

***"Cardinal Newman & Pope Francis:  
on Restoring Citizenship to those in Exodus"***

**Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB  
Keynote Address at the Blessed John Henry Newman Dinner  
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University of Prince Edward Island**

Bishop Grecco,  
President Alaa Abd-El-Aziz,  
Chancellor Donald McDougall,  
Brother Priests,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Dear Friends,

Thank you for your very kind invitation to be with you this evening and for naming me a Newman Fellow. Our presence together this night honours the unique Catholic heritage of UPEI's founding institution, St. Dunstan's University, as well as the Catholic intellectual and ministerial traditions that continue to serve today's students on the UPEI campus. It also offers me another opportunity to pay tribute and express gratitude and admiration to my friends and colleagues, Sr. Susan Kidd, CND, and Professor Robert Dennis for their outstanding leadership of the Catholic community on this campus.

You have invited me to speak about ***"Cardinal Newman & Pope Francis: on Restoring Citizenship to those in Exodus."*** It is a fascinating topic that offered me several weeks of reflection on the lives and writings of two people who have greatly impacted my life as a Catholic Christian, a priest, a teacher and a communicator.

For his message for the 52<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations last year – on April 26, 2015, Francis, Bishop of Rome chose an intriguing topic: *"Exodus, a fundamental experience of vocation."* He began his message with these words:

*"When we hear the word "exodus", we immediately think of the origins of the amazing love story between God and his people, a history which passes through the dramatic period of slavery in Egypt, the calling of Moses, the experience of liberation and the journey toward the Promised Land. The Book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible, which recounts these events is a parable of the entire history of salvation, but also of the inner workings of Christian faith. Passing from the slavery of the old Adam to new life in Christ is an event of redemption which takes place through faith (Eph 4:22-24). This passover is a genuine "exodus"; it is the journey of each Christian soul and the entire Church, the decisive turning of our lives towards the Father."*

The Pope continued:

*"At the root of every Christian vocation we find this basic movement, which is part of the experience of faith. Belief means transcending ourselves, leaving behind our comfort and the inflexibility of our ego in order to centre our life in Jesus Christ. It means leaving, like Abraham, our native place and going forward with trust, knowing that God will show us the way to a new*

*land. This “going forward” is not to be viewed as a sign of contempt for one’s life, one’s feelings, one’s own humanity. On the contrary, those who set out to follow Christ find life in abundance by putting themselves completely at the service of God and his kingdom. Jesus says: “Everyone who has left home or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29). All of this is profoundly rooted in love.”*

### **Cardinal Newman’s Exodus**

First let us consider the exodus journey of John Henry Newman, who was the firstborn of John Newman and Jemima Fourdrinier. From an early age he had a passion for God and spiritual matters, having experienced his "first conversion," as he described it, at 15. He was ordained an Anglican minister in 1825, when he finished his studies at the University of Oxford. Three years later, he was appointed vicar of St. Mary the Virgin Church, in Oxford. In 1833, he organized what became known as the Oxford Movement, intending to combat three evils threatening the Church of England – spiritual stagnation, interference from the state, and unorthodoxy. When studying the history of the early Christian Fathers in 1839, Newman discovered that the position of his own Church was like that of the early heretics. He decided to retire from Oxford life, and he and a few others took up quarters at nearby Littlemore. For three years he lived a strict religious life, praying for light and guidance. On October 9, 1845, Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church by Fr. Dominic Barberi, an Italian theologian and a member of the Passionist Congregation. (Fr. Barberi was beatified by Pope Paul VI in 1963.)

Through Newman’s exodus from the Anglican Church and in his becoming a Catholic, he had to make many sacrifices. Many of his friends broke off relations with him after his conversion, and his family kept him at a distance. He had to resign his teaching fellowship and lost his only source of income. Newman said that the one thing that sustained him during this trying period was Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Once a Catholic, Newman set out for Rome to study for the priesthood. In 1847 he was ordained priest and in 1848, founded the Oratory of St Philip Neri, a small community of priests at Maryvale, near Birmingham.

