

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN & THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY—INTEREST  
GROUP

Topic: John Henry Newman  
Conveners: Brian W. Hughes, University of Saint Mary, KS  
Danielle Nussberger, Marquette University  
Moderator: Tim Muldoon, Boston College  
Presenters: Dan Rober, Sacred Heart University, CT  
Chris Cimorelli, Caldwell University  
Tim Muldoon, Boston College

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.” It 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.

Chris Cimorelli’s paper, “Progress Traps and Christian Eschatology: Newman, Christian Spirituality, and Acedia,” integrates the thought of John Henry Newman and Christian spirituality. Cimorelli critically assesses the understanding of *progress* in the present context. Keeping in mind the present ecological crisis facing humanity, it explores how deficient notions of progress often lead to traps that can have devastating effects on humanity at large. The first part of the essay investigates progress and how progress traps arise from short-sighted, unsustainable practices and views, which ignore the eschatological dimensions of human existence. The second part analyzes Newman’s thoughts on progress within his eschatological theology of history and in the light of his consistent emphasis on personal moral obligation and growth. Newman’s attention to growth or progress in religious knowledge exposes a trap for believers that undermines effective moral agency. The final section argues that the traditional spiritual vice of acedia is worthy of greater consideration in and for the present context and in the light of the preceding analysis.

Dan Rober’s paper, “Christianity after the ‘Eclipse of Grace’: John Henry Newman and Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*,” puts Newman’s thought, particularly but not exclusively the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, in conversation with Charles Taylor’s thought on the secular. Both thinkers, he argues, possess a common notion of history that helps to resist decline narratives of secularization that posit a historical figure or cause who set in motion the events that brought about this phenomenon. Rober analyzes three areas of intersection between Taylor and Newman. First, it treats Taylor’s notion of the modern in dialogue with Newman, who lived at the apex of these developments in certain respects. He identifies Newman’s distinction between a principle and a doctrine as helpful for responding to the modern. Second, Rober discusses the “anthropocentric shift,” which Taylor describes in terms of an “eclipse of grace” and loss of mystery. He maintains that Newman’s critique of liberalism, on the one hand, and his development of the illative sense in the *Grammar of Assent*, model a response to this shift that proves even more

*Interest Group: John Henry Newman and the Crisis of Modernity*

helpful in a postmodern context where the supposedly modern foundations Newman shared with his interlocutors can no longer be assumed. The final section considers the sense of *loss* in Taylor's narrative, reading it through notes V through VII of the development of doctrine. Rober observes that these notes can help respond to secularization, while the seventh poses some troubling questions considering the huge losses to secularization in some locales. The paper concludes by emphasizing how Newman and Taylor demonstrate in their philosophy of history that developments within and without the church are not inevitable and thus are everyone's responsibility.

Tim Muldoon's paper, "Newman and the Architecture of Knowledge in the Modern University," brings Newman's university ideal into critical engagement with modern forces of fragmentation. His paper raises questions that emerge in the face of increasing fragmentation of disciplines in the modern "multiversity," a term from Clark Kerr's 1963 book *The Uses of the University*. Kerr designated "multiversity" for the modern university's many disconnected activities, reflecting nostalgically on the legacy of John Henry Newman. Muldoon argues that Newman's model takes seriously both the academic freedom of researchers in various disciplines and the drive toward wholeness as articulated by theologians such as Bernard Lonergan, John Haughey, and Michael Buckley. He points to the Boston College Roundtable and its accompanying journal *Integritas: Advancing the Mission of Catholic Higher Education* as a Newmanian experiment that suggests a direction forward for recovering the possibilities inherent in Newman's model that can mitigate fracturing impulses so present in the multiversity today.

BRIAN W. HUGHES  
*University of St. Mary*  
*Leavenworth, Kansas*

DANIELLE NUSSBERGER  
*Marquette University*  
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*