HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2072-8050, (Print) 0259-9422

Revisiting the faithful's imagination in the light of John Henry Newman and Jean-Luc Marion

Author:
Hadrianus Tedjoworo[1]

Affiliation:
Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy, Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, Indonesia

Corresponding author:
Hadrianus Tedjoworo,
htedjo@unpar.ac.id

Dates:
Received: 12 Feb. 2025
Accepted: 21 Mar. 2025
Published: 21 May 2025

How to cite this article:
Tedjoworo, H., 2025, 'Revisiting the faithful's imagination in the light of John Henry Newman and Jean-Luc Marion', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81(1), a10567. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10567

Our common understanding of reason and imagination does not always seem to coincide. In Christianity, and particularly in Catholicism, theology uses rational concepts to account for the truths of faith. While this is natural and necessary, faith knowledge does not come from rational understanding alone. There is a need for some explanation of the 'reasonableness' of faith knowledge that the faithful acquires from their experience and that is captured by their religious imagination. This study explores the realness of images captured by the faithful's imagination and placed within the framework of God's grace. By revisiting Catholicism, this article sees the faithful's imagination as a gift from God, and its limits can be found by analysing it phenomenologically in the faithful's role as witness to the truths of faith. Newman's concept of real apprehension and Marion's views on givenness and the turn from subject to witness will be correlated constructively to reveal the realistic features of the appeal of Catholicism. The following analysis provides a theological basis to recognise the layers of religious experience and the faculties in the faithful's mind that may be valuable to build faith knowledge more comprehensively.

Contribution: This article offers a different angle of faith knowledge as collected by the faithful with their imagination, phenomenologically exploring the realness of that knowledge in relation to their experience. It provides a theological basis for the faithful's real apprehension in Catholicism.

Keywords: John Henry Newman; religious imagination; faith knowledge; phenomenology; religious experience; real apprehension; the faithful's mind; Catholicism.

Introduction

The imagination of the faithful, as distinguished from their capacity to understand, carries a character that values reality and is close to the notion of real apprehension. This article explores constructively the thoughts of John Henry Newman that can give room to the faithful's imaginative way of seeing and apprehending in theology.[1] Newman tends to use the term 'real' instead of 'imaginative' when it comes down to the faithful's perception and impression (Insausti 2022:120).[2] In this exploration, the role of religious imagination – the faithful's simple capacity to imagine the objects of faith – in Newman's real apprehension will be correlated with Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological thoughts, which support the appreciation of religious phenomena experienced by the faithful in their role as witness.[3] In this study, the limits of the faithful's imagination will be observed and its plausibility will be explained in the framework of fundamental theology. The intention is not so much defining what the imagination in the faithful's mind is as finding its reasonableness in their apprehension of the truths of faith. The method used in this study is constructive-correlative analysis between Newman's and Marion's approaches with the consideration that the theological insights discovered can inspire the concrete situations and the pastoral needs of Catholics today.

Faith knowledge from religious imagination

Although Newman is not clear in explaining the role of imagination, this faculty is often related to mental images in mind consisting of things experienced in daily life.[4] Part if not most of our

1.John Henry Newman was a prominent English-speaking Catholic theologian of the 19th century who lived half his life as an Anglican and half as a Catholic. He was a priest, popular preacher, author and renowned theologian in both churches.

2.Newman also relates imagination to 'poetical fervour' (Dive 2018:150–151).

3.Jean-Luc Marion (born 3 July 1946) is a French philosopher and Catholic theologian whose works span the areas of patristic and mystical theology, contemporary phenomenology, and (post)modern philosophy.

4.Concerning Newman's vagueness on the concept of imagination, see Lash's Introduction (Newman 1870 [1979]:12–15).

knowledge is gained from experience. In terms of faith knowledge, experience is the part that provides perceptions and images captured by the senses for the mind (Newman 1870:68). In the faithful's life, faith knowledge comes not only from their experience, but also from their apprehension of meanings that transcend experience. Newman (1870:36) distinguishes apprehension from understanding, saying, 'It is possible to apprehend without understanding'. In the light of his thought, meanings that transcend these experiences are made possible by God's grace. He says, 'I speak to those who do not narrow their belief to their experience; I speak to those who admit that grace can make human nature what is not' (Newman 1862:69). In this sense, God's grace uses the faithful's mind to see the faith perspective in daily experience, so they can arrive at a deeper faith knowledge. The faithful's imagination broadens their horizon and at the same time puts a distance to their outlook. The faith knowledge formed in this enhanced horizon can enrich spiritually the real apprehension of the faithful. This enhanced apprehension may in turn affect their pious actions in life. Newman (1862) says that saintly acts:

> [*A*]re an opening of the heavens, a sudden gleam of supernatural brightness across a dark sky. They enlarge the mind with ideas it had not before, and they show to the multitude what God can do, and what man can be. (p. 115)

When Newman talks about enlarging the mind with ideas it had not before, new or different impressions and perspectives are added into the framework of faith.

