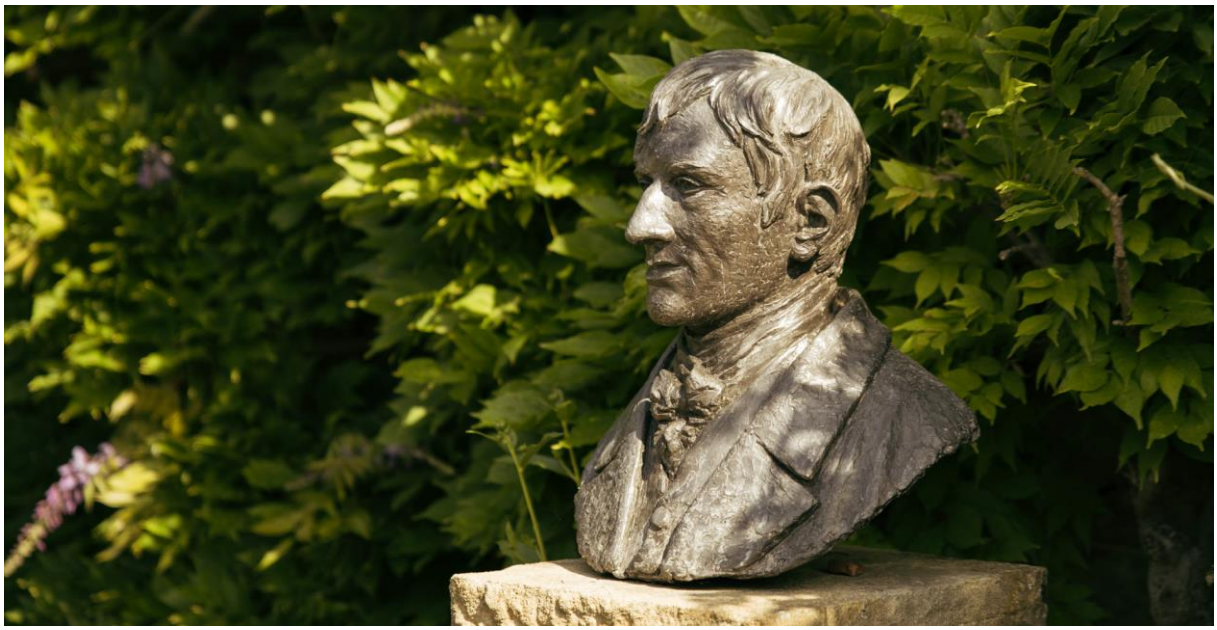

Newman and Friendship: Apologia pro Amicitia

Paul Shrimpton

Over recent years we have all become more conscious of our fundamental need for genuine friendships. We have grown in appreciation of having others around us who can share in our setbacks and joys, or just lend a listening ear. This is one of the lessons we have drawn from the Covid pandemic and its accompanying lockdowns.

But if we want to gain a deeper understanding of this precious human gift, we can do no better than approach those saints who exemplified it. Among a great many qualities for which St John Henry Newman is admired is his remarkable capacity for friendship, both natural and acquired. He was generously endowed with the ability to form and nurture friendships, but at the same time, he actively developed this skill. His talent for friendship is a wonderful example for our age because, despite living in the nineteenth century, he inhabits the same modernity as we do: a world split across large and socially fractured cities and pulled a thousand different directions by the sheer busy-ness of life.

Friendship is not a subject that lends itself to systematic treatment. Definitions leave us cold, clever quotations amuse and sometimes instruct, but examples …. Ah, examples! They rouse us, along the lines of Newman's famous dictum that 'The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons

influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us.'[1] So, rather that engage with Newman's abstract reflections on friendship, we should see him 'in action'.

Newman is one of the finest prose writers in the English language. However, it is not in his 34 major published works that he is visible as a person but in his many letters – 25,000 of them, collected into 32 fat volumes. Open any page, and in no time you will be eavesdropping on a conversation between Newman and a fellow human being. There we see heart speaking to heart in friendship – *cor ad cor loquitur* – or in a relationship which is open to and inviting friendship.

