

## **The Problem of Our Lady's Knowledge from the Perspective of the Theology of St. John Henry Newman (1801–1890)**

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### *A Brief Review of the Complex Question of Our Lady's Knowledge*

One of the Marian themes that theologians explored with great interest until the Second Vatican Council was the nature and extent of the knowledge of the Mother of Jesus during her earthly life. As there is no explicit information on this subject in Sacred Scripture or in patristic tradition, and no official decree of the Church has commented on it, since the Middle Ages various theses on Mary's exceptional knowledge have been deduced mostly from reasons of convenience, which were usually based on her other privileges, such as the divine maternity, the fullness of grace, or the Immaculate Conception. In particular, theologians made use of the well-known axiom expressing the fundamental Mariological principle of scholastic theology, formulated by St. Bernard († 1153): „It would certainly not be right to suspect that what was granted even to a few mortals was denied to that great Virgin through whom all mortals were brought to life.“<sup>1</sup> In virtue of this principle, Hugh of Saint Victor († 1141) was thus able to impute to Mary a comprehensive knowledge as one of her special privileges: „Fourth [privilege] is that she knows everything completely and perfectly.“ And the reason for his argument was precisely Mary's motherhood towards the Son of God: “For how could she be ignorant of anything, who knew him who knew all things, in whom dwelt bodily all the fullness of divinity?”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard, *Epistola* 174, PL 182,334 C. A similar principle was put forward by St. Thomas Aquinas († 1274) in his *Summa Theologica*, where he writes: “For it is reasonable to believe that she, who brought forth the Only-Begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, received greater privileges of grace than all others” (Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 27, a. 1). For more information on the issue, see Edward D. O'Connor, “The Fundamental Principle of Mariology in Scholastic Theology,” *Marian Studies* 10 (1959): 69–103.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *De assumptione et decem praeconiis Mariae semper Virginis*; PL 177,808.

A major influence on the development of this doctrine had the pseudo-Albertine *Mariale*, in which 17 questions (qq. 95–111) were devoted to the problem of Mary's knowledge. This treatise was later repeatedly referred to by Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who gave an exhaustive presentation of the whole issue in his first great manuscript on Mary, *De Deipara et Christo ut eius Filio* (dated to 1584–1585), where he discusses it in q. 19 under the title: *Quam perfectionem consecuta fuerit Beata Virgo in cognitione et scientia Dei?* In the conviction that Mary possessed the so-called *scientia infusa*, Suárez responds that she knew perfectly “the mystery of the Trinity and of the Incarnation” and attained “a knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures and of the things of theology which no viator possessed.”<sup>3</sup> For this reason, he considered the view of Erasmus of Rotterdam († 1536), who claimed that at the birth of Christ Mary did not yet have full knowledge of the true divinity of Jesus, to be “impious and heretical” (*impia et haeretica*).<sup>4</sup> According to the Jesuit theologian, Mary was also exempt from the possibility of error and from the so-called “privative ignorance” (which indicates the lack of knowledge a person is expected to possess), but not from the so-called “negative ignorance” (which in turn indicates the lack of knowledge a person is not expected to have). Thus, Mary did not know before the Incarnation that she would become the Mother of God, nor how the conception of Christ would take place, which of course opened up the possibility for the growth (*augmentum*) of her knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time, Christopher de Vega († 1672) even held that from the first moment of her existence Mary possessed full philosophical and scientific knowledge and was acquainted with the intrinsic nature of all material things.<sup>6</sup> This view, however, did not receive much sympathy from the majority of theologians.

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<sup>3</sup> Francisco Suárez, *De Deipara et Christo ut eius Filio*, q. 19. See Stefano de Fiores, “Suárez Francisco,” in *Maria. Nuovissimo Dizionario. Testimoni e Maestri*, vol. 3 (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2008), 787.

<sup>4</sup> See Anton Bodem, “Wissen Marias,” in *Marienlexikon*, vol. 6 (St. Ottilien: Verlag Erzabtei St. Ottilien, 1994), 747.

<sup>5</sup> See Bodem, “Wissen Marias,” 747.

<sup>6</sup> See Christopher de Vega, *Theologia Mariana*, vol. 1, Naples, 1866, 405–12.

A more complex explanation of the issue was offered by Matthias Joseph Scheeben († 1888). If from the remark in Lk 2:50 (“And they understood not the word He spoke to them”) it is evident that a relatively imperfect knowledge could exist in her prior to this time, nevertheless he warns that in respect to the perfection of Mary’s knowledge we should not apply too low a standard and this for one reason: there is a correlation between the perfection of knowledge and the perfection of holiness. So he can argue that especially after Christ’s conception, the highest forms of contemplation, granted to some saints only in passing and in ecstasies, was in Mary’s case her habitual state. Surprisingly, against the position of St. Thomas Aquinas, he even admits as not too improbable the opinion that already in the womb of her mother she was endowed supernaturally with the use of her intellect.<sup>7</sup>

A great number of Mariological manuals of the pre-conciliar period advanced the theory that Mary, in analogy with her divine Son, possessed three distinct types of knowledge: *scientia acquisita*, which referred to the knowledge that Mary acquired through the reasoning processes of the intellect or from her own experience; *scientia infusa*, which denoted the knowledge that she received by the direct action of God; *visio beatifica* or a direct perception of God as He is in Himself. It was specified that this third type of cognition proper to the saints in heaven she, as a wayfarer, did not possess permanently, but only at certain significant events in her life. Yet, it was considered inconvenient to deny her the grace which was apparently enjoyed by Moses when he spoke to God “face to face” (Ex 33:11) or by St. Paul, who was caught up into paradise (2 Cor 12:4).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Matthias J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, vol. 5/2 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1954) 1650–54. For Thomas Aquinas’s position on this question, see *ST III*, q. 27, a. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Gabriele M. Roschini, *Mariologia*, vol. 2 (Romae, 1948), 185–87; Alexius Martinelli, *De primo instanti conceptionis B. V. Mariae. Disquisitio de usu rationis* (Romae, 1950), 81–83; Juniper B. Carol, *Fundamentals of Mariology* (New York: Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1956), 159–60.

