HERE COULD NOT BE A BETTER TIME TO EXAMINE CARDINAL NEWMAN’S LIFE and thought as it pertains to the priesthood and the laity. We are celebrating this 150th anniversary of his conversion to the Catholic Church at a time when many hundreds, even thousands, of his former co-religionists—both priests and lay people—are following his example. Indeed, both in England and in the U.S. we have the example of, respectively, Graham Leonard of London and Clarence Pope of Fort Worth, two Anglican Bishops who have been received into full communion with the universal Church. Even the Duchess of Kent, a member of the royal family of England, was recently received into full communion with the Church and has had an audience with the Holy Father.

These conversions are in many ways harbingers of the quest towards unity that is so clearly the work of the Holy Spirit as we cross John Paul II’s “threshold of hope,” and enter the third millennium. The Holy Father has repeatedly, both publicly and privately, voiced his hope for the reunion of Rome with the Eastern churches so that the Church might “breathe with both lungs.” Indeed, this is perhaps the greatest temporal goal of his pontificate. We only have to look at one of his more recent encyclicals, *Ut Omnes Unum Sint*, to see how deep are his yearnings. I believe it safe to say that if this hoped-for reunion takes place, we can expect a large number of those Christians of good will who adhere to Protestant denominations to follow suit, either corporately or individually.

If and when these reunions take place, we will find Cardinal Newman’s thought and life constantly invoked, perhaps not only intellectually, but also as regards the powerful example of a life of heroic virtue. John Henry Newman was decreed Venerable by the Vatican in 1991, incidentally just a few months after Blessed Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei. A very interesting investigation would be a comparison of the life and work, contrasts and similarities, of these two great men of the Church of the last two centuries whose thought played such an important role in the development of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Fr. George Ruder, a Newman expert of renown and convert from Anglicanism, once named Newman as the invisible *peritus* of the Council and Escriva as the anonymous one! Included in this investigation might be the person and thought of Karol Wojtyla who, as John Paul II, has shown so much appreciation both for Blessed Josemaria and the Venerable John Henry and who, as a young bishop, actually participated in the Council. The fact that Newman was cited four times in the new Catechism and once in *Veritatis Splendor* tends to highlight the current high regard in which he is held not only by the Holy Father but by the whole Church.
The importance of Newman’s thought and life for today’s world is also underlined when we see how clearly Newman, in his prophetic role, foresaw what he considered to be the inevitable clash between the Church and liberalism. All of the other varieties of both Christianity and agnostic thought he saw merely as sideshows to the showdown between the forces of God and the fallen world, between Catholicism and atheism.

As we approach the end of the millennium and witness this tendency towards Christian unity in the universal Church, and at the same time witness the collapse of Marxism along with ideologies such as Darwinism and Freudianism, who could doubt that we are involved in an epochal struggle? We only have to look at the heroic stand of the Church at the Cairo Conference on Development and Population and the Beijing Conference on Woman, virtually alone against the forces arraigned on the side of the “culture of death,” to see that we have arrived at the moment that Cardinal Newman so clearly foresaw.

At the heart of Newman’s religious conception of both the laity and the priesthood is holiness, that is to say, union with Christ through an exact following of the specific vocation to which each person is called. Much has been written about Newman and the laity, indeed whole volumes. Unfortunately, in my opinion, almost all of it deals exclusively with the controversy in Newman’s early Catholic life provoked by his article in the Rambler, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.” The reason that I say “unfortunately” is that the authors often seem to be championing interference of the laity in the Ecclesia Docens, which is not at all what Newman had in mind. This is understandable, although still regrettable, when one realizes that most of these volumes were written in the context of the theological ferment surrounding the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Newman’s views on the priesthood have not been examined mainly because they are not extraordinary, although some of his insights more lived than necessarily committed to paper—have had their impact in this century.

