

The Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn



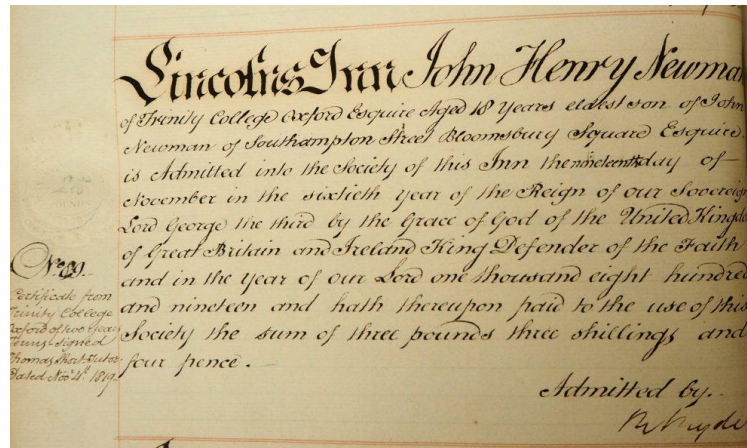
ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN SERVICE

4 OCTOBER 2020



NEWMAN AND THE INN

John Henry Newman was admitted to the Inn 201 years ago, on 19 November 1819. There is no date of call recorded for John Henry Newman and we know that he did not go on to train as a barrister, and indeed may never have intended to. This was not uncommon at the time; attending one of the Inns of Court was often used as a way for people to make good social contacts rather than qualify to be a barrister.



John Newman's admission entry to the Inn, 19 November 1819. From the Inn Archive.

Prior to his admission, John Henry Newman entered Trinity College, Oxford in 1817, winning a scholarship in May 1818. He did not achieve his predicted double first, as he failed Mathematics and attained a fourth in Classics. He ultimately decided to enter the Church and in 1825 he was ordained as a priest of the Church of England, becoming Vicar of University Church, St Mary's, in 1828. In the summer of 1833 he became associated with John Keble, Edward Pusey and others in what became known as the Oxford Movement, an attempt within the Church of England to rediscover and promote its Catholic aspects.

Newman went on to convert to Catholicism in 1845. In September 1846 he entered college in Rome and he was ordained on 30 May 1847. He founded the Birmingham Oratory in 1848 and helped to establish the Catholic University of Dublin (now University College Dublin). He died at the Birmingham Oratory on 11 August 1890 and was buried in the Oratory cemetery at Rednal.

John Henry Newman was canonised by Pope Francis nearly a year ago, on 13 October 2019.

Based on the article written by our Archivist, Megan Dunmall: <https://www.lincolnsinn.org.uk/library/archives/archive-of-the-month/november-2019-saint-john-henry-newman/>

**The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Morris,
Master of Trinity Hall Cambridge**



We are fortunate to have Dr Morris, a distinguished modern church historian, who has also written on another well known member of the Inn, F. D. Maurice (Chaplain from 1846 to 1860), to address us on Newman.

Prior to becoming Master of Trinity Hall, he was Dean of Trinity Hall from 2001 to 2010, and then of King's College, Cambridge from 2010 to 2014. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and a priest in the Church of England. His academic interests include modern European church history, Anglican theology and ecclesiology (especially High Anglicanism), the ecumenical movement, and arguments about religion and secularization. He is a specialist in modern religious history, including the Anglican tradition, the ecumenical movement, and arguments about secularization. His books have included *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (2005), *Renewed by the Word: The Bible and Christian Revival since the Reformation* (2005), *The Church in the Modern Age* (2007), and *The High Church Revival in the Church of England: Arguments and Identities* (2016). His current research projects include a study of the Eucharist in Western Europe since 1800, to be published by Oxford University Press, and a one-volume history of the Church of England. He is one of the editors of the multi-volume *Oxford History of Anglicanism* (2017).

