

Cardinal Newman and the “Conversion of England”

John R. GRIFFIN

In this paper I want to examine Newman’s response to what was for many a major theme in the Catholic revival of the nineteenth century, namely the belief that England was on the threshold of conversion to the Catholic church. By conversion I mean the change of one religion for another; in this case a change from Anglicanism to what Protestants invariably called the “church of Rome.” Such a change was, according to Newman, either a great sin or a great duty. Newman’s friends in the Church of England agreed with Newman’s assessment of such a move, and were strongly inclined to emphasize the sin of leaving the Church of England.¹

In his Catholic correspondence Newman seldom mentioned the idea of large-scale conversions, and then, as a rule, by way of dismissal. But there are two important exceptions. In 1848 he did remark that England might be converted if it were not for a shortage of priests. His remark, however, was in response to a successful mission that some of the Oratorians had conducted with the London Irish.² In another letter of that year, Newman protested the decision of Bishop Ullathorne to suspend a new series of saints’ lives that had begun under the direction of Frederic Faber. Newman urged that the English could only be converted through a “high” line on the part of Catholics:

Protestants are converted by high views, not low ones; to hide from them the Lives of the Saints, is to escape indeed offending those who never would be converted, but at the same time to miss those who would; nay, those who might in the event be saints themselves. We sacrifice the good to the bad.³

¹ [J.H. Newman] “Lyra Innocentium,” *Dublin Review*, 20(1846), p. 435

² *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. C.S. Dessain (New York, 1962), XII, p. 382; hereafter, *L+D*.

³ *L+D*, XII, 319.

The dispute with Ullathorne was eventually concluded, but the bishop was hardly alone in his misgivings about the strange (i.e., miracles) element in the lives of the saints. Thus, shortly after his conversion Newman fell under the “cloud” that was to plague him for many of his years in the Catholic church.

In addition to a voluminous correspondence, Newman kept a journal during his life as a Catholic. The journal is not pleasant reading, for it is mainly concerned with his private struggles with one or another faction in the Catholic church. As Newman grew older, the journal became even gloomier as one generation of his critics was replaced by another. First it was Fr. Faber and Cardinal Wiseman, then W.G. Ward, editor of the *Dublin Review*, and Cardinal Manning, as well as a host of lesser figures in England and Rome.⁴

The Essay on Development remained a suspicious document to Catholic theologians,⁵ and Newman’s efforts on behalf of Catholic education were put aside as an excursion in “literary vanities.”⁶ Newman’s marginal role in *The Rambler* had caused him still greater problems, and in 1859 he was deleted to Rome for heresy.⁷ Newman was too liberal for the hierarchy and not liberal enough for some of the laity, especially Lord Acton. With certain exceptions, the *Apologia* had done little to restore Newman’s status with important Catholics, and one of his archcritics expressed the regret that he had ever started writing again.⁸ The greatest complaint against Newman, however, was not related to any of these mooted charges against his orthodoxy. Rather, it was commonly believed that he was “doing nothing” for the church. In the language of the time, “doing nothing” meant not making converts. Here is Newman’s description of his standing in the second half of the nineteenth century:

I had disappointed friends & enemies, since I had been a Catholic, by doing nothing. The reason is conveyed in the remark of Marshall of Brighton to Fr. Ambrose last week: ‘Why, he has made no converts, as Manning &

⁴ *Autobiographical Writings*, ed. H. Tristram (London, 1957), pp. 260-262.

⁵ L. Henry, *Newman and Development: The Genesis of John Henry Newman’s Theory of Development and the Reception of His Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Ph.D. Dissertation (English), University of Texas, 1973.

⁶ Quoted in *Life and Letters of Ambrose de Lisle*, ed. A. de Lisle, 2 vols. (London, 1990), p. 7.

⁷ J. Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement in England* (London, 1962), p. 12; M. O’Connell, “Ultramontaniam and Dupanloup: The Compromise of 1865,” *Church History*, 53(1984), p. 208.

⁸ W. Ward, *Life of Cardinal Newman*, 2 vols. (London, 1912), II, 1ff.