By seeing the faithful's imagination as a faculty that forms faith knowledge, we can consider this imagination as God's gift. Imagination seen as God's gift complements the faithful's nature and can be nurtured in their daily experiences. Newman (1862:196) says, 'When man was created, he was endowed withal with gifts above his own nature, by means of which that nature was perfected'. He makes an analogy of God's grace as a 'potent stimulant' that 'rouses, invigorates, concentrates our animal powers, gives keenness to our perceptions, and intensity to our efforts' (Newman 1862:196). The understanding of the imagination as God's grace in the faithful's mind in a sense explains the development of their sense in matters of faith and life experiences. Because of God's grace, imagination can be called a religious imagination that supports a deeper faith knowledge. The root of the understanding of imagination as a gift is in the belief that the supernatural grace of God gives 'a meaning, and an aim, and a sufficiency, and a consistency, and a certainty, to the many faculties of that compound of soul and body, which constitutes man' (Newman 1862:196). In this theology of grace, we can see that God's grace gives clarity to the minds of the faithful through many faculties that form a comprehensive faith knowledge.

Knowledge is comprehensive and composed of various elements that are not only from reason. One of the elements that forms a more complete faith knowledge is perception, particularly spiritual perceptions. Perception of spiritual thing is mentioned by Newman as a gift from God that restores the integrity of a person.

> 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. (Newman 1862:197)

A person basically has a spiritual sensitivity that apparently can fade because of the person's fall. Here, faith knowledge is related to the conscience which may motivate a person to be willing to be saved. Salvation is God's gift, and the faithful's perseverance in doing good works is because of God's grace (Newman 1862:143). Knowledge in the sense of gift in faith is among other in the form of wisdom, such as the gift asked and received by Solomon (Newman 1862:155). Faith knowledge in wisdom, for instance, can be distinguished from knowledge in science and theology, for wisdom of faith is derived from experiences, devotions, encounters, conversations and real events in the faithful's life. These elements of social and daily life are absorbed and captured in the imagination of the faithful, thanks to their way of seeing what is real although invisible in the world.[5]

At this point, there is a sense of a different understanding of reasonableness when discussing the religious imagination. Because of God's grace, the faithful's imagination cannot be considered as something simply subjective and arbitrary. Newman (1862) contrasts 'the national religion' to 'the faith of Catholics', and says that the former:

> [*U*]ses religious words, of course, else it could not be called religion; but it does not impress on the imagination, it does not engrave upon the heart, it does not inflict upon the conscience, the supernatural.[6] (p. 118)

Three particular elements within the faithful, namely imagination, heart and conscience, are mentioned here as marking the distinctiveness of the Catholic faith. In other words, faith does not deal only with notions or 'religious words', but must touch the realm of the faithful's imagination, heart and conscience. In Newman's words (1870):

> … [*I*]n real [*assents, the mind*] is directed towards things, represented by the impressions which they have left on the imagination. These images, when assented-to, have an influence both on the individual and on society, which mere notion cannot exert. (p. 76)

Thus, faith knowledge can be considered reasonable to the extent that it has a transformative impact on the life of the faithful. Because it concerns the life of the faithful, the plausibility of faith knowledge also lies in the nature of real apprehension, namely, its relevance to everyday experience. Here the meaning of real is contrary to fictitious, and it can be said that the plausibility of religious imagination lies in its realness.

Newman (1862:118–119) says that Catholic faith touches the imagination, the heart and the conscience of the faithful. In contrast to the 'national religion', the Catholic faith introduces

5.See Rupert's reading of Newman on the role of the imagination: 'Through the role of the imagination in religion and in literature, an unseen world is apprehended that makes the material seem less real than the invisible world' (Rupert 2011:29).

6.Newman called Anglicanism '"the national religion of England" or "Bible Religion,"' which, to many, implied only formal adherence to Christianity.

to the mind of the faithful 'first principles or dogmas from which to start, to be handed down as images and specimens of eternal truth from age to age'. Newman distinguishes the 'images' of eternal truth from the 'idols' made of the world, and it can be said that only real (reasonable) images of the truth of faith will lead to certainty. By taking into account the interrelatedness of living images from experience and faith knowledge, we might imagine how the complex process of knowing happens in the minds of the faithful. With Newman, as Rupert (2011:3) puts it, 'the close connection of imagination, feeling, and thought makes feeling and imagination partners with thought'. Imagination is reasonable not because it depends on reason only, but because it completes our knowledge by relating it to the whole experience.

