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**CARDINAL NEWMAN'S PILGRIMAGE, IN HIS OWN WORDS**  
**ROBERT H. ELLISON**

**Presented at Marshall University October 14 and 17, 2019**  
**In Commemoration of Newman's Canonization on October 13**

**Introduction**

Hello, and thanks for coming to our session today. I appreciate the opportunity to kind of get back to my roots as far as my research is concerned. I first encountered Newman as an undergrad, in a course on Victorian autobiography. I came back to him in grad school—he was the subject of one chapter of my dissertation—and most of my early publications focused on Newman and his circle. My work has taken some different directions since then, and I haven't worked on him in 10 years or so. His canonization is the perfect occasion to take another look.

As I was talking with Nicholas Chancey, the director of the [Marshall Catholic Newman Center](#), about how we could commemorate this event, I mentioned doing a kind of survey of his pilgrimage of faith, from his teen years to his Anglican days to his conversion to Catholicism in 1845. Then I thought it might be interesting to describe this pilgrimage in Newman's own words. I'll provide some introduction and context and so on, but for the most part I'm going to step back and let him speak for himself.

Newman, in fact, might have approved of this approach. In a May 18, 1863 letter to his sister, he wrote

It has ever been a hobby of mine, though perhaps it is a truism, not a hobby, that the true life of a man is in his letters ... Not only for the interest of a biography, but for arriving at the inside of things, the publication of letters is the true method. Biographers varnish, they assign motives, they conjecture feelings...but contemporary letters are facts. (*Letters and Correspondence* 1: 1)

This notion may or may not bear close scrutiny. Whatever the case, it will serve as a kind of foundation or rationale for my talk today.

### **Disclaimer**

Let me begin my offering a caveat or a disclaimer. My research specialty is [sermon studies](#), and I have [published](#) specifically on Newman, so I am coming at this from within my area of expertise. This is not, however, intended to be a “traditional” academic paper, along the lines of what you’d expect to hear at a conference or read in a peer-reviewed journal. I have consulted secondary sources, but only for background and context, or to confirm historical details. I will not attempt to synthesize the vast body of scholarship on Newman, or to offer critical assessments of my own.

Strictly speaking, I suppose, this could be described as “hagiography,” given that I am talking about the life of a man who has just been declared a saint, but I want to avoid its connotations of looking at my subject only through rose-colored glasses. I recognize that Newman is hardly a neutral party in his own story, and might not always be what we would call a “reliable narrator.” We need to take into account that the memories he describes might be faulty or selective, that he might be overstating his achievements and downplaying his struggles, or that he might have worked too hard to vindicate himself from his detractors (and he did have them, as we’ll see in a moment!).

My goal, therefore, is to strike a kind of middle ground between a scholarly presentation and a “puff piece”; the closest genre may be that of the after-dinner speech. In the next thirty minutes or so, I’ll try to arrange excerpts from the volumes of primary material into a concise and coherent narrative of the nearly thirty-year span from his matriculation at Oxford in 1816 to his conversion to Catholicism at the age of 44. I’ll maintain as much critical distance as I can within whatever limitations the source

material may impose upon me; perhaps we can take up some of the analytical work during the discussion time.

## Sources

So what do these “volumes of primary material” look like? Newman was a prolific correspondent and diarist; the Oxford scholarly edition of his *Letters and Diaries* runs to over 30 volumes, some of which we have in Morrow Library. I will draw on these volumes and a 19<sup>th</sup>-century collection of his letters, and also on two books: *Loss and Gain*, which he published in 1848, not too long after his conversion, and *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (“defense of my life”), which followed in 1864; a second edition, published the next year, substituted English for Latin and bore the title *History of My Religious Opinions*. I have used the “‘definitive’ edition of 1886,” which reflects all of the changes Newman made over the course of twenty years (DeLaura xi).

Both of these books were written in response to provocations from others. *Loss and Gain* was a reply to attacks upon converts to Catholicism in general; as Newman described the situation,

A TALE, directed against the Oxford converts to the Catholic Faith, was sent from England to the author of this Volume in the summer of 1847, when he was resident at Santa Croce in Rome. Its contents were as wantonly and preposterously fanciful, as they were injurious to those whose motives and actions it professed to represent; but a formal criticism or grave notice of it seemed to him out of place.

