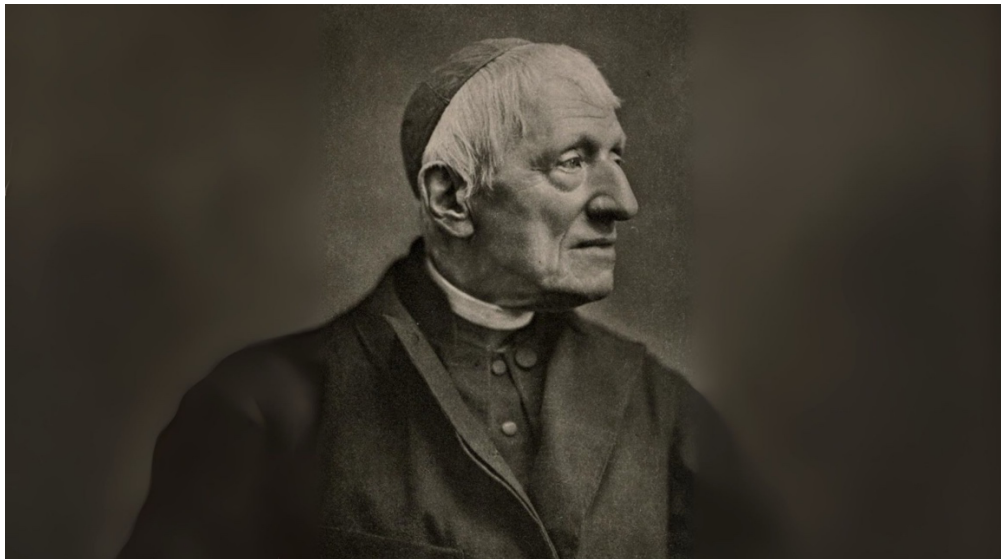

GANZ NOTES - TNS 17,3

ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

(1801-1890)

Version: 18, 19 October; 4, 10, 11 November 2025



There are from among the thirty-eight Doctors of the Church only two others from England: St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 CE; he was an Italian) and St. Bede the Venerable (672-735 CE). And John Henry Newman (1801-1890) is the third of only three Doctors of the modern era, the other two being, St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) and St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897).

THE FEAST OF ST. MARTIN OF TOURS

Foley, Leonard. *Saint of the Day: The Definitive Guide to the Saints* (p. 364). Kindle Edition.

Martin of Tours Bishop (316?–397) - A conscientious objector who wanted to be a monk; a monk who was maneuvered into being a bishop; a bishop who fought paganism but pleaded for mercy for heretics— **such was Martin of Tours, one of the most popular saints and one of the first not to be a martyr.** Born of pagan parents in what is now Hungary and raised in Italy, this son of a veteran was forced at the age of fifteen to serve in the army. He became a Christian catechumen and was baptized at eighteen. It was said that he lived more like a monk than a soldier. **At twenty-three he refused a war bonus and told his commander: “I have served you as a soldier; now let me serve Christ. Give the bounty to those who are going to fight. But I am a soldier of Christ, and it is not lawful for me to fight.”** After great difficulties, he was **discharged and went to be a disciple of Hilary of Poitiers (January 13).** He was ordained an exorcist and worked with great zeal against the Arians. He became a monk, living first at Milan and later on a small island. When Hilary was restored to his see after exile, Martin returned to France and established what may have been the first French monastery near Poitiers. He lived there for ten years, forming his disciples and preaching throughout the countryside. **The people of Tours demanded that he become their bishop. He was drawn to that city by a ruse—the need of a sick person—and was brought to the church, where he reluctantly allowed himself to be consecrated bishop.** Some of the consecrating bishops thought his rumpled appearance and unkempt hair indicated that he was not dignified enough for the office. Along with St. Ambrose (December 7), Martin rejected Bishop Ithacius’s principle of putting heretics to death—as well as the intrusion of the emperor into such matters.

STORY: On a bitterly cold day, a famous legend goes, Martin met a poor man, almost naked, trembling in the cold and begging from passersby at the city gate. Martin had nothing but his weapons and his clothes. He drew his sword, cut his cloak into two pieces, gave one to the beggar and wrapped himself in the other half. Some of the bystanders laughed at his now odd appearance; others were ashamed at not having relieved the man’s misery. **That night in his sleep Martin saw Christ dressed in the half of the garment he had given away, and heard him say, “Martin, still a catechumen, has covered me with this garment.”**

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1866 in a Letter about Newman to his friend Robert Bridges

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Dr Newman was most kind, I mean in the very best sense, for his manner is not that of solicitous kindness, but genial and almost, so to speak, unserious. And if I may say so, so sensible. He asked questions and made it clear for me how to act; I will tell you presently what that is: he made sure I was acting deliberately and wished to hear my arguments; when I had given them and said I could see no way out of them, he laughed and said, 'Nor can I'; and he told me I must come to the Church to accept and believe – as I hope to do. He thought there appeared no reason, if it had not been for matters at home, of course, why I should not be received at once, but in no way did he urge me on, rather the other way. More than once when I offered to go, he was good enough to make me stay talking. Amongst other things, he said that he always answered those who thought the learned had no excuse in invincible ignorance, that, on the contrary, they had that excuse the most of all people. It is needless to say he spoke with interest and kindness and appreciation of all that the Tractarians reverence. This much pleased me, namely a bird's eye view of Oxford in his room.¹

Pope Leo XIV, Proclamation of St. John Henry Newman as Doctor of the Church, 1 November 2025 –

Responding to today's challenges may sometimes seem beyond our capabilities, but this is not the case. **Let us not allow pessimism to defeat us!** I recall what my beloved predecessor Pope Francis emphasized in his *Address to the First Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Culture and Education*: that we must work together to set humanity free from the encircling gloom of nihilism, which is perhaps the most dangerous malady of contemporary culture, since it threatens to "cancel" hope. **This reference to the darkness that surrounds us echoes one of Saint John Henry Newman's best-known texts, the hymn "Lead, Kindly Light." In that beautiful prayer, we come to realize that we are far from home, our feet are unsteady, we cannot interpret clearly the way ahead.** Yet none of this impedes us, since we have found our Guide: "Lead, Kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on;" "Lead, Kindly Light, The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on."

¹ *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, edited by Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford UP, 1935), 5–6. As a young undergraduate Hopkins wrote to Newman in August, while the latter was on holiday in Switzerland; Newman replied on 11 September, apologising for the delayed reply and arranging to meet Hopkins. This letter to Robert Bridges was written after the visit.

The Essential Cardinal Newman Collection (1938), collected and edited by Daniel M. O'Connell, SJ -

"God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow, I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his. If, indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling. . . . O Adonai, O Ruler of Israel, Thou that guidest Joseph like a flock, O Emmanuel, O Sapiaientia, I give myself to Thee. I trust Thee wholly. Thou art wiser than I—more loving to me than I myself. Deign to fulfil Thy high purposes in me whatever they be—work in and through me. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used." [Newman, John Henry. *The Essential Cardinal Newman Collection: Prayers, Meditations, and Other Spiritual Writings* (pp. 24-25). Kindle Edition.]

St. John Paul II, Letter (January 2001)² -

Newman was born in troubled times which knew not only political and military upheaval but also turbulence of soul. Old certitudes were shaken, and believers were faced with the threat of rationalism on the one hand and fideism on the other. **Rationalism brought with it a rejection of both authority and transcendence, while fideism turned from the challenges of history and the tasks of this world to a distorted dependence upon authority and the supernatural.** In such a world, Newman came eventually to a remarkable synthesis of faith and reason which were for him "like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth" (*Fides et Ratio*, Introduction;

² https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20010227_john-henry-newman.html.

cf. *ibid.*, 74). It was the passionate contemplation of truth which also led him to a liberating acceptance of the authority which has its roots in Christ, and to the sense of the supernatural which opens the human mind and heart to the full range of possibilities revealed in Christ. "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead Thou me on", Newman wrote in *The Pillar of the Cloud*; and for him Christ was the light at the heart of every kind of darkness. For his tomb he chose the inscription: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*; and it was clear at the end of his life's journey that Christ was the truth he had found.

