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## **John Henry Newman on Emotions in *Parochial Sermons*: A Study of Selected Sermons** *John Henry Newman o čustvih v Župnijskih pridigah:* *študija izbranih pridig*

*Abstract:* The presented article<sup>1</sup> examines John Henry Newman's theology of emotions through an analysis of selected *Parochial Sermons*. It argues that Newman understands emotions as mediators between doctrinal truth and the lived reality of faith embodied in the Church. His understanding of emotions is rooted in personal experience: from youthful evangelical fervour, through disappointment at the liberalisation of parliament and the established Church, to a commitment to living according to the teachings of Christ. Newman identifies three key ideas: (a) emotions are legitimate but require constant formation; (b) worship and communal prayer do not suppress emotions but guide them towards calmness; (c) the source and direction of religious emotions is conscience, which leads a person to God. For Newman, emotions are consecrated in Christ and sustained in the Church, where they become expressions of compassion, community, and God's love. The article concludes by demonstrating how Newman's integration of reason and emotion offers a Christian approach to emotions that remains relevant to contemporary theological discourse.

*Keywords:* John Henry Newman, *Parochial Sermons*, sermons, emotions, theology of emotion, Anglican period, Victorian era, ecclesiology

*Povzetek:* Članek preučuje teologijo čustev Johna Henryja Newmana skozi analizo izbranih *Župnijskih pridig* (angl. *Parochial Sermons*). Cilj je pokazati, da Newman razume čustva kot posrednike med doktrinarno resnico in živeto realnostjo vere, utelešeno v Cerkvi. Njegov pogled na čustva izhaja iz osebnih izkušenj: od mladostne evangelijske gorečnosti, prek razočaranja in liberalizacije parlamenta in nacionalne Cerkve do zavezanosti življenju v skladu s Kristusovimi nauki. Newman izpostavlja tri ključne ideje: (a) čustva so legitimna, vendar zahtevajo nenehno oblikovanje; (b) bogoslužje in skupna molitev ne zatirajo čustev, ampak jih usmerjajo k miru; (c) vir in smer verskih čustev je vest, ki človeka vodi k

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Bogu. Za Newmana so čustva posvečena v Kristusu in ohranjena v Cerkvi, kjer postanejo izraz sočutja, skupnosti in Božje ljubezni. Na podlagi teh ugotovitev pokažemo, kako Newmanova integracija razuma in čustev ponuja krščanski pristop k čustvom, ki je relevanten za sodobni teološki diskurz.

*Ključne besede:* John Henry Newman, *Župnijske pridige*, pridige, čustva, teologija čustev, anglikansko obdobje, viktorijanska doba, eklesiologija

## 1. Introduction

Theology of emotion is considered a relatively recent field of research, best described as “a specific theoretical view of emotions and emotionality that takes particular account of the concepts of spirituality and thoughts about God or the transcendent, or even derives essentially from them, and considers emotions and emotionality through this prism.” (Centa Strahovnik 2023, 586) Yet, although the term “theology of emotion” may be new, theological reflection on emotions and feelings has been present for centuries. Historically, the study of religious emotions has long been evident in sermons, which in the past (and still today) praised, criticized, and attempted to convey emotional rules for believers and society. (Clement 2017; 2019; 2025)

This is particularly evident in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. Shifts in discourse on emotions marked changes in preaching practice, especially during the First Great Awakening in the 1830s and 1840s (Cummins and Stille 2021, 10–11), when emphasis was placed on faith, the emotional experience of conversion, and the individual’s relationship with God. As a result, many Evangelicals “had pursued homiletic strategies of affectionate religion to induce among their listeners either conversion or a longing for conversion” (Turner 2002, 32). Moderate and conservative Evangelicals prevailed over those who put greater emphasis on quiet piety and restrained preaching rather than intense emotional religious experience as the primary indicator of faith, which led to tensions with other non-conformists who rejected such religious fervour. “Consequently, evangelicalism both inside and outside the Church of England was almost always equated, especially by its critics, with a religion of emotional conversion or incitement of intense religious feeling.” (32)

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the Victorian era was shaped by a Romantic culture characterised by “its mawkish sentimentality, its anxieties of gender and class, its fantasies of empire, its elaborate matrix of sexuality, and – most memorably – its literature, defined both by complex portraits of emotion and an equally complex ability to spur emotion in readers” (Ketagbian 2011). Victorian emotional expression was as varied as it was a “central epistemological tool throughout the era” (Moore 2018).

