

John Henry Newman – to be canonised by Pope Francis on 13th October – wrote the well-loved hymns *Praise to the Holiest in the Height* and *Lead, Kindly Light*. However his importance in the Church, to both Anglicans and Catholics, goes way beyond that. He is recognised as an eminent Victorian. He was active in the first Vatican Council (1869-70), and has been called ‘a Father of Vatican II (1962-5)’; many of his ideas still resonate within the Church today. He was a great thinker and writer: of letters, of books, and of sermons. He was a priest and, as a member of the Congregation of the Oratory, he founded the Birmingham Oratory and helped to establish the London (Brompton) Oratory. Towards the end of his life he became a Cardinal and later this year Pope Francis will declare him a Saint!

From Newman’s beginnings it would have been difficult to foretell this illustrious status within the Roman Catholic Church.

He was born in 1801 in London, the eldest of six children whose father was a banker. The family was not especially religious but Newman was baptised into the Church of England. Aged 15, just before he left his school in Ealing, he experienced a spiritual conversion and became an Evangelical Christian; he always looked back to this event as the saving of his soul. From the end of 1816 until 1845 Newman was in Oxford, first as a student at Trinity College and then as a Fellow of Oriel College.

Through his theological studies and discussions with close friends, Newman’s personal spirituality developed year by year. He was ordained an Anglican priest in 1825, and in 1828 was appointed Vicar of St Mary’s, the University Church in Oxford. He became a leader in the *Oxford Movement*, the influential High Church wing of the Church of England. He began to embrace ‘catholic’ ideas, like the Apostolic Succession, devotion to Our Lady, and belief in the Real Presence. By 1845 Newman was convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was the true successor to the church of the apostles and he became a Catholic, at Littlemore near Oxford. He was ordained a Catholic priest in Rome in 1846. Throughout the second half of his life until he died in 1890, Newman continued working as a theologian, a parish priest and an educator. Except for four years in Ireland he was based mostly with his community of Oratorians in Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Newman wrote on many topics. One of his key works – it was both highly original and very influential on his personal decision to become a Catholic – was his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Unlike some others he knew, he considered that the Bible itself does not ‘teach’ doctrine: it is for the Church to teach doctrine, using the Bible to support the teaching. But he also appreciated the tension that arises when ‘tradition’ is seen as an important feature of religious teaching. He saw that doctrine (religious teaching) seemed capable of development, and for him that was a ‘problem’ that needed solving: he set out to justify it. In his *Essay*, Newman demonstrated that such developments can be quite proper additions to the original deposit of faith, and he provided tests to demonstrate genuine developments. We now see that not every aspect of religious teaching was fixed once the Bible was completed: in the early Church there clearly were developments in teaching about the Trinity, about the Real Presence and about infant baptism. In fact, due to Newman’s work, we recognise that many doctrines develop through history. He appreciated that the church is a living organic community and living implies growth, which is itself change. In a famous quotation he said ‘*In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often*’.

Another important strand of Newman’s work was his championing of the laity in the Church. He saw the need for an educated laity ‘.....not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but

[people] who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity...' While recognising the leadership roles of priests, Newman encouraged lay people to educate each other through discussion and debate. Newman was convinced that the laity have a vital contribution to make to the Church, because through Baptism they share in Christ's Priesthood; he proposed that they should be consulted in matters of doctrine since they are the Holy People of God, with an instinct for what God has revealed. He himself certainly valued contributions from lay people: when he was asked '*Who are the laity?*' he answered '*The Church would look foolish without them!*'

In 1942, in the dark days of WWII, a group of English Catholics started a national Catholic association for graduates – perhaps as a way of looking forward to better times. They named it after Cardinal Newman because they were strongly influenced by his views. Since then the Newman Association has broadened its membership to include all who wish to follow Newman's inspiration to build up a religiously educated and articulate laity. Its events – talks, conferences, pilgrimages – are open to everyone.

There are two local 'Circles' of the Newman Association in our diocese, which hold monthly talks and other events. The York Circle normally holds its meetings in the Bar Convent; the Cleveland Circle (covering north and south of the River Tees) holds meetings in the Cathedral Hall, Coulby Newham, Middlesbrough.

The next talk hosted by the Cleveland Circle is on Wednesday 18th September 2019, at 7.45pm (coffee/tea from 7.30pm). Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB will talk on '***Blood of Martyrs, Seed of Church Unity: the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and receptive ecumenism – significant progress?***'. For further details please contact Lorraine Canning, lorraine.canning@icloud.com.

The September talk for the York Circle is on Monday 16th September, at 7.30pm (coffee/tea from 7pm). Exceptionally it will be held at St Bede's Pastoral Centre, 21 Blossom Street, York. Judith Daley will be the speaker, and her topic is '***The Changing Ethics of Family Law***'. Please contact Judith Smeaton, judith.smeaton@btinternet.com, for more details.

Everyone is welcome to attend these talks!