The suitable answer lay rather in the publication of a second tale; drawn up with a stricter regard to truth and probability, and with at least some personal knowledge of Oxford, and some perception of the various aspects of the religious phenomenon, which the work in question handled so rudely and so unskillfully. (*Loss and Gain* ix)

Newman insisted that his response, like the attack, was written without anyone specific in mind. “It is not the history,” he wrote, “of any individual mind among the recent converts to the Catholic Church. The principal characters are imaginary; and the writer wishes to disclaim personal allusion in any” (*Loss and Gain* vii). Many scholars have rejected this claim, seeing Charles Reding, the main character, as a stand-in—and perhaps a thinly-veiled one—for Newman himself. I will follow their lead, and quote some passages that could parallel Newman’s own thought as he made his way to Rome.

The *Apologia*, on the other hand, was a response to attacks upon Newman himself, and, as the title indicates, the book he wrote in his own defense is clearly autobiographical. As I will discuss in more detail later on, there was a period of several years between Newman’s initial misgivings about the Church of England and his final crossing over to the Church of Rome. During that time of what Matthew Arnold might call “Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born,” Newman became aware of “a general feeling that I was for years where I had no right to be; that I was a ‘Romanist’ in Protestant livery and service; that I was doing the work of a hostile Church in the bosom of the English Establishment, and knew it, or ought to have known it” (8-9). He pled “guilty,” or at least “no contest,” to those charges, “considering them to be a portion of the penalty which I naturally and justly incurred by my change of religion.” He therefore “never felt much impatience under them” and chose not to respond, leaving “their removal to a future day, when personal feelings would have died out, and documents would see the light, which were as yet buried in closets or scattered through the country” (1).

That changed in 1864, when Charles Kingsley, an Anglican priest and staunch critic of Rome, spoke out against Newman in the January issue of *Macmillan’s Magazine*. The accusation, as Newman reports it in his Preface, read as follows:

Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and, on the whole ought not to be; that cunning is the weapon which Heaven has given to the Saints wherewith to withstand the brute male force of the wicked world which marries and is given in marriage. Whether his notion be doctrinally correct or not, it is at least historically so. (*Apologia* 2)

A heated correspondence ensued, which Newman collected and published in pamphlet form. Kingsley, in turn, published a pamphlet of his own, in which he leveled another strident charge (the quote is again from Newman's Preface):

I am henceforth...in doubt and fear, as much as an honest man can be, concerning every word Dr. Newman may write. How can I tell, that I shall not be the dupe of some cunning equivocation, of one of the three kinds laid down as permissible by the blessed St. Alfonso da Liguori and his pupils even when confirmed with an oath, because "then we do not deceive our neighbour but allow him to deceive himself"? (*Apologia* 3)

Newman believed that his "duty" to both "[his] own reputation" and his "Brethren in the Catholic Priesthood" required him to respond again (4). His self-defense first appeared as a series of seven pamphlets, which were later collected and, with some revision, published as the *Apologia*. The goal of the book is clearly stated at the end of the Preface: "I do not like to be called to my face a liar and a knave... I know I have done nothing to deserve such an insult, and if I prove this, as I hope to do, I must not care for such incidental annoyances as are involved in the process" (13).

### Earliest Thoughts of Religion

That introduction took some time, but the history of the *Apologia* is complex and I wanted to fully establish the context for the material to come. I move now to the specifics of Newman's pilgrimage of faith.