We begin with an examination of Newman’s views on the laity. There is no author who expresses his own views more clearly than Newman but he nonetheless, almost from the very beginning of his public life, has been subject to erroneous interpretation. Indeed, his best known work, the Apologia pro Vita Sua, was written, in part, to answer a false interpretation of some phrases from one of his sermons. In order to understand his views, it is necessary to consider the personality and character of Newman himself. Now is not the time to give a complete biographical sketch, as these are readily available, in Spanish as well as English.4

That Newman was profoundly religious by temperament is quite clear from his autobiography, in which he speaks of his religious sense from a very early age. Unlike a goodly number of his contemporaries of the Oxford Movement he did not come from a long line of clergy men. During his university years he felt a call to the clerical life and even to celibacy, not common at that time. Yet, in many other ways he was a man of the world. He drank deeply of the study of the classics and history during his undergraduate years, formed many deep friendships, and had a keen interest in the world of music, literature, and politics, as is evidenced by his letters and diaries. Indeed, he even chose the wine for his college. He played the violin, a hobby to which he returned in later life. He exercised vigorously by frightenningly long walks and enjoyed the fresh air of the sea while sailing with his close friend, Hurrell Froude. He was a poet, a novelist and a Latinist of the highest order. (The curia officials of the Vatican were astonished at the level of his classical Latin in their correspondence with him. He was able to express in a paragraph what took them a page!) He was also, arguably, the greatest master of English prose style of the nineteenth century.5 This emphasizes that while Newman was eminently religious,
he was not monastic. He had a keen appreciation for the world in all its positive aspects and enjoyed the company and friendship of many laymen, as is evidenced particularly by his letters and diaries.

His choice of the Oratory as the best setting for him and his followers to live their priesthood was predicated in part on the idea that the life of the Oratory was most suited for men from university backgrounds who chose to live their dedication more clearly in the world. Any follower of St. Philip Neri would clearly have a deep appreciation for the secular. In short, Newman was in the world, but not of it. As such, his views on the role of the laity were not simply theoretical but based on lived experience and observation.

For Newman, the enemy was not only the world, the flesh, and the devil in its classical formulation. Certainly he waged a life-long struggle against liberalism in its religious sense which he defined simply as religious indifferentism. Indeed he tells us at the end of his life upon receiving the Cardinal’s hat:

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 over spreading, as a snare, the whole earth. Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another ... it is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion as true.... [Liberalism holds that] 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.

It is good to keep the above passage in mind, as Newman’s call for a devout, well-educated Catholic laity was not set in a vacuum. He saw prophetically the absolute necessity of holy laypersons in the world not only as a good in itself but also in order not to let the world fall completely under the sway of liberalism. How at home he would feel waging the battles of the late twentieth century. After all, he had clearly foreseen them all.

In his conception of the role of the laity not only in the Church but in the world, I believe we can say that Newman was also truly an enemy of what we can call clericalism. Russell Shaw defines it this way:

Clericalism assumes that clerics not only are but are also meant to be the active, dominant elite in the Church, and laymen the passive, subservient mass. As a result, the laity are discouraged from taking seriously their responsibility for the Church’s mission, and evangelization is neglected. So are efforts to influence the structures of secular society on behalf of the values of the gospel—the evangelization of culture as it is called.... Clericalism deepens the confusion about lay and clerical identity ... perhaps as the most serious of all, clericalism tends to discourage laymen from cultivating a spirituality that arises above a rather low level of fervor and intensity. As the clerical mentality sees it, the serious pursuit of sanctity is the business of priests and religious. Minimalistic religious practice and legalistic morality are all that are asked of laymen and all many ask of themselves...

Although the Victorian Newman certainly would not have articulated the problem of clericalism in the same way as Shaw, he would have agreed with his analysis. In a much-recounted incident following the failure of his attempt to found an Oratory in Oxford to act as a Catholic chaplaincy for the students, Newman was attacked by members of the ultramontanist party both in Rome and in England. He was supported by a open letter by two hundred leading British Catholics, including all the Catholic members of parliament, nearly all the Catholic peers, and other prominent persons. This famed cleric was backed in this instance by a totally lay group of persons reflecting their appreciation for his teaching. It was this incident that provoked the attacks of Monsignor George Talbot, an English curial official in Rome and enemy of Newman, who said in an hysterical outburst that “if a check be not placed on the laity of England they will be the rulers of the Catholic Church in England instead of the Holy See and the Episcopate.... Laymen are beginning to show the cloven hoof.” Talbot then delivered his most famous line which has been so oft repeated, “What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain? These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters they have no right at
all... Dr. Newman is the most dangerous man in England, and you will see that he will make use of the laity against your Grace.” Of course, Newman did not see the laity interfering in “ecclesiastical” matters, but certainly his conception of the role of the laity in the Church as well as in the world was on another level from that of Msgr. Talbot (who finished his days sadly in an insane asylum). At an earlier time, as a result of a controversy at The Rambler, a Catholic lay journal, Newman confronted his ordinary, Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham. According to Newman, “[the Bishop] said something like ‘Who are the laity?’” [Newman] answered (not these words) that the Church would look foolish without them.”

