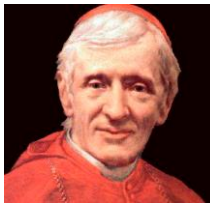


John Henry Newman 1801-1890 and Newman Catholic College, Harlesden 2019



Newman Catholic College in Harlesden, North West London to offer a personal perspective on the continued relevance of Cardinal John Henry Newman nearly 130 years after his death and to foreshadow his canonisation in Rome on 13th Oct 2019

There are, it seems to me, two principle reasons why Blessed John Henry Newman's teachings resonate today.

Firstly, Newman embraced change. He famously declared "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often". An examination of Newman's life and times definitely supports the view that Newman was familiar with transformation on a number of levels. Moreover, it is significant that he responded with dignity to those who would traduce him for his adherence to this position. As school leaders the capacity to manage change with compassion and integrity allied to vision and courage is arguably the greatest skill we can acquire.

The second element which illustrates my perspective of the contemporary resonance of Newman is the powerful evocation of love through, "cor ad cor loquitur." Indeed I would suggest that the

phrase evokes has seldom been in greater need. Much of what follows in this regard is a synthesis of what students at Newman Catholic College (NCC) see and hear on a daily basis. Indeed the school is characterised by our sui generis and ubiquitous, "Newman Values". (see below)

famine with the arrival of nearly one million Irish Catholic refugees to Britain's cities from the mid 1840s onwards. This was an age, let us not forget, of rampant prejudice and hostility towards Catholics. As Paz reminds us to be anti Catholic "was an integral part of what it means



Newman Values

- We are all **responsible for our own actions** and the impact they have upon others.
- We **respect the right of others** to learn and are prepared to learn ourselves.
- We actively **contribute to the life of the school** and the wider community.
- We **respect the faiths, cultures and values** of others in our community.
- We recognise that the purpose of **rules and laws are for the good of everyone**.
- We treat others **as we would like to be treated**.

 We actively encourage & promote the use of the **English language** by students at all times 

When considering the issue of change it is important to begin with some historical context. Notably Newman's life spanned the overwhelming majority of the Nineteenth century. He was 89 years old when he died on 11th August 1890. He therefore lived through some of the most momentous, turbulent and transformatory decades in English history. Newman was a well known and articulate Anglican reforming priest in the 1830s and 1840s as large parts of England were consumed by the upheaval and ravages of the Industrial Revolution. His conversion to Catholicism was contemporaneous with the highpoint of Chartist demands for suffrage. The later decades of his life saw the apogee of British imperial grandeur and its subsequent steady decline. Crucially he also lived through

to be Victorian" (It is worth reminding ourselves that Catholic Emancipation had only occurred in 1829 and the hierarchy restored for the first time since the Reformation of the 1530s in 1834).

It is well known that Newman converted to Catholicism in 1845. Prior to that however he had been a leading figure in both the Tractarian and Oxford movements which sought to restore pre Reformation elements of the Catholic church to Anglicanism. In addition, his central role in establishing the Oratory school and Catholic University of Ireland (now UCD) are further illustrations of his ability to deal with and manage change. The same can be argued for his opposition to the dogmatic turn of the church

following the doctrine of Papal Infallibility (18 July 1870).

I do not believe that I exaggerate when seeking to draw comparisons between Newman's era and that of our own. We are always of course surrounded by change but both periods seem to share a common anxiety and uncertainty. Moreover, the social issues of 2019 and those of Newman's day whilst self-evidently different have clear parallels. It is the response of Newman to the context of his day that provides us with a light for our own development. Furthermore, as school leaders we are constantly faced with the challenges that change brings. We have to be wise, knowledgeable, courteous but equally courageous and bold. I take for good coin the view that Newman's clear eyed determination and vision in a period of immense societal change offer a guide as to how we should seek to manage our schools and ourselves in modern Britain.

The second and in my mind paramount reason why we are proud to be a Newman school and why the memory of Newman is resonant today is due to the motto he chose upon his appointment as a Cardinal in 1879. "Cor ad cor loquitur", heart speaks unto heart defines our Harlesden community and provides us with a lodestone that is central to our vision and values. I have tried over the years to explain why this phrase is so powerful and pertinent to our school and to what we try to achieve every day. My message is firmly rooted in our environment.

