

# Blessed Cardinal Newman and Conscience: The Aboriginal Pro-Life Issue

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## Introduction

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, in his sermon “*Obedience without Love, as instanced in the Character of Balaam*” closes with these words ...

“4. **Lastly, I will but say this in addition,—God gives us warnings now and then, but does not repeat them**. Balaam's sin consisted in not acting upon what was told him once for all. In like manner, you, my brethren, now hear what you may never hear again, and what perchance in its substance is the word of God. You may never hear it again, though with your outward ears you hear it a hundred times, because you may be impressed with it now, but never may again. You may {36} be impressed with it now, and the impression may die away; and some time hence, if you ever think about it, you may then speak of it thus,—that the view struck you at the time, but somehow the more you thought about it, the less you liked or valued it. True; this may be so, and it may arise, as you think, from the doctrine I have been setting before you not being true and scriptural; but it may also arise from your having heard God's voice and not obeyed it. It may be that you have become blind, not the doctrine been disproved. **Beware of trifling with your conscience**. [trifling = the act of delaying; inactivity resulting in something being put off until a later time] **It is often said that second thoughts are best; so they are in matters of judgment, but not in matters of conscience. In matters of duty [ie conscience] first thoughts are commonly best—they have more in them of the voice of God. May He give you grace so to hear what has been said, as you will wish to have heard, when life is over; to hear in a practical way, with a desire to profit by it, to learn God's will, and to do it.**” (my emphasis)

<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume4/sermon2.html>

Blessed John Henry is reminding us that when God speaks to us he lets His ‘yes be yes and his no be no’ and then allows us our freedom. We may choose to rationalize and return to Him with doubts and second thoughts – as we would when forming a judgment – but more often than not this will prove unnecessary if not counter-productive. [The secular equivalent is ‘trust your gut’.]

Our gospel reading today (1/23/11) contains the same theme ...

“As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. 19 He said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 **At once** they left their nets and followed him. 21 He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father

Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, 22 and **immediately** they left their boat and their father and followed him.” Mt 4

It’s like the rich young man Jesus told to “Sell all you have ... and follow me” who then ‘went away sad, for he had many possessions’ ... Jesus did not run after him and say ‘let me rephrase that’.

So ... pay attention when you pray ... when you listen to your conscience. Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman is considered by all in the Church a master of conscience ... let’s listen to his counsel.

### **main point**

Main point of talk ... Truth is a fact and has a name = Jesus Christ. We have been given a gift – our conscience – that guides us to that truth, if we listen. Our culture does not believe there is such a thing as truth, as objective reality. Rather, what is “real” is the subject, our subjective “reality”.

Christ is the way/truth/life. Our conscience is our GPS which will guide us on the way to the *truth* of Christ so that we may best have *life*.

### **background**

I’m sure when JP asked me to speak today, he was thinking more of the entire ‘pro-life’ spectrum – including where I spend most of my time, ie at the end-of-life. Respecting the needs of those who are seriously ill and dying, euthanasia, physician assisted suicide, palliative sedation and similar topics are very important life issues.

I’m choosing to focus on conscience today because this is at the heart of all we do not only in the ‘pro-life’ world but in our day to day lives, in how we treat each other, in how we recognize each other. In addition, from a very practical point of view, conscience issues – rights of conscience, conscience freedoms – are coming more and more to the fore and will loom large in all areas of life – especially health care and bioethics.

It’s important to know exactly what we are talking about when we speak of conscience. One problem is that the culture of the ‘dictatorship of relativism’ means something very different when it speaks of conscience, opening up many possibilities for mis-communication and mis-understanding. Our secular culture thinks of conscience as one’s individual autonomous decision, not a judgment based on correspondence with reality. At best, our culture might recognize and impose a dualism – eg you can be a health care worker and be against abortion, as long as you just do that at home – but when you’re in the hospital you better tow the line.

In our time together this morning, we’re going to sort through an explanation of the title (Conscience as The Aboriginal Pro-Life Issue) ... listen to some music that touched

JHN ... then talk a little more about conscience, conversion and the dictatorship of relativism.

## Blessed Cardinal Newman & Conscience: The Aboriginal Pro-Life Issue

“Blessed Cardinal Newman and Conscience: The Aboriginal Pro-Life Issue”. Where might I have gotten the inspiration for such a title?

