

St John Henry Newman, Doctor of the Church

Yesterday we had special cause to rejoice as Pope Leo XIV proclaimed St John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church. Earlier in the week the Pope had named Newman as co-Patron of the Church's educational mission (alongside St Thomas Aquinas, who was named such by Pope Leo XIII in 1880). Following Newman's canonisation by Pope Francis on 13 October 2019, we devoted two Allocutiones to his life and teaching (available on our website), noting that 'of all people apart from Our Lord and Our Lady, and leaving aside quotes from Scripture or the Magisterium, Newman is second only to St Louis de Montfort in the number of mentions he receives' in the index of the *Legion Handbook*.

At yesterday's Mass, the Pope declared in Latin: 'We, having obtained the opinions of numerous brothers in the Episcopate and of many of Christ's Faithful throughout the world, having consulted the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, after mature deliberation and with certain knowledge, and by the fullness of the apostolic power, declare Saint John Henry Newman Doctor of the Universal Church. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

The word 'Doctor' in Latin simply means 'Teacher'. (So 'Doctor of the Church' is not of course a metaphor related to medical doctors, as though they were named such for treating a sickness in the Church.) In the Middle Ages, tradition named four Latin Doctors of the Church: St Gregory the Great, St Ambrose, St Augustine and St Jerome. In 1567 St Thomas Aquinas was the first to be added to their number, and in 1568, four eastern Doctors were added – St John Chrysostom, St Basil the Great, St Gregory Nazianzen and St Athanasius. Since then, others have periodically been named, and the elevation of St John Henry Newman brings the total number of Doctors to thirty-eight.

Briefly recalling his life: born in London in 1801, Newman had a teenage conversion experience that initially brought him to evangelical Calvinism. But his spiritual journey led him, while Anglican vicar of the university church of St Mary's in Oxford in the 1830s, to be a leading light of the 'Oxford Movement' that sought to revitalise Catholic traditions for the Church of England. Its influence is still seen in the Anglican Communion especially in what is termed 'Anglo-Catholicism'.

But Newman's historical studies and theological reflection led him, from 1839, to the conviction that the theory he had mapped out, with Anglicanism as the 'middle way' between Rome and Protestantism, was intellectually untenable: it was only the Church in union with Rome that was the Church of the Apostles, and of his beloved ancient Fathers.

Yet he still had a major objection: Rome seemed to have illicitly added many new doctrines to the original unchangeable Apostolic Faith, such as purgatory or devotion to Mary. But as he went through the final process of conversion in 1845, he wrote his classic *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* in which he came to the answer. Ideas necessarily grow from within, and all these doctrines simply brought out, under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, the implications of what was present in the original Revelation.

And history showed that teachings held by Protestants, Anglicans, and Catholics alike, such as the precise doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, or the correct list of New Testament books, were not fully explicit at the start either, but were arrived at in ancient times by this same

process of development. And so Newman realised that through all the upheavals of history, it was the Catholic Church that was identical with the original Church that Christ established.

On 9 October 1845, he was received into the Catholic Church, and in 1847 was ordained a priest of the Oratorian Fathers founded by St Philip Neri. He established the Oratory in England, at London and Birmingham, residing at the latter. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII named him cardinal. He died in Birmingham on 11 August 1890, and Pope Benedict XVI beatified him in the same city in 2010. His feast day is 9 October, anniversary of his becoming Catholic. Newman's writings and example have been an inspiration to numerous converts making the journey from other Christian communities into full communion with the Catholic Church.

As well as his *Essay on Development*, we can mention some of the other major works of his Catholic period. His book *The Idea of a University* (1852), produced in connection with his role as founding rector of the Catholic University of Ireland (1854-57), is a famous exposition of the value and nature of a liberal education, and the essential role of faith and religion in that. His most successful book during his lifetime was the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864) – a 'history of his religious opinions', written to refute the accusation that even before his conversion he had been a secret 'Romanist', working to corrupt the Anglican Church. It was a landmark in winning intellectual respectability for the Catholic Faith in Protestant England.

A Grammar of Assent (1870) set forth his psychologically subtle theory of the nature of faith and its relationship to reason, somewhat different in approach from the standard theological accounts of the time. Finally, following the First Vatican Council's dogmatic definition of papal infallibility in 1870, Newman's *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875) gave a nuanced account of that dogma, against some exaggerations, and also set forth his well-known teachings on conscience.

We conclude with Newman's own words – first, from one of his Meditations: '...God knows me and calls me by my name. 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 connection 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.

'Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me – still He knows what He is about.' (*Meditation: Hope in God – Creator* (7/3/1848))

And finally, the evocative prayer that concludes his *Sermon on Wisdom and Innocence* (1843): 'May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last.'