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Article

Wilfrid Ward on the Revelatory Nature of the Saints

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Abstract: This article examines how Wilfrid Philip Ward (1856–1916) explains his understanding of the saints as a categorical means of explicating divine revelation within the structures of a religion, particularly Catholicism. A description of the late nineteenth-century Zeitgeist, as perceived by Ward, is provided, followed by an explanation of how Ward responds philosophically to his perceived Zeitgeist with a description of the saints as revelatory of the incarnation in the particularity of historical and social contexts of those outside of the historical Jesus's own context. This article concludes that Ward's epistemology of the saints is the foundation for his incarnational ecclesiology.

Keywords: divine revelation; Wilfrid Ward; John Henry Newman; Synthetic Society; ecclesiology; saints; agnosticism; positivism; Catholicism

1. Introduction

Wilfrid Philip Ward (1856–1916) was one of England's preeminent Catholic thinkers of his day (See Weaver n.d.). Typically known today for his two-volume biography of John Henry Newman and, though to a lesser degree, his defense of Newman during the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis (ca. 1893–1914), his most philosophically astute writings have largely gone unnoticed by contemporary historians, theologians, and philosophers (On modernism, see Bullivant 2011; Daly 1980, 2000; Ward 1937; O'Connell 1994; Kerr 2007; Portier 2013; Meszaros 2014; Pope Pius X [1907] 1981).

A successful biographer and essayist, Ward published biographies of his father William George Ward (Ward 1889, 1893a), Nicholas Wiseman (Ward 1897), and John Henry Newman (Ward 1912), as well as numerous essays for the *Tablet* and the *Dublin Review* (Ward 1889, 1893a, 1897, 1912; See also Scotti 2006). In 1888, he was invited to participate in the "Catholic International Scientific Congress", which was held in Paris, and in 1890 he was appointed to the Royal University of Ireland as an examiner in Mental and Moral Philosophy. In 1896, Ward and his friend and colleague Arthur James Balfour co-founded the Synthetic Society, which remained active for twelve years before dissolving in 1909.

Writing at a time of great theological and philosophical turmoil, Ward entertains questions of how we can conclude that what we know of God (divine revelation) is not simply a "reflection of our own disordered imaginations" (Ward 1893b, p. xxiii). One line of argument Ward takes in answering this question is to explain how the saints, though understood as a collective epistemological category, also function within particular historical moments, which aids believers in their understanding of divine revelation.

Ward's explanation of the revelatory importance of the saints also takes on an ecclesiological tenor as he explicates Newman's three-fold ecclesiology into his own, both of which are based upon the three baptismal offices of priest, prophet, and king (See Newman 1837, [1877] 1878). Ward's ecclesiological structure emphasizes the importance of balancing three distinct ecclesial entities, and it functioned to subtly criticize the heavy-handed hierarchical ethos present in the Catholicism of his own day, while at the same time arguing against the overly interiorized understandings of religious experience, which were quickly gaining traction in the 1880s and 1890s.

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Most importantly, however, Ward's notion of the saints as both an epistemological category and ecclesiological category help to explain how the saints reveal the mystery of Christ's incarnation as experienced by real people within the particularities of historical, social, and linguistic contexts. In broad terms, the lived experiences of the saints provide real examples of how Christ's incarnation manifests in later contexts, even when the historical Jesus has not walked the earth physically in over 2000 years.

Scope and Outline

This paper proceeds in three sections, which are followed by conclusory remarks. Section 2 investigates Ward's perceived Zeitgeist and his proposed remedy to it. Section 3 investigates Ward's philosophical rendering of the saints as a revelatory category, and Section 4 explores how Ward understood the saints as foundational to his ecclesiology.

The purpose of this article is three-fold. First, it seeks to reintroduce the voice of Wilfrid Ward into our retrieval and analysis of relatively recent British Catholic history. Second, this article seeks to demonstrate the philosophical complexities in which a thinker such as Ward lived and wrote. Third, this article argues that Ward's categorization of the saints as a revelatory locus in response to the agnostic and positivist Zeitgeist of his day bears merit in our own day, which often deals with our own forms of antagonistic humanisms.

2. The Zeitgeist as Described by Wilfrid Ward

Ward locates what he calls the Zeitgeist of the age (1880s–1900s) between "agnosticism" and "positivism", which he sees as two poles to a similar epistemological difficulty. "In like manner", Ward writes,

> The Positivist and the Agnostic, finding in reach only Nature and the Unknown, make a desperate effort to satisfy their religious cravings with these very unpromising objects. The Positivist takes nature, the Agnostic the Unknown; and by a mental process, which can only be characterized as monomania, they contrive to enjoy a sort of religious Barmecide's feast". (Ward 1893b, p. 42)

The problem with agnosticism and positivism, as Ward sees them, is that they over-intellectualize and over-sentimentalize religion in a way that does not allow for relationship with a personal God, who is "accessible to the prayers of His creatures" (Ward 1893b, p. 42). Ward emphasizes that Christianity is by necessity communal and built upon relationship with a personal God, which is not actualized in the cases of agnosticism and positivism.

It should be noted that both "agnosticism" and "positivism" have rich and lengthy histories within the British intellectual tradition, which Ward would have encountered. His depictions of agnosticism and positivism, however, at times tend to be more caricatures than a full theological and philosophical engagement with them on their own terms. The following two sections outline how Ward describes agnosticism and positivism within his—sometimes confusing—apologetic schematization of what he deems "the Zeitgeist" for the purpose of introducing what Ward perceives himself as arguing against as a better path for understand what his theological arguments are.

