

The Parish  
of Roath  
Saint Martin of Tours

JR  
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THE BLESSED  
JOHN HENRY  
NEWMAN  
1801-1890



**On Sunday 19 September 2010 Pope Benedict XVI will beatify Cardinal John Henry Newman** during the celebration of the Mass at Cofton Park, Rednal, Birmingham.

The Roman Catholic and Anglican Church in the United Kingdom and beyond has good reason to rejoice and give praise to God for raising up from among our own a Servant of God who gave witness during his life of heroic virtue.

The man who was to become the greatest Anglican theologian, apart from Richard Hooker, as well as the most important Catholic theologian of the nineteenth century, and who has often been called 'the Father of the Second Vatican Council' because of the ways in which he anticipated the Council in his writings, did not grow up in an intensely religious family. His parents were ordinary, typical members of the Church of England: they did not belong to the high-church tradition of the seventeenth century, nor had they been affected by the Wesleyan or Evangelical revival that was sweeping the Church of England. In fact, they adhered to what their son, John Henry Newman, was later to call 'the national religion of England': that is, 'Bible religion', consisting 'not in rites or creeds, but mainly in having the Bible read in church, in the family, and in private'. He himself was 'brought up from a child to take great delight in reading the Bible'.

To understand John Henry Newman it is helpful first to look at the state of the Church of England in, say, the year 1800. The Church of England was divided into about 10,000 parishes throughout the land, but two-thirds of those parishes never saw their Clergy. Power of appointment lay not so much with the bishops but with the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and with the landed gentry and aristocracy – and they paid the wages too. So an Anglican priest would be appointed to a 'living' – or perhaps two or three of them – receive the income, but live the life of a scholar or gentleman elsewhere. The idea of responsibility for the spiritual and pastoral care of souls had ebbed and almost died

## *Conscience and Newman-The Kindly Light of Conscience*



John Henry Newman's famous hymn **Lead Kindly Light** is a mirror reflecting his core teaching on the importance of the formation of conscience. Each section of this article has a sub-heading taken from the hymn to illustrate where the chosen phrase resonates within Newman's sermons and letters.

### *I loved to choose and see my path*

One of Newman's favourite verses in the Bible is from St Paul (2 Cor. IV.6): 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' (Revealed in the Gospel, p.557).

Newman understood the word translated as 'heart' to be an equivalent of the term 'conscience'.

'...that obedience to our conscience, in all things, great and small, is the way to know the Truth; that pride hardens the heart, and sensuality debases it; and that all those who live in pride and sensual indulgence can no more comprehend the way of the Holy Spirit, or know the voice of Christ than the devils who believe with a dead faith and tremble!' (The Self-wise Inquirer, p.146).

He was well aware that sin can dull the sharpness of the rays of personal decision making falling upon present or anticipated circumstances.

God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' Is not the light that is in a man sometimes even darkness, sometimes twilight, and sometimes of this hue or that, tinging every part of himself with its own peculiarity? How then is it possible that a man can duly examine his feelings and affections by the light within him?' (Saving Knowledge, p.327).



## *Pride ruled my will*

Newman even recognised that it is not always clear how to interpret the lead of the beckoning 'kindly inner light'. Even when we have prayed for guidance, consulted the scriptures, sought wise council, familiarised ourselves with the Church's teaching we can be mistaken

about God's will. As an Oratory Father, writing a confidential letter to Henry Wilberforce, Newman admits with characteristic humility:

'I have wished earnestly to do some good work...and have to the best of my lights, taken what I thought God would have me do - but again and again, plan after plan, has crumbled under my hands and come to nought.' (Letter, 20th August, 1869).

## *So long thy power hath blest me*

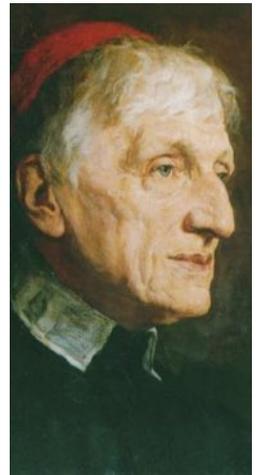
The Cardinal maintained that in such circumstances where a direction is unclear we need to remain focused on the basics:

'...be brave; make acts of faith, hope and charity; put yourself into God's hands, and thank Him for all that He sends you, pleasant or painful.' (Letter, 3rd October, 1884).

## *I do not ask to see the distant scene*

Newman taught that a person who was unsure of how to interpret God's will, he or she must be steadfast and patient.

To all who are perplexed in any way soever, who wish for light but cannot find it, one precept must be given, obey. It is obedience which brings a man into the right path; it is obedience keeps him there and strengthens him in it. Under all circumstances, whatever be the cause of the distress - obey.



