undertaking to justify certitude. This use of the term *moral* draws the secular and religious realms together, as in a sermon in 1839: “Faith is a moral principle . . . the very medium in which the argument for Christianity has its constraining influence” (*Sermons* 191). For Newman, then, the term *moral* goes beyond its ethical significance to include both intellectual and religious meaning. I refer to *moral imagination* to allude to Newman’s intricacy of thought on relating the intellectual, ethical, and religious meaning of discernment. His explanation of conscience illustrates this confluence of meaning.

Newman describes conscience as “a moral sense, and a sense of duty” (*Grammar* 106). As moral sense conscience refers to the intellectual process of informal inference that he compares with Aristotle’s practical wisdom: “It is . . . with the controlling principle in inferences that I am comparing *phronesis*” (356). As a sense of duty conscience refers to religious obligation based on one’s awareness of God as Supreme Governor so that “conscience is a connecting principle between the creature and his Creator” (117). It is significant that conscience, with its confluence of meaning (intellectual, ethical, religious), leads to his appeal to the imagination process in theological method:

To a mind thus carefully formed upon the basis of its natural *conscience*, . . . the theology of a religious imagination . . . has a living hold on truths . . . is able to pronounce by anticipation, . . . interprets what it sees around it . . . Thus conscience is a connecting principle between the creature and his Creator (*Grammar* 116–17, emphasis added).

Conscience, then, illustrates Newman’s “appeal to the imagination” which he construes as the combination of the three characteristics of discernment that are present in this passage. In this discussion of conscience he espouses the interaction between the secular and religious realms that is associated with discernment in his philosophy of education.<sup>38</sup> The interaction takes the form of relating his religious epistemology with his theological method. This view of conscience, illustrative of using the imagination in theology, illumines other discussions.

In his essay *On Consulting the Faithful* (1859)<sup>39</sup> he explains that the

<sup>38</sup> On conscience and liberal education see Gerard Magill, “Newman on Liberal Education and Moral Pluralism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 45 (1992) 47–52.

<sup>39</sup> J. H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, rev. ed. 1871, ed. John Coulson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 73 (hereafter: *Consulting*).

consent of the faithful entails “a sort of instinct, or *phronema*” as the “conscience de l’Eglise,” the conscience of the Church. When Coulson correctly explains this communal conscience of the Church (*phronema*) as the counterpart of individual conscience (*phronesis*) he relates its theological meaning with Newman’s view of education, but without further explanation.<sup>40</sup> This connection is implied also by Newman in 1851: “I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity . . . I wish you to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason, to get an insight into the relation of truth to truth.”<sup>41</sup> However, Coulson’s comment is more perceptive than his brief remark suggests. There are common characteristics of discernment (the “relation of truth to truth”) in Newman’s philosophy of liberal education, religious epistemology, and theological method. Coulson’s insight, then, is that Newman’s view of conscience is replete with theological meaning because of these shared characteristics.<sup>42</sup>

When Newman discusses conscience in his “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk,” his famous after-dinner toast, “to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards,”<sup>43</sup> celebrates informal inference: “I must rule myself by my own judgment and my own conscience” (*Norfolk* 244). Here his view of conscience cannot be explained adequately merely by applying principles (habitual conscience) to practical judgment (actual conscience). John Finnis forces Newman’s thought into this procrustean bed without relating that letter to the larger corpus of Newman’s writings.<sup>44</sup> He overlooks the view of conscience illumined by Newman’s “theology of a religious imagination.”

The culmination of this view of conscience as illustrative of Newman’s theological method appears in his 1877 preface to the *Via Media*. Although he does not discuss conscience specifically, he implicitly reiterates the communal view of conscience that inspired his 1859 essay on consulting: “Theology is the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole Church system” (*Via Media* xlvi). The context of the remark is a discussion of the interaction between the priestly (worship), prophetic (theology), and kingly (governance) offices of the

<sup>40</sup> John Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition* 122–130.

<sup>41</sup> J. H. Newman, *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England* (1851) (London: Longmans, Green, 1899) 390.

<sup>42</sup> John Coulson, “The Meaning and Function of Imagination according to J. H. Newman, and Its Relation to His Conception of Conscience and the Church,” in *Newman Studien*, ed. H. Fries (Nuremberg: Glock und Lutz, 1948–) 11.58.

