

Introduction to *the Apologia pro vita sua*

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There is no doubt that John Henry Newman (1801–1890) belongs among the most significant thinkers of the modern age. In his Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2010, Benedict XVI. spoke of Newman – whom he beatified earlier that year on September 19th – and emphasized Newman’s prophetic significance in our own day: “Why was he beatified? What does he have to say to us?” asked the Pope. He answered by turning our attention to Newman’s three-fold conversion, saying that we all “must learn from Newman’s three conversions, because they were steps along a spiritual path.” He therefore mentioned the decisive role of the conscience: “The path of Newman’s conversions is a path of conscience – not a path of self-asserting subjectivity but, on the contrary, a path of obedience to the truth that was gradually opening to him.”¹

In the *Apologia pro vita sua*² Newman deals with two fundamental themes: he describes the path of his conscience and recounts with great truthfulness how God formed his faith and thought through a deep conversion; he also reveals his encounters with various people and his confrontation with the signs of the times, which first made him into a reformer of the Anglican Church only then to lead him right up to the doorstep of the Catholic Church in 1845. To better understand the text, let us glance back at the history of the origin of the *Apologia*, told by Newman himself in the preface. Then, in order to be able to enter into the book, we will attempt to identify the recurrent theme of his interior development. In conclusion, we will mark the current place that this classic occupies in modern literature.³

¹http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101220_curia-auguri_en.html

² JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *Apologia pro vita sua*, I. KER, ed., Penguin Books, London 1994. All citations are taken from this edition and are cited as *Apo*.

³ In the better known biographies of Newman the context and significance of the *Apologia* are presented. Cf., IAN KER, *John Henry Newman. A Biography* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2009²); For a proper understanding of the *Apologia*, the letters that Newman wrote during the first half of 1864

The Origin

In 1864 it seemed as though Newman had been completely forgotten. Twenty years had gone by since his conversion to the Catholic Church. The majority of Anglicans considered him to be a traitor and thought he had passed into a corrupt Church, one that denied the true faith and was mixed up with the Antichrist. Prejudice against the Church of Rome had been fierce ever since the separation of England from the Church in 1529 under King Henry VIII over his dispute with the Pope concerning the annulment of his marriage. Many openly questioned Newman's personal righteousness, as they were unable to explain how a man of such intelligence could abandon the Church of England and take up, in the margins of English society, with a small group of believers, who continued to be held in disdain and misunderstood despite the politics surrounding emancipation initiated in 1829. Newman found interior peace in the Catholic Church, but his ideas and brilliant undertakings were generally overlooked: his grand project of a Catholic university in Dublin ended as a failure; his prophetic intuitions with respect to the witness of the faithful in matters of doctrine were badly interpreted and even suspected by some to be heresy; the Oratory which he founded in Birmingham existed in tension with that of London and seemed to be approaching its end. Newman was compelled to accept the fact that his life as a Catholic had apparently not borne much fruit. Indeed, his diary holds these sad realizations: "O how forlorn and dreary has been my course since I have been a Catholic! Here has been the contrast – as a Protestant, I felt my religion dreary, but not my life – but as a Catholic, my life dreary, not my religion."⁴ During this period Newman found himself in one of the most difficult phases of his life. He suffered much on account of his situation and thought he might soon die, yet all this changed in the course of a few months.

Why did Newman write the *Apologia*? What was his motivation, his inspiration, the stimulus without which he would never have written a single word? During that period, a well-known novelist and professor of history at the University of Cambridge, Charles Kingsley, published a review of James Anthony Froude's *History of England* in the periodical *MacMillan's Magazine*. Kingsley writes in the review: "Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole ought not to be; that cunning is the weapon which heaven has given to the Saints wherewith to withstand the brute male force of the wicked world which marries and is given in marriage. Whether his notion be doctrinally correct or not, it is at least historically so" (*Apo*, 4). Newman replied to Kingsley, asking him in turn to give a demonstration of this grave assertion. The latter cited some passages taken from

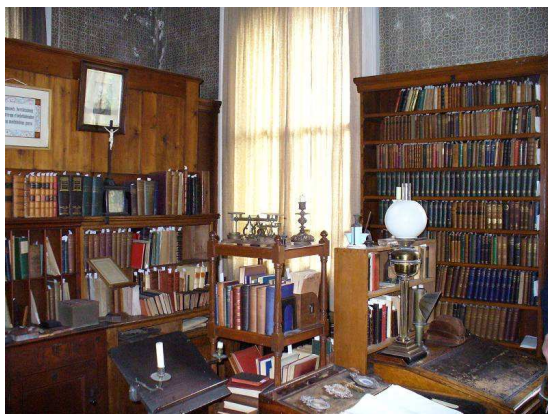
are indispensable. See CHARLES STEPHEN DESSAIN, ed., *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Vol. XXI (Thomas Nelson: London, 1971). In the text it is cited as *LD XXI*.

