

Newman Cause: Saint and Doctor

Dicastery for the Causes of Saints

<https://www.causesanti.va/it/santi-e-beati/john-henry-newman.html>

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Life and Works



John Henry Newman was born in London on February 21, 1801, to an Anglican family: his mother was a Huguenot and his father had a very tolerant religious orientation. He was the eldest of six children born to John, a banker, and Jemima Fourdrinier. In 1808, he entered Great Ealing School, on the outskirts of London at the time, where he received a high-quality education and was noted for his intelligence. In 1816, the year he completed his studies at Ealing and simultaneously witnessed the failure of his father's bank, he developed a commitment to the most radical principles of Calvinism: he came to believe that the Pope was the Antichrist. In 1817, he entered Trinity College, Oxford, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts. In 1822, he was elected a Fellow of Oriel College, where his friendship with Edward Bouverie Pusey began. On June 13, 1824, he was ordained a deacon in the Anglican Church, becoming coadjutor of the parish of St. Clement in Oxford. On May 29, 1825, he was ordained an Anglican priest.

From 1826 to 1832, John Henry Newman was Tutor at Oriel College, where he oversaw the cultural education of many university students. Here, he was in close contact with Edward Bouverie Pusey, John Keble, and Richard Hurrell

Froude. On March 14, 1828, he was appointed parish priest of St. Mary's University Church, where he carried out a rich pastoral and preaching activity that earned him great renown. In 1832, he accompanied Froude on his tour of southern Europe, visiting Rome, Malta, Corfu, and Sicily.

At the English College in Rome, he first met Father Nicholas Wiseman, the future Catholic Archbishop of Westminster. He wrote the ... short poem "Lead, Kindly, Light," expressing his complete surrender to Providence, which would guide and enable him to fulfill his specific mission. On July 14, 1833, in Oxford, he heard Keble's sermon, "National Apostasy," giving birth to the Oxford Movement, with Newman as its leading figure. Between 1833 and 1841, Newman, Froude, Keble, Pusey, and William Palmer published Tracts for the Times; of 90 published essays, Newman authored 26, including the last, Tract 90 (Remarks on Certain Passages in Thirty-Nine Articles), in which he attempted to interpret the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church from a Catholic perspective. The protests prompted the Bishop of Oxford to suspend publication of the Tracts. Condemned by the Hebdomadal Board of Oxford University and disavowed by 42 bishops, he renounced his university parish. On April 9, 1842, he retreated with some friends to Littlemore to write the famous Essay, *Development of Christian Doctrine*; here his "conversion" to Catholicism came to fruition.

In 1846, he went to Rome with some Anglican companions who had converted to Catholicism, without any definitive plans. In his 1848 Memorandum, he wrote that he was considering joining the Redemptorists, but ultimately chose to join the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri; he would, in fact, frequent the Chiesa Nuova in Rome and the priests of that community. Ordained a priest on May 30, 1847, he received warm encouragement from Blessed Pius IX (*Magna Nobis semper*, November 26, 1847).

Determined to become an Oratorian, Newman asked the Pope to establish an Oratory in Birmingham, thus adapting the constitutions of the Roman Oratory to the needs of the area. The new Oratory began in 1847, when he and six companions began their novitiate in a wing of Holy Cross Abbey, which had been made available to them. After several relocations, their first actual headquarters was established in Edgbaston, on the outskirts of Birmingham. Meanwhile, in 1848, a group of Oratorians, led by Father Frederick William Faber, moved to London, where the second English Philippine Congregation would be founded. In 1854, Father Newman was appointed rector of the Catholic University of Dublin, serving for four years.

In 1864, he published *Apologia pro vita sua*, and in 1878, Trinity College, Oxford, elected him its First Honorary Fellow.

Pope Leo XIII, at the suggestion of Monsignor William Bernard Ullathorne, Bishop of Birmingham, created Newman Cardinal on May 12, 1879, with the title of San Giorgio al Velabro; his chosen motto was: *cor ad cor loquitur* (St. Francis de Sales). From 1889 onwards, the nearly ninety-year-old Cardinal began to decline; on Christmas Day, he celebrated his last public Mass, and on August 11, 1890, he died in his room in Edgbaston. On his tomb, he wanted the inscription: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* (From shadows and images into the Truth).