Newman had a prodigious capacity for work and lived a remarkably full life, yet he always made time for his letters: around two hours a day. Why have so many survived? His correspondents treasured them because his insights were so profound, whether they were deeply personal or about the world at large. Speaking directly to the heart, Newman wrote the truth with clarity. His many letters showcase his range of friends and interests, as well as his insights and erudition. Many of them contain spiritual advice and amount to a form of spiritual direction, while others explain perplexities of faith. Overall, Newman's correspondence shows that he took the trouble to enter as fully as he could into the other person's doubts and concerns, according to his own principle that 'The first duty of charity is to try to enter into the mind and feelings of others'.[2] And he did so with a lightness of touch and with humour. There is a winning authenticity in all he writes and a striking emphasis on the real and practical.

School and University

At school, Newman not only excelled academically but developed socially. He acted in Latin plays, learnt to play the violin and compose music, took part in debating, led a boys' society, and edited several school magazines. He made many close friends and kept in touch with them in later years. At Oxford he threw himself into the life of the University, attending concerts, played first violin in a music club at St John's College, co-founding the Trinity College Book Society for the dissemination of modern novels, and starting a periodical with his closest friend John Bowden called *The Undergraduate*, which was Oxford's second student-run magazine. Newman and Bowden employed their wit at the expense of the academics, suggesting in one issue that the dons had left their sense of humour on the moon.

After being elected a Fellow of Oriel College, Newman became an Anglican priest and within two months completed a visitation of the whole parish, house by house. 'I shall know my parishioners, and be known by them',[3] he told his mother. However, rather than undertaking parish or missionary work, Newman saw his engagement in education as a way of fulfilling his priestly calling. As a college tutor he befriended his students, went walking with them, invited them for meals in Oriel, and gave them academic and sometimes spiritual advice. Such friendship between tutor and students broke with convention at the time. For Newman, education was a *relational* activity: 'An academical

[1] *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898), pp. 92–3.
[2] Newman to Keble, 8 October 1865, *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* [hereafter *LD*], vol. xxii, p. 69.
[3] Newman to his mother, 28 July 1824, *LD* i, p. 180.

system without the personal influence of teachers upon pupils', he once wrote, 'is an arctic winter; it will create an ice-bound, petrified, cast-iron University, and nothing else.'[4] He felt strongly that personal influence is what gives any system its dynamism: the action of mind on mind, personality on personality, heart on heart. And if acquaintance became friendship, all the better since friendship was the privileged way of doing good to someone; 'it requires one to be intimate with a person, to have a chance of doing him good', Newman once told his sister Jemima.[5]

At age of 28, Newman became vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin and from its pulpit preached around six hundred sermons. In one, he voiced the key idea of the Oxford Movement that truth is preserved and communicated 'not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men […] who are at once the teachers and patterns of it'. He spoke of 'God's noiseless work', that is, of the effect of unconscious holiness on others.[6]

His sermons were psychologically penetrating. In one entitled 'Love of relations and friends', he gently criticised the idea of do-gooders, who engage in grandiose schemes but neglect those around them.

> There have been men before now, who have supposed Christian love was so diffusive as not to admit of concentration upon individuals; so that we ought to love all men equally. And many there are, who […] consider practically that the love of many is something superior to the love of one or two; and neglect the charities of private life, while busy in the schemes of an expansive benevolence […] Now I shall here maintain, in opposition to such notions of Christian love, and with our Saviour's pattern before me, that the best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely, is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards those who are immediately about us.[7]

'We are to begin with loving our friends about us', Newman continues, 'and gradually to enlarge the circle of our affections, till it reaches all Christians, and then all men. […] Having benevolent *feelings* towards the world – feelings and nothing more – is the mere offspring of an indulged imagination. […] This is not to love men, it is but to talk about love. The real love of man *must* depend on practice.' And he went on to spell out the consequences:

> By trying to love our relations and friends, by submitting to their wishes, though contrary to our own, by bearing with their infirmities, by overcoming their occasional waywardness by kindness, by dwelling on their excellences, and trying to copy them, thus it is that we form in our hearts that root of charity, which, though small at first, may, like the mustard seed, at last even overshadow the earth.[8]

