As Beautiful as Fiction and as Real as Fact: Saints in the Theological Imagination of John Henry Newman

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Midway through his own life's journey, J. R. R. Tolkien penned a short story entitled "Leaf by Niggle," a story about a "little man called Niggle, who had a journey to make." Niggle is an artist, and the story focuses on one of his paintings—a tree in which he becomes wholly invested. While Niggle delights in his tree, he cannot shake the feeling that it is still somehow incomplete. It was to him "very lovely," and indeed "the really only beautiful picture in the world," and yet it still seemed "wholly unsatisfactory."[1] Niggle gets sick after trying to help his neighbor, Parish, in the cold and rain, and while bedridden he is visited by an Inspector who tells him it is time for him to begin his "journey." Niggle is taken to a Workhouse Infirmary—an imaginative Purgatory—where he is tasked with various sorts of manual labor. After the Council finds in Niggle a gesture of kindness, he is permitted to pass on to the next stage—this time not an infirmary, but a sunny, green countryside. As Niggle is riding through the landscape toward the station that will presumably take him to his Destination, he is struck by the sight of something. Stunned, he falls off his bike.

> Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished. If you could say that of a Tree that was *alive*, its leaves opening, its branches growing and

[1] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 95.

> bending in the wind that Niggle had often felt or guessed and had so often failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide. "It's a gift!" he said. He was referring to his art, and also the result; but he was using the word quite literally. He went on looking at the Tree. All the leaves he had ever laboured at were there, as he imagined them rather than as he made them; and there were others that had only budded in his mind, and many that might have budded if he had had time.[2]

Niggle's friend, Parish, soon arrives in the countryside. At first he does not recognize where he is, and he inquires of his guide. "Don't you know?" said the man. "It's Niggle's Country. It's Niggle's Picture."[3] Parish had seen Niggle's painting, but in his past life he had regarded it only as "Niggle's Nonsense." "But it did not look like this then," says Parish, "not *real*." "No," the guide replies. "It was only a glimpse then, but you might have caught the glimpse, if you had ever thought it worth while to try."[4]

I open with Tolkien's story because I find in Niggle's painting a remarkable illustration of John Henry Newman's theology of sainthood. The governing principle that drives "a great portion" of Newman's thought and teaching—namely *analogy*—is thoroughly at work in both Tolkien's story and Newman's hagiographic writings. In his *Apologia*, Newman recounts how the turn toward analogy marked a critical moment in his theological development and ultimate conversion. Whereas his earliest religious sentiments were marked by a deep "mistrust of the reality of material phenomena,"[5] encountering Joseph Butler and the writings of the Church Fathers resolved this suspicion in young Newman and opened up for him a new world. The doctrine of analogy, Newman writes, "leads to the conclusion that the system which is of less importance is economically and sacramentally connected with the more momentous system."[6] This turn was not a mere notional, intellectual shift, but rather reflected a deep, *imaginative* shift; it entailed for Newman a fundamental reorientation vis-a-vis reality. The material, visible world was no longer (as Newman spoke of in an earlier sermon) "a *mere* screen between us and God" (Parish's "Niggle's Nonsense").[7] Quite the contrary: on the basis of the sacramental,

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2 Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 109–10.
3 Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 114.
4 Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 115.
5 John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 25.
6 Newman, *Apologia*, 30.
7 John Henry Newman, "The Immortality of the Soul" (1833), in *Parochial and Plain*

analogical principle, the exterior, visible, and historical world is now seen as the "manifestation to our senses of realities greater than itself."[8]

Something like Niggle's painting becoming a living tree is at work in Newman's theology of the Saints, and like with Tolkien, analogy is Newman's driving principle. There is a *continuity* between Niggle's picture and the tree he meets before his passage into Paradise that mirrors the continuity between the natural life of a human being and the supernatural life of a Saint. The tree *is* Niggle's tree, but it *finished*—it is *alive*. Everything that Niggle painted—every leaf and piece of bark, in all its concreteness—is there, but it is, as Parish came to see, more *real*. Similarly, Newman states that the Saints have all the same "thoughts, feelings, frames of mind, attractions, sympathies, antipathies, of other men, so far as they are not sinful," only they have these properties of human nature "purified, sanctified, and exalted."[9] In a statement that well encapsulates his broader vision, Newman reflects on the impression that Saints have on those who read about them: "Their actions are as beautiful as fiction, yet as real as fact."[10] Saints strike us as beautiful—even almost fictitious—because they are *otherworldly*; they live transcendent, heavenly lives. And yet, at the same, they are exceptionally *worldly*—they live in human history, retaining all their human particularities, and for this reason, Newman writes, the Saints are as real as fact.

