



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ACADEMIC SYMPOSIUM
ORGANIZED TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENARY
OF THE DEATH OF CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN**

Friday, 27 April 1990

*Your Eminences,
Excellencies,
my Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. I am very pleased that this meeting allows me to take part as it were in the *Academic Symposium* which the International Community "The Work" and the Centre of Newman Friends have organized to commemorate *the centenary of the death of the renowned Cardinal John Henry Newman*. I welcome all of you and thank you for drawing attention through your celebration to the great English Cardinal's special place in the history of the Church. The passage of a hundred years since his death has done nothing to diminish the importance of this extraordinary figure, many of whose ideas enjoy a particular relevance in our own day. The theme of your Symposium, "John Henry Newman - Lover of Truth", points to a major reason for the continuing attraction of Newman's life and writings. His was a lifelong pursuit of the Truth which alone can make men free (Cfr. *Io.* 8, 32).

2. In this brief encounter I can mention only some of the many lessons which Newman holds out to the Church and to the world of culture. I would underline the inspiration that scholars and thoughtful readers of Newman continue to receive today from this pilgrim for truth. Your Symposium and other such celebrations during this centenary year offer the occasion for a deeper appreciation of Newman's charism. Not least among his merits, he reminds us of the need for *an interior disposition of loving obedience to God* if contemporary society is to be successful in its quest for the full liberating truth which it urgently needs, and indeed knows itself to need.

Ever since his first "conversion grace" at the age of fifteen, Newman was never to lose his sense of God's presence, his respect for revealed truth and his thirst for holiness of life. In his own lifetime, the example of his singular piety and integrity was widely esteemed throughout England by both Catholics and Anglicans alike. His reputation as a man of deep spirituality as well as of learning was one of the principal motives inspiring the English laity to petition Pope Leo XIII to raise the founder of the English Oratory to the College of Cardinals (Cfr. *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, XXIX, Oxford 1961 ss., p. 85).

3. Newman's intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage was made in earnest response to an inner light of which he seemed always aware, the *light which conscience projects on all of life's movements and endeavours*. For Newman, conscience was a "messenger from Him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil" (*Difficulties of Anglicans*, Westminster, Md., II, p.248). It inevitably led him to obedience to the authority of the Church, first in the Anglican Communion, and later as a Catholic. His preaching and writings reflected his own lived experience. So, he could instruct his listeners: "Do but examine your thoughts and doings; do but attempt what you know to be God's will, and you will most assuredly be led on into all the truth: you will recognize the force, meaning and awful graciousness of the Gospel Creed..." (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, VIII, p. 120).

Newman did not seek worldly success for his own sake, nor did he let the misunderstanding which often accompanied his efforts distract him from the search for true holiness, which was always his conscious aim. He enjoyed great influence and authority during his life, not for any office that he held but because of the human and spiritual personality which he portrayed.

4. The inner drama which marked his long life hinged on the question of *holiness and union with Christ*. His overriding desire was to know and to do God's will. Thus, at a time of intense spiritual questioning, before retiring to pray about his decision to enter the Catholic Church, he asked his parishioners at Littlemore to "remember such a one in time to come, though you hear him not, and pray for him, that in all things he may know God's will, and at all times he may be ready to fulfil it" (*Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*, Westminster, Md., 1968, p. 409).

This ideal sustained him in the difficult hour when he sacrificed so much in leaving his beloved and familiar Church of England in order to enter the Catholic Church. His reasoned fidelity to the way God's Providence led him made this experience - what he called the "hidden years" of his life - a source of encouragement and inspiration for many who were looking for the "port after a rough sea" (*Apologia pro Vita Sua*, London 1888, p. 238). With letters of spiritual direction and counsel he helped countless others along the path of the truth he himself had found and which filled him with so much joy. Newman's influence in this sense has increased over the past hundred years and is no longer limited to England. All over the world people claim that this master of the spirit, by his works, by his example, by his intercession, has been an instrument of divine Providence in their lives.

5. In the contemporary cultural climate, with particular reference to Europe, there is an area of Newman's thought which deserves special attention. I refer to the *unity* which he advocated between theology and science, between *the world of faith and the world of reason*. He proposed that learning should not lack unity, but be rooted in a total view. Thus, he concluded his Discourses before the University of Dublin with these striking words: "I wish the intellect to range with the utmost freedom, and religion to enjoy an equal freedom but what I am stipulating for is, that they should be found in one and the same place, and exemplified in the same persons" (*Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, London 1904, p. 13).

In the present changing circumstances of European culture, does Newman not indicate the essential Christian contribution to building a new era based on a deeper truth and higher values? He wrote: "I want to destroy that diversity of centres, which puts everything into confusion by creating a contrariety of influences. I wish the same spots and the same individuals to be at once oracles of philosophy and shrines of devotion..." (*Ibid*). In this endeavour the path the Church must follow is succinctly expressed by the English Cardinal in this way: "The Church fears no knowledge, but she purifies all; she represses no element of our nature, but cultivates the whole" (*The Idea of a University*, Westminster, Md., p. 234).

6. Still another area of Newman's spiritual itinerary stands out as particularly relevant in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Because of it we feel Newman to be our true spiritual contemporary. *The mystery of the Church always remained the great love of John Henry Newman's life*. And in this there is a further profound lesson for the present. Newman's writings project an eminently clear picture of his unwavering love of the Church as the continuing outpouring of God's love for man in every phase of history. His was a truly spiritual vision, capable of perceiving all the weaknesses present in the human fabric of the Church, but equally sure in its perception of the mystery hidden beyond our material gaze. May his memory inspire us to make our own the significant prayer that flowed so naturally from his heart: "Let me never forget that Thou hast established on earth a kingdom of Thy own, that the Church is Thy work, Thy establishment, Thy instrument; that we are under Thy rule, Thy laws and Thy eye - that when the Church speaks Thou dost speak. Let not familiarity with this wonderful truth lead me to be insensible to it - let not the weakness of Thy human representatives lead me to forget that it is Thou who dost speak and act through them" (*Meditations and Devotions*, Westminster, Md., pp. 378-379).

7. May these same sentiments fill all our hearts as we commemorate this eminent churchman. In Newman's entire experience we hear the echo of the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "He who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God" (*Jo.* 3, 21). I trust that your Symposium will inspire further studies to bring out more clearly the importance and relevance of this "Lover of Truth" for our times.

Upon you and Newman scholars and friends everywhere I invoke the light of the Holy Spirit so that

through your efforts the teachings of this great English Cardinal may be better known and appreciated. I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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