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Addresses

Auxiliary Bishop of Denver

Living the Christian Virtues: Growing in Truth and Strength Ever Yours Affly: Insight into Christian Virtue

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"Ever Yours Affly: Insight into Christian virtue," based on the letters of the Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman to his circle of female friends

First of all, I want to thank Terry Polakovic, for her very kind introductory words. I also want to thank Kate and Brigid Sweeney and all the women of ENDOW for inviting me to deliver the keynote address this evening at this Fourth Annual Catholic Women's Conference. (I really feel "blessed among women"!)

I had the pleasure of attending last year's banquet and keynote address which was given by our own Archbishop Charles Chaput. I had only been in Denver a few months at that time, having been ordained a bishop on May 30th of last year, and I would have to say that from the very beginning of my arrival in Denver, the women of ENDOW have welcomed me with warmth and affection. As I have come to know them and work with them, I can now say, with Archbishop Chaput, that we are the ones who are lucky, and very blessed to have ENDOW headquartered here in the Archdiocese of Denver.

The topic I am going to speak on tonight, as Terry mentioned, is very near and dear to my heart. The title of my talk is "Ever Yours Affly: Insight into Christian Virtue based on the letters of John Henry Newman and his circle of female friends." While I will make reference to Newman's letters to women, I thought that I could best serve this topic by presenting a general introduction to the life and thought of John Henry Cardinal Newman, England's most celebrated convert to Roman Catholicism. I hope you will not be disappointed in that.

This is, indeed, a very timely topic because, as some of you know, on April 23rd of this year, the Vatican approved the beatification of John Henry Newman. His heroic virtues had already been declared in 1991, the first step in the canonization process, giving him the title "Servant of God." The Catholic Church has now accepted as miraculous, the cure of an American deacon's crippling spinal disorder. The deacon, Jack Sullivan of Marshfield, Massachusetts, prayed for John Henry Newman's intercession and was healed. At a beatification ceremony, of which the date has not yet been determined, Newman will receive the title "Blessed." Now we call him "Venerable" - the Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman.

And more recently, on Thursday of this week, a spokesman for Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister of England, announced that Pope Benedict XVI, will make an Apostolic Visit to Britain sometime next year in 2010. This will be the first papal visit to the United Kingdom since 1982, when Pope John Paul II visited those British shores. It is a well known fact that Pope Benedict is a great admirer of the English Cardinal and he has written extensively on the thought of Newman, particularly Newman's writings on conscience. Some have speculated that Pope Benedict himself will beatify Newman during his Apostolic Visit to England next year. On a side note, I was at a Newman conference in Rome several years ago and the then, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, said to a group of us, "one day this English cardinal will be proclaimed a doctor of the Church." (I heard these words with my own ears).

Newman, like many of the great 19th century Victorian authors, was a prolific letter writer. Letter writing in 19th century England could almost be said to have been raised to an art form. From the Bronte sisters to Charles Dickens, from Jane Austin to Lord Acton, Victorian writers penned thousands of letters in their lifetime. John Henry Cardinal Newman's letters and diaries, alone, comprise a total

of 26 volumes in all. Some have said that the reason Newman's beatification process has taken so long, is because he wrote so many letters! As in any canonization process in the Catholic Church, every written word of a candidate has to be examined and scrutinized individually during the canonical investigation to make sure that all of their writings are not only in accord with Catholic teaching, but also reveal a person who excels in heroic virtue and holiness.

Like many of the Victorians, Newman's handwriting was very beautiful and elegant. And people had the habit of saving their letters. Newman would even make hand written copies of his own letters if they were important. And, as Newman became more and more famous, those who received a letter from Newman (and there were many) would certainly save this precious relic. Biographers say that in the latter decades of his life, Newman would write 18 to 20 letters every day. I have often wondered what Newman would have thought about email? I think he would have used it because the important thing for Newman was maintaining friendships and keep connected with his friends. I don't know, however, if he would have approved of Facebook or "texting" (although he was into abbreviations!) But there is something about a handwritten letter, knowing that the person who wrote the letter actually touched the parchment and guided the pen and ink. There is a real and mysterious connection there, that I am afraid loses something through electronic mail.