In the words of the text, 'Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee.' (Obedience the Remedy, p.147).

### *One step enough for me*

This 'waiting' is to involve actively developing our inner life through prayer and the eucharist.

'Do not despair then; nay, do not despond...He gives grace by little and little. It is by coming daily into his presence that by degrees we find ourselves awed by that presence and able to believe and obey Him. Therefore if anyone desires illumination to know God's will, as well as strength to do it, let him come to Mass daily, if he possibly can. At least let him present himself daily before the Blessed Sacrament, and, as it



were, offer his heart to His Incarnate Saviour, presenting it as a reasonable offering to be influenced, changed, and sanctified under the eye and by the grace of the Eternal Son.' (Catholic Sermons, p.52).

### *Those angel faces smile which I have loved*

Newman concludes with characteristic encouragement for those who are suffering and are longing for the Kindly Light of God to lead them from the 'encircling gloom'.

'It is the consolation which comes from above, and that alone, which can aid you - and that you have abundantly. And as time goes on, the pain will be less and less, and the light of divine consolation will become brighter and brighter - for you will understand, more than anyone else, how great a thing it is to have a son, secured from the ten thousand temptations of the world, and safely lodged in unchangeable blessedness.

Meantime, be sure you have the deep sympathy of all who know and love you and their best prayers.' (Letter, 24th November 1857).

If anyone desires illumination to know God's will, as well as strength to do it, let him come to Mass daily. Finally, writing to a Dominican Sister at Stone who was dying Newman offers the following consolation:

'God's Angel will be with you every step you take – and I will try to help you with my best remembrances and sacred wishes as you descend into the valley – but you are to be envied not lamented over, because you are going to your own Lord and God, your Light, your Treasure, and your Life. Only pray for me in your place of peace and rest, for I at most can be but a little time behind you.

Yet a little and a very little while, and He that is to come will come, and will not tarry.

Ever yours affectionately in Xt.,' (Ward, Vol II, 325).

**Lead, Kindly Light** is a hymn with words written in 1833 by John Henry Newman as a poem titled "the Pillar of Cloud". As a young priest, John Newman became sick while in Italy and was unable to travel for almost three weeks. In his own words:

*Before starting from my inn, I sat down on my bed and began to sob bitterly. My servant, who had acted as my nurse, asked what ailed me. I could only answer, "I have a work to do in England." I was aching to get home, yet for want of a vessel I was kept at Palermo for three weeks. I began to visit the churches, and they calmed my impatience, though I did not attend any services. At last I got off in an orange boat, bound for Marseilles. We were becalmed for whole week in the Straits of Bonifacio, and it was there that I wrote the lines, Lead, Kindly Light, which have since become so well known.*

**John Henry Newman** (21 February 1801 – 11 August, was an important figure in the religious history of England in the 19th century.

*Originally a priest in the Church of England, where he was major figure in the Oxford Movement (which wished to return the Church of England to many Catholic beliefs and forms of worship), he eventually converted to Roman Catholicism (1845) and become a Cardinal. He also a literary figure of note, his major writings including his autobiography Apologia Pro Vita Sua (1865–66), the Grammar of Assent (1870), and the poem Gerontius, which formed the text for composer Edward Elgar's Dream of Gerontius.*

*His intellectual brilliance saw him appointed to a Fellowship in Oxford at the young age of twenty-one. His Evangelical roots gradually gave way to a more Catholic view of the Church, particularly after liberal trends both in politics and theology appeared to undermine the Church of England's authority. Newman was one of the leaders of the Tractarians who defended the Church and he is associated especially with the idea of Anglicanism as a Via Media or middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.*

*His beatification will officially proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the UK on 19 September 2010*

## **Beatification**

Beatification (from Latin beatus, blessed, via Greek μακάριος, makarios and Latin facere, make) is a recognition accorded by the Church of a dead person's ascension to Heaven and capacity to intercede on behalf of individuals who pray in his or her name (intercession of saints). Beatification is the third of the four steps in the canonization process. A person who is beatified is given the title "Blessed". The feast day for the Blessed person is not universal, but is celebrated only in regions where the person receives particular veneration.

The Feast Day of the **Blessed John Henry Newman** is to be October the 9th. This was the day in 1845 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. The Anglican Church already celebrates Newman on 11th August, the date of his death.

*Lead, kindly Light, 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 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!*

*Meantime, along the narrow rugged path, Thyself hast trod,  
Lead, Savior, lead me home in childlike faith, home to my God.  
To rest forever after earthly strife  
In the calm light of everlasting life.*