

## PI 2010 Newman Conference Introduction

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to the 2010 Portsmouth Institute. It is good to see so many old friends in the audience this morning and wonderful to see many of you who are visiting Portsmouth Abbey for the first time. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to make your stay with us more enjoyable.

This year's conference is on NEWMAN AND THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION. We have assembled a distinguished array of speakers to explore Cardinal Newman's far-ranging life and thought.

Newman lived through some of the most dynamic years of British history when the island kingdom became a global empire on an unprecedented scale. In fields such as science, literature, education, and technology great Victorian minds marched in tandem with the successes of the most explosive industrial and commercial power that the world had ever seen. Although giants such as Charles Darwin, James Clerk Maxwell, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, and Lord Acton bestrode the land, Newman more than held his own in that illustrious company, and he contributed greatly to one of the most fertile eras of intellectual argument and advancement in modern times.

John Henry Newman was born in 1801 and died in 1890. An Anglican priest for two decades, he was one of the founders of the Oxford Movement, which, starting in 1833, sought to reinvigorate the Church of England. In 1845, Newman left the Anglican Church to convert to Roman Catholicism—an exceedingly brave thing to do in nineteenth-century Protestant England. He was ordained a priest in Rome in 1847. On his return to England, he spent most of his adult life in Birmingham at the Oratory he founded in 1848. He also founded the Catholic University in Dublin and the Oratory School in Birmingham, from which Hilaire Belloc graduated. Newman was elevated to Cardinal in 1879.

Those are the bare bones of the life of the man who will move one step nearer to canonization when Pope Benedict XVI personally beatifies him in Coventry on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September. Our capable speakers will flesh out these bones.

The connections of this Abbey and School to Cardinal Newman are many and of long standing as those of you who have seen the portrait of the great man in the auditorium foyer might surmise. For many years that hung in the Manor House when it was the center of our campus. Our School's founder, Dom Hugh Diman was himself a deacon in the Episcopal church (in which capacity he founded St. George's School on the other side of Aquidneck Island) before crossing the Tiber to Rome and founding this School in 1926. In 1933, in fact, he delivered a largely laudatory series of lectures on "Newman and the Oxford Movement" in Newport and Providence, so we may borrow a phrase from Father Ker and describe this 2010 conference as Portsmouth Abbey's "Hermeneutic of Continuity."

Newman's work as priest, theologian, educator, philosopher, poet and prose stylist remains powerful and provocative, not least because of his mastery of English style. For those of you who have not yet dipped into the Cardinal's writings, I can only urge you to make their acquaintance post haste: they are of an incomparable richness. But even if you have not read Newman, you will doubtless be familiar with some of his more memorable sallies. He is infinitely quotable. "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to change often." "If falsehood assails Truth, Truth can assail falsehood." "The Church moves as a whole...it is a communion," "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt," are but a few examples.

However, no introduction of a conference on Cardinal Newman would be complete without some mention of his character, and one anecdote nicely sums that up. In his preface to a recent edition of *The Idea of a University*, General Josiah Bunting III, a past Commencement speaker here who had hoped to be with us this weekend, recounts an encounter that Bishop William Ullathorne had with Newman in 1886, when the Cardinal was preparing a third edition of his *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius*.

Before becoming Bishop of Birmingham, Ullathorne, a bluff, burly, no-nonsense Yorkshireman was a sailor who made several voyages to the Baltic and Mediterranean. He was educated for the clergy at the Benedictine college of St. Gregory, Downside. And no sooner did he become a priest than he sailed out to New South Wales so he could convert the convicts. (Robert Hughes, in his extraordinary history of Australia, *The Fatal Shore*, makes many lively references to Ullathorne.) Right before he retired, he visited Newman, and when he was rising to go, he recalled Newman detaining him and saying "in low and humble accents, 'My dear Lord, will you do me a great favor?' 'What is it?' Ullathorne asked." Newman "glided down on his knees, bent down his venerable head, and said, 'Give me your blessing.' Ullathorne was taken aback but "laid his hand on his head and said, "My dear Lord Cardinal... I pray God to bless you..." As they walked to the door, Newman turned to Ullathorne and said: "I have been indoors all my life, whilst you have battled for the Church in the world." Ullathorne was profoundly moved and recalled: "I felt annihilated in his presence: there is a Saint in that man!"

Of course, from his desk at the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, Newman launched many battles for the Church of his own, but here was moving testimony to the man's simple humility.

Throughout the next three days, we will be treated to a number of talks on various aspects of this extraordinary figure and his faith-affirming legacy. Now, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Mr. Edward Short, whose forthcoming book, *Newman and his Contemporaries* will be published next year by Continuum. Mr. Short will introduce our first speaker, Father George Rutler.