2.1. Agnosticism

Ward labels the "root-disease" in the English thought of his day as "agnosticism", which "roughly-speaking—implies the opinion that knowledge of God, immortality, and of all spiritual truth, is unattainable by man. In its technical form it means the belief in an unknowable being from which the universe proceeds" (Ward 1885, p. 35). This agnosticism does not allow for humans to attain any real (in the Newmanian sense) knowledge of God.

Along with the more academic account of agnosticism in Ward's milieu, which is more associated with Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), Ward also recognizes a "popular agnosticism", labeled "know-nothingism", which "partakes more of the nature of positivism" (Ward 1885, p. 35; On Huxley, see Huxley [1868] 1899; Lyons 2012). Ward writes that that know-nothingism "is as much a tone of thought as a creed. It says equivalently, 'The whole matter is a riddle, and a sensible man cannot expect to get certain knowledge on it at all'"

(Ward 1885, p. 35). The danger of know-nothingism, according to Ward, is that it leads to the belief that objective reality is unattainable and unrelatable. "The arguments for natural religion and for revelation are submitted to criticism", writes Ward. "The axioms on which they rest are called into question. The idea of causation is asserted to have no objective character" (Ward 1885, p. 35). The problem with removing the objective character of divine revelation, Ward notes, is that it only leaves us with our own minds to contemplate as we search for religious belief. Religion becomes interiorized and based solely upon the human subject as revealed, rather than understanding something divine, transcendent, and other as the object of worship. The objective "who" must be understood as present and the object of Christian devotion.

Ward locates Hume's thought at the helm of this subjectivism. He writes that "it is the principle of Hume, though applied in a somewhat new way", "on which this destruction of belief proceeds" (Ward 1885, p. 35). He argues that "Hume started with the principle that complete analysis of the grounds of belief is the only decisive test of the belief's correspondence with fact, and that all our knowledge has reference only to the regions of experience" (Ward 1885, p. 35).

The problem Ward finds in what he interprets as Hume's relegating only analyzable experience to certainty is that belief in things outside of our sensory experience are also outside the certainty of belief. The difficulty for Hume, according to Ward, is that "everything must be analyzed in terms of sensation, and what cannot be so analyzed we have no right to believe in with certainty" (Ward 1885, p. 35). Consequently, Ward notes, that once it is determined that all we know of our world comes from our sense perception, then the basis of our belief in an external world becomes nil, and the grounds for our belief in something exterior to ourselves becomes obsolete:

> As soon as it was clearly shown that in our knowledge of the external world all that we know in terms of sensation is the sequence of touch, taste, sight, smell, the conviction that something outside us caused these sensations that their regular correspondence was due to something external, was not allowed to stand; for it rested on the conception of causation; and causation, as distinct from mere sequence, was an idea with no counterpart in the region of sensible experience. Thus, we have no ground for believing in an external world. (Ward 1885, pp. 35–36)

A related problem Ward finds with Hume's thought is that for this form of subjectivism, the "mind was simply a succession of feelings and ideas", which leads to the assertion that "a healthy mind does not cease to carry reasonable conviction because we are unable in cold blood to trace every step it has taken; and conceptions of intellect do not cease to be real because they cannot be resolved into conceptions of sense" (Ward 1885, p. 36).

Theologically, know-nothingism, as described by Ward, does not see the Trinitarian God as properly both transcendent and immanent. In consigning the divine world as that which is essentially unknowable, at least with any certainty, we can neither stand in awe of God because we cannot be certain of a reality within the transcendence, nor can we witness God within our innermost being, because anything we witness within ourselves cannot be understood as originating from someone other than our own sentimentality. Know-nothingism does not allow for an incarnational version of Christianity because of its misperceptions of the transcendence and immanence of God.

Ward often looks to patristic sources as a platform on which to understand the agnosticism of his day because he sees the agnosticism in the early church as analogous to, though not exactly the same as, his contemporary agnosticism. He, thus, sees the early "martyrs" or "witnesses" for the faith as an example of how faith has "wrought a great transformation in that earlier age of agnosticism" (Ward 1893b, p. 8). Similar to his explanations of agnosticism described above, Ward locates in his article "Witnesses to the Unseen", the danger of his own day as "the ever-widening doubt as to the validity of all religious faith" (Ward 1893b, p. 8). As will be discussed in Section 3, Ward argues that the saints act as subjective lenses through which Christians in all times and places can

experience the same transcendent revelation even though the historical, philosophical, and social context can appear drastically different. The saints also provide for Ward a helpful balance between theologies of God's immanence and transcendence in our explication of divine revelation.

2.2. Positivism

In his 1886 *The Clothes of Religion: A Reply to Popular Positivism*, Ward takes aim at the "popular positivism" of Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison, and Sir J. Stephen. Popular positivism, as Ward describes, "deals not so much with the details of the elaborate system built up by M. Comte in the Positive Polity, as with the general principles of the positivist cult, as designed for a popular and practical religion" (Ward 1886, pp. ix–x; For context see Feichtinger et al. 2018). Ward describes positivism in terms of a rejection of religious mystery, in which science (including logical and/or mathematical proof) is thought to be able to explain everything understood to be "logical" (For context on science and religion, see Bowler 2001). "Humanity", Ward argues, is the "Positivist deity" (Ward 1893b, p. 46; 1887). While Ward is addressing the general Zeitgeist and a popular positivism, rather than Comte in particular, he finds that "the central defect in Compte's conception is the supposition that feeling and imagination apart from faith may be an adequate incentive to moral action" is "characteristic of the age" (Ward 1886, p. xiii; For context on Compte, see Bourdeau and Chazel 2018, 2022; Comte 1852; Gane 2006; Wernick 2000; Wright 1986).