---

[4] *Historical Sketches*, vol. iii (1872; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909), p. 74.
[5] 8 February 1829, *LD* ii, p. 119.
[6] 'Personal influence, the means of propagating the truth', preached on 22 January 1832, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London: Rivingtons, 1871), pp. 91–2, 96.
[7] 'Love of relations and friends, preached on 27 December 1831, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (1834–43; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1869), vol. ii, pp. 52–3.
[8] 'Love of relations and friends', *Parochial and Plain* ii, pp. 54–5. In Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–53) Mrs Jellyby is a 'telescopic philanthropist' obsessed with an obscure African tribe but having little regard for the notion of charity beginning at home. It is thought that Dickens invented this character as a criticism of activists like Caroline Chisholm – but one wonders whether his inspiration may have come from this sermon.

Newman's sway over Oxford in the 1830s cannot be attributed to his preaching alone, but owed a great deal to his personal magnetism, which made disciples of many of those around him. He captivated an idealistic and serious-minded younger generation in the University who reacted against the academic conservatism and religious laxity of the time and was idolised by undergraduates who hung on his words and even imitated his gait and gestures.

Newman entered into full communion with the Catholic Church halfway through his life, in October 1845, after many years of searching for the true successor of the primitive or original Church. The title of his last Anglican sermon, 'The Parting of Friends', reminds us of the huge sacrifice his conversion entailed in putting the quest for the truth above ties of family and friendship. His sister Harriet never saw him again; though Jemima did, she declined to receive him into her home. Almost all of Newman's Anglican friends cut their ties with him; he was completely ostracised from society and treated as someone who had lost his mind. In 1845 he hardly knew any Catholics, only those who had preceded him into the Catholic Church. For the sake of the truth, therefore, Newman was prepared 'to give up almost everything that was dear and precious to him', Benedict XVI comments, including 'family ties and many friends',[9] and join a people who were effectively strangers to him.

The Bowdens and the Froudes

It was typical of Newman that once he got to know someone, he was soon welcomed into their circle of relations. This happened with his closest undergraduate friend at Trinity College, John Bowden, and with his fellow tutor at Oriel, Hurrell Froude. Though they both died before Newman's conversion, many of their relatives followed him and maintained close ties with him for the rest of their lives.

Newman and John Bowden were so inseparable at Oxford that other undergraduates got their names mixed up. When John married Elizabeth Swinburne, he himself would sometimes mix up Newman's name with his wife's and call her 'Newman'! In John's family circle, Newman was known as 'the great man'. When Newman visited John on his death bed, he refrained from sharing his doubts about the Church of England, but as John instructed his wife to take Newman as her guide after his death, Newman felt obliged to inform Elizabeth of his state of mind. Newman officiated at John's funeral in September 1844 and thereafter kept in close contact with Elizabeth and her children. On 8 October 1845, she was among the fifteen close friends or relatives whom Newman informed about his imminent reception into the Catholic Church. She herself became a Catholic in July 1846, along with three of her four children, and was followed by her brother-in-law Henry Bowden and his family; over the following decades the Bowden's house in London was where Newman stayed when he was in town.

Elizabeth's eldest daughter Mary Anne, whom Newman had baptised in 1831, began to think of entering a convent when she was seventeen. During the next five years Newman was in communication with Elizabeth about her daughter's vocation. He shared with her some shrewd observations about Mary Anne and the type of religious life that would suit

[9] Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 20 December 2010.

her, and he took the trouble to visit the Bowdens in London to speak to them in person. In all this we get a glimpse of Newman's closeness to the family.

Hurrell Froude was one of Newman's closest friends in the Oriel common room. He joined Newman as a college tutor in 1827 and, along with Robert Wilberforce, they refashioned the system for tutoring so as to provide 'the germ of the modern tutorial system' at Oxford.[10] When they lost their tutorship in 1831, Newman joined Hurrell and his father on a Mediterranean trip for the sake of Hurrell's health. Hurrell did not improve, however, and he died of tuberculosis in 1836. Newman got to know two of Hurrell's brothers, who followed him to Oriel: William, who become an engineer and well-known scientist, and James Anthony, the future historian. Through the Froude family circle, Newman got to know Catherine Holdsworth who married William in 1839. In his correspondence with William and Catherine over five decades, Newman shared his lifelong quest for truth and his insights on such matters as faith and reason, certitude and assent, the vitality of grace, the life of prayer, and, not least, the difficulties felt by Anglicans in submitting to the Catholic Church.[11]

