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FAITH AND REASON IN THE TEACHING OF BL. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

WIARA I ROZUM W NAUCZANIU
BŁ. JOHN HENRY'EGO NEWMANA

*What is matter of faith is true for all times,
and never can be unsaid.*

John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (p. 172).

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the relationship between faith and reason in the writings of Bl. John Henry Newman, one of the greatest personalities of nineteenth-century Britain. The topicality of Newman is stressed today in the context of social, political, and theological considerations. He is called in invisible peritus of the Second Vatican Council. In his sermons and essays, sought to show that there is no contradiction between faith and reason because in our daily matters we more often than not act on faith. If such is the case, we must find a broader sense of rationality. In this broader sense, Newman finds certitude. This certitude is different than certainty of logical propositions, for it concerns concrete acts, therefore it is personal rather than merely logical. Certitude resembles personal maturity in which we assent to certain truths and follow what we have thus assented to. This following, this personal readiness Newman calls realization. To realize something in faith means to transcend natural difficulties and grasp the truth.

Artykuł koncentruje się na relacji pomiędzy wiarą i rozumem w pismach bł. Johna Henry'ego Newmana, jednego z największych osobowości XIX-wiecznej Brytanii. Aktualność Newmana podkreśla się dzisiaj w kontekście rozważań społecznych, politycznych i teologicznych. Nazywany jest niewidzialnym rzeczoznawcą II Soboru Watykańskiego. W swoich kazaniach i esejach Newman pragnął pokazać, iż nie ma sprzeczności pomiędzy wiarą i rozumem, ponieważ na co dzień naturalnie działamy na gruncie wiary. Jeśli tak się sprawy mają, musimy znaleźć szerszy sens racjonalności. W tym szerszym sensie Newman odnajduje pewność osobową. Pewność ta jest inna niż pewność zdań logicznych, gdyż dotyczy konkretnych aktów. Pewność osobowa przypomina osobową dojrzałość, w której przyświadczamy pewnym prawdom oraz idziemy za tym, czemu przyświadczyliśmy. To pójście za, tę osobową gotowość nazywa Newman realizowaniem. Zrealizować coś w wierze oznacza przekroczyć naturalne trudności i uchwycić prawdę.

Introduction

The nineteenth century is characterized by a general distrust of speculative thinking, a mode of thinking that still fitted so well the eighteenth-century paradigm with its claim for universality. We know that the age of the Enlightenment gave rise not only to scientific discoveries but also to bold political projects among which one should mention the American and Polish constitutions. People in those days lived in a world of brave hopes for the future.¹ Its inhabitants firmly believed, if somewhat naively, in the power of the untrammelled intellect in its planning of a better society, liberated from religious “superstitions.” Admittedly, the “better society” often meant the growth of the planning state and its omnipotence. The French revolution had shown the *naďveté* of similar plans and gave the lie to the ambitions of emancipated reason.

The nineteenth century, therefore, with its advent of the concrete man in his individual social milieu and his individual history, is also an age of disillusionment with the previous model. It is the first time that technological progress shows its dubious face, that is, it promises unending growth and at the same time creates new problems. If we focus too much on the technical aspect of human development, we end up with one-sided people to the detriment of man as a whole.

The social structures are rapidly changing; cities are expanding, a new social class – the Proletariat – is born. Together with the birth of the theory of evolution (1859) the human being, as the creature of God, seems to be dethroned. The inhabitants of western civilization were shocked to hear about this grim message – living beings in the grip of inhuman technology, in a world abandoned by God, and left at the mercy of deterministic evolutionary forces. The philosophy of positivism boldly announced the advent of the positive, that is, scientific, epoch that would enlighten mankind on its way to some bright and infinite progress; a secular eschatology was well on its march forward. Religion in this process was regarded as being only a passing historical stage.

Given the above-mentioned facts, it is not surprising that such intellectual visions also met with resistance. It came from those who, far from rejecting human rational powers for reasons of fear or unchecked admiration for scientific accomplishments, opposed the influx of such unsubstantiated claims. They appealed to distinctions, rather than contradictions or eliminations; human beings are not merely calculating intellects, but living persons. Once we begin to distinguish and delineate things that belong to the sphere of matter and those that belong to the sphere of spirit, they cease to be contradictory and become complementary. A *naďve* veneration for the natural sciences appears too far-fetched for an impartial spectator and is disastrous for the human being as a whole. Reason and faith, when treated as being complementary, satisfy the most urgent human needs. One

¹ In 1770 Sébastien Mercier published his book *L'an 2440* (The Year 2440). That was indeed a very bold prophecy about the future, see J. Kłos, *Faith, Freedom & Modernity*, Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2010, p. 270.

of the nineteenth-century heroes who had taken this position was bl. John Henry Newman: a theologian, philosopher, and writer.