In 1851 the Bishops of Ireland decided to found a separate University for Catholics and invited Fr. Newman to become first Rector. It was a demanding task for an older man, but he succeeded in laying the foundations for what is today known as University College, Dublin. Through it all, Newman was an exemplary model of intellect, graciousness and hospitality to countless young men and women at the university.

When he returned to Birmingham, Newman faced a life of trials, as he was suspected and even resented by some in authority. Several projects which he undertook – a magazine for educated Catholics, a mission at Oxford, and a translation of the Bible, met with outright rejection or glaring failure. *"O how forlorn and dreary has been my course since I have been a Catholic!"* he wrote in his journal in 1863. *"Since I have been a Catholic, I seem to myself to have had nothing but failure, personally."*

In his old age, Newman continued in Birmingham, quietly writing, preaching and counseling. In his writings, Newman focused on theological and humanistic learning, including philosophy, patristics, dogmatic and moral theology, exegesis, pedagogy and history. But Newman's search was not without pain and suffering. Once he had come to that unshakeable sense of the mission entrusted to him by God, he declared: *"Therefore, I will trust Him... If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him... He does nothing in vain... He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me. Still, He knows what He is about."*

It was only late in his life that the Roman Catholic Church realized the treasure Newman was, and his beloved Oxford University recognized the full value of the man it had lost. As a tribute to his extraordinary work and devotion, Pope Leo XIII named Fr. John Henry Newman a cardinal in 1879. After a life of trials, Newman received the news with tears and great joy, declaring: *"The cloud is lifted forever."*

Cardinal Newman died at the age of 89 at the Oratory House in Edgbaston on August 11, 1890. At his death he received universal tributes of praise. The **Times of London** wrote: "whether Rome canonizes him or not, he will be canonized in the thoughts of pious people of many creeds in England." He was declared Venerable in 1991 by Pope John Paul II and proclaimed blessed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 in Birmingham during Benedict's memorable apostolic journey to England.

Newman was a churchman whose ecclesial vision was nurtured by his Anglican background and matured during his many years of ordained ministry in the Church of England. He teaches us the virtues that ecumenism demands: on the one hand, he was moved to follow his conscience, even at great personal cost. On the other hand, he modeled the warmth of his continued friendship with his former colleagues that led him to explore with them, in a truly peace-loving spirit, the questions on which they differed, driven by a deep longing for unity in faith.

Cardinal Newman's tombstone inscription, *"Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem"* (*Out of shadows and appearances into truth*) – speaks to his determined quest by faith and by reason for the Truth who is God. Newman lived in dialogue with that Truth who is not an object but a definitive Being. Newman, whose name is borne by universities and student groups worldwide, urges us to seek communion between our hearts and the very heart of God.

### ***Newman's theological method***

John Henry Newman is known for the important idea of the development of doctrine. In 1845, immediately prior to his reception in the Roman Catholic Church, Newman finished his Essay on the ***Development of Christian Doctrine***. What did he intend by this important concept? For 20 or so years, while a student and teacher at Oxford, Newman studied the changes in doctrines and practices of Christians throughout the centuries. For many years he accepted the Protestant notion that Catholic doctrines and practices were a corruption of primitive Christianity. However, Newman's study of Christianity and the actions of the Anglican Church

led him to closely and carefully examine his position. He began to understand that over time Christianity incorporates some doctrines and corresponding religious practices. He saw that these changes had a good explanation.

In Newman's mind, can Church teaching change? The answer is both "Yes" and "no." Church teaching undergoes development. This is not the same as teaching which "evolves." Evolution implies one thing – changing into something else: the Church's teaching does not evolve into something else. To ascribe false understanding of "evolution of Church doctrine" to Newman is incorrect. Newman explained that development can be good or bad. A bad development in doctrine is called a corruption in Christian teaching. An example of a good development was the actual exercise of authority that the successor of Peter grew to have. The contrary was in fact the corruption – namely disregard for the Petrine office willed by Christ himself. Newman believed that religion is a definite set of doctrinal truths and practices which do not change substantially; forms or external elements can change or develop, but only in keeping with their original reality. Through the ages, what is required is a more serious reflection on certain truths in light of the signs and the places, a better articulation of these truths and the quest for a deeper understanding.