Process of the Cause

Concerning the Beatification

The cause for the beatification and canonization of John Henry Newman was initiated under the provisions established by the Codex Iuris Canonici of 1917. The first process, canonically called informative and ordinary, aimed at proving the *fama sanctitatis vitae, virtutum atque miraculis in genere*, opened in Birmingham on June 17, 1958. The apostolic process, aimed at demonstrating the existence of specific virtues, lasted only two years: from February 20, 1984, to June 19, 1986.

After the documents were transferred to Rome and their legal validity was examined, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints responded positively, issuing the relevant decree on February 20, 1989.

The *Positio* was quickly prepared and received a favorable review from the Historical Congress on December 12, 1989, followed by an equally favorable outcome from the Theological Consultors on April 20, 1990.

The Ordinary Congregation of the Most Eminent Cardinals and Bishops was held on January 8, 1991. On January 22, 1991, the Holy Father John Paul II promulgated the *Decretum super heroicitate virtutum*.

The process of the miracle, which would lead to Cardinal John Henry Newman's beatification, also had a swift and successful outcome: the diocesan inquiry took place in Boston from June 25, 2005, to November 9, 2006; the Special Congress of Theological Consultors was successfully held on December 20, 2008, followed by the Ordinary Session of Cardinals and Bishops on June 2, 2009. The *Decretum super miro* is dated July 3, 2009.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI beatified Venerable Newman on Sunday, September 19, 2010, during a celebration he presided over in Cofton Park, Rednal, Birmingham.

Concerning the Canonization

For this next phase, the alleged miraculous healing of a mother from Chicago was examined. She had been suffering from profuse abdominal bleeding for days, with a suspected miscarriage. At the most dramatic moment, she only had the strength to say, "Cardinal Newman, help me," which was followed, instantly and scientifically inexplicably, by the definite cessation of the bleeding. It was May 15, 2013.

The diocesan inquiry took place from June 22 to October 26, 2015.

The Dicastery's Medical Council, at its meeting on March 1, 2018, expressed a favorable opinion regarding the healing examined, which was deemed instantaneous, perfect, and lasting, and inexplicable scientifically.

At the Special Congress, convened on October 11, 2018, the theological consultors unanimously voted in the affirmative. The Cardinals and Bishops expressed an identical opinion in the Ordinary Session of January 15, 2019.

On February 12, the Holy Father Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree *super miraculo*.

Concerning the title of Doctor of the Universal Church

After Newman's canonization on October 13, 2019, many requests were submitted to grant him the title of Doctor of the Universal Church. His reflections significantly influenced 20th-century theology, especially the Second Vatican Council. Several Popes, from Leo XIII to Francis, drew on his authoritative teaching in their papal magisterium.

The official request for the title was submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales on February 22, 2021. It was joined by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ireland, the Family of Consecrated Life "Das Werk," and the Confederation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, as well as the Episcopal Conferences of Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Spain, Hungary, India, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Peru, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland, the United States of America, and Zimbabwe. Postulatory letters were also received

from the International Center of Friends of Newman, the Hochschule Heiligenkreuze (Austria), the Sisters of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Reparatrix (IHMR) (Uganda), the Lumen Christi Institute (USA), Mercy College of Iowa (USA), the National Institute for Newman Studies of Pittsburgh (USA), the University of Oxford, Oriel College, and Trinity College, Oxford. It is significant to add to these multiple requests the favorable opinion of the two primatial sees of the Anglican Church.

In response to these requests, the Holy Father Francis authorized the process for granting the title of Doctor of the Universal Church to Saint John Henry Newman on May 23, 2024. Upon consultation with this Dicastery, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith responded on September 17, 2024, that there were no doubts about the excellence and quality of the Saint's writings, expressing a completely positive judgment on his *eminens doctrina*. The theological consultants, meeting in a Special Congress on April 1, 2025, also unanimously expressed an affirmative opinion.