This paper seeks to bring to light the period when Newman was Anglican and when he became Catholic. Accordingly, I shall primarily refer to the collection of his Anglican sermons (*The Parochial and Plain Sermons*), in which the Blessed Cardinal addressed the issues of faith and reason, and to his later works (*Apologia pro vita sua*, *Grammar of Assent*). We shall see how faith under concrete circumstances takes on various forms of human approach to life: trust, obedience, natural reasoning, and love. In a similar manner, we obtain a comprehensive view of Newman's ideas and observe how coherent and consistent he was in his thinking.

I. Faith versus Trust

In his intellectual endeavour, Newman decided to look at man in his concrete and individual situation. He seems to be asking: how does man in fact confront reality? In our daily life, we remain amidst the chaos of many influences, images, and words; our minds are not surrounded by a world of pure ideas but real people and real circumstances that call for our assent. Such was Newman's basic starting point. First and foremost, he was interested in the concrete man and his action, not an imagined human being, that is, he was interested in the natural circumstances under which, despite this primary chaos, he decides to make a decision and act. Under such varied occurrences he is called upon to act, to choose good rather than evil, without a blueprint of some ready-made solutions. The concrete man, in spite of his troublesome situation, can nevertheless make choices and be certain of his action.

Reason and faith have long been regarded as the key faculties of human nature; the pre-modern epoch had sought coexistence between the two rather than opposition (the coexistence of *ratio* and *fides*). Reason enables man to gain knowledge about himself and the surrounding world; faith reaches beyond the limits of the visible world to God. Since we are placed not only amidst the comprehensible components of our beings, things that belong to our biology, but also amidst things we do not understand, and yet we yearn after them, faith comes to our support. Thus faith and reason may coexist in man because he is a compound of what belongs to his biology and to his spirit. This pre-modern harmony of coexistence between reason and faith was broken up at the turn of modernity, when intellect and morality go their separate ways.

Faith in man denotes, on the one hand, the insatiable yearning for transcendence. In this manner it may turn into a form of religion; in its second meaning, however, it can be interpreted as a general attitude in our daily dealings. It appears, and such is Newman's argumentation, that the attitude of faith is a ubiquitous rather than rare phenomenon. We naturally act on faith because our knowledge is lacking and our information is scarce. Consequently, we would not be able to act at all if we decided to demand a proof at every moment because that would simply be impossible to obtain evidence each moment we are expected to assent

to something. Therefore, in his *Grammar of Assent* Newman puts it bluntly that it is our constitution “that faith, not knowledge or argument, is our principle of action [...]”² Events that call for our decisions come to us in a flow of spontaneous sequences here and now. In our common occurrences, we more often than not act on faith, that is, we spontaneously assent to what comes to us for our approval. This is how we confront reality and there is nothing extraordinary about it. In other words, we believe, that is, we trust, that a certain course of sequences is bound to happen, that people we encounter are trustworthy, rather than have calculated it with the precision of an exact science. We are trusting rather than calculating creatures. In other words, we are certain after the mode of persons with all their personal idiosyncrasies, with all the intricacies of a given moment.

Faith and trust are Newman’s synonymous faculties which people use to approach reality, that is, they determine the grounds for our acting in the first place. We spontaneously interpret the events that we encounter as trustworthy and we take them for granted. Such is his, let us say, broadened epistemology. Contrary to the modern claim that our reason can be certain only if it deals with clear and distinct ideas, Newman, for his part, contended that personal certitude is much more complicated and of a different kind than intellectual certainty of propositions. In these matters, faith (trust) is our natural attitude, no matter whether we are religious people or not. As he writes, “we are acting on trust every hour of our lives.”³ To be precise, this trust is spontaneously presupposed, otherwise we would not be able to live.

Unlike with Descartes, therefore, Newman’s starting point is that of trust and confidence: firstly, we trust our memory and our senses; secondly, we trust other people as they present themselves to us. And Newman seeks no other safeguards, trust alone must suffice in daily matters, unless we want to be lost in an unending chain of testing questions. Obviously, we may be disappointed in our trust but trust we must. This is also what we can understand as Newman’s “realism,”⁴ that is, in practice, we cannot bracket our sense experience or our present knowledge, an intellectual experiment proposed by Descartes. The human beings cannot theoretically suspend all their natural endowments and distance themselves from their concrete circumstances, if they are to face reality as real beings. Bracketing reality is an artificial procedure and does not help in practical behaviour.

We know that we exist and that there is an Unseen Power we are bound to obey – intimates Newman – but beyond that we need to act “on trust, i.e. faith.”⁵ What is our starting point? What are we certain of? Newman claims that “we know little

² J. H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of Grammar of Assent*, New York: Longmans, 1947, p. 73. (I shall later refer to it as simply *Grammar of Assent*).

