

## Chapter X. Inference and Assent in the Matter of Religion

In this section, Newman focuses on the role that conscience plays in our lives as the ultimate authority in the matter of religion. Conscience is the basis that forms Natural Religion, which Christianity does not contradict or supersede, but completes by addition.

On conscience Newman clearly states:

- ♣ The **Primary Evidence** of religion is private, derived from private thoughts and experience.
- ♣ Christianity does not supersede or contradict Natural Religion, but adds to it.
- ♣ Conscience authoritatively teaches us that God exists and is a God of Judgment and Justice.
- ♣ Conscience tells us that we are personally responsible for what we do and that dereliction of duty involves punishment.
- ♣ Conscience teaches man, who suffers, to “hope for a future good.”

*In religious inquiry each of us can speak only for himself ... he cannot speak for others ... he cannot lay down the law ... He knows what has satisfied and satisfies himself; if it satisfies him, it likely satisfies others; if, as he believes and is sure, it is true, it will approve itself to others also, for there is but one truth. ... What convinces him convinces others also.*

*Conscience answers all doubts about God's seeming absence, pronouncing “without any misgivings that God exists: - and it pronounces quite as surely that I am alienated from Him; that 'His Hand is not shortened, but that our iniquities have divided between us and our God.' Thus it solves the world's mystery, and sees in that mystery only a confirmation of its own original teaching.”*

### Natural Religion

“What is universal is natural.”

Lucretius documents the seeming universality of the “practice of atonement” which arises from this teaching of conscience. Thus Natural Religion arises in all times and places because conscience is universally present in mankind.

Natural Religion has a “severe” and “barbaric” aspect to it, which originates from the requirement of conscience for atonement. Lucretius finds this to be a horrible yoke imposed upon mankind by religion, but Newman claims that the yoke does not originate from religion. In fact, religion is a response to the yoke in which mankind already finds himself.

In an attempt to free himself from such a yoke, modern man has made a religion out of civilization and philosophy, which are more humane than the barbarian traditions from which Natural Religion arises, but these new religions are “counterfeit and hollow” because they do not recognize a basic fact of mankind, which is the teaching of conscience which tells of his sin and guilt, and need for atonement.

While Philosophy is capable of recognizing the moral sense, it is a development mainly of the intellect, and therefore makes for a hollow religion because it ignores the teaching of conscience and thus is not a development of “man's whole nature” but a perversion of it.

## Divine Providence

“There is a general feeling, originating directly in the workings of conscience,” that recognizes “the Hand of unseen power directing in mercy or in judgment the physical and moral system.”

A “Divine Supervision” directs the prominent events of the world, personal, political and natural.

## Prayer

Along with hope, prayer is a universal constituent in Natural Religion. Individual prayers and rites vary, and therefore are not universal, but prayer itself, like hope, is a permanent fixture in the religion of mankind.

## Revelation and Sacrifice

“As prayer is the voice of man to God, so Revelation is the voice of God to man.”

Sacrifice is a universal aspect of Natural Religion which is given by revelation (“Among the observances imposed by these professed revelations, none is more remarkable, or more general, than the rite of sacrifice”), not the deduction of reason or social contract. Providence sanctions and enforces by law that we are to “bear one another's burdens.”

*“The final burden of responsibility when we are called to judgment is our own; but among the media by which we are prepared for that judgment are the exertions and pains taken in our behalf by others. On this vicarious principle, by which we appropriate to ourselves what others do for us, the whole structure of society is raised. ... We all suffer for each other, and gain by each other's sufferings; for man never stands alone here, though he will stand by himself one day hereafter; but here he is a social being, and goes forward to his long home as one of a large company.”*

*“In the daily course of natural providence, it is appointed that innocent people should suffer for the faults of the guilty ... and ... vicarious punishments may be fit, and absolutely necessary.”*

## Revealed Religion

Newman turns from Natural Religion (a matter of private judgment) to the proof of the Revealed Religion, whose truths, while demonstrable, rests on arguments that can be challenged.

*“Truth certainly, a such, rests upon grounds intrinsically and objectively and abstractedly demonstrative, but it does not follow from this that the arguments producible in its favour are unanswerable and irresistible.”*

*“While I can prove Christianity divine to my own satisfaction, I shall not be able to force it upon any one else.”*

The method of finding this proof will not be as in mathematics, where “we are justified by the dictate of nature in withholding our assent from a conclusion of which we have not yet a strict logical demonstration” but rather, by the dictate given by religious inquiry whereby “we are not justified ... in waiting till such logical demonstration is ours.”

*“[we] are bound in conscience to seek truth and to look for certainty by modes of proof, which, when reduced to the shape of formal propositions, fail to satisfy the severe requisitions of science.”*

Newman points out that the reason why some may challenge the conclusions of his arguments are because they start from different first principles than he does.

*“As they start with one set of first principles, I start with another.”*

*“If any one starts from any other principle than ours, I have not the power to change his principles or the conclusion which he draws from them.”*

*“Men differ from each other, not so much in the soundness of their reasonings as in the principles which govern its exercise, that those principles are of a personal character, that where there is no common measure of minds, there is no common measure of arguments, and that the validity of proof is determined, not by any scientific test, but by the illative sense.”*

This is an interesting observation: as in mathematics, given the first principles, the conclusions are necessarily true. The quality of being “necessarily true” makes for a sort of tautology; the use of logic is simply the means for extracting (computing) what is already there in the first principles. Mathematics and logic tell us where the starting point leads us, but no mathematics, no logic, and no reasoning can determine (compute) which starting point is “true”. The human being alone bears the burden of choosing, and in this he has no “calculator” to do the work for him. This burden is the work of what Newman calls the illative sense.

It is this illative sense (a matter of private judgment?) which is present in Natural Religion, which Newman considers the starting point, or “first proposition” to which he wishes to prove the second.

He further qualifies his argument by stating some of these starting points, which are the very points of which are held in disagreement by the “civilized age.”