

Chapter VII. Certitude

by Peter Trahan

Newman distinguishes simple and complex assent as two separate states of mind, “Assent” and “Certitude,” respectively.

Newman describes **simple assent** as

- ⤴ “Assent” (capital “A”)
- ⤴ “material certitude”
- ⤴ “religious assent”
- ⤴ unreflective assent *
- ⤴ “an assent which they barely recognize”
- ⤴ “virtual certitude”
- ⤴ “interpretative certitude” *
- ⤴ never tempted by doubt
- ⤴ of very little intellectual processing
- ⤴ no opportunity of certainty
- ⤴ “The highest quality of religious faith”
- ⤴ “invincible knowledge”
- ⤴ not a reflex act
- ⤴ characteristic of partisans
- ⤴ based on instinct
- ⤴ the Martyrs
- ⤴ simple, full, firm belief

* “...but it [reflection] does not occur; and accordingly, most genuine and thorough as is the assent, it can only be called virtual, material, or interpretative certitude.”

“great numbers of men must be considered to pass through life with neither doubt nor, on the other hand, certitude (as I have used the words) ... but with only a **simple assent**, that is, an assent which they barely recognize, or bring home to their consciousness or reflect upon, as being assent.

“I will call **simple assent** material certitude; or to use a still more apposite term for it, interpretative certitude.”

Complex assent

- ⤴ “Certitude” (Capital “C”)
- ⤴ the product of “scientific convictions of philosophy.”
- ⤴ the product of an “argumentative process”
- ⤴ a “reflex” act
- ⤴ does not immediately touch us
- ⤴ purely intellectual
- ⤴ the recording of a conclusion
- ⤴ disposes men to silence as to their convictions

- ⤴ based on arguments
- ⤴ a deliberate assent given after reasoning

Part 3.

Assents change. **Certitudes endure.** Certitude is marked by its “unchangeableness”

Religion demands **more than an assent**; it requires a certitude.

Convictions may be lost and that we have been wrong about what we have been certain does not mean all of our certainties are wrong.

Part 4.

Certitude follows upon examination and proof. “This proviso greatly diminishes the catalog of genuine certitudes.” But it does not eliminate them.

“Probability does in some sense presuppose and require the existence of truths which are certain.”

Without certainties there can be no probabilities at all.

“It is on no probability that we are constantly receiving the informations and dictates of sense and memory, of our intellectual instincts, or the moral sense, and of the logical faculty.”

The initial truths of divine knowledge ought to be viewed as certain.

“If religion is to be devotion and not a mere matter of sentiment, if it is to made the ruling principle of our lives ... we need something higher than a mere balance of arguments to fix and control our minds.”

A vital Christianity needs “more than human reasonings and inferences.

Part 5. Defending the doctrine of indefectibility in certitude.

Argument: **Certitude does not change and cannot be lost.**

Newman responds to the following objection: That there are a multitude of theological hypotheses and creeds. At present there is no clear certainty anywhere about religious truth at all.

Newman give science as an example of certainties which are nevertheless only partially received. The lack of universal reception of these certainties does not amount to a lack of certainty. Likewise, the certainties of religion do not depend upon universal reception.

Assent and certitude have reference to propositions, one by one, whereas “Catholicism” or “Protestantism” is not a single proposition.

Certitudes do not change but assents may. Furthermore, a man who changes his assents from one

religion to another may have not lost any certitude in the process.

A man who converts to Catholicism but turns away from the faith upon learning of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception never had certitude of the Church's infallibility. It is wrong to suggest that certitude has changed or been lost.

Sometimes what seems to be a loss of certitude is due to prejudices that do not bear careful examination. "Such is the prejudices existing against the Church among Protestants who dress her up in the most hideous and loathsome images"

Part 6.

Certitude does not admit of an interior, immediate test, sufficient to discriminate it from false certitude. Whoever loses his conviction on a given point is thereby proved not to have been certain.

When we make the mental act expressed by "I know", we sum up a whole series of reflex judgments.

3 Conditions of Certitude:

1. certitude follows on examination and proof
2. certitude is accompanied by a specific sense of intellectual satisfaction
3. certitude is irreversible