Within the framework of grace, the faithful's approach in apprehending the Church's doctrines keeps their knowledge true and certain. This can be seen from an experiential perspective of apprehension rather than from a definition of knowledge. The approach of the faithful is through real apprehension, while the theologians through notional apprehension. Newman rightly describes the process of arriving at religious truth: '… 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' (Newman 1862:197; emphasis mine). Seeing the truth of faith is an apprehension, because it does not depend primarily on arguments. Here we can see that the truth of faith is revealed through various means and is grasped by the faithful in a different way than those who are more accustomed to using notions.

Newman relates this different way of obtaining faith knowledge – we can see a different understanding of reasonableness – to St. John's saying, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things' (1 Jn 2:20). Because faith knowledge is spiritual and concerns spiritual matters, we need God's grace to be able to know all things. There is a certainty that is also reasonable in faith knowledge, because the process of apprehension is carried out in a willingness to receive divine assistance. On the role of grace versus reason, Newman (1862:207) says, 'grace believes, reason does but think; grace gives certainty, reason is never decided'. Using the religious imagination under God's grace keeps faith certain of its reasonableness. The functioning of the religious imagination in this framework can be considered, to borrow Rupert's (2011:34) term, as 'the magisterial function of the imagination'.[7] Even though our imagination brings real images from experience, assent to the truth of doctrine goes beyond sight and proof. Newman (1862) reflects further on this:

> Now in the first place what is faith? it is assenting to a doctrine as true, which we do not see, which we cannot prove, because God says it is true, who cannot lie. (p. 226)

Real apprehension helps the faithful intensify their assent to the truths of faith. Newman (1870:81) confirms this process as 'the natural and rightful effect of acts of the imagination upon us, and this is, not to create assent, but to intensify it'. Apprehension is a way to 'understand' and not an end in itself, therefore the goal should be of a more comprehensive knowledge of the truths of faith.

The character of faith knowledge acquired imaginatively is clarifying and should not be complicating. In line with the conception of the real in apprehension, this particular character complements the knowledge acquired notionally. In comparison with ratiocination that is frequently practised by theologians, imagination is more readily exercised among the faithful in meditation (reflection) and contemplation. However, it appears that Newman does not intend to separate imagination from reason, because both are practically inseparable in the minds of the faithful as well as in the minds of the theologians. What makes the difference when compared to notional apprehension is that the faithful's faith knowledge is primarily supplied by the imagination. Regarding the faithful's real apprehension of a dogmatic truth, one may refer to what Newman says in his essay on biblical inspiration. Newman (1861:19) says, 'Just as meditation impresses it more vividly on the affections, so does a steady contemplation of it make the image of it clearer and more exact to the intellect'. And further, 'The more I think of Almighty God … the more vividly I shall hold what can be known', and 'Catholic teaching then, in the course of ages, may and will become more precise and minute …'. One could pay attention to the terms 'vivid', 'clear', 'exact', 'precise' and 'minute' that Newman applies to apprehension, and that in our discussion involves the work of both imagination and intellect in building faith knowledge.

Phenomenology of apprehension

From the foregoing exploration, we have a different sense of how religious imagination works in apprehension, especially in the faithful's real apprehension. We may realise that there are different ways of gaining knowledge, and in this case, the intention is to have a more comprehensive faith knowledge. Phenomenology, understood in the context of our discussion, can be seen as an approach that appreciates phenomena without 'mastering' them with judgement or interpretation. By referring to Jean-Luc Marion, two important keywords in phenomenology can be used in our correlation, namely, *gift* and *givenness*.[8] Before all else, in short, a phenomenon is given. Marion (2008) says:

> The character of gift – givenness – intrinsically belongs to the gift and to its mode of appearance rather than to the process whereby givenness defines itself extrinsically in relationship to a giver, to a cause, or to a certain efficiency. (p. 100)

He says further that the phenomenon of revelation is the most radical mode of givenness as emerging from itself and not from a cause. Marion (2002a:234) uses phenomenology to unbind phenomenon from the limits of objectivity and causality, and God from all categories of being in metaphysics.

7.See also Rupert's (2011:45) reference to Newman's prayer in his sermon on 'Implicit and Explicit Reason' and to Newman's view of how '[the] divine grace uses the imagination as an instrument of illumination' (p. 50).

8.It is striking to find out that Newman considers poetry as involving the work of imagination as a gift, and as Dive (2018:82–83) puts it, 'The "gift itself" consists in 'the imagination, revelling without object or meaning beyond its own exhibition' (Newman 1871:4).