Newman had a deep knowledge of and love for the early Church Fathers. He had read through them all, in their original Greek and Latin, at least twice before he reached thirty. He could well be figured as the precursor of the rassourcement, the going back to the Church Fathers as sources for theological investigation, which has been such a notable characteristic of some of the giants of twentieth century thought such as de Lubac, von Bal- thasar, and Congar. In addition, Newman wrote historical sketches on some of the leading Fathers. He also had a deep devotion for everyday early Christians, both for the martyrs and confessors whom he so highly revered, as well as the untold millions who lived out their everyday lives bearing witness to Christ through their family and professional life. These are the men and women who were responsible, with the help of God’s grace, for the gradual but sure spread of the Church throughout the Roman empire during the course of the first three centuries up until the edict of Milan. This primitive Christianity is a model for modern Christian life.

It [the Church] has been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men as... are at once teachers and patterns of it.... But after all, say they are few, such Christians; and what follows? They are enough to carry on God’s noiseless work. These communicate their light to a number of lesser luminaries, by whom, in its turn, it is distributed.... A few endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come.

Newman’s view is very much like the one the Pope expressed in Christifideles Laici: “The eyes of faith behold a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people, both men and women, busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, un known to the world’s great personages but nonetheless looked upon in love by the Father, untiring laborers who work in the Lord’s vineyard. Confident and steadfast through the power of God’s grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the kingdom of God in history.”

As for Newman’s view of the laity’s participation in doctrinal fidelity and development, we can consult The Arians of the Fourth Century, written when he was a young Anglican cleric and tutor at Oxford. It is a masterful and entertaining history of the Arian heresy and the controversy leading up to and beyond the Council of Nicea. Newman’s basic thesis is simple: The mass of Catholics were faithful to the authentic Trinitarian doctrine when, at least at a certain moment of the controversy, the majority of Bishops were not.

The Catholic people, in the length and breadth of Christendom, were the obstinate champions of Christian truth and the bishops were not.... And again, in speaking of the laity, I speak inclusively of their parish priests (so to call them), at least in many places; but, on the whole, taking a wide view of history, we are obliged to say that the governing body came short and the governed were preeminent in faith, zeal, courage, and constancy. This is a remarkable fact, but there is a moral in it.... Perhaps it was permitted to impress upon the church .... the great evangelical lesson that, not the wise and powerful, but the obscure, the unlearned and the weak constitute her real strength. It was mainly by the faithful people that paganism was overthrown; it was by the faithful people, under the lead of Athanasius and the Egyptian bishops, and in some places supported by their bishops and priests, that the worst of heresies was withstood.

Newman in no way is impairing the teaching authority of the hierarchy—the Pope and the bishops in communion with him—but rather emphasizing the responsibility of the faithful to hold fast and hand on the faith entrusted to them. He finds the behavior of the Catholic laity during the apogee of the Arian heresy a wonderful example of faithfulness to authentic doctrine when there appeared, at least, to be a temporary suspension of its propagation by certain elements of the hierarchy.

In that earliest age, it was simply the living spirit of the myriads of the faithful, none of them known to fame, who received from the disciples...
of the Lord, and husbanded so well, and circulated so widely, and transmitted so faithfully, generation after generation, the once delivered apostolic faith; who held it with such sharpness of outline and explicitness of detail, as enabled even the unlearned instinctively to discriminate between truth and error, spontaneously to reject the very shadow of heresy, and to be proof against the fascination of the most brilliant intellects, when they would lead them out of the narrow way.16

Cardinal Newman, of course, being a man of the nineteenth century and not the fourth (no matter how much he was able to enter into that world in spirit), was above all concerned with the role of the Catholic laity in a world that he saw increasingly falling into infidelity. As an Anglican minister and Oxford tutor he directed his personal counsel and pastoral preaching to effect a change, both spiritual and intellectual, in the people who heard him. Almost all of his writings, both Anglican and Catholic, are directed towards lay people, mostly to the educated classes. Although he does enter into theological discussion and disputation with some of the leading theologians of his day, both Anglican and Catholic, in Oxford and Rome, and on some occasions with the French, nonetheless it is normally the educated laity that he addresses. As he puts it in a justifiably famous passage that so clearly presages the Conciliar teaching on the laity:

What I desiderate in Catholics is the gift of bringing out what their religion is; it is one of the “better gifts” of which the Apostle bids you be “jealous.” You must not hide your talent in a napkin, or your light under a bushel. I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity [my emphasis]; I am not denying you are such already; but I mean to be severe and, as some would say, exorbitant in my demands, I wish to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason, to get an insight into the relation of truth to truth, to learn to view things as they are, to understand how faith and reason stand to each other, what are the bases and principles of Catholicism, and where lie the main absurdities of the Protestant theory. I have no apprehension you will be the worse Catholics for familiarity with these subjects, provided you cherish a vivid sense of God above, and keep in mind that you have souls to be judged and to be saved. In all times the laity have been the measure of the Catholic spirit.17

The passage is so clearly in line with the most up to date teachings of the Church that it sounds familiar to us now. But how strange this teaching would sound to the ears of Catholic of the age of Victoria, the great majority of whom were illiterate. Irish immigrants with a only small minority of descendants of the “recusants,” those few who remained faithful to the Church through the long centuries of persecution. The Church had just recently regained its hierarchical status in England amidst great controversy and the number of “educated” Catholic laymen either in the theological or secular sense, was sparse.

The Cardinal’s ideal of the educated layman was a person who was unreservedly loyal to the Magisterium of the Church.

It must be borne in mind that, as the essence of all religion is authority and obedience, so the distinction between natural religion and revealed lies in this, that the one has a subjective authority and the other an objective. Revelation consists in the manifestation of the invisible divine power, or in the substitution of the voice of a Lawgiver for the voice of conscience. The supremacy of conscience is the essence of natural religion; the supremacy of Apostle, or Pope, or Bishop, is the essence of the revealed.... Thus, what conscience is in the system of nature, such is the voice of Scripture, or of the Church, or of the Holy See, as we may determine it, in the system of Revelation.18

John Henry Newman, with all his love for freedom of conscience, would not have recognized the theological notion of “dissent.” He insisted, above all, that the educated laymen “keep in mind that you have souls to be judged and to be saved.” Only in this way could a true “unity of life” be found which would insure proper rectitude of intention vis-a-vis the impact that the Catholic
layman could make his own greater surroundings. Personal holiness is always at the heart of the Newmanian project: the glory of God and salvation of souls. “Devotion is not a sort of finish given to the sciences, nor is science a sort of feather in the cap, if I may so express myself, an ornament and set-off to devotion. I want the intellectual layman to be religious and the devout ecclesiastic to be intellectual.”

For Newman, the road to holiness was above all a work of grace. At the same time he was no quietist. He encouraged laypersons both through his preaching and spiritual direction to pursue holiness through the ordinary: their family and professional circumstances united to a life of devotion. Although it cannot be said that he had a well-developed theology of work, he certainly did not see it as an obstacle to sanctity or unduly encourage laymen to flee the world.

It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well. A short road to perfection—short, not because easy, but because pertinent and intelligible. There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones.

We must bear in mind what is meant by perfection. It does not mean any extraordinary service, anything out of the way, or especially heroic—not all have the opportunity of heroic acts, of sufferings—but it means what the word perfection ordinarily means. By perfect we mean that which has no flaw in it, that which is complete, that which is consistent, that which is sound—we mean the opposite to imperfect. As we know well what imperfection in religious service means, we know by contrast what is meant by perfection. He, then, is perfect who does the work of the day perfectly, and we need not go beyond this to seek for perfection. You need not go out of the round of the day. I insist on this because I think it will simplify our views, and fix our exertions on a definite aim. If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say, first—Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God's glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect.

Newman simply draws on traditional ascetical theology for the advice that he gives to those who would be perfect, by no means proposing a “new way.” What appears to be missing in his advice would be the counsel of attending Holy Mass and communicating daily. However, when we put his advice in historical context we realize the paucity of both Catholic priests and churches in mid-century England and that daily communion was an infrequent and even frowned-upon custom.