However, since the Second Vatican Council explicitly emphasized Mary's "pilgrimage of faith" (LG 58), new orientations in Mariology have not only abandoned altogether the scholastic approach to the question of her knowledge, but where the theme still arises, theologians generally speak of the historical character and gradual development of Mary's knowledge, not infrequently pointing out that Mary was in fact an ordinary and ignorant woman. This new approach was initiated to a great extent by a small volume, *Die Mutter des Herrn* (The Mother of the Lord), written in 1955 by Romano Guardini († 1968), where he does not propose an abstract meditation on Mary, but seeks to enter into her concrete religious experience of faith with regard to the mystery of her Son. He clarifies that if in living with her Son Mary experienced all that a mother experiences, at the same time Jesus as the Son of God transcended any merely human possibility of comprehension. This means that Mary could not understand his mystery in its actual meaning, as it is explicitly shown by the passage in Lk 2,41–52, and, therefore, she needed to experience Pentecost, as well. On the basis of this premise he makes the following statement: "Thus, in her relationship with her Son, in the midst of the deepest intimacy, there must have been a distance, a lack of understanding, which is also evident in the reports [of the Gospels]."<sup>9</sup>

A rather bolder thesis was put forward by Jean Galot († 2008) who argued that Mary, shaped by strict Jewish monotheism, could not have grasped the doctrine of God in three persons at the Annunciation, and therefore she did not know about the divine identity of her Son until it was revealed to her on the occasion of the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple: "The episode of the twelve-year-old boy found in the temple confirms that she did not know the divine identity of Jesus."<sup>10</sup> The main reason is that as a young mother, she would not be able to cope psychologically with this fact: "First, it would have been an inconvenience for Mary to learn this shocking truth, that of not

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<sup>9</sup> Romano Guardini, *Die Mutter des Herrn. Ein Brief und darin ein Entwurf* (Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1955), 48.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Galot, *Maria. La donna nell'opera della salvezza* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1991), 70.

being able to give her son, in the most natural way, all the motherly manifestations of affection and solicitude.”<sup>11</sup>

In this context, it may be noted that two popes have recently raised even the subject of Mary’s experience of the darkness of faith and her exposure to possible doubts about Jesus’s mission. In the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, John Paul II admits that the mystery of Jesus’s divine sonship was revealed to Mary, but at the same time he explains, applying the expression of St. John of the Cross to her, that from the very beginning of their life together there was “a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of night of faith”.<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis went a little further, causing something of a stir when, in his homily on 20 December 2013, he spoke of Our Lady’s silence at the foot of the cross, imagining how, at this pivotal moment in salvation history, she was confronted with various questions and doubts:

The Gospel tells us nothing: if she said a word or not.... She was quiet, but in her heart – how much she said to the Lord! “You told me then – that’s what we have read – that He will be great. You told me that You would give him the throne of his father David, that he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And now I see Him there!” The Blessed Mother was human! And perhaps she would have wanted to say: “Lies! I have been cheated!” John Paul II said this when he spoke of the Mother of God at one point. But she was overshadowed with the silence of the mystery that she did not understand, and with this silence, she accepted that this mystery can grow and flourish in the hope.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Galot, *Maria. La donna nell’opera della salvezza*, 71. However, even before Galot, a similar view was held by some Catholic scholars, especially by Edmund F. Sutcliffe, “Our Lady and the Divinity of Christ,” *The Month*, 180 (1944): 347–50; “Our Lady’s Knowledge of the Divinity of Christ,” *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 66 (1945): 427–32.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, I, §17.

<sup>13</sup> Francis, “Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae.” Friday, 20 December 2013; retrieved from: <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican->

In light of these divergent approaches this study focuses on whether and how St. John Henry Newman addressed the problem of Our Lady's knowledge. To inquire how Newman dealt with this question does not seem at all inappropriate, not only because he always sought a kind of middle way (*Via Media*) between extreme positions,<sup>14</sup> but also because throughout his long academic career he was particularly concerned with questions of both epistemology and Mariology.

*The Knowledge of the Virgin Mary in the Context of Newman's Epistemology and Mariology*

Before entering into how Newman viewed the issue of Our Lady's knowledge, it is necessary to make some preliminary observations. First of all, it should be mentioned that the doctrine of Mary's special knowledge, which in pre-conciliar theological manuals was considered to be an exceptional privilege of the Virgin Mary, seems to be quite problematic for many contemporary theologians today because of their tendency to regard Marian privileges as such with a certain amount of suspicion.<sup>15</sup> Newman is also known to have been critical of some statements made by Catholic writers about the Mother of the Lord, which seemed to him exaggerated, but at the same time he had no difficulty to proclaim her privileges, which he justified in line with the aforementioned scholastic principle when he wrote: „Mary must surpass all the saints; the very fact that certain privileges are known to have been theirs persuades us, almost from the necessity of the case, that she had the same and higher.“<sup>16</sup> And like some of the scholastic

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<sup>14</sup> See Andrej M. Čaja, “Via Media ako ekleziologický model a teologická metóda Johna Henryho Newmana (1801–1890) [Via Media as an Ecclesiological Model and Theological Method of John Henry Newman],” *Verba Theologica* 21/1 (2022): 45–64.

<sup>15</sup> On the objections to the so-called “Mariology of privileges”, see Francesco Scanziani, “Il Manuale di Mariologia dagli inizi dell’ottocento al Vaticano II,” in *Storia della mariologia*, vol. 2, ed. Emanuele Boaga, Luigi Gambero (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2012), 783–816.

<sup>16</sup> John H. Newman, “On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary,” in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), 393.

authors, Newman also saw in Mary's privileges a consequence of her motherhood towards the Son of God:

So stands the case with Mary; she gave birth to the Creator, and what recompense shall be made her? what shall be done to her, who had this relationship to the Most High? what shall be the fit accompaniment of one whom the Almighty has deigned to make, not His servant, not His friend, not His intimate, but His superior, the source of His second being, the nurse of His helpless infancy, the teacher of His opening years? ... Nothing is too high for her to whom God owes His human life; no exuberance of grace, no excess of glory, but is becoming, but is to be expected there, where God has lodged Himself, whence God has issued.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, it is worth noting that though Newman did not write a treatise on the question of Mary's knowledge, he left a number of texts on the subject in various writings, whether philosophical, doctrinal, homiletical or devotional. In this connection, the following works may be mentioned in particular: the 15th University Sermon preached before the University of Oxford: *The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine*<sup>18</sup>; two of Newman's sermons from the Catholic period: *The Glories of Mary for the Sake of her Son*<sup>19</sup> and *On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary*;<sup>20</sup> Newman's major Mariological work: *A Letter to the Rev. E.B. Pusey, D.D. on his Recent Eirenicon*,<sup>21</sup> and his extraordinary meditation on

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<sup>17</sup> Newman, "On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary," 384.