It was within this cultural and religious context that John Henry Newman (1801–1890), one of the most influential Anglican and later Roman Catholic theologians

of the nineteenth century, produced writings that shaped modern Christian thought. Despite his significance, the emotional dimension of Newman's theology has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Only recently have studies such as Veléz (2022) and Emrich (2023) begun to examine the Englishman's understanding of emotion.

Given this gap, the present study seeks to examine how Newman conceptualised the role of emotion in Christian life, focusing on the sermons later published as *Parochial Sermons* (PS). It argues that across these texts, which span nearly a decade from his early preaching at Oriel to the height of his Oxford influence, Newman articulates a coherent theology of emotion that affirms grief, sympathy, friendship, peace, and joy as Christian virtues, while subjecting religious excitement to the disciplines of worship, doctrine, and moral principle. In short, the article contends that Newman develops a Christian pedagogy of emotions, in which emotions are acknowledged, formed, and sanctified within the context of Christ, the Church, and conscience.

## 2. Sermons and Preaching Style of John Henry Newman

Before turning to the analysis of Newman's theory of emotion, it is helpful to recall the scale of his preaching activity. Over the course of his life, Newman wrote approximately 670 sermons, in addition to nearly 200 sermon notes and fragments. According to Oratorian Paul Chavasse (2009), Newman stepped into the pulpit some 1,270 times during his Anglican years.

Newman first extended preaching ministry began when he assumed responsibility for the parish of St Clement's, Oxford. These early sermons were strongly Calvinist in tone and theoretical emphasis<sup>2</sup>. This soon provoked open criticism from Edward Hawkins (1789–1882) of Oriel College, who objected to Newman's fervour in attempting to lead parishioners towards his own beliefs. Hawkins presented Newman with J. B. Sumner's *Apostolical Preaching Considered in an Examination of St. Paul's Epistles*,<sup>3</sup> a work that significantly influenced his theological beliefs. As a consequence, his preaching gradually shifted away from Calvinist emphases towards High Church ecclesiology.

When Newman took over the parish of St Mary's, Oxford, he began to deliver sermons that were later published in six volumes as *Parochial Sermons* (1834–1842). Newman also contributed the entire fifth volume to the collaborative series *Plain*

<sup>2</sup> In his first sermon (Sermon no. 1) *Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening*, preached on 27 June 1824, Newman denied baptismal regeneration and divided people into two exclusive groups: saints and sinners. (*Sermons 1824–1843*, IV, Sermon no. 1, 17–25; *AW.*, 77)

<sup>3</sup> John Bird Sumner (1780–1862), also an evangelical Anglican and later Archbishop of Canterbury, conceived his work *Apostolic Preaching* as a handbook for preachers. In it he emphasises practical examples, taking the apostles, especially St Paul, whom he recognised as the most suitable model, as the central figure of preaching. Sumner seeks to demonstrate that what is important in preaching is the selection of material and the manner in which it is treated, rather than the expression of personal opinions, and with that he strongly criticised the doctrine of Calvinism.

*Sermons* (1843), intended to support parish clergy with accessible homiletic material. In 1868, these two strands were brought together in the eight-volume *Parochial and Plain Sermons (PPS)*, which reprinted the six *Parochial Sermons* alongside Newman's *Plain Sermons*, thereby unifying all his Anglican parish preaching in a single corpus consisting of almost 200 sermons. However, for the purposes of the present study, the focus rests solely on the early editions of *Parochial Sermons*.

In terms of structure and style, Newman's sermons characteristically lack composition, structural symmetry, or clearly marked divisions. This reflects a broader nineteenth-century movement away from the established oratorical tradition. Newman was concerned primarily with communicating theological truth, which is the main goal of a sermon. Newman's sermons appear to be written with the aim of engaging listeners more effectively, "to initiate contact with listeners, to name the ceremony of the day, to refer to the gospel, and to introduce exemplary stories. Newman included also acclamations, wishes, and calls for prayer in his sermons." (Kuczok 2014) However, "commentators agree that the sermons were original and exceptional since they followed the homiletic conventions in a unique way, resulting in a new individual genre of sermon" (2014).