<sup>43</sup> J. H. Newman, “A Letter Addressed to His Grace the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone’s Recent Expostulation” (1875), in *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans* (London: Longmans, Green, 1898) 2.261 (hereafter: *Norfolk*).

<sup>44</sup> John Finnis, “Conscience in the *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*,” in Ian Ker and Alan G. Hill, eds., *Newman after a Hundred Years* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 413.

Church.<sup>45</sup> Emphasizing theology, Newman conveys a view of communal discernment akin to his earlier explanation of consulting the faithful. This rapport between theology and the faithful is apparent in a letter from Newman to Canon Walker of St. Edmund's College, dated 1867: "For myself I think the *securus judicat orbis terrarum*, is the real rule and interpretation of the words of the Church, i.e. the *sensus theologorum* primarily, then *consensus fidelium* next" (*Letters* 23.254). In that letter there prevails a communal view of discernment among theologians and the faithful. In another letter, written to the convert medievalist William Maskell four years later in February 1871, the rapport between theologians and the faithful is reiterated more poignantly:

The voice of the *Schola Theologorum*, of the whole Church diffusive, will in time make itself heard, and Catholic instincts and ideas will assimilate and harmonize into the credenda of Christendom, and the living tradition of the faithful . . . as a momentous addition to the faith (*Letters* 25.284, emphasis added).

Once again Newman's three characteristics of discernment are present: the subjective characteristic in the "living tradition," the accumulative characteristic in ideas that "assimilate and harmonize," and the dynamic characteristic in the "addition to the faith" in the sense of the "movement onwards." Here, Newman implicitly uses the imagination to convey the reciprocity between theologians and the faithful as they communally discern religious truth. Further, he identifies this communal process of discernment as a function of conscience in his 1859 essay on consulting, and especially in the *Grammar* where he portrays conscience as a function of the imagination. Theology, then, entails the use of conscience, each beholden to the imagination. The *Via Media's* view of theology as the basic principle of the Church implies that conscience is at the root of ecclesiology.

Edward Jeremy Miller makes a similar observation in his study of Newman's ecclesiology in the 1877 Preface to the *Via Media*. Epistemologically, he argues, Newman's ecclesiology is rooted in conscience as personal, ethical experience. I suggest that conscience in his theological method also contributes to his ecclesiology. For Miller, Newman's theological method (with regard to ecclesiology) was a quest for "dynamic equilibrium" within a "dialectics of discourse"; this means seeking balance among many personal views so that theological insight and ecclesial authority are mutually accountable.<sup>46</sup> Also, John T.

<sup>45</sup> See *Via Media* xl; and *Consulting* 103.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (Shepherdstown, W. Va.: Patmos, 1987) 31–32, 89–91; and Gerard Magill, "Newman and The



Ford recalls Newman's image that "theology is like dancing on the tight rope" depicting the adroitness of holding a dialectical balance among contending claims.<sup>47</sup> Avery Dulles describes this balance as a dialectic of tension and support. Dulles, however, finds it difficult to reconcile the supremacy of theology in the *Via Media's* Preface (1877) with what he perceives as theology's subordinate (as merely notional) status in the *Grammar*.<sup>48</sup> Here I disagree. Theology implements the *Grammar's* general argument of combining formal inference (as notional) with informal inference (as imaginative), the latter having primacy.<sup>49</sup> The primacy of theology reflects a method that uses the imagination and, therefore, anticipates the 1877 Preface of the *Via Media*. The imagination, then, is the apex of a consistent methodology that combines the three characteristics of discernment in his liberal education, religious epistemology, and theology.<sup>50</sup>

Newman rhetorically describes the equilibrium or balance that results from his philosophical and theological method as seeking "a possible road, lying between a mountain and a morass" through an "appeal to the imagination" (*Via Media* xxi–xxii). His achievement is to show that such balance, arising from interpretation through converging arguments, is the fruit of the imagination. In the passage cited from Newman's letter to Canon Walker in 1867 a connection between interpretation and the "securus judicat orbis terrarum" is established. Because interpretation is a crucial function of the imagination, this Augustinian phrase also betokens "an appeal to the imagination." In the final section of this essay I will consider Newman's use of the imagination in his theological recovery of Church tradition.

