



Certainly the teachings of the Council reflect many aspects of Newman's thought. What I can do is identify briefly some areas where I feel Newman's influence can be seen. The watchword of the Council was *aggiornamento* – updating. Newman himself firmly believed in the development of Christian doctrine and wrote his major work on this subject at the very end of his Anglican period.

He took the position that Christian dogma was in itself unchangeable but that our understanding of it developed over time. Hence new aspects and new insights would emerge which previous ages had not perceived. Different ages would express the same doctrine in different ways or emphasise different aspects of the same teaching. Catholic teaching thus can become more detailed and explicit over the centuries while remaining fully rooted in the tradition of the Church.

These views of Newman can be clearly seen reflected in many Council documents – on the Church, on relations with the Jews, on education, on liturgy, on scripture, to name but a few. The unseen influence of Newman lies behind the deliberations and decisions of the Council Fathers. The Council emphasised the role of the Church in society. The pastoral constitution *Lumen Gentium* – Light of the Nations – is dedicated to the role of the Church on the modern world. Newman frequently wrote and preached about this need to engage actively with the world.

He engaged actively in the public life in his time, often at great personal cost, and he encouraged his readers and his hearers to do the same. Everything Newman wrote is a challenge to his readers, including us; a challenge to play a full and active role in the life of the Church and of society.

The Council also spoke strongly about the role of the laity, even issuing a decree on the subject. Newman consistently spoke and wrote about the need for a well-informed, well-educated, active laity. He saw the Oratory schools as the means of educating and training such active laymen. The teachings of Vatican II can truly be viewed in many ways as Newman's living legacy to the Church. But for me, the most interesting feature of Newman's intellectual legacy is his teaching on conscience. In a letter to the Duke of Norfolk in 1874, Newman wrote "I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please – still to conscience first and to the Pope afterwards." This is frequently quoted and just as frequently misunderstood. Newman took a very high view of the importance of conscience. He viewed the existence of conscience as almost a proof of the existence of God.

He saw his own journey from his evangelical childhood to the Catholic priesthood as dictated by his conscience.

He did not, however, view conscience as something blind or random. Following your conscience isn't just doing what seems good to the individual at any given moment. Conscience isn't conditional nor do the demands of conscience fluctuate with circumstance. Conscience, wrote Newman, was "the essential principle and sanction of Religion in the mind", but it was an informed conscience, a developed conscience, a conscience in tune with God's word.

These insights into the role and significance of conscience have had a great influence in the past century. For me, they are an essential part of Newman's legacy. He placed such a high value on conscience that he believed the main purpose of Catholic education to be the development of informed consciences.

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This holistic view is obviously at serious odds with the box-ticking, target-driven mode of education on offer today. It is a great challenge for all Catholic educators to maintain the high view of education envisaged by Newman in today's more impersonal educational climate.

Newman's writings and sermons on the nature of faith and belief have also been very influential but these are highly technical philosophical areas. It is, of course, as a churchman and religious figure that John Henry Newman is best known and the areas I have briefly touched on seem to me to be some of the major places where his influence can still be felt.

He was a master of English prose and wrote many books in his lifetime. Some, like 'A Grammar of Assent' or 'An essay on the development of Christian doctrine' are learned and complex works. Others, like his various collections of sermons, are more readily accessible. He even managed to write two novels - 'Loss and Gain,' based on his own conversion and 'Callista,' subtitled 'A tale of the third century.' All of his works are superbly written. If anyone wants to learn how to write clear, rhythmic, fluent English, let him read Newman.

He also turned his hand to verse. His poem *Lead, Kindly Light*, written in 1833 while becalmed in the Straits of Bonifacio between Corsica and Sardinia, is a standard English hymn, set to a variety of tunes. There are two other Newman hymns in regular use – *Firmly I Believe* and *Truly and Praise to the Holiest in the Height*. These two last hymns are both taken from Newman's long dramatic poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*, so splendidly set to music by that other great Catholic, Sir Edward Elgar. Newman himself had thrown the manuscript of *Gerontius* into the waste-paper basket, whence it was rescued by his secretary, Ambrose St John, and eventually published. The Elgar version is now very much a staple item of the classical music repertoire.

More significantly than any of these, though, he wrote in 1864 a book that he called his "spiritual autobiography", *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (*Explanation of His Life*). This is one of the greatest autobiographies in the English language and, as spiritual reading, stands comparison with the *Confessions* of St Augustine. The novelist Charles Kingsley had claimed that "Truth for its own sake has never been a virtue of the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not be and, on the whole, ought not to be."

To defend his own integrity and that of his Church, Newman produced the magnificent *Apologia*, a book which has never been out of print since its first publication. Even those of no religion at all can recognise the honesty of the account and the dignified beauty of the writing.

Newman's legacy still lives, in books and hymns, in buildings and institutions, in the Anglo-Catholic tradition and in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. More than any other single figure of his time, he made Catholicism intellectually and culturally acceptable, just as his great contemporary, Cardinal Manning, established the political and social role of the Church. He helped to move the Church from being the preserve of foreigners and a few old recusant families, the faith of a silent and hesitant minority, to being a faith able to live and breathe in the light and in the open. The fact that today we can practice our faith openly is due in no small measure to John Henry Newman and to the generation of which he was a part. This is a freedom we need to hold on to today.

In the 21st century, Catholicism, and Christianity in general, is increasingly seen as something personal and esoteric, something for a minority to practice in private. Newman played a leading role in bringing the Catholic Church into public life. It is for us to help to keep it there.

John Henry Newman, pray for us.