As I said, there are many abbreviations in Newman's letters, (we all do it), and he would always sign his letters, especially his letters to, "Ever yours Affly" which was short for "Ever yours, Affectionately". The British author, Joyce Sugg, a convert to Catholicism and Newman scholar herself, compiled the letters of Newman to his circle of female friends in a book she entitled: *Ever Yours, Affly*. She writes in her introduction that the letters of Newman to women:

touch on the stories, the problems and character of a most assorted group. There are letters to his mother and sisters; to single women like Maria Rosina Giberne and Emily Bowles whom he had known since his tractarian days, when he was a clergyman of the Church of England, an Oxford don and one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement; letters to married women, the wives of friends; to nuns and to a whole host of converts who wanted his help and advice when they were considering a change to the Roman Church or when they were trying to live as earnest Catholics (pg. 1).

Avery Cardinal Dulles, the undisputed Dean of American theologians and great Catholic convert from Presbyterianism (and son of the former Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles) who just passed away last December at the age of 90, wrote in his biography of Newman, "because he kept such complete diaries, wrote so many letters and composed such detailed autobiographical memoirs, the events of Newman's life are easily accessible." Cardinal Dulles, like Cardinal Newman was one of the few Cardinals in the history of the Church who was given the red hat without ever becoming a bishop. He and Newman were both raised to the College of Cardinals because of their great contribution to theology and ecclesiastical writings.

As Terry mentioned in her introduction, the motto that I chose for my episcopal ministry is a Latin inscription: "Cor ad cor loquitur" (which translates "heart speaks to heart"). This was the same motto chosen by the Newman when he was elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1879 by Pope Leo XIII.

Cardinal Newman has played a significant role both in my conversion to the Catholic Church, which happened during my undergraduate years in college, as well as my vocation to the priesthood. I have always considered Cardinal Newman my spiritual mentor. I first discovered Newman in my sophomore year of college in an English literature survey course called Major British Authors after 1800. I had to write a paper on an English prose author from this period and, providentially, I chose John Henry Newman from an anthology of essays in our text book. I remember that I asked my mother to type my paper for me!

The writing style of Victorian authors can be difficult to read. Victorians tend to be very flowery and wordy, but the writing of Newman captured my heart from the very start. It was as if he were writing to me personally and speaking to my heart - cor ad cor. Newman is considered by some English literature scholars to be the best example of English prose writing in the history of the English language. From that day on, I fell in love with the writings of Newman and have been reading him ever since.

Newman's life fits neatly into a time frame that can easily be remembered. He was born in London on February 21, 1801, the eldest of six children, three boys and three girls, and died August 11, 1890, at the age of 89. His first 45 years were spent as an Anglican and his second nearly 45 years were spent as a Roman Catholic. Newman is, perhaps, most famous as the undisputed leader of the

"Oxford Movement" in England which took place in the 1830s and 1840s. This was a movement led mostly by Oxford dons, who were seeking to lead the Anglican Church back to its apostolic roots, through a study of the ancient Fathers of the Church. In the early part of the 19th century, the Church of England had become so indifferent and watered down and lethargic, that for all intents and purposes, it was a dying church. The only real religious life existed among the evangelical Protestants who broke away from the Anglican church, people like John Wesley (Methodism) and William Wilberforce who all had a big influence on early Protestantism in this country.

Newman, like the other leaders of the Oxford movement, believed that the Catholic Church, on the one hand, had deviated from the apostolic faith by adding all kinds of doctrines and devotions that were not biblically based in the Sacred Scriptures. The mainline Protestant religions, of Calvin, Luther and John Wesley, had failed to remain true the Christian tradition and the authentic development of Christian doctrine. They believed that the Anglican Church had struck a balance between the two extremes and achieved the middle way, the *Via Media* as they called it. The "Oxford Movement" resulted in the greatest revival of the Anglican Church in the history of England.

At the height of the movement in the late 1830's Newman began to have doubts about his own Anglican communion. Newman's co-religionists and fellow leaders of the Oxford Movement like John Keble, Edmund Pusey and Richard Hurrell Froude, sought to demonstrate that the Church of England was a direct descendent of the Church established by the Apostles. This movement was also known as the Tractarian Movement after a series of publications called Tracts for the Times (1833-1841). The majority of these tracts were by Newman himself.

