

JOHN HENRY
CARDINAL NEWMAN

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JOHN HENRY
CARDINAL NEWMAN

In My Own Words

*Compiled and Edited by
Lewis Berry, CO*



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INTRODUCTION

John Henry Newman was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the United Kingdom in September 2010. A beatification is, in its proper sense, permission to celebrate the liturgy in a person's honor in a local place. Yet Newman's beatification has a significance that stretches far beyond his own country and has implications for the life of the whole Catholic Church—and perhaps implications not only for Catholics.

Two events in Newman's life stand out as defining what he means for us today. The first is his reception into the Catholic Church. It was a decision with its roots in prayer, deep study of the sources of the Christian tradition, and his own experience of what it means to be human. Newman's journey to Catholicism was not an easy one. He learned what it was to be

attracted to atheism and the denial of traditional Christianity. Yet in 1816, when still at school, he had a powerful conversion to what he called “dogmatic Christianity.” It was accompanied by his recognition of “two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself, and my Creator.” Newman had embraced Christianity as a revealed religion and God as creator and judge.

Newman's career at Oxford in the 1830s and 1840s gave him international renown. He preached with a psychological and spiritual insight unrivaled to this day in English-speaking Christianity. His “Oxford Movement” aimed to renew the contemporary Anglican Church in principles drawn not from Protestantism, but from the Fathers of the Church. It was destined to end in failure, as Newman's “Anglo-Catholicism” was rejected by his own bishops. But a stronger movement within Newman himself was to bring him toward the Church of Rome. He came to accept that Roman Catholicism was the authentic descendant of the “Church of the Fathers.” He entered the “one true fold of Christ” on October 9, 1845.

The second event is when Newman was made a Cardinal in 1879. This exceptional decision of Pope Leo XIII—Newman was not a diocesan bishop—was a

recognition above all of the importance of Newman's theology and mission.

What is at the heart of Newman's message? Here, for sure, we find his doctrine of conscience. For Newman, conscience is our way to God. If we follow it, if we do what is right, then we are prepared to welcome and love the teaching of Christ. If we do not, we end up in a circle of self-righteousness and rejection of the truth. Newman was also an important writer about Christian education. He believed in a broad education that taught people how to think independently—but always faithful to revelation, protected and defended by the Church and its visible head, the Pope.

Benedict XVI himself has been profoundly influenced by John Henry Newman. He read Newman at seminary and has always recognized in him a witness to the unity of the Church and to the power of truth. According to the Pope, Newman's life teaches us that conscience, enlightened by Christ and the teaching of the Church, must come before all other loyalties: "Cardinal Newman[s]...life and work could be described as a single great commentary on the question of conscience...A man of conscience is one who never acquires tolerance, well-being, success, public standing, and approval on the part

of prevailing opinion at the expense of truth.” Pope Benedict loves Newman so much that he officiated at his beatification—his very first since becoming Pope. Benedict’s particular devotion to Newman and his message is something that should make us sit back and think.

Newman lived a holy life. The process that declared him “Venerable” in 1991 confirmed that fact. He was unfailingly generous to the poor; he was a man of prayer and had great devotion to the Mass. He was an outstanding priest who lived a life of purity and self-sacrificing love for others, which places him among the greatest saints. He founded institutions that have made their mark on England—the communities of the Birmingham and London Oratories and the Oratory School—and in Ireland, where he founded the Catholic University in Dublin. Yet his greatest witness then and now lies in his call to “holiness of mind”: the capacity, through a life lived in obedience to God and to conscience, to think with Christ and his Church. This holiness Newman both lived and taught.

This devotion to “holiness of mind” lies behind everything you will read in the following pages, which are arranged and selected in order to draw on the central themes of Newman’s writings. Newman wasn’t

a “pessimistic” thinker, but he knew that the reality of sin has to be confronted and recognized if we are to realize why we need a Redeemer and why we need the Catholic Church. He wrote extensively on “faith and reason.” He knew the power of human reason and that it could be a true servant of faith. But he also knew how reason is too often abused by those who want to escape their own responsibilities before God and man. In fact, Newman knew—with a rare sharpness of vision—the need for our “conversion in Christ.” This is a conversion achieved only through “prayer,” which demands serious attention and self-sacrifice. The public worship of the Church and the “sacraments” are key for Newman: the instruments of the New Covenant, they bring God’s life to a world separated from him. Finally, Newman’s entire theology points toward “heaven” and to God himself, so utterly different from the things of this world, but the goal of every Christian.

Heaven, of course, is where Catholics believe Newman is. The process of beatification implies that God has granted the prayers of a person in heaven by physically healing someone on earth. The story of the healing worked through Newman’s intercession has a beauty and a power all its own. Jack Sullivan, a civil magistrate, experienced severe back problems in

2000. He was preparing for ordination as a permanent deacon, and his back problems put that ordination in jeopardy. He had learned about Newman that summer by watching a television presentation in which viewers were told to write to the Oratory in Birmingham, England, if they had experienced any favors through praying to Newman. From then on, Sullivan entrusted himself in a special way to the English Cardinal. Days after a difficult operation on his spine in 2001—one that left him virtually immobile—he prayed in the hospital to Newman on the Feast of the Assumption of our Lady: “Please, Cardinal Newman, help me to walk so that I can return to classes and be ordained.” He was overcome by a powerful physical sensation and sense of inner peace. He got up from his bed and walked unaided. He left the hospital that day. Months of recovery had been reduced to seconds.