On average, Newman's sermons were fourteen pages long and took about 45 minutes to deliver (Chavasse 2009). His preaching style was simple: "unpretending and sincere, proclaimed or even read in a low voice." (Kuczok 2014) Except for the occasional long pause, which may have hinted at the depth of his reflections, he simply read the sermons in an almost monotone voice, without gesture, his gaze fixed on the text before him (Chavasse 2009). Newman's voice made quite an impression on the audience: "Another hearer recalled that 'it is hardly necessary to mention the wonderful charm of Newman's voice and manner as a reader. I once heard him read the Gospel of the lilies of the field before preaching on it. So impressive and suggestive was his modulation of the words that it rang in my ears for days, and seemed to suffice for a sermon by itself.'" (Chavasse 2009)

Newman insisted on reading his sermons in accordance with Anglican practice, believing that this brought greater clarity to his message. It was, of course, also his personality, religious rigour, and devotion to Christ that made him an earnest and effective preacher. As Kuczok observes (2014), Newman knew how to create a magnetic preaching personality that was simultaneously aligned with the linguistic preferences of the Victorian Era:

"sermons were expected to find a middle way between a classical oratory and a literary work. The style of a sermon could be neither mean nor vulgar, nor ornate and affected in fact, the only rhetorical device used by Newman in his sermons was pausing, but employed rather for the result of intensity of thought than for ornamental effects. He distrusted the so-called trope based rhetoric, and thus, avoided the common rhetorical figures, such as recapitulations, startling illustrations, over-worked phrases, or elaborate metaphors." (Kuczok 2014)

Building on these foundations, we can conclude that *PPS* stand as the clearest expression of theological reflection on the inner life of faith, offering a sustained meditation on the meaning of Christian discipleship and the spiritual formation of the believer.

### 3. Aims and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, textual-theological approach, focusing on close readings of selected sermons from John Henry Newman's *PS*. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive survey of Newman's preaching, but to conduct a targeted analysis of sermons in which the role of emotions is explicitly thematised, either as a theological concept or as a pastoral concern. The emphasis lies in identifying how Newman interprets, regulates, and integrates emotions within Christian life, and how his theological vision situates emotions within Christology, ecclesiology, and spiritual practice, alongside Newman's position within nineteenth-century debates concerning emotion in religion.

Two criteria were followed in selecting sermons for analysis: first, sermons in which Newman explicitly discussed emotion; and those in which he integrated emotions into broader theological themes. The sermons were then organised into five thematic clusters.

Thematic Cluster	Title & Reference	Date	PS Vol.	Sermon No.	Focus
Christological grounding of emotions	<i>The Tears of Christ at the Grave of Lazarus</i>	12 Apr 1835	3	10	Christ's tears as revelation of divine compassion in human emotion
	<i>Christian Sympathy</i>	17 Feb 1839	5	9	Emotions sanctified in ecclesial community and solidarity
Regulation of religious excitement	<i>Religious Emotions</i>	27 Mar 1831	1	14	Difference between fervour and mature commitment
	<i>The Religious Use of Excited Feelings</i>	3 Jul 1831	1	9	Intense emotions as temporary gifts aiding conversion
	<i>Religious Worship a Remedy for Excitements</i>	8 Feb 1835	3	23	Liturgy as corrective to excessive emotionalism
	<i>Equanimity</i>	22 Dec 1839	5	5	Calmness and balance as the fruit of grace
Friendship and ordered affections	<i>Love of Relations and Friends</i>	27 Dec 1831	2	5	Friendship and natural affections as training for charity
Emotion in suffering and consolation	<i>Peace and Joy amid Chastisement</i>	12 Jun 1836	4	8	Coexistence of fear, joy, sorrow, and consolation in suffering
Critique of sentimental religion	<i>The Religion of the Day</i>	26 Aug 1832	1	24	Exposure of shallow, aestheticised religious feeling

Table 1: Selected sermons from *PS*, classified in thematic clusters.

## 4. Analysis of Selected Sermons

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### 4.1 Christological Validation of Emotion

John Henry Newman saw the foundation of the dignity of all human emotions in their adoption by Christ. As he observed, “hardly do we enter into the feelings and meaning of men like ourselves, who are gifted with any special talent; even human philosophers or poets are obscure from the depth of their conceptions. What then must be the marvellous abyss of love and understanding in Him who, though partaker of our nature, is the Son of God?” (*PS*, Vol. 3, Sermon no. 10)

This presupposes that Newman understood emotions to be an integral part of every human nature and as such belonging to the order of salvation history: they are considered a constitutive element of humanity, accepted by the Word and thereby sanctified. In the sermon *The Tears of Christ at the Grave of Lazarus* (preached 12 April 1835), Newman interpreted Jesus’ weeping at the tomb as a *locus theologicus* in which divine compassion and love are revealed within the realm of human emotions and feelings (*PS*, Vol. 3, Sermon no. 10). As such, this scene is presented as authentically human and theophanic.