In a passage from one of his *Parochial Sermons*, reproduced in Volume 1 of the 1890 edition of his letters, Newman reflected on the process whereby young people come to an awareness of spiritual things:

At first children do not know that they are responsible beings, but by degrees they not only feel that they are, but reflect on the great truth and on what it implies. Some persons recollect a time as children when it fell on them to reflect what they were, whence they came, whither they tended, why they lived, what was required of them. The thought fell upon them long after they had heard and spoken of God; but at length they began to realise what they had heard, and they began to muse about themselves. (*Letters and Correspondence* 1: 11)

In his own case, those reflections began in his mid-teens. Looking back from a distance of some seventy years, he wrote, "I recollect, in 1815 I believe, thinking that I should like to be virtuous, but not religious. There was something in the latter idea I did not like. Nor did I see the meaning of loving God" (*Letters and Correspondence* 1: 19). Elsewhere, in the first chapter of the *Apologia*, he also recalled that

I was very superstitious, and... used constantly to cross myself on going into the dark. Of course I must have got this practice from some external source or other; but I can make no sort of conjecture whence; and certainly no one had ever spoken to me on the subject of the Catholic religion, which I only knew by name. (14-15)

Things began to change around age 15: “(in the autumn of 1816,) a great change of thought took place in me. I fell under the influences of a definite Creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured” (*Apologia* 16).

One of the “impressions” that would stay with him was the idea of remaining unmarried:

I am obliged to mention, though I do it with great reluctance, another deep imagination, which at this time, the autumn of 1816, took possession of me... that it was the will of God that I should lead a single life. This anticipation, which has held its ground almost continuously ever since... was more or less connected in my mind with the notion that my calling in life would require such a sacrifice as celibacy involved; as, for instance, missionary work among the heathen, to which I had a great drawing for some years.

(*Apologia* 19)

Newman never became a missionary, but he did remain a bachelor for the next 70+ years, right up until his death at the age of 89. This is significant, as it was one of the decisions that made his career paths possible. It was not until late in the nineteenth century, well after his conversion, that members of the Oxford community were allowed to marry ([Duckenfield Abstract](#)); with some exceptions, celibacy remains a requirement for Roman Catholic priests (“[Pastoral Provision](#)”).

### **His Sense of a Religious “Calling”**

1816 was also the year Newman went to Oxford, where he took on academic and religious roles. In succession, he matriculated at Trinity College in 1816; received his BA in 1820; was elected Fellow of Oriel College in 1822; was ordained as a deacon in 1824 and as a priest in 1825; and became a tutor at Oriel in 1826 (“[Chronology of Newman’s Life](#)”). He saw these roles as complementary, perhaps even intertwined; in a March 1826 letter to his mother, he wrote



I have a great undertaking before me in the tutorship here. I trust God may give me grace to undertake it in a proper spirit, and to keep steadily in view that I have set myself apart for His service for ever. There is always the danger of the love of literary pursuits assuming too prominent a place in the thoughts of a college tutor, or his viewing his situation merely as a secular office—a means of a future provision when he leaves college. (*Letters and Correspondence* 1: 114)

This is one of my favorite statements from Newman. For years—first at my university down in Texas and now here at Marshall—I’ve had it on my office wall, as a reminder that academic work is a kind of “vocation” for me as well.

### **The Anglican Years**

In the *Apologia*, Newman writes that by “the spring of 1839”—thirteen years after he composed that letter—his “position in the Anglican Church was at its height” (81). He was indeed a prominent figure: the popular preacher at Oxford’s University Church of St. Mary the Virgin; editor of and contributor to the *British Critic*, a conservative “theological review”; author of such treatises as *Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833) and *Lectures on Justification* (1838); and leader—along with John Keble, E. B. Pusey, and others—of a High-Church effort to return Anglicanism to pre-Reformation days and ground it once again in the teachings of the Church Fathers (“[What was the Oxford Movement?](#)”). This effort was known by two names: the “Oxford Movement,” because of its geographical center, and “Tractarianism,” after the series of 90 *Tracts for the Times* that emerged from it. These were not “tracts” in the sense of the little evangelistic booklets we sometimes see today, but rather learned publications with such titles as *Church and State*, *The Ministerial Commission*, *On Dissent without Reason in Conscience*, and *Bishop Cosin on the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (“[Tracts for the Times](#)”). Newman wrote 30 of the Tracts

himself, including the final one, *Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles*, which I will discuss in more detail in a moment ([“Tracts for the Times. John Henry Newman”](#)).