John Henry Newman was a towering figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century church in England and throughout the West. He lived the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century an Anglican (Church of England 1801-1845), the second half a Roman Catholic (1845-1890) following his famous conversion. He anticipated many of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century issues of the Church and is thought of as a father of Vatican II [he lived through Vatican I and in fact turned down the offer to be a peritus – a theological adviser - to Bishop Brown of Newport (Ker 634)]

In 1874 Wm Gladstone, the long-standing Prime Minister of England wrote a scathing critique of the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility that had just been defined by Vatican I in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Pastor aeternus*,

In response to Gladstone, Newman wrote “*A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*”, a prominent Catholic layman who had been one of Newman’s students at his oratory school. We will have occasion to refer to his letter later, but of pertinence now is a phrase of Newman’s that refers to our conscience as the “aboriginal Vicar of Christ”.

Let’s listen to the key paragraph ... “The rule and measure of duty [there’s that pesky word ‘duty’ again ... being used by JHN almost as a synonym for conscience ... we’ll hear BXVI do the same thing in just a minute] is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor State convenience, nor fitness, order, and the [beautiful] pulchrum. Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself; but it is a messenger from Him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives. **Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ**, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its peremptoriness, a priest in its {249} blessings and anathemas, and, even though the eternal priesthood throughout the Church could cease to be, in it [ie conscience] the sacerdotal principle would remain and would have a sway.” (my emphasis)

<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/anglicans/volume2/gladstone/section5.html>

Let’s return to the dictionary ... *aboriginal* = having existed ... from the beginning ... *vicar* = A priest who acts for or represents another, often higher-ranking member of the clergy. The ‘Vicar of Christ’ refers of course to the Pope.

Blessed John Henry is telling us that our conscience is prior to the Pope ... it is closer to the depths of our "I" than our Holy Father ... it is that spiritual organ which God has given us to know and understand how to carry out His Will. The Pope informs us – infallibly - of precepts and concepts and moral laws thereby forming our conscience which then leads us to truth – to our encounter with Christ the way-truth and life. We must attend to these teachings of the Pope ... and then we ourselves make the day-to-day minute-to-minute decisions ... and walk this journey to our destiny.

As our current Pope – BXVI – recently summarized when he was speaking to the Roman Curia about his fall trip to the UK to beatify Newman. "The driving force that impelled Newman along the path of conversion was conscience. But what does this mean? In modern thinking, the word "conscience" signifies that for moral and religious questions, it is the subjective dimension, the individual, that constitutes the final authority for decision. The world is divided into the realms of the objective and the subjective. To the objective realm belong things that can be calculated and verified by experiment. Religion and morals fall outside the scope of these methods and are therefore considered to lie within the subjective realm. Here, it is said, there are in the final analysis no objective criteria. The ultimate instance that can decide here is therefore the subject alone, and precisely this is what the word "conscience" expresses: in this realm only the individual, with his intuitions and experiences, can decide. **Newman's understanding of conscience is diametrically opposed to this.** For him, "**conscience**" means **man's capacity for truth**: the capacity to recognize precisely in the decision-making areas of his life – religion and morals – a truth, *the* truth. At the same time, conscience – man's capacity to recognize truth – thereby imposes on him the *obligation* to set out along the path towards truth, to seek it and to submit to it wherever he finds it. [I think he's talking about 'duty' here!] Conscience is both capacity for truth and obedience to the truth which manifests itself to anyone who seeks it with an open heart. The path of Newman's conversions is a path of conscience – not a path of self-asserting subjectivity but, on the contrary, a path of obedience to the truth that was gradually opening up to him. His third conversion, to Catholicism, required him to give up almost everything that was dear and precious to him: possessions, profession, academic rank, family ties and many friends. ... In support of the claim that Newman's concept of conscience matched the modern subjective understanding, people often quote a letter in which he said – should he have to propose a toast – that he would drink first to conscience and then to the Pope. But in this statement, "conscience" does not signify the ultimately binding quality of subjective intuition. It is an expression of the accessibility and the binding force of truth: on this its primacy is based. The second toast can be dedicated to the Pope because it is his task to demand obedience to the truth." (BXVI to Roman Curia 12/20/10 – my emphasis) [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2010/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20101220\\_curia-auguri\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101220_curia-auguri_en.html)

In his "Holy Week Exercises" preached in 1964, Msgr. Luigi Giussani – founder of the ecclesial movement 'Communion and Liberation' - said "Existing is the communion of God with us. Existing is God's communication to us. God is more interior to us than our own heart, our own I, than ourselves. Prayer thus is the only gesture that is totally intelligent. Prayer is nothing but the realization that life is communion."

