

Tomasz Szarliński Philosophy of language in the late writings of J. H. Newman

Newman in his criticism of this rationalistic view anticipated modern debate on the place and structure of language of faith. His two-fold answer to the liberalistic claim contained in a note from Philosophical Notebook entitled On economical representation and in a letter with the title On economy and reserve dispels the utopia of possibility of an epistemological distance to our faith narratives. In fact, they do constitute what we call “the state of things” and we cannot compare them with some more relevant reality, as we cannot also grasp the economical reference of sense data to so called reality. However, the economical faith narratives as all human theories might come to contradict each other, when driven by an intellect to their limits, this happens, not because they are false and we could replace them by more accurate, but because as always partial and incomplete they prove to be, what they have been from the beginning – human economies of logos. The economical structure of faith narratives is indispensable to our human condition, in which we see things “like a dim image in a mirror” (in aenigmatum) and not “face to face”. Theology is – according to Newman – a necessity for real religion, but it deals with notions and inference which are comprehended notionally. We might assent to the propositions of our symbols (dogmas) separately, but we cannot join them together in one real image. Thus dogmas – Newman seems to say – are a kind of grammar for the language of faith.