



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE ELEVATION

TO THE CARDINALATE OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN *To my Venerable Brother George Patrick Dwyer
Archbishop of Birmingham*

President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales IN SPIRITUAL COMMUNION and with pastoral solicitude I gladly respond to your invitation to celebrate together with the Church throughout England the centenary of the elevation to the Cardinalate of one of her great sons and witnesses of the faith, John Henry Newman, created Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church by my venerable predecessor Leo XIII on 12 May 1879, with the title of Saint George in Velabro. The elevation of Newman to the Cardinalate, like his conversion to the Catholic Church, is an event that transcends the simple historical fact, as well as the importance it had for his own country. The two events have long since been deeply inscribed in ecclesial life far beyond the shores of England. The providential meaning and importance of these events for the Church at large have been seen more clearly in the course of our own century. Newman himself, with almost prophetic vision, was convinced that he was working and suffering for the defence and affirmation of the cause of religion and of the Church not only in his own time but also in the future. His inspiring influence as a great teacher of the faith and as a spiritual guide is being ever more clearly perceived in our own day, as was pointed out by Paul VI in his address to the Cardinal Newman Academic Symposium during the Holy Year 1975: He (Newman) who was convinced of being faithful throughout his life, with all his heart devoted to the light of truth today becomes an ever brighter beacon for all who are seeking an informed orientation and sure guidance amid the uncertainties of the modern world – a world which he himself prophetically foresaw. In raising John Henry Newman to the Cardinalate, Leo XIII wished to defend and honour his activity and mission in the Church. Acceding to the earnest desire expressed by members of the English laity under the leadership of the Duke of Norfolk, the Pope meant to pay tribute to the genius of Newman and to give public expression to his own personal appreciation of Newman's merits. He intended to recognize the value of Newman's many writings in defence of God and the Church. In this way Pope Leo upheld and encouraged all those – inside and outside the Catholic Church – who regarded Newman as their spiritual teacher and guide in the way of holiness. Newman himself made this comment on the Pope's intentions: He judged it would give pleasure to English Catholics, and even to Protestant England, if I received some mark of his favour. The philosophical and theological thought and the spirituality of Cardinal Newman, so deeply rooted in and enriched by Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers, still retain their particular originality and value. As a leading figure of the Oxford Movement, and later as a promoter of authentic renewal in the Catholic Church, Newman is seen to have a special ecumenical vocation not only for his own country but also for the whole Church. By insisting that the Church must be prepared for converts, as well as converts prepared for the Church, he already in a certain measure anticipated in his broad theological vision one of the main aims and

orientations of the Second Vatican Council and the Church in the post-conciliar period. In the spirit of my predecessors in the See of Peter, I express the hope that under this very important aspect, and under other aspects no less important, the figure and teaching of the great Cardinal will continue to inspire an ever more effective fulfilment of the Church's mission in the modern world, and that it will help to renew the spiritual life of her members and hasten the restoration of unity among all Christians. It is my hope that this centenary will be for all of us an opportunity for studying more closely the inspiring thought of Newman's genius, which speaks to us of deep intellectual honesty, fidelity to conscience and grace, piety and priestly zeal, devotion to Christ's Church and love of her doctrine, unconditional trust in divine providence and absolute obedience to the will of God. I also wish to express my personal interest in the process for beatification of this good and faithful servant of Christ and the Church. I shall follow with close attention whatever progress may be made in this regard. In extolling his memory and his contribution to the Church of God I send my special Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the faithful of England, and in particular to the members of the English Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri, of which John Henry Newman was the founder, as well as to all those who revere him throughout the world. *From the Vatican, 7 April 1979.* **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**