<sup>18</sup> John H. Newman, "The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine," in *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. and New York, 1892), 312–51.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Newman, "The Glories of Mary for the Sake of her Son," in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), 362–80.

<sup>20</sup> Newman, "On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary," 381–402.

<sup>21</sup> John H. Newman, *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D. on his recent Eirenicon* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866).

Mary as the Seat of Wisdom in his commentary on the Litany of Loreto.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, it must be stressed that Newman did not explicitly speak of the traditional three kinds of Mary's knowledge (acquired and infused knowledge, beatific vision), but used subtly different terminology, which can be explained by the fact that he drew on his own particular theory of epistemology, in which, however, he also distinguished analogical kinds of cognition. His texts on the subject reveal, as we are going to see in the following pages, that he not only applied these specific cognitive processes to Our Lady, but illustrated her precisely as a unique paradigm of each one of them.

### 1. Mary as a Paradigm of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*

For many years Newman was intensely concerned with the relationship between faith and reason, trying to show that the process of faith treads a middle way between two extremes: sentimentalism, which identifies faith exclusively with religious feeling, and rationalism, which inappropriately applies logical proof to matters of religion and revealed truth.

Initially, Newman himself was influenced by this “emotional religion”, which, inspired to a great extent by the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher († 1834), gradually penetrated into England forming a movement that attracted many Christians dissatisfied with the Established Church. However, he soon acquired a great distaste for it: not only was it too vague and shallow for him, but he realized that its main danger lay in ignoring the objective facts of the Christian religion, especially its dogmas, thus leading to the proliferation of liberal views. He thematized this form of religiosity repeatedly during his Anglican period. In his sermon *Religious Emotions*, he explains that “a violent impulse is not the same as a firm determination, – that men have their religious feelings roused, without being on that account at all the more

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<sup>22</sup> John H. Newman, “Sedes Sapientiae,” in *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. and New York, 1893), 47–50.



likely to obey God in practice, rather, the less likely.”<sup>23</sup> As an example, he mentions the Gospel accounts of the Passion, which contain a striking contrast between the Lord’s inner peace and the agitated emotions of the disciples and the people. Certainly, it is no sin to be passionate on the subject of religion, but it is a rule that the more religious men become, the calmer and more serene they become. Faith is not the same thing as emotion; if it were, it would soon cease, for emotion is not a permanent but a transitory state, which quickly wears off.<sup>24</sup> To regard faith as something merely emotional, he adds in another sermon, even gives other people an excuse to ridicule the Christian faith:

There are serious men who are in the habit of describing Christian Faith as a feeling... And thus they lead others, who wish an excuse for their own religious lives, to speak of Christian Faith as extravagant and irrational, as if it were a mere fancy or feeling, which some persons had and others had not; and which, accordingly, could only, and would necessarily, be felt by those who were disposed that certain way.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John H. Newman, “Religious Emotions,” in *Parochial Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1837), 205.

<sup>24</sup> See Newman, “Religious Emotions,” 210–11.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Newman, “Religious Faith Rational,” in *Parochial Sermons*, vol. 1, 219–20. Even as a Catholic, Newman spared no criticism of the widespread tendency to focus attention in religious life only on the experience of exalted emotions and in *The Idea of a University* he condemned this attitude in very harsh terms: “The religious world, as it is styled, holds, generally speaking, that religion consists, not in knowledge, but in feeling or sentiment. The old Catholic notion, which still lingers in the Established Church, was, that Faith was an intellectual act, its object truth, and its result knowledge ... but in proportion as the Lutheran leaven spread, it became fashionable to say that Faith was, not an acceptance of revealed doctrine, not an act of the intellect, but a feeling, an emotion, an affection, an appetency; and, as this view of Faith obtained, so was the connexion of Faith with Truth and Knowledge more and more either forgotten or denied. At length the identity of this (so-called) spirituality of heart and the virtue of Faith was acknowledged on all hands. Some men indeed disapproved the pietism in question, others admired it; but whether they admired or disapproved, both the one party and the other found themselves in agreement on the main point, viz.—in considering that this really was in substance Religion, and

At the same time, Newman vigorously opposed the introduction of rationalistic principles into religion.<sup>26</sup> His position in this regard is expressed very clearly in his university lectures delivered before the University of Oxford in 1826–1843, where he emphasized the fundamental difference between purely rational or logical evidence and the process of faith, which requires the active participation not only of reason but of all the faculties of man. Newman enters the heart of the subject in Lecture 4 on *The Usurpations of Reason*, when he points out that following reason alone in religion is no guarantee that we will arrive at the truth. Certainly, reason has its place in the process of faith,

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nothing else; that Religion was based, not on argument, but on taste and sentiment, that nothing was objective, every thing subjective, in doctrine. I say, even those who saw through the affectation in which the religious school of which I am speaking clad itself, still came to think that Religion, as such, consisted in something short of intellectual exercises, viz., in the affections, in the imagination, in inward persuasions and consolations, in pleasurable sensations, sudden changes, and sublime fancies. They learned to believe and to take it for granted, that Religion was nothing beyond a *supply* of the wants of human nature, not an external fact and a work of God.” (John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* [Longmans, Green, and Co. and New York: 1889], 27–28).