⁴ JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *Autobiographical Writings*, Sheed and Ward, London 1956, 254.

one of Newman's homilies. These, however, could clearly have been shown to be tendentious interpretations. Kingsley, though declaring himself to be ready to accept Newman's clarifications, had no interest in retracting his claims. Newman therefore published the entirety of his correspondence with Kingsley concerning these matters, utterly besting Kingsley in the debate.

Kingsley, however, did not think himself defeated: he published a pamphlet wherein he piled high the accusations against Newman and Catholic priests, claiming one could not trust Newman insofar as Newman's life had not been sincere: Already as an Anglican he had secretly started a Catholic movement. He justified himself with snake-like cleverness in the use of "Roman" moral principles, according to which all is allowed which fits into one's own concept. The book appeared on Palm Sunday in 1864, with the title *What Does Dr. Newman Mean?*

For more than twenty years, Newman endured public accusations and calumny. He never reacted to any of the attacks, rather he bore them in a spirit of penance. He writes in the *Apologia*: "I left their removal to a future day, when personal feelings would have died out, and documents would see the light, which were as yet buried in closets or scattered through the country" (*Apo*, 4). But these accusations advanced against him were of another kind. Not only did they touch on his person, but they touched the whole of the Catholic clergy. Hence, in his conscience he felt he was obliged to act swiftly and firmly. "Even if I could have found it consistent with my duty to my own reputation to leave such an elaborate impeachment of my moral nature unanswered, my duty to my Brethren in the Catholic Priesthood, would have forbidden such a course. *They* were involved in the charges which this writer, all along, from the original passage in the Magazine, to the very last paragraph of the Pamphlet, had so confidently, so pertinaciously made. In exculpating myself, it was plain I should be pursuing no mere personal quarrel – I was offering my humble service to a sacred cause. I was making my protest in behalf of a large body of men of high character, of honest and religious



Newman's private studio at Birmingham

minds, and of sensitive honour – who had their place and their rights in this world, though they were ministers of the world unseen, and who were insulted by my Accuser, as the above extracts from him sufficiently show, not only in my person, but directly and pointedly in their own. Accordingly, I at once set about writing the *Apologia pro vita sua*" (*Apo*, 6).

From mid-April to mid-June of 1864, Newman worked almost incessantly on this work. Volume XXI of his *Letters*

and Diaries contains hints that reveal just how much this task consumed him. He worked “from morning to night” and even “during dinner time”, often sixteen hours a day. But in addition to the urgency of its timeliness and the task of actually writing it, the corrections and modifications weighed on him. He found himself reliving the interior conflict that he had experienced in prior years, so much as to admit in a letter, “I have been constantly in tears...” (*LD XXI*, 103, 107). With the help of many documents he had preserved and the active collaboration of many of his friends, as well as the fortune of having a good memory, he managed in a small period of time to reconstruct a detailed account of his religious convictions and put it down in writing. For eight consecutive weeks, every Thursday he completed a chapter in the form of an pamphlet. In the end, these different parts were assembled in a single volume that was then published.

The *Apologia* is an autobiography of a particular nature, one that is not seldom compared to the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine. Prompted by Kingsley’s *What Does Dr. Newman Mean?*, Newman writes: “He asks what I *mean*? Not about my words, not about my arguments, not about my actions, as his ultimate point, but about that living intelligence, by which I write, and argue, and act. He asks about my Mind and its Beliefs and its sentiments; and he shall be answered” (*Apo*, 15). In the *Apologia*, Newman is not as concerned with speaking about external events – in fact, he says nothing of his family, hobbies, travels, daily activities, etc. – as much as he is with describing the development of his religious convictions. Or as he says, “My most private thoughts. I might even say the intercourse between myself and my Maker” (*Apo*, 17). Newman rouses the history of his conscience, his search for the truth. Only in this way was he able to reveal as true fantasy the accusations that his life was false and insincere. His one desire was “to tell the truth, and to leave the matter in God’s hands” (*LD XXI*, 103).