Faber have.’ Here is the real secret of my ‘doing nothing.’ The only thing, of course, which is worth producing is *fruit* – but with the Cardinal immediate *show* is fruit, and conversions the *sole* fruit. At Propaganda, conversions and nothing else, are the proof of doing *anything*. Everywhere with Catholics, to make converts, is doing something; and not to make them is ‘doing nothing.’ And further still, in the estimate of Propaganda, of the Cardinal, & of Catholics generally, they must be splendid conversions of great men, noblemen, learned men, not simply of the poor. It must be recollected that at Rome they have had visions of the whole of England coming over to the Church, and that their notion of the instrumentality of this conversion en masse, is the conversion of persons of rank.⁹

The above entry, like most of the journal, is undated, but the cardinal is Wiseman, who had been taken up with the idea that England was about to become Catholic. How Wiseman came to that conclusion is a story in itself,¹⁰ but we can measure his enthusiasm for the idea of massive conversions by a letter from the early 1840s:

I have hardly any doubt that in a short time we shall have many joining us, and I know that they look to us ... as the person through and by whom their return to the Catholic Church will be effected. What a glorious thing it would be to see even a dozen or 20 Oxford men established at St. Mary’s pursuing their ecclesiastical studies! I will not despair of seeing such a happy event and then I should begin to hope more sanguinely for England’s conversion.¹¹

Wiseman was not alone in his expectations, and he was encouraged in his notion by Ambrose de Lisle, a convert from 1830. De Lisle wrote to Wiseman about the prospect of massive conversions: “We ... look to your Lordship as the Apostle especially raised up for the reconversion of our beloved country.”¹²

Other friends were equally enthusiastic for that ideal, and all of Newman’s efforts on behalf of Catholics and Catholic doctrine were as

⁹ *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 257.

¹⁰ J. Vanden Bussche, *Ignatius (George) Spencer, Passionist (1799-1864)* (Louvain, 1991).

¹¹ Ms. letter (Sept. 1841) #845, *Wiseman Collection*, Ushaw College, Durham, England.

¹² Ms. letter, Ambrose de Lisle to Nicholas Wiseman (March 14, 1838) *Wiseman Collection*, Ushaw College; see also *Life and Letters of Ambrose de Lisle*, in passim; also Vandem Bussche, in passim.

nothing compared to the on-going efforts to return England to the faith. Newman's writings, in fact, may have hurt his popularity with the hierarchy since he seemed even less than indifferent towards the Wiseman agenda.

But the journal does have its cheerful side. Late in his life, Newman was probably the only Catholic who had received any measure of respect from Protestants. The Roman clergy were also very kind in their appreciation of what Newman had done for them. The final entry in the journal is perhaps the most interesting of all: "Since writing the above, I have been made a Cardinal!"¹³

Newman was made a cardinal in May, 1879, but the rumor that Leo XIII might nominate him for the honor had existed for almost a year. Some of the credit for that honor belongs to the English laity, who had received no encouragement from Cardinal Manning.¹⁴ Yet the pope had every reason to call Newman "My cardinal, my cardinal." The general belief was that Newman was dangerous; he was a liberal. W.G. Ward said he would rather have a man die unconverted than be brought into the church through Newman's influence.¹⁵ Manning, for his part, suffered in silence, but may have been responsible for the idea that Newman had refused the honor. He did, moreover, edit a collection of Ward's *Dublin Review* essays in 1881, and Ward had written that the mission of his Catholic life was to oppose the principles espoused by the *Rambler*.¹⁶

When Newman went to Rome to receive the cardinal's hat, the authorities, especially the pope, were very kind, but his visit was not pleasant as he had been sick for most of the time. When he returned to England, there was a widespread rejoicing at England's cardinal. Newman then offered a series of brief addresses to groups who supported him during his years of unpopularity. These addresses are usually about Catholic devotions or expressions of gratitude and of no great interest to the general reader. There are, however, two important exceptions, and it is curious that none of Newman's biographers or Newman scholars have paid any attention to them, since they serve as a kind of summary to Newman's Catholic life. The first is "The Relations Between Catholics and Protestants" (Jan. 1880), the second "The Conversion of England" (May 1880).

In the first Newman described the improved relations between Catholics and Protestants. His point of reference was the widespread enthusiasm for the

¹³ *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 275.

¹⁴ The best account of this episode is in M. Trevor's *Newman*, 2 vols. (London, 1962), II, pp. 550ff.

¹⁵ *L&D*, XXIX, p. 72.