During the Plenary Session of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, held on July 1, 2025, His Eminence the Relator, after having recalled the petitions received in favor of the granting of the Doctorate, outlined the biographical profile of Saint John Henry Newman in the historical and theological context in which he lived, subsequently highlighting the originality of his *eminens doctrina*.

He emphasized that this "eminence" must be understood in a qualitative, rather than quantitative, sense. The doctrine must have contributed significantly to the progress of sacred science and the perfection of spiritual life. He then highlighted, in this specific case, the ecumenical importance of a possible doctorate attributable to St. Newman. Recalling that in the Church's practice, it is impossible to separate the excellence and orthodoxy of doctrine from the sanctity of life, he recalled the reflection expressed in 1990 by then-Cardinal Ratzinger, who recognized that Newman had taught not only with his thought and speeches, but also with his life, considering him "a model for theologians and intellectuals of all time."

Many popes in the twentieth century expressed appreciation for Newman's thought. In a 1908 letter to the Bishop of Limerick, Saint Pius X wrote that he considered his works to be in perfect harmony with his encyclical *Pascendi*, adding that it would be very useful to learn "*multa praeclara e tali magistro*." Pope Pius XII emphasized Newman's characteristic search for

truth as his main claim to fame, confiding to the French philosopher Jean Guittou that he was certain that Newman would one day become a Doctor of the Church. It was above all Saint Paul VI, a profound connoisseur of the English Cardinal and an admirer of his from his youth, who referred to Newman's thought, reiterating it in many speeches not only during his pontificate but also during his episcopate in Milan.

On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, giving a conference in Milan on "Councils and the Church," Cardinal Montini compared the Council that was about to begin to the "second springtime" that Saint Newman glimpsed in the Catholic Church in an 1852 sermon, seeing in it a sign of its divine vitality. Paul VI also confided to Jean Guittou that he believed Newman's thought had inspired the Council. This opinion was shared by Saint John Paul II who, in a 1979 Letter to the Bishop of Birmingham, defined Newman's broad theological vision as a precursor to the Second Vatican Council. Benedict XVI made constant references to Newman throughout his pontificate, during which the English Cardinal was beatified in Birmingham. Pope Francis, in his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, also emphasized the importance of Newman's doctrine on the development of dogma.

Regarding the influence of Newman's thought on the teaching of the Council, it is possible to identify areas in which the English cardinal anticipated some fundamental themes. In his work on *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, he presented it as a living reality that deepens over time and in the Church understood as "the body of Christ, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and the living community of all the faithful." The process described by Newman, which was taken up and explored by various 20th-century theologians, can also be described as an inculturation of the Gospel in which Jesus' teachings are made to grow in different environments and cultures without altering their essential origin. In 1859, Saint Newman published an article in the periodical "The Rambler" on the importance of the contribution of the lay faithful in the Church and on the significance of the *consensus fidelium*, which could compensate for any shortcomings of patristic testimony on individual points of Catholic doctrine.

In this work, he almost anticipates the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* regarding the mission of the lay faithful, even if the *consensus fidelium* is interpreted only as an indicium, an instrument of evaluation by the Church, which is infallible. Throughout his life, Saint Newman also recalled the importance of conscience, which he understood as the human capacity to recognize the

truth. In his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, he conceived of it as the echo of God's voice, which generates an intrinsic openness to Christ. This reflection will find its perfection in the description of conscience in the Conciliar Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 16). In this context, reference can also be made to the recognition of some positive aspects found in other religions, without questioning the fundamental importance of the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world.

After recalling the theme of the university as a place of integral formation in which religion can interact with other sciences, the Relator finally emphasized that the main reason Newman can be proclaimed a Doctor of the Church is that his thought was not confined to libraries or universities, but continues to speak to the people of today, and his teaching remains a sure compass for anyone who wishes to live an authentic faith, rooted in truth and capable of answering the questions of our time.

At the end of his report, His Eminence the Relator concluded by acknowledging that in Saint John Henry Newman all the conditions for the conferral of the title of Doctor of the Universal Church are present. The Most Eminent and Excellencies, therefore, unanimously responded to the *dubbio* with an affirmative opinion.