And so, as you engage your work in the pro-life movement ... as you engage your life's calling ... adhere to the voice of God deep in your soul, in your heart. Beware an ideological 'pro-life-ism' that sees and frames others in terms of power-politics ... whether it be pro-life – pro-choice/red-blue/left-right. Love the other ... Love Christ ... cling to your destiny ... and you will then 'do' the right thing for life.

## **Violin Sonata**

We're going to take a little change of pace and listen to some Beethoven ... one of Newman's favorite pieces ...

Among the many ways Blessed John Henry was "fully alive" (gloria dei vivens homo) was in his love for music. He was an accomplished violinist and would often play for guests after dinner. Fr. Ian Ker, in his biography of JHN, describes ...

"Jemima [JHN's sister] came to lunch and afterwards played Beethoven's [violin] sonatas on Mrs. Wootten's piano, accompanied by her brother on the violin. The one in A minor, wrote Newman, 'had, and has had since, an effect on me I can't describe. Often Beethoven transports me, but I cannot express, or analyze, the strange effect which its first movement had on me. I could hardly go on playing.'" (Ian Ker. John Henry Newman. p. 610. JHN quote LD xxiii. 255.)(this also in Bashford article – Newman Music Bashford article)

Let's take a few minutes and listen to this violin sonata in A minor ... imagine Newman with his violin ... (and maybe BXVI at the piano!) ...  
[play Beethoven Violin Sonata Op.23 n. 4 first movement in A minor]

Newman, in Idea of a University, said "Music, I suppose ... has an object of its own ... it is the expression of ideas greater and more profound than any in the visible world, ideas, which center indeed in Him whom Catholicism manifests, who is the seat of all beauty, order, and perfection whatever ..."

<http://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ImagefromIndex/81074>

[http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin\\_Sonata\\_No.4,\\_Op.23\\_\(Beethoven,\\_Ludwig\\_van\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Sonata_No.4,_Op.23_(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van))

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin\\_Sonata\\_No.\\_4\\_\(Beethoven\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Sonata_No._4_(Beethoven))

## **Liberalism (BXVI- Dictatorship of Relativism) – Conversion - Conscience**

### ***Liberalism – Dictatorship of Relativism (BXVI)***

Pope Benedict XVI's notion of the 'dictatorship of relativism' has many of its roots in Newman's concept of 'liberalism'. What do these two giants of our faith mean by these terms?

In 1879, John Henry Newman was made a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Leo XIII. One is reminded of Avery Cardinal Dulles of our own times – a priest-

theologian named a cardinal to celebrate the immense contribution made to Holy Mother Church.

On Monday morning, May 12, Newman received a messenger from the Vatican bearing the *biglietto* [italian – ‘ticket’] from the Cardinal-Secretary of State, informing him that in a secret Consistory held that morning his Holiness had deigned to raise him to the rank of Cardinal. The so-called ‘biglietto speech’ is Cardinal Newman’s famous response to the Holy Father and the Church. In it he defines ‘liberalism’ ... let’s listen to him in his own words ...

“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, not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy ... Instead of the Church's authority and teaching, they would substitute first of all a universal and a thoroughly secular education, calculated to bring home to every individual that to be orderly, industrious, and sober, is his personal interest. Then, for great working principles to take the place of religion, for the use of the masses thus carefully educated, it provides—the broad fundamental ethical truths, of justice, benevolence, veracity, and the like; proved experience; and those natural laws which exist and act spontaneously in society, and in social matters, whether physical or psychological; for instance, in government, trade, finance, sanitary experiments, and the intercourse of nations. As to Religion, it is a private luxury, which a man may have if he will; but which of course he must pay for, and which he must not {67} obtrude upon others, or indulge in to their annoyance.”