¹⁶ *Essays on the Doctrinal Authority of the Church*, ed. H. Manning (London, 1881), viii.

honor he had received, an enthusiasm which was in marked contrast to the response that his predecessor had received. When Wiseman had first been appointed as Archbishop of London and published his letter *Out of the Flaminean Gate*, all of England had protested. The Anglican bishops, the Prime Minister (Russell), and popular press had condemned the letter and its author as illustrations of Rome's insolence.¹⁷ Wiseman and the pope were burnt in effigy; *Punch* began a series of savage caricatures of the pope and Wiseman in some imperious gesture. Newman was added to this duo since he was believed to have opened the door for the "papal aggression" via the Oxford Movement.¹⁸ Priests were stoned and Catholic churches burnt or damaged. A literature was invented to show the truth about convent life in which every young woman was the prisoner of the priests' sexual desires. No woman was safe if a Catholic priest were in the neighborhood, and the "No Popery" agitation was spread throughout Canada, America, and Australia. Laws were enacted against religious gatherings, and it was routinely asserted that every thinking Catholic was at heart a skeptic.¹⁹

Newman was not exaggerating when he wrote in a sermon of 1850 that no slander was too absurd or malicious not to be readily believed by Protestants. Much of that slander was directed at himself. He had gone over to Rome because of his injured feelings, and was about to return to the English church. He had become a skeptic and given up all religion. His

¹⁷ Wiseman's letter is reprinted in *English Historical Documents*, XII, ed. G. Young and W. Hancock (New York, 1956), pp. 364-367; for the official response to Wiseman's letter, see J. Russell, "Letter to the Bishop of Durham," *English Historical Documents*, XII, pp. 367-369, e.g., "My Dear Lord, I agree with you in considering 'the late aggression of the Pope upon our Protestantism' as 'insolent and insidious', and I therefore feel as indignant as you can do upon the subject. ... There is an assumption of power in all the documents which I have seen from Rome; a pretension of supremacy over the realm of England, and a claim to sole and individual sway, which is inconsistent with the Queen's supremacy, with the rights of our bishops and clergy, and with spiritual independence of the nation, as asserted even in Roman Catholic times."

¹⁸ See below, n. 35.

¹⁹ W. Arnstein, *Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* (Columbia, MO., 1986); *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, ed. E.R. Norman (New York, 1968); for a fine survey of Protestant fiction on the subject of convent life etc., see V. Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (New York, 1990); Canadian "No Popery" is described in A.J. Johnston, "Popery and Progress: Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Nineteenth Century Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review*, 64(1984), pp. 46-63; also, J. Moir, "Toronto's Protestants and Their Perception of Their Roman Catholic Neighbours," in *Catholics at the 'Gathering Place': Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1841-1991*, ed. M. McGowan and B. Clark (Toronto, 1993 pp. 313-27).

morals had deteriorated.²⁰ Contrary to the comments of Owen Chadwick, these attacks on Catholics were not confined to the lower orders.²¹ Most of the more serious slanders came from the highest levels of England. By 1880, however, the position of Catholics had changed, and some of that change can be traced to Newman's influence.

For one, Newman always refused to join in the attacks on the English church or the Anglo-Catholics within the national church. It is true that he did not regard the Church of England as a church, but he thought that there was no need for the chronic abuse of the English church that was so characteristic of the Catholic press in the nineteenth century. For another, Newman had shown that Catholics could be and usually were good Englishmen. They did not take their orders from Rome or *The Dublin Review*, nor were they divided, as a rule, in their loyalties. They did not lie under the sanction of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, nor were they idolaters under the support of Faber. Each of these issues had been addressed by Newman in the *Apologia* and later works.²² Another factor for the spread of something like good will towards Catholics was the increased number of conversions in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Newman, it was hard to think of an English family that had not given at least one convert to the church. Thus, whatever one might think about Catholics in general, it was difficult to believe that the same about a Catholic relative.²³

In the same address Newman did gently observe that the earlier policies of Wiseman and others had been poorly calculated to assist English Catholics. The reference was to Wiseman's *Out of the Flaminean Gate*. Without intending it, Wiseman had offered a "great insult" to Protestants by apparently forgetting that they already had a religion. Another source of insult was connected to the letter; that is, the promulgation of prayers for the conversion of England, which Wiseman had published shortly before Newman's conversion.²⁴ Such prayers seemed to suggest that England was no more than a heathen nation. Those prayers were still in effect when Newman was made a cardinal and until the early sixties of this century.