As a keen student of the writers of antiquity, Newman had a great appreciation for the nobility of human virtues as evidenced in the literature and history of ancient Rome and Greece. At the same time the saints that he most admired—St. Paul, the ancient Fathers, St. Francis de Sales, and his spiritual father St. Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratory, among others—could all be described as humanly attractive on account of their many virtues. So both in a secular and religious sense Newman was educated and formed to appreciate the goodness of an integral human nature that grace would be called upon to perfect. He realized that all human virtue was the result of many years not only formation but also personal struggle on the part of the individual in order to gain those good habits which could, make sanctity an attractive way. His famous definition of a gentleman best describes what he would desire as the human qualities of the modern apostle although he would, and indeed was, the first to point out that without faith and grace, all the human virtues in the world are for naught towards salvation.

It is almost the definition of a gentleman that he never inflicts pain.... The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast—all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make everyone at ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favors while he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends
Newman's ideal of the gentleman is in a sense a look at the ordinary and perhaps most effective means by which the layman shares his love of God with others, by the apostolate of personal influence, or friendship. Newman himself had an extraordinary gift, we could say charism, for friendship which often translated itself into leadership. He had an even temperament that was pleasant and winning, but that was prone to occasional moodiness or what some might call over-sensitivity. That no one would normally describe him as extroverted or light-hearted makes his influence all the more mysterious. Yet one has only to peruse the many volumes of his letters and diaries or to look at the index of names in his autobiographical works to see that he shared deep friendships with hundreds of people throughout his life. Indeed, this personal influence was exerted powerfully to the millions of persons who have read his works and have been hypnotized by his holy spell. Rare is the English or American intellectual convert to Catholicism during the last 150 years who has not given a large share of the credit to Newman's influence. He truly speaks heart to heart, "cor ad cor loquitur," a phrase that he chose as his personal motto. In short we are dealing with a powerful personality, a religious genius whose virtues have already been recognized by the Church. As Bishop Ullathorne, his Catholic ordinary, would say, "There is a Saint in that man."25

This ideal, in fact, forms the basis of Newman's conception of the integrated personalities of the saints, which were a determining factor in their attractiveness and heightened their personal influence on others.

There are those, and of the highest order of sanctity too, as far as our eyes can see, in whom the supernatural combines with nature, instead of superseding it, invigorating it, elevating it, ennobling it; and who are not the less men because they are saints. They do not put away their natural endowments, but use them to the glory of the Giver; they do not act beside them but through them; they do not eclipse them by the brightness of divine grace, but only transfigure them. They are versed in human knowledge; they are busy in human society; they understand the human heart; they can throw themselves into the minds of other men, and all this in consequence of natural gifts and secular education. While they themselves stand secure in the blessedness of purity and peace, they can follow in imagination the ten thousand aberrations of pride, passion, and remorse. The world to them is a book, to which they are drawn for its own sake, which they read fluently, which interests them naturally, though by reason of the grace which dwells within them, they study it, and hold converse with it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Thus they have the thoughts, feelings, frames of mind, attraction, sympathies, antipathies of other men, so far as they are not sinful, only they have these properties of human nature purified, sanctified, and exalted; and they are only made more eloquent, more poetical, more profound, more intellectual, by reason of their being more holy.26
Newman clearly exercised in his life what he recommended to others. He had a gift for friendship that began with those about him at school and extended through correspondence to at least many hundreds of others. It is also remarkable to see how many of his friendships lasted through the decades and were only cut short by death. His loyalty to his friends extended beyond the grave in that he kept a meticulous list of deceased friends and remembered them frequently in his daily celebration of Mass, particularly on their anniversaries.

We are to begin with loving our friends about us, and gradually to enlarge the circle of our affections, till it reaches all Christians, and then all men.... We see then how absurd it is, when writers ... talk magnificently about loving the whole human race with a comprehensive affection, of being friends of all mankind ... this is not to love men, it is but to talk of love. The real love of man must depend on practice.27

By no means would Newman have looked down upon the various modalities of apostolic work as exercised through the many religious congregations and initiatives of the laity. Yet he would have insisted that at the root of it all must always be personal holiness exemplified in what Karol Wojtyla referred to as “The Acting Person.” Newman would have felt at home today in using the philosophical and theological language of phenomenology rooted in the perennial system of Thomism that is so evident in the magisterial teaching of John Paul II. He would have understood very well the centrality of the need to make a “sincere gift of self”28 in order to effect the new evangelization so repeatedly called for by the Pope during the course of his pontificate. This task will principally be taken on by the Catholic layperson, the whole man: well-formed and totally faithful to the teaching authority of the Church, devout, hard-working, firmly centered in the family, cultured according to his circumstances and educated in virtue, with a great desire to share his faith with others principally through friendship.