Pope Paul VI, Address (7 April 1975) –

Many of the problems which he treated with wisdom - although he himself was frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted in his own time - were the subjects of the discussion and study of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965], as for example the question of ecumenism, the relationship between Christianity and the world, the emphasis on the role of the laity in the Church and the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. ... **The "realisation" of the Christian ideal in Newman's sense is but another name for a continual effort for the renewal of personal and community life in the spirit of the Gospel and in accordance with the just demands of the present moment of history. "Realising" our Christian vocation means, in Newman's view, making the truths of our faith a living reality, full of practical consequences for daily life; it means becoming true followers of Christ.** And, in the lofty and arduous task to which this Holy Year urgently calls us, the thought and example of John Henry Newman bring a precious light and a great incitement.

Pope Francis, General Audience on Discernment (28 September 2022) –

Many people, even Christians, think the same thing: that is, that Jesus may well be the Son of God, but they doubt that he wants our happiness; indeed, some fear that taking his proposal seriously, the one Jesus proposes to us, means ruining our lives, mortifying our desires, our strongest aspirations. These thoughts sometimes creep up inside us: that God asks too much of us, we fear that God asks too much of us, that he doesn't really love us.

Instead, in our first encounter we saw that the sign of the encounter with the Lord is joy. When I encounter the Lord in prayer, I become joyful. Each one of us becomes joyful, a beautiful thing. Sadness, or fear, on the other hand, are signs of distance from God: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments", Jesus says to the rich young man (Mt 19:17).

Discerning what is happening within us is not easy, for appearances are deceptive, but *familiarity with God* can melt doubts and fears in a gentle way, making our lives increasingly receptive to his “gentle light,” according to the beautiful expression of Saint John Henry Newman. The saints shine with reflected light and show in the simple gestures of their day the loving presence of God, who makes the impossible possible. It is said that two spouses who have lived together for a long time, loving each other, end up resembling each other. Something similar can be said about affective prayer. **In a gradual but effective way, it makes us more and more capable of recognizing what counts through connaturality, as something that springs from the depths of our being.** To be in prayer does not mean saying words, words, no: *being in prayer means opening my heart to Jesus, drawing close to Jesus, allowing Jesus to enter into my heart and making us feel his presence.* And there we can discern when it is Jesus and when it is us with our thoughts, that so many times are far from what Jesus wants.

Let us ask for this grace: “to live a relationship of friendship with the Lord, as a friend speaks to a friend” (cf. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 53).

PRAYER

St. John Henry Newman (1801-1890)
“The Pillar of Cloud” (aka, “Lead, Kindly Light”)
Written at Sea, on June 16, 1833

Lead, Kindly Light,³ amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou

³ For a haunting, sublime version of this poem set to music, find it by John Rutter and performed by The Cambridge Singers (12 November 2021), “Lead, Kindly Light” - <https://music.apple.com/us/album/lead-kindly-light/1592745799?i=1592745800>.

Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

[The following notes on the text are taken from my **Rewilding the Word** essay #15 (October 2025)]

We keep a close eye on **Exodus 13:17-22**, in whose lines Newman finds the biblical framing best suited to what he has been feeling when he wrote this poem:

Exodus 13 (NJB): ²¹ Yahweh preceded them, by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could march by day and by night.* ²² The pillar of cloud never left its place ahead of the people during the day, nor the pillar of fire during the night. ⁴

“Lead, Kindly Light” - The poem begins with this command, which Newman in his unbearable helplessness speaks to God. This seems impertinent⁵ – “Who are we to command God?” Yet, we think of the famous line from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine: “Give what you command, O Lord, and then command whatever you will.” It is right that we feel bold about “commanding” God to give to us what He has already demonstrated that He wants to give us. Such as other commands, “Forgive me!” or “Remember us!” or “Love us, or me!” We notice that Newman does not demand an *explanation* from God about the human complexities in which he finds himself trapped.

* 40:36+ Dt 1:33; Ne 9:19; Ps 78:14; 105:39; Ws 10:17-18; 18:3; Is 4:5; Jn 8:12; 10:4

⁴ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Ex 13:21-22.

⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**impertinent**” – **4.a.** - Characterized by presumptuous speech or behaviour, or by intrusion or interference in that which is not one's concern; insolent; rude, disrespectful.

How difficult it is for us to break the bad habit of complaining to God, saying “Why?”, which is always the wrong question. It is enough for him to ask God to lead him ... wherever God wishes to take him. In the spirit of John 10, Newman recalls that in the biblical world, shepherds did not “drive” their flocks (e.g., the Australian and American tradition of “drovers”, those who drive herds from behind) but “called them” by name, “going before them”, that they hearing his voice could follow him. Thus, Newman commands “Lead!”, because his sheep may command him, their shepherd, to do what he already intends.

14 I am the good shepherd;
I know my own
and my own know me, ⁶

The adjective “**kindly**” has unlooked for textures of meaning. We find in the 15th century it qualifies something “that is naturally suited to or required by a person ... something proper or fitting or appropriate for a person to have.” In this sense, Newman has understood that the divine Light (the Holy Spirit) is *required* that we might become persons at all; **we are made/designed to receive the Light**. This is what the great Jesuit philosopher, Bernard Lonergan, SJ⁷ meant by “obediential potency”⁸ – a person defined as a creature made by God with an active capacity to listen closely to God and to respond. Newman is acknowledging that the divine Light is not like the lights at a Football stadium – very bright; diffused over a large area; indiscriminate. Rather, it is a highly personal gift of Light, perfectly fitted to each person, giving to each person a capacity to know and to love God and to be able to love others as God does. St. Paul is getting at this when he famously writes:

⁶ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Jn 10:14.

⁷ **Lonergan, Bernard (1904–84)** Canadian Jesuit priest, philosopher, and theologian, born Buckingham, Quebec, and ordained to the priesthood in 1936. He obtained the doctorate at Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. [Richard Bernier, “Lonergan, Bernard,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. Andrew Louth (Oxford, United Kingdom; New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) 1157.]

⁸ ChatGPT concerning “**obediential potency**” in Lonergan: “Basic idea: a built-in, ordered capacity or finality in human nature that is properly obedient to and directed toward a supernatural end; human powers are naturally disposed to receive and cooperate with supernatural grace (an intrinsic “vertical” orientation).” I think, but I am not sure, that this is what St. Thomas Aquinas, OP refers to as “**sanctifying grace**.” I will have to ask my longtime friend Professor Michael Stebbins about this.

Romans 5 (NJB): ³ Not only that; let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance,* ⁴ and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope,* ⁵ and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.⁹

Pope Benedict XVI, Letter (10 November 2010) – In presenting and defending the Truth, Newman was always careful to find the appropriate language, the correct form and a suitable tone. He tried never to offend others and to witness to the gentle inner light, **the “kindly light”**, forcing himself to convince others with humility, happiness and patience. In a prayer to St Philip Neri he wrote: “that my countenance may always be open and cheerful, and my words kind and pleasant, as becomes those who, in whatever state of life they are, have the greatest of all goods, the favour of God and the prospect of eternal bliss” (J.H. Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*, Novena of St Philip May 22, Philip's Cheerfulness).

The noun “**Light**” is a famous way of referring to God, as if it were one of His personal names. What is striking about this Name is how it is the very expression of a Person Who is completely other-centered – the very heart of what it means to be LOVE. How? *Because light does not see itself*; it is that by which we are capable of seeing other things. This means that for us to love God will always mean, at least in great part, to love what the divine Light allows us to see, to *notice* what God reveals to us to see and to respond to it as something shown us by God.