“This is a consideration full of comfort, but of which commonly we do not avail ourselves as we might. It is one comfortable thought, and the highest of all, that Christ, who is on the right hand of God exalted, has felt all that we feel, sin excepted; but it is very comfortable also, that the new and spiritual man, which He creates in us, or creates us into, – that is, the Christian, as he is naturally found everywhere, – has everywhere the same temptations, and the same feelings under them, whether innocent or sinful; so that, as we are all bound together in our Head, so are we bound together, as members of one body, in that body, and believe, obey, sin, and repent, all in common.” (*PS*, Vol. 5, sermon no. 9)

Newman developed this further in the sermon *Christian Sympathy* (preached 17 February 1839), where the Christological grounding of emotion gives way to an ecclesial grounding within the community of believers. He warned against the danger of isolation and the withering of sympathy among Christians: “Persons think themselves isolated in the world; they think no one ever felt as they feel. They do not dare to expose their feelings, lest they should find that no one understands them. And thus they suffer to wither and decay what was destined in God’s purpose to adorn the Church’s paradise with beauty and sweetness.” (*PS*, Vol. 5, sermon no. 9)

Even more troubling for Newman was the tendency of people to blindly assent to religious principles without professing or passing judgement on them. “Thus it is that the world cuts off the intercourse between soul and soul, and substitutes idols of its own for the one true Image of Christ, in and through which only souls can sympathise.” (*PS*, Vol. 5, sermon no. 9) This matters because in Newman’s opinion, sympathy is grounded in shared Christian experience. This is because

“whereas the grace in us is common to us all, the sins against that grace are common to us all also. We have the same gifts to sin against, and therefore the same powers, the same responsibilities, the same fears, the same struggles, the same guilt, the same repentance, and such as none can have but we.” (*PS*, Vol. 5, sermon no. 9)

On this basis, Newman shaped a framework in which every Christian is one and the same: “as in Christ, who is perfect, so in himself, who is training towards perfection.” (*PS*, vol. 5, sermon no. 9)

## 4.2 Religious Emotion and the Regulation of Excitement

Although Newman affirmed the value of emotion in Christ himself, he insisted that emotions are insufficient as criteria for true religion; moreover, he warned against the instability inherent in unregulated religious feeling. In the sermon *Religious Emotions* (preached 27 March 1831) Newman cautioned against confusing fervent religious emotion with enduring Christian commitment, for “a violent impulse is not the same as a firm determination” (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 14).

Using the examples of Peter’s impetuous vow (Mt 26:35) and the fickle enthusiasm of the crowd on Palm Sunday (Mt 21:1-11), Newman drew a sharp distinction between passing excitement and the “calm, deliberate preference” for God’s will that characterises a mature faith. His purpose was not to suppress genuine affection for God, but to prevent believers from mistaking its early or incidental manifestations for spiritual depth. He pointed out that Peter’s fervour, which turned to denial within hours, served as a warning of the danger of grounding religion in emotions alone. (*PS*, vol. 1, Sermon no. 14)

“No one can be religious without having his heart in his religion; his affections must be actively engaged in it; and it is the aim of all Christian instruction to promote this. But if so, doubtless there is great danger lest a perverse use should be made of the affections. In proportion as a religious duty is difficult, so is it open to abuse. For the very reason, then, that I desire to make you earnest in religion, must I also warn you against a counterfeit earnestness, which often misleads men from the plain path of obedience, and which most men are apt to fall into just on their first awakening to a serious consideration of their duty. It is not enough to bid you to serve Christ in faith, fear, love, and gratitude; care must be taken that it is the faith, fear, love, and gratitude of a sound mind.” (*PS*, vol. 1, Sermon no. 14)

Later that year, in *The Religious Use of Excited Feelings* (preached 3 July 1831), Newman took a more nuanced stance. He likened intense emotional experiences in the early stages of Christian repentance and discipleship to the restored Gerasene demoniac (Mr 5:19). In doing so, he argued that strong initial emotions such as fear, gratitude, relief, and joy are providential tools to facilitate the first steps towards obedience, but not the essence of faith. Emotions, he argued, are useful

only as instruments directed towards principle, temporary gifts to be acted upon before they fade away. (*PS*, Vol. 1, sermon no. 9)

In this context, he addressed the greater pastoral concern for those who come to serious religion later in life, often after long neglect. For them, obedience is “laborious uphill work” compared with those who have been brought up in faith or have lived in faith since their youth. As Newman saw it, God, in His mercy, grants these stragglers a temporary “cure” for their disadvantage, an emotional impetus that helps them overcome their initial reluctance to fulfil their duty. Yet this gift harbours a danger: the risk of mistaking emotions with religion itself. When emotions inevitably wane, there is a danger that the believer will fall into despair, spiritual stagnation, or unhealthy attempts to artificially rekindle past fervour, since fervour or zeal are not reliable indicators of genuine faith. (*PS*, Vol. 1, sermon no. 9)

