

JOINT SESSION OF THE JOHN HENRY NEWMAN
AND METHOD IN THEOLOGY GROUPS

- Topic: Newman, Lonergan, and the Otherworldly
 Conveners: Edward Jeremy Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College
 Kevin Godfrey, Alvernia College
 Moderator: Kevin Godfrey, Alvernia College
 Presenters: Robert C. Christie, DeVry University
 Edward Jeremy Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College
 Richard Liddy, Seton Hall University

Robert Christie opened the seminar with a summary of his paper, “After-Life in Newman’s Anglican Sermons,” which examined Newman’s development of a theology of the afterlife through a series of nine sermons preached between 1826 and 1837. The sermons interrelate the following themes in Newman’s reflections on the subject of the afterlife: revelation, epistemology, morality and the essence of human nature in respect to both the body and the soul.

Newman says that revelation indicates the whole person, body and soul, is immortal, a difficulty for us to understand because we lack full knowledge of the nature of both body and soul. Our state in the afterlife is conditioned by our moral conduct in this life. Importantly, our lack of knowledge of, and questions about, both the afterlife and the nature of the body are addressed more by faith than by reason. With respect to the soul, it has a sense of self that feels a need and craving for its Creator and dissatisfaction with the temporal world, characterized by a growing sense of the Creator’s presence and its accountability to Him. Christie concludes that, for Newman, the afterlife consists of the mysterious experience of being in God’s presence. The Eucharist is the great example of this mystery. The phenomenon of “presence,” by its very nature, is linked to the interpersonalist character of Newman’s entire theology.

In the next presentation, “Warrants for the Otherworldly from the *Grammar of Assent*,” Edward Jeremy Miller raised the issue of whether Newman justifies belief in afterlife—and hence, belief in bodily resurrection—in the *Grammar*. He contends that, although afterlife matters are not raised directly in the book, Newman’s justification for belief in resurrection can be clearly inferred from the manner in which he approaches the justification of belief in the *Grammar*.

Part one of the *Grammar*, dealing with “believing in what one cannot see,” is more germane to the question than is part two, dealing as it does with the kinds of evidences that warrant certitude in what one believes. To believe, for Newman, means giving assent, without reservation or hint of doubt, to a religious statement. Even though assents must be total, one assent can be keener or weaker than another assent, and the difference depends on the kind of apprehension one has of the matter. The more vivid it is, the keener it is. If asked, Newman would say of belief in bodily resurrection: “My church, a trusting mother to me, teaches that we resurrect bodily. This is more vividly apprehended than is the statement that the just

are resurrected bodily.” Miller provided three indicators from Newman’s corpus why directing attention to the “church as teacher” is Newman’s instinctive warrant for how one most keenly believes in afterlife matters.

Richard Liddy’s concluding reflections concerned Lonergan’s distinction between the horizon of the “this-worldly secularist” and the “otherworldly believer.” The distinction is found in Lonergan’s article “Pope John’s Intention.” This coheres with Lonergan’s total project of highlighting the growing self-knowledge involved in moving from the unauthentic to the authentic, from drifting to commitment. This is not only a personal project—“minor authenticity”—but also a social and cultural project—“major authenticity.” Not only can secularists not live up to the ideals of scientific inquiry but religious people themselves can water down the words and phrases of their own traditions.

The principle point of Liddy’s argument was that Lonergan identified his own project with Pope John XXIII’s essentially pastoral intention in calling the Second Vatican Council: that the converting and renewing Word of God be preached to all peoples—especially to the poor. “Doctrines and systems, however valuable and true, are but the skeleton of the original message. A word is the word of a person . . . it is living speech that, from the start, alone can be at once concrete and alive, interpersonal and communal, historical and ecumenical” (Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, New York: 1985, 227-28). Reflection on what is happening to one as one reads and studies Lonergan’s article can facilitate breakthroughs to purification, enlightenment and union with God.

KEVIN GODFREY
Alvernia College
Reading, Pennsylvania