Biglietto Speech 1879

<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/addresses/file2.html#biglietto>

We hear many echoes of our modern day scourge of the ‘dictatorship of relativism’. Fr. Julian Carron, leader of the ecclesial movement CL and an adviser to the Pope, recently described relativism as “ ... this cultural climate that hinders the capacity to know the truth of reality ...” (Opening Day p. 9) One readily brings to mind, in the current context of this pro-life event, the many lies and half-truths spread about the reality of abortion that obscures the ability of many – especially vulnerable young women – to know the truth of what is happening inside her womb; the truth of her relationships ... with her child, with the child’s father, with her own parents, with her God. ... Fr. Carron continues ... “if religion is a purely private and subjective fact, a question of personal opinion, the consequence is obvious: relativism. Relativism is the failure of man’s capacity to know the truth, to find in it the definitive freedom and fulfillment of the deepest human aspirations, that is, to find the full answer to his needs. In fact, if man does not find what answers this aspiration, this need, everything is relative, everything is debatable and nothing manages to grasp all his full ‘I.’” (Opening Day p. 5)

## Conversion

How do we avoid this trap of relativism and stay the course of truth? By the work of our ongoing – day by day – conversion ... our turning toward Christ. Our conscience is the navigator for this journey. It guides us in our ongoing – minute by minute judgments of the correspondence of reality with our hearts.

Msgr. Luigi Giussani reminds us that ... "Cardinal Newman used to say that conversions are nothing more than a deeper discovery of what we already truly desire." (Risk of Education p 57) Newman had this deep desire for truth ... a deep desire for Christ – the way, truth and life ... a deep human aspiration to find the full answer to his life.

Newman is commonly said to have made 3 significant religious conversions in his life ... as a young man of 15 to Christianity itself, a subsequent conversion to Anglicanism and his ordination as an Anglican priest, and finally his conversion to Catholicism in 1845.

In his spiritual autobiography – *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* – Newman tells of a key event in his journey to the Roman Catholic Church ... We will listen to Blessed John Henry in his own words, but just a few introductory clarifications ... He mentions many of the heresies of the early Church – Donatism, Monophysitism, Arianism – A critical insight of Newman's was the many similarities and analogies between the relationship of these heresies and the early Church as compared with Anglicanism and the Catholic Church of Newman's day. That is, Newman recognized his own Anglicanism as a modern day heresy. And a translation ... the key phrase of Augustine's is "Securus judicat orbis terrarum" translated as "the verdict of the world is conclusive". In this context "the world" is the Roman Catholic Church. Also ... remember that the 'via media' is Newman's notion [prior to his conversion to Catholicism] that Anglicanism is the 'via media', the middle road, between the scriptural literalism of Protestantism and the excesses of Roman Catholicism. Let me anticipate one of my conclusions by asking you to listen for evidence of Newman's docility, humility, and receptivity – key elements of conversion - in this passage.

"But my friend ... pointed out the (palmary [of first rate importance – Latin 'palm' of victory]) words of St. Augustine, which were contained in one of the extracts made in the *Review*, and which had escaped my observation. "Securus judicat orbis terrarum." He repeated these words again and again, and, when he was gone, they kept ringing in my ears. "Securus judicat orbis {117} terrarum;" [the verdict of the world is conclusive] they were words which went beyond the occasion of the Donatists: they applied to that of the Monophysites. They gave a cogency to the Article ['Anglican Claim' by Wiseman in *Dublin Review*], which had escaped me at first. They decided ecclesiastical questions on a simpler rule than that of Antiquity; nay, St. Augustine was one of the prime oracles of Antiquity; here then Antiquity was deciding against itself. What a light was hereby



thrown upon every controversy in the Church! not that, for the moment, the multitude may not falter in their judgment,—not that, in the Arian hurricane, Sees more than can be numbered did not bend before its fury, and fall off from St. Athanasius,—not that the crowd of Oriental Bishops did not need to be sustained during the contest by the voice and the eye of St. Leo; but that the deliberate judgment, in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a final sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede. Who can account for the impressions which are made on him? For a mere sentence, the words of St. Augustine, struck me with a power which I never had felt from any words before. To take a familiar instance, they were like the ... "Tolle, lege,—Tolle, lege," of the child, which converted St. Augustine himself. "Securus judicat orbis terrarum!" By those great words of the ancient Father, interpreting and summing up the long and varied course of ecclesiastical history, the theory of the *Via Media* was absolutely pulverized." Apologia 117 ... JHN on reading an article by Wiseman in Dublin Review "Anglican Claim" (Ker 182)  
<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/apologia65/chapter3.html>