Catherine began to regard Newman as a 'light to my paths'[12] after reading his sermons in 1834 and thereafter took him for a guide. Once they started corresponding on religious matters, Newman recognized in her a fellow truth-seeker who was ready to sacrifice whatever was necessary to cooperate with God's grace. He found her deeply sympathetic, and in due time shared with her his doubts about the Anglican Church. After becoming a Catholic in 1845, he was exquisitely delicate in the way he dealt with the concerns that were holding her back. Eventually, on 19 March 1857, Catherine overcame her religious procrastination and was received into the Catholic Church. That very day she expressed her heart-felt thanks to Newman, particularly for his tact and telling advice: 'Other Catholics always seemed "making a case" when they said things to me; *you* always contrived to say exactly what suited my mind'.[13] She was followed, one by one, by four of her five children – but not by her husband. Extraordinarily, Newman managed to remain on close terms with William, despite his religious scepticism.

Such was the friendship between them that Catherine could say to Newman, 'You are dearer to me than any person in the world after my husband and children and my dear sister. What would I give to be able to help you!'[14] 'I thank God every year more and more, that we have had you a friend. It is curious to me to see that, although my children are all so different, yet there is something in your writings which fits into their minds in a way that no other serious reading does.'[15] Though it might surprise us that she should write in such familiar terms to a priest, it should be born in mind that they had known each for decades, that she was married, and that her husband was a loyal friend of Newman.

Her husband William was a loving father who was fair-minded and thoughtful, but he had absorbed from his fellow scientists an attitude of doubt in all matters, above all in religion.

---

[10] M. G. Brock, 'The Oxford of Peel and Gladstone, 1800–1833', *History of the University of Oxford*, vol. vi, ed. M. G. Brock & M. C. Curthoys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 61.
[11] Edward Short devotes a whole chapter to Newman and the Froudes in *Newman and his Contemporaries* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), pp. 135–63.
[12] Catherine Froude to Newman, 1 November 1843, *LD* x, p. 51n.
[13] Catherine Froude to Newman, 19 March 1857, *LD* xvii, p. 544n.
[14] Catherine Froude to Newman, 2 January 1862, *LD* xx, 101n.
[15] Catherine Froude to Newman, 20 February 1868, *LD* xxvi, p. 61n.

Newman, however, declined to abandon his friend to his sophistical doubts and did all he could to undo his scepticism. Shortly after his wife's conversion, he told William, 'Whatever pain it is to me to think of our actual differences of opinion, I feel no separation from you in my heart, and, please God, never shall.'[16] Newman dedicated to him the first volume of *Essays Critical and Historical* (1871) 'as to a true friend, dear to me in your own person, and in your family […] as one, who, amid unusual trials of friendship, has always been fair to me, never unkind; as one […] with […] a deep sense of the responsibilities of religious inquiry, and the sacredness of religious truth'. By 'trials of friendship' Newman refers to his influence over the Froude family and the reception of Elizabeth and her children into the Catholic Church, to the dismay of William. Right up to William's sudden death in 1879, he and Newman exchanged lengthy letters on certainty in science and religion, though William remained a religious sceptic to the end.

Difficulties as a Catholic

Shortly after his conversion Newman was sent to Rome, ordained a priest, and returned to England to establish the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Birmingham. His Catholic life was very different from his Anglican. He was treated shabbily, misunderstood, and suspected of heresy and of not having gained a fully Catholic spirit. He was the target of gossip and misinformation, and effectively endured a silent martyrdom until he was made a cardinal at the age of 78. He spent his years as a priest working with Irish immigrants in Birmingham and in parish life, but he also singlehandedly founded and ran the Catholic University in Ireland, aided and briefly edited a Catholic journal run by converts, and founded a new type of Catholic school with his convert friends. Despite the way he was treated, Newman was always restrained and generous in his dealings with others. Many were won over by his patience and understanding, thus exemplifying the maxim that 'we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend.'[17]

Newman's early exchanges with William Ullathorne, his bishop after 1850, were somewhat chilly if not strained due to misunderstandings and their completely different backgrounds. But over time they came to understand and have a high regard for each other. Newman joked at the outset that, **'**just as gentlemen make acquaintance with bowing and civil speeches, so the way to be good friends with him is to begin with a boxing bout'.[18] Ullathorne dedicated his last book, *Christian Patience* (1886), to Newman with the words, 'you have honoured me with a friendship and a confidence that have enriched my life'.