Sermon by The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Morris

I'm delighted to have been invited to preach to you this morning – thanks very much to Sheila, and Aleksandra. We particularly commemorate this morning, of course, John Henry Newman, the great English theologian, writer and priest whose canonization was presided over by Pope Francis in Rome last October. So we are marking in a sense the first anniversary of *Saint* John Henry Newman, and as someone who's studied Newman and his era, and written on him, I'm honoured to be addressing you about him.

But there is a double irony, nonetheless, which I ought to get out of the way immediately. First, although Newman's name was entered into the roll here at the age of 19, as a member, he didn't study law, and I'm not aware of any evidence that he actually came here, or worshipped here in this chapel. His father had wanted him to become a lawyer, but evidently he had no interest in it. But that does not mean he had nothing to say on the subject at all, as I hope to show.

The second irony is much the greater one. Outside St Peter's on 13 October last year, in tribute to the first 44 years of his life, which Newman spent as an Anglican, serried ranks of Anglican dignitaries were there joining in the service and the celebrations, in response to an invitation which was a generous ecumenical gesture. But Anglicans have come very late to full appreciation of Newman. For much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries he was a controversial figure in the Church of England, not particularly estimated as the theologian of stature that he unquestionably was. Only in 2000 did he finally make it onto the Church of England's calendar, and even then at the very lowest level – certainly not as a 'saint'. The change was particularly due to the influence of the Second Vatican Council in the Catholic Church, and its rehabilitation of Newman as one of the guiding spirits of modern Catholicism. For in the Catholic Church in the mid and late nineteenth century, Newman was also mostly regarded with suspicion, his tragedy to leave the Church and University he loved on grounds of conscience, and to be shunned by much of the hierarchy of the Church he joined.

But ironic though it may be, still the fact is there, staring us baldly in the face – Newman, by a long and sometimes convoluted journey, has come to be seen as a saint, not I think because he was a particularly nice or generous person, but because he was a person of Christian integrity who risked and lost much that was precious to him in pursuit of the truth, and was a modern doctor of the Church, a teacher for the modern Church of great profundity. He was something almost inconceivable today – an ardent defender of Church tradition who was also a mind on the move, fully alert to the seriousness of the challenges faced by faith in the modern world.

But thinking about Newman in connection with law brings us sharply to the point. Newman, as a Roman Catholic, like all Catholics of his time, had to grapple with an inherited, cultural mindset around him that assumed that the major challenge for Catholics was essentially a question of law - the divided allegiance alleged against Catholics, the idea that they owed a prior, supra-national obedience to the Papacy, a Papacy which continued all the way through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century to regard itself as monarch of a temporal state, a sovereign as well as a spiritual authority. Catholics, it was claimed, could not be servants of two masters. They could not owe a divided allegiance. Their loyalty to the Crown, their obedience to the law of the land, was surely conditional,

because they owed a prior allegiance to the Pope. Catholics ultimately could not be trusted. Moreover, when papal infallibility was formally declared in 1870 at the first Vatican Council – though it had always been implicit in Catholic understanding – the challenge was sharpened even more – the Pope could not now, surely, be contradicted?

What Newman has to say on this matter was triggered by Gladstone's raising once again this old charge of divided allegiance, in the wake of the Vatican decrees. And Newman, in a public letter to the Duke of Norfolk, took the charge head on. Papal infallibility, as it bears on faith and morals, is no more a kind of 'minute' director of human lives than is human law: "the Law is supreme, and the Law directs our conduct under the manifold circumstances in which we have to act...and must be absolutely obeyed", he says, "but who therefore says that the Law has the 'supreme direction' of us?"¹ Statute law, civil law including property law, common law, custom – these are potentially a bewildering array of authorities, but they do not amount to a tyranny over human life, but rather convey the great blessings of an ordered and free society. This was analogous to the authority of the Pope. It was possible to imagine some situations in which what the Pope directs and the States requires come into conflict, but then that is no different from the situation that Protestants might find themselves in, or, say, citizens of one country domiciling for a time in another. Citizens are bound to obey the laws created for their good, and to suffer the consequences if they do not.