There is relatively little written on Newman and the priesthood.29 It is well to note that much if not virtually all that Newman proposed for the Catholic layman can be applied, mutatis mutandis, to the Catholic priest. His views on the priesthood are not overly remarkable; however, the beauty of his way of expressing them is. His life as a priest was exemplary, in every aspect, although there continues to be some controversy over his foundation and governance of the English Oratory.30

As a Catholic priest he was noted for his love for the Holy Mass and devotion to the Eucharistic Presence. “To me nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overwhelming as the Mass, said as it is among us. I could attend Masses for ever, and not be tired. It is not a mere form of words—it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. He becomes present on the altar in flesh and blood, before whom the angels bow and devils tremble.”31

Newman spent hours each week over the course of decades at the Birmingham Oratory hearing confessions.

If there is a heavenly idea in the Catholic Church, looking at it simply as an idea, surely, next after the Blessed Sacrament, Confession is such. And such it is ever found in fact—the very act of kneeling, the low and contrite voice, the sign of the cross hanging, so to say, over the head bowed low, and the words of peace and blessing. Oh, what a soothing charm is there, which the world can neither give nor take away! Oh, what piercing, heart-subduing tranquillity, provoking tears of joy, is poured almost substantially and physically upon the soul, the oil of gladness, as Scripture calls it, when at length the penitent rises, his God reconciled to him, his sins rolled away forever! This is Confession as it is in fact.32

Newman’s preaching in Mass, both as an Anglican and Catholic, was simply-in style, content, and the impression left on the hearers—the most profound in English of the nineteenth century, producing innumerable conversions and changes of hearts. Short of the Fathers of the Church or perhaps Bossuet, it is hard to
think of any man who had a better sense of the proper use of Scripture in preaching, anticipating in many ways the new emphasis on Scriptural preaching put forth by the Church in the Second Vatican Council. Listen to the impression he left on one witness: “For a few moments there was breathless silence. Then, in a low, clear voice, of which the faintest vibration was audible in the farthest corner of St. Mary’s, he said, ‘Now, I bid you recollect that He to whom these things were done was Almighty God.’ It was as if an electric stroke had gone through the church, as if every person present understood for the first time the meaning of what he had all his life been saying. I suppose it was an epoch in the mental history of more than one of my Oxford contemporaries.”

Newman was a confessor and spiritual director to hundreds during the course of his life. Much of his priestly work had to do with the poor people of Birmingham, ignorant and in some cases, diseased.

No state of things comes amiss to a Catholic priest; he has always a work to do, and a harvest to reap. The disease is sin; all men have sinned; all men need a recovery in Christ; to all must that recovery be preached and dispensed. If then there be a preacher and dispenser of recovery, sent from God, that messenger must speak, not to one, but to all; he must be suited to all, he must have a mission to the whole race of Adam, and be cognisable by every individual of it. I do not mean that he must persuade all, and prevail with all—for that depends on the will of each; but he must show his capabilities for converting all by actually converting some of every time, and every place, and every rank, and every age of life, and every character of mind.

At the end of his extremely long life, Newman could look back over the decades and realize the prophetic truth in his case of the words he had written as a young Anglican clergyman. “So again they who enter Holy Orders promise they know not what, engage themselves they know not how deeply, debar themselves of the world’s ways they know not how intimately, find perchance they must cut off from them the right hand, sacrifice the desire of their eyes and the stirrings of their hearts at the foot of the Cross, while they thought, in their simplicity, they were but choosing the quiet easy life of ‘plain men dwelling in tents.’”