Matthew Arnold, according to Ward, is the "prophet of the Zeitgeist". Ward writes that Arnold has expressed the tendencies of popular positivism when he "described religion as 'morality touched by emotion', and explained its power as an incentive to action as consisting in certain ideas being 'filled with feeling'" (Ward 1886, p. xiii). Similarly, Ward writes that the religion of Spencer and Harrison "is really not a Religion at all, but only a Ghost of a Religion" (Ward 1886, p. 29). Ward notes that Spencer sees "the old idea of a Personal God, such as Christianity believes in", as "plainly unscientific, and [as] merely a development of the primitive belief in Ghosts" (Ward 1886, p. 28). Likewise, Ward characterizes Spencer as saying that "we have no capability of acquiring any knowledge as to the ultimate cause of existence" (Ward 1886, p. 28). Poignantly, Ward writes that Spencer "has destroyed for us . . . certain objects of worship and belief to which we fondly clung—Conscience, God, the soul; but he does not 'leave us orphans'. He sends his spirit to comfort us with a new religion, whose deity is the Unknowable" (Ward 1886, p. 28). Whereas "the Christian God consisted of a Trinity, namely, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Unknowable . . . consists of a Trinity–Infinity, Eternity, and Energy" (Ward 1886, p. 29).

"What, in short, has Positivism to offer to those in distress?" asks Ward, "Only illusions and dreams" (Ward 1886, p. 65). The popular positivism that Ward outlines, much like what is described in his characterization of "know-nothingism", is both an over-intellectualization and an over sentimentalization of religion in light of advances in humanistic and scientific thought.

2.3. Scientific Advances: A Cautionary Tale

While Ward is cognizant of the over-intellectualization and the sentimentalization of religion by agnostics and positivists, he does not advocate for a simplistic, unthinking faith. He supports the use of new scientific methodologies that were being applied to the study of Christian history and to the Bible. He too is concerned with squaring faith with scientific discovery and methodological advances, though he is often cautious in his incorporation of conclusions that tend to fragment the providential nature of Christian tradition. Though he sees the necessity of utilizing various new scientific techniques, he cautions that "during the tedious work then of sifting evidence, we are in danger of losing rudder and compass, of losing sight of that unity of plan, which in spite of all anomalies, does exist on the large canvas of history in general, and is clearly visible to the eye of faith in the story of the Church" (Ward n.d.).

Similarly, in the introduction to his 1893 compilation, *Witnesses to the Unseen*, Ward notes that popular opinion (what he calls the Zeitgeist) should not be trusted with faith because it "tends to extremes" (Ward 1893b, p. xv). He fears that the scholarship in the age of what he deems "destructive criticism" is biased against the supernatural. Found in Ward's writings of the late nineteenth century are essentially his fears of throwing the theological baby out with the scientific bathwater in the efforts to analyze Christian tradition through the lens of newly founded scientific and historical methodologies. With an air of caution, Ward writes, "A given age tends to exaggerate the significance of its own discoveries, and to fill in their details prematurely and inaccurately. And it tends to carry too far its criticisms and revisions of the thoughts prior to an earlier time" (Ward 1893b, p. xv).

The response that Ward provides for the Zeitgeist just outlined is a reflection on how the saints aid in the interpretation of the revelation of a God who is equally transcendent and immanent, who is incarnational and guides our explication of the deposit of faith through providence. The following section looks specifically at how Ward incorporates a theory of sainthood as authoritative in light of the perceived Zeitgeist.

3. Ward's Response to the Perceived Zeitgeist

Ward understands the witness of the saints as a remedy for the perceived "infection" within the British psyche in the 1890s. He sees Newman's illative sense as a rebuttal against agnosticism because the illative sense bases its conclusions "on the positive declarations of the mind; taking into account the moral and spiritual nature of man as well as the intellectual" (Ward 1885, p. 36). For Newman, the illative sense is essentially what phronesis is for Aristotle: practical wisdom, or "prudentia". Within four years of the original 1870 publication of his *Grammar*, Newman defines the illative sense in the following terms:

> The Illative Sense, that is, the reasoning faculty, as exercised by gifted, or by educated or otherwise well-prepared minds, has its function in the beginning, middle, and end of all verbal discussion and inquiry, and in every step of the process. It is a rule to itself, and appeals to no judgment beyond its own; and attends upon the whole course of thought from antecedents to consequents, with a minute diligence and unwearied presence, which is impossible to a cumbrous apparatus of verbal reasoning, though, in communicating with others, words are the only instrument we possess, and a serviceable, though imperfect instrument.
>
> (Newman [1870] 1874, p. 362; See also, Aquino 2004; Nichols 1985; Dessain 1957)

Ward writes that the illative sense "clearly and unhesitatingly affirms as certain is certain" and argues that "Newman seems to show that provided the mind is in a normal and healthy state its declaration is a declaration of objective truth" (Ward 1885, p. 36).

Similarly, Ward finds in his father's "Philosophy of Theism", that "in any continuous experience the power of the mind to declare objective truth is assumed" (Ward 1884, 1885, p. 37). This stands in opposition, according to Ward, to the notion that "our knowledge is subjective and relative—that the mind may know, indeed, its own experience, but that the experience is no indication of objective truth. Thus, there is nothing seen and known to be true, but only something felt and experienced" (Ward 1885, p. 37). Ward's conclusion from both W. G. Ward and Newman in this discussion is that just as phenomena of the physical world are "examined with the greatest minuteness before a cause is assigned to them, equal care should be taken as to the phenomena of the spiritual life" (Ward 1885, p. 37).

