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In Honor of John Henry Newman

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“In Honor of John Henry Newman”

“In Honor of John Henry Newman” is a speech written by Dr. Robert Kendall impersonating John Keble in 1854. Keble was a teacher and contemporary of J. H. Newman at Oxford University, U.K. Newman publicly converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism, and is remembered today by Newman Centers at colleges and universities.

Impersonation speaking was developed by Dr. Robert Kendall who taught in the Communication Studies Department at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota between 1971 and 1992. Dr. Kendall described impersonation speaking in this way: “Each student chooses an historical character, does independent research on that person, writes a speech, locating it in a particular year of that person’s adult life, making it interesting and relevant to a [contemporary] audience, assumes that character through costume, attitude, worldview, and mannerisms, and delivers the speech to an open-invitation public.”

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* We have known each other as friends now, let's see, this being 1854, ^{that was} some 32 years.

Firstly, I want to express to you my deep appreciation for asking me, a simple country parson, Vicar of Hursley, to join you in honoring my longtime friend, John Henry Newman.* Being I am nine years his elder, til only a few years ago he insisted I serve as his confessor and mentor, and I take full responsibility for the pain he has suffered as he has wrestled with his spiritual decisions. However, I must also quickly add that it was most wise of you not to publicize widely my being here. Given the current animosity between our two church bodies, and the attitude of our respective bishops, and the ill feeling that most Englishmen have toward the Church of Rome, particularly now that they perceive Newman as a defector, given all this, had the word leaked far that I, a priest in the Church of England had anything good to say about a renegade priest ^{in their perception,} who now lives as an English Papist, no matter how brilliant or honorable that man is, I would be subject to ecclesiastical censure, and maybe even tarred and feathered by an unthinking mob. I applaud your discretion.

These days are most trying times, more changes in the world than ever before in history. How we long for the "good old days," when we could count on things staying the same, when revolution wasn't everywhere, wasn't in every breath we took. As I go about my parish in Hursley, or accompany my wife, Charlotte, to the seacoast to ease her ailments, I hear people talking about our war in Crimea, where English Christians are

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fighting side-by-side with Turkish infidels against another Christian country. The unrest just across the channel in France has infected our country as well. Italy, Hungary, Germany, India, Spain---all in upheaval; and, of course, always Ireland. Is there no way back to settled times?

Even the Church is not an oasis from trouble. Every so often, in my travels across these islands, I hear the cry for the old church before John Keble, before Hurrell Froude, before Edward Pusey, and especially before John Henry Newman---before the church was torn asunder by the Tractarians and their movement in Oxford. Let me tell you about that church. That church of the "good old days," before 1833, only 21 years ago that sometimes seems like a century, was a church in which the weekly cleaning lady could place the dripping mop pail on the altar and no one would think it either strange or sacrilegious. It was a church in which the unused communion elements were dropped down the outhouse holes, and few people objected. It was a church whose clergy were ridiculed and mocked because they stood for nothing, and amounted to nothing. It was a church whose decisions were often overturned by acts of Parliament, controlled by the state to which the church willingly gave this authority. This was the church of the "good old days," the church of which we *Anglo-Catholics* ~~Tractarians~~ at Oxford became ashamed, and which we *Tractarians* openly attempted to change. This was the church that John Henry Newman left ten years ago, giving up his

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orders^{as a priest} in the Church of England and one year later becoming a priest in the Church of Rome.

Today, even the bishops in his new church treat him badly, not unlike the bishops in the Church of England did. John Henry has^{only recently} been assigned an impossible task that even he with his extraordinary talents cannot possibly accomplish. As the Rector and Provost of the new Catholic University in Dublin, he is still, as an Englishman, a despised alien among the Irish, who treat him openly as badly as his bishops treat him with subtlety. I have heard a rumor that the Vatican was considering elevating him to bishop in conjunction with his office as Head of the university, but I have also heard a very credible rumor that the current bishops in Ireland are pressuring the Vatican not to do so because of Newman's English blood and his former Church of England association. Because our paths have taken us in different directions since 1846, some eight years now, we have been out of direct correspondance with each other. I know what is happening to Newman only from a distance, yet I keep abreast of my friend's travels and accomplishments; and I believe our friendship is such that he knows where I am and what I am attempting to do as well. Someday, God willing, we will have the opportunity to sit across a table from one another, to share a meal and open our hearts, each to the other as we did so many times in days past.