³ J. H. Newman, *Religious Faith Rational*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 121.

⁴ I have put the category “realism” in brackets because, for Newman himself, the philosophical opposition: “realism-idealism” was not that important as far as human action in reality is concerned. It may be important for some highly theoretical considerations.

⁵ J. H. Newman, *Religious Faith Rational*, p. 123.

more than that we exist, and that there is an Unseen Power whom we are bound to obey. Beyond this we must trust; and first our senses, memory, and reasoning powers; then other authorities: – so that, in fact, almost all we do, every day of our lives, is on trust, i.e. faith.”⁶

And, for Newman, trust means in the first place trust in other people’s words. We rely on their knowledge, on what they say about themselves or what they inform us about things we do not know. Such is the foundation of our common life, so that “the world could not go on without trust.”⁷

Trust is the very bond of social cohesion, therefore “distrust, want of faith, breaks the very bonds of human society.” Trust is a common phenomenon, it is our daily experience, for “we daily take things on trust, and [...] to act on faith is in itself quite a rational procedure [...]”⁸ Newman’s words show that man’s natural milieu is that of trust. We need to live in a society where people trust one another, we need to live in an atmosphere of trust, since trust is our natural reference to the world around. Trust is almost coequal with what it means to live in a human society. It means interdependence and interpersonal relations, reliance on what is said to believe. If we cannot test everything and provide demonstration, our destiny is to believe. A further conclusion from Newman’s presuppositions would be that a perfect society (if one can imagine it) is not a society with perfect knowledge, but a society with a profound trust. Consequently, to destroy a society is not to deprive it of knowledge or information, but to paralyse it with distrust. It is not surprising then that totalitarian societies cannot grow – they are taught to distrust everybody. They are taught to distrust the word of another person, to distrust their senses and their natural faculties. Their only source of trust is the state and its authorities. But, and here is the totalitarian paradox, once you are taught to distrust, you begin to distrust even those who you are obliged to trust.

Another thing that is of utmost importance here is that Newman shows us the true nature of a Christian society. If we are encouraged to trust the other person, we rely on this person, we feel the interdependence (solidarity) of our social (communal) life. And this situation brings us home to the Biblical message, that is, that we should be servants of others. We are dependent creatures,⁹ we depend on others, e.g. for their truthfulness. Newman therefore emphasises the fact, underlined by the representatives of personalism, that formal structures (institutions and regulations) do not suffice for a society to be well-ordered and peaceful. Additionally, human beings need to be imbued with good will, empowered with well-informed consciences because conscience should come first when a matter of obedience (trust) appears.

If such is the case in our human daily affairs, Newman encourages us to take faith as something natural, as an essential part of our common experience, to rely

⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

⁹ Ibid., p. 126.

on it and make mature. And then, shifting to faith as a religious experience, he proposes to “venture to believe,” to “make trial before we see, and the evidence which others demand before believing, we shall gain more abundantly by believing.” And subsequently, he proceeds to evaluate the world of our sense experience as a source of our (religious) faith and says that “Almighty God is hidden from us; the world does not discover Him to us; we may go to the right hand and the left, but we find Him not. The utmost we can do in the way of nature is to feel after Him, who, though we see Him not, yet is not far from every one of us.”¹⁰ God absolutely transcends the world. The frustration of the inadequacy of our natural endowments should make us seek help from God. This is also a very interesting point in Newman’s thinking, that is, to pass from the natural (and here faith as such is ubiquitous) to the supernatural on the grounds of our experience. And as in the natural sphere faith ordinarily precedes our decisions and actions, since we are unable to provide an exact proof, in the same manner we can operate in the supernatural sphere wherein our natural capacities and faculties are helpless, if they are not transformed by grace. We find here his belief – as Frank Cross stresses – in the “natural analogy of nature and the Sacramental system [...]”¹¹

Our original situation, therefore, is that of uncertainty and revolt. In other words, there is nothing in man, in the way of nature, that would make him believe in the things he cannot grasp with his natural reason (or intellect). The human intellect is at best “wild” and nothing can “make a stand against the wild living intellect of man [...]”¹² And there is nothing in him, to continue in the same vein, to assent to the truth on behalf of which every evidence speaks or to dissuade him from denying what he has already approved as true. The so-called natural man is immersed in darkness; all his natural faculties, his feelings and emotions, indeed, his very being must be renewed and lifted up “to a higher level than its own” by “an inward spiritual power or grace”; this cannot be brought about by way of the natural working of the human intellect because “all true conversion must begin with the first springs of thought, and [...] each individual man must be in his own person one whole and perfect temple of God, while he is also one of the living stones which build up a visible religious community.”¹³ This is Newman’s main idea – namely that to assent to something, that is, to accept it and realize, is not a mere matter of intellectual comprehension. Let us repeat, one “must be in his own person one whole.” In other words, to strive after intellectual perfection will not contribute much to our certitude. We have to grow to it, we need to be transformed to gain it.