His pursuits were varied, but Newman tells us that three bedrock principles lay beneath them all. As he recounts in the *Apologia*, they were “the principle of dogma,” or the importance of “persistence in a given belief”; the view that the Church of England was the “visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are the channels of invisible grace”; and the conviction that the Pope was Antichrist. His view, and the view of unnamed “Protestant authorities,” was that “St. Gregory I. about A.D. 600 was the first Pope that was Antichrist” and that the entire “Church of Rome was bound up with the cause of Antichrist by the Council of Trent” (50-53).

### **The Move Toward Rome**

For a time, Newman was steadfast in these beliefs and had an apparently unwavering allegiance to the goals toward which he and the Movement were working. In the chapter of the *Apologia* that covers the years 1833-1839, he writes,

I had a supreme confidence in our cause; we were upholding that primitive Christianity which was delivered for all time by the early teachers of the Church, and which was registered and attested in the Anglican formularies and by the Anglican divines. That ancient religion had well-nigh faded away out of the land, through the political changes of the last 150 years, and it must be restored. It would be in fact a second Reformation:— a better reformation. (47)

But the time would come when that confidence would be shaken and he would come down from the heights he occupied in 1839. As it turned out, it didn’t take very long! Sometime between 1839 and 1841, he concluded that two of the three core convictions I mentioned earlier—“the principle of dogma”

and “the sacramental system”—“were better secured in Rome than in the Anglican Church”; he does not explicitly say so, but it probably followed that the third principle, “anti-Romanism,” was negated as well (*Apologia* 101).

Newman went on to note that “From the end of 1841, I was on my death-bed, as regards my membership with the Anglican Church, though at the time I became aware of it only by degrees” (121). There were many factors behind this change, but for the sake of time and simplicity, I will focus on just one, the final installment of the *Tracts for the Times*. As I mentioned earlier, the tracts were intended to establish the authority and authenticity of the Church of England. Newman’s Advertisement to the series begins, “THE following Tracts were published with the object of contributing something towards the practical revival of doctrines, which, although held by the great divines of our Church, at present have become obsolete with the majority of her members, and are withdrawn from public view even by the more learned and orthodox few who still adhere to them.” The “zealous sons and servants” of the English Church, he goes on to say, believe that “nothing but these neglected doctrines, faithfully preached, will repress that extension of Popery, for which the ever multiplying divisions of the religious world are too clearly preparing the way” (“[Advertisement](#)”).

For Newman, at least, they wound up having the opposite effect. He wrote some tracts in defense of Anglican doctrines (*[The Episcopal Church Apostolical](#)*) and others in opposition to Catholic ones (*[On Purgatory](#)*), but ended the series by essentially eliminating the gap between the two. This development was perhaps foreshadowed in the Advertisement, as the two neglected doctrines he mentions by name are “The Apostolic succession” and “the Holy Catholic Church,” but it became explicit in Tract 90. In the introduction to that treatise, he writes that the Thirty-Nine Articles, the official statements of Anglican faith and practice, are “so loosely worded, so incomplete in statement, and so ambiguous in their meaning, as to need an authoritative interpretation” (“[Notice](#)”). Such an interpretation, he asserts in

the conclusion, can be found in the Catholic Church. In fact, it *must* be found there; “it is a *duty* which we owe both to the Catholic Church and to our own, to take our reformed confessions in the most Catholic sense they will admit.” By “giving the Articles a Catholic interpretation, we bring them into harmony with the Book of Common Prayer” (“[Conclusion](#)”).

Given the subject matter, Newman was probably being a bit naive when he wrote that he did not expect his work “to attract attention” (*Letters and Correspondence* 2: 292). In fact, it got him into what he called “a serious mess” (292). Prior to its publication, “rumours of its contents had got into the hostile camp in an exaggerated form,” and it provoked a “sudden storm of indignation” after it appeared in print (*Apologia* 78). Reaction came not just from the general public, but from the academic and ecclesiastical authorities as well. The “Heads of Houses” at Oxford published a “strong resolution...that [Newman’s] explanation of the Articles is *evasive*” (*Letters and Correspondence* 2: 300); Newman also was asked to write his bishop a letter stating that ““at his *bidding*,’ I will suppress Tract 90” (302).

