



## A Heightened Sense of Anticipation

By Grand President Joe McNally

**T**he recent speculation around the possibility of a Papal Visit to the UK has no doubt filled some of us with a heightened sense of anticipation for what 2010 may bring. Those of us who experienced the joy of the visit of the late Pope John Paul II look forward to a new and different Pope coming to celebrate our Catholic Faith with us. This celebration could be all the more special in so far as the life and faith of the Venerable John Henry Newman will fall into the arena of discussion once more.

### His faith was a journey

The life and times of John Newman are interesting to reflect upon. Born into a prosperous family in 1801, his acceptance (or realisation) of his faith was a journey shaped by a sharp intellect during which he reflected painfully upon the questions of whether there was a God, and, if so, what that meant in terms of the religion to which he was to submit.

As a young man he was drawn to Anglicanism, and in common with the times, was then hostile to the Catholic Church and the authority of the Pope. He was admitted to the Anglican clergy, but some 22 years later he was driven to accept the Roman Catholic Faith, being promoted from priest to Cardinal in 1879.

### Problems of Our Age

When we are anxious about the problems of our age we can often draw parallels with those faced by Newman, or even wonder whether they have truly changed. His was a society hostile to Catholics, and the Catholic religion as an institution - a position not far removed from the moral equivalence which can be engendered and promoted by secularism.

What is remarkable is that Newman was prepared to take on the 'hard questions', answer them, and then live the answer out in faith - even if the answer required sacrifice. Newman's immense significance within the life of the Church is credibly argued for in *John Henry Newman, Doctor of the Church* (2007). In this Jean Rencki postulates that many of the insights formalised within Vatican II are

consistent with (if not derived in part from) Newman's vision of the Church as an institution living through its members, each possessed of human dignity and conscience.

Imagine a priest who was prepared to accept the intellectual possibility of atheism. Newman did, albeit that he was not prepared to accept as credible any 'fudge' in between the two positions.



Joe McNally, Grand President

In his *Apologia Pro Viata Sua* (1864) he wrote that "I came to the conclusion that there was no medium, in true philosophy between Atheism and Christianity, and that a perfectly consistent mind, under those circumstances in which it finds itself here below, must embrace the one or the other."

Having accepted a God, Newman also had to accept the manner in which God revealed himself and what authority amongst the Christian Churches truly meant. In a letter to a friend of November 1880, Newman wrote that, "there are three grand principles; the first leading to the second, the second to the third; 1 There is a God and a Moral Governor; 2 that He has revealed Himself in Christianity; and 3 that this revelation is contained in the Catholic Church."

### No mere artifice

This submission to the Church was no mere artifice. Newman had rejected the tenets of the Anglican Communion and submitted to the Catholic Church. He did so without equivocation. Although privately he expressed concern about the timing of the declaration of the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870, he did not shirk from supporting the truth it contained: that which God reveals is true.

But Newman was no mere theologian. He knew that Catholics had to live in a society which was in part hostile to them, or to religion. The doctrine of infallibility was as controversial then as it is now; it was argued that it threw into sharp relief the idea that Catholics were disloyal and would always revert to Rome rather than the society in which they lived.

### Response

Newman's response to the charge (raised by William Gladstone) was to point out in an open letter to the Duke of Norfolk that the exercise of Papal authority was limited to guiding Catholics as to their belief, their behaviour and their morals - the responsibility for the daily living of that life falling to individuals - a short examination of the statute books would show that the Civil authority was more intrusive.

### A teacher to all Catholics

I have sought in my column to avoid a focus upon matters 'English' in our great international Association. I believe that I have kept to my self-imposed stricture, as Venerable Newman is a teacher to all Catholics, and perhaps it would be wise to leave the last words to him as expressed in his letter to the Duke of Norfolk:

'Left to himself, I say, each Catholic likes and would maintain his own opinion and his private judgment just as much as a Protestant; and he has it and he maintains it, just so far as the Church does not, by the authority of Revelation, supersede it.

The very moment the Church ceases to speak, at the very point at which she, that is, God who speaks by her,