“**Keep Thou my feet**” – Have you noticed that when it is very dark, and we need to move, on foot, through that darkness to some destination, we keep our head up and eyes bulging out, and our head moving to enable the different light-gathering capacities of our inner eye (the “rods and cones”) to pick up whatever light is available? But in order to do this, we cannot also be watching where our feet step. Thus, Newman asks God to guard him from tripping and falling, as he, Newman, keeps his head up and eyes straining to find any light, or some lighter texture of dark. The “**Thou**” used to be in English a more familiar way of addressing another person (now considered an archaic way of speaking). In that earlier stage of English, to use “Thou” when addressing a person revealed how the speaker felt himself or herself personally closer to

* 3:23h

* 2 Co 12:9-10; Jm 1:2-4; 1 P 4:13-14; Rv 1:9 • 1 Co 13:13e • 8:4-16; Ga 4:4-6; 3:26m

⁹ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Ro 5:3-5.

the hearer. Notice the familiarity indicated by “thy” (i.e., your) in the Lord’s Prayer - “thy Kingdom come; thy will be done”.

“I loved to choose and see my path” – A wise Jesuit, who had spent most of his life spiritually directing people, remarked to me. “Rick, I now believe that it is only when a person has completely exhausted every spiritual technique, has expended himself or herself making every effort to get “right” his or her spiritual path, only then does there emerge the real possibility that he or she might surrender to God.” Newman, a man of such prodigious talents, took a long time to get there (as did C.S. Lewis) because, as he remarks: “I loved the garish¹⁰ day, and, spite of fears, / Pride ruled my will.” Fr. Moreland, SJ then said, “Only when this surrender begins to happen does a person’s genuine spiritual path truly begin.” You hear Newman voicing his surrender throughout this poem, expressing his surrender to God in a single word, “**Lead**”, and then “**one step enough for me.**”¹¹

BIOGRAPHY

Saint John Henry Newman is set to become just the 38th saint in the Church’s 2,000-year history to be named a doctor of the Church.

Pope Leo XIV approved the decision on Thursday, July 31. Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, said Pope Leo XIV has “confirmed the affirmative opinion of the Plenary Session of Cardinals and Bishops, Members of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, regarding the title of Doctor of the Universal Church, which will soon be conferred on Saint John Henry Newman.”

This will take place in Rome on 1 November 2025, on the Solemnity of All Saints.

There are from among the thirty-eight Doctors of the Church only two others from England; St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 CE) and St. Bede the Venerable (672-

¹⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the adjective “**garish**” – **1. – 1545** – Of dress, ornament, ceremonial, etc.: Obtrusively or vulgarly bright in colour, showy, gaudy.

¹¹ How often it has been the case in my experience of spiritually directing people that a person comes seeking from me a new *technique*, which if he or she were to practice it, they imagine that it would make their spiritual life better, giving them the means to “feel good” about their spiritual progress. People often seek a “sure thing” rather committing themselves to learn, patiently and humbly, the unique ways that God is already present within them, richly alive in them. It takes training (not techniques) for a person to learn how to pay attention, to learn how to “read” his or her inner experiences (one’s thoughts and affects, one’s longings), discovering how the Spirit communicates “with sighs too deep for words.”

735 CE). And John Henry Newman (1801-1890) is the third of only three Doctors of the modern era, the other two being, St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) and St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897).

Being named a Doctor of the Church is one of the highest honors the Church can bestow upon a saint. The title, derived from the Latin *doctor*, meaning “teacher,” is reserved for canonized saints whose theological writings and teachings have made a lasting and universal impact on the Faith and understanding of the Church. To receive this designation, a saint must meet three essential criteria: eminent holiness, eminence in doctrine, and formal proclamation by the pope or an ecumenical council.

Saint John Henry Newman was born in London and baptized in the Church of England in 1801. He was a popular Anglican priest, theologian and writer even before his conversion to Catholicism.

In 1845, he joined the Catholic Church and was ordained to the priesthood just two years later. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII named him a cardinal. He died in 1890. On his tomb, he asked that only his name and a brief phrase be inscribed, one that encapsulates the extraordinary arc of his 89 years of life: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in Veritatem*, “From shadows and images into the Truth.”

Saint John Henry Newman is credited with writing 40 books and more than 20,000 letters during his lifetime. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 and canonized by Pope Francis in 2019.

TWO CRITERIA OF NEWMAN’S LIFE

Pope Benedict XVI –

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI ON THE OCCASION OF THE SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE ON NEWMAN FRIENDS (18 November 2010) -

HOLINESS RATHER THAN PEACE - After his conversion, he was guided by two fundamental criteria — drawn from the book *The Force of Truth* by the Calvinist Thomas Scott — which fully manifest the primacy of God in his life. The first: “Holiness rather than peace” (ibid.), which documents **his determination to adhere to the interior Master with his own conscience, confidently abandoning himself to the Father and living in faithfulness to the**

recognized truth. These ideals were later to entail “a great price to pay”. In fact, Newman both as an Anglican and as a Catholic, was subjected to many trials, disappointments and misunderstandings. Yet, he never descended to false compromises or easy agreements. **He always remained honest in his search for the truth, faithful to the promptings of his conscience and focused on the ideal of sanctity.**

GROWTH - The second motto Newman chose was “Growth the only evidence of life” (ibid.), which completely expresses his willingness for continuous conversion, transformation and interior growth, always faithfully relying on God. Thus, he discovered his vocation in service to the Word of God and, turning to the Fathers of the Church to find greater light, proposed a true reform of Anglicanism, adhering in the end to the Catholic Church. He summed up his own experience of growth in faithfulness to himself and to the Lord’s will in these well-known words: “Here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often” (J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 1, “On the Development of Ideas”). **Newman, during his long life, was one who converted, who was transformed and in this way remained the same, becoming ever more himself.**

From Eamon Duffy, *John Henry Newman: A Very Brief History* (2019) –

Page 17 - John Henry Newman’s intellectual journey was one of the most remarkable of the nineteenth century. As Vicar of the University Church in Oxford and a university teacher, between 1833 and 1843 he was the key theorist and the most vigorous propagandist of ‘Tractarianism’, the Oxford-based movement to re-Catholicize the Protestant Church of England. This ‘Oxford Movement’ would transform Anglicanism in Newman’s own lifetime. His influence within the Roman Catholic Church, which he entered in October 1845, took much longer to make its impact. **He was, by nineteenth century Catholic standards, a deeply unconventional thinker.**

Page 17 - Newman was one of the first Christian theologians to grasp the historical contingency of all theological formulations, even the Creeds, which he characterized as ‘the truth as far as they go, and under the conditions of thought which human feebleness imposes’. So as a Catholic, he rejected doctrinaire demands for unquestioning obedience to contemporary church formulae as if they were timeless truths.

Page 18 – Born in 1801, and living till 1890, Newman's career spanned almost the whole nineteenth century, and what were then two different worlds, Protestant and Catholic. In both, he was a force for unsettlement.

Page 18 – As a Cardinal he chose as the motto on his coat of arms a phrase from St Francois de Sales – *Cor ad cor loquitur* (Heart speaks to heart).

Page 19 - Eloquent, learned, widely read, combining a beautiful voice with an unmatched mastery of words, by the early 1830s Newman's preaching had acquired a cult following in Oxford. *Credo in Newmanum* became an undergraduate slogan, and admiring undergraduates imitated even his eccentricities, like his habit of kneeling down abruptly as if his knees had given way. The University authorities became alarmed, and changed College timetables so that undergraduates had to choose between hearing Newman preach and eating their dinners. In their hundreds, they chose the preaching. **This was all the more remarkable since Newman's message was both uncompromisingly austere, and often deliberately provocative.**

Page 19 – on the Parochial and Plain Sermons – **It could be argued quite plausibly that his Anglican sermons were Newman's greatest achievement.** Professor Owen Chadwick called the *parochial and plain sermons* 'the most important publication not only of Newman's Protestant days but of his life' and thought that taken as a body of reflection on the Christian life and the quest for "reality in religion", the sermons stood comparison with the greatest devotional classics in the language. **Preached over a period of fifteen years, they trace Newman's own religious development as he moved decisively away from his early Evangelicalism, under the influence in particular of the Alexandrian Fathers, whom he was studying intensively in Greek in these years.**

Page 20 – Yet alongside this theologically rich and often sublime preaching, Newman was also a ferocious, and sometimes unscrupulous pamphleteer and polemicist. The role of provocateur came naturally to him, and he quickly established himself as **the fieriest spirit of a determined group of like-minded High-Church clergy in Oxford, which included his Oriel colleague John Keble, Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1831-1841 and the Regius Professor of Hebrew, Edward Bouverie Pusey.** Disgusted by the weakening of the National Church by political concessions to Dissenters and Roman Catholics, they claimed the religious loyalty of the nation, not as earlier high-churchmen had done, on the basis of the Church of England's legal Establishment, but on a new awareness of the Church's 'Apostolical descent'.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN - SERMONS PREACHED ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS

John Henry Newman, ["The Religion of the Pharisee, the Religion of Mankind,"](#) in *John Henry Newman: Selected Sermons*, ed. Ian Ker and Bernard McGinn, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 393–405.

From ZENIT (7 November 2025) – “The Vanishing Line Between Sin and Choice” –

(ZENIT News / Phoenix, 11.07.2025) - **For generations, Americans shared a rough consensus about what counted as sin — a moral vocabulary rooted, however loosely, in the language of Scripture and tradition. *But that shared grammar of right and wrong is rapidly dissolving.***

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**grammar**” – **1.a. - a1387** – The area of study concerned with the structure of a language or of languages in general; *esp.* the study of the structure of sentences and words, that is, syntax and morphology (sometimes specifically inflectional morphology). Sometimes also more generally: **the study of the norms or conventions of usage and communication.**

According to new findings from the American Worldview Inventory 2025, produced by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, the majority of Americans now reject half of the behaviors once considered sinful.

It is not merely an abstract shift in moral theory. **The redefinition of sin is shaping the ways Americans think, relate, and live. It is visible in the fragmentation of families, the rise of loneliness, and the growing difficulty of finding moral common ground. The very word “sin,” once weighted with spiritual gravity, has become negotiable — more a matter of taste than conviction.**

...

The study suggests that the real story is not simply a loss of faith, but a growing moral pluralism — **a society in which ethical boundaries are drawn from a thousand different sources: personal preference, social consensus, identity politics, or psychological well-being.** The result is a country that no longer speaks a common moral language.

For Americans who continue to see morality as grounded in divine revelation, this trend is deeply unsettling. **“If sin can mean anything or nothing,” said one of the report’s researchers, “then redemption also loses its meaning.** A culture that no longer recognizes sin cannot easily talk about forgiveness, responsibility, or grace.”

...

Still, the cultural consequences are hard to ignore. **When the concept of sin collapses, so too does the sense of *shared accountability* that once bound communities together.** Without a moral North Star, even moral debates themselves become disoriented — arguments about everything, agreement on nothing.

America’s redefinition of sin may reflect its deepest spiritual paradox: a people that remains fascinated by faith but uncertain about truth, yearning for meaning while suspicious of authority. The question that now hangs over the nation is not simply whether it believes in sin, but whether it still believes in moral gravity — in the idea that some acts, regardless of fashion or feeling, fall short of something higher than ourselves.

VOLUME 1, SERMON II

The Religion of the Pharisee, the Religion of Mankind

(PREACHED IN THE UNIVERSITY CHURCH, DUBLIN)

Evang. sec. Luc., c. 18 v. 13. - *Deus, propitius esto mihi peccatori.* O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

These words set before us what may be called the characteristic mark of the Christian Religion, as contrasted with the various forms of worship and schools of belief, which in

early or in later times have spread over the earth. **They are a confession of sin and a prayer for mercy.**

SIMUL JUSTUS ET PECCATOR - Not indeed that the notion of transgression and of forgiveness was introduced by Christianity, and is unknown beyond its pale; on the contrary, most observable it is, the symbols of guilt and pollution, and rites of deprecation and expiation, are more or less common to them all; **but what is peculiar to our divine faith, as to Judaism before it, is this, that confession of sin enters into the idea of its highest saintliness, and that its pattern worshipers and the very heroes of its history are only, and can only be, and cherish in their hearts the everlasting memory that they are, and carry with them into heaven the rapturous avowal of their being, redeemed, restored transgressors.**

Sacramentum Mundi at “Sin” – The gospel proclaims divine salvation in Jesus Christ as redemption and forgiveness of our sins. Jesus calls for conversion as he proclaims and offers the kingdom of God. The Church preached that he died for our sins and as having accomplished purification from sins. We were baptized in his name for the forgiveness of sins. **Sin seems therefore to be one of the primary suppositions of the gospel, and in this it is in line with the OT, especially the prophets.** But Christian preaching encountered a self-understanding of man in which sin was taken for granted. It has no such place in modern thought. No doubt the optimism of the 19th century, which saw industrial and social progress mainly as an enchanting future, has given way to an experience of the “human condition” and human failure which has become a sort of obsession in philosophy and above all in the novel, the theatre and the cinema. **But the word “sin” is not readily used and seems in fact to be avoided. One of the main causes is a reaction against a rationalistic, moralistic and legalistic notion of sin in a seemingly recent past.** But sin also implies a (negative) relationship to God, and hence the notion becomes obscured – or truer – according to the purity of our notion of God. *It must be our task to propound in a way relevant today the notion of sin which has and always will have a place in Christian preaching.*¹

God’s law is identical with the demands which his creation and salvation make upon us – demands which are identical with creation and salvation themselves.

¹ Piet Schoonenberg and Karl Rahner, [“Sin,”](#) in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Adolf Darlap (New York; London: Burns & Oates; Herder and Herder, 1968–1970) 87.

From this we deduce above all that sin is against men. Sinful man offends against what is demanded by his and his neighbour's being.²

The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality –

Michael Downey, in [*The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*](#) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 889–890, at “Sin” by Stephen J. Duffy.

Sin is an axial category in Christian life. **The word is weary, but the reality is energetic and destructive.** As sin recedes to the periphery of modern consciousness, there appears a loss of confidence in its traditional images, models, and themes. Many regard guilt as mental malaise, when it might be symptomatic of their true moral condition. **Hence the effort to restore intensity to the language of sin to revitalize its reality.**

Only a being who is both nature's culmination and its transcendence has a capacity for sin. **Sin is a mystery that arises in the ambiguity of the heart and defies definition. Sin “hates the light.”** Though freely chosen evil is a basic datum of experience, access to its irreducible opacity is gained through metaphor and simile. The language of sin is analogous. *Whatever its models, it must speak of sin less as infraction of law than as betrayal of a relationship with God,* of freedom and the lack thereof experienced in turning from God, and of the way that sin cripples the will. For sin is a notion that marks convergence between revealed religion and morality, spheres sundered in modern culture. As such, it transcends the ethical and points to the bonding of person and community to a self-communicating God. **Sin menaces the health or survival of that bond. Hence it is more than unethical or illegal, it is unholy.**

Christian concern with sin is not morbid fascination with the heart's darkness. Christianity's central proclamation is the “good news” of God's triumph over sin through Christ. Talk about sin, which is indispensable to talk about salvation, is subordinate to talk about grace. **The mystery of iniquity must be understood in light of God's eschatologically victorious grace.**³

Such an avowal is not simply wrung from the lips of the neophyte, or of the lapsed; it is not the cry of the common run of men alone, who are buffeting with the surge of

² Piet Schoonenberg and Karl Rahner, “Sin,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Adolf Darlap (New York; London: Burns & Oates; Herder and Herder, 1968–1970) 88.

³ Michael Downey, in [*The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*](#) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 889–890, at “Sin” by Stephen J. Duffy.

temptation in the wide world; **it is the hymn of Saints, it is the triumphant ode sounding from the heavenly harps of the Blessed before the Throne, who sing to their Divine Redeemer,** “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

And what is to the Saints above a theme of never-ending thankfulness, is, while they are yet on earth, the matter of their perpetual humiliation. Whatever be their advance in the spiritual life, they never rise from their knees, they never cease to beat their breasts, as if sin could possibly be strange to them while they were in the flesh. Even our Lord Himself, the very Son of God in human nature, and infinitely separate from sin, — even His Immaculate Mother, encompassed by His grace from the first beginnings of her existence, and without any part of the original stain, — even they, as descended from Adam, were subjected at least to death, the direct, emphatic punishment of sin.

And much more, even the most favoured of that glorious company, whom He has washed clean in His Blood; they never forget what they were by birth; they confess, one and all, that they are children of Adam, and of the same nature as their brethren, and compassed with infirmities while in the flesh, whatever may be the grace given them and their own improvement of it. *Others may look up to them, but they ever look up to God; others may speak of their merits, but they only speak of their defects.* The young and unspotted, the aged and most mature, he who has sinned least, he who has repented most, the fresh innocent brow, and the hoary head, they unite in this one litany, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

So it was with St. Aloysius; so, on the other hand, was it with St. Ignatius; so was it with St. Rose, the youngest of the saints, who, as a child, submitted her tender frame to the most amazing penances; so was it with St. Philip Neri, one of the most aged, who, when some one praised him, cried out, “Begone! I am a devil, and not a saint”; and when going to communicate, would protest before his Lord, that he “was good for nothing, but to do evil.”

Such utter self-prostration, I say, is the very badge and token of the servant of Christ;— and this indeed is conveyed in His own words, when He says, “I am not come to call the just, but sinners”; and it is solemnly recognized and inculcated by Him, in the words which follow the text, “Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.”

This, you see, my brethren, is very different from that merely general acknowledgment of human guilt, and of the need of expiation, contained in those old and popular religions, which have before now occupied, or still occupy, the world. In them, guilt is an attribute of individuals, or of particular places, or of particular acts of nations, of bodies politic or their rulers, for whom, in consequence, purification is necessary. Or it

is the purification of the worshiper, not so much personal as ritual, before he makes his offering, and an act of introduction to his religious service. **All such practices indeed are remnants of true religion, and tokens and witnesses of it, useful both in themselves and in their import; but they do not rise to the explicitness and the fulness of the Christian doctrine.** "There is not any man just." "All have sinned and do need the glory of God." "Not by the works of justice, which we have done, but according to His mercy." The disciples of other worships and other philosophies thought and think, that the many indeed are bad, but the few are good. **As their thoughts passed on from the ignorant and erring multitude to the select specimens of mankind, they left the notion of guilt behind, and they pictured for themselves an idea of truth and wisdom, perfect, indefectible, and self-sufficient. It was a sort of virtue without imperfection, which took pleasure in contemplating itself, which needed nothing, and which was, from its own internal excellence, sure of a reward.**

Their descriptions, their stories of good and religious men, are often beautiful, and admit of an instructive interpretation; but in themselves they have this great blot, that they make no mention of sin, **and that they speak as if shame and humiliation were no properties of the virtuous.**

I will remind you, my brethren, of a very beautiful story, which you have read in a writer of antiquity; and the more beautiful it is, the more it is fitted for my present purpose, for the defect in it will come out the more strongly by the very contrast, viz., the defect that, though in some sense it teaches piety, humility it does not teach. I say, when the Psalmist would describe the happy man, he says, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord hath not imputed sin." Such is the blessedness of the Gospel; but what is the blessedness of the religions of the world?

A celebrated Greek sage once paid a visit to a prosperous king of Lydia, who, after showing him all his greatness and his glory, asked him whom he considered to have the happiest lot, of all men whom he had known. On this, the philosopher, passing by the monarch himself, named a countryman of his own, as fulfilling his typical idea of human perfection. **The most blessed of men, he said, was Tellus of Athens, for he lived in a flourishing city, and was prospered in his children, and in their families; and then at length when war ensued with a border state, he took his place in the battle, repelled the enemy, and died gloriously, being buried at the public expense where he fell, and receiving public honours.** When the king asked who came next to him in Solon's judgment, the sage went on to name two brothers, conquerors at the games, who, when the oxen were not forthcoming, drew their mother, who was priestess, to the temple, to the great admiration of the assembled multitude; and who, on her praying for them the best of possible rewards, after sacrificing and feasting, lay down to sleep in the temple, and never rose again.

No one can deny the beauty of these pictures; but it is for that reason I select them; they are the pictures of men who were not supposed to have any grave account to settle with heaven, who had easy duties, as they thought, and who fulfilled them.

Now perhaps you will ask me, my brethren, whether this heathen idea of religion be not really higher than that which I have called preeminently Christian; for surely to obey in simple tranquility and unsolicitous confidence, is the noblest conceivable state of the creature, and the most acceptable worship he can pay to the Creator. Doubtless it is the noblest and most acceptable worship; such has ever been the worship of the Angels; such is the worship now of the spirits of the just made perfect; such will be the worship of the whole company of the glorified after the general resurrection.

WHAT HUMAN BEINGS ACTUALLY ARE - But we are engaged in considering the actual state of man, as found in this world; and I say, considering what he is, any standard of duty, which does not convict him of real and multiplied sins, and of incapacity to please God of his own strength, is untrue; and any rule of life, which leaves him contented with himself, without fear, without anxiety, without humiliation, is deceptive; it is the blind leading the blind; yet such, in one shape or other, is the religion of the whole earth, beyond the pale of the Church.

The natural conscience of man, if cultivated from within, if enlightened by those external aids which in varying degrees are given him in every place and time, would teach him much of his duty to God and man, and would lead him on, by the guidance both of providence and grace, into the fulness of religious knowledge; but, generally speaking, **he is contented that it should tell him very little, and he makes no efforts to gain any juster views than he has at first, of his relations to the world around him and to his Creator.**

Thus, he apprehends part, and part only, of the moral law; has scarcely any idea at all of sanctity; and, instead of tracing actions to their source, which is the motive, and judging them thereby, he measures them for the most part by their effects and their outward aspect.

MYTH OF A SINLESS PERSON OF VIRTUE - Such is the way with the multitude of men everywhere and at all times; they do not see the Image of Almighty God before them, and ask themselves what He wishes: If once they did this, they would begin to see how much He requires, and they would earnestly come to Him, both to be pardoned for what they do wrong, and for the power to do better. And, for the same reason that they do not please Him, they succeed in pleasing themselves. For that contracted, defective range of duties, which falls so short of God's law, is just what they can fulfil; or rather they choose it, and keep to it, because they can fulfil it. Hence, they become both self-satisfied and self-sufficient;—they think they know just what they

ought to do, and that they do it all; and in consequence they are very well content with themselves, and rate their merit very high, and have no fear at all of any future scrutiny into their conduct, which may befall them, though their religion mainly lies in certain outward observances, and not a great number even of them.

THE PHARISEE OF THE GOSPEL - So it was with the Pharisee in this day's Gospel. He looked upon himself with great complacency, for the very reason that the standard was so low, and the range so narrow, which he assigned to his duties towards God and man.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**complacent**" - 2. - 1767 - *spec.* Feeling or showing pleasure or satisfaction, *esp.* in one's own condition or doings; self-satisfied.

He used, or misused, the traditions in which he had been brought up, to the purpose of persuading himself that *perfection lay in merely answering the demands of society*. He professed, indeed, to pay thanks to God, but he hardly apprehended the existence of any direct duties on his part towards his Maker. **He thought he did all that God required, if he satisfied public opinion.**

To be religious, *in the Pharisee's sense*, was to keep the peace towards others, to take his share in the burdens of the poor, to abstain from gross vice, and to set a good example. His alms and fastings were not done in penance, but because the world asked for them; penance would have implied the consciousness of sin; whereas it was only Publicans, and such as they, who had anything to be forgiven. *And these indeed were the outcasts of society, and despicable; but no account lay against men of well-regulated minds such as his: men who were well-behaved, decorous, consistent, and respectable. He thanked God he was a Pharisee, and not a penitent.*

Such was the Jew in our Lord's day; and such the heathen was and had been. Alas! I do not mean to affirm that it was common for the poor heathen to observe even any religious rule at all; **but I am speaking of the few and of the better sort: and these, I say, commonly took up with a religion like the Pharisee's, more beautiful perhaps and more poetical, but not at all deeper or truer than his.** They did not indeed fast, or give alms, or observe the ordinances of Judaism; they threw over their meagre observances a philosophical garb, and embellished them with the refinements of a cultivated intellect; still their notion of moral and religious duty was as shallow as that of the Pharisee, and the sense of sin, the habit of self-abasement, and the desire of contrition, just as absent from their minds as from his. *They framed a code of morals which they could without trouble obey; and then they were content with it and with themselves.*

Virtue, according to Xenophon, one of the best principled and most religious of their writers, and one who had seen a great deal of the world, and had the opportunity of bringing together in one the highest thoughts of many schools and countries, – virtue, according to him, consists mainly in command of the appetites and passions, and in serving others in order that they may serve us.

VICE (according to Xenophon) - He says, in the well-known Fable, called the choice of Hercules, that vice has no real enjoyment even of those pleasures which it aims at; that it eats before it is hungry, and drinks before it is thirsty, and slumbers before it is wearied. It never hears, he says, that sweetest of voices, its own praise; it never sees that greatest luxury among sights, its own good deeds. It enfeebles the bodily frame of the young, and the intellect of the old.

VIRTUE (according to Xenophon) - Virtue, on the other hand, rewards young men with the praise of their elders, and it rewards the aged with the reverence of youth; it supplies them pleasant memories and present peace; it secures the favour of heaven, the love of friends, a country's thanks, and, when death comes, an everlasting renown. **In all such descriptions, virtue is something external; it is not concerned with motives or intentions; it is occupied in deeds which bear upon society, and which gain the praise of men; it has little to do with conscience and the Lord of conscience; and knows nothing of shame, humiliation, and penance. It is in substance the Pharisee's religion, though it be more graceful and more interesting.**

Now this age is as removed in distance, as in character, from that of the Greek philosopher; yet who will say that the religion which it acts upon is very different from the religion of the heathen? Of course, I understand well, that it might know, and that it will say, a great many things foreign and contrary to heathenism. I am well aware that the theology of this age is very different from what it was two thousand years ago. I know men profess a great deal, and boast that they are Christians, and speak of Christianity as being a religion of the heart; **but, when we put aside words and professions, and try to discover what their religion is, we shall find, I fear, that the great mass of men in fact get rid of all religion that is inward; that they lay no stress on acts of faith, hope, and charity, on simplicity of intention, purity of motive, or mortification of the thoughts; that they confine themselves to two or three virtues, superficially practised; that they know not the words contrition, penance, and pardon; and that they think and argue that, after all, if a man does his duty in the world, according to his vocation, he cannot fail to go to heaven, however little he may do besides, nay, however much, in other matters, he may do that is undeniably unlawful.**

Thus a soldier's duty is loyalty, obedience, and valour, and he may let other matters take their chance; a trader's duty is honesty; an artisan's duty is industry and

contentment; of a gentleman are required veracity, courteousness, and self-respect; of a public man, high-principled ambition; of a woman, the domestic virtues; of a minister of religion, decorum, benevolence, and some activity. **Now, all these are instances of mere Pharisaical excellence; because there is no apprehension of Almighty God, no insight into His claims on us, no sense of the creature's shortcomings, no self-condemnation, confession, and deprecation, nothing of those deep and sacred feelings which ever characterize the religion of a Christian, and more and more, not less and less, as he mounts up from mere ordinary obedience to the perfection of a saint.**

A WORTHLESS RELIGIOSITY - And such, I say, is the religion of the natural man in every age and place; — often very beautiful on the surface, but worthless in God's sight; good, as far as it goes, but worthless and hopeless, because it does not go further, because it is based on self-sufficiency, and results in self-satisfaction.

I grant, it may be beautiful to look at, as in the instance of the young ruler whom our Lord looked at and loved, yet sent away sad; it may have all the delicacy, the amiableness, the tenderness, the religious sentiment, the kindness, which is actually seen in many a father of a family, many a mother, many a daughter, in the length and breadth of these kingdoms, in a refined and polished age like this; **but still it is rejected by the heart-searching God, because all such persons walk by their own light, not by the True Light of men, because self is their supreme teacher, and because they pace round and round in the small circle of their own thoughts and of their own judgments, careless to know what God says to them, and fearless of being condemned by Him, if only they stand approved in their own sight.**

And thus they incur the force of those terrible words, spoken not to a Jewish Ruler, nor to a heathen philosopher, but to a fallen Christian community, to the Christian Pharisees of Laodicea, — “Because thou sayest I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of Me gold fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich, and be clothed in white garments, that thy shame may not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise; be zealous, therefore, and do penance.”

Yes, my brethren, it is the ignorance of our understanding, it is our spiritual blindness, it is our banishment from the presence of Him who is the source and the standard of all Truth, which is the cause of this meagre, heartless religion of which men are commonly so proud.

Had we any proper insight into things as they are, had we any real apprehension of God as He is, of ourselves as we are, *we should never dare to serve Him without fear, or to rejoice unto Him without trembling.*

And it is the removal of this veil, which is spread between our eyes and heaven, it is the pouring in upon the soul of the illuminating grace of the New Covenant, which makes the religion of the Christian so different from that of the various human rites and philosophies, which are spread over the earth.

The Catholic Saints alone confess sin, because the Catholic Saints alone see God. **That awful Creator Spirit, of whom the Epistle of this day speaks so much, He it is who brings into religion the true devotion, the true worship, and changes the self-satisfied Pharisee into the broken-hearted, self-abased Publican.** It is the sight of God, revealed to the eye of faith, that makes us hideous to ourselves, from the contrast which we find ourselves to present to that great God at whom we look. It is the vision of Him in His infinite gloriousness, the All-holy, the All-beautiful, the All-perfect, which makes us sink into the earth with self-contempt and self-abhorrence. *We are contented with ourselves till we contemplate Him.* Why is it, I say, that the moral code of the world is so precise and well-defined? Why is the worship of reason so calm? Why was the religion of classic heathenism so joyous? Why is the framework of civilized society all so graceful and so correct? Why, on the other hand, is there so much of emotion, so much of conflicting and alternating feeling, so much that is high, so much that is abased, in the devotion of Christianity? **It is because the Christian, and the Christian alone, has a revelation of God; it is because he has upon his mind, in his heart, on his conscience, the idea of one who is Self-dependent, who is from Everlasting, who is Incommunicable. He knows that One alone is holy, and that His own creatures are so frail in comparison of Him, that they would dwindle and melt away in His presence, did He not uphold them by His power.** He knows that there is One whose greatness and whose blessedness are not affected, the centre of whose stability is not moved, by the presence or the absence of the whole creation with its innumerable beings and portions; whom nothing can touch, nothing can increase or diminish; who was as mighty before He made the worlds as since, and as serene and blissful since He made them as before. He knows that there is just One Being, in whose hand lies his own happiness, his own sanctity, his own life, and hope, and salvation. He knows that there is One to whom he owes everything, and against whom he can have no plea or remedy. All things are nothing before Him; the highest beings do but worship Him the more; the holiest beings are such, only because they have a greater portion of Him.

Ah! what has he to pride in now, when he looks back upon himself? Where has fled all that comeliness which heretofore he thought embellished him? What is he but some vile reptile, which ought to shrink aside out of the light of day? **This was the feeling of St. Peter, when he first gained a glimpse of the greatness of his Master, and cried out,**

almost beside himself, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” It was the feeling of holy **Job**, though he had served God for so many years, and had been so perfected in virtue, when the Almighty answered him from the whirlwind: “With the hearing of the ear I have heard Thee,” he said; “but now my eye seeth Thee; therefore I reprove myself, and do penance in dust and ashes.” So was it with **Isaias**, when he saw the vision of the Seraphim, and said, “Woe is me ... I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King, the Lord of Hosts.” So was it with **Daniel**, when, even at the sight of an Angel, sent from God, “there remained no strength in him, but the appearance of his countenance was changed in him, and he fainted away, and retained no strength.”

This then, my brethren, is the reason why every son of man, whatever be his degree of holiness, whether a returning prodigal or a matured saint, says with the Publican, “O God, be merciful to me”; it is because created natures, high and low, are all on a level in the sight and in comparison of the Creator, and so all of them have one speech, and one only, whether it be the thief on the cross, Magdalen at the feast, or St. Paul before his martyrdom: — not that one of them may not have, what another has not, but that one and all have nothing but what comes from Him, and are as nothing before Him, who is all in all.

For us, my dear brethren, whose duties lie in this seat of learning and science, may we never be carried away by any undue fondness for any human branch of study, so as to be forgetful that our true wisdom, and nobility, and strength, consist in the knowledge of Almighty God. Nature and man are our studies, but God is higher than all. **It is easy to lose Him in His works. It is easy to become over-attached to our own pursuit, to substitute it for religion, and to make it the fuel of pride. Our secular attainments will avail us nothing, if they be not subordinate to religion.** The knowledge of the sun, moon, and stars, of the earth and its three kingdoms, of the classics, or of history, will never bring us to heaven. We may “thank God,” that we are not as the illiterate and the dull; and those whom we despise, **if they do but know how to ask mercy of Him, know what is very much more to the purpose of getting to heaven, than all our letters and all our science.**

Let this be the spirit in which we end our session. Let us thank Him for all that He has done for us, for what He is doing by us; but let nothing that we know or that we can do, keep us from a personal, individual adoption of the great Apostle’s words, **“Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.”**⁴

⁴ John Henry Newman, [*“The Religion of the Pharisee, the Religion of Mankind,”*](#) in *John Henry Newman: Selected Sermons*, ed. Ian Ker and Bernard McGinn, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 393–405.

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What Makes John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church?

by **Cyril O'Regan**[\[link:/articles/authors/cyril-oregan/\]](/articles/authors/cyril-oregan/)

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The declaration on July 31 by Pope Leo XIV of Newman as a Doctor of the Church has rightly been received with great joy. This is not to say that the bestowing of this great honor on Newman was entirely unexpected. On his canonization by Pope Francis in 2019, it seemed

more or less inevitable that Newman would be fast-tracked to be declared a doctor of the Church. While there can be little doubt about Newman's sanctity, Newman's intellectual virtues were in his own time far more public, and the "history of effects" of his writings so consequential not only in and for his own time, but also for ours, as to make his case compelling. To be declared a doctor of the Church and join the company of such luminaries as his beloved Athanasius, Aquinas, whose systematic gifts he became acquainted with only after his conversion, and the sublime Augustine whose interrogation set a standard and whose grasp of the meaning of the Church in history is unparalleled, would have shocked him almost as much as it would have shocked him to have been declared a saint.

But for those who have not simply read him, but being guided by him, his entrance into this society of the elect which, of course, is not his own act, seems to be so intrinsically right as to be covered by Emily Dickinson's line, "the soul selects her own society." In any event, given the extent and depth of Newman's contribution to our understanding of Catholicism and the situation of all Christians in [secular modernity](#)

[\[link:/articles/newman-and-the-dis-asters-of-modernity/\]](#) that he paints with such clarity and detail, it seems not only fitting, but simultaneously an act of justice and providence that Newman's name has been carried forward from Saint to Doctor of the Church. This rightness provides us with more rather than less motivation to celebrate.

At the root of Newman's reputation and continuing Catholic relevance is a core of classic texts that continue to be read enthusiastically and debated with profit; the [Apologia](#) [\[link:https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19690/19690-h/19690-h.htm\]](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19690/19690-h/19690-h.htm) (1864), a classic of religious autobiography of a very particular type; the [Development of Doctrine](#)

[\[link:https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268009212/an-essay-on-the-development-of-christian-doctrine/\]](https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268009212/an-essay-on-the-development-of-christian-doctrine/) (1845), a classic explicating the dynamic formation of the tradition rather than tradition as a static deposit; [The Idea of the University](#)

[\[link:https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268210052/the-idea-of-a-university/\]](https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268210052/the-idea-of-a-university/) (1852), a classic on the nature of a liberal arts university; [A Grammar of Assent](#)

[\[link:https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268010003/essay-in-aid-of-a-grammar-of-assent-an/\]](https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268010003/essay-in-aid-of-a-grammar-of-assent-an/) (1870), a classic of religious epistemology. These texts are classics, however, not because they represent an encyclopedic summing up of the scholarship on a particular topic for the Victorian Age, but as scholarship which, as yet, has not become

redundant. Rather, each of these tomes represents a unique literary contribution from a deeply penetrating mind written somewhat at a slant to what has erstwhile being produced.

The *Apologia* is, indeed, Newman's account of his conversion to Catholicism in 1845, but it differs from most spiritual autobiographies in focusing exclusively on conversion of the intellect rather than the will and bracketing for the most part the agency of God. Similarly, the *Development of Doctrine* is less a straightforward account of the development of doctrine based on scripture, grounded in Christ, moved by the Holy Spirit and guaranteed by the hierarchical Church, than an apologetic account of the general intelligibility of a dynamic view of ecclesial tradition, given its sanction in law and politics. The singularity of Newman's approach to topics, perceived as problems to be elucidated and at a limit solved, is also illustrated in the other two classics. Undoubtedly, *The Idea of a University* can be brought into conversation with the medieval curriculum of the trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, astronomy, music, geometry) and the Oxford curriculum that for Newman supplied something like an operative standard, and serve for those interested in the topic as a foil to the founding of the research university at Berlin (1810) by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), but it is unique in specifying that the aim of a liberal arts education is the production of the capacity to judge wisely and well when presented with heterogeneous forms of knowledge with respect to which one is precisely not an expert. And, finally, in the formidable *A Grammar of Assent*, Newman tackles the age-old question of the relation between faith and knowledge, again aslant, by asking and answering the question of whether faith itself is a form of knowing and how it might be described. In terms of contribution to a field of inquiry, this text rivals *Development*. It was a foundational text for both Wittgenstein and Bernard Lonergan, a crucial text for [Erich Przywara](#) [\[link:/articles/authors/erich-przywara/\]](https://articles/authors/erich-przywara/), a conversation partner for the hermeneutics of Gadamer, and an important text in analytic philosophy's attempt to articulate a social epistemology. The list goes on.

This classic core, however, hardly sums up Newman's intellectual achievements. [The Oxford University Sermons](#)

[\[link:https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268009960/fifteen-sermons-preached-before-the-university-of-oxford-between-a-d-1826-and-1843/\]](https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268009960/fifteen-sermons-preached-before-the-university-of-oxford-between-a-d-1826-and-1843/)

provide the germ of Newman's mature views both with regard to the nature of the development of doctrine and faith and knowledge. [The Arians of the Fourth Century](#) [\[link:https://wipfandstock.com/9780965351720/the-arians-of-the-fourth-century/\]](https://wipfandstock.com/9780965351720/the-arians-of-the-fourth-century/)

(1833) provides just one example of Newman's historical work, while substantively contributing to Newman's account of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in *Development*. [Discourses to Mixed Congregations](https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268025571/discourses-addressed-to-mixed-congregations/) [link:https://undpress.nd.edu/9780268025571/discourses-addressed-to-mixed-congregations/] (1848)—a favorite of mine—complements and supplements Newman's earlier and still insufficiently appreciated *Lectures on Justification* [link:https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/lectures-on-justification/8A7DA44564E5EF2C1162916F057359ED] (1837) in which he inveighs against the doctrine of Justification as sufficient for the Christian life. Then, of course, there is Newman's prodigious production of sermons, meditations, and prayers, as well as his output in verse and fiction that put a seal on his Augustine-like versatility.

Yet, it is not only that Newman's texts, both his classics and those texts that we might regard their supporting cast, have made their impress on the individual. It is that throughout Europe and North America in particular, but really throughout the world, Newman has been institutionalized in Newman Centers, served as the focus of study groups, and become a mainstay in Catholic colleges and high schools. In addition, *The Idea of a University* has continued to serve as an inspiration for Catholic administrators despite the burdens of the market economy and the expectation that colleges produce people with professional and/or technical expertise. In North America, in particular, much is owed to the [National Institute for Newman Studies](https://newmanstudies.org/) [link:https://newmanstudies.org/] in Pittsburgh that sponsors a well-respected journal on Newman and whose scholars (together with Notre Dame's own [Jennifer Martin](https://www.newmanstudies.org/articles/authors/jennifer-newsome-martin/) [link:/articles/authors/jennifer-newsome-martin/]) played a significant role in putting together the dossier supporting Newman's cause.

Still, beyond the wide reading of his texts and the institutional support provided Newman over the past decades, we might still ask what accounts for the gravitational pull that Newman has exercised to make congruous his elevation into the title of Doctor of the Church. My own particular answer to the question is that what ultimately makes Newman a non-substitutable voice in the Church is his role as witness in the modern age to a Church that is ever ancient and ever new. His witness is simultaneously that of a visionary and a prophet. Newman is a visionary in that he figures our situation in modernity as something of a "last battle" in which the fate of Christianity is to be decided and configures it, after the manner of the Book of Revelation, as the battle between the Church of martyrs (witnesses) and the [counterfeit Christianity of secular modernity](#)

[link:/articles/newman-apostle-of-fear-and-trembling-to-liberal-christianity/], devoid of doctrine,

authority, sacrament, and devoid of both a sense of sin as rebellion against God and redemption as its unimaginable and undeserved complement. As he helps us to see, he awakens us to the beauty and risk of Christianity. Newman is a prophet in his condemnation of the lack of substance and direction of Christianity in the modern age, as well as in his sublime conviction of having been chosen to speak the truth, even as, or especially as, it comes at great cost to his personal happiness, reputation, and personal friendships.

Newman charges us, makes us feel helpless, and invites us with Ignatius of Loyola to ask the question what are we called to do. It is precisely as a visionary and a prophetic figure that this new Doctor of the Church guides us now and makes us feel equal to the challenges that secular modernity presents to us and helps us to feel capable of resisting its structural temptations, on the one hand, the temptation to wash and rinse Christianity to make it more agreeable to a world in which reason (or a particular inflection of it) is supposed to be the absolute measure and, on the other, to confound it with a political movement that would enlist it to serve its cause. One particular stroke of Newman's genius is that he has taught us that secular modernity not only has a large arsenal of arguments that it uses against the Church, but a range of tactics intended to embarrass Christianity such as feigning and bafflement at the very existence of religious belief, thereby shifting the burden entirely on the believer. Newman wants us to realize that secular modernity or what he calls "liberalism" routinely cheats and the open debate it demands hides the fact it precedes on the basis of convictions that are not open to debate.

Newman has also taught the Church here and now not to be complacent. Though, in the final chapter of the *Apologia*, Newman speaks to his arrival in the Catholic Church as a ship putting into safe harbor out of the storm, we have good reason to think that the Church too is at sea and is being buffeted by contrary winds of secularity and a confounding of Church and empire. Newman continues not only to be our guide, but the captain of the ship who can guide us safely to port. In terms of basic form, no doubt Erich Przywara gets it right when he constructs Newman as an [*Augustinus redivivus*](#) [\[link:/articles/a-prospect-john-henry-newman/\]](https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/a-prospect-john-henry-newman/), that is, a gifted and versatile thinker who does theology in the interrogative mood, a masterly reader of Scripture, a consummate maintainer of the tradition, yet, nonetheless, a resolute intervener in the arguments that break out, a true connoisseur regarding the opportunities as well as difficulties in parsing the relation between faith and

culture and faith and reason, and a genius who sees the Church as caught in a crisis that may very well be a series of crises. The last point is essential, and in the English-speaking world was perhaps grasped best by the historian Christopher Dawson, though perhaps echoed in a literary form by the likes of Tolkien. There is no need to be embarrassed by the literary reference. Newman is rightly acclaimed to be a great writer as well as a great thinker, as was Augustine, the thinker, also Church Father and Doctor of the Church, whom Przywara thinks he most resembles.

Not all saints are declared Doctors of the Church, though all Doctors of the Church are necessarily saints. Though intellectual accomplishment and its particular accent and flavor are constitutive when it comes to the attribution of Doctor of the Church, nonetheless, honoring such accomplishment is tied to the commendation for the personal holiness of the one so elevated, who so often also, as is the case not only in the Doctors of the Church already mentioned—but in the Cappadocian Fathers, in Bellarmine, in John of the Cross, in Theresa of Avila, and in Thérèse of Lisieux—are masters of the spiritual life who elevate holiness above all else and speak with great passion and eloquence to the privileged means not so much of its acquisition as its granting. As is well known, the Swiss theologian, [Hans Urs von Balthasar](#)

[\[link:/articles/authors/hans-urs-von-balthasar/\]](#), continually underscored the connection: holiness is the source of all that is healthy in theological investigation, as it is also its telos. This was also Newman's view. This is also how Balthasar views him in the first volume of [Glory of the Lord](#) [\[link:https://ignatius.com/the-glory-of-the-lord-vol-1-2nd-ed-gl12p/\]](#). This is superlatively the way Newman is perceived by the great Oratorian, Louis Bouyer, who even when he is putting the accent on Newman as the prophet of our secular age, argues that in the end his spirituality is ground zero for his most acute reflections and that textually speaking we might begin and end our reading of Newman with [Parochial and Plain](#) [\[link:https://ignatius.com/parochial-and-plain-sermons-ppsh/\]](#) [Sermons](#) [\[link:https://ignatius.com/parochial-and-plain-sermons-ppsh/\]](#). Above all, this is the way the Church has traditionally seen the relation between enabling faith and intellectual performance. This conviction finds expression in the way it conjugates on the highest level of authority the relations between the declarations of sainthood and Doctor of the Church.

Newman has been an object of admiration for the last three popes. For Benedict XVI, Newman was a significant influence in his work, as well as serving as a kind of model for his theological vocation both as expositor of the faith and public theologian unafraid to engage the Church's cultured

despisers; for Francis Newman's view of tradition is a permanent gift to the Church and his spiritual writings a treasury of wisdom that has the power to inspire and move; and one might infer considerable enthusiasm in Leo XIV, who with all that befalls a new pope has expedited Newman's elevation.

Perhaps this should not surprise for a cardinal who took on the name of Leo after Leo the Great, also a Doctor of the Church, and who professes enormous admiration for Leo XIII, who it so happens elevated Newman to the cardinalate in 1879. Perhaps we might also note the pope is a distinguished Augustinian. Perhaps he too sees the analogy between this saint, who joins his fellow Englishmen Bede and Anselm as Doctors of the Church, and the towering figure, Augustine, after whom his order is named.

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Newman: Apostle of Fear and Trembling to Liberal Christianity

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Cyril O'Regan, University of Notre Dame Huisking Chair in Theology, retrieves St. John Henry Newman's recovery of the fear of God.

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