Newman acknowledged that he was “quite unprepared for [this] outbreak, and was startled at its violence” (*Apologia* 78). He also realized the implications it carried for his career:

I saw indeed clearly that my place in the Movement was lost; public confidence was at an end; my occupation was gone. It was simply an impossibility that I could say any thing henceforth to good effect, when I had been posted up by the marshal on the buttery hatch of every College of my University, after the manner of discommoded pastry-cooks, and when in every part of the country and every class of society, through every organ and occasion of opinion, in newspapers, in periodicals, at meetings, in pulpits, at dinner-tables, in coffee-rooms, in railway carriages, I was denounced as a traitor...I had not less confidence in the power and the prospects of the Apostolical movement than before; not less confidence than before in the grievousness of what I called the "dominant errors" of

Rome: but how was I any more to have absolute confidence in myself? how was I to have confidence in my present confidence? how was I to be sure that I should always think as I thought now? (78-79)

Judging by these last few statements, it may not be accurate to say that this incident pushed him over the edge to Rome, but does appear that it brought him closer to the ledge.

### **Not an Easy Road**

Two years later, in 1843, Newman took what he regarded as “two very significant steps:—1. In February, I made a formal Retracting of all the hard things which I had said against the Church of Rome. 2. In September, I resigned the Living of St. Mary's” (*Apologia* 158). He did not, however, take the final plunge until 1845, four years after the publication of Tract 90. Newman offers a brief explanation of the delay at the beginning of chapter 4 of the *Apologia*:

1. I had given up my place in the Movement in my letter to the Bishop of Oxford in the spring of 1841; but 2. I could not give up my duties towards the many and various minds who had more or less been brought into it by me; 3. I expected or intended gradually to fall back into Lay Communion; 4. I never contemplated leaving the Church of England; 5. I could not hold office in her if I were not allowed to hold the Catholic sense of the Articles; 6. I could not go to Rome, while she suffered honours to be paid to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints which I thought in my conscience to be incompatible with the Supreme, Incommunicable Glory of the One Infinite and Eternal. (121)

This series of “one the one hand, but on the other hand” statements sums the matter up nicely, but it is almost too neat and clean, so to speak. In reality, the journey from 1841 to 1845 was often rough and messy. Continuing the image of the “death-bed” I mentioned earlier, Newman wrote, “A death-bed

has scarcely a history; it is a tedious decline, with seasons of rallying and seasons of falling back” (*Apologia* 121). To give a more complete sense of Newman’s “rallying” and “falling back” during this period of his pilgrimage, I would like to present a series of extracts, in chronological order, from Volume 10 of the *Letters and Diaries*, which covers the years from 1843 to 1845. This will be the longest portion of the presentation without any comments from me; I think it is especially important here to let Newman’s words speak for themselves.

May 4, 1844: “I am more sure that we are in schism than that the Creed of Pope Pius is not a development from primitive doctrine. 2. I am far more certain that we have taken from the Faith, than that Rome has added to it. On the other side. I. there is more responsibility in changing to a new communion than in remaining where you are placed. 2. One ought to have some clear proof to outweigh the certainty of the misery it would occasion to others” (225).

June 8, 1844: “for the last five years...I have had a strong feeling...but very active now for two years and a half, and growing more urgent and imperative continually, that the Roman Communion is the only true Church” (261).

July 14, 1844: “I am far more certain that *our* (modern) doctrines are wrong, *than* that the *Roman* (modern) doctrines are wrong” (297).

September 9, 1844: “I do not say I have...certainty, but I am approximating to it. To judge from the course of my thoughts for five years, I am certain of reaching it some time or other. I cannot tell whether sooner or later” (332).

November 7, 1844: “I am still where I was—I am not moving...Two things, however, seem plain: first that every one is prepared for such an event, next that every one expects it of me. Few indeed who do not think it suitable, fewer still who do not think

it likely. However, I do not think it either suitable or likely...It seems to me I have no call at present to take so awful a step” (390).

November 12, 1844: “The pain I suffer from the thought of the distress I am causing cannot be described—and of the loss of kind opinion on the part of those I desire to be well with. The unsettling so many peaceable, innocent minds is a most overpowering thought, and at this moment my heart literally aches and has for days. I am conscious of no motives but that of obeying some urgent imperative call of duty—alas what am I not sacrificing! and if after all it is for a dream?” (399).