Newman was profoundly grateful for being blessed with many close friends and acknowledged in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua* that 'never man had kinder or more indulgent friends than I have had'.[19] One of these was the parliamentary barrister Edward Bellasis, who along with their mutual friend James Hope-Scott, acted as co-founder of the Oratory School, and helped Newman through thick and thin. Newman expressed his gratitude by dedicating to Bellasis his major philosophical work, 'In remembrance of a long, equable, sunny friendship, in gratitude for continual kindnesses shown me, for an unwearied zeal

[16] Newman to William Froude, 24 December 1859, *LD* xix, p. 259.
[17] *Idea of a University* (1873; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907), p. 209.
[18] Newman to J. M. Capes, 19 November 1848, *LD* xii, p. 337.
[19] *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1865; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908), p. 15.

on my behalf, for a trust in me that has never wavered, and for a prompt, effectual succour and support in times of special trial.'[20]

Newman's friendship with the convert John Hungerford Pollen began when Pollen called on him in Dublin. Though he had been a senior academic at Oxford and was a man of great energy and humour, Pollen was apprehensive about meeting Newman, but after entering the rector's house, he soon found himself chatting over port and biscuits as the two reminisced about their times in Oxford. As Pollen reported to his fiancée, Newman was 'most kind, ever so nice, and full of fun'.[21] As a professor at the Catholic University, Pollen spent time with Newman walking around the parks, despite all the work pressing down on the rector, and they even visited Dublin Zoo. As with other academics at the University, Newman helped to launch his career, in Pollen's case as an architect and interior designer.

Eleanor Bretherton

It is natural for us to forge close relationships with those at roughly the same phase of the life cycle and from similar social backgrounds, but the chemistry of friendship is unpredictable and sometimes surprising. It can happen that we make unexpected bondings with people who are vastly different in age, temperament or background. True friendships can straddle these boundaries, as in the case of Eleanor Bretherton and Newman.

Eleanor was one of Newman's more unlikely friends.[22] She was born in 1845, raised in a Catholic family and had Newman as her confessor from childhood. Her father, who ran a horse and carriage business in Birmingham, got to know the Oratorians first at Alcester Street then at Edgbaston. Daisy, as she was known, was a sickly baby, and when she was in danger of death, Newman visited her with a relic of St Philip Neri and prayed for her; after her recovery he dedicated her to our Lady. All this created a special bond between them, and for the rest of his life, she was the object of Newman's special care.

His letters to her begin 'My dear Child', even when she was a middle-aged married woman, with children of her own, and they reveal a friendship that was as playful as it was profound. When she was thirteen Eleanor was sent to a school run by the Dominican sisters while her parents went abroad for the sake of her father's health. At the time, Newman was in his late fifties and immersed in the life of the Oratory, yet he kept up a correspondence with Eleanor. She was not at all in awe of her eminent priestly friend and pestered him to visit her at school. Tongue in cheek, he reprimanded her, insisting that he was 'not a locomotive' to be summoned. He told her that St Philip Neri had not left Rome for sixty years, so on that basis, as he had only been in Birmingham for fourteen years, she could expect a visit when he was 108 and she was an elderly schoolgirl of about sixty-two![23]

[20] Dedication page, *Grammar of Assent*.
[21] Pollen to Maria La Primaudaye, 13 May 1855, cited in A. Pollen, *John Hungerford Pollen*, (London: John Murray, 1912), p. 253.
[22] I am indebted to Professor Judith Champ for the story of Eleanor Bretherton, which is told in 'Heart speaks to Heart: Newman and friendship', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 20:2 (2020), pp. 1–11.
[23] Newman to Eleanor Bretherton, 22 February & 4 May 1863, *LD* xx, pp. 409, 437–8.