For John Henry Newman, there was no rhyme nor reason to hand down to next generations dogmas and teachings that had become fossilized and no longer able to speak to people. Catholics believe that Christ transmitted to the Apostles and their immediate successors the doctrines that He wished them to hand down to the bishops who would succeed them. For any development in doctrine to be faithful to what God has revealed it must be faithful to Tradition and Scripture. Newman would probably see as true developments of Catholic doctrine various social teachings of the Church such as the notion of common good and subsidiarity, as well as the contemporary post-Conciliar teaching on the collegiality and synodality of bishops.

### ***Liberal or conservative?***

Was Newman a closeted liberal or a conservative? He was neither. He was simply Catholic, a man firmly rooted in the Church's Tradition and Scripture who looked to the authoritative Teaching of the Church to teach, guide and decide in doctrinal matters. Newman provided future Christians and theologians with tools to judge about the soundness of developments in doctrine. He shows us that any true development is always rooted in Tradition and faithful to Scripture as well as subject to the Church's teaching authority.

Any institutions, organizations, groups of people who claim Cardinal Newman as their patron, guide or mentor, but fail to understand and reflect John Henry Newman's personal exodus journey and complex theological method, do not do justice to this great, intelligent, holy man of the Church. Many today use Newman's name and mission incorrectly. As a young man, Newman stressed the importance of the laity at a moment in England's history when lay views were hardly recognized. As a deeply faithful young believer, Newman stressed the idea of the *consensus* of the faithful and the *consent* of the faithful to be paramount in determining correct doctrine.

Newman believed firmly in dialogue: he held firm that controversies should be settled by open discussion and dialogue and not by the silencing of disagreeable voices. And it was Newman who famously upheld the supremacy of conscience in a very heated discussion with an English nobleman who accused him as a Catholic of abject deference to the papacy. Newman responded, "*I shall drink to conscience first ... and to the pope afterwards.*"

Newman's groundbreaking positions drew harsh criticism from conservative critics. At one time he was labeled "the most dangerous man in England," and he lived many years under a cloud, barely escaping silencing or total exile from the Vatican. But as often happens in the church, some 70 years after his death, many of Newman's insights became Catholic teaching at Vatican II. Blessed Paul VI called that blessed, historic event "Newman's council"

John Henry Newman was a complex, controversial man, universally considered a liberal in his day, almost always in tension with Rome, almost always in opposition to her orthodox authorities. Many of these aspects have been frequently downplayed or glossed over by his biographers and devotees. Let us never forget that Newman openly criticized papal infallibility. When it was declared as a dogma in 1870, he wrote "I never expected to see such a scandal in the Church," and affirmed that it was orchestrated by those who "wished the Church's downfall." He reluctantly accepted the dogma but predicted that the day would come "when the whole Church will be heard" and Catholic instincts and ideas would "assimilate into the living tradition of the faithful." A century later, that day came at Vatican II.

As I sat in the Vatican Synod Hall and witnessed two Synods of Bishops on the Family in 2014 and 2015, I often wondered what Cardinal Newman would have done, had he been a Synod Father or *peritus* at those two historic, ecclesial assemblies. His intelligence, understanding of Church history, conviction and fidelity to the truth would have helped him to detect the movement of the Spirit in the Synod of Bishops, truly leading us from *shadows and appearances* into truth and reality of our times. Something tells me that John Henry Newman would have quietly delighted in what was happening before his very eyes. I also wonder at times if Cardinal Newman would be invited to speak in certain Catholic institutions of higher learning today that consider themselves authentic, faithful schools, even bearing Newman's name for some of their departments, activities or lecture series!

Newman's carefully chosen language offered so-called liberal Catholics a springboard to move forward, while the so-called conservatives would toil and labor in demonstrating how Newman's thinking could be interpreted in light of Tradition. Does this not sound familiar to us today, as we see many "so-called traditional" Catholics selectively choosing among the teachings of Popes Benedict or John Paul II to justify certain positions over and against Pope Francis, while many "so-called liberal" Catholics doing the same against Francis' predecessors?