In his understanding of faith, Newman also sought to avoid the trap of sentimentalism, a typical mode of thinking in the romantic period. This “feeling after God,” therefore, from the above quotation has nothing to do with our emotions but

¹⁰ J. H. Newman, *The Gospel Sign Addressed to Faith*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 1248.

¹¹ F. L. Cross, *John Henry Newman*, Glasgow 1933, p. 95.

¹² J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1987, p. 164.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

with the transformation of our whole persons. In this transformation, our emotions and our reason, indeed all our natural faculties are subdued to the sense of the supernatural. This outcome naturally fits into the overall structure of Newman's intellectual construction. If our original state is that of chaos, we have to bring ourselves round to certain truths. An intellectual approval only would be insufficient and it would resemble a mere verbal game. We have to bring our whole beings to assent to truth, so that the final result is to act, without hesitation and deliberation, "with the first springs of thought."

II. Faith and Intellect

Newman acquiesces in the fact "that even the unaided reason, when correctly exercised, leads to a belief in God, in the immortality of the soul, and in a future retribution; but," he writes, he is "considering the faculty of reason actually and historically" where "its tendency is towards a simple unbelief in matters of religion."¹⁴ In other words, what classical philosophy has coined as right reason is indeed capable of arriving at the objects of religious tenets, but Newman is considering reason in the individual mind. This mind is not an impersonal, universal, and logical structure, but it is the mind of a concrete being. In our concrete circumstances, we are to confront the supernatural truth with the whole store of our past and present experience, of our fears and habits, that is, we are to lift, so to say, our whole beings up and to give our assent to the truth. Thus, it is working not in line with an inhuman blueprint of objective action, but in conformity with its own impenetrable and unpredictable manner. This does not mean that Newman opted for a purely subjective idea of truth, but that he firmly believed that the truth would not denote much unless it was personally chosen and realized. Only then does it become a working principle within. The aforementioned category of "arriving" does not mean invention; man does not invent truth but permits it to be born in himself.

At the same time, Newman often entreats his readers to go by reason. Do we find an apparent contradiction here? In Newman's view, we need to attain a personal integrity of our being, the integrity that gives us control over our thoughts, images, appetites, and desires. Intellect alone is helpless because we are not entirely intellectual beings; we are persons with emotions, desires, ambitions, and anticipations. And intellect is placed amidst this unsteady personal landscape; speaking metaphorically, it is dealing with bits and pieces rather than pure and clear-cut entities. As such, it is incapable of restoring order on its own. Newman was wholeheartedly against the modern dualism in which intellect is developed independently of the will, and in which it is treated as the only restorative force. Obviously, they do need different kinds of training, but never separately, that is, one cannot stress the development of the intellect, and neglect the will. By adhering to reason, therefore, the Cardinal does not mean adhering to some universal intellectual power, but our personal reason as the integral power of our persons.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

It is the reason educated not only by logical inferential sequences, but first and foremost by yielding to testimonies and examples.

Newman's main philosophical work, *An Essay in Aid of the Grammar of Assent*, can be compared to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. After all, they both deal with our faculty of judgment, that is, our power to assent to certain truths. Besides, they both address the question of imagination in the process of judging. What is the basic difference between reason and faith in our approval of what comes to us? How do we learn in faith? How do we learn in reason? Either faculty is capable of acquiring knowledge. In reason we say that we know, and we are ready to present arguments on behalf of our knowledge; in faith we also say we know, but do not feel it necessary to give reasons why. When is the moment that reason and faith coalesce? They coalesce in what Newman called personal knowledge.

Newman focuses on our "childhood" or "boyhood," that is, the period when we "trusted our divinely-enlightened sense of duty and our right feeling implicitly [...]" and this is what he calls "that original temper of faith" or "the spirit of little children [...]"¹⁵ And here Newman differs from Kant in the sense that his "sense of duty" does not come from the transcendental (indeed, impersonal) imperative, but it is "divinely-enlightened;" it is "the spirit of little children," not of those who decide "to think for themselves" confined to their emancipated (and immanent) intellects. Newman is wary of the revolting spirit of reflection that may continue weighing and considering all the pros and cons without arriving at any conclusive decision. Reflection closes us within our own selves, where we would rather listen to immanent drives or follow impersonal argumentation than the voice from without (witnesses' testimonies) or from within (conscience); reflection and its twin sister deliberation are the spawning ground for doubts. We are tempted with unbelief and disobedience, these two drives appear due to our fallen nature. Reason is drawn astray by passion, and it wars "against our better knowledge."¹⁶ And where is the source of this better knowledge? It is in our conscience unspoiled by its worst enemies: deliberation and rationalization, conscience that is ready to know the truth and possess it by one act of our eager spirit, that is, conscience ready to realize the truth.