In the second of these addresses, "The Conversion of England," Newman set forth his own opinion about the suitability of prayers for

²⁰ J. Griffin, "The Anglican Response to Newman's Conversion," *Faith and Reason*, 4(June, 1976), pp. 17-32.

²¹ *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols. (London, 1962)1, p. 263.

²² The business of Catholic politics and loyalty is addressed in *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875); Catholic integrity in the *Apologia* (1864); devotions to Mary in *Letter to Dr. E. B. Pusey* (1865).

²³ "The Relations Between Protestants and Catholics," *Sayings of Cardinal Newman* (Dublin, 1976), p. 50.

²⁴ "The Relations Between Protestants and Catholics," pp. 50-51.

England's conversion. The topic of England's conversion was both "difficult and dangerous." Difficult because it related to the future; dangerous because it might give offense to Protestants, and prompt a return of the violent anti-catholicism of earlier periods. Since the prayers had been officially enjoined upon Catholics, it was appropriate to examine what Catholics meant when they said the prayers. "Do we mean," he asked, "the conversion of the State, or of the nation, or of the people, or of the race? Of which of these, or all of these together?—for there is an indistinctness in the word 'England.'"²⁵ What, also, are these people to be converted to, and from what? In the past, such prayers were that the whole nation might become Catholic; then the chief instrument of massive conversions was the state. Catholics in earlier periods had prayed for a Catholic monarch, as Primitive Christians had prayed for a Christian emperor and the defeat of a pagan emperor. But English Catholics had not really done well with either Queen Mary or James II. Acts were committed in the reign of the former that provided an excuse for the terrible reprisals that followed. The same acts, moreover, created an enduring prejudice against Catholics that was still fresh in the minds of Victorian Protestants. Such prayers, if suited to a time of persecution, were no longer appropriate. The best that Catholics should hope for was to be left alone by the state.

The first requisite for all prayer was a spirit of resignation, and that spirit had been absent in the prayers that had been said for the conversion of Newman's Anglican friends, especially Dr. Pusey. Contrary to the expectations of Wiseman and many others, Pusey had never been near to the Catholic church. The multitude of masses and novenas for his conversion, according to Newman, might bring a heavier judgment on Pusey, who was almost a pure Protestant; that is, one who went exclusively by his own judgment.²⁶

It was even less appropriate to pray for the conversion of the whole English nation. Prayer should be directed toward a plausible object. The conversion of England, as Newman observed, would be like bringing a dead person back to life. Of course, the miracle had happened in the past, which created a philosophical argument that it might happen again. But the "normal" case of miracles was different in that the Creator seemed to honor the laws of nature even as He extended or suspended their effects. St. Augustine's conversion was a choice example of such a miracle. His mother had prayed constantly for his conversion, but it came after his visit to Milan on other business. Catholics ought to direct their attention to a natural

²⁵ "The Conversion of England," *Sayings of Cardinal Newman*, p. 63.

²⁶ *L&D*, XVII, p. 414.

working out of Catholic ideals in a country that had already witnessed an amazing revival of those ideals.²⁷

The most important reason for such prayers was to honor the blood and sufferings of the English martyrs. It was a law of providence that no good ever came about without suffering on the part of those who were agents of that good, but there was another law of providence that ought to comfort Victorian Catholics: No suffering for good ever went unrewarded. Newman's message of 1880 was anticipated in his most famous sermon, "The Second Spring," and a few excerpts from it might be useful to illustrate his thoughts. In his sermon of thirty years earlier he had written:

It is not God's way that great blessings should descend without the sacrifice first of great sufferings... We have no light outfit for our opening warfare. Can we religiously suppose that the blood of our martyrs three centuries ago and since, shall never receives its recompense? These priests, secular and regular, did they suffer for no end? or rather, for an end which is not yet accomplished.²⁸

With the vehemence of the anti-Catholic protests of his time, Newman anticipated that fresh blood might be spilt as the church made its formal return in England. Certainly, there would be suffering, and Newman always regarded his sufferings during the Achilli trial as an illustration of that first law of providence in its operation.