Recognition of a divinely instituted priesthood is central to Newman’s ecclesiology. From this priesthood flows the whole sacramental system and indeed, the apostolic succession in the Church. This was true of Newman’s Anglican life as well as, obviously, of his later Catholic one. “A sacerdotal order is historically the essence of the Church; if not divinely appointed, it is doctrinally the essence of Antichrist.” Newman here is referring more to the necessity of a priestly order that teaches with authority than to its sacramental meaning. As he says much later, “If her clergy be priests, if they can forgive sins, and bring the Son of God upon her altars, it is obvious they cannot, considered as such, hold of the State. If they were not Priests, the sooner they were put under a minister of public instruction, and the Episcopate abolished, the better.”

He rejects wholeheartedly both a self-appointed priesthood not proceeding directly through the apostolic succession and the priesthood whereby religion and its ministers have become an appendage of the state, as in the Anglican.

The new Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests tells us “the identity of the priest comes from participation in the Priesthood of Christ, in which the one ordained becomes, in the Church and for the Church, a real, living and faithful image of Christ the Priest, ‘a sacramental representation of Christ, Head and Shepherd.’”

The Cardinal puts it more poetically:

But when Christ had come, suffered, and ascended, He was henceforth ever near us, ever at hand, even though He was not actually returned, ever scarcely gone, ever all but come back. He is the only Ruler and Priest in His Church, dispensing gifts, and has appointed none to supersede Him because He is departed only for a brief season. Aaron took the place of Christ, and had a priesthood of his own; but Christ’s priests have no priesthood but His. They are merely his shadows and organs, they are his outward signs; and what they do, He does; when they baptize, he is baptizing; when they bless, He is blessing. He is in all acts of His Church, and one of its acts is not more truly His act than another, for all are His. Thus we are, in all times, of the Gospel, brought close to His Cross. We stand, as it were, under it, and receive its blessings fresh from it; only that since, historically speaking, time has gone on, and the holy One is away, certain outward forms are necessary, by way of bringing us again under His shadow; and we enjoy those blessings through a mystery, or sacramentally, in order to enjoy them really.
At the same time Cardinal Newman states that the Christian priesthood is a participation in the one priesthood of Jesus, he also insists that the priest is united with the “common priesthood” in the mystical body Christ. “There is under the Gospel but one proper Priest, Prophet, and King, Altar, Sacrifice, and House of God. Unity is its characteristic sacrament; all grace flows from one Head, and all life circulates in the members of one Body, and what is true of priests and sacrifices, is true of righteous and holy men. It is their very privilege thus to be taken into Christ, to exist in Christ, as already in their mortal life they ‘have their being’ in God.”

The priest, then, according to Newman, in participating in Christ’s priesthood, acts as an instrument in communicating his Redemption, i.e., above all, the forgiveness of sin. “Christ is a priest, as forgiving sin, and imparting other needful divine gifts.... By a Priest, in a Christian sense, is meant an appointed channel by which the peculiar Gospel blessings are conveyed to mankind, one who has us power to apply to individuals those gifts which Christ has promised us generally as the fruit of his mediation.” Essentially, although by no means exclusively, for Newman the priesthood exists for the administration of all the Sacraments and as a means of communicating the redemptive grace Christ.

Has not the Gospel Sacraments? And have not sacraments, as pledges and means of grace, a priestly nature? If so, the question of a Christian priesthood is narrowed at once to the simple question of whether it is or not probable that so precious an ordinance as a channel of grace would be committed by Providence to the custody of certain guardians. The tendency of opinions at this day is to believe that nothing more is necessary for acceptance than faith in God’s promise of mercy; whereas it is certain from Scripture, that the gift of reconciliation is not conveyed to individuals except through appointed ordinances. Christ has interposed something between Himself and the soul; and if it is not inconsistent with the liberty of the Gospel that a Sacrament should interfere, there is no antecedent inconsistency in a keeper of the Sacrament attending upon it. Moreover, the very circumstance that a standing Ministry has existed from the first, leads on to the inference that the ministry was intended to take charge of the Sacraments; and thus the facts of the case suggest an interpretation of our Lord’s memorable words when He committed to St. Peter “the keys” of the Kingdom of heaven.