The most famous one of all of the tracts was Tract 90 which was written by Newman in 1841. In Tract 90, Newman engaged in a detailed examination of the Church of England's 39 Articles, which was, and still is, the Magna Carta of the Anglican Church. These tracts, by the way, were far from short pamphlets like we might think of today, but rather in-depth theological treatises. Tract 90 resulted in the claim that the fundamental ecclesiological identity of the Church of England was essentially Catholic rather than Protestant.

Tract 90 had such an impact on the whole movement, and all of England for that matter, that Newman was accused of giving a Roman Catholic interpretation to the 39 Articles, God forbid! He was forced to immediately give up his position as an Oxford professor at Oriel College and resign his beloved appointment as Vicar of Saint Mary's, the university chapel. In essence, the Vicar of Saint Mary's was equal to the chaplain of the University of Oxford. At Oxford, in Newman's day, Roman Catholics were not allowed to hold professorships or chaplaincies at the university. It was strictly an Anglican institution.

At that point Newman decided to retire to his small mission parish in Littlemore, a few miles outside of Oxford, for further prayer and reflection. A number of his undergraduate students followed him there and they lived a sort of monastic way of life of regular prayer and study.

It was at this time that Newman began writing his famous Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. Newman used the idea of development of doctrine to trace certain Catholic doctrines to discover whether or not these doctrines were examples of true development of apostolic teachings, or whether they were corruptions or innovations. He argued that, on the contrary, various Catholic doctrines not accepted by Protestants (such as devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Purgatory, and the Communion of the Saints) had a developmental history analogous to doctrines accepted by Protestants (such as the Trinity or the divinity and humanity of Christ).

In September 1845, after nearly four years of writing, he finally put his pen down, without finishing the work, and sought to be received into, as he wrote, "the one true fold of the Redeemer." By this time many of his students and letter correspondents had already converted to the Catholic Church. Some of them were the wives of very important British statesmen and literary figures. Religious historians have said that the Anglican Church has never really recovered from the defection of Newman.

The writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman, like two other great converts in the history of the Church, Saint Paul of Tarsus and Saint Augustine, were inspired by specific events that happened in his life. Newman was not a systematic theologian and all of his works were written in response to certain questions of the day.

Perhaps the book that Newman is best known for was his own autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (literally, "an apology for my life") which he wrote in 1863. Next to the Confessions of Saint

Augustine, Newman's *Apologia* is probably the best known Christian autobiography in the history of the Church. He wrote the book in answer to an accusation by the famous English clergyman and Cambridge professor, historian and novelist, Charles Kingsley, that he was dishonest and deceitful, in his conversion to the Catholic Church.

First Conversion

Looking back over his life at the age of 62, Newman wrote that his life as a Christian was marked by three distinct conversions. These three conversions were associated with three illnesses which evoked profound spiritual experiences in his life.

The first came when he was 15 years old. At the age of seven, not unlike many English families, John Henry was sent to a private boarding school at Ealing, west of London. The headmaster of the school, Dr. George Nicholas, said of Newman, "no boy had run through the school, from top to bottom, so rapidly as John Newman." By the time he finished his studies at Ealing in 1816, he had mastered the Greek and Latin language, English literature, and had excelled in math and science as well. His father had given him a violin and he took lessons, becoming an accomplished musician, whose musical sense is reflected in the varied and magnificent rhythms of his prose writings.

Newman, at 15, had just finished private boarding school at Ealing and, remaining at school during the summer months because his father's bank had closed in London and his family was in financial turmoil, he fell quite ill. During this time he wrote that he confessed to God "Thou didst change my heart, and in part my whole mental complexion at that time." Newman had become quite skeptical of religion during his school days at Ealing, and was very much influenced by the British Enlightenment philosophers of the 18th century, people like John Locke, David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (French). But during this extended period of illness, Newman discovered "the wisdom and goodness of God." Only one year earlier, when he was 14, he wrote in his diary that he "wanted to be virtuous, but not religious."

Years later, he would write in another famous work on education entitled, *The Idea of a University*, that it is not enough just to be virtuous. It was in this context that he wrote his famous "Definition of a Gentleman", which I have provided for you at your table. You can read this on your own, but it is a marvelous example of the prose writing of Newman. A good education, Newman said, can produce a gentleman, but only God can produce a saint.