What does Sullivan say about this miracle? During his visit to England in November 2009, he said: “This miracle was not for me alone, but for everyone. It is to show that God is real, Newman is real: he is alive, there is life after death, there is more to life than what we can see and touch and feel. The greatest reality is the spirit; that’s the most meaningful reality. We can

experience heaven on earth.” Newman, who spoke so often of heaven in his life, has spoken again.

Newman’s life is a challenge and an inspiration to many. His hundreds of thousands of letters show him helping and advising his many friends; they chart his travels, his struggles and disappointments, his work among famous figures and events of his day. These things you will find in the many studies of Newman’s perennially fascinating life and personality. But in this book you find the voice of Newman speaking to the Church and the world—his concerns, his penetrating insights, his love for the truth—his words travel over two centuries as if they come from one of our contemporaries. Let us allow this great seeker of truth to speak to us, and so be educated afresh in the ways of Christ.

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8.
GOD
FATHER,
SON, AND
HOLY SPIRIT

This world is always changing, but God alone is unchanging: From the beginning, he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New: he who revealed himself to the Jews is he who has revealed himself in Christ. The life of Christ on earth, he who is the Word of God, shows us what God is like: a God of compassion, but also a judge, who speaks of good and evil. God's love is shown in the humility of the Incarnation: he has become weak for our sakes, he has taken our infirmity, our temptations upon himself. And as Christ suffered death before returning to the Father in glory, so our lives are marked by the pain of the cross. But God works through this, through "means and ends, by steps, by victories hardly gained," so that he may bring us through the trials of this world into the peace and joy of his kingdom.

-LB

I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in God; and if I am asked why I believe in a God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I feel it impossible to believe in my own existence...without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being in my conscience.

APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA

Christ came...to gather together in one all the elements of good dispersed throughout the world, to make them His own, to illuminate them with Himself, to reform and refashion them into Himself...He came to construct a new kingdom on the earth: that what had as yet lain in sin, might become what it was at the first...He took on Him our nature, that in God that nature might revive and be restored; that...after being perfect on the Cross, might impart that which itself was, as an incorruptible seed, for the life of all who receive it in faith.

LECTURES ON JUSTIFICATION

When we confess God as Omnipotent only, we have gained but a half-knowledge of Him: His is an Omnipotence which can at the same time swathe Itself in infirmity and can become the captive of Its own creatures. He has...the incomprehensible power of even making Himself weak. We must know Him by His names, Emmanuel and Jesus, to know Him perfectly.

SERMONS PREACHED ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS

The heavenly gift of the Spirit fixes the eyes of our mind upon the Divine Author of our salvation. By nature we are blind and carnal, but the Holy Ghost by whom we are new-born, reveals to us the God of mercies, and bids us adore Him as our Father with a true heart.

PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS II

Eternal Paraclete, co-equal with the Father and Son...you are that living love, wherewith the Father and the Son love each other. And You are the Author of supernatural love in our hearts—As a fire You came down from heaven on the day of Pentecost; and as a

fire You burn away the dross of sin and vanity in the heart...We are by nature blind and hard-hearted in all spiritual matters; how are we to reach heaven? It is by the flame of Your grace, O Almighty Paraclete.

MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS

Whereas God is one, and His will one, and His purpose one, and His work one; whereas all He is and does is absolutely perfect and complete, independent of time and place, yet...in His actual dealings with this world...He seems to work by a process, by means and ends, by steps, by victories hardly gained, and failures repaired, and sacrifices ventured.

PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS II

The Creator of this world is none other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; there are not two Gods, one of matter, one of spirit; one of the Law, and one of the Gospel. There is one God, and He is Lord of all we are, and all we have; and, therefore, all we do must be stamped with His seal and signature.

PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS VI

He it was who created the worlds; He it was who... showed Himself to be a living and observant God, whether men thought of Him or not. Yet this great God condescended to come down on earth from His heavenly throne, and to be born into His own world; showing Himself as the Son of God in a new and second sense, in a created nature, as well as in His eternal substance.

PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS V

The fortunes of the world change; what was high, lies low; what was low, rises high. Riches take wings and flee away; bereavements happen. Friends become enemies, and enemies friends. Our wishes, aims, and plans change. There is nothing stable but You, O my God! And You are the center and life of all...who trust You as their Father [and]...are content to put themselves into Your hands.

MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS

God beholds you individually...He “calls you by name.” He sees you, and understands you, as He made you. He knows what is in you, all your own peculiar feelings and thoughts, your dispositions and likings, your strength and your weakness. He views you in your day of rejoicing, and your day of sorrow. He sympathizes in your hopes and your temptations. He interests Himself in all your anxieties and remembrances, all the risings and fallings of your spirit.

PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS III

You alone, O God, are what You ever have been. Man changes. You are unchangeable; even as man You were ever unchangeable, for Jesus is yesterday and today Himself, and for ever. Your word endures in heaven and earth. Your decrees are fixed...Your Nature, Your Attributes, are ever the same. There ever was Father, ever Son, ever Holy Ghost.

MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS

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