On the surface we are all different. I stand in assembly every day and look out at hundreds of young people from different ethnic groups, gender, religions, languages, sexuality and values. In recent years the school has been blessed with the advantages of immigration. (Interestingly Newman's mother was a descendant of Huguenot refugees) We have developed a sophisticated and highly successful assessment, induction and curriculum to ensure that these students can make rapid progress and gain access to the powerful knowledge that they need to flourish in our society.

At this point it is important that we understand how Newman Catholic College has itself changed and the context in which we are now working. The school was established as Cardinal Hinsley in 1958 (we celebrated our 60th anniversary with a wonderful mass in the Cathedral in October 2018) to serve an overwhelmingly Irish, West African and Caribbean working class community. The majority of these young men left this secondary modern school at 16 and found dignified and rewarding work relatively straightforwardly. The following point requires little elaboration but this world has gone forever. The school now has a 55% Catholic cohort and a growing number of Hindu and Muslim students. We are marinated in a world of inclusivity. There is no doubt that this presents complex challenges. It is often difficult for example to ensure that all children engage with mass and we have frequent discussions about mutual respect, tolerance and the shared benefits of

celebrating together. We have had long and difficult discussions for example with some of our Muslim students about the action of priests when blessing them during the Eucharist. There are times when I would love to be Head teacher of a 100% Catholic school, where everyone knows all the words and engagement is a given. However, there is part of me that believes that within this often difficult dialogue there is a worthiness and a benefit for the common good.



The point however is that there needs to be a constant reminder that we share a common humanity, that there is more that unites than divides us. Hence the appropriateness of "heart speaks unto heart" For us it proclaims that no matter where you come from, whatever your background or circumstances, you stand shoulder to shoulder, student to student, heart to heart with one another. Our students wear a badge on their green blazers with three hearts on them. It's a visual representation that in a world that seems increasingly divided and frightening there is a greater influence at play in our lives... the power of "heart speaking unto heart" and love. I have worked in Catholic schools in London since 1989 and never felt I would hear the word love used so frequently as I do at NCC. That is the key of "heart speaks unto heart" and the visual symbol on the school

blazer. It allows us to engage in a dialogue of love. To develop the point further the hearts can be seen as representing equality and communication. The coat of arms is therefore the antithesis of much of the toxic behaviour we see in our society. It is a prophylactic against the dangers we all face and a shining light towards a better life. Finally, the three hearts are significant for they represent not merely our universal humanity but also our closeness and devotion to God (the third heart at the bottom of the badge is the larger of the three). As I have said elsewhere this message is a common refrain at our daily school assembly. It is reinforced by our "Newman values ". I feel it is incredibly puissant and propitious.

In conclusion I must begin by stating that there is not space in this short article to focus on Newman's role as key historical figure in the development of Catholic education through his establishment of the Oratory in Birmingham and the Catholic University of Ireland (now University College Dublin).I have always been drawn however to his prayer for Saint Monica (For Teachers and Students) where he states that we must be " zealous for all the better gifts " as a beautifully eloquent manifestation of what we want for our students and what they themselves should aspire towards . It is a phrase moreover that encapsulates much of the contemporary debate around the rights of children to benefit from a knowledge rich curriculum.

Rather, I have chosen to focus on his understanding of change as evidence of a perfect life and his

promotion of egalitarianism and love through the notion of "heart speaks unto heart" . At NCC we have been vocal advocates of change in the last 6 years. It is a difficult path to traverse. Furthermore, our promotion of" heart speaks unto heart" has delivered efficacious results beyond our daily work. As I write this piece during the summer holidays I am conscious of two summer schools running concurrently at NCC. This is the fourth year we have run these events. The Syrian Summer camp , supported by Caritas , the US Charitable Trust , Children in Need and Sport England has supported hundreds of refugee children since 2015. Equally the police camp engages Harlesden children in a series of astonishing educational and fun activities throughout the summer weeks.(<https://www.ncc.brent.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=96>)

Newman Catholic College will mark the canonisation of Cardinal Newman with a mass celebrated by Bishop Sherington on October 30th at 5pm. The school is also organising a competition for a new badge to commemorate the historic events in Rome. More significantly however we recognise our responsibility as Catholic teachers in Twenty First century Britain . As " The Catholic School on the Eve of the Twenty First Century " argues , " Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of our most excellent and creative activities. For the teacher does nor write on inanimate material but on the very spirit of the human being " .

In our endeavours to fulfill these obligations we can do no

better than to learn from the life and work of Cardinal John Henry Newman.

Written by Mr Daniel Patrick Coyle, Headteacher