#### CHURCH TRADITION

To recover Church tradition Newman used the characteristics of discernment that are constitutive of intellectual knowledge and con-

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Ecclesial Nature of the Theologian,' *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 12 (1991) 19–20. Theology, then, interprets the language of the community to the community (Lee Yearley, *The Ideas of Newman* [University Park, Pa.: Penn State Univ., 1978] 80–81).

<sup>47</sup> John T. Ford, "Dancing on the Tight Rope: Newman's View of Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985) 138, 142.

<sup>48</sup> Avery Dulles, "The Threefold Office in Newman's Ecclesiology," in Ker and Hill, *Newman after a Hundred Years* 378, 381–82, 387.

<sup>49</sup> Similarly, T. Milligan explains Newman's theology as integrated with the polar character of his epistemology (*Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman* [Louvain: Peeters, 1991] 166).

<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, T. Norris's examination of mystery and analogy in Newman's theology (*Newman and His Theological Method* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977] 187) offers no study of the imagination.

strued as “an appeal to the imagination” in two ways: in a theoretical way for doctrinal development, and in a practical way for his explanation of doctrinal history when studying Arianism.

### *Doctrinal Development*

The characteristics of discernment appear clearly in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845):

And the more claim an idea has to be considered living, the more various will be its aspects; . . . having aspects many and bearings many, *mutually connected and growing* one out of another, and all parts of a whole (56, emphasis added).

The subjective characteristic, that “an idea has to be considered living,” parallels the “living knowledge” discussed earlier; this is as much a communal activity as it is personal, so that a living idea must be assimilated “in the minds of individuals and of the community” (37). Next, the dynamic characteristic entails “growing,” akin to the “movement onwards”; the development of an idea means that “it grows when it incorporates, and its identity is found, not in isolation, but in continuity” (39). Continuity is assured by making meaningful connections with its antecedents; this occurs when the dynamic characteristic and the accumulative characteristic of discernment are combined. Also, the accumulative characteristic requires that the aspects of an idea are “mutually connected,” like his “connected view”.<sup>51</sup>

[An] idea will in course of time expand into a multitude of ideas, and aspects of ideas, connected and harmonious with one another, . . . interpreting, . . . as they accumulate, to a perfect image. There is no other way of learning or of teaching (55).

Here there is an inkling of his later thought: making connections offers a glimpse of liberal education (“no other way of learning”) that he later articulated in 1852; the link between interpretation and accumulation (“interpreting . . . as they accumulate”) indicates an aspect of his religious epistemology that was crucial for the *Grammar* in 1870; and, above all, there is a glimmer of his later use of the imagination for accumulating arguments (“they accumulate to a perfect image”), anticipating the association of informal inference with the imagination in the *Grammar*.

Newman’s theory of doctrinal development celebrates tradition from

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas Lash also describes this synthetic and imaginative approach as referring to the personal grasp of concrete reality that characterized Newman’s “educational and intellectual ideal” (*Newman on Development* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1975] 35).

the historical perspective of theology. Drew Philip Morgan appropriately describes Newman's theory as "a hermeneutics of retrieval" that theologically interprets the modern Church in the light of the early Church. But he mistakenly asserts that conscience became "the major corrective" to Newman's theory, being "the principle that established balance and integration."<sup>52</sup> I contend that Newman applies the same approach to his theory of conscience as to doctrinal development. His view of conscience is subsumed into his use of the imagination. The imagination has the function of integration in the sense of combining the characteristics of discernment. This use of the imagination, made explicit in the *Grammar*, is operative throughout his major works whenever he calls upon the interaction of these characteristics. Therefore, the characteristics in his essay on doctrinal development reflect his use of the imagination in his quest for a theological method to retrieve tradition in a meaningfully historical way. He turns to the imagination for historical balance in the tradition: in 1877 he makes an "appeal to the imagination" to find "a possible road, lying between a mountain and a morass" (*Via Media* xxi–xxii), between the perceived excesses of Catholicism and Protestantism. This use of the imagination illumines the influence of the early Church upon his theology.

### *Theological History*

The influence of tradition was crucial to Newman's theological method for examining doctrinal history in his first book, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*.<sup>53</sup> Though designed originally as a history of the early Councils, in August 1831 Newman wrote to his publisher, Hugh James Rose: "To understand it (the Nicene Confession), it must be prefaced by a sketch of the rise of the Arian heresy" (*Letters* 2.352). His point was that history cannot be separated from theological meaning in concepts and vocabulary: church history is necessarily theological.<sup>54</sup> With a new publisher (Rivingtons), the book presented Newman's discovery of the Church of Alexandria, understanding for the first time "that Antiquity was the true exponent of the doctrines of Christianity" (*Apologia* 35–36).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Drew Philip Morgan, "Hermeneutical Aspects of John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*," *Horizons* 16 (1989) 240 n. 90, and 241.