Reason revolts against conscience when it explains away its dictates, a fact that Newman calls "a rebellious rising against the authority of Conscience", "unmeaning use of sceptical arguments and assertions" – these are followed by "the affectation of originality, the desire to appear manly and independent, and the fear of ridicule of our acquaintance [...]"¹⁷ Reason left to itself is a dangerous guide, its light is "dim" and "uncertain." When intellectual skills are developed, while morals are left uncultivated, man is in a hazardous position of imbalance. He can develop a Faustian attitude, wherein "intellectual power is fearfully unfolded amid

¹⁵ J. H. Newman, *The Self-Wise Inquirer*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 140.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

the neglect of moral truth.”¹⁸ As we look upon the totalitarian regimes, an interesting observation in point here is that they are usually propounded by intelligent individuals whose moral resources are scarce. If, however, we are urged by Newman to go by reason, we should understand it as reason of an integral personal.

Faith is often set in opposition to intellect, when people “dream of some other fellowship of civilization, refinement, literature, science, or general mental illumination, [...]” people think of “intellectual advancement; they are bent on improving the world by making all men intellectual; and they labour to convince themselves, that as men grow in knowledge they will grow in virtue.”¹⁹ By saying this, Newman shows clearly that he is against ethical intellectualism, which history of philosophy has known from the times of Socrates. It is naïve to believe that theoretical argumentation immediately leads to practical consequences.

At the same time Newman is ready to call faith (belief)²⁰ a (special) intellectual act because “presented to [us] by the imagination.” This belief is synonymous to real assent, that is, this kind of assent that succumbs to the concrete. The concrete is more powerful than theoretical considerations to become operative, that is to lead us to action. Real assent lives in the images whose potency may set in motion our affections and passions. Unlike notional assent or inference, real assent affects our conduct.²¹

III. Realizing and Acting or Realizing without Acting

There are many words we exchange in our daily conversations. Most of them hardly ever touch the innermost depths of our persons. Our regular acts of communication force us to exchange messages for the sake of communal existence. We absorb opinions, we read newspapers, watch television and listen to the radio; we very often mechanically repeat someone else’s sentences without even trying to make out what they mean. This common practice of ours is to move along the surface of things. Newman rightly observes that “there is an abundance of matters which men do not realize, though they ought to do so. For instance; how loudly men talk of the shortness of this life; of its vanity and unprofitableness, and of the claims which the world to come has upon us! This is what we hear said daily, yet few act upon the truths they utter; and why? Because they do not realize what they are so ready to proclaim.”²² Indeed, this is an example of assenting without acting, that is, without realizing.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

²⁰ Let us observe that the word “belief” in the English language is synonymous to “faith,” “trust,” and “confidence.”

²¹ See J. H. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 68; cf. L. Richardson on informal and natural inference in Newman, *Newman’s Appearance to Knowledge*, Leominster: Gracewing, 2007, p. 103 and ff.

²² J. H. Newman, *Subjection of the Reason and Feelings to the Revealed Word*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 1340.

There is abundant evidence in Newman's writings to claim that this term "realize" is of utmost importance. To realize something can be understood in two ways: internal and external. To realize something internally is to be aware of it, to grasp it profoundly, to adhere to it with the whole of one's person. Intentionally, I have not used here the word "understand" because realizing does not have to mean understanding, and even if it does, it is not the same kind of understanding that we naturally identify with providing evidence, with providing argumentation on behalf of our understanding, or to prove. If we insist on this component of "understanding" in realizing, we should rather think about insight, attachment and assent, in which our whole being is at one with something. I think that, following Newman's intuition, we could call this kind of realizing natural understanding or personal understanding – when the person is ready to act without being involved in a fruitless speculation and deliberation. This is the readiness of a well-informed conscience.

Now, in the second sense, in the external sense of realizing, Newman means acting. In this sense, to realize one's duty to act is to act, and to realize one's duty not to act is not to act, but to abstain from acting. And this is what Karol Wojtyła called integration of one's person in acting, or self-determination to act.²³ To realize something in this way is to take hold of one's person; it is to be truly free as a human person because to be truly free is to possess our person. We are not external onlookers of our own beings and we are not researchers conducting an experiment in a laboratory. To realize in this sense is to truly live through one's life, to be present in it and to take responsibility of this presence; to realize in this sense is to treat one's own being seriously. Hence Newman's conclusion reads clearly: "Life is for action."²⁴