Like Niggle's tree, the Saint expands our vision of reality. Just as Niggle saw things in the tree he had never imagined, so too are the acts of the Saints "an opening of the heavens, a sudden gleam of supernatural brightness across the sky." Newman suggests that they "*enlarge* the mind with ideas it *had not before*, and they show to the multitude what God can do,

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Sermons [*PPS*] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 20. It is worth noting that, in this sermon, Newman speaks in precisely the terms he will later say the doctrine of analogy saved him from: namely, that the material world is ultimately unreal and when we are weaned from it we begin "to perceive that there are only two beings in the whole universe, our soul, and the God who made it" (17). The Catholic Newman will later call out this sentiment. He described that early outlook as "isolating from the objects which surrounded me, in confirming in me my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thought of two and only absolutely two and luminously self evident beings, myself and my creator" (*Apologia*, 25).

8 Newman, *Apologia*, 43.

9 John Henry Newman, "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," in *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* [*SPVO*] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 93.

10 John Henry Newman, "Saintliness the Standard Christian Principle," in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* [*DMC*] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 99.

and what man can be."[11] It is, in fact, the Saints' simultaneous likeness and unlikeness to us that constitutes the paradox of our attraction to them. As Newman states in the *Grammar of Assent*, "the more keenly we feel our own distance from holy persons, the more we are drawn near to them, as if forgetting that distance, and proud of them because they are so unlike ourselves, as being specimens of what our nature may be, and with some vague hope that we, their relations by blood, may profit in our own persons by their holiness."

Cardinal John Henry Newman was canonized Saint John Henry Newman on October 13, 2019. Newman thought deeply about the Saints, and his writings are permeated with the fruits of this contemplation. A thorough reconstruction of Newman's theology of the Saints is, to my knowledge, yet to be written.[12] While I do not presume to execute such a project here, I hope to lay the groundwork by pulling together in one place Newman's key insights about the Saints. I will begin by fleshing out a bit more the principle of analogy and how it operates in Newman's thought. We will then visit the key discourses where Newman explicitly sketches his vision of Saints and Sainthood. I will conclude by considering how Newman understood the place or *effect* of the Saints in the Church and in the world.

First Principles: The Incarnation and Analogy

As stated above, Newman regarded analogy as one of the chief principles that underlined all his teaching. If Newman saw reality according to the principle of analogy, it is because he was looking *along* the reality of the Incarnation. The Incarnation, Newman tells us, "is the central truth of the gospel, and the source whence we are to draw out its principles."[13] In his essay on doctrinal development, Newman identifies nine principles of Christian teaching that are rooted in the dogma of the Incarnation—four of which are crucial to understanding his theology of the Saints. The first of these—and the one that upholds the other four—is the principle of analogy. Newman explains, "the doctrine of the Incarnation is the

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11 Newman, "Saintliness," 99–100.

12 The two pieces I know deal with Newman and holiness/sanctity are Jennifer Newsome Martin, "Sainthood as Selfhood: The Dramatic Art of Becoming Holy," *Newman Studies Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 5–22, and Cyril O'Regan, "John Henry Newman and the Argument of Holiness," *Newman Studies Journal* 9. no. 1 (2012): 52–74.

13 John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 324.

announcement of a divine gift conveyed in a material and visible medium, its being thus that heaven and earth are in the Incarnation united. That is, it establishes in the very idea of Christianity the *sacramental* principle as its characteristic."[14] The Incarnation gives Christianity its characteristic principle—the same analogical principle that young Newman discovered in Butler and the Fathers. It states that the visible material world is not unreal, but rather—as revealed in and through the Incarnation—the very medium of grace and the divine life.

This primary, sacramental principle upholds the other three principles, all of which concern the relationship between the natural and supernatural, and therefore all bear directly on Newman's doctrine of the Saints. (1) There is the principle of sanctifying grace, namely that it is the Lord's intention in his Incarnation to "make us what He is Himself." (2) It establishes the principle of asceticism: through mortification, the lower nature can be *elevated* and *changed* into a higher nature. And finally, (3) the Incarnation teaches not only that matter is an essential part of our human nature, but that it, as well as mind, "is *capable of sanctification.*"[15]

The principle of analogy establishes for Newman the very grammar of his theological thought. This is reflected in his two major essays—*The Development of Doctrine* and *The Grammar of Assent*—both of which rely in their argumentation on the movement from the earthly and natural to the heavenly and supernatural. Working along this principle of analogy, Newman builds his essay on doctrinal development around the image of organic development. Likewise, his treatment of religious assent and certainty is built on establishing a likeness to the certitudes we hold in our everyday, secular existence. Similarly, in all Newman's writings on the Saints—whether speaking about Saints in general or constructing the life narrative of a Saint—Newman is remarkably consistent in following this grammar, beginning with the concrete reality of human nature.