To study the phenomena of spiritual life, as Ward puts it, is to study the religious experience of the saints. The saints, for Ward, act as a balance between the objective transcendence of God, who is wholly other, and our experience of the immanence of God within the depths of our being. To study the saints to the study the church's understanding of the incarnation in the earthly domain of God's objective divine revelation as witnessed by actual human beings. The purpose of the study of the saints, for Ward, is a path that leads to the imitation of the saints and ultimately communion with God. Ward explains this most thoroughly within the context of his ecclesiology, which will be explained in Section 4.

At this juncture, it is important to note that Ward has a couple of different ways of talking about the saints, or what he calls "seers" in his papers circulated to the Synthetic Society. In his *Synthetic Society Papers* (SSP), the saints or "seers" are seen as a collective epistemological category that function to explain the transcendent truths of a particular religion. Seers are understood as representatives of particular historical milieux who "witness" to the paradigmatic thinking within their time. These witnesses, or seers, are not necessarily canonized by the church and thus can speak more broadly to the philosophical Zeitgeists that include Christianity, but that are not limited to ecclesiastical problems. In his other works, in which is he writing from a more Christian-focused perspective, he at times speaks of the saints as a collective epistemological category, though he is also interested in the particularities of individual saint's experience. This is the case in his reflection on the mystical experience of St. Theresa and Francis de Sales, whose mystical theology functions as a remedy for both the popular and intellectual agnosticisms.

Ward proposes the study of the mystical experience of the saints in conjunction with other patristic and medieval scholastic sources to assuage the fear some had of mysticism, which was a concern particular to Ward's English intellectual context (See also von Hügel [1909] 1923). While the intelligentsia is a significant focus for Ward, he also expresses a desire for a theology that everyday Catholics can understand and assess the health of their own religious experience by comparing it to how God works in the spiritual lives of those the church has canonized. This general spiritual mentorship of the saints is something in which Ward wants every Catholic to participate, regardless of education.

Ward understands the saints to be "manifestations of the Church's vitality", in which the "unseen world" has "direct action . . . on the saints and chosen ones of God" (Ward 1885, p. 40). Because the mystical experiences of the saints are difficult to express philosophically and systematically, they are often subordinated to more philosophically astute voices. Ward notes, for example, that "those innumerable manifestations of intercourse with the unseen world which the Church presents along the whole line of her history hold a subordinate place in the recognized philosophical and evidential courses" (Ward 1885, p. 40). However, Ward counters this subordination through the lens of the objectivity and reliability of the experience of the mystics when placed in conjunction with patristic and scholastic sources. The witness of the saints, Ward maintains, is the backbone of Catholic spirituality because it is through the witness of the saints that the incarnational God still works in our world. "The continued existence of miracles, the constant fertility of the Church in saints, the unique character of the Catholic spiritual life, the effect of religion on our moral nature, and, above all, the marvelous experiences of the mystics", Ward argues, "are a part of the atmosphere in which a Catholic lives, and fosters his faith naturally" (Ward 1885, p. 40).

The saints, according to Ward, are witnesses to the divine world, which is the object of Catholic devotion. Against the agnostic, who discounts the mystical writings of the saints as less true than logical argument, Ward argues that a divine reality beyond our sensory world is witnessed in the conscience of the saints. Similarly, Ward notes that the witness of the saints often brings people into closer communion with God than logical argument, which is a similar argument seen in Newman's *Grammar* (Ward 1888, p. 676).

3.1. Corporate Certainty and the Psychology of Mysticism

Ward explores the nature of corporate certainty in the Christian faith as he addresses the question of how Christians can remain faithful in an age of growing skepticism. He looks to the "constancy of the martyrs", as both a source for Christian faith and a method for shifting the trend from understanding divine truth as revealed in logical arguments to truth as revealed in the lives and faith of the saints. The saints are also a transformative common ground between the various intellectual and religious perspectives:

> Whether we hold with Matthew Arnold only that Christ 'lived while we believed', or prefer the alternative that truth may continue truth though the human mind is changeable and unfaithful, it is an admitted element in that great transformation that faith kindled faith. The 'witnesses' or 'martyrs' whose vision of the next world was such as to be undimmed by the immediate prospect of suffering and death, or by the atmosphere of doubt around them, helped to expel that atmosphere, and to restore confidence in the possibilities of human nature for virtue, and in the ground for faith and hope. (Ward 1893b, pp. 6–7)

The narrative of the faith of the saints, rather than the miraculousness, Ward argues, provides the saints with credibility in the face of skepticism. Ward writes that "the union in some of the saints of strong common sense which testifies to the absence of delusions or fanaticism with a super human depth and reality in their trust in God is in itself an evidence for the unseen world" (Ward 1888, p. 676). Ward argues, for example, that if "St. Theresa and St. Francis de Sales" are "treated as plain records of Christian life, rather than in their miraculous aspect, which would not readily be accepted as true", they "may do more to make an agnostic believe that conscience contains in it some reflection and intimation of a reality above itself than any argument can do" (Ward 1888, p. 676).