In his autobiography, the *Apologia*, looking back nearly 50 years to that time of prolonged illness when he was 16, Newman wrote that; "I fell under the influence of a definite Creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured." He would return again and again to this theme throughout his life, that religion is more than a mere feeling or an emotion. That our Christian faith is more than just a philosophy or a set of ideas but it is based on a set of propositional truths that are rooted in person, Jesus Christ, that there is rational content to our faith which is objective and certain and can be known by the human mind.

He went on to write that during that illness God isolated him from "the objects which surrounded me, (and thus) confirming me in my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my creator." He also vowed at that time to remain celibate for the rest of life.

He therefore mapped out for himself a program for growth in the spiritual life, which included daily prayer and reading the Sacred Scriptures.

Second Conversion

The following term in the fall of his 16th year, Newman matriculated at the University of Oxford and was accepted as an undergraduate at Trinity College. The Oxford system is sort of a confederation of 38 colleges, all on the same campus. Trinity was one of the most prestigious and ancient of the colleges. In three years Newman completed his undergraduate degree in classical literature and applied for admittance to Oriel College as a graduate student. He had a bit of glitch in that he froze up during his final exams and did not do very well. Known the less, his reputation was already well known, and the dons at Oriel accepted him to the program.

Newman continued to excel and became a very popular tutor to the undergraduates. He applied for

holy orders and was ordained a deacon and a priest in the Anglican Church in 1824. On February 2nd, 1828, Newman was appointed Vicar of Saint Mary's, the University church. In his *Apologia* he wrote: "it was to me like the feeling of spring weather after winter; and, if I may so speak, I came out of my shell; and remained out of it till 1841."

Newman soon became the principal preacher for the Vespers service on Sunday afternoons. Undergraduates would flock to Saint Mary's to hear the young Dr. Newman - as he was called - preach. The most famous of these sermons from 1832 to 1841 are compiled in one volume entitled *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, and are in my humble opinion some of the best of Newman's writings and the easiest to access in bite size pieces (although each sermon would last approximately 45 minutes).

Newman was known as a great preacher, but he did not have a great oratorical voice. They say he had a rather quiet voice, with very little but subtle inflection. He was by no means a charismatic preacher. But the students remarked that he spoke to their hearts: "it was if he speaking to me personally" they would say. He would inspire the very best in people and draw them out of their selves to do great things. Some of most famous sermons had titles such as "Holiness Necessary for Future Blessedness", "The Religious Use of Excited Feelings:", "Secrecy and Suddenness of Divine Visitations", "Guilelessness", "The Invisible World", "The Consequences of a Single Sin". The titles alone are fascinating and intriguing, don't you think.

His second important illness and "conversion," came in 1833 when he took his first journey abroad to Italy with his good friend Richard Hurrell Froude and his father. He was aboard a boat off the coast of Sicily and fell ill of a vicious fever. It was night time and the waters were becalmed. There was a lone light house on the shore and the boat attempted to steer toward that lone light in the utter darkness and the stars. He saw then and later what he called "a strange Providence in the experience." He judged himself to have been guilty of great pride and self-will do to the fame his now achieved in the world of Oxford. Yet he kept saying to himself: "I have not sinned against the light." He also felt that he would not die because God had a "work" for him to do in England. He now resolved to search for God's will, not his own, and to conform his own will to God in loving surrender and trust in His Providence. And so when the ship was becalmed in the Straits of Bonifacio, he wrote the hymn which became famous in his lifetime and is still sung today in both Anglican and Catholic churches in England, entitled "Lead Kindly Light". You have the text at your table (*read the text*).

At this time I would like to play the hymn for you (*play recording*).

This hymn became the guiding light for the rest of his life - "Lead kindly light." When Newman returned to England, the "Oxford Movement" began with the publication of the "Tracts for the Times" which I referred to earlier. He saw this movement as the "work" which he believed God wanted him to do.

During this period of time from 1833, when he published the "Arians of the Fourth Century" (a study of the early Church fathers), to 1845 when he finished (or stopped writing, as it were) "An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine" his literary output is simply staggering: tracts, book-length treatises, lectures, articles, book reviews, collections of sermons, editions of works of the Fathers, he would write sometimes 10 to 12 hours a day. This even more remarkable when one reads in the Letters and Diaries the record of hours consumed in correspondence, personal meetings with colleagues and students, and the constant discharge of his pastoral duties at Saint Mary's and his mission church at Littlemore.