Their friendship became more serious when, a year after her father died, she became engaged to Frank Watt, who was not a Catholic. Newman was aware that there were doubts about Frank's character, and, after talking to Eleanor as her father might have done, became still more concerned when he learned that Frank had not told his parents of the engagement. Newman reported to Eleanor's mother that he was deeply concerned to find that 'All her playfulness was gone' and that her manner 'had the appearance of a mind anxious and uneasy'; he urged Mrs Bretherton 'if possible to come to some understanding with his [i.e. Frank's] parents'.[24]

Newman's fatherly concern was also evident in the way he pointed out to Eleanor's mother the danger of a long engagement, as Frank was a solicitor's clerk in Oxford and received little financial support from his parents. Newman's experience of Oxford told him that, without any relations there and not being part of the university scene, Frank would struggle to find good company and after a hard day's work would either end up 'passing some lonely hours in his lodgings' or else 'seeking recreations which are not innocent'. Unless Frank's parents took up the case in earnest, 'the affair will linger, languish on – nothing settled – every thing in prospect – hope – disappointment – hope again – to and fro, to and fro, and no end of it.'[25] Newman also tried to find him better employment. After Frank had been received into the Church, Newman officiated at the wedding of Eleanor and Frank, though he thought it a foolish match.[26]

For the rest of her life of impoverished motherhood, punctuated by life-threatening illness, Newman was always there, with prayers and encouragement, with a warm welcome when she visited, and with money to help make ends meet. He never forgot her passion for stamp collecting, and continued to send her any interesting and exotic stamps his correspondence brought him. He encouraged and supported her through poor health, constant house moves and the raising of her four children. Ten years after being married, when she was close to dying and had received the Sacrament of the Sick, Newman visited her at Southampton. Before doing so he sent her two short letters of the sort he had been writing for two decades.

> Of course I keep you in mind. Our dear Lord, Who has been with you all your life, will not fail you. Heaviness, as Scripture says, may be with you in the night, but joy cometh with the morning. Your Guardian Angel will wait for you, and keep you from all harm – only don't forget me, who soon must follow you, into that land, where there is no sin, no doubt, and no sorrow.[27]

Ten days later he wrote:

> I said Mass for you on your birthday. He, who is the Life of it, the Eternal Priest and Sacrifice, will in all your weakness be your Life too. […] He will be with you in all you have to suffer. He will not forsake you, though for a while you may not feel that He is near you.[28]

[24] Newman to Mrs Bretherton, 17 May 1865, *LD* xxi, p. 468.
[25] Newman to Mrs Bretherton, 17 May 1865, *LD* xxi, p. 469.
[26] Newman to H. Schomberg Kerr, 31 May 1889, *LD* xxxi, p. 274.
[27] Newman to Eleanor Watt, 9 July 1876, *LD* xxviii, p. 87.
[28] Newman to Eleanor Watt, 19 July 1876, *LD* xxviii, p. 88.

For her part, Eleanor always remembered Newman's birthday and the anniversary of his reception into the Church. One of her sons, Philip, became a Jesuit; another, John Henry Newman Watt, emigrated to New Zealand and had eleven children, three of whom entered religious orders, and numerous grandchildren.

Even in his last frail years, Newman would send brief notes, sometimes written for him by others, to remind her that he was always thinking of and praying for her. One of his last acts, in May 1889, was to send a cheque for £50 to her parish priest, to be used for her benefit. She only outlived Newman by five years. The difference in age, education, background and experience was huge, yet Newman's profound loyalty and care for his 'dear Child' suggests a gentle paternal love, which, like that of any father, survives anything thrown at it by experience. Newman's letters to Eleanor reveal his capacity for love and tenderness, and the depth of his instinctive human wisdom.

Comfort in sorrow

As Newman lived to a great age, he outlived most of his contemporaries and as a result found himself writing countless letters of consolation to relatives or friends of the bereaved. None of his letters of consolation read as if they were mere formalities; instead, we see Newman sharing the grief of his recipients and meditating aloud on the inscrutable will of God and his saving plan for the human race. He also corresponded with friends about illness, old age, loneliness, and loss of energy and enthusiasm, commiserating with them by sharing his own sufferings or ailments. In the case of Miss Munro, who had known Newman as an Anglican before becoming a Catholic, Newman counselled her on how to battle against sadness in the face of the passage of time and the frustration of feeling under-used by God.