It is easy to observe that if one portrays the human person as an integral being, the two aspects – internal and external – should coalesce rather than be treated separately. Should it be different, the result we would have is "barren knowledge." Newman elaborates on this in his sermon: "Barren knowledge is a wretched thing, when knowledge ought to bear fruit; but it is a good thing, when it would otherwise act merely as a temptation. When men realize a truth, it becomes an influential principle within them, and leads to a number of consequences both in opinion and in conduct."²⁵ To realize a truth is not only to learn it but to follow it. And here we find this coalescence. It is expressed by the final phrase: a truth is realized when it bears "consequences both in opinion and in conduct." To be one person, to be an integral person, is to be at one with oneself, both internally and externally. Such integrity, of necessity, brings forth a practical fruit. Otherwise, as Newman suggests above, our knowledge is barren.

²³ See K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, translated from the Polish by A. Potocki, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979, p. 171-172.

²⁴ J. H. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 72.

²⁵ J. H. Newman, *Subjection of the Reason and Feelings to the Revealed Word*, p. 1340.

Newman was a staunch opponent of what he called a mechanical truth, abstract thinking, and general conclusions because he was firmly sure that if anything they might be a subject matter of an elegant conversation without even touching the essence of one's own personality (without being committed). Instead, he advocated informal reasoning and personal thinking. This does not mean that he was an individualist, rather – much in accord with his epoch – he was in favour of a lived experience that moves one from within. Such an assenting and realizing person is spontaneously active to give witness to the truth inside, the truth that has a firm grip upon his or her whole person. It is faith that leads one out of his or her subjective enclosure. Thus, the intellectual life of a person is not a mere game of verbal deliberation. It is something that makes up the external manifestation of his whole person. John Crosby renders perfectly this essential difference between formal and informal thinking in Newman when he writes: “In reasoning formally I tend to disappear behind some paradigm of argument, which even has a certain existence outside of my reasoning and which in a way does the work of reasoning for me, whereas in reasoning informally it is preeminently I who reason.”²⁶

Personal thinking begins when a person who realizes that a certain idea and, consequently, a concrete action are his and reports: this is MINE. Nothing “does the reasoning” for him. Before he arrives at this personal perception he may stick to various arguments. Some of them he finds overwhelming because they appeal to reason, as certain logical truths do. He can merely repeat them as automatically as he repeats every general theorem, but they do not touch his innermost self. And when he in fact does realize the truth, he finds it impossible to demonstrate it for others to see his reasoning. Newman, however, does not require external demonstration. It suffices for the truth, and is its sure mark, that the person who has thus realized it is capable of acting accordingly.

And in all his writings, Newman cares little about the formal aspect of his argumentation, at least this is not his main goal. Rather, he takes pains to bear witness. Therefore, Crosby rightly notes: “Yes, there is in all his religious writings this passion of a witness. The reader not only finds penetrating arguments and telling rebuttals, he also finds Newman solemnly bearing witness.”²⁷ He is always in favour of concrete reality. Hence his cardinal motto reads: *cor ad cor loquitur* (heart speaks unto heart).

IV. Faith and Obedience

At the same time, Newman argues that in matters of faith we should “answer by reasoning,” not by affections.²⁸ He is aware that there are people whom we cannot trust, although trust is the foundation of social cohesion, as I have stressed

²⁶ J. Crosby, *Personalist Papers*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 228.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

²⁸ J. H. Newman, *Religious Faith Rational*, p. 127.

it in section one. Our safeguards in such circumstances are conscience and obedience; if our conscience warns us against committing an act, we should obey it instantly without rationalizing its dictates. Faith is “a habit, a state of mind, lasting and consistent.”²⁹ Faith is synonymous with obedience. Both faith and obedience are not solitary acts; to believe and to obey – either comes from the heart. They are attitudes of our readiness to follow in our acts what we have believed in our minds. Newman has always emphasized the importance of acting, its precedence over thinking, that is, thinking, let us remember, not as one’s natural activity, but thinking as unnecessary deliberation that dissuades us from acting.

The Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, strikes a similar tone when he writes that “an increased power of reflection like an increased knowledge only adds to man’s affliction,” therefore we need “to escape from the temptations of reflection,” a task which is very difficult.³⁰ The Danish philosopher’s line of reasoning is much on a par with Newman’s. The Cardinal also treated reflection, or to be precise, the tendency to be over-reflective, with suspicion, especially in matters of conscience. The human being is in a dangerous position “when the qualitative distinctions are weakened by a gnawing reflection.”³¹ Reflection draws us away from action; it is gnawing because it pushes us into multitudinous byways on which our positive arguments are always opposed by negative counterarguments instead of making us act. That is especially destructive in matters of conscience where one has to be on the side of good rather than explaining everything away. The main problem, as Kierkegaard had excellently put it, is the “process of ceasing to exist,” for the reality is transformed into its mere representation.³²