Several pages earlier I suggested that Newman's address might be read as a partial summary of his Catholic life, and it might be useful to briefly examine some of his earlier writings on the subject of converting the English. Individual conversions, like that John Keble and E.B. Pusey, do briefly come up in his writings, but Newman was well aware that neither Keble nor Pusey was likely to become Catholic. The idea of massive conversions is addressed in three of the longer volumes: *Difficulties Felt by Anglicans* (1850), *The Present Position of Catholics in England* (1851), and the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864).

By conversion of an English Christian, Newman meant an addition to what that Christian already believed. Here is Newman's definition of that process:

²⁷ "The Conversion of England," p. 66.

²⁸ "The Second Spring," *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (London, 1874), pp. 189ff.

They [converts] come, not so much to lose what they have, as to gain what they have not; and in order that, by means of what they have, more will be given to them.²⁹

A convert from Protestantism, however, did change his religion. The word *reunion*, as it was used in Newman's time, meant something else, the larger movement of two separate bodies towards each other, which we today call *ecumenism*. Ecumenism, as I understand it, proscribes individual conversions. Newman expressed a slight interest in 1841 in the idea of corporate union with Rome, but he faulted those Catholics who seemed to be promoting union between Rome and Canterbury all the while aiming at individual conversions. The greater issue was that the Catholic overtures towards himself and the other Tractarians enhanced the popular idea that the Tractarians were acting as 'Jesuits' in doing the work of Rome while professed members of the Protestant Church of England.

It might be convenient to begin with the best-known of Newman's works, the *Apologia*. The most common reading of the *Apologia* is that it is, in no small way, a work of fiction.³⁰ Newman created an ideal portrait of himself with the idea of recovering his lost place in the Catholic life of England and his lost friends in the English church. On the other hand, Newman anticipated and denied that reading. He said that the writing of the *Apologia* was a solemn duty and that he was answering his many 'judges' with the work: those who had accused him of acting in bad faith during his Anglican years; those, like Dr. Pusey, who said that he had gone over to Rome because of his sensitivity, and those who said that he was not a good Catholic because he was not doing his part to promote the conversion of England. This last charge is specifically addressed in the following:

Since I have been a Catholic, people have sometimes accused me of backwardness in making converts; and Protestants have argued from it that I have no great eagerness to do so. It would be against my nature to act otherwise than I do; but besides, it would be to forget the lessons which I gained in the experience of my own history of the past.³¹

In a related passage, Newman did offer an apology to Father Spencer, an earlier convert, from Anglicanism, who had been doing his best to promote the idea that England was ripe for conversion. Spencer had visited England in 1842 with the idea of promoting prayers for the reunion of Rome

²⁹ *Grammar of Assent*, ed. I. Ker (Oxford, 1985), p. 163.

³⁰ J. Buckley, *The Turning Key* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 96.

³¹ *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. W. Ward (London, 1912), p. 200.

and Canterbury. At that time, Newman regarded him as an apostate Anglican and refused to meet with him.

We can measure the accuracy of the *Apologia* by looking briefly at Newman's earlier works of controversy, *Difficulties Felt by Anglicans* (1850) and its sequel, *The Present Position of Catholics in England* (1851).

The occasion of the *Difficulties* lectures was a trial of doctrine that was going on in the civil courts. The plaintiff was a clergyman named R.G. Gorham, whose denial of Baptismal Regeneration (i.e., that baptism was essential for membership in the church) had caused his bishop to deny him a living in the Exeter diocese. The bishop's denial had been upheld by a church court, whereupon Gorham took his case to a secular court, the Privy Council, and won. The disputed doctrine was an "open question" in the Church of England. The doctrine was perhaps less important than what the court's ruling illustrated about the Church of England. The ultimate authority in the English church was the state, the very heresy that Newman and the other Tractarians had set out to oppose in the Oxford Movement.

At first Newman was content to watch the trial progress. It was no concern of Catholics, and it would be wrong to spoil a "party fight" in the English church. The trial was the natural result of a machinery that Henry VIII had set up but of no concern to Catholics.³² Rather suddenly, Newman changed his mind and determined to give the lectures addressed to those who had remained behind in the English church. In the *Difficulties* Newman argued that the original Oxford Movement had been founded in a fundamental ignorance of the origins and traditions of the English church. The Tractarians had not known that the church had been founded in erastianism and that to attack erastianism was to attack the church itself. But the response of the church, statesmen, bishops, clergy and laity, to the first principles of 1833 had forever destroyed the earlier excuse of "invincible ignorance." Those who professed, as everyone had professed in 1833, a belief in the dogmatic principle and the authority of the church in matters of doctrine ought to be Catholics. The very authorities that the Tractarians had intended to support – the Anglican bishops – had repudiated their teachings as dangerous ("Roman") and the only option was for those who remained to ignore such repudiations and to "set up for themselves" within the national church; that is, to form a "party" within the church. But that measure was also inconsistent with the professions of 1833, and it had the effect of narrowing the exponents of Catholic orthodoxy to a very small number of Oxford clergymen. Such a process was morally dangerous and intellectually absurd.