<sup>26</sup> Certainly, as Newman was not an enemy of human emotion as such, neither was he an enemy of logic. This is already indicated by his great interest in the study of mathematics at the university of Oxford, through which he acquired his clear and logical mind. In a letter from 1822 Newman briefly summarized his relationship to mathematics as follows: “I lay great strength on the attention I have given to Mathematics on account of the general strength it imparts to the mind” (*Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman*, ed. Anne Mozley, vol. 1 [London: Longmans, Green, and Co. and New York, 1891], 69). For this theme, see Gillian R. Evans, “Science and Mathematics in Newman’s Thought,” *Downside Review* 96 (1978): 325, 247–66. Rather, it should be said that Newman recognized a dangerous enemy in rationalism, which he defined in Tract 73 thus: “To Rationalize is to ask for reasons out of place; to ask improperly how we are to account for certain things, to be unwilling to believe them unless they can be accounted for, i.e. referred to something else as a cause, to some existing system as harmonizing with them or taking them up into itself.... Thus it is characterized by two peculiarities; its loves of systematizing, and its basing its system upon personal experience, on the evidence of sense. In both respects it stands opposed to what is commonly understood by the word Faith, or belief in Testimony” (John H. Newman, “Tract 73: On the Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Religion,” in *Tracts for the Times* [Leominster – Notre Dame: Gracewing and University of Notre Dame Press, 2013], 181).

but the rational evidences themselves serve as answers to objections rather than as direct arguments in favor of revelation. Drawing on concrete experience, Newman asks: “In matter of fact, how many men do we suppose, in a century, out of the whole body of Christians, have been primarily brought to belief, or retained in it, by an intimate and lively perception of the force of what are technically called the Evidences?”<sup>27</sup> Belief is also a form of knowledge, but it is exercised in such a way that it does not rely on logical evidence, but is primarily based on the so-called “antecedent probabilities,” i.e., habits, forms of behavior, previously entertained principles, views and wishes.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, belief is not merely a kind of conclusion of the reasoning process or the result of calculation, but is closely linked to a certain moral attitude, which is not required in argumentative thinking. Faith, then, is properly a moral principle, for the antecedent probabilities that precede it depend to a large degree on the moral foundation of the person, from which it follows that “a man is responsible for his faith, because he is responsible for his likings and dislikings, his hopes and his opinions.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore it is also a fatal error for the world to think that it can judge religious truth without the preparation of the heart, and to approach it as one approaches any secular matter. Newman’s explanation is almost reminiscent of the noetic approach of the spirituality of the Russian *starecestvo*, which sees in the purification of the heart a necessary condition for the comprehension of Christian mysteries:

For is not this the error, the common and fatal error, of the world, to think itself a judge of Religious Truth without preparation of heart? ... Men consider that they have as full a right to discuss religious subjects, as if they were themselves religious. They will enter upon the most sacred points of Faith at the moment, at their

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<sup>27</sup> John H. Newman, “The Usurpations of Reason,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> See John H. Newman, “Faith and Reason contrasted as Habits of Mind,” in *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford*, 187–89.

<sup>29</sup> Newman, “Faith and Reason contrasted as Habits of Mind,” 192.

pleasure, – if it so happen, in a careless frame of mind,  
in their hours of recreation, over the wine cup.<sup>30</sup>

Even though the antecedent probabilities of belief do not extend so far as to touch the conclusion – which makes belief imply a certain risk and venture – they nevertheless continually move towards the conclusion and asymptotically approach it. Moreover, Newman reminds us that pure and bare evidence leads only to the passive acceptance of knowledge, whereas anticipations, presuppositions, and probabilities are creations of the mind and make the act of believing an eminently active act.<sup>31</sup>

All these reflections eventually culminate in the 15th sermon, where Newman presents Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as a pattern and example of faith and reason to his listeners. Above all, Mary is a pattern of faith because, unlike Zechariah, she believed the angel's message, for which she earned the praise of Elizabeth: "And blessed is she who believed that what the Lord has said to her will be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45). Subsequently, in connection with Luke's remark that Mary "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19), Newman presents the Mother of the Lord in a masterful passage also as an example of the use of reason in its investigation of the contents of faith and thus as a paradigm of the scholastic motto *fides quaerens intellectum*.

Thus St. Mary is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it; not enough to submit the Reason, she reasons upon it; not indeed reasoning first, and believing afterwards, with Zacharias, yet first believing without reasoning, next from love and reverence, reasoning after believing. And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the

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<sup>30</sup> Newman, "Faith and Reason contrasted as Habits of Mind," 198–99.

<sup>31</sup> See John H. Newman, "Love the Safeguard of Faith Against Superstition," in *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford*, 224–26.

doctors of the Church also, who have to investigate, and weigh, and define, as well as to profess the Gospel; to draw the line between truth and heresy; to anticipate or remedy the various aberrations of wrong reason; to combat pride and recklessness with their own arms; and thus to triumph over the sophist and the innovator.<sup>32</sup>

It is no coincidence that this final lecture is entitled “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine”, since the theme of doctrinal development was soon to become one of Newman’s dominant themes. Its significance lies in the fact that he understood this development not as acquisition or sudden discovery of new doctrines that the Church had never before professed or even possessed. For Newman, authentic development is a gradual and often very complex deepening of an identical deposit of faith that can be likened to the growth of a living organism, and so it represents a transition from implicit to explicit knowledge. The absence of an explicit profession of faith or dogmatic formulation of a doctrine does not, therefore, preclude the Church’s inward and implicit knowledge of it.<sup>33</sup> And if this is true of the Church’s knowledge with respect to the deposit of faith, *a fortiori* is it true of Mary, whom Newman singled out as the one who develops and deepens paradigmatically the knowledge received in faith.

## 2. Mary as a Paradigm of Divine Illumination

However, the use of reason, as we have outlined it, does not constitute the only *modus cognoscendi*, according to Newman, because in the life of grace the possibility of another kind of cognition opens up, which has its origin in the divine illumination. It is important to note that in this context Newman does not use the scholastic term of *scientia infusa*, but

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<sup>32</sup> Newman, “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine,” 313–14.

<sup>33</sup> See Newman, “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine,” 323. Newman develops the same idea in his main work on the theme: *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Leominster – Notre Dame: Gracewing and University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 124–25.

rather the biblical term of “light” and the patristic concept of “illumination,” which was specifically elaborated by St. Augustine.<sup>34</sup>

It is quite likely that Newman learnt to appreciate the doctrine of illumination by his own experience of faith. This is suggested by the account of his first conversion in 1816, when, during an illness and through an extraordinary grace, he fell under the influence of a definite Creed and received into his intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God’s mercy, were never effaced or obscured. This led him at the same time to the idea that there are “two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator”.<sup>35</sup> Years later, he poetically expressed his longing for God’s light in the hymn *Lead, Kindly Light*, which he composed after overcoming illness and a near-death experience during a trip to Sicily.