Ah, that past. How I long for that comradarie with Newman and the others! Forgive an ^{aging} ~~old~~ man for his

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reflections. As a Tutor at Oxford, I first became aware of John Henry when he was a young scholar at Oriel College in 1822. There was something special about him, though at that time it ^{certainly} was not his intellect that impressed anyone, failing as he did to achieve a passing grade on his first major examination. He became a member of Oriel in a very unmemorable way. Little did we know at that time we were relating to one of the great minds of the century, that all of England in but a few years would hang on every word that he spoke and await news of his most personal decisions.

It was with very mixed emotions that I left my post at Oxford in 1826 to assume the curacy at Fairford, a country parish at which my father was the vicar. I would miss that daily intellectual stimulation which only could be found with my young friends at Oxford; yet I believed myself called to the life of a parish priest, which would allow only periodic visits to Oriel College. And visit I did--as often as I was able to excuse myself from my duties at Fairford. It seems that once a member of the High Table of the Oriel Common Room, always a member! Two years later, in 1828, Hurrell Froude, the renowned professor of Hebrew at Oxford and a distinguished High Churchman, arranged a visit of John Henry, newly elected as Vicar of St. Mary's, the University Church, to the Fairford vicarage, a visit that lasted a full fortnight, and a time I'll never forget so long as God gives me breath. Many were the long walks and conversations. We shared our deepest feelings for the Church and our understanding of the

mysteries of Scripture, John Henry from his precisely reasoned point of view with which I could never argue, and I from my reliance upon my experience in the parish with God's needy and struggling people---a difference in perspective that both enlightened and divided us over the years, and I daresay, still keeps us somewhat apart. John Henry has always been, at least so long as I have known him, a searcher after Truth, in whatever form it might take, and whatever sacrifices it may demand. His poem, "Lead, Kindly Light," is truly an expression of his spiritual journey. His goal has always been to define the relationship between Faith and Reason, and that is why, if anyone can succeed in Dublin, John Henry can. His treatise on his idea of the university is a compelling affirmation of this connection between Faith and Reason. It may someday be considered a classic, and I hope, if you haven't already done so, you will make the effort to read it, and see for yourselves how Newman reasons magnificently that teaching is but one part of university life and that the seeking of community and pastoral care is the other and oft-neglected part. Anyway, that week at Fairford in 1828 was the real beginning of a long friendship, one that someday will be renewed face-to-face.

On July the 14th of 1833, it was my turn to preach the Assize sermon at St. Mary's Church, Oxford. I did not intend it to be a sermon that later would be viewed as the birth of the Oxford Movement; but God works in mysterious ways, even with the unworthiest of us. Parliament had, a few days earlier, overruled the

Bishops' decision to establish ten new bishoprics in Ireland. I simply asked the congregation that day, "What has happened to the Church's authority over its own affairs?" The Church, it seemed to me, had sunk to a new low, and it was becoming more and more obvious that there would be continuing successful attempts by the secular powers to control the spiritual life of the Church. Many of us, especially Newman, saw in this act, not only the need for disestablishment of the Church of England,, but we also recognized the spiritual strength and authority of the Church of Rome, with its apostolic grounding and its supranational witness and perspective---all of which was sorely lacking in the Church of England. It was an understanding of the Church that John Henry Newman would explore with passion and intensity for the next twelve years, until he could no longer, in good conscience, remain in the Church of England. I, and many of his other friends, shed tears of anguish, when, in 1845, he left his Mother Church, and of necessity resigned as Vicar of St. Mary's, decisions that would cost him estrangement from his own family and bring him the animosity of hundreds of thousands of Englishmen who, even yet, picture him as a turncoat and pawn of the papists. When Newman left, not a few other Anglo-Catholics in the Oxford Movement, departed, also. Some of our finest priest followed him, so compelling were his reasons. Then, in 1846 he made the final step of separation when he took his vows as a priest in the Church of Rome.

God had led us in different directions. John Henry Newman into the Church of Rome as the reasoned conclusion in his spiritual journey, as he followed his scriptural admonition: "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free." And I, John Keble, have been led as a country priest in the Church of England to stay, with her and help her recover the Catholic spirit and its apostolic practices. Many is the time, in my most reflective moments with John Henry, as he struggled with his decision on church loyalty and authority, and as one who could never outreason him, have I felt akin to King Agrippa as the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel in his own defense, when the King replied to Paul: "Almost thou persuadest me." John Henry, across the miles and across the Irish Sea, I say to you, "almost thou persuadest me." *And when we have finished the race, may we both be judged with Paul as having kept the Faith.* And as we both have so many times exclaimed in confession to each other, as did the Publican in Scripture, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."