Seen from the phenomenological perspective, the process of apprehension as seen from Newman's viewpoint previously is more appreciative of the given phenomena. In the scope of faith, apprehension can be distinguished from understanding and interpretation. From the idea of imagination as a mental faculty that captures experience in a different way than the intellect, we can make an analogy that phenomena are captured or apprehended by the faithful's imagination. The faithful's apprehension is distinguished from interpretation, which is driven notionally by reason. The faithful's real apprehension can be explained as a 'way of seeing' or a process of *witnessing* a phenomenon as phenomenon. The roles of the subject and the witness are inverted in the case of revelation, that is, in Marion's view, a 'saturated phenomenon', in which intuition exceeds what the concept can foresee and show (Marion 2002b:112). On the role of a witness, Marion (2002a) says:

> Constituted witness, the subject is still the worker of truth, but he cannot claim to be its producer. With the name *witness*, we must understand a subjectivity stripped of the characteristics that gave it transcendental rank.(pp. 216–217)

The faithful's apprehension is in line with their role as witness, especially in the framework of theology of grace, which allows faith knowledge to be obtained through religious experience.

Apprehension starts with and goes through experience, and this can be distinguished from interpretation that attempts to find the meaning of a phenomenon. A phenomenon is *given* in the sense that it appears or happens regardless of a person's awareness and intention. Marion's saturated phenomenon here explains the phenomenon of revelation. He describes it as:

> [*I*]*nvisable* (unforeseeable) in terms of quantity, unbearable in terms of quality, unconditioned (absolute of all horizon) in terms of relation, and finally irreducible to the I (irregardable) in terms of modality. (Marion 2002a:218; emphasis Marion's)

The faithful as witnesses who capture the real aspects of experience are driven by the power of their imagination. Here, the faithful do not first interpret and judge an event, but rather they experience it in the sense of entering it and capturing its images in their minds. In the context of religious experiences, the faithful can find it easier and even more necessary to experience them in their position as witness and recipient.

Phenomenology of apprehension is also in line with our previous discussion on the role of imagination in meditation (reflection) and contemplation. Our awareness of being present in a certain place, for example, is influenced by our ability to 'see' ourselves in that place. This ability is not limited to the moment we are experiencing an event, because at some point the images of the event can be re-presented by the imagination. As Newman (1861:19) says, meditation makes impression more vivid and contemplation makes image more clear to the mind. These particular characters of the faithful's apprehension when practising meditation and contemplation can be found in religious experiences viewed as saturated phenomena. By not being too quick to interpret using reason, the faithful respect phenomena and relate to them imaginatively, for they believe in God's presence and God's work in phenomena. Respecting God's work in experience shows a receptive attitude as in belief, and phenomenologically the turn from subject to witness also illustrates this act of submission or acceptance. Newman (1862:232) contrasts faith to private judgement by asking: 'Is not submission quite contrary to judging?'.

Believing can be explained phenomenologically in its reasonableness as an act out of respect to phenomenon as a place of revelation. Here, revelation is God's gift and it invites the faithful towards acceptance. The faithful's imaginative apprehension is closer to the act of accepting and embracing the truths of faith. The relatedness of faith and acceptance can be described with the faithful's awareness when entering the church. Newman (1862) contemplates about the converts in the time of the Apostles, for:

> [*W*]hen they entered the Church, they entered in order to learn. The Church was their teacher; they did not come to argue, to examine, to pick and choose, but to accept whatever was put before them. (p. 228)

In the light of Marion, the truth of faith as gift does not imply the superiority of the faithful to accept or to reject it, because the revelation of the truth of faith remains a gift from God, and its existence as a phenomenon lies in its acceptability. On this acceptability, Marion (2002a) says:

> '[*T*]he act of receiving a gift consists neither in the transfer of property nor in the object received (for the obvious reason), but in the acceptance, or rather the *acceptability*, of this gift. (p. 109; emphasis Marion's)

From phenomenology we learn to accept what is given in reality and not first of all to interpret or to judge it. Marion's phenomenology emphasises the absoluteness of saturated phenomenon, and that this phenomenon is free from any horizon. In reality, saturated phenomenon may be considered a poor phenomenon, and this could result in the danger of misapprehension. This danger can arise precisely because it is 'born of the most real experience', but if 'by contrast, its specificity is recognized, the bedazzlement it provokes would become phenomenologically acceptable, indeed desirable…' (Marion 2002a:211). When saturated phenomenon is recognised, real apprehension occurs, the bedazzlement it brings provokes acceptance, and its nature as a gift is safeguarded by its absoluteness. 'The saturated phenomenon safeguards its absoluteness and at the same time dissolves its danger when it is recognized as such, without confusing it with other phenomena' (Marion 2002a:211).

