



PROCURA GENERALIS
CONFOEDERATIONIS ORATORII S. PHILIPPI NERII

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**To the Superiors
and all the Members of the Congregations of the Oratory
on the announcement of the Beatification
of the Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman, C. O.**

Rome, 16 March 2010

Dear Brothers,

I have the joy of communicating officially that on 19th September of this year his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to the United Kingdom, will officiate at the Beatification of the Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman.

From that moment, our brother will share this honour with our Holy Father S. Philip Neri and the other Oratorians recognised by the Church as authentic disciples of Christ and sure models of sanctity: Saint Frances de Sales (1567-1622), founder and first Provost of the Oratory of Thonon (France), whose apostolic work and the genius that made him a Doctor of the Church give him a spiritual significance far beyond the confines of the Oratory; Saint Luigi Scrosoppi (1804-1884), the humble and strong 'saint of charity' in the city of Udine (Italy); Blessed Juvenal Ancina (1545-1604), disciple of Father Philip at the Roman Oratory and great reforming bishop of the diocese of Saluzzo in Piedmont (Italy); Anthony Grassi (1592-1671), 'angel of peace' in his own city of Fermo (Italy); Sebastian Valfré (1629-1710), tireless apostle of Turin in the work of evangelisation and of service to the needy, and the third centenary of whose death we celebrate this year; Joseph Vaz (1651-1711), Goan and missionary of Sri Lanka, 'the greatest missionary of Asia for Asia' (Pope John Paul II) and the third anniversary of whose death we celebrate on the 16th January 2011.

Summing up the joy and gratitude of the whole Oratorian Family, I wish to express to the Holy Father our sincere and respectful thanksgiving for this new act of benevolent recognition of the Oratory of S. Philip.

Our fellow Oratorian John Henry Newman, of whom Pope Pius XII had already confided to Jean Guilton, 'do not doubt it, Newman one day will be a Doctor of the Church', belongs at the same time to all those who – as Pope Paul VI says - 'are seeking an informed orientation and sure guidance amid the uncertainties of the modern world'. John Paul II also underlined the universal

significance of the English Cardinal in his letter for the second century of Newman's death: 'I gladly join ... [the] voices throughout the world in praising God for the gift of the great English Cardinal and for his enduring witness ... Newman was born in troubled times which knew not only political and military upheaval but also turbulence of soul. Old certitudes were shaken, and believers were faced with the threat of rationalism on the one hand and fideism on the other. Rationalism brought with it a rejection of both authority and transcendence, while fideism turned from the challenges of history and the tasks of this world to a distorted dependence upon authority and the supernatural. In such a world, Newman came eventually to a remarkable synthesis of faith and reason.'

As Newman's Beatification approaches, we should listen again to the words of the Popes, and along with Pius XII, Paul VI and John Paul II, surely as well to the words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Bishops of England of Wales during their recent *Ad Limina* visit to Rome. 'In a social milieu that encourages the expression of a variety of opinions on every question that arises, it is important to recognize dissent for what it is, and not to mistake it for a mature contribution to a balanced and wide-ranging debate. It is the truth revealed through Scripture and Tradition and articulated by the Church's Magisterium that sets us free. Cardinal Newman realized this, and he left us an outstanding example of faithfulness to revealed truth by following that "kindly light" wherever it led him, even at considerable personal cost. Great writers and communicators of his stature and integrity are needed in the Church today, and it is my hope that devotion to him will inspire many to follow in his footsteps. Much attention has rightly been given to Newman's scholarship and to his extensive writings, but it is important to remember that he saw himself first and foremost as a priest. In this *Annus Sacerdotalis*, I urge you to hold up to your priests his example of dedication to prayer, pastoral sensitivity towards the needs of his flock, and passion for preaching the Gospel.'

These testimonies of the Popes to Newman's importance recall the high opinion that Pope Leo XIII – who in so many ways worked for the rebirth of the Oratory – had of John Henry Newman. Speaking of his choice to make Newman a Cardinal in the first Consistory of his Pontificate, Pope Leo confided: 'It wasn't easy, it wasn't easy. They said that he was too liberal, but I wanted to honour the Church in honouring Newman. I have always had a great devotion for him.' Leo considered him – and said so – '*his* Cardinal.'