From a theological point of view, he addressed this theme in the Catholic sermon *Illuminating Grace*, where, after pointing to some texts from the Old and New Testament, he laid down a principle according to which one of the consequences of sin is ignorance and error, and therefore one of the consequences of redemption is the gift of knowledge and light:

Now, one of the defects which man incurred on the fall was ignorance, or spiritual blindness; and one of the gifts received on his restoration is a perception of things spiritual; so that, before he is brought under the grace of Christ, he can but inquire, reason, argue, and conclude, about religious truth; but afterwards he sees it.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Rudolph Allers, “St. Augustin’s Doctrine on Illumination,” *Franciscan Studies*, 12/1 (1952): 27–46

<sup>35</sup> John H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. and New York: 1890), 4.

<sup>36</sup> John H. Newman, “Illuminating Grace,” in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, 180.

It follows for Newman that without God's light one cannot see spiritual realities, just as without natural light one cannot see sensible realities:

You ask, what it is you need, besides eyes, in order to see the truths of revelation: I will tell you at once; you need light. Not the keenest eyes can see in the dark. Now, though your mind be the eye, the grace of God is the light; and you will as easily exercise your eyes in this sensible world without the sun, as you will be able to exercise your mind in the spiritual world without a parallel gift from without.<sup>37</sup>

Now, it is noteworthy that Newman also applies this form of supernatural knowledge directly to the Mother of the Lord when, in his meditation on the Marian title *Sedes Sapientiae* in the Litany of Loreto, he explains that by the enlightenment she received through the intimate communion of her life with Jesus she was introduced into the knowledge of God's plan and the mysteries of the faith that the Church defined and solemnly proclaimed during the centuries that followed:

What was the grand theme of conversation between her and her Son but the nature, the attributes, the providence, and the works of Almighty God? Would not our Lord be ever glorifying the Father who sent Him? Would He not unfold to her the solemn eternal decrees, and the purposes and will of God? Would He not from time to time enlighten her in all those points of doctrine which have been first discussed and then settled in the Church from the time of the Apostles till now, and all that shall be till the end – nay, these, and far more than these? All that is obscure, all that is fragmentary in revelation, would, so far as the knowledge is possible to man, be brought out to her in clearness and simplicity by Him who is the Light of the World.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Newman, "Illuminating Grace," 181–82.

<sup>38</sup> Newman, "Sedes Sapientiae," 48–49.

This Meditation is part of a reflection on the mystery of the Annunciation, and so at this point it is appropriate to ask whether Newman considered Mary to have received a special form of illumination about the divine identity of her Son at the Incarnation. In fact, some of his statements may help us to form a more or less probable idea of his view on this matter.

In his sermon from the Anglican period *Christ Manifested in Remembrance* he highlights the principle that “God’s Presence is not discerned at the time when it is upon us, but afterwards, when we look back upon what is gone and over.”<sup>39</sup> This is specifically shown in the case of the revelation of the divine identity of Jesus: though he was professed as the Son of God by Peter or the centurion, who was present at his crucifixion, still the apostles “did not understand that our Lord, as being the Son of God, was not the creature of God, but the Eternal Word, the Only-begotten Son of the Father.”<sup>40</sup> This was fully manifested to them only through the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost. Although Newman does not explicitly state it in this sermon, it is clear that this principle applies to the Virgin Mary as well, with the sole difference that she received the Holy Spirit in an anticipatory way at the moment of the Incarnation. This thesis, which has been endorsed by some contemporary scholars who saw in the events of the Annunciation and the Visitation a kind of Mary’s “Proto-Pentecost,”<sup>41</sup> seems to have been sustained by Newman himself. If in the homily *The Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Reverence Due to Her* he first claims that Mary felt “ignorance” with regard to the mystery of the Incarnation,<sup>42</sup> he immediately proceeds to make the following statement:

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<sup>39</sup> John H. Newman, “Christ Manifested in Remembrance,” in *Parochial Sermons*, vol. 4 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 291.

<sup>40</sup> Newman, “Christ Manifested in Remembrance,” 290.

<sup>41</sup> See René Laurentin, *I Vangeli dell’infanzia di Cristo* (Torino: Edizioni Paoline, 1985), 139; Stefano de Fiores, “Spirito Santo,” in *Maria. Nuovissimo Dizionario*, vol. 2 (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane), 1497–98, 1501.

<sup>42</sup> John H. Newman, “The Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Reverence Due to Her,” in *Parochial Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1840), 143.



If to him that hath, more is given, and holiness and Divine favour go together (and this we are expressly told), what must have been the transcendent purity of her, whom the Creator Spirit condescended to overshadow with His miraculous presence? What must have been her gifts, who was chosen to be the only near earthly relative of the Son of God, the only one whom He was bound by nature to revere and look up to; the one appointed to train and educate Him, to instruct Him day by day, as He grew in wisdom and in stature?<sup>43</sup>

Newman's conviction that Mary must have been sufficiently informed about Jesus's divine identity is later expressed in his meditation on the Annunciation and the invocation *Regina Angelorum*, where he writes in all simplicity but also clarity: "St. Gabriel hailed her as 'Full of grace,' and as 'Blessed among women,' and announced to her that the Holy Ghost would come down upon her, and that she would bear a Son who would be the Son of the Highest."<sup>44</sup>

The fact that Mary represents a paradigm of the singular and anticipated illumination by the Holy Spirit at the Incarnation eventually emerges from the Mariological rudimentary teaching of the Church Fathers about Mary as the New Eve, from which Newman derived several Marian Catholic doctrines. Similarly, in this case, he shows that the first parents in Paradise were "created in the image, and after the likeness of God" and as such were "supported and exalted by an indwelling of Divine grace." Consequently, as in them "ignorance was dissipated by the clear light of the Spirit,"<sup>45</sup> so in Mary, as the New Eve, ignorance must have been overcome not only by reasoning, but especially by the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, which allows Newman to declare categorically:

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<sup>43</sup> Newman, "The Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary," 147.

<sup>44</sup> John H. Newman, "Regina Angelorum," in *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Newman, "The Glories of Mary for the Sake of Her Son," 373.