Instantly, the *Apologia* made Newman famous once again. It was read by a multitude throughout England – it was spoken of at the dinner table, in clubs, on the train, in bars, and out on the town it exchanged hands; in both Anglican and Catholic churches it was recommended by pastors, and after being written about in many newspapers and journals, it was translated into several languages. Public opinion made it clear: Newman had triumphed over Kingsley in the controversy. Furthermore, the *Apologia* made an essential contribution to the reinforcement of the Catholic Church in England. Beyond demonstrating his personal sincerity and fidelity to the truth, Newman spoke in the name of all Catholic priests and helped improve public opinion on their behalf. One can understand why, along with the Bishop of Birmingham, 558 priests (nearly half the priests in England at the time), personally thanked Newman for publishing the *Apologia*. Abroad, the German Catholic Conference in Wurzburg in 1864 sent word to Newman. Even the Anglicans positively received the *Apologia*. Many wondered at the fact that Newman wrote as identifying himself so much with the Church of England and renewed their friendships with him. Even those unable to understand Newman’s

conversion expressed lively admiration for his beautiful English, as well as the sincerity and coherency with which he conducted his life. The *Apologia* certainly, and much more than many other written works, contributed to overcoming the many prejudices the English harboured with regard to the Catholic Church. To all those who were sincerely seeking the truth, it became clear that there was in Newman's life a recurrent theme that bound together all the various stages of his tumultuous history: it was the obedience to the truth revealed in each step of his journey.

The Recurrent Theme

The *Apologia* is a difficult read. Here Newman is not offering a novel about his life. Rather, he gives voice to objective sources – he places before our eyes people by whom he has been influenced and who have directed his religious convictions. He describes the development of his thought in confrontation with the challenges faced by the Church and English society in the first half of the 19th century. He who delves into the five chapters of the *Apologia* obtains a full vision of Newman's motives – the complexity, the drama and the different angles connected to the progression of his conscience, which bore in him the fruit of conversion in three successive stages.

John Henry Newman was born in London on 21st February 1801 and grew up in the home of his Anglican parents. His mother introduced him and her other five children to the Bible at a very young age, though what determined everything was not the faith, but feeling. Later, Newman wrote that as a child “I had no formed religious convictions” (*Apo*, 23). At the age of fourteen he had already read such authors as Hume and Voltaire, whose ideas appeared so evident to him as to very nearly suffocate his predisposition to religion. This interior storm resulted in his first conversion. “When I was fifteen, (in the autumn of 1816) a great change of thought took place in me. I fell 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” (*Apo*, 25). How did the thought of his youth arrive at this transformation? Newman's family was struggling economically, which forced Newman to stay at school after falling ill during the summer vacation of 1816. In those weeks he read, upon the recommendation of a Calvinist professor, a book called *The Force of Truth* by Thomas Scott. This book deeply impressed him. It led him to discover a personal faith in God and to recognize the vanity of earthly things. The idea “of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator” (*Apo*, 25) brought him peace. Newman's faith gained a solid foundation in this first conversion: “From the age of fifteen, dogma has been the fundamental principle of my religion: I know no other religion...religion as a mere sentiment, is to me a dream and a mockery. As well can there be filial love

without the fact of a father, as devotion without the fact of a Supreme Being” (*Apo*, 61).



Oriel-Common Room

After finishing his studies at Trinity College, Newman began teaching at the famous Oriel College where he came into contact with the leading intellectual figures who at the time were teaching at Oxford, figures who greatly influenced his thought. It was also there that he decided to enter the service of the Church of England. In 1824 he was ordained a deacon, and an Anglican priest one year later. In 1828 he assumed the prestigious post of Vicar of the parish church of the University of Oxford. In these years he freed himself of certain individualistic traits and felt all the more the influence of Keble and Froude, the two men most responsible for directing him to High Church Anglicanism. Newman broke from the shadow of liberalism, whose darkness he felt in