In the context of the discussion about the reasonableness of faith, revelation in religious experience, which we associate with saturated phenomena, does not depend on the faithful's interpretation. For the faithful, believing does not depend on their own deductions, for deductions will continuously change their mind. Newman (1862) reflects on this:

> Now, in matter of fact, do not men in this day change about in their religious opinions without any limit? … If they had faith, they would not change. Once believe that God has spoken … you have received it once for all; you will believe it ever. Such is *the only rational, consistent account of faith* … (emphases mine). (pp. 234–235)

This is in line with what Marion (2002a:212) says about a saturated phenomenon, that 'it is freed because it does not depend on any horizon', it is called 'an unconditioned phenomenon'. The reasonableness of faith is also in line with a phenomenological view of revelation in religious experience, which values the absoluteness of revelation. Newman's insight emphasises the consistent character of faith because it is God who speaks in revelation.

Marion (2024:6) brings further insight on revelation and experience:

> A revelation is defined, then, as a phenomenon that cannot be forgotten, like a presence that will not go away because it affects and transforms the one who sees it, perceives it, and receives it. Such revelations are actually not so rare, and each of us can face them in sensual or aesthetic experience, in theoretical or ethical experience, in intellectual, moral, or religious experience, and so on. (p. 6)

Revelation occurs in everyday life and can be encountered through various experiences. For the faithful who have lived in the Catholic tradition, revelation is part of the events in their lives. There are times when revelation may not be recognised, but because of the phenomenality of revelation and its character as a gift, the faithful may experience it according to the time and situation of each person in the framework of grace. On God's gifts to the faithful, Newman (1862) says:

> … [*E*]very one who is in the grace of God, leads a supernatural life, more or less supernatural, according to his calling, and the measure of the gifts given him, and his faithfulness to them. (p. 67)

The co-presence of grace and nature in experience may be more surprising to ordinary minds. Revelation as a saturated phenomenon associated with the grace event is experienced by the faithful in and beyond nature. This phenomenon might serve as a 'learning' event for the faithful so as to apprehend the truths of faith with their imagination and with the help of God's grace. Certain events in their lives may not be rationally understandable, but in that grace they receive opportunities to apprehend and to accept the truths of faith differently. Newman (1862:218) also says that 'grace and nature might clearly be contrasted with each other; but it is not the case in fact'. The role of imagination in the faithful's real apprehension is significant and therefore we need to observe its limits within the scope of Catholicism.

The scope of a Catholic imagination

A Catholic imagination can be seen in the light of Newman as a faculty guided by God's grace. It plays an important role in the faithful's real apprehension, insofar it is assisted by God's grace. Newman (1862:219) says, 'Many are using the assistances of grace so well, that they are in the way to receive its permanent indwelling in their hearts'. From our earlier discussion, imagination is not a faculty to judge; reason is. Imagination, in the faithful's real apprehension, helps them towards faith. Therefore, in faith, a believing person subjects reason to the word of God and this is consistent with the principle of faith (Newman 1862:238–239). From Marion's phenomenology, we have seen previously that this submission of reason is reflected in the turn from subject to witness in religious experience. There are elements in Catholicism that feed the faithful's perceptions of the phenomena in their lives and the process of apprehension of faith knowledge. Their faith sensitivity (*sensus fidelium*) is needed to grasp the elements that come from nature and those from grace. God's grace is given to all human beings, even though not all of them act from grace. Newman (1862:218) says that 'some men act simply from nature'. We need a framework of grace to find the scope and the limits of a Catholic imagination.

At this point, imagination in faith in a sense is different from imagination in human nature. A Catholic imagination is not just 'poetry', to borrow Newman's word, but it should be 'of religion' (Newman 1862:181), or in other words, supernatural. It is God's gift and a faculty that brings the human mind beyond nature and enters the realm of grace in religion. In the realm of nature, the powers of imagination are but poetry. On the other hand, a Catholic imagination can be described as the faithful's capability under God's grace to realise the objects of faith in their mind. On the knowledge obtained by imagination, Marion rightly refers to Spinoza: '*the very certain* knowledge of the prophets, thus *revelatio*, rests on the imagination' (Marion 2024:82; emphases Marion's). Although there is a distinction regarding the modes of knowledge, as Marion observes, Spinoza's view tends to lead only to moral certainty and therefore it downgrades imagination, because reason is still used as a measure of certainty. However, phenomenological approach actually shows the emancipation of revelation above the ability of reason, and therefore the faithful's real apprehension is a unique mode of knowing in faith that can be accounted for. Following Newman (1862), there is an insight for imagination in faith as its reasonableness is caused by God's grace:

> [*I*]t is the office of grace to clear up gloom and haziness, to steady that fitful vision, to perfect reason by faith, and to convert a logical conclusion into and object of intellectual sight. (p. 217)

By phenomenologically analysing the role of imagination that drives real apprehension in matters of faith, we also find some aspects or layers in the faithful's experience. What we see as natural according to reason turns out to still hide layers that include perceptions, sentiments, and passions. When describing a person who feels 'natural' in living faith, Newman (1862:190) says, 'you have a natural strength of character, – if so, you are able to bring your passions under the power of reason'. There is a tendency to place passions behind faith knowledge that is considered natural by the

mind. The naturalness of the mind might place aspects of experience and knowledge under reason, but imagination brings those aspects beyond the natural. Phenomenology reminds us of the treasure of reality, phenomena, and religious experiences. Reality has its way of disclosing the layers of phenomena through our experiences. Analogically, the spiritual layer of experience can be seen as a layer disclosed to the faithful's imagination by the grace of God. Imagination in the faithful's mind can be seen as God's gift and not simply a human capability learned in order to know the truths of faith notionally. When seeing this faculty as a gift, we may imagine a horizon of apprehension that is perfected with the Scripture's message, the Church's doctrines, and the Catholic tradition in the minds of the faithful. Catholicism is often associated with the devotional practices of the faithful, and in this sense it reaches the heart of a person. Newman (1870) says:

> The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. (p. 89)

The connecting point between nature and grace is the faithful's conscience, which, in Newman's words (1870:99), is 'a voice' and 'a sanction of right conduct' in the whole of the faithful's experience. This awareness is phrased by Newman (1862:191): 'Nature is one with nature, grace with grace'. The faithful can experience both realms in this world, and it is by God's grace that their conscience may enable them to see beyond nature. Newman (1862:219) says, 'the great and general truths remain, that nature cannot see God, and that grace is the sole means of seeing Him'. The view of imagination as a given faculty within the framework of grace leads to the role of the faithful's conscience. When imagination is placed under conscience rather than reason, faith knowledge obtained by the faithful is not an achievement. This kind of knowledge is received by the grace of God, and cannot be discovered by the mind alone. Marion (2024) speaks of self-consciousness in the light of Paul's thought:

> My thought is not enough to think on its own basis, but it thinks what it receives to think; it thinks from *elsewhere* … No one attains a self-consciousness nor the existence of self through the mere thought of oneself ... (emphasis Marion's). (p. 354)

The statement is followed by a reference to 1 Cor. 15:10. Here, the faithful's conscience is God's gift to help them know and weigh matters in a different, imaginative, way, so that they can reflect on their decision in faith and can put it into action.

In the life of faith, knowledge acquired imaginatively through real apprehension is also shared in reflections within the community. This act of sharing reflection in a pastoral context embodies the attitude of witnessing to faith. We have seen that imagination in relation to conscience, is God's gift to human beings, and the outcome of individual apprehension can be shared communally without anyone claiming it as one's own achievement. We can refer to Meszaros (2018:9) to see this as a formation of *sensus ecclesiae* in Newman's view: 'a phenomenon associated with the *sensus fidei* (i.e. the individual's sense of the faith) now shifts to the realm of the *sensus fidelium* (i.e. the sense of all the faithful)'. This act of sharing communally can also be compared to the act of a preacher who essentially testifies about his religious experience. Related to this act, Newman (1862:21) explores the motive of a preacher: '… we come among you, because we have received a great gift from God ourselves, and wish you to be partakers of our joy'. The difference between a testimony and a teaching lies in how faith knowledge is acquired and the language in which it is communicated to others. The language of the faithful who witness to faith is composed of real images from their experience, and not primarily of concepts and notions. The conscience of the faithful requires the treasury of Christian tradition in order to convey an impactful testimony. In Newman's view (1862:97), conscience, 'that inward light, given as it is by God, is powerless to illuminate the horizon' and it needs a guiding pattern of saintliness as the Christian principle for the faithful. He says that the faithful should 'have a standard for their principles of conduct, and it is the image, the pattern of Saints which forms it for them' (Newman 1862:109). An imagination that matures the faithful's conscience needs to be nurtured within the pattern of the Catholic tradition.

