

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN & THE CRISIS  
OF MODERNITY—INTEREST GROUP

- Topic: John Henry Newman  
Conveners: Brian W. Hughes, University of Saint Mary  
Danielle Nussberger, Marquette University  
Moderator: John Connolly, Loyola Marymount University  
Presenters: Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, Loyola Marymount University  
Rev. Benjamin King, Sewanee School of Theology, University of  
the South  
Susan Abraham, Loyola Marymount University

This interest group focuses on how John Henry Newman's thought perceptively describes, analyzes, and provides compelling explanations or interpretations of the complex set of issues that many associate with "modernity." This interest groups hopes to foster a critical engagement with Newman's thought and a variety of theological and philosophical topics relevant to our particular cultural context: the meaning and exercise of reason both for and against Christian faith, the possibility of knowing God and the intellectual substance of religious belief, the challenges of atheism, secularism, religious indifferentism, the privatization of religion, Biblicism, the understanding of human freedom, and the nature and exercise of religious authority.

Tracy Tiemeier's paper, "Universal Revelation and Religious Diversity," outlined the development of Newman's thought on universal revelation and natural religion. She presented the broad contours of Newman's thought as it developed over his intellectual life. As a comparative theologian, she then turned to Buddhist theologian Rita Gross in order to flesh out some possible openings in Newman's ideas for our contemporary situation. Finally, Tiemeier went on to speculate on several ideas emerging from her brief comparison to develop further: namely, conscience, the sanctification of non-Christian practices, and the *sensus fidelium*. She did not suggest that Newman did--or even would--agree with her. In sum, Tiemeier aimed to make some initial suggestions on Newman's possible contribution to a Catholic theology of religious diversity that not only tolerates diversity but also flourishes with it.

Ben King's paper, "Consulting the Faithful": the origins and afterlife of Newman's idea," traced the historical origins and meaning of the "*sensus fidelium*." The origins of the term *sensus fidelium* lie with pagan orators who exhorted their audience to be of "one mind with" the orator. As an Anglican, Newman used the term "mind of the Church," and gave the auditors of the church's teaching—the faithful—a role in the development of that mind. Here lay the origins of Newman's appropriation of the pre-modern term and as a Catholic he would famously argue that the faithful needed to be consulted. The appropriation of Newman's ideas concerning the laity came later, first in the Anglican Communion and then in the Catholic Church. King traced this appropriation of Newman to show that today *sensus fidelium* represents an ancient rhetorical trope to which the churches are trying to give a liberal democratic meaning.

Susan Abraham's paper, "The Cultural reception of Newman's *Sensus Fidelium*: Comunion and Hierarchical Institution in opposition," examined a number of scholarly perspectives on Newman's challenge to the polarization of magisterium, theologians, and laity. She showed how Ian Ker, Kathleen Kirk and Avery Cardinal Dulles provide

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key insights into Newman's understanding of the relationship between magisterium and laity. Each scholarly perspective made clear that Newman's own positions are to be contextualized and nuanced. Further, the paper argued that any retrieval of Newman also circulates in a rhetorical context. Thus, any contemporary reception of Newman's theology must account for those contextual challenges that led to the development of his ideas on the relationship between magisterium, theologians and laity and also examine the current relations between magisterium, theologians, and laity that sets the tone for a retrieval of Newman.

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