As Real as Fact: Hewn from the Rock of Adam

The pre-conversion Newman was mindful of the Saints. He was weary of potential superstitions, but in an 1831 sermon on All Saints Day, Newman preached that the observation of certain Saints' days should not despised. "The peculiar benefit to be derived" from such celebrations "lies in their

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[14] Newman, *Essay on the Development*, 325.

[15] Newman, *Essay on the Development*, 326.

setting before the mind patterns of excellence for us to follow."[16] In an 1837 sermon titled "The Communion of Saints," Newman stressed the invisible unity the Church has throughout time and space by virtue of the shared "principle of life"—the Holy Spirit. He concludes the sermon with a warning that, although this invisible union is real, we are restrained from such invocations of her members "as are unhappily so common in other Christian countries."[17] Newman states that the Church is only a channel of God's gifts sacramentally, not as an agent, nor in her members one by one: "St. Paul does not say that we are brought near to this saint or that saint, but all together."[18] Newman will later invert this assumption. For the Catholic Newman, as we shall see, it is through knowing a specific Saint in his or her concrete particularity that we are drawn to and know the Saints all together. While the Catholic Newman will see invocations of Saints as true and holy, and while he will later encourage devotion and attention to Saints in their particular persons, one key insistence unites both the Catholic and Anglican Newman: "We are sons of sinful Adam as well as they."[19]

A discourse titled "Men, Not Angels, the Priests of the Gospel," written around 1849, takes up this theme. Newman opens with a meditation on Christ's nativity—announced by the angel Gabriel and attended to by Holy Mary and Saintly Joseph. Surely it would be suitable, given that Christ was sinless, that his ministers likewise be sinless: "Angels alone are fit to preach the birth, the death, the suffering of God."[20] And yet it was not so. "He sent forth your brethren, not beings of some unknown nature and some strange blood, but of your own bone and your own flesh to preach to you." These men, he insists, are our kin: "the same by nature, differing only in grace, . . . with the same human heart, the same wayward heart: differing only as the power of God has changed and rules it."[21] Taking the first Apostles as his point of departure, Newman expands his reflection to apply to the whole history of Saints. "Ponder this truth well, my brethren: . . . Among the Preachers . . . there have been Apostles, there have been Martyrs, there have been Doctors—Saints in plenty among them; yet out of them all,

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16 Newman, "Use of Saints' Days," in *PPS*, 480.
17 John Henry Newman, "The Communion of Saints," in *PPS*, 848.
18 Newman, "The Communion of Saints," 848.
19 Henry Newman, "Use of Saints' Days," 482.
20 John Henry Newman, "Men, Not Angels, the Priests of the Gospel," in *DMC*, 44.
21 Newman, "Men, Not Angels," 45.

high as has been their sanctity, varied their graces, awful their gifts, there is not one of them who did not begin with old Adam."[22]

Newman condenses "the whole history of the Saints" (excluding the Blessed Mother) into one statement: "Grace has vanquished nature."[23] Everyone else—the soul that would become the most glorious Saint and the most obdurate reprobate—came from the same stock. Both are born into original sin, and both would continue willfully in sin, "but for the vistings of an unmerited supernatural influence upon it, which did for it what it could not do for itself."[24] Newman narrates the Saint's "biography"—how God, principally through the mercy of the Sacraments, leads one over the course of her life from earth to heaven. We get a litany of different "conquests" of grace, including above all Saint Augustine, who by God's providence (and the prayers of his mother) had his "attention arrested" by Saint Ambrose. Saint Augustine had his conflicts with the flesh, but "God's grace was sweeter far, . . . and he who without it would have lived and died a child of the devil, became under its wonderworking power, an oracle of sanctity and truth."[25] To Saint Augustine Newman adds Saints Agnes, Aloysius, Rose, and Stanislas—all unique in their gifts but common in their nature and origin.