November 16, 1844: “There is no fear (humanly speaking) of my moving for a long time yet” (412).

November 16, 1844 (another letter): “As far as I know myself the one single overpowering feeling is that our Church is in schism—and that there is no salvation in it *for one who is convinced of this*...I have waited, not because my conviction was not clear, but because I doubted whether it was a duty to trust it” (416-17).

November 24, 1844: “My intention is, if nothing comes upon me...to remain quietly in statu quo for a considerable time, trusting that my friends will kindly remember me and my trial in their prayers. And I should give up my fellowship sometime before any thing further took place” (433).

January 19, 1845: “No one, I suppose, has a notion of the extreme anguish it gives me, ‘the continual sorrow of heart,’ to be *unsettling* the minds of others; this is what consumes me. I should not mind it, so I think, did I see my way more clearly—but to have to act as if in the dark...and, while acting, to be unsettling others...is a trial so great that I may claim your prayers and those of any other friend who knows it” (500-01).

February 11, 1845: “Considering this conviction [of the heretical status of the English Church] came on me going on six years ago, when you think how much I have written against it, how much I have done in keeping others from it, I do not think, whatever be my fault, you will accuse me of want of patience” (546).

March 30, 1845: “My own convictions are as strong as I suppose they can be—only it is so difficult to know whether it is a call of *reason* or of *conscience*...You can understand how painful this doubt is. So I have waited on, hoping for light...But I suppose I have no right to wait for ever for it...My present intention is to give up my fellowship in October—and to publish some work or treatise between that and Christmas. I wish people to know *why* I am acting as well as *what* I am doing—It takes off that vague and distressing surprise ‘What *can* have made him etc etc?’ and also what I feel myself as good reasons may have to strengthen and satisfy others who mean to take the same step, but want reasons put out for them” (610).

April 3, 1845: “I have never for an instance [sic] had even the temptation of repenting my leaving Oxford. The feeling of repentance has not come even into my mind. How could it? How could I remain at St Mary’s a hypocrite? How could I be answerable for souls...with the convictions, or at least persuasions, which I had upon me? It is indeed a dreadful responsibility to act as I am doing—and I feel His hand heavy on me without intermission” (613).

April 11, 1845: “I should like to wait a whole seven years, which would come to the summer of 1846, but I do not expect that my state of mind [will] let me” (623).

June 4, 1845: “It is now near six years since I came to a clear conviction that our Church was in schism...At the end of 1841 my conviction returned strongly—and has



been on me without interruption ever since. I have delayed acting from a dread lest I should be under the power of some delusion” (690).

July 3, 1845: “I have no misgivings—every day I am getting more and more sure what I ought to do” (723).

July 11, 1845: “it is morally certain I shall join the R. C. Church...It has been the conviction of six years—from which I have never receded...I have waited patiently a long time” (729).

August 7, 1845: “My reason for going to Rome is this:—I think the English Church in schism. I think the faith of the Roman Church the only true religion. I do not think there is salvation out of the Church of Rome” (745).

These extracts cover a period of only about 15 months, from May 1844 to August 1845. An overview of Newman’s entire journey appears in the fourth chapter of the *Apologia*:

For the first four years [up to 1839]...I honestly wished to benefit the Church of England, at the expense of the Church of Rome...For the second four years I wished to benefit the Church of England without prejudice to the Church of Rome...At the beginning of the ninth year...I began to despair of the Church of England, and gave up all clerical duty; and then, what I wrote and did was influenced by a mere wish not to injure it, and not by the wish to benefit it...Lastly, during the last half of that tenth year I was engaged in writing a book...in favour of the Roman Church, and indirectly against the English. (148)

As Newman wrote of Charles Reding (and likely of himself) in *Loss and Gain*, “here we see what is meant when a person says that the Catholic system comes home to his mind, fulfils his ideas of religion, satisfies his sympathies, and the like; and thereupon becomes a Catholic” (203).