In my experience, one of the most important virtues we must exercise in this journey of conversion is humility – a docile receptivity to all of reality. Remember St. Paul's "Test everything, hold on to what is good." (1 Thess 5:21) Listening to Cardinal Newman's witness in the passage we just read, we sense this keenly ... " ... which had escaped my observation ... repeated these words again and again ... kept ringing in my ears ... which had escaped me at first ... what a light was hereby thrown (not 'my insight' but an –external- light) ... the whole Church rests and acquiesces ... a mere sentence struck me with a power which I had never felt from any words before ... the theory of the *Via Media* (JHN's own theory) was absolutely pulverized ..." In a sense the entire passage is a confession, an act of humility.

Let's take just a brief break and pray a strophe of Cardinal Newman's 'Lead Kindly Light' ... Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home – Lead Thou me on! Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see The distant scene, -one step enough for me.

### ***Conscience ... Tolstoy & Dostoevsky***

We're going to take a little break from JHN and call on two other 19<sup>th</sup> century geniuses to help us understand what conscience is ...

Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* tells the story of a Russian bureaucrat whose pedestrian life is caught up short when he develops a fatal illness. As he reflects on his life, he recalls ...

"In law school he had committed acts which had formerly seemed to him of great vileness and had inspired a feeling of self-loathing in him at the time he committed them; but subsequently, seeing that such acts were also committed by highly placed people and



were not considered bad, he, without really thinking them good, forgot all about them and was not troubled in the least by the memory of them.” (Tolstoy - Death of Ivan Ilyich - Pevear/Volokhonsky trans. p. 48 Knopf-NY 2009)

As we reflect on this passage, we notice several pertinent issues of conscience ... We first hear Ilyich’s conscience speaking very clearly to him ... “acts which ... seemed to him of great vileness” ... [acts] “which had inspired a feeling of self-loathing in him”. We then hear that his conscience becomes [mal]formed ... as with any formation, there can be both good and bad ... “but subsequently, seeing that such acts were also committed by highly placed people and were not considered bad, he, without really thinking them good, forgot all about them and was not troubled in the least by the memory of them.” Ilyich’s conscience is dulled by his acquiescence to the power – the dictatorship of relativism – of those ‘highly placed’.

To our culture, conscience is, at best, a ‘decision’ based on facts ... not a judgment based on reason [reason in its fullest – Catholic – sense of an openness to all of reality ... see *Fides et Ratio*, Luigi Giussani’s *Religious Sense*, etc ... that’s another talk]. The ‘foundation’ for this decision of our culture is a worldview of pragmatic utilitarianism - whose first commandment is that decisions are good in so far as they maximize utility ... in fact they are good precisely because they maximize utility. This is our dictator – pragmatic utilitarianism.

Another towering figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is Fyodor Dostoevsky whose novel *The Brothers Karamazov* introduces the character of the ‘Grand Inquisitor’ who reproves Christ for the gift of our freedom. The ‘Grand Inquisitor’ sequence has much to tell us about our human nature, freedom, and God’s gift to us of His Son.

In commenting on this episode, Fr. Julian Carron reminds us of Eliot’s admonition ... that we ‘dream of systems so perfect ... no one will need to be good.’ There is a funny thing about our human nature ... there is a sense that many of us *want* a ‘dictator’ to tell us what to do, to inform our lives and decisions so we will not have to take responsibility for them [I see this in many young men today who cannot seem to make the commitment/decision of a vocation – whether to married or priestly life].

“This desire to possess what is good, that it be mine, is common to all men. But to reach it means loving, adhering, that is, involving our freedom, and sometimes, as we well know, we want to spare ourselves this. It is an ever lurking temptation. Luisa Muraro writes, “We always have the wish to give the responsibility for our lives to someone else; we easily seek someone we can tell, ‘Please take care of my life.’” And rest assured that there will always be someone so “charitable” that he will be ready to do it ...