Newman arrived in Rome on the 24th April 1879 in preparation for the Consistory in which he was to receive the red hat. He remained in Rome until 4th June, recalling the 'kindness' and 'great honour' shown to him, and wrote to his own Bishop Ullathorne of the 'affectionate tenderness' of the Pope, who received him twice in private audience, on 27th April and on 2nd June: 'The Holy Father received me most affectionately—keeping my hand in his. He asked me, "Do you intend to continue head of the Birmingham House?" I answered, "That depends on the Holy Father." He then said, "Well then I wish you to continue head."'

Inos Biffi recently gave us a series of valuable reflections on the significance of Newman being chosen as a Cardinal, that choice so much wanted by Pope Leo XIII. Biffi writes: 'The Cardinalate and the welcome of Leo XIII, apart from making up for the suspicion that for so many years had surrounded Newman's life and work, were above all a recognition of the value of Newman's extensive and wide-ranging writings. It's significant that on the day of the consistory (14th May) the Vatican newspaper, the *Osservatore Romano*, published on its front page the address given by Newman after receiving the *Biglietto* (the letter of nomination) two days before. Newman gave a brief account of how he saw his own mission, and spoke on a theme of unquestionable relevance today: 'religious liberalism'.

Newman, beginning by speaking in the 'musical language' of Italian, continued in English, expressing his 'wonder and profound gratitude' for his nomination, describing himself as overcome by the 'condescension and love ... of the Holy Father' in choosing him for 'so immense an honour'. 'It was a great surprise. Such an elevation had never come into my thoughts, and seemed to be out of keeping with all my antecedents. I had passed through many trials, but they were over; and now the end of all things had almost come to me, and I was at peace.' But the Holy Father 'felt for me, and he told me the reasons why he raised me to this high position. Besides other words of encouragement, he said his act was a recognition of my zeal and good service for so many years in the Catholic cause; moreover, he judged it would give pleasure to English Catholics, and even to Protestant England, if I received some mark of his favour.' The newly elected Cardinal added: 'In a long course of years I have made many mistakes. I have nothing of that high perfection which belongs to the writings of Saints ... but what I trust that I may claim all through what I have written, is this,—an honest intention, an absence of private ends, a temper of obedience, a willingness to be corrected, a dread of error, a desire to serve Holy Church, and, through Divine mercy, a fair measure of success.' Newman went on: 'And, I rejoice to say, to one great mischief I have from the first opposed myself. For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of liberalism in religion. Never did Holy Church need champions against it more sorely than now, when, alas! it is an error overspreading, as a snare, the whole earth; and on this great occasion, when it is natural for one who is in my place to look out upon the world, and upon Holy Church as in it, and upon her future, it will not, I hope, be considered out of place, if I renew the protest against it which I have made so often. Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, as *true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact ... and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy. ... Men may go to Protestant Churches and to Catholic, may get good from both and belong to neither. They may fraternise together in spiritual thoughts and feelings, without having any views at all of doctrine in common, or seeing the need of them. Since, then, religion is so personal a peculiarity and so private a possession, we must of necessity ignore it in the intercourse of man with man.'

Biffi writes: 'It's difficult not to recognise the ruinous topicality of this religious liberalism, which worried Newman in 1879: today it is exactly the idea that all religions are equivalent that is becoming widespread, and that the question of their truth is indifferent and unimportant, and that confessions or Churches are of equal value. And that, in any case, religion belongs exclusively to the private and personal sphere, without social implications. And sometimes inter-religious dialogue isn't lacking in ambiguity: when, that is, it dulls our awareness that in the end, what is important is the true religion.'

'There's another feature of Newman's thought that is of surprising relevance today. We see around us the dismantling of the Christian culture and of its educational resources, on the pretext of 'secularism' and of 'shared values', as we hear said. The newly elected Cardinal spoke of 'justice, benevolence'; we today usually speak of 'solidarity'. But, whatever words we use, a merely secular education conducted in a context of religious indifference is incapable of being the basis of authentic ethics, and is ultimately an education devoid of moral substance.'

'Today whoever says something bizarre or speaks against the Church proclaims himself as a 'prophet'; but in fact this is what Newman really was. His words, with the subtlety of their historical and psychological judgment, with their poetical beauty, and with the splendour of their truth, have permanently enriched the Church'

Dear Brothers,

Newman belongs to those who seek the truth through the gift of human reason but illumined by the light of faith (see John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*); and the Oratory of S. Philip, that counts Newman among its brothers, is profoundly aware of the great richness that, in Newman, has been given to her.