Meanwhile, faith is inherently related to obedience. If (theoretical and impersonal) reason is not the only guide in our life, or indeed a very uncertain guide, we have to obey what we have realized is the truth. Newman’s conclusion is logical enough. Obedience operates when we recognize the truth and are ready to act accordingly, without wasting any time on deliberation. The dictates of a well-informed conscience are of that character – they command our unquestioning obedience, whereas in deliberation, there is a danger that we may always go this or that way, most often rationalizing them. Faith “works with obedience. In proportion as a man believes, so he obeys; they come together and grow together, and last through life. Neither are perfect; both are on the same level of imperfection; they keep pace with each other; in proportion to the imperfection of one, so is the imperfection of the other; and, so the one advances, so does the other also.”³³ And this is clear that we proceed in faith as we proceed in obedience to our conscience. As Newman writes, neither faith nor obedience is perfect, so we have to take a risk, that is,

²⁹ J. H. Newman, *Faith and Obedience*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 531.

³⁰ S. Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, translated from the Danish by A. Dru, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, p. 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³³ J. H. Newman, *Faith and Obedience*, p. 535.

“to make a venture.”³⁴ If the way of faith be our natural and supernatural essence of life, as Newman claims it is, we can never rely on calculations, on proofs provided by some general propositions (they hardly apply in concrete cases). We have to grope in darkness rather than in certainty, that is, in confidence and trust. Not in certainty, but not without personal certitude. The latter is Newman’s another key word. Acting in faith is not irrational, although it is without our perfect knowledge or accurate anticipation, “not indeed rashly or lightly, still without knowing accurately what we are doing [...]”³⁵ And thus, we have come closer to the concept of spontaneous action, to this peculiar personal relationship between reason and faith. We are uncertain in terms of clear premeditation and calculation; and at the same time, we may (indeed we should) be certain in terms of our personal intent upon action.

V. Faith and Love

Faith and love are interrelated. In his sermon, Newman writes: “Faith is the first element of religion, and love, of holiness; and as holiness and religion are distinct, yet united, so are love and faith. Holiness can exist without religion; religion cannot exist without holiness.”³⁶

We can note the above in the form of logical reasoning:

- 1) If there is religion, there must be holiness;
- 2) If there is holiness, there can be religion.

And in a different context, he says that “it is love makes faith, not faith love.”³⁷

Faith is turned outward, while love is turned inward, “[...] faith is that which hears the voice without us [...], love is the life of God in the solitary soul, faith is the guardian of love in our intercourse with men [...]” There is no contradiction between faith and reason, but faith overcomes “sense and reason by representations more urgent than their own.”³⁸ Newman clarifies this interrelation between faith and love further by saying, “Love is the condition of faith; and faith in turn is the cherisher and maturer of love; it brings love out into works, and therefore is called the root of works of love; the substance of the works is love, the outline and direction of them is faith.”³⁹ The relationship between faith and love resembles the relationship between reason and faith. If faith is the ground that prepares our readiness to proceed without evidence, we need to accept what comes to us in faith

³⁴ J. H. Newman, *The Ventures of Faith*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 914.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 916.

³⁶ J. H. Newman, *Faith and Love*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 926.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 928.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 926.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 927.

while we love. It is love that makes us capable of trusting, obeying, and realizing. Thus, love is the quintessence and crowning of our personal being.

A true love does not demand demonstration, just as faith does not need any. In many cases we rely on the testimony of others, those who have acquainted themselves with a matter in hand, rather than seek an answer on our own in books. Theirs is practical and personal knowledge that results from their long experience, from their theoretical and practical acquaintance. Ours, if we rely on a mere bookish comprehension, would be only theoretical. Like Kierkegaard, Newman says that endless disputation will bring rather skepticism than certitude. "Some things, nay, the greatest things, must be taken for granted, unless we make up our minds to fritter away life, doing nothing."⁴⁰

One obviously finds a counterargument to Aquinas' five ways when Newman criticizes "books written to prove to us (as they profess) the being of an Almighty, Infinite, Everlasting God, from what is seen in the natural world, but they do not strictly prove it; they do but recommend, evidence, and confirm the doctrine to those who believe it already. They do not make an approach to a complex argumentative proof of it. They are obliged to pass over, or take for granted, many of the most important points in the doctrine. They are, doubtless, useful to Christians, as far as they tend to enliven their devotion, to strengthen their faith, to excite their gratitude, and to enlarge their minds; but they are little or no evidence to unbelievers."⁴¹