<sup>53</sup> J. H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833) (London: Longmans, Green, 1901) (hereafter: *Arians*).

<sup>54</sup> Rowan Williams, "Newman's *Arians* and the Question of Method in Doctrinal History," in Ker and Hill, *Newman after a Hundred Years* 265–66.

<sup>55</sup> Gilley, *Newman and His Age* 88.

Newman presented the error of Arius, denial of the divinity of Christ, as based upon a mistaken use of reason in faith: "His heresy, thus founded in a syllogism, spread itself by instruments of a kindred character" (*Arians* 28). Although Newman's polemical interests led him to draw an exaggerated parallel between Arianism and the religious rationalism among Protestant liberals in the nineteenth century (*Apologia* 130),<sup>56</sup> his basic insight remains valid: doctrine and its development in the early Church was based upon a nuanced mode of reasoning in faith. Newman's approach in the *Arians* attempts to emulate that subtlety of reasoning, an approach that Ian Ker appropriately describes as a careful balance between doctrinal history and theology.<sup>57</sup> This poise is a precursor of Newman's use of the imagination. It is revealing that later he recounted his memory of writing the *Arians* in imaginative, metaphorical terms: the teaching of the Fathers "came like music to my ears," "Nature was a parable: Scripture was an allegory" (*Apologia* 36). More importantly, however, the same passage from the *Arians* contains the three characteristics of discernment whose combination, I contend, can be construed as his "appeal to the imagination."

In the fulness of time both Judaism and Paganism had come to nought; the outward framework, which concealed yet suggested the *Living Truth*, had never been intended to last. . . . The *process of change* had been slow. . . . And thus room was made for the anticipation of further and deeper disclosures. . . . Her (Holy Church's) *mysteries are but the expressions in human language of truths to which the human mind is unequal* (*Apologia* 36–37, emphasis added).

Here two characteristics of discernment are quite clear: the subjective ("Living Truth") and the dynamic ("process of change"). The accumulative or holistic characteristic is also present in the phrase that contains his basic insight into doctrinal history, namely, that theological language contains more than it can enunciate: "Mysteries are but the expressions in human language of truths to which the human mind is unequal." A similar theme appears in other works: in his Dublin discourses the function of the accumulative characteristic of discernment is to establish "order and meaning" (*Idea* 134); in his religious epistemology meaning arises from converging arguments when the imagination "interprets what it sees around it" (*Grammar* 117; see *Via Media* xx). Therefore, Newman's primary instrument for expressing

<sup>56</sup> On nineteenth-century liberalism and heresy in the early Church, see Stephen Thomas, *Newman and Heresy: The Anglican Years* (New York: Cambridge Univ., 1991) 165–77; Robert Pattison, *The Great Dissent: John Henry Newman and the Liberal Heresy* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1991) chap. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* 49.

mysteries in human language is reasonable discernment through the imagination. In the *Arians* he uses the imagination by clustering the three dimensions of discernment to provide meaning and interpretation while remaining open to new insight. Similarly, Rowan Williams examines the figurative character of theological reflection in the *Arians*. Newman, he argues, was sensitive to the paradoxical character in the history of doctrine seeking verbal formulae that decisively avoid closures of meaning while creatively generating new metaphors.<sup>58</sup> "Theology," Newman wrote in 1879, "makes progress by being always alive to its fundamental uncertainties" (*Letters* 29.118). He used the imagination, then, to maintain a paradoxical tension between disclosing the meaning of what is otherwise unavailable to us while veiling the transcendent mystery of religious truth.