The faithful's conscience needs God's grace, for 'the grace of God is the light' and '… [your] thoughts and [your] words will not get beyond a mere reasoning' (Newman 1862:199). The limit of a Catholic imagination is the grace of God that guides the conscience, and without it the faithful cannot see the truths in revelation. When contrasting nature and grace, Newman (1862:202) indicates how 'natural' people know not in the same way as a believer, because when experiencing the fragments of revelation they are not 'really *seeing* them, as the Catholic sees them' (emphasis Newman's). On the side of the faithful, imagination should be cleared by faith to be called Catholic. Not every one's imagination corresponds to the faithful's apprehension of the Scripture's message and the Church's doctrines. Newman (1862:243) says that 'God might have renewed us by other means, by sight, by reason, by love, but He has chosen to "purify our hearts by faith"'. Apprehending imaginatively is about seeing things with faith, and this is to be done by remaining faithful to the Church's tradition. A practical advice is given by Newman (1862:328) to remain in (the tradition of) the Church, that is, to 'avoid, I say, inquiry else, for it will but lead you thither, where there is no light, no peace, no hope'. By this state of mind, the faithful can avoid the danger of misapprehension and become like, as Newman says (1870:173), 'good Catholics, perhaps the majority, who live and die in a simple, full, firm belief in all the Church teaches, because she teaches it'.

However, at this point, the 'firm belief in all the Church teaches' may place the faithful in a less responsible position in their assent to the truths of faith. One can refer to Merrigan's critical view of Newman's religious imagination in the process of the faithful's real assent. Merrigan notes that in Newman's opinion 'the (realizing) imagination exists only

"to intensify" assent, "not to create" it' and concludes that 'the imagination is not a judicial power at all' (Merrigan 1992:187; Newman 1870:81). This statement sends imagination back to its non-reasonable role in the faithful's way of apprehending the truths of faith. It also makes our previous assumption about a different understanding of reasonableness in the religious imagination no longer valid. To respond to this counter argument, we can consider another, also plausible, perspective of faith knowledge as an acceptance of truth made possible by imagination.

Imagination, in the light of Newman's (1862) view, is part of our apprehending mind in relation to the visible objects of our faith, but our knowledge of them are not and will never be perfect:

> Thus the attributes of God, though intelligible to us on their surface, … yet, for the very reason that they are infinite, transcend our comprehension, when they are dwelt upon, when they are followed out, and can only be received by faith. (p. 371)

Faith knowledge is not so much about a knowledge deducted by reason alone as an acceptance of the truths of faith by imagination. We realise that faith knowledge supported by real apprehension is never 'complete' and perfect, as Newman (1870:181) says that 'Truth would still be truth, but the knowledge of it would be beyond us and unattainable'. However, the faithful's imagination continues to provide and to keep real and proper images according to their particular situations, for the acceptance of the truths of faith:

> [*A*]ll is but a whirling of the reason, and a dazzling of the imagination, … reminding us that … the outlines which nature draws for us are not His perfect image, nor to be pronounced inconsistent with the further lights and depths with which it is invested by revelation. (Newman 1862:373)

Faith knowledge is seen more as a process of correlation between nature and grace, reason and imagination, interpretation and apprehension, which develops comprehensively in fidelity to the Church's doctrines and tradition.

Mysteries are also the limit of our imagination, but they are also an opening towards revelation. Marion (2024:203) analyses mystery within a phenomenological framework and concludes that 'the *mystērion* can be un-covered, as the manifestation of charity which surpasses all knowledge. The *mystērion* thus does not close, but *opens* access to the *elsewhere*' (emphases Marion's). In the context of faith, imagination helps us to picture and to realise the objects of faith in our apprehension, but in reality, many of the truths of faith as well as of nature are beyond even our imagination. Newman (1862:309) says that 'there are many truths which are not less truths because we cannot picture them to ourselves or conceive them', and therefore mystery is only received by faith (see also Newman 1862:401). In the light of Newman's view, the important role of the faithful's imagination is to provide 'more illustrations' when they contemplate the truths of faith and the doctrines of the Church. When explaining the Illative Sense, Newman (1870:282) says, 'The mind contemplates [the first elements of thought] without the use of words, by a process which cannot be analysed'.

In the faithful's mind, reason needs reflection and imagination needs orientation, in the sense that these faculties of the mind need to be put within the scope of the Catholic doctrines and the Church's tradition. We can draw an insight from Newman's (1862:400–401) view when he reflects on the glories of Mary, Mother of God, in the Church's teaching: 'They are startling and difficult to those whose imagination is not accustomed to them, and whose reason has not reflected on them'. The Church's doctrines and tradition can be considered an 'analogy or rule of faith' (Newman 1862:420) that keeps the consistency of revealed teachings in the Church. Newman, cited by Meszaros (2018:24), says that 'the gift of discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of tradition resides solely in the *Ecclesia* docens' (Newman 1859:63). The faithful practices both real and notional apprehensions in gaining faith knowledge, involving different proportions of imagination and reason. Without further attempting to separate the two faculties, our analysis has shown the limits of a Catholic imagination, which may be useful to discuss the possibilities of a theological grammar of imagination.