If somebody wants to look for someone else to spare him his freedom (call him spiritual director, or boss, or friend - it’s all the same), he has to clearly understand that he will not reach happiness in this way, that nothing will ever be his, because I can reach my fulfillment only through my freedom; otherwise, it will never be my fulfillment. And if I don’t understand this (and, unfortunately, I often see that many of us don’t), I will always

try to unload the drama of my freedom onto someone else." (Muraro - God's Empty Seat - 2006 p. 25 - cf 54)(Carron CL 2010 Spir Ex p. 35)

## Conclusion

“Memory is the contents of the conscience of a Christian.” (Carron 2010 Opening Day gsb notes) ... Pope Benedict XVI, in a recent homily at a funeral Mass for one of his staff, reminds us that “St. Bonaventure says the memory of the Creator is inscribed in the depths of our being. And precisely because this memory is inscribed in our being, we can recognize the Creator in his creation, we can remember him, see his traces in this cosmos created by him. St. Bonaventure says, moreover, that this memory of the Creator is not only a memory of the past because the source is present, it is also a memory of the presence of the Lord; it's also a memory of the future, because it is certain that we come from the goodness of God and are called to strive for the goodness of God.” (BXVI Manuela 12/2/10 Mass)

The closing of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman's sermon 'Unreal Words' will conclude our reflections ... “What I have been saying comes to this:—be in earnest, and you will speak of religion where, and when, and how you should; aim at things, and your words will be right without aiming. There are ten thousand ways of looking at this world, but only one right way. The man of pleasure has his way, the man of gain his, and the man of intellect his. Poor men and rich men, governors and governed, prosperous and discontented, learned and unlearned, each has his own way of looking at the things which come before him, and each has a wrong way. There is but one right way; it is the way in which God looks at the world. Aim at looking at it in God's way. Aim at seeing things as God sees them. Aim at forming judgments about persons, events, ranks, fortunes, changes, objects, such as God forms. Aim at looking at this life as God looks at it. Aim at looking at the life to come, and the world unseen, as God does. Aim at "seeing the King in his beauty." All things that we see are but shadows to us and delusions, unless we enter into what they really mean.

It is not an easy thing to learn that new language which Christ has brought us. He has interpreted all things for us in a new way ['behold I make all things new']; He has brought us a religion which sheds a new light on all that happens. Try to learn this language. Do not get it by rote, or {45} speak it as a thing of course. Try to understand what you say. Time is short, eternity is long; God is great, man is weak; he stands between heaven and hell; Christ is his Saviour; Christ has suffered for him. The Holy Ghost sanctifies him; repentance purifies him, faith justifies, works save. These are solemn truths, which need not be actually spoken, except in the way of creed or of teaching; but which must be laid up in the heart. That a thing is true, is no reason that it should be said, but that it should be done; that it should be acted upon; that it should be made our own inwardly.

Let us avoid talking, of whatever kind; whether mere empty talking, or censorious talking, or idle profession, or descanting upon Gospel doctrines, or the affectation of philosophy, or the pretence of eloquence. Let us guard against frivolity, love of display, love of being talked about, love of singularity, love of seeming original. Let us aim at meaning what we say, and saying what we mean; let us aim at knowing when we understand a truth, and when we do not. When we do not, let us take it on faith, and let us profess to do so. Let us receive the truth in reverence, and pray God to give us a good will, and divine light, and spiritual strength, that it may bear fruit within us.”  
<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume5/sermon3.html>

## key points ...

Truth is a fact and has a name = Jesus Christ. We have been given a gift – our conscience – that guides us to that truth, if we listen. Our culture does not believe there is such a thing as truth, as objective reality. Rather, what is “real” is the subject, our subjective “reality”. Christ is the way/truth/life. Our conscience will guide us on the *way* to the *truth* of Christ so that we may best have *life*.