The account of doctrinal history in the *Arians* portrays a struggle with theological method to ensure that the recovery of tradition entails growth and not fossilization. Here the contours of a theology of doctrinal history mark the beginning of Newman's theory of doctrinal development. The clearest point of contact between the *Arians* and his essay on *Development* is in his discussion of the principle of economy, which illustrates his use of the imagination. He argues that the theological teachings of the Alexandrian Church were based on "the various Economies or Dispensations of the Eternal" (*Apologia* 36). Newman's principle of economy articulates the theological task of expressing mystery in language as doctrine: doctrine is always merely an economical representation of truth and therefore its formulation is limited by history. The principle of economy exhorts the community "to be leading . . . to perfection, and to be recovering and purifying" (*Arians* 84), remaining inseparable from his theory of doctrinal development, which, as argued by Morgan, includes a hermeneutics of retrieval and a hermeneutics of purification.<sup>59</sup>

Newman supplies ample evidence for the principle of economy in the early Church. One of the most illuminating references in the *Arians* is to Clement of Alexandria in whose writings Newman identifies the principle of economy among Christians with "their desire to rouse the moral powers . . . their dread of loading or formalizing the mind" (*Arians* 49).<sup>60</sup> In this text Newman's principle of economy presages the interaction between moral and intellectual character that would be-

<sup>58</sup> Williams, "Newman's *Arians*" 284–85.

<sup>59</sup> Morgan, "Hermeneutical Aspects" 242; Morgan does not refer to this text from Newman's *Arians*.

<sup>60</sup> Newman referred to Clement's *Stromateis* ("Tapestry-work") 1.1.12; 5.3; 6.1; 7.18 in *Arians* 48–49.

come crucial for his use of the imagination. Accordingly, Williams explains that for Newman the involvement of the principle of economy with theological language implies the anticipation of further understanding for developing doctrinal proficiency. That is possible because the principle of economy nurtures the connection between doctrinal understanding and the development of character.<sup>61</sup> As character improves intellectually and morally among the community of believers, there is greater sensitivity to the mystery underlying doctrine and therefore more perceptive discernment of its disclosure of meaning. Nearly forty years later Newman explains that the appropriate mental instrument for apprehending such "depth of meaning" is "that real ratiocination and present imagination" (*Grammar* 316). His principle of economy, then, is in accord with the characteristics of discernment: "A practical approximation . . . is what in theological investigations I should call an economy" (*Grammar* 47). Here, Robin Selby claims, the principle of economy in theology is equivalent to Newman's proof by convergence ("a practical approximation"); economy and convergence represent the means for moral certainty insofar as probabilities converge to certainty.<sup>62</sup> In that sense, Newman's principle of economy, recovered from the tradition of the early Church, illustrates his use of the moral imagination.

#### CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this essay I sketched a definition of the imagination as a mental instrument for creative discernment. Newman used the imagination for a nuanced mode of reasoning both in his theological method and in his use of church tradition. To explain my definition, in my systematic analysis I suggest that the dynamic, holistic, and subjective characteristics of discernment as constitutive of intellectual knowledge are construed as "an appeal to the imagination." And my use of the term *moral imagination* alludes to the balance that Newman maintained between the secular and religious realms of discourse. On the one hand, his use of the imagination enabled him to maintain a skillful poise in the face of so many conflicting views in the political and religious arena of his day. On the other hand, his achievement remains relevant today insofar as his use of the imagination portrays the intellectual depth of living faith.

The plausibility of his view of the imagination is increased in light of his recognition of its inherent dangers. He shared the nineteenth-

<sup>61</sup> Williams, "Newman's *Arians*" 266–68.

<sup>62</sup> Robin C. Selby, *The Principle of Reserve in the Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London: Oxford Univ., 1975) 66.

century Romantic view of the imagination as creative (productive). But, like Hegel, Feuerbach, and later Freud, Newman was aware of imaginative distortion and illusion (see *Apologia* 20). In response he explained the legitimate association between the imagination and the perception of concrete reality by construing the combination of the three characteristics of reasonable discernment as an appeal to the imaginative process. He thereby provided an anticipatory response to the dismissal of the imagination's creative ability as unreal and unrelated to perception by Sartre—for example, the contention that the artist's painting depicts what does not have being, what is unreal.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, Newman's view of the imagination anticipated contemporary literary theory's exploration of the interaction between subject and object, reader and text, an interaction that unveils the oversimplification of Sartre's view. Newman espoused a creative role for the imagination as epistemologically coherent by coupling its innovative capacity (the dynamic characteristic of discernment) with its synthetic capacity (the holistic characteristic) in a process of reasoning that is eminently personal (the subjective characteristic). He argued that the imagination enables us to apprehend reality meaningfully through converging arguments in an interpretative process that discloses what is within our range of perception, even though not logically apparent. In doctrine this process celebrates the tension between disclosure and concealment in religious mystery.