³² *L&D*, X111, p. 276.

Given Newman's harsh portrait of the Church of England, or, as he called it throughout the lectures, the "Establishment," it is easy to imagine that he had been commissioned by Wiseman to write the *Difficulties*. Yet it was Newman who proposed the lectures, and a close reader will discover much in Newman's version of the movement that contradicts Wiseman's version. The Tractarians had always been a very small number; then, there was the intrinsic conflict with the agenda of 1833 and the aspirations of the national church. According to Newman, the Tractarians had been unable to influence the Establishment and those who remained in it could not expect to withstand the flood-tide of liberalism. The national church was a reflection of the will of the nation, and in the Victorian age that will was increasingly liberal.³³

At the same time, there were problems with the Catholic church. Protestant travellers were often scandalized at the behavior of Catholics they encountered in their tours of the continent. Catholic countries, moreover, were behind Protestant countries in their social and economic development. The religious orders of the church were often engaged in unseemly struggles, so much so that the unity of the church seemed not to exist. In elaborating on these "difficulties" Newman may have struck Wiseman's nerves, but he was at least faithful to the Tractarian literature. He and others had been scandalized on their trips to Italy.

The *Difficulties* lectures have always been regarded as too polemical³⁴ in purpose to serve as an accurate history of the religious revival of 1833, and perhaps more than any other of Newman's Catholic volumes the lectures seemed to justify Fr. MacDougall's complaint that Newman was too much the propagandist to be a good historian.³⁵ Still, the abundance of citations from the "literature" of 1833 is almost unique in the entire body of writings about the revival. Those who maintained the ideals of 1833 ought to be Catholics if some of the more common objections to the Catholic church could be removed.

It was otherwise with the great majority of English Protestants and the English church, and this is the problem that Newman addressed in the lectures of 1851, *The Present Position of Catholics in England*. *The Present Position* is addressed to Catholics in his attempt to explain the origins of the "No Popery" riots that were then going on throughout England. The riots and the prejudice that motivated those riots have scarcely been noticed by

³³ For a positive reading of the lectures, see J. Griffin, "Newman's Difficulties Felt by Anglicans: History or Propaganda?" *Catholic Historical Review*, 69(July, 1983), pp. 371-383.

³⁴ M. O'Connell, *The Oxford Conspirators* (New York, 1969), IX.

³⁵ H. MacDougall, "Newman: Historian or Apologist?" *Canadian Catholic Historical Association: Study Sessions*, 1968, pp. 91-101.

historians of the nineteenth century, and with all that can be said on behalf of “the Age of Reform” etc., the display of fierce anti-Catholicism was not confined to the “vulgar” classes. Newman traced the origins of that prejudice to the Reformation itself, when all the literary talent of the day had been enlisted on behalf of the new religion and Catholics silenced. The result of three hundred years of indoctrination in the new religion meant that the Victorian Protestant was hardly about to become Catholic; and the success of the Protestant legend had been secured by imposing a silence upon Catholics that had lasted until the early part of the nineteenth century.

The standard reading of *The Present Position* is that it is a work of satire.³⁶ Newman was exploiting the “John Bull” type in a manner not unlike that of Dickens. But Newman flatly and repeatedly denied such a reading, and in his indictment of the Reformation and the propaganda used to ensure its success, he posed the first major challenge to a Protestant tradition of three hundred years. As recently as 1828 Macaulay had remarked that the Reformation was the most disputed and least understood period in English history.³⁷ Of course, Cobbett and Lingard had challenged the Protestant version, but the myth of the Reformation was as vital in 1851 as it ever had been.