Ward acknowledges the trepidation concerning the sanity of many of the saints. Citing St. Theresa, Ward attempts to demonstrate that the saints are aware of the fact that mystical visions "may be clouded by prejudice", or that "memory may play false and become indistinguishably mingled with imagination; and so in like manner is the mystic vision liable to an admixture fully conscious of this" (Ward 1885, p. 44). Ward writes that even "St. Theresa speaks of her possession of God in 'the centre of the soul where *illusion is impossible*', fully aware that under circumstances illusion may exist" (Ward 1885, p. 44). The late Victorian era, while sometimes categorized in terms of large-scale secularization of England because of the industrial revolution and the rise in Darwinian-based scientific analysis on religious themes, still maintains a fascination with spiritualism, the occult, and magic. Ward's fear of the use of the mystics seems to be that the legitimate Christian mystics would be grafted into this other fascination, and thus not be deemed of sound mind.

Ward, however, finds St. Theresa's acknowledgement of the possibility of the difficulty as grounds for guarding against it. "In this consciousness there is an additional testimony to the unmistakably divine character of the mystical experiences", writes Ward, "just as one who is fully aware of his own prejudices, and on his guard against them, may judge with far greater confidence and security than another who is unaware of any defect in his mental vision" (Ward 1885, p. 44).

Referencing Newman's notion of "the heart and the eye for truth", Ward argues that the saint recognizes the transcendent character of God within the deeply personal experience of the incarnational immanent workings of God within the mysticism of the saints (Ward 1885, p. 44). Because it is transcendent truth that propels the saints toward God, rather than their own psychosis, Ward argues that methodologically, the starting point must be of trust in the expressions of faith from those whom the church has canonized as saints. If the saints "are to be classed with the ravings of madmen", Ward argues, "the mystics must be shown to have been mad" (Ward 1885, p. 41). One cannot simply assume the insanity of those deemed reliable by the church. The burden of proof is on the skeptic, rather than the saints, according to Ward.

3.2. Witnesses to the Unseen: Kant, Newman, and Tennyson

According to Ward, "the witness to faith amid difficulties primarily intellectual, is he who sees and feels those difficulties vividly, and yet sees clearly beyond them the highest truth which to others render obscure" (Ward 1893b, p. 8). While the intellectual witness is understood to be "inferior to the martyr of old", he saw the intellectual witness as supplying "a need less universal in time and place, but absolutely necessary here and now" (Ward 1893b, p. 10). The intellectual "saint,"—in this instance meaning more of an expert

in reasoning and morality than anything miraculous or official—Ward reasons, can provide a voice of truth and a path to certainty at a time when certainty wanes. Ward argues, that "one who sees better than I do the agnostic view of life, and sees the certainty of religious truth in spite of it, and beyond it, redresses the balance of sceptical [sic] public opinion. If he shows stronger sight where I *can* see, I will trust his perception of what to me is unseen" (Ward 1893b, p. 11). The three intellectual witnesses Ward deems necessary for responding to the Zeitgeist of his day were Immanuel Kant, John Henry Newman, and Alfred Lord Tennyson; neither Tennyson nor Kant can be canonized as they were not Catholics, while Newman would be canonized a Catholic saint at a later date.[1]

Of these three "witnesses", Ward writes that Kant "flourished immediately after Hume had first, with power not since surpassed, marked out the lines of the agnostic position" (Ward 1893b, p. 14). Ward also notes that "The mystical insistence on conscience as the source of religious knowledge is Kantian; the love of souls is suggestive of Fénélon" (Ward 1889, p. 258n2). "Kant was the prophet of scepticism in an age of belief", writes Ward, and so Kant "is a witness, in a sceptical age to man's moral nature and its connection with the Unseen World" (Ward 1893b, p. 12).

Similarly, Newman "ruled the strong-hold of English thought just before the wave of doubt had broken on the popular mind" (Ward 1893b, p. 15). Ward argues that "Newman was, in the very outset of the agnostic movement—which he foresaw in marvelously close detail before it had shown its true character to the world at large—a 'martyr' or 'witness' in the sense I have indicated" (Ward 1893b, p. 12).

Tennyson "lived his most active mental life in the very midst of the dissolution of the spirit of belief, and has ever been regarded as specially sensitive to the intellectual conditions of his time" (Ward 1893b, p. 15). Tennyson was the first to coin the phrase "know-nothing creed", and illustrates the "feeling of the average agnostic of the nineteenth century about God" in the lines of his poem aptly titled, "Despair":

> He is only a cloud and a smoke who was once a pillar of fire,
>
> The guess of a worm in the dust and the shadow of its desire. (Tennyson [1881] 1898)

Tennyson, according to Ward, "has fulfilled the double condition . . . laid down for the intellectual witness. He has felt the doubt; he has known the faith. The faith has ever been deeper; the difficulty has always been real" (Ward 1893b, p. 14).

From the witnesses of Kant, Newman, and Tennyson, Ward concludes that "the sceptic makes an unreal isolation of the speculative intellect, and refuses to view life as a whole—in its hope and its action as well as in the analysis of the passive impressions of the mind" (Ward 1893b, p. 19). Ward argues for the unitive nature of knowledge when he writes that "to know what is to be known he must use all his faculties; whereas he sits down and uses one set only, with painful exactness, perhaps, and greatest industry" (Ward 1893b, p. 20). "The sceptic", argues Ward, uses "but one set of faculties and assuming the proportions due perhaps to his special point of view to be real" (Ward 1893b, p. 20). Ward expounds upon his theory that Kant and Newman are witnesses to the unseen in his writings circulated among the members of the Synthetic Society.