His major effort was to battle against liberalism in religion. By liberalism in religion he meant the view that "there is no positive truth in religion, but one creed is as good as another, and all are to be tolerated since all are matters of opinion." Here we see that Newman was almost prophetic in that he was way ahead of his time. Pope Benedict has called this kind of liberalism today "a dictatorship of relativism."

The second principle of the "Oxford Movement" was that "there was a visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are channels of invisible grace." Needless to say, the Movement was vehemently opposed by the Evangelicals and Protestant leaders of the day who emphasized the Calvinist doctrine of the invisible Church of the elect. One writer wrote of Newman during this period "a mysterious veneration had by degrees gathered around Newman, so that it was almost as though some Ambrose or Augustine of elder ages had reappeared. In Oriel lane as he would walk to Saint Mary the Virgin church, light-hearted undergraduates would drop their voices and whisper, there goes

Newman!"

His sermons at Saint Mary's were described by undergraduates by saying "Newman had the wondrous, the supernatural power of raising the mind to God, and rooting deeply in us a personal conviction of God, and a sense of His Presence."

Anthony Froude wrote: "With us undergraduates Newman spoke about subjects of the day, of literature, of public persons and incidents, of everything which was generally interesting... He was never condescending with us, never didactic or authoritative. He was lightness itself... which was interesting because he never talked for talking's sake, but because he had something to say."

Third Conversion

When he resigned his position at Oxford and retreated to Littlemore with his band of students, he pursued these thoughts amid controversy, hostility, persecution, anxiety and the pain he was giving to his friends and relatives, particularly his dear sisters and mother. Many slanders and misrepresentations were spread about him; the only one that cut deeply was the charge of dishonesty, that he was a Roman mole in the Anglican Church. All during this time of soul searching, he never for once believed that God in His Providence had abandoned him. He was well aware that if he did become a Catholic, he would ostracized from the predominantly Protestant and anti-Catholic society of the day, and also that were he wrong in his move, he would lead a multitude of others into error, since they would follow him into the Church, while still others would fall into skepticism and infidelity. His health at this time became extremely frail and thus, his third illness had set in. As he undertook this keen examination of history of the early Church, he prayed and fasted and took on harsh penances to sharpen his intellect.

As I mentioned earlier, the study of the development of Christian doctrine convinced Newman that what the Protestants called Roman corruptions were genuine developments of the original deposit of faith and revelation and that the present Roman Church and the Church of the early Fathers were identical, one in the same. As soon as he became not only certain in his views of the Catholic Church but also to his own duty in conscience to enter it, he did so, being received by the famous Italian Passionist missionary priest, Fr. Dominic Barberi at Littlemore on October 9th, 1845 at the age of 45. Fr. Dominic, by the way, is now Blessed Dominic Barberi, himself an extraordinary and holy priest. Others began immediately to follow his example, and thus, the "Oxford Movement" came to its ultimate conclusion.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, but perhaps fortunately for you because this has turned out to be a rather long discourse, I have come to the end of my talk tonight, and we have not even delved into his extremely prolific and extraordinary accomplishments during his Catholic years! I leave that up to your own reading and study.

Shortly after his conversion Newman went to Rome to be ordained a priest. After only two short years of study and after the Roman professors discovered that the brilliance of this English convert to Catholicism knew more scripture and theology than most of the professors in the Roman pontifical universities, he was ordained a Catholic priest in 1848.

He returned to England and founded the Oratorians of Saint Philip Neri, established the first Catholic University of England, the Oratorian school system in England, help to reestablish the English hierarchy England, wrote many more important books, treatises, publications, sermons and thousands of personal letters.

Allow me to conclude this talk by reciting with you the meditation on the back of the card which is at your table. To me, this meditation captures the heart of the soon to be blessed, John Henry Cardinal Newman, and gives us an insight into our own hearts, as God speaks to each one of you, cor ad cor, heart speaks to heart. *(Read the meditation)*

*God has created me to do Him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me
Which He has not committed to another. I have my mission-
I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connections between persons.*

*He has not created me for nothing. I shall do good; I shall do His work.
I shall be an angel of peace,
A preacher of truth in my own place while not intending it-
If I do but keep His commandments.
Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.
If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him;
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.
He does nothing in vain,
He knows what He is about.
He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers.
He may make me feel desolate, Make my spirits sink, hide my future from me-
Still He knows what He is about.*