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman is a model – in many ways – for our lives today. Gloria Dei Vivens Homo. His conversion ... his insights into conscience ... and the correspondence in his own life of conscience and conversion. He followed his conscience to the truth of Catholicism – despite significant personal, societal, and ecclesial roadblocks and difficulties. So too, we are each called to a conversion – guided by our own conscience – and to accept the responsibility inherent in this. This is the most ‘pro-life’ thing we can do.

“For JHN, ‘conscience’ means man’s capacity for truth: the capacity to recognize precisely in the decision-making areas of life ... a truth, the truth.” BXVI

JHN was an accomplished violinist ... “Music is the expression of ideas greater and more profound than any in the visible world, ideas, which center indeed in Him whom Catholicism manifests, who is the seat of all beauty, order, and perfection ...” Seek out the truth expressed in beauty around you – music, art, literature, poetry, nature - nurture a love for beauty.

“And then, one very special day, the grace of conversion illumined this undecided soul. His [JHN’s] conscience, which had been limited to a strict moralism, discovered a new horizon whose dimension he was unable to size up. It was no longer just a matter of faithful obedience to a strict moral code but a loving submission to an interior Master. Henceforth, he turned less to moral values as a guide to rule his conduct than to listening to the One in Whom the supreme harmony of moral values is achieved.” Honore. Spiritual Journey of JHN. p 225-6.

We encounter Christ in the other ... who becomes the Other. Cor ad cor loquitur. Our gaze on the other/Other, then, becomes our prayer.

We are called to ongoing conversion ... as we form our consciences and then walk toward that destiny ... we are on the path – our path – of conversion.

Our culture (dictatorship of relativism) understands conscience as subjective expression of autonomy ... so ultimately devolves to power. We all have the detritus of this – our culture – dripping from us. We all smell of this sewage.

The most fundamental pro-life ‘thing you can do’ is attend to your own soul – conversion - conscience – your own “I” ... your own being. Acting follows being ... ergo ... you will then advance the ‘pro-life movement’ (as well as many other movements, people, loves). It is only by following your conscience – by constantly judging your experiences with the correspondence of your heart ... that you will fulfill your destiny ... for which God has created you. Undoubtedly - since you are here in this place at this time (in history) - some of that destiny involves the ‘pro-life’ movement ... you teach by actions - converting people one by one - listen to the depths of your heart - your "I" - it is there that Jesus will walk with you to your destiny ... and in walking with Jesus - others will join you in the journey to the Kingdom ... cor ad cor loquitur.

+John Brungardt ... 12/15/10 ... press conf ... "listen to the word of God in the depth of our heart ... follow Him ... love Him ... and love one another."

## Bibliography

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Sermons – Parochial & Plain; Oxford Univ.; On Subjects of the Day; Faith & Prejudice; Preached on Various Occasions ... are a good place to start engaging Newman ...  
Przywara’s ‘The Heart of Newman’ ... is a classic anthology of Newman’s writings arranged by topic ... each entry just a page or two  
Apologia Pro Vita Sua ... Newman’s spiritual autobiography  
Development of Christian Doctrine ... how he ‘thought’ his way into the Church  
Loss and Gain, Callista ... novels of conversion  
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Bishop James D Conley ...

Cor ad Cor

[http://www.archden.org/repository//Documents/BishopConley/Addresses/CorAdCorLoquitur\\_LCFC\\_2.27.09.pdf](http://www.archden.org/repository//Documents/BishopConley/Addresses/CorAdCorLoquitur_LCFC_2.27.09.pdf)

Mass of Beatification <http://www.archden.org/index.cfm/ID/4807>

The Heart of Newman <http://www.archden.org/index.cfm/ID/2644/Bishop's-Column/>

I will post this material and text of the talk at [www.brungardtmd.com/newman](http://www.brungardtmd.com/newman)

“Most Christians then will allow in general terms that they are under a law, but then they admit it with a reserve; they claim for themselves some dispensing power in their observance of the law. What I am saying is quite independent of the question, what is the standard of obedience which each man proposes to himself? One man puts the line of his duty higher than another; some men take a low view of it, confining it to mere personal morality; others confine it to their social obligations; others limit it by some conventional law, which is received in particular classes or circles; others include religious observances. But whether men view the law of conscience as high or low, as broad or narrow, few indeed there are who make it a rule to themselves; few there are who make their own notion of it, whatever that be, binding on themselves; few who even profess to act up to it uniformly and consistently. {6} Inquire of the multitude of men, as you meet them in the world, and you will find that one and all think it allowable at times to put themselves above the law, even according to their own standard of it; to make exceptions and reserves, as if they were absolute sovereigns of their conscience, and had a dispensing power upon occasions.”