Like Niggle's neighbor, Parish, who never imagined so magnificent a tree could come from Niggle's "nonsense" painting, the world, Newman suggests, cannot understand the Saint. "Men of the world," he explains, "know the power of nature; they know not, experience not, believe not, the power of God's grace." Furthermore, "since they are not themselves acquainted with any power that can overcome nature, they think that none exists."[26] The world cannot comprehend a sanctified human nature because most people lack the sacramental, analogical vision that sees the natural, sensible world as a manifestation of realities greater than itself. As we saw above, the principle of analogy, rooted in the reality of the Incarnation, reveals that human nature—matter and mind—can be elevated to participate in the divine. These natural realities can by grace become *more* than they are, and yet they never cease to be what they are. While we can never lose sight of the natural, sensible world, if we are trapped by a purely immanent frame of vision, we will miss what is truly there in the sensible. Parish is told he might have caught a glimpse of the *real* tree if only he had

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22 Newman, "Men, Not Angels," 48.
23 Newman, "Men, Not Angels," 49.
24 Newman, "Men, Not Angels," 50.
25 Newman, "Men, Not Angels," 55.
26 Newman, "Men, Not Angels," 58.

thought it worthwhile to look long enough at Niggle's painting. To see how this plays out in Newman's theology of the Saints, we turn to his discourses on Saint Paul, and what he identifies as Paul's "Characteristic gift."

In 1857, Newman preached a sermon for the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. He opens with the remark that all the Saints, "from the beginning of history to the end," resemble each other in a few key characteristics: their excellence is supernatural, their deeds are heroic, their merits are extraordinary and prevailing, their lives are marked by penance, and they are all choice patterns of the theological virtues.[27] Yet Newman further distinguishes the Saints into two categories—a twofold classification he will later revisit, as we will see below. On the one hand, there are those Saints who are so absorbed in the divine life that they "seem even while they are in the flesh, to have no part in earth or human nature; but they think, speak, and act under views, affections, and motives simply supernatural."[28] These are those rare and glorious Saints who live an almost angelic existence—think of those who are miraculously preserved from starvation or subsist only on the Eucharist. On the other hand, Newman identifies a second class of Saints. These are those who, with the first class, belong to the highest order of sanctity, yet in whom the "supernatural combines with the nature, instead of superseding it—invigorating it, elevating it, ennobling it; and who are not the less men, because they are saints."[29] Of this class Saint Paul is emblematic.

The distinguishing mark of Saint Paul—that characteristic by which we recognize him from others—is that "in him the fulness of divine gifts does not tend to destroy what is human in him, but to spiritualize and perfect it."[30] Newman finds this doctrine in Saint Paul's own writings. "We would not be *unclothed*," he says, but "clothed *upon*, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor 5:4). Thus, in St. Paul, Newman finds a living icon who reveals in a concrete manner how grace works in and upon human nature. "In him, his human nature, his human affections, his human gifts, were possessed and glorified by a new and heavenly life."[31]

Every part of human nature—intellect and will, passions and emotions—becomes the material out of which God makes a Saint. Again, analogy is at work: "You present a green branch to the sheep; fruits are offered to the child, and he is drawn; in that he runs, he is drawn by loving,

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27 John Henry Newman, "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," in *SPVO*, 91.
28 Newman, "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," 92 (emphasis mine).
29 Newman, "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," 92.
30 Newman, "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," 95.
31 Newman, "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," 95.

. . . drawn by the bond of the heart."[32] Likewise, the Father draws a soul by giving him a sight of Christ. God takes the soul as he is and uses him against himself—"He turns his affections into another channel and extinguishes a carnal love by infusing a heavenly charity."[33]

Crucially though, like Niggle's tree, while the person is *changed*, God "violates in nothing that original constitution of mind which He gave to Man." All of man's powers are appealed to: reason, moral sense, conscience, fear, and love. The only difference is the animating principle by which the soul is kindled and sustained, and that is the "flame of charity."[34]

Newman relates the "deservedly praised" line from a heathen poet: "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto" ("I am a man, nothing human is without interest to me"). In the person of Saint Paul, "the fulness of meaning" of this poem, "which a heathen could not understand," is revealed. Saint Paul spoke "human things" and spoke them "as a man" and "according to man"; that is, "human nature, the common nature of the whole race of Adam, spoke in him, acted in him." At the same time, Saint Paul spoke with an "energetic presence, with a sort of bodily fulness, always under the sovereign command of divine grace, but losing none of its real freedom and power because of its subordination."[35]