> Be sure that many others besides you feel that sadness, that years pass away and no opening comes to them for serving God. Be sure that I can sympathise with you, for now for many years I have made attempts to break through the obstacles which have been in my way, but all in vain.
>
> One must submit oneself to God's loving will – and be quieted by faith that what He wills for us is best. He has no need of us – He only asks for our good desires.[29]

If Newman was truly interested in his friends and those who approached him for guidance, never more was this apparent than when they suffered bereavements of relatives and close friends. In all his letters of condolence there is an uncompromisingly supernatural conviction which underpins his sympathy, as he reminds his readers of the reality of the next life and of the communion with the faithful departed. At same time, he enters fully into the suffering of the bereaved, a suffering he shared with them. His letters are also suffused with a supernatural optimism, seeing in sorrow the fulfilment of the inscrutable Will of God and his loving plan for everyone. 'Let us be sure that those God loves He takes

[29] Newman to Miss G. Munro, 21 October 1873, *LD* xxvi, p. 378.

away, each of them, one by one, at the very time best for their eternal interests,'[30] he observed at the funeral of Hope-Scott.

Newman's words of consolation to Henry Bowden, on the death of his second wife, are representative of other similar letters he wrote.

> We have been full of your great trial, and have said many Masses for your dear wife, and for you, and all your children. God has struck you most heavily but your dear children will rise up and console you. And God Himself, who has afflicted you, will be your best Comforter and Friend.
>
> She is now in peace and rest, for her great and long sufferings have been her deliverance from what she might have had to suffer after death. For myself, thinking of her, *this* is a great consolation. I feel that I have a great loss myself, the loss of one so kind, so gentle, so open and true a friend, whom I sincerely admired and loved, who talked with me so frankly and familiarly, and made me know her by that most winning ease of her conversation – ah! it is a great distress to think I shall not see her again – but still to know that the worst is over, that all the terrible suspense of pain and dying is ended, that she has crossed the awful river, this is to me a thought full of comfort. She cannot die again – she has heaven before her. O what a thought of peace is this! And you too, my dear Henry, must feel it, and you will feel it more and more. I doubt not you will be supported through your suffering, and learn to love God more and more, the more He afflicts you.[31]

The geography of Newman's prayer

One of the 'secrets' of Newman's capacity for friendship is the way he grounded them in his life of prayer. Within the 'geography' of his prayer we can see the prominence his friends occupied in his mind and heart, as well as his concerns for other souls both inside and outside the Church. Although Newman did not preserve all his prayer lists and destroyed parts of his private diary, enough survives to piece together the range of his petitions. Intercessory prayer for friends and family was central to Newman's life: he describes it in 1835 as 'the characteristic of Christian worship, the privilege of the heavenly adoption, the exercise of the perfect and spiritual mind'.[32] He never wavered in this conviction, and decades later, when as a cardinal he was obliged to have a private chapel, he adorned its walls with pictures of friends for whom he wished to intercede while he celebrated Mass: loyalty to his friends meant praying for them after they departed from this world.

As early as 1816 Newman began composing long prayers for daily use, which included intercessory prayers for those near to him. By 1824, when a Fellow of Oriel and an Anglican deacon, Newman's prayer routine took a more serious turn; he drew up a framework for each day of the week, which incorporated petitions for individuals or groups of people. On

[30] 'In the World, but not of the World', preached on 5 May 1873, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (1874; Longmans, Green & Co., 1908), p. 279.
[31] Newman to Bowden, 28 June 1864, *LD* xxi, pp. 135–6.
[32] 'Intercession', preached on 22 February 1835, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* iii, pp. 350–1.