3.3. The Synthetic Society

Ward's contribution to the Synthetic Society's mission of "considering agnostic tendencies" in which to "contribute to a working philosophy of religion" is based on some of the presuppositions of John Henry Newman and Immanuel Kant. For Ward, Newman and Kant serve as a foundation for his argument that the "saints" or "seers" of a religion should be understood as a categorical gauge by which to understand the essence of a religion, both in terms of morality[2] and in terms of revealed doctrine, which is a more nuanced case.

Kant's "rejection as theoretically invalid alike of the Ontological, the Cosmological, and the Teleological proofs of Theism", makes way for an "ethical atmosphere", which moves away from the perceived "medievalism" of accepting dogmatic principles uncritically, according to Ward (Ward 1896, pp. 1–2). The import of Kant's rejection of this perceived

"medievalism" is philosophy's acceptance of a more practical scope. Ward describes this more practical scope as an adoption of the idea that if the actual causes of important convictions are to be found in the social influences surrounding the individual, and if our knowledge and our very faculties of knowing have been developed by the social environment of successive generations, the study of sociology and of evolution[3] is clearly necessary for an adequate philosophy of the human mind (Ward 1896, p. 4).[4]

Ward argues that morality and belief are derived from a divine cause, in which the saint, or "seer", as he calls it in his Synthetic Society papers, is able to recognize as such. "It seems, at least, clear that a 'working philosophy' of religious belief", argues Ward, "cannot leave out of account what has so much influence as a cause of belief, and what has certainly in it at least some rational value attaching to the argument from man's moral nature to a moral author of the universe and of humanity" (Ward 1896, p. 18).

Speaking from within a theistic framework, Ward asks two questions arising from the assumption that morality and doctrine are derived from a divine cause: (1) *Who* should we look to for an adequate interpretation of divine revelation, which is understood as transcendent, immanent, and invisible, and (2) *How* are the saints able to provide an authoritative witness to divine realities.[5] Writing within a context in which individual subjective religious experience was often lauded over the "experts", Ward argues that the religious experts must be viewed as authoritative on religious and moral matters much in the same way scientists must be authoritative in scientific matters. "For the conquests of the human mind in astronomy", Ward contends, "we look to the astronomers"; likewise, "for its conquests in religion we look to the Saints and moral heroes" (Ward 1896, p. 52).

Ward does distinguish between the ability of the general population to comprehend the mathematical basics of astronomy and the mysterious underpinnings of divine revelation. "The individual can (at least in most cases) understand enough of the methods employed by mathematical or astronomical specialists to justify his confidence in their results", writes Ward (Ward 1896, p. 52). However, in religion "the very nature of the path whereby the moral hero attains the full extent of his confidence in an overruling Deity remains to a large extent shrouded in mystery. He cannot fully explain it even to himself" (Ward 1896, p. 52). Because of its mysterious nature, Ward notes, religious intuition "belongs to the same category as those intuitions of genius which have not as yet received full analytical interpretation" (Ward 1896, p. 52). Ward argues that even though divine mystery does not allow for knowledge of "ultimate laws connecting phenomena", there are real (empirical) practical imports associated with the imitation of the religious experts, what he calls "saints" or "seers" (Ward 1896, p. 52).

Ward recognizes that "it is the path of wisdom to be guided by empirical laws while we remain in ignorance of the ultimate laws to which they are resolvable" (Ward 1896, p. 53). "Our ancestors guided their ships by the stars though they were ignorant of Copernicanism", Ward notes. Quoting a maxim of Joubert, "In poetry I should fear to be wrong if I differed from the poets, in religion if I differed from the Saints",[6] Ward explains the relationship between the conscience of the saint and with God and how that relationship works to provide empirical evidence for the divine mystery existing beyond our sense perception (Ward 1896, p. 52).

The saints, Ward argues, are authoritative because their attention and closeness to the divine mystery has further developed their human nature, and it is because of their developed human nature that the saints are able to give a more accurate account of the divine world:

> If Kant and Cardinal Newman are right, that the full realisation of the significance of the ethical nature is that which gives alike motive and power to rise from suspense to certainty as to the truth of Theism, the *authorities* on the subject are surely those whose ethical nature is most highly developed, and whose religious experience is fullest. (Ward 1896, p. 51)

Ward suggests that "studying the experience of the most highly developed natures" can "justify the statement that Theism is the necessary presupposition of the facts of experience, and especially of ethical experience" (Ward 1896, p. 63). The more fully developed nature of the "saint" or "seer", Ward argues, does not provide "a complete account of the grounds for Theism", but it acts as "an evidence of our personal relations with God, and as supplying what Natural Theology leaves incomplete in its testimony of the moral character of the Deity" (Ward 1896, p. 61).

Ward explains that the moral character of the saint is intimately connected with the moral character of the deity. To this end, Ward differentiates between the theistic and agnostic views in that "the Theist claims that our knowledge transcends the world of experience, and asserts not only . . . that experience points to a 'beyond', . . . but that we have some knowledge, partial and inadequate, but of great practical value, of the nature of that 'beyond'" (Ward 1897, p. 125). "If revelation professes to have culminated in One in whom an absolutely Divine nature has been manifested, and whose teaching is calculated to draw forth moral aspirations and perceptions of a higher order than any which mankind had previously known", writes Ward, "such a profession would be in harmony with the hierarchy of knowledge and the means of attaining it to which we find in human society" (Ward 1896, p. 19).