The heathen spoke well when he said that "nothing human is without interest to me," but that poet could not grasp the full meaning of his own poem because he did not grasp the full meaning of *humanity*—all that truly belongs to human nature is revealed and actualized only by divine grace. As Newman insists, the Saints have all the natural human thoughts, feelings, attractions, yet by grace they are "purified, sanctified, and exalted." Like Niggle's tree, which kept all its characteristics and yet became more real, the Saints are made "more eloquent, more poetical, more profound, more intellectual, by reason of their being more holy."[36]

For the Catholic Newman, while science working in and for itself reaches truth in the abstract, the "living mind" aims at the real, and therefore seeks "truth in the concrete."[37] Newman did not approach the Saints by contemplating sanctity in the abstract; he learned about sanctity and the Saints by contemplating a particular Saint. Newman set before him

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[32] John Henry Newman, "Purity and Love," in *DMC*, 71.

[33] Newman, "Purity and Love," 68.

[34] Newman, "Purity and Love," 72.

[35] Newman, "Purity and Love," 95–96.

[36] Newman, "Purity and Love," 93.

[37] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of the Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 223.

Saint Paul as "the wonderful work of God's creative grace mercifully presented to our inspection." In "aiming at things," in this case the great Apostle, Newman draws out truths about the Communion of Saints as a whole.[38] Thus, when Newman identifies a "characteristic gift" and "distinguishing mark" of a Saint this in no way isolates that Saint from the others, nor does it establish any hint of competition. Identifying what is characteristic about a Saint does *distinguish* that Saint from the others. In a paradoxical manner it simultaneously *reveals* something about those others: the separation, as it often does, becomes the link. Saint Paul is a concrete image of the principles identified above—that by virtue of the Incarnation, human nature, both matter and mind, is capable of sanctification. In the Incarnation, Christ reveals his will to make us "what He is Himself." As one sharing in everything belonging to human nature, Saint Paul—like Our Lord—is as "real as fact." And yet, in revealing how that earthly nature is elevated to something heavenly, Saint is Paul is likewise "as beautiful as fiction."

Beautiful as Fiction: The Lily and the Rose

In his sermon on Saint Paul, Newman opened by identifying Saints under two classes—those who are so absorbed in the divine life that they seem to wholly transcend their human nature, and those in whom nature and grace work wondrously together in harmony.[39] A few years later, Newman revisits this theme, this time slightly modified and expanded. Still committed to beginning with the concrete, Newman puts before us John the Evangelist and the Apostle Simon Peter. These two Saints represent for Newman "two special manifestations of divine grace in the human heart"—love and purity.[40] As he insisted when speaking of Saint Paul's characteristic gift, Newman again here reminds us that every Saint possesses each of the virtues. Peter was pure in all his loving and John was loving in all his purity. This is because purity and love always work in tandem: "Purity prepares the soul for love, and love confirms the soul in purity."[41] Purity without love is icy, while the flame of love is dim unless the substance which feeds

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38 The world of concrete things perceptible to the senses is always for Newman the proper starting place. "Aim at things," Newman wrote in an 1839 Advent sermon, "and your words will be right without aiming" ("Unreal Words," in *PPS*, 986).

39 Of course, in the former, their human nature is retained, and in the latter human nature is also transcended.

40 Newman, "Purity and Love," 62.

41 Newman, "Purity and Love," 63.

it is pure and unadulterated. While every Saint lives according to love and purity, "it pleases the Giver of grace to endue His Saints specially with certain gifts, for his glory, which light up and beautify one particular portion or department of their souls, so as to cast their excellences into the shade."[42] This gift becomes that characteristic gift by which we recognize and admire the Saint. With Saints John and Peter as his representatives, Newman revisits his two classes, this time under the emblems of the lily and the rose—"those who are bright with angelic purity" and those "who burn with divine love."[43]

Before speaking about the Beloved Disciple, Newman honors his namesake, "the Holy Baptist." Together the two Saint Johns—Saints emblematic of the lily—constitute the two "great instances of the Angelic life." Newman draws our attention to the unique purity that belongs to John the Baptist. Along with Jesus Christ and Our Lady, it is only John the Baptist whose nativity is observed by Mother Church—"nothing unholy does the Church celebrate." Every other Saint, however glorious he or she would become, was born in sin. It was the unique prerogative of the Forerunner to be purified in his mother's womb "as soon as Christ, his Lord and Saviour, came to him," and thus he shares with Our Lord and Lady a holy birth.[44] John the Baptist "left no act of sin on record. . . . Sanctity is the one idea of him impressed upon us from first to last."[45] He was hermit from his childhood, the baptizer of Our Lord, preacher to a fallen people, and finally a Martyr. "Yet still more beautiful," Newman suggest, "and almost as majestic" is the Beloved Disciple. "Greatly to be honored," the Church says, "is blessed John, who on the Lord's Breast lay at supper, to whom, a virgin, did Christ on the Cross commit his Virgin Mother."[46]