<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume4/sermon1.html>

+ Conley Cor ad Cor talk ...

“Newman is perhaps most famous, at least in England, for his preaching. He served as the chaplain to the students at the University of Oxford during his Anglican years. The young Anglican cleric would preach at the Vespers service every Sunday evening at the university church, Saint Mary the Virgin, and the undergraduates would flock to the church to hear his sermons. It caused such a stir in the university in the 1820s and 1830s, that the colleges actually had to change their dinner hour in order to accommodate the students' desire to attend vespers and here Dr. Newman preach. The students who regularly attended his sermons in those days would often say that it was as if Newman was speaking directly to their heart in his sermons.”

[http://www.archden.org/repository//Documents/BishopConley/Addresses/CorAdCorLoquitur\\_LCFC\\_2.27.09.pdf](http://www.archden.org/repository//Documents/BishopConley/Addresses/CorAdCorLoquitur_LCFC_2.27.09.pdf)

EDITORIAL ... Another Chernobyl

We just have to hear the word “relativism” to jump to the wrong conclusions. Our thoughts fly at once to something abstract; important, yes—that’s why the Pope keeps talking about it. To be honest, though, we tend to see it as a philosophical problem, a question of cultural debate. On one side are the few, the Pope included, who insist on the existence of a Truth; on the other side are the many more who deny it. And this has several consequences. It also gives the impression that the Church, though right on principle, is, in practice, the loser. And this is where we go astray, because relativism is not only a weak thought that brings with it formless ethics. It does not concern only the great moral issues (life, values), denied in the idea that one position is as good as another and that the only practical indicators remaining are scientific skill and consensus (what we are able to do is licit, provided the majority agrees). It has a concrete consequence for all aspects of everyday life, and it is a paradoxical and dramatic consequence. If all things are equal, the consequence is not that everything has the same value, but that nothing is worthwhile. Everything is quickly consumed in life, in our daily life: work relationships and the family... This generates disappointment, vexation, and, at times, anger. All too often we find ourselves precisely in this condition.

Relativism, then, has to do with us. It eats away at us. This is why we simply must defeat it; we have to find a weapon that will enable us to win the war in the field of everyday life. This is where the true contribution that Christians can offer for everyone’s life comes in. This contribution is not merely to defend certain values to be safeguarded by every possible means—this is mandatory, but first we need to witness to something that enables us to face up to this vexation fearlessly, and not be trapped in anger but able to overcome the disappointment. We need something that will give a new taste to life. Ideas are not enough to achieve this—not even right ideas. Comments and words on relativism are not able to defeat it, not even the most Christian words. Years ago, Fr. Giussani introduced the marvelous and potent image of “the Chernobyl effect” to describe what happens to our humanity. Externally, it seems intact, but inside it is weakened, tired, and sick, as if from the aftermath of the radiation cloud that spread from the famous nuclear power plant. Faced with this tragedy, we often risk suffering another effect of this same reduction—a kind of Chernobyl effect on the way of living the Christian event. The words used can be unaltered in their orthodoxy: charism, faith, experience, etc.... But not the content. It can become just an empty shell, made of correct categories and words, but lacking its main characteristic: that of being real, something that happens in our lives and that “draws along the whole of our humanity,” as it did for Andrew and John before Christ.

In the Page One section of this issue, it is well described. Read it attentively; it clarifies that the only antidote to this sickness that corrodes life from within is memory: Christ happening once again in our lives, now, to the point of attracting our humanity and challenging the conception we have of ourselves—and of changing us, if we are ready for it. Pope Benedict XVI, too, describes this in his indomitable witness. His witness cannot be reduced to mere words, but is first and foremost a fact, a presence. Here we can grasp the true contribution that we Christians can give even in public life, wherever we are: in teaching at a school or in preaching at a missionary outpost; in the privacy of one’s own home or on the benches of Parliament. We can be a presence in which His Presence happens again, and brings a change.