Sundays, for example, his particular prayers of intercession were for 'Parents and whole family'; on Mondays, for 'Oriel College. Provost and fellows individually'; on Tuesdays, for his 'Flock at St Clements' and others; on Wednesdays, for his closest school and Oxford friends (by name).[33]

Within a few years, he began composing lengthy prayer lists, which included the names not just of friends but of academic colleagues and tutees, parishioners and those who attended his sermons at St Mary's. The list of 1835 has 44 names on it, with seven added in pencil, presumably to update the list. The list of 1836 contains around a dozen entries of the type 'Froude's friends', as well as the wives and sisters of his friends. The prayer list for 1839 contains over two hundred names and is heavily thumbed. In the 1840s he began to group the names under headings (pencilled in Greek).[34]

Newman had nothing to unlearn as regards intercessory prayer when he became a Catholic. In one of his prayer notebooks, lists of names appear from 1850 up to 1882 which were entered under short headings (written in English, Latin and Greek):

> Auld lang Syne; Protestants; Dear to me, Kind to me, Cold to me, No how to me; Godchildren; Cousins; St Mary's and Littlemore; Faithful Women; Old and Catholic; Old and Protestant; With claim on me; Loyal to me; Catholics 1, Catholics 2, Catholics 3; Benefactors to Congregation; Irish friends; About Oratory; Ecclesiastical; Converts; Dead.[35]

Newman's deceased friends were never far from his mind because he made for himself a Book of Anniversaries, which he kept on his desk. The date and other circumstances of death (time of day and age) of his friends and relatives is faithfully recorded in it from 1825 up to 1888. It contains over six hundred names and would, in all likelihood, have been kept open at the relevant day.

Doctor of Friendship?

Newman had 'heart-knowledge' in spades and understood human nature so well that he was able to show sympathy by speaking out of it. His dealings with others exhibit a solidarity with them, not least in the way he readily acknowledged his own frailties, doubts and shortcomings**.** Newman teaches us that patience and time are needed to forge proper friendships. At times, the pace of life today can lead us to neglect our friends: we have to know how to 'waste time' with them, as Newman did with Pollen in Dublin when he was completely overwhelmed with university as well as Oratory work. Getting to know others well is an adventure, with its high and low points, its joys and sorrows, as we see in his dealings with Eleanor Bretherton. But like any adventure, investing in friendship is investing in something worthwhile. Everyone we meet is unique as is every relationship of friendship. And we can nurture our friendships by including them in our prayer life, as Newman did.

[33] Birmingham Oratory Archive, A.10.4. A different version can be found in V. F. Blehl, *Pilgrim Journey. John Henry Newman, 1801–1845* (London: Burns & Oates, 2001), pp. 419–21.
[34] Ten pages of prayer lists can be found in the Birmingham Oratory Archive, A.10.4.
[35] *Newman the Oratorian: His Unpublished Oratory Papers*, ed. P. Murray (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1969), pp. 62–3.

We all know the joy of discovering a kindred spirit, someone we hit it off with. It may not happen often but when it does sets us purring inside, like a good whisky.

The challenge of how to evangelise a post-Christian secular world is exercising many of the finest hearts and minds in the Church. But for all the recommendations, however sophisticated – ingenious forms of argumentation, creative use of new technologies, inspirational mass gatherings, ten-year plans, structures and organisations of every type – it is easy to overlook the accumulated effect of the friendships of the 2.4 billion Christians who are alive today. At its most basic level, the Christian apostolate or evangelism can be regarded as the perfection of friendship: it is what Christ called his disciples to carry out, what the early Christians excelled at, and what St John Henry can teach us, too.

Paul Shrimpton

Dr Paul Shrimpton is the author of two books on John Henry Newman: *A Catholic Eton? Newman's Oratory School* (2005) and *The 'Making of Men': the Idea and Reality of Newman's University in Oxford and Dublin* (2014), as well as of the volume *Conscience before Conformity: Hans and Sophie Scholl and the White Rose Resistance in Nazi Germany* (2018). He brought out two volumes of Newman's unpublished university papers, *My Campaign in Ireland, Part I* (2021) *& Part II* (2022), both of which are critical editions. He is also the editor of the festschrift *Lead Kindly. Light. Essays for Fr Ian Ker* (2022). He teaches at Magdalen College School, Oxford. He is currently working on a book on *Newman and the Laity* for Word on Fire Academic.

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE of NEWMAN FRIENDS

Publication date: May 2024

www.newmanfriendsinternational.org/en