Emblematized by the lily, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist are representatives those of Saints characterized above all by purity. This is that class of Saints mentioned earlier by Newman—those who, "almost absorbed in the Godhead," live an "angelic life, as far as man could lead one."[47] This class of Saints—to which Newman adds Saints Joseph, Anthony the Great, and Catherine of Siena, and to which we may include the Little Flower—lived in a "world of their own, uniform, serene, abiding

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42 Newman, "Purity and Love," 63.

43 Newman, "Purity and Love," 63.

44 Newman, "Purity and Love," 64. John the Baptist, unlike Mary, still contracted original sin in his conception, but it was "wiped away from his soul" at the Visitation.

45 Newman, "Purity and Love," 65.

46 Newman, "Purity and Love," 65.

47 Newman, "Purity and Love," 67.

in visions of peace."[48] These are those Saints whom God has defended from sin, "sometimes in a miraculous way," since their youth. Newman speaks of them as "patterns of sanctity" rather than of love, for the sole reason that, while lovers seek an external object, these Saints were granted to receive Christ into their own breasts. Their hearts did not so much seek heaven as they were "themselves a heaven;" they did not so much *see* light as they *were* light.[49]

The other class of Saints Newman identifies are those represented by the rose—those whose principal characteristic is charity. Often these are Saints whom grace has regained from sin. They are those who have misused their talents and quenched the grace given to them. Some may have been under false opinions, indulgent passions, or obstinate habits. They are those who "have served Satan, not as infants before their baptism, but with their will, . . . with their faculties responsible, and their hearts alive and conscious."[50] Here Newman returns to an earlier theme: grace perfects nature; it does not destroy nature. When God reclaims these souls, he draws them "by the cords of Adam, . . . conquering us indeed at His will, saving us in spite of ourselves—and yet by ourselves." Grace perfects nature because the very reason and affections of the old Adam which had been made "instruments of iniquity" are now under grace converted to become "instruments of justice unto God."[51]

While he does not state it explicitly, Newman uses the lily and the rose to imaginatively recast the traditional distinction between the contemplative and the active life.[52] In John the Baptist and John the Evangelist (lilies), charity dwells as a principle of preservation; their love is "so contemplative as almost to resolve itself into the sanctity of God Himself."[53] In this second class of Saints, charity dwells as a principle of recovery. These Saints are marked by a different sort of fervor. Their love is "so full of devotion, of zeal, of activity, and good works, that it gives a visible character to their history."[54] If John the Evangelist is emblematic of the lily, Saint Peter is the rose: "St. John beholds, and St. Peter acts."[55]

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48 Newman, "Purity and Love," 66.

49 Newman, "Purity and Love," 67.

50 Newman, "Purity and Love," 68.

51 Newman, "Purity and Love," 69.

52 While it is traditional to associate John with the contemplative life and Peter with the active (for example in Augustine), I do not know whether there is precedent to do the same with the lily and the rose, or whether that is a contribution by Newman.

53 Newman, "Purity and Love," 72.

54 Newman, "Purity and Love," 72.

55 Newman, "Purity and Love," 73.

To Saint Peter, Newman adds Saints Paul, Augustine, and Ignatius of Loyola. They are each "saints of penance of love," and while the lilies are bright with charity, the roses burn. We find in St. Paul "a love fervent, eager, energetic, active, full of great works, 'strong as death,' . . . a flame which 'many waters could not quench, nor streams drown.'"[56] Mary Magdalene is especially representative of this class, and Newman dedicates a significant portion of the discourse to her. She is "the woman who was a sinner," and yet she was the one who found her place at Christ's feet. "She looks and she recognizes the Ancient of Days, the Lord of life and death, her Judge; and again she looks and she sees in His face and in His mien a beauty, and a sweetness, awful, serene, majestic, more than of the sons of men, which paled all the splendour of that festive room."[57] What is written of Mary Magdalene becomes the testimony of those represented by the rose, "Many sins are forgiven her, for she loved much." In the Saints of penance, love becomes "a wound in the soul, so full of desire as to become anguish."[58] As Newman summarizes: "Love is the life of both [the lily and the rose]: but while the love of the innocent is calm and serene, the love of penitent is ardent and impetuous, commonly engaged in the contest with the world."[59]