One of the most interesting development of the Oxford Movement was a changed perception of the English Reformation. R.W. Church’s celebrated “memoir” of the Oxford Movement virtually dismissed the idea that the Church of England was created in the sixteenth century, and his interpretation has been followed by virtually all modern Anglican scholars who dismiss the events of the Reformation as unimportant or “unprofitable” in the history of the church of England.³⁸ But in Newman’s time, the work of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, as well as the acts of “Bloody Mary,” were taken as proof of England’s moral superiority and God’s providential care for the English people.³⁹ In any event, Newman’s treatment of the Reformation and its effects were regarded as proof of his moral deterioration.

The idea behind the *Present Position* was to suggest a policy for Catholics in Victorian England. In the ninth discourse, Newman proposed an agenda for Catholics that was in partial contrast to Wiseman’s ideal. First, Catholics should live in such a way as would directly contradict what their neighbors might believe about them. Protestants might well believe that

³⁶ I. Ker, *The Achievement of Cardinal Newman* (South Bend, 1990), p. 153.

³⁷ “Hallam’s History,” in *Critical and Historical Essays*, ed. D. Jerrold, 2 vols. (New York, 1963), pp. 1, 5: “No portion of our annals have been more perplexed and misrepresented by writers of different parties than the history of the Reformation.”

³⁸ J. Griffin, *The Oxford Movement: A Revision*, (Edinburgh, 1984), ch. 5.

³⁹ *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, pp. 15ff.

distant Catholics were the most immoral sort, but that did not matter so long as those Catholics they knew did not fall into that category. Personal influence was everything in breaking-down the Protestant legends about the Catholic church. The second duty of Catholics seems to have been aimed directly at Wiseman. Catholics ought not to hope for conversions from English Protestants for the Protestant mind was incapable of even listening to arguments on behalf of the church. Catholics who were able should attempt to contradict their critics by direct confrontation.

England was not on the threshold of conversion. Attempts at conversion usually resulted in greater violence against Catholics. The question was one of Catholic policy in a time of persecution, and in his correspondence of this period Newman was even more critical of the Wiseman ideal. A letter of this period illustrates his position:

I am not displeased at this row, though the extreme trouble it causes to private persons, domestic persecution, tyrannical efforts at conversion and the like, are the most serious and painful matters-but I mean in its public bearing. Humbug is detestable – and at home and abroad such things have been said of the approaching conversion of England, as make one rejoice in any thing, however rude, which destroys the dream.⁴⁰

Before he had completed *The Present Position*, Newman was informed that he was being sued by the Evangelicals for his attack on the ex-priest Giacinto Achilli. The Evangelicals had brought Achilli to England to lecture on the horrors of Popery from which he had recently escaped. Achilli had been imprisoned by the Roman Inquisition, but not for the reasons stated by the Evangelical party. He had attacked three women while a priest and been suspended for those attacks, but to Victorian Protestants he was a martyr for the gospel. Wiseman had set forth his history in an article for the *Dublin Review*, which Newman used in the fifth lecture. If any one event in the history of the Victorian church could be used to illustrate the depth of anti-Catholic sentiments, the Achilli trial and verdict would be a likely candidate.

Many of the Evangelicals knew or suspected Achilli's guilt, but since Newman failed to prove one point in his charges, he was found guilty of libel and fined. At the end of the trial, one of the judges lectured Newman on his moral deterioration since becoming a Catholic. The lecture was entitled a "Puseyite jobation" to indicate its source, and one of the stock arguments in the Anglo-Catholic arsenal was that men deteriorated after they became Catholics. In addition, the Protestant journals took up Achilli's case. When

⁴⁰ *L&D*, XIV, p. 160; also VIX, p. 163.

he was declared to be implicitly guilty on two of the charges made by Newman, the fault was not the ex-priest's but the Roman church and its vow of celibacy. These were the persons that Wiseman and others believed were about to become Catholic.

Throughout the trial and beyond, Newman was remarkably patient. The fact that the present pope has declared him to be venerable suggest that his patience, as I think, was heroic in quality. The student of Newman's life and work will notice a certain irony throughout this paper. Newman was in fact as interested in making converts as Wiseman or his party. Perhaps a third of Newman's Catholic correspondence is addressed to those who had come to Newman with inquiries about the faith and were stuck on some "difficulty" in the church. Newman's Catholic volumes, as well, were often addressed to problems that born Catholics cannot imagine. What was required was a pre-disposition towards the church. Without that, further discussion was useless. Hence the motto Newman selected when he became a cardinal: "Cor ad cor loquitur."