## Conversion to Catholicism

The two books also provide two different—but probably complementary rather than conflicting—accounts of Newman’s reception into the Catholic Church. The *Apologia* conveys a sense of anticipation; in a letter to several friends on October 8, 1845, he wrote, “I am this night expecting Father Dominic, the Passionist...He is a simple, holy man; and withal gifted with remarkable powers. He does not know of my intention; but I mean to ask of him admission into the One Fold of Christ” (181).

*Loss and Gain* records the moment of conversion itself for Reding/Newman. The somewhat lofty and emotional language stands in contrast to the matter-of-fact tone of Newman’s letter, so the account is worth quoting at length. In the final pages of the novel, Reding attends a Mass and is moved when a priest begins to celebrate the Eucharist:

A cloud of incense was rising on high; the people suddenly all bowed low; what could it mean? the truth flashed on him, fearfully yet sweetly; it was the Blessed Sacrament—it was the Lord Incarnate who was on the altar, who had come to visit and to bless His people. It was the Great Presence, which makes a Catholic Church different from every other place in the world; which makes it, as no other place can be, holy. (427)

The experience inspires him to action:

He made his way to a lay-brother who was waiting till the doors could be closed, and begged to be conducted to the Superior. The lay-brother feared he might be busy at the moment, but conducted him through the sacristy to a small neat room, where, being left to himself, he had time to collect his thoughts. At length the Superior appeared; he was a man past the middle age, and had a grave yet familiar manner. Charles's feelings were indescribable, but all pleasurable. His heart beat, not with fear or anxiety, but with the thrill of delight with which he realised that he was beneath the shadow of a Catholic

community, and face to face with one of its priests. His trouble went in a moment, and he could have laughed for joy...Charles and [the priest] soon came to an understanding...and it was arranged that he should take up his lodgings with his new friends forthwith, and remain there as long as it suited him. He was to prepare for confession at once; and it was hoped that on the following Sunday he might be received into Catholic communion. After that, he was...to present himself to the Bishop, from whom he would seek the sacrament of confirmation. Not much time was necessary for removing his luggage from his lodgings; and in the course of an hour from the time of his interview with the Father Superior, he was sitting by himself, with pen and paper and his books, and with a cheerful fire, in a small cell of his new home. (428-29)

### **The Catholic Years**

Newman's Catholic career was at least as illustrious as his Anglican one. Between his ordination to the priesthood in 1846 and his elevation to cardinal in 1879, he established a [Catholic community in Birmingham](#) (1848), was the founding Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland (1854-1857), and edited a periodical (*The Rambler*, 1859); he also received the Doctor of Divinity degree from Pope Pius IX in 1850 and was named an honorary Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford in 1877 ("[Chronology of Newman's Life](#)").

He also, of course, continued to publish; his works included not only sermons and theological books, but also a second novel (*Callista*, 1855), a long poem tracing a man's journey through the afterlife (*Dream of Gerontius*, 1865), and translations of "selected treatises" by Athanasius, the fourth-century bishop, saint, and Doctor of the Church ("[Works of John Henry Newman](#)"). Perhaps his best-known Catholic volume is *The Idea of a University*, a collection of the lectures he delivered at the

opening of the university in Ireland. It has, as the saying/cliché goes, “stood the test of time” and is still widely regarded as the classic statement about the nature and goals of a liberal-arts education.

This summary is a poor substitute for Newman’s own words, but I am afraid it may have to suffice. Marshall’s library has only 3 of the 21 volumes of the *Letters and Diaries* covering his Catholic period, and the *Apologia* says little about his post-conversion days. Newman stated, in fact, that there was little to be said; the final chapter, entitled “Position of My Mind Since 1845,” begins with these words:

From the time that I became a Catholic, of course I have no further history of my religious opinions to narrate. In saying this, I do not mean to say that my mind has been idle, or that I have given up thinking on theological subjects; but that I have had no variations to record, and have had no anxiety of heart whatever. I have been in perfect peace and contentment; I never have had one doubt. I was not conscious to myself, on my conversion, of any change, intellectual or moral, wrought in my mind. I was not conscious of firmer faith in the fundamental truths of Revelation, or of more self-command; I had not more fervour; but it was like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without interruption. (184)