Newman did not, however, deny heightened emotions that are part of one’s natural temperament, or that occur under special circumstances or initial remorse. Such feelings are mostly episodic and often fade upon reflection. In this regard, he linked strong emotions with sound Christian principles, describing “the perfect state of mind” as “a deliberate preference of God’s service to everything else, a determined resolution to give up all for Him; and a love for Him, not tumultuous and passionate, but such love as a child bear towards his parents, calm, full, reverent, contemplative, obedient” (*PS*, Vol. 1, sermon no. 9). Of course, such strong emotions cannot be avoided altogether, but Newman observed a general rule: “the more religious men become, the calmer they become; and at all times the religious principle, viewed by itself, is calm, sober, and deliberate.” (*PS*, Vol. 1, sermon no. 9)

Newman concluded that the highest Christian temperament is free from all violent and tempestuous emotions, for all things in this world are fleeting. Indeed, a Christian should not be carried away by excitement, but should embody joy, temperance, gratitude, and peace, in short – equanimity. Drawing on Isaiah’s vision, he affirmed: “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.” (*PS*, Vol. 1, sermon no. 9)

These findings raise an important question: how is equanimity to be achieved? By the late 1830s, Newman had transformed this criticism into a constructive pastoral strategy, articulated in two sermons: *Religious Worship a Remedy for Excitements* (preached 8 February 1835) and *Equanimity* (preached 22 December 1839). In them, he argued that liturgical worship, with its structured prayers and established rituals, serves as a remedy for the excesses of religious fervour. Summarising the words of St John, Newman described worship as

“religious worship which supplies all our spiritual need, which suits every mood of mind and every variety of circumstances, over and above the heavenly and supernatural assistance which we are allowed to expect from it. Prayer and praise seem in his view to be an universal remedy, a panacea,

as it is called, which ought to be used at once, whatever it be that affects us. And, as is implied in ascribing to them this universal virtue, they produce very opposite effects, according to our need; allaying or carrying off the fever of the mind, as the case may be." (*PS*, Vol. 3, sermon no. 23)

According to Newman, liturgy serves as a remedy for both worldly distraction and religious fervour: in worship, emotions are interrupted, calmed, and refocused on God. He emphasised not only the act of liturgy itself, but also the value of its form: the fixed prayers and established patterns that discipline emotion and prevent it from being left unchecked. In this way, Newman directly contradicted evangelical tendencies to distrust formal worship and to equate emotional intensity with spiritual authenticity. For him, it was precisely the liturgical rite that safeguarded genuine piety by engaging the emotions in reverence and obedience. (*PS*, Vol. 3, sermon no. 23)

Such established patterns, he argued, establish equanimity: a life marked by freedom from anxiety, fairness, joy, and deep peace. Drawing on St Paul, who was zealous and severe by nature, Newman urged calmness, moderation, and cheerfulness even amid persecution, thereby revealing the supernatural character of grace. Christians are called daily to detach from worldly cares, judge impartially, rejoice reverently (tempered by godly fear), and rest in the hidden peace of God that "keeps the heart." This is because

"there are persons who think religion consists in ecstasies, or in set speeches; — he is not of those. And it must be confessed, on the other hand, that there is a common-place state of mind which does show itself calm, composed, and candid, yet is very far from the true Christian temper. In this day especially it is very easy for men to be benevolent, liberal, and dispassionate. It costs nothing to be dispassionate when you feel nothing, to be cheerful when you have nothing to fear, to be generous or liberal when what you give is not your own, and to be benevolent and considerate when you have no principles and no opinions. Men nowadays are moderate and equitable, not because the Lord is at hand, but because they do not feel that He is coming. Quietness is a grace, not in itself, only when it is grafted on the stem of faith, zeal, self-abasement, and diligence." (*PS*, Vol. 5, sermon no. 5)

### 4.3 Friendship and Ordered Affections

In *Love of Relations and Friends* (preached 27 December 1831) Newman presented John the beloved disciple and his relationship with Jesus as the model of the most intimate Christian friendship. He was fascinated by it:

"Much might be said on this remarkable circumstance. I say remarkable, because it might be supposed that the Son of God Most High could not have loved one man more than another; or again, if so, that He would not have had only one friend, but, as being All-holy, He would have loved all

men more or less, in proportion to their holiness. Yet we find our Saviour had a private friend; and this shows us, first, how entirely He was a man, as much as any of us, in His wants and feelings; and next, that there is nothing contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, nothing inconsistent with the fulness of Christian love, in having our affections directed in an especial way towards certain objects, towards those whom the circumstances of our past life, or some peculiarities of character, have endeared to us." (*PS*, Vol. 2, Sermon no. 5)

From Jesus' behaviour and affection towards John, Newman concluded that we are not required to love all people equally, and that the love of the crowd cannot surpass the intimacy between two individuals. Furthermore, Newman asserted a strong position that intimate friendship and affection for others reflect the love we bear for the Word. As the Doctor of the Church put it, such love is part of Divine Providence, rooting "good and true in religion and morals, on the basis of our good natural feelings. What we are towards our earthly friends in the instincts and wishes of our infancy, such we are to become at length towards God and man in the extended field of our duties as accountable beings." (*PS*, Vol. 2, Sermon no. 5)

These intimate bonds, Newman argued, teach us important Christian principles, as they involve "that of persons who differ in tastes and general character, being obliged by circumstances to live together, and mutually to accommodate to each other their respective wishes and pursuits" (*PS*, Vol. 2, Sermon no. 5). He further emphasised that "where persons do their duty, [life] must be in various ways more or less a state of self-denial" (*PS*, Vol. 2, Sermon no. 5). The prime example of such a relationship is the family, specifically holy matrimony. Here Newman developed a theological anthropology in which natural affection becomes a school of charity. The love of family and friends does not oppose universal love; rather, it serves as a training ground on which the Christian learns patience, fidelity, and sacrifice. By loving a friend (or a spouse) well, Newman argued, one acquires the habits necessary to love all in God. As before, Newman warned against absolutising such loves: affections must be subordinated to conscience and principle, which alone lead us towards God.

#### 4.4 Emotion in Suffering and Consolation

John Henry Newman's theology of the emotions is perhaps most vividly expressed in his reflections on chastisement. In his sermon *Peace and Joy amid Chastisement* (preached 12 June 1836), he explored the paradoxical emotional state of the believer who lives under both the light of grace and the shadow of judgement. Newman called this condition *a double state*, a paradox common in Christian experience, in which contradictory emotions coexist – fear and trust, sorrow and joy, consolation and apprehension (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8).

Central to Newman's account is the interpretation of punishment. Divine chastisement is never mere rejection, but is "overruled to be a healing medicine as

well as a punishment. Thus, 'in wrath' He 'remembers mercy.'" (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8) The believer's emotional response should therefore be neither resentment nor despair, but acceptance of God's hand as a Father's discipline. He similarly acknowledged fear, but it is enveloped in gratitude and submission.

Newman's most distinctive contribution lies in his description of the serious Christian's inner condition. Such a believer knows the consolations of grace – "his being allowed to attend God's ordinances, his being enabled in a measure to do his duty, his perception of Gospel truths" – yet is haunted by the memory of past sins. This produces what Newman calls a *duality of feeling*: "two feelings at once, not at all inconsistent with each other, one of present enjoyment, another of undefined apprehension; and on looking on to the Day of Judgment, hope and fear both rise within him." (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8)

Theologically, this dual state resists two distortions: despair, which denies God's present favour, and pride, which presumes without justification that past sins are completely forgiven. Psychologically, the rejection of these two distortions represents a mature emotional attitude: peace without complacency, sorrow without paralysis. Newman contended that this tension must be maintained, because it preserves the humility of the soul and dependence on God's mercy. (*PS*, Vol. 4, sermon no. 8)

Newman was especially wary of equating strong feelings with forgiveness. "Where does Scripture tell us that such an assurance... comes from God?" (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8) he asked, challenging the claim that sorrow, contrition, or relief prove absolution. Repentance is not a single emotional event but takes a lifelong self-discipline: "Is it enough to say, 'I am sorry?'" (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8)

The danger is that believers, mistaking emotion for reality, may fall into presumption or disappointment when feelings fade. Hence Newman urged perseverance in prayer and patient waiting. This is also why the Church continues to pray "forgive us all that is past" in the Eucharistic confession. Were sins fully and finally erased at the moment of contrition, such prayers would be redundant. Their persistence testifies to the believer's ongoing burden of memory and the necessity of continued penitence. Emotion, therefore, is not dismissed but chastened: contrition is real and valuable, yet it must be joined with humility, vigilance, and perseverance. (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8)

How, then, is the believer sustained in this double state? Newman's answer is through worship and prayer. "It is plainly our duty to make the most of our time of grace; to be earnest and constant in deprecating God's wrath; to do all we can to please Him; to bring Him of our best, not as if it had any intrinsic merit, but because it is our best." (*PS*, Vol. 4, Sermon no. 8) Here emotions are re-ordered by liturgical time: patient repetition, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession form the heart into endurance.