The choice of the Oratory made by the newly-converted Newman – who returned from Rome to England in 1847 carrying with him the Papal 'Brief' '*Magna Nobis sempre*', with which Blessed Pius IX instituted the Oratory in England, giving Newman the permission to spread the Oratory in that country – calls all the disciples of Father Philip to rediscover the contemporary relevance of the Oratorian charism and the beauty of the Oratorian vocation, that this new Blessed lived so intensely and described so powerfully in his two sermons on the 'Mission of S. Philip Neri' (Birmingham, 1850), in the seven letters sent from Dublin in 1856 to his community in Birmingham, and in numerous prayers – among which are some beautiful litanies – composed to ask for the intercession of S. Philip to obtain the graces which our Holy Father himself was so richly endowed.

Newman wrote of S. Philip in a hymn: 'Yet there is one I more affect / Than Jesuit, Hermit, Monk, or Friar / 'Tis an old man of sweet aspect, / I love him more, I more admire. / I know him by his head of snow, / His ready smile, his keen full eye / His words that kindle as they flow, / Save he be rapt in ecstasy.'

So Newman's request of Leo XIII, made when Newman was being raised to the College of Cardinals, have a special significance for us: 'I have lived now thirty years *in nidulo meo* in my much loved Oratory, sheltered and happy, and would therefore entreat his Holiness not to take me from St. Philip, my Father and Patron.'

So the founder of the English Oratory, who well understood the Oratorian life from a profound study of its origins, placed himself with these words among the faithful disciples of S. Philip who were called to the dignity of Cardinal, according to that tradition of close and affectionate bonds to the Congregation found in the most recent Oratorian Cardinal, Father Giulio Bevilacqua (1881-1965), who accepted the honour at the insistence Paul VI, but who obtained from the Pope permission to continue his work as parish priest of the Oratorian community of S. Antonio in the suburbs of Brescia.

What was it about Father Philip that so fascinated John Henry Newman, moving him to choose the Oratory as the context of his priestly life in the Catholic Church? Others have answered this question in depth, such as Placid Murray in *Newman the Oratorian*, and A. Boix in his *John Henry Newman. The Oratorian Vocation*.

Here I would like to emphasise one of the reasons why Newman chose the Oratory, that seems to me to be in harmony with the interior world of Father Philip, and valued deeply by Newman: the characteristic of *kindness*.

S. Philip temperamentally had the gift of kindness towards others, and, at the same time, combined it with the other virtues and in close relationship with the living presence of Jesus Christ in others: S. Philip had a great liberty of spirit, a love for a community life regulated by the law of discretion, respect for the gifts of each, and a wise simplicity that gave him a 'thoughtful joy', to use the beautiful words of Goethe in the diary of his 'Italian Journey'.

The Oratorian John Henry Newman, who speaks us to through that journey of Christian conversion which characterised his own whole life, as he does through his vast and rich body of works, is so concisely summed up in the motto that he chose for his coat of arms as a Cardinal, taken from S. Francis de Sales: : '*Cor ad cor loquitur*' (Heart speaks to heart).

As Biffi writes, these words express perfectly the spirit of Newman, 'for whom the Word of life isn't just communicated purely abstractly, but through concrete human relations, with the whole person and therefore also the affections, according to the words of Gregory the Great: *Amor ipse notitia* – love is in itself the source and beginning of knowledge, so that to love is to know.'

It is my sincere wish for the whole Oratorian family that the approaching Beatification of this great Son of S. Philip Neri and master of all those who are 'seeking an informed orientation and sure guidance amid the uncertainties of the modern world', will be the occasion of a deeper – and fruitful – knowledge of his thought, and of the example left by his life.

To the intercession of this new Beatus I entrust, in particular, the Congregations of the Oratory of England – Birmingham, London and Oxford – and those other Congregations in different parts of the world that have drawn particular inspiration from Cardinal Newman.

To all my brothers of all our Congregations, and also of communities in formation, I send my most fraternal greetings, wishing that the experience of this Priestly Year will be strengthened by the particular features of the Oratorian charism, that comes to us from this great disciple of Father Philip.

Also, turning to all those lay faithful who are members of the Secular Oratory, I pray that they may be able also to grow closer to this authentic master of the Oratorian spirit.

In the heart of Christ and of our Holy Father S. Philip.



Edoardo Aldo Cerrato, C.O.
Procurator General