We must be careful in understanding Newman's meaning when he speaks about the Saints being in "contest" with the world. He does not mean "the world" as representative of all created reality, but only what is sinful in the world. This is critical: for Newman, a Saint's otherworldliness allows her, paradoxically, to live *more* in the world. Remember that the Saints are as beautiful as fiction but also as real as fact. We have already seen this at work earlier in Newman—the Saints are able to draw out the fullness of meaning in things that belong to the heathens. This is because, as Newman explains: "The world is to them a book, to which they are drawn for its own sake, which they read fluently, which interests them naturally—though, by the reason of the grace which dwells within them, they study it and hold converse with it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls."[60]

When Newman writes that the Saints can read the book of the world "fluently," he is not suggesting that grace will automatically make a Saint the equivalent to a PhD in any given field of study. Newman is stressing that holiness in no way diminishes the Saint's interest in anything belonging

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56 Newman, "Purity and Love," 75.
57 Newman, "Purity and Love," 76.
58 Newman, "Purity and Love," 78.
59 Newman, "Purity and Love," 79.
60 John Henry Newman "St. Paul's Characteristic Gift," 93.

to the "world" (so long as it is not sinful). The Saint will still need to put in all the natural effort of study and attention into whatever subject she is drawn. The Saints' holiness is, however, by no means irrelevant to their pursuits. Because the Saints have whatever gifts the natural man has, but in them they are "purified, sanctified, and exalted"; all their insights are "more profound, more intellectual, by virtue of their being more holy."[61] For this reason Newman will say of Saint Thomas Aquinas that he was "as holy as he was profound, or rather the more profound in theological science, because he was so holy."[62] For Newman, this *profundity* that the Saints possess—this depth of vision—stems from the fact that their eyes have been opened to the unseen realities as well as the seen. Like an illative sense for the spiritual world, they not only look at individual parts but can see the *whole*. This sense of the whole—this fluency—allows them in turn to "introduce us to the unseen world."[63]

Sanctity and Suffering

I opened with "Leaf by Niggle" because Tolkien provides a helpful framework through which one can better understand the analogy between the natural and supernatural that sustains Newman's vision of the Saints. The tree at the end of the story was Niggle's painting, and yet it was *finished* and *alive*. Likewise, the Saints in Newman's imagination are as real as fact (natural, worldly), and yet as beautiful as fiction (otherworldly, supernatural). In this final section I want to turn to another short story from a different twentieth-century Catholic writer. Flannery O'Connor's "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" is about a young girl who, like Niggle, is on a journey of sorts. It is also a story about what it means to be a Saint. O'Connor herself tells us that the story "all revolves around what is purity," which she regards as the "most mysterious of the virtues."

The young girl we meet at the beginning of the story, who remains unnamed, paces around her bedroom at night, pondering what she will become. She first thought she would be a doctor, then settles on an engineer. Finally, she decides she would have to be much more than both. "She would have to be a saint because that was the occupation that included everything you could know; and yet she knew she never would be saint."[64]

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61 Newman, "Purity and Love," 99.

62 Newman, "Saintliness," 99.

63 Newman, "Saintliness," 102.

64 Flannery O'Connor, "The Temple of the Holy Ghost," in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 243.

The child knew she could never be a Saint because, while she never stole or murdered anybody, "she was a born liar and slothful and she sassed her mother and was deliberately ugly to almost everybody." Above all, however, she was "eaten up" with pride, which she knew to be the worst sin. She determined she would never become a Saint, but she thought she still "could be a martyr if they killed her quick." At night the girl would prepare herself for martyrdom—of course not the hot oil; she could, however, take a bullet. More likely her persecutors would throw into a den of lions and one by one the lions would fall at her feet, converted. They would the try to burn her, but she won't burn. Finally, they cut off her head "very quickly." She never meets the One for whom she is supposedly spilling her blood. The child rehearses her martyrdom several times, "returning each time at the entrance of Paradise to the lions."[65]