1828, and began to systematically read the Church Fathers. These became a spiritual guide to him. In 1832, he published his first great study on *The Arians of the 4th century*. Yet, while Newman sought the truth under the guidance of the Church Fathers, he observed with great concern that at Oxford and throughout England the influence of the liberal current of thought was growing. This realization urged him to found the Oxford Movement (1833) together with other Anglican ecclesiastics. The fundamental belief behind this movement was that England was distancing herself from the faith of the early Church and needed a “second reformation” to restore the spirit of early Christianity to Anglicanism. Those promoting the Oxford Movement worked largely through very active preaching and by publishing pamphlets known as *tracts*. The most basic tenet of the movement, next to its dogmatic principle, was the ecclesiastical-sacramental idea “that there was a visible Church, with the sacraments and rites which are the channels of the invisible grace” (*Apo*, 62). Newman was the driving force behind the Oxford Movement. His conversion to the faith of the Church was the second fundamental stage in the way of his conscience.

But the Oxford Movement had another essential principle: it was anti-Roman to reject the criticism of popery. Consequently, Newman sought to set Anglicanism on firm ground and deepen the theories of the *via media*. Using this theory, Protestants abandoned elements of the early Creed, that of Catholics – by adding errors to it Catholics stained the purity of the faith, whereas Anglicans in adhering to the *via media* remained faithful to the traditions of the early Church. Yet the theory of the *via media* posed one difficulty. Is truth always found in the middle?

Studying the heresies of Monophysitism and Arianism, Newman came to see that the answer to this question is no. The truth was not on the side of the Semi-Arians;



rather, the truth was in Rome. The *via media* thus collapsed like a house of cards. Beyond that stunning realization, Newman endured the condemnation of the University of Oxford and the refusal of his *Tract 90* by the Anglican Bishops. *Tract 90* was an attempt to explain the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican Creed from a Catholic perspective, with the intent of deterring Anglicans from conversion.

Hence, Newman decided in 1841, together with some friends, to transfer to Littlemore, and there in this small village near Oxford to seek to better understand his future while praying, fasting, and studying. Newman was convinced that God would give him the necessary light if he would only have patience and wait, so he prayed fervently and listened closely to the voice of his conscience. In 1843 he retracted every accusation he had ever made against the Church of Rome, which until that moment he had considered to be a community linked to the cause of the Antichrist. He later renounced with great regret his position as parish priest and as professor at the university. We can understand just how much he was tormented in his conscience about his future from a letter he wrote during this period: “The simple question is, Can *I* (it is personal, not whether another, but can *I*) be saved in the English Church? Am *I* in safety, were I to die to-night? Is it a mortal sin in *me*, not joining another communion?” (*Apo*, 208). The great difficulty that Newman had to overcome was whether or not the recent teachings of Rome with respect to purgatory, Mary, and the Saints tainted the pure faith of the Fathers. He wrote a paper along these lines in 1845 entitled *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. The result of this study determined his final conversion and the future of his life. On this point he writes, “As I advanced, my difficulties so cleared away that I ceased to speak of ‘the Roman Catholics’ and boldly called them Catholics. Before I got to the end, I resolved to be received, and the book remains in the state in which it was then, unfinished” (*Apo*, 211). On 8th October 1845, the day before his conversion to the Catholic Church, he wrote to his closest friends: “I am this night expecting Father Dominic, the Passionist...He is a simple, holy man; and withal gifted with remarkable powers. He does not know of my intention; but I mean to ask of him admission into the One Fold of Christ...” (*Apo*, 211).

Newman concludes the *Apologia* with a very interesting chapter on his religious convictions, beginning with his conversion. His conviction stems from his faith in the existence of God, which for Newman is as evident to him as his own existence, and at the same time verifies with impressive clarity the spread of the lack of faith in modern society. He describes the course of human history and says, “the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle’s words, ‘having no hope and without God in the world’ – all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution” (*Apo*, 217). Newman saw in his own day that humanity was knee-deep in that evil which theologians call “original sin” and that to his eyes was “almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God” (*Apo*, 218).

Since God does not desire that human beings fall into scepticism – Newman continues – one is compelled to admit that God has established an institution to which he entrusted the full truth of Revelation and the real remedy for the ills of humanity: “and thus I am brought to speak of the Church’s infallibility, as a provision, adapted by the mercy of the Creator, to preserve religion in the world, and to restrain that freedom of thought, which of course in itself is one of the greatest of our natural gifts” (*Apo*, 220). The Church does not teach “that human nature is irreclaimable...but to be extricated, purified, and restored; not, that it is a mere mass of hopeless evil, but that it has the promise upon it of great things, and even now, in its present state of disorder and excess, has a virtue and a praise proper to itself. But in the next place she knows and she preaches that such a restoration...must be brought not simply through certain outward provisions of preaching and teaching...but from an inward spiritual power or grace imparted directly from above, and of which she is the channel. She has it in charge to rescue human nature from its misery, but not simply by restoring it on its own level, but by lifting it up to a higher level than its own” (*Apo*, 221-222). Newman professes, unconditionally and in the deepest conviction, to belong to this Church – the infallible Church in matters of faith and morals, who offers to human beings the divine remedy of grace.

In his conclusion, Newman tackles yet a third fundamental theme: the relationship between faith and science. Up to this point he has presented the competence of ecclesiastical Magisterium in upholding and safeguarding Revelation, and he then wishes to demonstrate how the doctrine of the Church and free scientific research are closely related and reciprocal. “There are two great principles in action in the history of religion, Authority and Private Judgment...Every exercise of Infallibility is brought out into act by an intense and varied operation of the Reason, both as its ally and as its opponent, and provokes again, when it has done its work, a reaction of Reason against it...Catholic Christendom is no simple exhibition of

religious absolutism but presents a continuous picture of Authority and Private Judgment alternately advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide” (*Apo*, 225). The authority of the Church, on the one hand, protects reason “from its own suicidal excesses” (*Apo*, 220), and on the other hand needs the scientific enterprise of reason and the contribution of all the different theological schools of various countries around the world. This is part of the catholicity of the Church that according to Newman “is not only one of the notes of the Church, but, according to the divine purposes, one of its securities” (*Apo*, 238-239). These affirmations exhibit the balance through which Newman describes the relationship between the Magisterium and scientific research and avoids falling into an extremism of a fideistic or rationalistic nature.

The Apologia Today

The *Apologia pro vita sua* describes the interior progress of a theologian of the nineteenth century, but it has significance that endures and is relevant to the great challenges we face today.

Newman begins the *Apologia* with a description of his first conversion, or his conversion to faith in the living God. Even though quite brief, this description sufficiently shows us the interior impulse behind Newman’s search for God, which ultimately became a reality. No one has succeeded in expressing the importance of this conversion as well as Benedict XVI, who said in his address of 20th December 2010: “Until that moment, Newman thought like the average men of his time and indeed like the average men of today, who do not simply exclude the existence of God, but consider it as something uncertain, something with no essential role to play in their lives. What appeared genuinely real to him, as to the men of his and our day, is the empirical, matter that can be grasped. This is the ‘reality’ according to which one finds one’s bearings. The ‘real’ is what can be grasped, it is the things that can be calculated and taken in one’s hand. In his conversion, Newman recognized that it is exactly the other way round: that God and the soul, man’s spiritual identity, constitute what is genuinely real, what counts. These are much more real than objects that can be grasped. This conversion was a Copernican revolution. What had previously seemed unreal and secondary was now revealed to be the genuinely decisive element. Where such a conversion takes place, it is not just a person’s theory that changes: the fundamental shape of life changes. We are all in constant need of such conversion: then we are on the right path.”



Newman continually revisits the need to “realize” faith in God, to enter into his truth, to orient oneself to God so that God might influence one’s practical life. After all, for Newman the risk is that human beings abandon God, not vice versa. Newman foresees this apostasy. Today, he might make this exhortation: Convert, turn yourselves to what counts and open your hearts, your minds, and your consciences to God; be aware of his presence; give him precedence in your lives; live the faith! This will make you into credible witnesses even in the face of those who waver, those who are distant, and the many of our day who seek the truth.

In his first conversion, Newman discovered the truth of a personal God to whom he cried out in the depths of his conscience. The *Apologia* shows how he let himself be led by the voice of his conscience – as if by a “kindly light” – and how step by step he opened himself to the truth and obeyed its commands. Above all, Newman is a master and witness of the conscience in its true and authentic meaning, something which it is absolutely necessary to rediscover today. Once again, the words of Pope Benedict in the same address tell us much: “In modern thinking, the word ‘conscience’ signifies that for moral and religious questions, it is the subjective dimension, the individual, that constitutes the final authority for decision. The world is divided into the realms of the objective and the subjective. To the objective realm belong things that can be calculated and verified by experiment. Religion and morals fall outside the scope of these methods and are therefore considered to lie within the subjective realm. Here, it is said, there are in the final analysis no objective criteria. The ultimate instance that can decide here is therefore the subject alone, and precisely this is what the word ‘conscience’ expresses: in this realm only the individual, with his intuitions and experiences, can decide. Newman’s understanding of conscience is diametrically opposed to this. For him, ‘conscience’ means man’s capacity for truth: the capacity to recognize precisely in the decision-making areas of his life—religion and morals – a truth, *the* truth. At the same time, conscience – man’s capacity to recognize truth – thereby imposes on him the obligation to set out along the path towards truth, to seek it and to submit to it wherever he finds it. Conscience is both capacity for truth and obedience to the truth which manifests itself to anyone who seeks it with an open heart.” In his interior way, Newman encountered many people who offered him important life advice. But the majority of these counsels he was forced to leave aside in order to follow the interior light of his conscience, which for him always represented the most trustworthy compass. In the *Apologia*, he expresses gratitude for all those who accompanied him for a time on his path, and further describes how his conscience compelled him to decisions that were not always understood and led him into solitude. Yet obedience to his conscience rendered him interiorly free from human ties to a career, honour and a profession—it left him free for God, for the truth and for the Church of Christ. With his own life, Newman shows us that the conscience is not one’s own voice, but the echo of the voice of God himself, the advocate of truth in our hearts. “Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice

echoes in his depths” (Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 16). We too, should have the courage to give ear to this voice even if it sets us apart from others, for we feel obligated to move towards its indications so as to be able to live as free, true and authentic people.

The obedience to the truth led Newman to the harbour of the Church of Rome. It is often emphasized that the *Apologia* is not an apology written for the Catholic Church, rather that Newman’s intention was simply to show others the development of his conscience. It is indeed true that in the *Apologia* Newman does not utilize as many theological arguments as he does historical. He tells the story of his own religious conviction with utter sincerity: how, after his first conversion, he became more and more aware of the great truth of Christianity; how he strove to reform his own religious community according to the model of the early Church and to preserve it from the harmful influence of liberalism in religion; how, against his will, he came ever closer to the Catholic Church, urged on by interior necessity, and how finally after much searching he arrived at the conviction of the necessity of his conversion. Newman, however, published the *Apologia* with the intention of not simply defending himself, but also of defending the good name of the Catholic priesthood by publicly presenting the history of his religious convictions and “telling the truth”. Hence, one might say that the *Apologia* could be understood as a defence of the Catholic Church in the form of a testimony, or witness. For, as Paul VI says, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers” (PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 41), and so in our era works such as the *Apologia* effect much more than purely theoretical arguments. Perhaps we could say outright that a real apology for the Catholic Church in our day must have the form of testimony in order to be credible and convincing to others. Furthermore, Newman’s *Apologia* contains his admission of the infallibility of the Church in the final chapter – the Church to whom is entrusted the remedy for the true evil of humanity, the Church whose doctrine is able to safeguard reason from suicidal excesses, the Church who is not only open to proper scientific research, but indeed encourages and sustains it. Today more than ever, the Church needs these testimonies and confessions that present a coherence between life and thought.

Lastly, the *Apologia* also contains a message for the ecumenical movement. One recalls that “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart” (Vatican II, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 7). Through conversion, prejudice and misunderstanding are removed from one’s path. Abuses and excesses, when possible, must be cut out so that any opposition between theory and practice will not impede individual communities in making progress towards unity. For Newman, persevering prayer and penance are essential, and differences or contrasts in doctrine must be dealt with first using Sacred Scripture and then the Fathers of the Church and the great Christian Tradition. Obedience to revealed truth is, then, absolutely necessary, without compromising or invoking a false kind

of fear. One asks whether it would have been more effective to the cause of unity had Newman remained in the Church of England and worked from the inside for the reunification with the Catholic Church. It is certain that in this case Newman would have had to labour for the catholicization of the Church of England against the will of the Bishops. He would have thereby renounced his personal integrity and would not have followed his conscience and hence lost all of his influence. It was not easy for Newman to leave the Church of England: he loved his church, he loved Oriel and Oxford, he loved his family and his friends. But the commands of his conscience were stronger than any other human consideration. In these, Newman recognized the will of God. For him it was clear that it is one's duty to always obey the truth. For this reason also he is an impressive ecumenical figure.



Newman's beatification
19th September 2010