While Ward does not argue that the experience of the saints verifies theism—because, according to Ward, "Theism cannot be verified"—the acceptance of theism "has been the basis of those lives of self-sacrifice and devotion which mankind refuses to dethrone from their place as the highest realisation of the possibilities of human nature", rather than propositional claims (Ward 1897, p. 125).

The "result of the accumulated experiences", of the saints, Ward argues, is a testimony of their experience of the divine that can serve as an objective measure from which to analyze our own subjective spiritual experiences. Ward argues that the collective experience of the saints acts as a compass for both our individual and ecclesial religious experience, and he notes that while divine nature is mysterious, the compass of the saints navigating us through the structures of a particular religion allows for us to better comprehend the ultimately incomprehensible divine world. Ward writes,

> The human race, which is endowed with touch but not with sight of religious truth, which is universally sensitive to the warning touch of an unseen hand in the ethical nature, and is yet unable to descry that region in which the explanation it suggests is verified, is surely not acting beyond its competence if it strives, under the guidance of its most sensitive minds to co-ordinate such indications as are given to it of our practical relations with realities which, as they are in themselves, are transcendent to our present experience. (Ward 1897, p. 126)

Though we cannot see God, much like the blind cannot see the world, we are still able to navigate transcendent religious experience through the witness of the saints by means of the church (See Huddleston 2021).

Ward suggests that though no one can be an expert in all scientific fields, less is accepted on blind authority as one becomes more familiar with the minutia of specific scientific subfields. "The backward schoolboy—at the opposite pole [than the learned scientist]", Ward states, "accepts nearly the whole on authority" (Ward 1899, p. 224). However, as someone becomes more of an expert, less is accepted on the grounds of authority. Using the analogy of bankers and mail-carriers, Ward argues that our dependence upon mundane actors to perform their tasks can be seen as an appeal to authority, both in terms of our immediate experience and in terms of our collective historical experience. Regarding our immediate experience, Ward maintains that anyone with previous repeated experience of a banker or a mail carrier doing their jobs, would have certainty that these persons will carry out the tasks appropriate to the job.

Slightly different, however, is Ward's developmental argument that our knowledge in general over time, and in society over time, and in workers associated with a particular field—the world of finance, for example—has developed the most sufficient and efficient

knowledge of the task. Ward labels this idea "social reasoning", which is understood to enable us to "leave trust to the authorities of the company or of the bank the employment of our debentures or deposits, but only because of the elaborate co-ordination existing in the rational machinery of the world of finance" (Ward 1899, p. 225).

Ward is clear that "in most cases", it is "very misleading to describe his [any individual trusting the banker or mail carrier] trust as non-rational, or as a blind submission to authority" (Ward 1899, p. 226). Rather than blind obedience, Ward argues that through social reasoning, trusting the authority of everyday systems entails a "latent rational foundation" (Ward 1899, p. 226). Upon this dictum, Ward argues that "among the beliefs which we accept in the first instance on authority, and which are largely confirmed by their practical utility, are the religious beliefs of the community" (Ward 1899, p. 229).

Ward concedes that "the ground for trust in the authority of the Christian Church is not similar to the ground for trusting a scientific teacher which is supplied by an elaborated discovery to a mind which is capable of verifying it in detail" (Ward 1899, p. 233). However, the authority of the Christian Church "has a real similarity to that ground which is regarded as an adequate working philosophy by a man of average intelligence, who can sufficiently understand the discovery to trust in the discoverer's higher knowledge" (Ward 1899, p. 233). Integral to Ward's argument from authority is "a latent recognition . . . of rational trust [in the saints of the church] as distinguished from complete reasoning" (Ward 1899, p. 233).

Ward's argument for a trust in the authority of the experts, which he presented to his colleagues in the Synthetic Society on several occasions, is best read in light of his other writings on how the church provides a balanced structure through which Christ is revealed. Ward adopts much of Newman's incarnational ecclesiology to explain how the experience saints can provide a foundation for trusting that which is inherently shrouded in mystery.

4. Ecclesiological Response to His Perceived Zeitgeist

In his *Essay on Development*, Newman argues that the incarnation is "the central aspect of Christianity, out of which the three main aspects of its teaching take their rise, the sacramental, the hierarchical, and the ascetic" (Newman 1845, [1877] 1878, p. 36). Similarly, in his preface to the 1877 edition of the *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church*, Newman outlines a triadic ecclesiology based upon the three baptismal offices of priest, prophet, and king, which coincide with his three aspects of the incarnation. Newman writes that as Christ ascended, the church was instituted in three offices:

> When our Lord went up on high, He left His representatives behind Him. This was Holy Church, His mystical Body and Bride, a Divine Institution, and the shrine and organ of the Paraclete, who speaks through her till the end comes. She . . . is 'His very self below', as far as men on earth are equal to the discharge and fulfilment of high offices, which primarily and supremely are His. These offices, which specially belong to Him as Mediator, are commonly considered to be three; He is Prophet, Priest, and King; and after His pattern, and in human measure, Holy Church has a triple office too; not the Prophetical alone and in isolation, . . . but three offices, which are indivisible, though diverse, viz. teaching, rule, and sacred ministry. (Newman [1877] 1878, pp. xxxix–xl)

From the incarnation, the mystical body of Christ, the church, came into being, or was revealed. The mystical body is made up of three aspects, as Newman notes: the sacramental, the hierarchical, and the ascetic. The three aspects of the church must function harmoniously, in which "one aspect of Revelation must not be allowed to exclude or to obscure another" (Newman 1845, [1877] 1878, p. 36).

