

Maritain, Romano Guardini, and William Lynch. Discussion concluded with comments about appraising O'Connor's fiction vis-à-vis David Tracy's understanding of "Catholic" in *The Analogical Imagination*.

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### NEWMAN'S CONVERSION: 1845-1995

On October 9, 1845 John Henry Newman (1801-1890) converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism. At the end of September, two of Newman's closest friends and members of his Littlemore community, John D. Dalgairns and Ambrose St. John, had converted to Catholicism. Dalgairns invited his friend the Italian Passionist Father Dominic Barberi, who had received him into the Church, to spend the night at Littlemore on his way to Belgium. On October 8 Newman began his confession to Father Dominic, and after completing it the next day, he was received into the Church with two others from Littlemore, Frederick Bowles and Richard Stanton, and a local family, the Woodmasons. At the end of October, Newman went to Oscott College near Birmingham to be confirmed. He also met with Nicholas Wiseman, then Coadjutor to the Vicar Apostolic, who agreed not to censor Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine*. He had written the book during the months leading to his conversion and he was a Catholic before the printing was complete.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of Newman's conversion in 1845 four papers were presented at the convention. The first paper was delivered by Edward Jeremy Miller from Gwynedd-Mercy College, titled, "Newman's Conversion: Lessons for Ecclesiology." In this paper the author discussed the importance of Newman's conversion for clarifying the relevance of the language we use and the conclusions we draw when we encounter similar experiences today. It is more helpful to examine what attracted Newman to Rome rather than concentrating on the blows that he described as preceding his conversion—the melting away of his argument in the *Via Media*, the Anglican Bishops' rejection of his *Tract 90*, and the Jerusalem bishopric affair. Newman became convinced that he was duty-bound in conscience to join the Catholic Church as God's prophetic voice and sacramental holiness in the world. Three ecclesiology features can be drawn out of his conversion. First, we can understand Church membership as an impelled choice that involves assent, acting on conscience to

make an act of faith. Second, the revelation of God as gift involves an ongoing life that requires being taught. Third, the many features that attract converts should be kept in balance, viewed in healthy tension and as historically situated.

The historical circumstance and situation of Newman's conversion was examined in detail in the second paper, delivered by John T. Ford from The Catholic University of America, titled, "Newman's Conversion of 1845: Discovery, Discernment, Decision." From an historical perspective Newman's decision was the final step of a process that might easily have turned out differently than it did. As a process, his conversion can be described as having three different components: discovery, discernment, and decision. This threefold process involves personal investigation of the evidence and a careful discernment of it before a decision is reached. But this process was not unilinear in Newman's case. He encountered a series of what he referred to as a "hit" that caused him to rethink his views in a radical way. Some hits were accidental: recognizing the Monophysite controversy in himself; the Jerusalem bishopric affair; Nicholas Wiseman's article on Apostolic Succession. Other hits were self-constructed: Froude's *Remains* and *Tract 90*. But others like Keble and Pusey did not see what Newman saw in the pattern of these hits—like seeing or not seeing the three-dimensional figure in a modern-day holograph. With this discovery and discernment his decision to convert was nonetheless difficult because he was sensitive to the possibility of uncovering contradictory evidence. Perhaps the real surprise is that Newman eventually did convert to Rome, since he surely could have found more issues to examine before deciding.

The justification of Newman's decision was developed further in the third paper by John R. Connolly from Loyola Marymount University, entitled "Reflections on the Theological Justifications of Newman's Conversion." Newman's conversion was rooted in his ecclesiology, for example by emphasizing the role of antiquity in doctrine. The development of his ecclesiology and his theology was influenced significantly not only by his experience of doubt but also by the three blows that he says broke him: when his fear of self-recognition in the Monophysite controversy returned; the condemnation of his *Tract 90*; and the Jerusalem bishopric. His theological development took its most serious turn in his preparation of the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* whereby he resolved his final obstacle to Rome. Understanding his conversion as a process of development has theological significance for understanding religious conversion and the process of theology today. In his process of development there was both continuity and discontinuity. But the process was always reasonable. Although his conversion process was very personal, it was not subjective or relative but determined by objective reality and truth. He also understood his conversion as a matter of salvation guided by the Holy Spirit. Based on Newman's experience, we can see that religious conversion is an evolving, developmental process that must respect the element of mystery. Also, his conversion process has significance for systematic theology insofar as his

theory of development provides a hermeneutic for reformulating the Christian message in new historical situations, combining respect for tradition with openness to change and development.

This openness to change and development that characterized Newman's conversion has implications for ethics today as discussed in the final paper by Gerard Magill from Saint Louis University, titled, "The Ethical Implications of Newman's Conversion." These ethical implications emerge by distinguishing the external and internal concerns that Newman faced as he considered converting to Catholicism. The external concerns are well known, for example the rejection of his *Tract 90* and his opposition to the Jerusalem bishopric. But his internal concerns were far more important: his quest for religious certitude to overcome his emerging doubt, and his growing awareness that his salvation was at stake. In a sense, his battle against liberalism was a metaphor for the combination of his concern with certitude (against the scepticism of liberalism) and his concern with salvation (against the infidelity of liberalism). The ethical implications of his conversion reflect these two concerns. Just as Newman struggled with religious doubt, many today struggle with fundamental doubt about the meaning of irrevocable commitment in marriage or religious life. The process of resolving doubt in Newman's theory of certitude, lived in 1845 and explained in 1870 in his *Grammar of Assent*, can help people today as they struggle with certitude in life commitments. Also Newman's growing awareness of the relation between resolving his doubt in conversion and his personal salvation should remind us today to perceive the reversal of life commitments as soul deep—soul deep in the salvific and not merely the rhetorical sense.

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