We cannot rely on theoretical reasoning, when applied to individual instances, for "the highest reason is not to reason on system, or by rules of argument, but in a natural way; not with formal intent to draw out proofs, but trusting to God's blessing that you may gain a right impression from what you read."⁴² We have "to follow generously what has fair evidence for it," we need to obey what we hear in our conscience, without trying to "analyze, define, contemplate," and that is the way of faith.⁴³ If we seek to prove what we have accepted by faith, it is diluted, fades away, and disappears. This opposition between arguments and impressions is interesting in Newman's teaching; impressions are strong and they last long. Arguments weaken impressions and make us open to doubts. This is also the area of our freedom, as "religious convictions cannot be forced," ensures Newman. We may, obviously, argue about them, but a testimony leaves impressions. They "consist, not in going to about to prove, but in the outset confiding on the testimony of others." Therefore, the rationalistic way in matters of faith is out of the question; here we cannot plan or premeditate. We find what we have not been looking for. It is rather a rear look that brings reflection to our comprehension that we have found something unexpectedly. And here again the key pair: "faith and obedience"

⁴⁰ J. H. Newman, *Faith without Demonstration*, in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 1384.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1386.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 1387.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1386.

appears. Only then are we able to “reason well without knowing it.”⁴⁴ This is to reason naturally and to infer naturally, indeed to assent to, to realize in the same manner as we breathe – this is the most profound sense of loving.

And this is what Newman has in his mind when he speaks about walking by faith. We are surrounded by proofs that are on the surface, and impressions that may reach our hearts. Impressions affect us in invisible ways, but not without our active participation, that is, not without our openness, simplicity of the mind, and obedience to the voice of our conscience. We need to be, so to speak, impressionable. To impress is to leave an indelible trace. Most obviously, Newman believes that a trace like this is from without, that is, from God’s grace, not from our own contrivance; true, it is subjective, but in the same manner that we can say we can feel it as our own. It has come to us, however, in a natural way, without any working of our intellects, so that we might be in the danger of being driven away by the force of arguments. Impressions are powerful, but they are not ours, yet remain in us and exert a lasting influence on us. Eventually, what we know in faith is our “personal result,”⁴⁵ a result of our effort to subdue in obedience and simplicity what is thus in a supernatural manner impressed on us. I write “supernatural” in the sense that we do not know the “why” of something, and its impression – like someone else’s testimony, like the example of witnesses – is overpowering. In other words, it appeals not merely to our rational faculties, but to our whole persons. In like manner, it obliges us as persons. We feel in our heart of hearts that we cannot go by in indifference and neutrality, the terms so much in fashion nowadays.

The kind of knowledge gained in love and faith is personal and can be called (personal) certitude. It is “not an extravagance [...], not a weakness or an absurdity to be certain.” This is yet another formulation of Newman’s starting point: there are people who claim to be certain in matters they are very awkward in giving reasons (in accounting for). The most important thing is not to demonstrate how certitude is possible but it suffices that “certitude is felt.” Newman does not want to “fall into metaphysics,” but his task is “of a practical character.” Thereby, he wishes to confine himself “to the truth of things, and to the mind’s certitude of that truth.” Then, Newman enumerates a list of properties attributed to certitude, that is, it is “a mental state”; it is “not a passive impression made upon the mind from without, by argumentative compulsion”; “it is an active recognition of propositions as true.”⁴⁶

In this sense, if certitude is our personal mode of living in faith, it is not impressed upon the mind by argumentative compulsion, it is unlike certain propositions in the rationalistic train of thinking. Newman is concerned with our action, our inclination for good and bad actions. We are centres of our own thinking, therefore there is “no common measure of minds,” no criterion of accuracy, no objective (universal) warrant. Rather, we grope in darkness, yet not without certitude,

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 1387.

⁴⁵ See J. H. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

we can rely in concrete matters only on “the personal action of the ratiocinative faculty” whose perfection is our personal sense of reasoning and inferring Newman called the Illative Sense. In this special communion between reason and faith we learn to be more perfect human beings who can provide the right answer to daily challenges.

Conclusion

In this paper I have been discussing the relationship between faith and reason in John Henry Newman. Newman does not consider faith only in its religious sense but rather as our general attitude. In concrete (everyday) matters we act on faith, that is, we take many things for granted. Otherwise, we would not be able to act at all if we have resolved to act only inasmuch as there is sufficient evidence. Acting on faith does not mean that we cannot be certain. Far from it, we are certain, and it is our common experience that we are certain with personal certitude. It is not reason (intellect) that thinks in us, we have our personal faculty of ratiocination—we think and act with our whole beings. Therefore, it does not suffice to be apt in formal thinking, that is, producing the correct conclusion. We need personal maturity to recognize certain truths and follow what we have recognized. First and foremost, we are trusting, obeying, and loving creatures.

Słowa kluczowe: przyświadczenie, wiara, miłość, posłuszeństwo, rozum, zaufanie
Keywords: assent, faith, love, obedience, reason, trust