In similar fashion today David Tracy turns to the imagination by using analogical language to protect the irreducible tension of disclosure and concealment in religion. He argues that the analogical imagination enables us to discern relations (and therefore also the differences) between different realities in a specific tradition and among the plurality of religious traditions. Tracy does not refer to the imagination in Newman's thought, though he clearly appreciates the contribution of the *Grammar* as a classic on the critical analysis of faith commitment.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, Newman's use of the imagination in his theological method complements Tracy's analogical imagination by weaving together the three characteristics of discernment.

These dynamic, holistic, and subjective characteristics of discernment clarify the epistemological function of the imagination in Newman's works, and thereby they illumine Tracy's strategy for compre-

<sup>63</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948) 14, 20; and *L'Imagination* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969) 1–6.

<sup>64</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad; and London: SCM, 1981) 28, 408–9, 429, and 86 n. 33.

hending claims to meaning and truth in theology: to apprehend "depth of meaning" Newman explains that we require "that real ratiocination and present imagination" (*Grammar* 316). For Tracy meaning and truth in theology emerge from the critical interpretation of church tradition and of contemporary realities in particular situations when we discover "some ordered relationships for understanding the similarities-in-difference in the whole."<sup>65</sup> For Newman the interpretation of church tradition and of history requires the holistic characteristic of discernment; and relating information in a holistic perspective was the basis of knowledge in his philosophy of education. These functions of relating and interpreting information in Newman's use of the imagination are consistent with and expand upon Tracy's analogical imagination.

Tracy, however, applies the imagination more explicitly than Newman to theological conversation within a specific religious denomination and among diverse traditions of belief. Newman was sensitive to the interaction between the secular and religious realms of discourse through the imagination, especially in his view of university education. But Tracy's argument goes further by exploring how the imagination can integrate religious traditions with contemporary culture in the sense of combining church, academy, and society in public discourse.<sup>66</sup> Robert N. Bellah and others adopt a similar strategy for the social sciences by appealing to the "social imagination" in order to advance cultures as "dramatic conversations"; these conversations depend upon the character of those involved to make connections with older ways for the "recovery of a genuine tradition, one that is always self-revising and in a state of development."<sup>67</sup>

Newman's insight into the relevance of intellectual and moral character for an appropriate use of the imagination anticipated these sorts of approaches (Tracy's in theology, Bellah's in sociology) that envision diverse conversations for advancing culture through the imagination. For Newman the influence of character upon the imagination en-

<sup>65</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* 29, 423. This accords with Warnock's philosophical account of the imagination as an intellectual power of perception and interpretation that ascribes meaning to reality as significant (*Imagination* 196, 199, 206).

<sup>66</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* 449, 453. The relation between religious traditions and culture is apparent in his subtitle "Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism."

<sup>67</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California, 1985) 27, 275, 283. These scholars also extend their inquiry from cultural and personal resources for common life to institutions as patterned ways for living together (*The Good Society* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991] 4).



hances such conversation by recovering the vitality of tradition in doctrinal development and theological history; hence his stunning remark in 1845 that hints at his later use of the imagination: "There is no other way of learning or of teaching" (*Development* 55). Warnock reinforces this rapport between education and imagination. She concludes her study of the imagination by observing that the cultivation of the imagination depends upon education.<sup>68</sup> Newman, too, nurtured this affinity between imagination and education insofar as his use of the imagination in theological method and church tradition developed from his philosophy of education.

In this essay I have argued that at the root of Newman's philosophy of liberal education are the dynamic, holistic, and subjective characteristics of discernment, which he applied to his theological method (including his religious epistemology) and to his recovery of church tradition (including his theory of doctrinal development). I have suggested that he construed the combination of these three characteristics of discernment as "an appeal to the imagination" (*Via Media* xxi), whose explanation appears most clearly in the *Grammar*. My use of the term *moral imagination* alludes to the interaction between the secular and religious realms of discourse, which entails a confluence of ethical, intellectual, and religious meaning that pervades his major works. Newman's achievement, therefore, was to portray the intellectual depth of religious belief by prescribing a central role for the imagination in theological method and church tradition. His contribution to scholarship today is to invigorate theology as creative, intellectual inquiry by the reasonable discernment of moral imagination.

<sup>68</sup> Warnock, *Imagination* 202.