Newman never wanted theology to be abstract or impersonal. Theology is one interpretation of dogma; living religion is another interpretation. We cannot accept and embrace Cardinal Newman only for sentimental, pietistic or other reasons, without recognizing his great understanding of history and theology at the service of the Church and the Truth. John Henry Newman was clearly a herald of the Second Vatican Council, and of the collegiality and

synodality that followed the Council, and finds a home in the mind, heart and Petrine Ministry of Francis, the current Bishop of Rome.

### ***Convergence points between John Henry Newman and Francis***

Let us consider Pope Francis' exodus journey that was mentioned from the very first 2013:

*"You know that it was the duty of the Conclave to give Rome a Bishop. It seems that my brother Cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth to get one... but here we are... I thank you for your welcome."*

*"...And now, we take up this **journey**: Bishop and People. This **journey** of the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches. A **journey** of fraternity, of love, of trust among us. Let us always pray for one another. Let us pray for the whole world, that there may be a great spirit of fraternity. It is my hope for you that this **journey** of the Church, which we start today, and in which my Cardinal Vicar, here present, will assist me, will be fruitful for the evangelization of this most beautiful city."*

In considering Pope Francis, we must take into consideration the multiple exoduses of his own life: as a young man discerning a vocation to the Society of Jesus, the multiple exoduses he experienced within the Society of Jesus in his homeland of Argentina that included light and shadows; his exodus to episcopal ministry in Buenos Aires and his passage from the See of Argentina's capital to the See of Rome. I quote once again from Pope Francis' message for the 52<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations last year – on April 26, 2015:

*"...Responding to God's call, then, means allowing him to help us leave ourselves and our false security behind, and to strike out on the path which leads to Jesus Christ, the origin and destiny of our life and our happiness."*

*"This exodus process does not regard individuals alone, but the missionary and evangelizing activity of the whole Church. The Church is faithful to her Master to the extent that she is a Church which "goes forth", a Church which is less concerned about herself, her structures and successes, and more about her ability to go out and meet God's children wherever they are, to feel compassion (com-passio) for their hurt and pain. God goes forth from himself in a Trinitarian dynamic of love: he hears the cry of his people and he intervenes to set them free (Ex 3:7). The Church is called to follow this way of being and acting. She is meant to be a Church which evangelizes, goes out to encounter humanity, proclaims the liberating word of the Gospel, heals people's spiritual and physical wounds with the grace of God, and offers relief to the poor and the suffering."*

It is this ***ecclesial exodus*** that lies at the heart of the ministry and mission of the Argentine Jesuit pastor who now leads our Church. His messages are filled with paradoxes because life is a paradox and Christian life is a great paradox. The world is listening to him because Francis models a solid consistency, the one between his words and deeds, and that between its current papal mission and life forever. Is Francis a closeted liberal or a conservative? He is neither. He is just Catholic. He is a man firmly rooted in the Church's Tradition and

Scripture who looks to the authoritative Teaching of the Church to teach, guide and decide in doctrinal matters. Through his exercise of the Petrine ministry, he is teaching us that any authentic development of doctrine is always rooted in Tradition and faithful to Scripture as well as subject to the Church's teaching authority. Like Cardinal John Henry Newman, Francis believes that religion is a definite set of doctrinal truths and practices which do not change substantially; forms or external elements can change or develop, but only in keeping with their original reality.

The inability of commentators to pigeonhole Francis into a single category is frustrating to some people, especially to some Church leaders. Francis does not compromise on the hot-button issues that divide the Church from the secular West – a gap that liberals would like to close by modernizing doctrine. Yet he is also not a pope for the Catholic Right. For him contrasting positions, held together in tension, loyal to fundamentals but open to the action of the Holy Spirit, are necessary to forge a new, better consensus and the differences make for an honest, open discussion.