As grace was infused into Adam from the first moment of his creation, so that he never had experience of his natural poverty, till sin reduced him to it; so was grace given in still ampler measure to Mary, and she was a stranger to Adam's deprivation. She began where others end, whether in knowledge or in love. She was from the first clothed in sanctity, sealed for perseverance, luminous and glorious in God's sight, and incessantly employed in meritorious acts, which continued till her last breath.<sup>46</sup>

This text leads us directly to Newman's opinion of the thesis of some of the Eastern Church Fathers (namely St. Basil, St. Chrysostom and St. Cyril of Alexandria) who attributed to the Mother of God certain moral imperfections such as vanity, love of honor, inconstancy in faith and even the sin of doubt to which she succumbed at the sight of her crucified Son. This thesis, which has its source in Origen's exegesis of the sword in Simeon's prophecy to Mary,<sup>47</sup> is dealt with at length by Newman in his Mariological work *A Letter to the Rev. E.B. Pusey*, where he presents the following arguments: 1. This thesis is not a representation of the universal Tradition of the Church, but a private and personal opinion of these writers; 2. Certainly the image of the sword may have denoted "the presence of temptation and darkness of spirit" to which Mary was subjected during the Passion; 3. However, there is nothing in Simeon's words about the sword to suggest an idea of sin or doubt, but rather, according to Newman, they express the painful separation of the Son from the Mother, which began with his public ministry and ended with the accomplishment of his salvific mission at Calvary.<sup>48</sup> As a result, in his *Sermon Notes* for the month of

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<sup>46</sup> Newman, "The Glories of Mary for the Sake of Her Son," 375.

<sup>47</sup> See Origen, *In Lucam*, 17,6-7; PG 13,1845.

<sup>48</sup> See Newman, *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, 131-146. It should be noted, however, that in the Anglican sermon dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Newman clarifies that Mary's suffering is not to be understood as despair, but rather as a form of blessed suffering: "And when sorrow came upon her afterwards, it was but the blessed participation of her Son's sacred sorrows, not the sorrow of those who suffer for their sins" ("The Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary," 153).

May, Newman can claim that Mary, as the New Eve, was distinguished by indefectibility, i.e., by the inability to lapse in faith and morals:

And thus she is a better Eve. Eve, too, in the beginning may be called the May of the year. She was the first-fruits of God's beautiful creation. She was the type of all beauty; but alas! she represented the world also in its fragility. She stayed not in her original creation. Mary comes as a second and holier Eve, having the grace of indefectibility and the gift of perseverance from the first, and teaching us how to use God's gifts without abusing them.<sup>49</sup>

### **3. Mary as a Paradigm of the Beatific Contemplation of Christ**

A favorite theme of Newman's eschatology is the beatific vision of God experienced by the saints in heaven, where they finally see him face to face after the hardships of this life. His statements to this effect are found scattered in a number of his works, such as the novel *Callista*, the poetic composition *The Dream of Gerontius*, as well as his Anglican sermons. Their main feature is Newman's conviction that the beatific vision is possible only after death, as he expressed it in his sermon *Peace in Believing*:

After the fever of life; after weariness and sickness; fightings and despondings; languor and fretfulness; struggling and failing, struggling and succeeding; after all the changes and chances of this troubled unhealthy state, at length comes death, at length the White Throne of God, at length the Beatific Vision. After restlessness comes rest, peace, joy; – our eternal portion, if we be worthy; – the sight of the Blessed Three, the Holy One.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John H. Newman, "On Mary as the Pattern of the Natural World," in *Sermon Notes of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), 79.

<sup>50</sup> John H. Newman, "Peace in Believing," in *Parochial Sermons*, vol. 6 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 400–401.

As an Anglican, Newman initially seems to have held that even Jesus, being subject to the laws of learning, was ignorant in his human nature.<sup>51</sup> However, by studying the history of the early Church, he gradually comes to believe that his apparent ignorance – implied in the Gospel, for example, by the *logion* that the Son does not know the hour of the end of all things (cf. Mt 24:36) – is to be understood rather economically, i.e., in relation to us and for our sake. Thus, in his *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius*, Newman explains that if some of the early Fathers made contradictory affirmations about Jesus’s human knowledge and seem to have attributed ignorance to his human nature, this changed significantly after Athanasius, when it became a common teaching that “though He took on Him a soul which left to itself would have been partially ignorant, as other human souls, yet as ever enjoying the Beatific Vision from its oneness with the Word, it never was ignorant in fact, but knew all things which human soul can know.”<sup>52</sup>

It would seem, then, that the beatific vision of Jesus during his earthly life constitutes a unique case and a singular exception, and this because of the hypostatic union of his human soul with the Word of God. That is why Newman does not ascribe the same privilege to Mary, and yet there are some of his texts in which Mary’s knowledge on earth is described almost in direct analogy to the privilege of the beatific vision. In the meditation *Sedes Sapientiae*, for example, he ventures to assert that thanks to Mary’s unique and unparalleled intimacy with her Son, her knowledge surpassed that of all the philosophers, saints and prophets:

For if such close and continued intimacy with her Son created in her a sanctity inconceivably great, must not also the knowledge which she gained during those many years from His conversation of present, past, and

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<sup>51</sup> John H. Newman, “Affliction, A School of Comfort,” in *Parochial Sermons*, vol. 5 (London: Rivingtons, 1857), 346: “Even He Himself, when He came on earth, condescended to gain knowledge by experience.”

<sup>52</sup> John H. Newman, “Ignorance Assumed Economically by Our Lord,” in *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians*, vol. 2 (London: Pickering and Co., 1881), 162.

future, have been so large, and so profound, and so diversified, and so thorough, that, though she was a poor woman without human advantages, she must in her knowledge of creation, of the universe, and of history, have excelled the greatest of philosophers, and in her theological knowledge the greatest of theologians, and in her prophetic discernment the most favoured of prophets?<sup>53</sup>

Thereupon he contrasts Mary with Moses to show that while Moses was allowed to converse with God occasionally “face to face,” which some Mariologists in the past explained precisely as a sign of the beatific vision of God, Mary enjoyed this privilege continually during the thirty years she spent with Christ:

God spoke to the Prophets: we have His communications to them in Scripture. But He spoke to them in figure and parable. There was one, viz., Moses, to whom He vouchsafed to speak face to face.... This was the great privilege of the inspired Lawgiver of the Jews; but how much was it below that of Mary! Moses had the privilege only now and then, from time to time; but Mary for thirty continuous years saw and heard Him, being all through that time face to face with Him, and being able to ask Him any question which she wished explained, and knowing that the answers she received were from the Eternal God, who neither deceives nor can be deceived.<sup>54</sup>

Besides, as in the *Letter to Pusey* Newman puts forward the idea that Mary, as “a creature has been brought so close to the Divine Essence” because she “bore, nursed, and handled the Eternal in the form of a child,”<sup>55</sup> so in the meditation *Regina Angelorum* he stresses the fact that by virtue of her motherhood she was closer to Christ than the angels:

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<sup>53</sup> Newman, “Sedes Sapientiae,” 48.