Newman concludes his essay on the *Grammar of Assent* with a reflection on why Christianity spread so rapidly in the first three centuries (and why is still exists today). Many have attempted to rationalize this by assigning purely human explanations to the phenomenon, the most famous attempt in Newman's day being Edward Gibbon's "five causes."[66] Newman is not opposed to identifying a "cause" for conversions to Christianity, but he does not believe it can be explained in purely immanent terms. The Kingdom of Heaven, Newman tells us, is not won by the "force of arms or by other means of this world," but rather it is won by "sanctity and suffering."[67] While supernatural, Newman nevertheless regards it as a "fact" that the world was converted by the "single testimony" of the Apostles, Bishops, Apologists, and Martyrs"—the testimony of faith, hope, and love.[68]

If we look to the evidence, Newman insists, we find that people converted to Christianity not because of miracles or promises of immortality, but because its preachers "preached Christ."[69] Like Abraham, converts "see His day, and are glad."[70] Souls are converted because, through his preachers, Christ "imprints His image" on the minds of his subjects. It is the Image "of Him who fulfills the one great need of human nature, the Healer of its wounds, the Physician of the soul, this Image it is which both creates

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65 Connor, "The Temple of the Holy Ghost," 243.

66 They are their zeal, their doctrine of a future state, their claim to miraculous power, their virtues, and their ecclesiastical organization (Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 354).

67 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 353.

68 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 368.

69 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 358.

70 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 359.

faith, and then rewards it."[71] This imprinted Image of the Crucified is the "principle of conversion" for every soul that is reborn.[72] This same Image was also the "living principle" of the Martyrs' "obstinate resolve."[73]

Newman agrees with Tertullian that the "blood of the martyrs is their seed for their harvest,"[74] but theirs was not the kind of martyrdom imagined by the child in O'Connor's story. Her pseudo-martyrdom created a closed loop of self-interest, bringing her again and again back to the lions without her ever passing through the gates of Paradise. The child's arena dreams are, however, not the last word. At the end of the story the child's mother takes her to Mount Saint Scholastica for Adoration and Benediction. As the child is leaving the convent the old nun, Sister Perpetua (!) swoops down upon the little girl and "nearly smothered her in the black habit, mashing the side of her face into the crucifix hitched onto her belt."[75] It is the "living principle" that distinguishes the Martyr from the masochist. The girl knew she could not be a Saint, but thought she could be a Martyr "if they killed her quick." Both Newman and O'Connor remind us that the two cannot be separated. The child cannot be a Martyr until she—with Christ's Martyrs—is imprinted with the Image of the Crucified. The blood of the Martyrs does not witness to itself, but beyond itself to that imprinted Image. If the Martyrs looked for heaven, Newman writes, "it is because He is the Light of it."[76]

Recall why Newman set before us Saints Paul, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and the two Johns. It was to *distinguish* them from other Saints, but not to *isolate* them. For Newman, the particular—the concrete—reveals something about the universal. It does so, however, without sacrificing the special honor due to them in their particularity. Newman is drawn to the Martyrs because they reveal to us in the most vivid strokes what it looks like for one to be imprinted with the Image of the Crucified. In the conclusion to the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman asserts that Christianity "certainly has its foundations in past and glorious memories, but its *power* is in the present."[77] We do not contemplate it in "conclusions drawn from dumb documents and dead events, but by faith exercised in *ever-living objects*,

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71 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 359.
72 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 360.
73 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 369.
74 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 374.
75 O'Connor, "Temple," 248.
76 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 372.
77 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 376.

and by the appropriation and use of *ever-recurring gifts*."[78] Among those ever-living objects are the Saints, and among those ever-recurring gifts are their unique instantiations of that "one testimony": faith, love, and hope.

It was not the mere sight of the Martyr's blood that converted souls, but rather the Image whom the blood witnessed to. It was in humbling themselves "before a power which was founded on a mere *sense of the unseen*" that the Martyrs were rendered "strange" and both terrified and amazed their onlookers.[79] If the world cannot comprehend the Saint, it is for the same reason that those in the first three centuries could not comprehend the Martyrs. "Very various are the Saints" Newman writes, and "their variety is a token of God's workmanship."[80] In all their variety, the Saints are united in two things. Like Niggle's tree, they "enlarge the mind with ideas it had not before," revealing "what God can do, and what man can be." Like the child in O'Connor's "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," they are *imprinted* with the Image of the Crucified: Sanctity and suffering, the lily of purity and the rose of sacrificial love—beautiful as fiction and as real as fact.

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78 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 376.
79 Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 369.
80 Newman, "Saintliness," 101.