I would, however, like to touch on one incident that illustrates how fully he embraced the teachings of his new Church, and how he explained his acceptance of those teachings to others. Newman described his general rule of thumb in an April 15, 1870 letter to his fellow priest Reginald Buckler: “My rule is to act according to my best light as if I was infallible, before the Church decides; but to accept and submit to God’s Infallibility when the Church has spoken” (*Letters and Diaries* 25: 100). He advised others to take this approach as well; in an August 31 letter to a woman named Anna Whitty, who was wrestling with some doctrinal issues, he wrote, “I think you should do two things—first make

an act of faith ‘*in ALL that the Church teaches*’—and next, when doubts arise against this particular doctrine, put them away, on the ground that *perhaps* the Church teaches this doctrine, and that it is safer therefore *not* to oppose it” (*Letters and Diaries* 25: 200).

The word “infallible” was not a coincidence or accident, for both letters were referring to the question of papal infallibility. The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) was considering the issue at the time Newman wrote to Buckler and formally decided it a few months later, on July 18; it was also the teaching that Whitty was struggling to accept.

Newman himself did not struggle at all. He accepted the idea but was “strongly opposed to its being defined” as an article of faith; in his letter to Buckler, he expressed his concern that the “party” in favor of defining it was “going too fast” in its efforts to get it codified (*Letters and Diaries* 25: 100, 189). If matters were to get to that point, however, he would abandon his opposition; as he wrote to Thomas Joseph Brown, the Bishop of Newport, on April 8, 1870, “I will not believe that the Pope’s Infallibility will be defined by the Council till it is actually done and over—when this is so, then of course, with every Catholic, I will accept it” (*Letters and Diaries* 25: 83). In keeping with his own guiding philosophy and his advice to Anna Witty, that is precisely what he did.

## Conclusion

I close with a final word from Newman, taken from a letter he wrote in 1850. He had received word that a certain “Miss Moore” regarded him as a kind of “saint,” even though he had been a Catholic for only about 5 years. In a response to her friend, “Miss Munro,” he wrote,

You must undeceive her about me, though I suppose she uses words in a general sense. I have nothing of a Saint about me as every one knows, and it is a severe (and salutary) mortification to be thought next door to one. I may have a high view of many things, but it is the consequence of education and of a peculiar cast of intellect—but this is very different from *being* what I admire. I have no tendency to be a saint—it is a sad thing to say. Saints are not literary men, they do not love the classics, they do not write Tales. I may be well enough in my way, but it is not the “high line.”...It is enough for me to black the saints’ shoes—if St. Philip uses blacking, in heaven. (*Letters and Diaries* 13: 419)

Sheridan Gilley, who edited my copy of *Loss and Gain*, has suggested that Newman was being somewhat tongue-in-cheek (dust jacket), but it is possible that he was entirely in earnest. Either way, we know now that his literary pursuits were no impediment at all. His path to sainthood began in 1991, when Pope John Paul II proclaimed him “venerable,” or “heroic in virtue” ([Scarisbrick and Bordoni](#)). In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed Newman’s first miracle—the healing of an American named Jack Sullivan in 2001—which led to his beatification in September 2010 ([Hirst](#)). February of this year brought the confirmation of a second miracle—the healing of another American, this time a pregnant woman ([Hallett](#))—and his canonization took place this past Sunday.

There may be one more step to come: Ian Ker, whose [definitive biography](#) of Newman was published in 1988 and reprinted to commemorate his beatification in 2010, has [suggested](#) that this

“opens the way to the Church’s recognition of Newman the theologian as a ‘Doctor of the Church’.”

According to a document published by the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), those who receive such a designation

are probably best thought of as doctors in the PhD sense of the word. Through their research, study, and writing, they have advanced the Church’s knowledge of our faith. To be declared a Doctor of the Church does not imply that all their writings are free from error but rather that the whole body of their work, taken together serves to advance the cause of Christ and his Church. ([Rice](#))

Newman may very well fit this description, but there is as yet no indication of when, or even whether, such a designation might be made. For the moment, because sainthood is the highest recognition most Roman Catholics can receive, it could perhaps be said that, after a little over 100 years, the pilgrimage that began around 1816 is now complete. Thank you very much.

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