<sup>54</sup> Newman, “Sedes Sapientiae,” 49–50.

<sup>55</sup> Newman, *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, 88.

“She, as the Mother of our Lord, comes nearer to Him than any angel; nearer even than the Seraphim who surround Him, and cry continually, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy.’”<sup>56</sup>

What are we to make of these texts and how are we to interpret them? Admittedly, they are not easy to explain, because in purely terminological terms Newman does not explicitly speak here of Mary’s beatific vision. However, it does not seem entirely unreasonable to attempt to interpret his statements in the sense that Mary’s face-to-face communication with Christ, her intimate communion with the incarnate Word of God, and her incomparable access to God were a kind of earthly equivalent of the beatific vision. In other words, for Newman, Mary’s life with Christ on earth was already an anticipation and even a prototype of the rapturous and beatifying vision that the saints experience in heaven, and at the same time a source of extraordinary knowledge and insight.

#### **4. Mary as Seat of Wisdom**

Before looking at the last aspect of Newman’s reflection on the knowledge of the Virgin Mary, we must briefly mention Sophiology, which undoubtedly represents the most original and speculative aspect of modern Russian Mariology, and whose main exponents were Vladimir Solov’ev († 1900), Sergej Bulgakov († 1944) and Pavel Florensky († 1937). They refer Wisdom-Sophia to God, insofar as he carries within himself the idea of creation, as well as to creation and history, in which the purest manifestations or realizations of Sophia are Christ, Mary and the Church.<sup>57</sup> If for Solov’ev the link between Sophiology and Mariology has as one of its foundations the Church’s ancient liturgical practice to apply to the Blessed Virgin the Old Testament texts that speak of the Wisdom,<sup>58</sup> for Bulgakov the link has

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<sup>56</sup> Newman, “Regina Angelorum,” 41.

<sup>57</sup> See Bernard Schultze, “La mariologie sophianique russe,” in *Maria. Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, vol. 6, ed. Hubert du Manoir (Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1961), 215.

<sup>58</sup> Vladimir Solov’ev, *La Russia e la Chiesa universale e altri scritti* (Milano: La Casa di Matrona, 1989), 200: “For if by substantial Wisdom of God one were to understand only and exclusively the person of Jesus Christ, how could one apply to the Blessed

almost an ontological necessity, since Christ and Mary represent two perfect concretizations of Wisdom, one theanthropic and the other created: “The Virgin is the personal manifestation of divine Wisdom, of Sophia, who in a different sense is Christ, the power and wisdom of God. There are thus two personal images of the Sophia: one created, the other theanthropic; and there are two images of man in the heavens: the God-Man and the Mother of God.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, according to Florensky, the Divine Sophia is realized in history in concentric circles, reaching her unique perfection and center in the figure of the Mother of God.<sup>60</sup>

It may sound surprising at first, but Newman could also be classified to some extent as a representative and even as a precursor of Mariological Sophiology for several reasons. It is already noteworthy that in his theological writings he put forward the thesis that the Old Testament texts on the creation of Wisdom (Sir 1:4, 9; 24:14; Prov 8:22–23) were fittingly referred by the Church to the mystery of the election and creation of the Virgin Mary especially after the Arians used them in derogation of Our Lord’s divinity.<sup>61</sup>

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Virgin all the texts of the sapiential books that speak of this Wisdom? Now, this very application, which was practiced from the earliest times both in the offices of the Latin Church and in those of the Greek Church, has received doctrinal sanction in our day in the bull of Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin.” On this question, see also Jeremy Pilch, *“Breathing the Spirit with Both Lungs”: Deification in the Work of Vladimir Solov’ev* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 150–52.

<sup>59</sup> Sergej Bulgakov, *Il roseto ardente* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 1998), 126–127. On his distinction between the uncreated Wisdom and the created Wisdom, see Sergej Bulgakov, *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* (Lindisfarne Books, 1993), 54–81.

<sup>60</sup> Pavel Florensky, *Stĺp a opora pravdy* [The Pillar and Ground of the Truth] (Velehrad: Refugium, 2003), 304: “If the whole creation is Sophia, then humanity, which is the soul and consciousness of creation, is first of all Sophia. If all humanity is Sophia, then Sophia is first of all the Church, which is the soul and consciousness of humanity. If Sophia is the Church, then Sophia is first of all the Church of the Saints, which is the soul and consciousness of the Church. If Sophia is the Church of the Saints, then Sophia is first of all Mary, who is the soul and consciousness of the Church of the Saints, the Advocate and Protectress of creation before the Word of God, the Mother of God, the Purification of the world.”

<sup>61</sup> See Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 174–75; *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, 64–65.

In addition, interpreting St. Athanasius's theology of the Incarnation, Newman argued that since God and man meet in Mary, she can in this sense be designated as the "centre of all things."<sup>62</sup> Most remarkable, however, is the fact that long before Bulgakov, Newman, in his homily *On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary*, described the Mother of the Lord precisely as "created wisdom":

Thus His Mother is the first of Prophets, for of her came the Word bodily; she is the sole oracle of Truth, for the Way, the Truth, and the Life, vouchsafed to be her Son; she is the one mould of Divine Wisdom, and in that mould it was indelibly cast.... if she bore the Eternal Wisdom, she should be that created wisdom in whom "is all the grace of the Way and the Truth"; that if she was the Mother of "fair love, and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope," "she should give an odour like cinnamon and balm, and sweetness like to choice myrrh." Can we set bounds to the holiness of her who was the Mother of the Holiest?<sup>63</sup>

Yet, there is also a profound difference between the Russian Sophiologists and Newman: while they base their reflections on ontological and controversial speculations about Wisdom, for

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<sup>62</sup> Newman, *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, 93.