But what if the Pope, let alone the State, demands something of Catholics that actually contravenes their conscience? Here Newman's argument took a surprising turn, though not without a battery of Catholic authorities. Conscience, says Newman, is the law that God himself has implanted in us, "in the intelligence", he says, "of all His rational creatures". It is a "sovereign, irreversible, absolute authority in the presence of men and Angels".² It is the "internal witness of both the existence and the law of God".³ If the Pope commanded something that went against Conscience, in the true sense of the word, he would be committing a suicidal act, cutting the very ground from under his feet, for it is his mission, like that of the Church as a whole, to protect and promote what the Gospel of John speaks of, 'the Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world'. His very authority is founded on this law of conscience. And so Newman can say, in a famous phrase, "if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts...I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please, - still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards".

Now, this is not a crux for Anglicans, who do not accept the ecclesial authority of the Pope, of course. But what Newman is saying is capable of wider application. Christians – particularly Protestants, I might say - sometimes lean very heavily on the idea, which they get from St Paul, that there is a dichotomy between law and grace. The old covenant, the covenant with Israel, founded the law of Israel. But Jesus – his message in effect generalized by St Paul – emphasized the spirit, not the letter; love as the motivating principle, not formal obedience; like the prophet Hosea, mercy and not sacrifice. When it comes to the declaration of truth and revelation, this is so – the Spirit giveth life.

But it is not a dichotomy that runs like a great chasm through the life to which Christians in faith are called. Christians living Christianly cannot simply ignore law, including secular law, but also moral law, the law of implanted conscience, as if faith frees us from the need to obey the law, for in the Christian life all the ordered, social harmony that the law seeks to protect must be lived and treasured, as the outworking of the love to which Christians are called.

In difficult situations, this does require of us hard choices, conscience-driven. Newman's emphasis on the priority of conscience has a practical application, then, too. One thinks of Christian opposition to repressive regimes, Christian campaigning for social justice. It was Newman's work on conscience that particularly inspired Theodor Haecker, the philosopher and lecturer who influenced the White Rose resistance circle in Munich University during the war, the circle of Hans and Sophie Scholl who were executed for circulating anti-Nazi leaflets.⁴ It would be hard to think of a more poignant application of Newman on conscience.

Conscience is, as Newman sees it, like a mighty river flowing through Christian history, the life-giving grace of God flowing through the teaching of Jesus himself, through the witness of the apostles and the martyrs for the faith, through the work of the Church whenever and wherever the Gospel is truly taught and lived, through the lives of innumerable ordinary Christians as they try to live the faith to which they are called. Conscience needs law to give force and expression to it; law needs conscience to steer it, to keep it true to its course.

This conscience is nothing more, then, than the mind of Christ in the Church and in the lives of individual believers. It is absolutely not a mere subjective impression, but the cultivated sense of what the Gospel teaches us rightly, that must be developed and fine-tuned in prayer, in worship, in study, in a disciplined and moral life, in attention to other people, in compassion and generosity. It is where, in Christ, the Church meets the mind of the individual Christian, and the individual Christian expresses the mind of Christ.

Newman reminds us that Christian faith is nothing if not a practical guide for living. It is not a misty-eyed dreaming of things above, but searching out what is good and true in the world in which we find ourselves, day by day, and accepting and facing the sometimes difficult situations that ensue. It is Newman, in one of his sermons, who said rightly "He loves the unseen company of believers, who loves those who are seen. The test of our being joined to Christ is love; the test of love towards Christ and His Church, is loving those whom we actually see."⁵ His teaching on conscience lands squarely in our actual daily lives – living out God's love for us and for his world in the people and worlds we know, conforming ourselves to Christ, living as he lived for others. May God give us grace and strength to do that! Amen.

¹ J.H. Newman, 'A Letter addressed to the Duke of Norfolk', in Newman, *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, II (new edn., 1900), p. 227

² *Ibid.*, p. 246.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁴ D. Fenlon, 'From the White Star to the White Rose: Newman and the Conscience of the State', in E. Botto & H. Geissler (eds.), *Una ragionevole fede. Logos e dialogo in John Henry Newman* (2009).

⁵ J.H. Newman, *Parochial & Plain Sermons*, IV (new edn.n 1869), p. 184.