The sacrament par excellence to which are ordered the sacraments of initiation and penance, of course, is the Eucharist. It is there that the priest renews the sacrifice of Calvary and dis tributes Jesus’ Body and Blood as spiritual food. “Who then is that faithful and wise steward,” says Christ, ‘whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food, in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing’ (Luke 12:43). Now I infer from this passage, first, there are under the Gospel, especial dispensers of the Christian’s spiritual food, in other words (if the word ‘food’ may be interpreted from the parallel of the sixth chapter of St. John), Dispensers of invisible grace, or Priests; next, that they are to continue to the church in every age till the end, for it is said, “Blessed is he, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing (Luke 12: 43).”

The Cardinal had the highest estimation of the dignity of the priesthood but at the same time realized the frailty of the men called to this high office. He writes of this in perhaps his most complete and revealing sermon on the priesthood, “Men, not Angels, the Priests of the Gospel”:

But still men they could not be, if they were to preachers of the everlasting Gospel, and dispensers of the divine mysteries. If they were to sacrifice, as He had sacrificed; to continue, repeat, apply, the very Sacrifice which He had offered; to take into their hands that very Victim which was He himself; to bind and to loose, to bless and to ban, to receive the confession of his people, and to give them absolution for their sins; to teach them the way of truth, and to guide them along the way of peace; who was sufficient for these things but an inhabitant of those blessed realms of which the Lord is the never failing Light?

And yet, my brethren, so it is, he has sent forth for the ministry of reconciliation, not Angels, but men: He has sent forth your brethren to you, not beings of some unknown nature and some strange blood, but of your own bone and your own flesh, to preach to you.... Not a temptation, my brethren, can befall you, but what befalls all those who share your nature, though you may have yielded to it, and they may not have yielded. They can understand you, they can anticipate you, they can interpret you, though they have not
kept pace with you in your course. They will be tender to you, they will "instruct you in the spirit of meekness," as the Apostle says, "considering themselves lest they also be tempted." Come then unto us, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and ye shall find rest to your souls; come unto us, who now stand to you Christ's stead, and who speak in Christ's name; for we too, like you, have been saved by Christ's all-saving blood.\textsuperscript{44}

He generally had the highest opinion of his confreres in the Catholic priesthood, saying "there was nothing of that smoothness, or mannerism which is commonly imputed to them, and they were more natural and unaffected than many an Anglican clergy man..."\textsuperscript{45}

Newman's desire, both for the priesthood and the laity, was that each live up fully to the privilege and duty of the high calling of being a Christian. No one who approaches the writings of Newman will be left unchallenged in bettering his relationship with God and neighbor. At the heart of Newman's message for today's Catholic is the sense of personal vocation. "God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission-I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught, I shall do good. I shall do his work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve him in my calling."\textsuperscript{46}

NOTES


5In 1974, while I was interviewing for admission into a class on the English romantic literature of the nineteenth century, the Professor Lionel Trilling of Columbia University-perhaps the century's most renowned critic of English literature-assured me that this was his opinion.


9See Ian Ker, op cit., p. 603.


11Ibid. p. 18-19.


13Newman, \textit{University Sermons}, p. 65, 77, 82-83. (All Newman quotations are from the Longman, Green and Co. editions, unless otherwise noted. I will also use the standard Rickaby title abbreviations when necessary.)

14John Paul II, \textit{Christifideles Laici}, (Rome, 1989), n. 17; vide also McCloskey III, C. John, "Spirituality in the
Professions and Work place,” *Faith & Reason* (Front Royal, VA.: Summer, 1990), pp. 163-175.


16H.S., 1, 209-10.


18Dev., p. 86.

19John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, (1989), n. 17. The phrase, “unity of life” was a core teaching of the founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaria, and, to my knowledge, was first used in a magisterial text in the above mentioned document following the synod on the Laity.

20O.S., p. 13


25Ker, op. cit., p. 744.

26O.S., p. 91-93.

27P.S., p. 259.


29Murray, OSB, Placid, *Newman the Oratorian*, (Gill and Macmillan, LTD., Dublin, 1968), pp. 3-133. This study can serve as an introduction for further study into the theology of the priesthood as developed by Newman in his writings.


33Froude, James Anthony, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, fourth series (New York: Charles Scriibner’s & Sons, 1910), p. 188.

34Mix, p. 246.

35P.S., 3; p. 304.

36Ess., 2, p. 173.

37Diff., 1, p. 217


40Jfc., p. 198.

41P.S., 4; pp. 304-305.


44Mix., pp. 44-5, 60.

45Prepos., p. 339.

46M.D., p. 301.