<sup>63</sup> Newman, *On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary*, 391–92. It is interesting to note, however, that this original version of the sermon, published in 1849, was altered and shortened in later editions. Newman here no longer calls Mary "created wisdom" but "Seat of Wisdom," perhaps to avoid the controversial implications that might somehow arise from this terminology. Thus in the 1886 edition we find the following refurbishment: "He is the Wisdom of God, she therefore is the Seat of Wisdom; His Presence is Heaven, she therefore is the Gate of Heaven; He is infinite Mercy, she then is the Mother of Mercy. She is the Mother of 'fair love and fear, and knowledge and holy hope'; is it wonderful then that she has left behind her in the Church below 'an odour like cinnamon and balm, and sweetness like to choice myrrh'? Such, then, is the truth ever cherished in the deep heart of the Church, and witnessed by the keen apprehension of her children, that no limits but those proper to a creature can be assigned to the sanctity of Mary" (*On the Fitness of the Glories of Mary* [London: Burns and Oates, 1886], 369).



Newman Christian wisdom is first and foremost a gift of the Holy Spirit, which becomes in man “a habit” that enlarges the mind and the heart. However, this enlargement does not primarily consist in the acquisition or gathering of new knowledge, but “in the comparison of the subjects of knowledge one with another” and thus wisdom represents “a comprehensive mind“ which „implies a connected view of the old with the new; an insight into the bearing and influence of each part upon every other.“<sup>64</sup>

It may be observed that this understanding of wisdom as a “connected view” and as an apprehension of the intrinsic and mutual relations of individual mysteries finds its biblical basis precisely in the sapiential attitude of the Virgin Mary, who “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). As biblical scholar and Mariologist Aristide Serra pointed out,<sup>65</sup> this text does not refer to mere pondering, but to the form of wisdom as Newman outlined it. In fact, the use of the Greek verb *συμβάλλω*, which literally means “to unite,” “to confront,” “to compare,” or “to do exegesis”, suggests that Mary as a uniquely sophianic person and Seat of Wisdom confronted and compared in a paradigmatic way the words and events concerning Jesus in order to arrive at a fuller and more complete understanding of them.

## **Conclusion**

In general, scholarship on Newman’s epistemology focuses on the important distinction between “notional knowledge” and “real knowledge” (or “notional assent” and “real assent”), which is also quite understandable, since this is the most prominent part of his theory of knowledge. Nevertheless, the analysis of the connection between Newman’s epistemology and Mariology highlighted in this study has

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<sup>64</sup> John H. Newman, “Wisdom, as Contrasted with Faith and with Bigotry,” in *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford*, 287.

<sup>65</sup> See Aristide Serra, “Maria nell’AT,” in *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia Biblica*, ed. Piero Rossano, Gianfranco Ravasi, Antonio Giralda, (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni paoline 1988), 902; *Maria nelle sacre Scritture* (Milano: Gruppo Editoriale Viator, 2016), 191–226.

shown that the English theologian was well aware of different forms and shades of knowledge, which he in turn illustrated in the figure of the Virgin Mary.

True to his method of oscillating between various extreme positions, Newman also takes a middle path (*Via Media*) with regard to the question of Our Lady's knowledge, presenting her as neither completely ignorant nor completely omniscient. Throughout her life Mary was *in statu viatoris*: she learned, reflected on the content of the faith and deepened it, sought to understand the mutual relations between the various mysteries, but at the same time she was singularly favored and enlightened, and so by this unique collaboration of nature and grace she came to a knowledge surpassing that of all the saints becoming for us the very Seat of Wisdom.

Why did Newman address the subject of Mary's knowledge at all in his theology? One possible motive is that Our Lady's extraordinary knowledge, being the result of the synergy of God's grace and human cooperation, represents what Newman so strongly emphasized against Pusey by pointing out how, in the optics of patristic protomariology, Mary as the New Eve "co-operated in our salvation, not merely by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her body, but by specific holy acts."<sup>66</sup> For this reason, Newman did not hesitate to ascribe to Mary even the title of "Co-redemptress," which seemed to him but "a poor compensation" for the lofty and rhetorical Marian terminology of the Fathers.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, there is also a second possible motive. Did not Newman extol the importance of Mary's knowledge because he saw in her the concrete realization of what he identified as the main goals of education to be

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<sup>66</sup> Newman, *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, 38.

<sup>67</sup> Newman, *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, 83: "When they found you with the Fathers calling her Mother of God, Second Eve, and Mother of all Living, the Mother of Life, the Morning Star, the Mystical New Heaven, the Sceptre of Orthodoxy, the All-undefiled Mother of Holiness, and the like, they would have deemed it a poor compensation for such language, that you protested against her being called a Co-redemptress or a Priestess."

pursued by the university? It is indeed quite remarkable how in *The Idea of a University* he explains, as if contemplating St. Mary, that the university is not a foundry, mint or treadmill producing machines capable of accumulating and assimilating as many facts and information as possible, but is an *Alma Mater* who knows her children, educates them in a family atmosphere and forms them according to specific principles.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the intellect formed by the university “is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near” and is capable to attain “the knowledge, not only of things, but also of their mutual and true relations.”<sup>69</sup> And at the same time, in analogy to Mary, in whom extraordinary knowledge is unified with extraordinary holiness, Newman wishes the university premises to be at once “oracles of philosophy and shrines of devotion,” and, like the *Alma Mater*, to unite science and religion under one roof, so that the intellectual layman may become religious, and the devout ecclesiastic may become intellectual.<sup>70</sup>

In conclusion, it can be argued that when Newman speaks of the university and education, it is as if he sees therein a re-presentation and continuation of Mary, which also explains why he entrusted the newly founded Catholic University of Dublin to the protection of the Virgin Mary as *Sedes Sapientiae* and wished that the central decoration of the university church he had built should also depict the Mother of the Lord under that title.

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<sup>68</sup> See Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 144–45.

<sup>69</sup> Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 134.

<sup>70</sup> John H. Newman, “Intellect, the Instrument of Religious Training,” in *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (London: Burns and Lambert, 1857), 15.