Likewise, Newman understands Christianity as existing within certain tensions, which must be held in balance. Newman argues that within the three aspects of the mystical body, "Christianity is dogmatical, devotional, practical all at once; it is esoteric and exoteric; it is indulgent and strict; it is light and dark; it is love and fear" (Newman 1845, [1877] 1878, p. 36).

Similar to Newman's three aspects of the church are Ward's three ecclesial elements. Ward explains his three-fold ecclesiology using geographical–cultural monikers: (1) a Roman/ruling element, (2) a Greek/thinking/intellectual element, and (3) a Hebrew/prophetic/saintly element. Ward, much like Newman, emphasizes the significance of the prophetical/saintly/spiritual office as unique and fundamental in the church's reception of divine revelation (See Pahls 2009). While the three elements must function in accord, Ward regards the prophetic or saintly ecclesial element as historically unitive and that which the Roman and Greek elements of the church regulate and explicate. He writes, for example that "the infusion of Hebrew Theism [saintly office] into Roman civilization [ruling office]" is developed in "the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation—the former deepening man's sense of its mystery, the latter bringing it closer to his heart and intelligence" (Ward 1904, p. 352).

The purpose of the Hebrew/saintly element is that it is the living foundation for both the Roman/ruling and Greek/intellectual elements. Ward writes, "Ever conscious when a crisis came that the prophetic element of living devotion and sanctity is the one on which all else depends" (Ward n.d.). Ward argues that the three elements must be balanced for proper doctrinal development and for a healthy functioning church: "One might almost say that it has been, under Providence, the law of organic growth and advance within the Church that these three elements have corrected and balanced each other" (Ward n.d.). Without harmony between the three elements, the elements themselves stray in unhealthy directions. For example, Ward argues that "the spiritual element, where it assumes a self-witted form and emancipates itself from theology and from the principle of obedience to authority, denigrates into fanaticism and dangerous forms of mysticism, into Cathari, Illuminati, Quietists and the rest of the tribe" (Ward n.d.). Similarly, "the intellectual element", which Ward identifies as the Greek element, "has needed, to prevent its degenerating into rationalism, correction from both the spiritual life of the Church and the discipline of authority—both of them representing in different ways the primitive Christian tradition and revelation" (Ward n.d.). Likewise, the "Roman element, the element of authority has at times stood in need of pressure from both the spiritual and the intellectual forces to prevent stagnation, spiritual or intellectual, or absolutism—the vices of officialism" (Ward n.d.). Ward notes St. Catherine of Siena as an historical example of how the spiritual, or saintly, element has acted as a corrective for an under-performing Roman element when "St. Catherine of Siena rouses a Pope to a sense of his duty and restores the Papacy to Rome" (Ward n.d.).

While Ward's ecclesiology is ultimately based upon authority, his explanation of authority is inherently incarnational, rather than clericalist or individualist. It is the experience of the Triune God within the living faith of the saints that animates the church for Ward. For both Newman and Ward, the essence of the church is the witness of both the transcendence and the immanence of the Triune God. Unlike agnosticism, Ward understands the saints of the church to witness to the realities of the divine world, which are translated in history through the language of religious devotion, practice, and theological reflection. Likewise, unlike the positivists, Ward understands the saints of the church as witnessing a divine world that while deeply intimate and personal, remains mysterious and transcendent.

5. Conclusions

At the heart of Wilfrid Ward's theology of the saints is an incarnational ecclesiology in which the religious experience of the saints is foundational for the church's knowledge of divine revelation. His reflection on the saints during what he deems the Zeitgeist of late nineteenth-century England—agnosticism and positivism—demonstrates how he understands the experience of the saints, particularly their mystical experience, as necessary for navigating the cultural misunderstandings of the transcendence and imminence of God.

In his papers presented at the Synthetic Society, Ward outlines an epistemological argument in which the saints, or "seers", as he calls them, are understood as those which have profoundly experienced the Zeitgeist and who have responded prophetically. The "seers" Ward names to speak to his own Zeitgeist are John Henry Newman, Immanuel

Kant, and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Ward deems their philosophical and theological voice helpful, particularly because they have experienced and spoken profoundly to the Zeitgeist of their own day.[7]

In Ward's other writings noted here, he speaks more directly about the religious experience of canonized saints, which forms the foundation of his ecclesiology. In this schema, the saints, both as a collective and in the particularities of their experiences, aid both individuals and Christianity as a whole in the question as to whether what they know of the invisible God is truly God, or simply a mirror reflecting back our own imaginings.

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Notes

1 Newman has since been officially canonized a saint as of 13 October 2019.

2 Ward's sense of the term "moral" was broader than it is typically used today. Ward in this case seems to mean all Christian behavior and methods of belief.

3 Ward here, as in other places within the *Synthetic Society Papers*, refers to the term "evolution" not in strict Darwinian biological terms, but in the broader sense of sociological and philosophical development, though at other times he does speak in terms of biological evolution.

4 Ward, however, does not fully articulate his philosophy of the human mind in his papers for the Synthetic Society.

5 Ward begins his argumentation through a more zoomed-out lens that the saints in any religion should tell us about the essence of the religion. However, Ward's more epistemological explanation of how that works in the saints, was clearly more interested in particularities and was squarely from within the Christian perspective.

6 Joseph Joubert (1754–1824) is a French moralist and essayist whose writings were published posthumously around the time Ward was writing.

7 The work of John Cottingham demonstrates how the conversation of the saints are understood as authoritative in contemporary philosophical scholarship (Cottingham 2017).

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