## 4.5 The Dangers of Sentimental Religion

Nineteenth-century religion was closely allied with social refinement. Courtesy, benevolence, and good taste became the markers of moral virtue (Knitter 2002); conscience itself was displaced by “the so-called moral sense” or the calculation of expediency. Newman objected most strongly to the aestheticization of emotion: vice was rejected as “out of taste,” not because it offended God. The natural affections of sympathy and benevolence were cultivated, while holy fear, zeal for truth, and hatred of sin were dismissed as “bigotry” or “excess of zeal.” The emotional life is thus flattened into cheerfulness and propriety, while the darker and more searching affections – compunction, awe, trembling before divine majesty – were banished (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 24)

In sermon *The Religion of the Day* (preached 26 August 1832), Newman was keen to expose how this counterfeit religion misuses emotion to lull the conscience. By denying the stern declarations of Scripture – “strait is the gate and narrow the way” (Matt 7:14) – it produced a religion that seemed “pleasant and easy.” Newman observed that excitement replaced repentance; novelty was sought in preachers, systems, and doctrines to satisfy a cultivated but restless taste. In Newman’s view, these were signs of emotional craving and shallowness. They mirrored the “false peace” of Jonah asleep in the storm, not the “peace of God which passeth all understanding” enjoyed by Christ as He slept in the boat. Emotion here became the very instrument of deception: a dream of religion, not its substance. (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 24)

Newman identified two groups particularly susceptible to the world’s religion. First were those with millennial hopes, who confused the refinement of civilisation with the kingdom of Christ. Eager for visible progress, they “sacrificed Truth to expedience” and welcomed even anti-Christian reformers as heralds of Christ’s reign. Their emotions awakened visions of peace and improvement, but for all their enthusiasm, they lacked the sound conscience needed to protect them. (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 24)

The second group were rationalists, who rejected religious fear altogether. For them, natural theology sufficed: the heavens declared God’s benevolence, and religion became little more than gratitude for creation. Such men “discard gloomy views of religion” interpret judgment texts as obsolete, and interpret “rejoice evermore” as a licence for comfortable optimism. Their emotional life is shaped entirely by cheerfulness and self-assurance. Newman warned that this emotional posture is doubly dangerous: it silenced conscience and blinded the heart to the gravity of sin. (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 24)

Against this counterfeit, Newman insisted on recovering what he called “the dark side of religion.” By this he did not mean superstition or cruelty, but the emotional disciplines of fear, compunction, and awe before God’s majesty. He even declared that it “would be a gain to this country, were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, fiercer in its religion, than at present it shows itself to be” (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 24). Though such tempers are undesirable in themselves, they are at least closer to true religion than the false calm of the world. Better to fear like the

sailors in Jonah's storm than to sleep in self-deception. Emotionally, the trembling of superstition is more promising than the tranquil indifference of refined unbelief.

The true emotional posture, Newman concluded, is a balance of fear and love: "Fear and love must go together; always fear, always love, to your dying day." (*PS*, Vol. 1, Sermon no. 24) Without the fear of God, joy is premature and shallow. This discipline of fear purifies, leading to resignation, humility, and calm surrender to God's will. True Christian emotion, then, is not the shallow serenity of the age but the paradoxical peace of those who both tremble and trust.

## 5. Discussion

Looking at the sermons analysed, we can conclude that Newman offers neither repression nor romanticism of emotions and feelings. Instead, he integrates them into a fourfold pattern: validated in Christ, included and nurtured within the Church, disciplined by liturgy into equanimity, and guided under conscience.

It is not surprising that Newman's conclusions on emotions and feelings draw upon his personal experiences. First, his warning against feverish religious emotion can be traced to his own conversion to Anglican Calvinism at the age of 15. At this time, his spirituality became strongly characterised by Evangelical rigour: a strong commitment to regular Bible reading, prayer, moral seriousness, evangelistic concern, and an ongoing search for assurance of salvation (Ryle 1874, 134–141; Bebbington 1989, 2–19; Noll 2003, 122–227). At the same time, he became very fervent in his religious emotions, emphasising holiness and sin, which unfortunately culminated in a crisis in 1821. It took several years before Newman moderated his religious emotions (*AW.*, 165–166).