During Pope Francis' historic visit to the United States last September, 2015, Francis addressed the American bishops with these stirring words at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington, DC on September 23, 2015:

*“...It is not about preaching complicated doctrines, but joyfully proclaiming Christ who died and rose for our sake. The “style” of our mission should make our hearers feel that the message we preach is meant “for us”. May the word of God grant meaning and fullness to every aspect of their lives; may the sacraments nourish them with that food which they cannot procure for themselves; may the closeness of the shepherd make them long once again for the Father's embrace”*

*“...The path ahead, then, is dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly. The richer the heritage which you are called to share with parrhesia, the more eloquent should be the humility with which you should offer it. Do not be afraid to set out on that “exodus” which is necessary for all authentic dialogue. Otherwise, we fail to understand the thinking of others, or to realize deep down that the brother or sister we wish to reach and redeem, with the power and the closeness of love, counts more than their positions, distant as they may be from what we hold as true and certain. Harsh and divisive language does not befit the tongue of a pastor, it has no place in his heart; although it may momentarily seem to win the day, only the enduring allure of goodness and love remains truly convincing.”*

Pope Francis has stressed that quintessential quality of Ignatius of Loyola and a distinguishing characteristic of Blessed John Henry Newman: discernment. Discernment is a constant effort to be open to the Word of God that can illuminate the concrete reality of everyday life. One of the concepts that re-emerged at last year's (2015) Synod of Bishops is the proper formation of conscience. A very important paragraph of the Synod's Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* speaks to the Church's great respect for the consciences of the faithful as well as the necessity of formation of consciences:

*“We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life. We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. **We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.**” (AL #37)*

The Church does not exist to take over people's conscience but to stand in humility before faithful men and who have discerned prayerfully and often painfully before God the reality of their lives and situations. Discernment and the formation of conscience can never be separated from the Gospel demands of truth and the search for charity and truth, and the tradition of the Church.

*Amoris Laetitia* says, "General rules set forth a good, which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation, they cannot provide absolutely for every particular situation. At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment, in particular circumstances, cannot be elevated to the level of a rule."

Some people are alarmed that Francis' suggestions mean that even the best rules have exceptions, while others are very disappointed with his refusal to turn the exception into the basis for new rules. But rigor or laxity of the rules themselves was never, and is never the purpose of the Pope to convene these Synods. The Synods of Pope Francis did not go about inventing a new Church, but making the existing one more effective in her pastoral care. Too often some may see a false opposition between doctrine (the past) and mercy (the future), or doctrine and reality. We may well speak of a renewed focus on mercy, of new ways of exercising pastoral care, but not without starting from the foundation that is there. Mercy is not complete without doctrine.

## **Conclusion**

In the heart and mind of Pope Francis, we need “a church that is again capable of restoring citizenship to so many of its children that walk as if in exodus. Christian citizenship is above all the result of God’s mercy. If the church is truly a mother, it needs to respond to its children from its “guts of mercy” (Lk 1:78): not only from its heart, but precisely from its “guts.” The two Synods on the Family have been *kairos* moments when misery and mercy met, and in fidelity to the Lord of the Church, and faithful to the rich teaching of the Church, mercy has triumphed.

I leave you with this final image from the first Jesuit Pope – the powerful image of the “field hospital” which he uses often and is drawn from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. When Jorge Mario Bergoglio speaks of the church as a “field hospital after a battle” he appeals to the Jesuit founder’s understanding of the role of the church in light of God’s gaze



upon the world: “so many people ask us to be close; they ask us for what they were asking of Jesus: closeness, nearness.” It is the opposite image of a fortress under siege. The image of a church as a field hospital is not just a simple, pretty poetic metaphor; from this very image we can derive an understanding of both the church’s mission and the sacraments of salvation. The Church is the *kindly light* of Newman, leading us amidst the encircling gloom of our times. It is precisely this beautiful, consoling image of the Church that Pope Francis left with his brother bishops and with us, as he addressed the Bishops of the United States one year ago in Washington:

*“...Consequently, only a Church which can gather around the family fire remains able to attract others. And not any fire, but the one which blazed forth on Easter morn. The risen Lord continues to challenge the Church’s pastors through the quiet plea of so many of our brothers and sisters: “Have you something to eat?” We need to recognize the Lord’s voice, as the apostles did on the shore of the lake of Tiberius (Jn 21:4-12). It becomes even more urgent to grow in the certainty that the embers of his presence, kindled in the fire of his passion, precede us and will never die out. Whenever this certainty weakens, we end up being caretakers of ash, and not guardians and dispensers of the true light and the warmth which causes our hearts to burn within us (Lk 24:32).”*

It is that heartburn, and only that kind of heartburn, which I wish for each of you this night.

Thank you.