Conclusion

Examining the reasonableness of the faithful's imagination and correlating it with a phenomenological view of faith knowledge and apprehension has brought out some theological insights. Those insights can be translated into spiritual and pastoral language to support the faithful's way of obtaining knowledge of faith. Viewed phenomenologically as a gift from God, the faithful's imagination opens their conscience to see God's work in everyday phenomena. As Newman (1862) says:

> [*T*]he spiritual works of God show differently from each other to our eyes, and that they display, in their character and their history, some of them this virtue more than other virtues, and some that. (p. 72)

In explaining how the imagination helps the faithful in apprehending the Scriptures, Newman (1870) says:

> The purpose [then] of meditation is to realize them; to make the facts which they relate stand out before our minds as objects, such as may be appropriated by a faith as living as the imagination which apprehends them. (p. 79)

This study provides a theological basis for discovering and confirming the layers of experience and the faculties in the faithful's mind in building faith knowledge more comprehensively. A framework of theology of grace and gift has been used to correlate phenomenology and religious imagination. This exploration of religious imagination is necessary:

> [*T*]o find ourselves where we can use every faculty of the mind and affection of the heart in its perfection … to find ourselves in the possession of certainty, consistency, stability, on the highest and holiest subjects of human thought. (Newman 1862:220)

Certainty, consistency, and stability in matters of faith are things the faithful need in their daily life. Further explorations are still needed in the area of praxis of faith, and especially in catechesis. Catechetical methods today need to focus at the importance of learning from experience, because revelation among the faithful occurs in a real and imaginative way through images and impressions, rather than in notions and concepts.

Catholicism offers many realistic features to the faithful to live their life of faith. Faith knowledge as apprehended by the faithful relies on images, analogies, and illustrations that can be captured by their imagination. Newman (1851:171) says, 'Catholicism appeals to the imagination, as a great fact, wherever she comes; she strikes it' and its strength – it is still true today – lies in 'some idea equally vivid as the Church, something fascinating, something capable of possessing, engrossing, and overwhelming'. The attractiveness of Catholicism in the hearts of the faithful is 'reasonable' to their minds insofar as it continues to give room for the real or imaginative apprehension in their life of faith.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

H.T. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical waiver to conduct this study was obtained from the Universitas Katolik Parahyangan Institute for Research and Community Service (No. III/LPPM/2025-02/17-E).

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. The article does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

Dive, B., 2018, *John Henry Newman and the imagination*, T&T Clark, London.

Insausti, G., 2022, 'Coleridge and Newman: Four aspects', *Literature & Theology* 36(1), 114–130. https://doi:10.1093/litthe/frab021

Marion, J.-L., 2002a, *Being given: Toward a phenomenology of givenness*, transl. J.L. Kosky, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Marion, J.-L., 2002b, *In excess: Studies of saturated phenomena*, transl. R. Horner & V. Berraud, Fordham University Press, New York, NY.

Marion, J.-L., 2008, *The visible and the revealed*, transl. Christina M. Gschwandtner et al., Fordham University Press, New York, NY.

Marion, J.-L., 2024, *Revelation comes from elsewhere: A contribution to a critical history and a phenomenal concept of revelation*, transl. S.E. Lewis & S. Rumpza, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Merrigan, T., 1992, *Clear heads and holy hearts: The religious and theological ideal of John Henry Newman*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, Peeters, Louvain.

Meszaros, A., 2018, '*Ecclesia docens et cogitans*: Doctrinal development and the Illative Sense of the Church', *Newman Studies Journal* 15(1), 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1353/nsj.2018.0000

Newman, J.H., 1851 [1942], *Lectures on the present position of Catholics in England*, D.M. O'Connell (ed.), The America Press, New York, NY.

Newman, J.H., 1859 [1961], *On consulting the faithful in matters of doctrine*, J. Coulson (ed.), Sheed and Ward, Kansas City.

Newman, J.H., 1861, 'Essay on inspiration', in J.D. Holmes (ed.), 1979, *The theological papers of John Henry Newman on biblical inspiration and on infallibility*, pp. 4–27, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Newman, J.H., 1862, *Discourses addressed to mixed congregations*, James Duffy, Wellington Quay, Dublin & Paternoster Row, London.

Newman, J.H.C., 1870 [1979], *An essay in aid of a grammar of assent*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, InN.

Newman, J.H., 1871, *Essays critical and historical Volume I*, Basil Montagu Pickering, London.

Rupert, J., 2011, *John Henry Newman on the nature of the mind: Reason in religion, science, and the humanities*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD.