

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN
THE GREATEST PERVERT TO ROME



MATTHEW J. HYDE



The Oxford martyrs' memorial erected in 1843, in response to the Oxford Movement, commemorating Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, and Bishops Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer.

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BY
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The front cover illustration of John Henry Newman is from an original watercolour by Sir William Ross, painted in 1845. It now hangs in the Senior Common Room of Keble College, Oxford. It is reproduced by kind permission of the Warden and Fellows of Keble College, Oxford.

The Protestant Alliance holds six City Lectures in Central London every year. Their principal aim is to educate and warn the general populous of the errors of Romanism.

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The substance of the Protestant Alliance City Lecture
given by Dr. Matthew J. Hyde, 22nd March 2010

Readings: John 6:53-71 and 1 John 2:18-29.

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. (1 John 2:18-20)

In Rome on the 12th May 1879, Pope Leo XIII bestowed on John Henry Newman, an Englishman, the title of cardinal-deacon¹. Yet, Newman had been born and raised in a Protestant family and had professed to have had an “Evangelical” conversion through reading a book by William Romaine, placed in his hands by his school master, Walter Mayers. As a young man Newman seemed promising: a good mind, amongst the better scholars of the century, an apparent Evangelical; one could have seen a great sphere of usefulness for him

¹ Four years before, in 1875, another Englishman, Bernard Manning, had been made a cardinal of the Romish Church. While English cardinals were not unknown, there had been nine other English cardinals since the formation of the Church of England in 1534, these two men had not been born into the Roman Catholic Church. Manning, like Newman was brought up a Protestant and had a “conversion experience” as a young man. Originally he had ambitions of a career in politics, but later turned to the ministry of the Church of England, being ordained in 1833, through the influence of Favell Lee Mortimer, the authoress of the well known children’s books *Peep of Day* and *Line upon Line*.

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in the Church of England. But by the age of 44 he had been received into the Church of Rome, and within 35 years would be received into the highest enclaves of the Papacy – as a Cardinal of the Church. One could ask, “how is the gold become dim?” (Lamentations 4:1), but our text tonight suggests there was never any gold. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” (1 John 2:19)

In this light it may be asked, why give a lecture on an apostate? In response I would give one simple reason: I believe the church of our generation has lessons to learn from Newman’s apostasy.

It is my intention to firstly, briefly survey the life of John Henry Newman up to him being received into the Church of Rome in 1845, drawing out some of his chief errors in doctrine and practice; secondly, to seek to bring out some lessons for us today.

Firstly then, the life of John Henry Newman to his conversion to Rome in 1845.

Newman was born in the City of London, on 21st February, 1801, the eldest of six children. His father, John Newman, was a banker, while his mother, Jemima Fourdrinier, was of Huguenot descent. Of his five siblings, his brother Francis is the most well known; he followed John to Oxford and also professed an Evangelical conversion. Francis later came under the successive influence of J. N. Darby and the Unitarians, ending his days as a Deist having been sometime professor of Latin at University College, London. John’s other brother Charles in later life professed atheism. Together the three brothers are a sad reflection considering their Huguenot background.

Their father, John Newman senior, appears to have been of questionable religious standing. While he attended church regularly, he became more and more disenchanted with the growing religiosity

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of his family.² His son Francis claimed that his father learned his religion more from Shakespeare than from the Bible.³ It is undoubtedly from their mother that the Newman children were brought up with the influence of Biblical truths. Both the testimony of John and his brother Francis speaks of a childhood steeped in the Bible. John states he was “brought up from a child to take great delight in reading the Bible; but I had formed no religious convictions till I was fifteen”,⁴ while Francis says, “I first began to read religious books at school, and especially the Bible, when I was eleven years old; and almost immediately commenced a habit of secret prayer.”⁵

As with many children, John was imaginative, but at times his imagination appears to have run riot and at one time he thought life might be a dream, himself being an angel and his fellow angels trying to deceive him with the “semblance of a material world.”⁶ Associated with this appears to have been a severe superstition which led him to constantly cross himself on going into the dark. These turns of mind were probably not helped by him immersing himself in the writings of the humanists - Paine and Hume; after the reading of some lines of Voltaire denying the immortality of the soul he remarked “How dreadful, but how plausible!”⁷

In March 1816, when Newman was 15, the financial collapse following the Napoleonic Wars caused his father's bank to fail. As a consequence John was forced to remain at school that summer and following a period of ill health experienced “a conversion experience” of which John later said he “believed that the inward conversion of which I was conscious, (and of which I still am more certain than that I have hands or feet,)”

² Faber (1954) *Oxford Apostles*, Penguin Ed. p. 20-24.

³ Newman, F. W. (1891) *Contributions Chiefly to the Early History of the late Cardinal Newman* p. 7.

⁴ Newman, J. H. (1909) *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Longmans p. 1.

⁵ Newman, F. W. (1860) *Phases of Faith* p. 1.

⁶ *Apologia* p. 2.

⁷ *Apologia* p. 4.

would last into the next life, and that I was elected to eternal glory.” Newman describes his conversion as being able to rest “in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my creator.”¹⁰ This experience occurred through the instrumentality of his school master the Rev. Walter Mayers, who gave both the Newman brothers reading matter of the Calvinistic school, in John’s case William Romaine and in Francis’s, Philip Doddridge.

In time Newman’s conversion experience was to prove itself to be what it really was – nothing but an illusion. We are not always the best judges of the Lord’s work in our own souls, let alone in other people’s, but there are two principles which I believe must, in measure, form the basis of every real “conversion experience” and which are central to the work of grace in the soul. These two principles are 1) a knowledge of and repentance of personal sin and 2) a knowledge of the Lord Jesus as our only hope of salvation. Of the latter, we may go so far as to stress it is a “hope”, not necessarily a full assurance, but there must be a realisation that as a sinner we cannot save ourselves, nor do anything to merit salvation. Newman’s conversion lacked both of these vital aspects. Consequently the remainder of his days were solemnly spent as described by the Apostle, “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 3:7).

Associated with his conversion, Newman states he came “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.”¹¹ Amongst the points of doctrine he assented to at this time was the doctrine of election, which he says he retained a belief in until he was 21 when it gradually faded away and in his *Apologia* he describes it as a “detestable doctrine”.¹² Also at this time he was brought

⁹ *Apologia* p. 4.

¹⁰ *Apologia* p. 5.

¹¹ *Apologia* p. 4.

¹² *Apologia* p. 5.

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to see the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, through the reading of books by the Rev. Thomas Scott (the famous Bible commentator). Of Scott, Newman claimed 'he (humanly speaking) owed his soul'. Yet, because he had no grace in his soul and knew nothing of the inward working of the Holy Spirit, these doctrines were but notions or intellectual ideas. Consequently, the doctrine of perseverance also did not sit long with him. It appears the only vestiges of Calvinistic doctrine Newman felt he maintained throughout his life were "the fact of heaven and hell, divine favour and divine wrath, of the justified and unjustified",¹³ although these distinctions would later be blurred in Newman's mind by the Romish doctrines of degrees of sin, of justification and heavenly glory and that there was an intermediate state between Heaven and Hell – purgatory.

It was largely through his reading matter at this stage that Newman began to develop his first Romeward trends. He read William Law's *Serious Call*, from which he accepted the Romish doctrine of the warfare between the city of God and the powers of darkness and dipping into Joseph Milner's *Church History* introduced him to the church fathers. Interestingly enough, reading Newton *On the Prophecies*, led him to accept the belief that the papacy was the antichrist spoken of in Daniel and the Revelation. At the same time he claims to have been persuaded that it was God's will that he should lead a single life. While some authors have questioned his reasons and whether he had an eye even then on the Romish priesthood, and others have questioned Newman's sexuality, I feel in the light of a lack of evidence it is best not to speculate, but simply record the fact.

In December 1816, he matriculated at Trinity College, Oxford, where in 1821 he graduated with an unexpectedly low third-class honours degree. Wishing to remain in Oxford he became a private tutor while reading for a fellowship at Oriel College. He was elected to the fellowship in April 1822.

¹³ *Apologia*, p. 7.