Second, when discussing religion becoming merely an aesthetic aspect of society, Newman was actually referring to the governmental reforms in England and Ireland from the late 1820s, which weakened the established Church's role in public life. His view on the actions of the government and its relationship with the Church and religion in general is perhaps best summarised in a letter to Simeon Lloyd Pope (1802–1855), written on 9 April 1832:

"This I think pretty clear – that the present reign of Whiggery cannot last – the notion is an absurdity. When good and evil fight together, Tories and Radicals come into the field – but Whigs are neither fish, flesh, nor fowl – and have no resting place – their whole view is a supercilious theory – their policy is liberalism, and their basis Socinianism – they have no root in the heart Superstition may last for ages, and true religion, and Manicheism, and fanaticism – any thing that has depth and reality in it – but as to that cold and scoffing theory, which says there is no great evil in the world, affects non-chalance, and says all religions are about the same, nothing can come of it – it is a shortlived dream." (John Henry Newman to Simeon Lloyd Pope, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1832, *LD III*, 42)

Third, Newman's commitment to living according to Christ's teachings shaped his theology of emotion. Whether as priest, Oriel fellow, or Oratorian, he sought to put religion and faith first. From adolescence onwards he endured many trials—from the deaths of close family and friends to conflicts with the University colleges and accusations surrounding the Oxford Movement.

From this, three important implications emerge. First, Newman offers a Christological affect-theology that legitimises emotion without making it sovereign; assumed by the Word, emotions are capable of sanctification but require constant formation. Second, he provides an ecclesial and liturgical pedagogy for the affections (Towey 2020): common prayer and sacrament do not suppress feeling but guide it towards equanimity. This is directly relevant to pastoral practice in contexts tempered either by perpetual revivalism or by polite indifference. Third, Newman located the origin and direction of religious emotion in conscience (as developed in *Grammar of Assent*). Here, he supplied a moral psychology:

“Who is it that he sees in solitude in darkness in the hidden chambers of his heart If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world the Object to which his perception is directed must be Supernatural and Divine and thus the phenomena of Conscience as a dictate avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a Supreme Governor a Judge holy just powerful all seeing retributive and is the creative principle of religion as the Moral Sense is the principle of ethics.” (Newman 1903, 111)

With this, Newman's warning against mistaking feelings for faith does not reduce emotion to *nothing*; rather, it aligns with contemporary accounts in which affections support rational assent when rightly ordered. (Aquino and Gage 2020)

In summary, for Newman, emotions are both sanctified in Christ and sustained within the living body of Christ, the Church, and its communion. The *communio sanctorum* enables believers to share their burdens and joys with one another, so that sympathy becomes a concrete expression of ecclesial life. As many scholars have observed, Newman's ecclesiology is deeply personalist: he often described the Church as a family or a home for the heart, where affective bonds mirror and mediate divine charity. Moreover, he consistently taught that the Church's worship and sacraments serve to cultivate and discipline “holy” emotions, providing the framework within which the affections are purified and directed towards God (Christie 2009; Heft 1997). In this way, Newman affirms the centrality of emotion for Christian existence and also situates it firmly within Christological and ecclesial structures.

## 6. Conclusion

Our research has shown that Newman placed emotions and feelings not merely as mediators but also at the centre and foundation of a Christian's personal and ecclesial life. In this way, he articulated a vision for Christians that is affectively

rich yet spiritually steady: a middle path that affirms emotion as a genuine *locus* of divine encounter, while warning against its instability when detached from principle, worship, and moral responsibility.

In doing so, Newman contributes to contemporary theological reflection on emotion by offering a Christological and ecclesiological grounding for the affections, a pastoral pedagogy of worship that shapes feeling into endurance, and a moral psychology that interprets conscience as the creative principle of religion.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that, in Newman's theology, emotions are inextricably linked to the relationship with God. As Hoegemann (2008) observed, in Newman's words, a human being "is not sufficient for his own happiness: he is not happy except the Presence of God be with him... he has a void within him which needs filling, and he knows not how to fill it." He made his congregation aware of the fact that the soul receives pleasure through a person's affections as the body does through the channels of its senses. The saint ultimately reminded them that "He alone is sufficient for the heart who made it." (Hoegemann 2008)

## Abbreviations

AW – Newman 1956 [*Autobiographical Writings*].

LD – Newman 1979 [*Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*].

PS – Newman 1834; 1835; 1836; 1839; 1940 [*Parochial Sermons*].

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