

**WORK AND PRAYER
IN A CONSTANT SEARCH FOR GOD:
ONE OF NEWMAN'S BENEDICTINE TRAITS**

When John Henry Newman returned to England from Rome at the end of June 1879, having received the dignity of the Cardinalate from Pope Leo XIII the previous month, he was given a warm reception by the whole English population. Letters, addresses and deputations arrived at the Oratory in Birmingham from civic and religious bodies all over the country and even beyond his native land. Among those who offered their congratulations was a deputation of English Benedictines led by their President General, Dom Placid Burchall. In their address they drew attention to a particular aspect of Newman's life which endeared him to the children of St Benedict, namely, the Cardinal's « spirit of the Ascetic » and his preference to do his « great intellectual work in retirement », reluctant, as they said, that any event should call him forth from his truly monastic cell¹.

Newman was particularly gratified with this address because, as he himself stated in his reply, « it comes from Benedictines », and he begged their prayers so that he might become more like that « ideal of work and prayer » which they identified with him².

It is this Benedictine trait and its setting in Newman's life and teaching, that will be investigated in the following pages.

Peaceful work

Work is an essential part of the homage that a rational creature owes to God. It is one of the laws of created human nature.

¹ *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with His Replies Etc. 1879-81*. Edited by The Rev. W. P. Neville (Cong. Orat.). London 1905, p. 209.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 211. 213.

Without it, man does not reach the fulness of his capacity, for he has been called upon to collaborate with God in transforming and bringing to perfection the material universe. This cooperation is not reserved to those who rule and invent, to the gifted few who lead humanity with their intuitions and ideas, or who work at the front of human investigation and progress. Even the most common toil of daily life, however dull and dreary it may be, takes on a sublime meaning in the christian vision. The most ordinary everyday activities are also acts by which we obey the divine mandate to work, as the Vatican Council teaches. Hence, « when men and women provide for themselves and their families in such a way as to be of service to the community as well, they can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the creator, a service to their fellow man, and their personal contribution to the fulfilment in history of the divine plan »³. Moreover, as a result of sin, work is linked with toil, fatigue and penance. It is now an eminent expression of poverty, a school of virtue and holiness and a prominent aspect of cristian asceticism.

St Benedict gave manual labour and, indeed, work in general a place of honour in the monastic life. Before his time, the life of the monk was predominantly based on prayer and kindred exercises. One of Benedicts noteworthy contributions was the harmonious introduction of work as an essential element and sustaining pillar of the monastic life⁴. He considered it to be a healthy remedy against the evils of idleness; it gave the monastic family the possibility of exercising fraternal charity by offering hospitality and distributing alms to the poor; it was an appropriate expression of the life of a poor man and made him resemble Christ and the apostles more closely⁵. Work also helped to sanctify the precious but fleeting mo-

³ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, No. 34 (The translation is that of *Vatican Council II The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. General Editor, Austin Flannery, O. P. Dublin 1975).

⁴ « ... Das 'Ora et Labora' gebe im Arbeitsethos Benedikts den treffendsten Grundton einer neuen Arbeitswertung an. Ruhe das Mönchsleben bisher auf einem Fundamente, dem kontemplativen Leben, so werde es jetzt durch zwei Pfeiler, Gebet und Arbeit, getragen » (Hermann Dedler, O. S. B., *Vom Sinn der Arbeit nach der Regel des heiligen Benedikt*, in *Benedictus der Vater des Abendlandes 547-1947*. Weihegabe der Erzabtei St. Ottilien zum Vierzehnhundersten Todesjahr. Dargebracht und herausgegeben von Heinrich Suso Brechter. München 1947, p. 103. Cf. pp. 103-118). Cf. R. Sorg, *Towards a benedictine Theology of manual labor*. S. Procopius, Illinois, 1951; Anna C. Morganti, O. S. B., *L'asctica del lavoro nella Regola di S. Benedetto*, in *Vita cristiana* 17 (1948) 131-147.

⁵ « Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina... Si autem necessitas loci aut paupertas exegerit ut ad fruges recollendas per se occupentur, non contristentur, quia tunc vere monachi sunt si labore manuum

ments of time and thus keep the monk ready and waiting for the coming of his Lord. Christ, the divine Worker, promises to be with man, the human worker, and to be his reward at the end of the day of this life: « Et quaerens Dominus in multitudine populi ... operarium suum, iterum dicit: *Qui est homo qui vult vitam et cupit videre dies bonos?* »⁶.

Those who share in the charism of St Benedict could well be an example to modern man in the art of peaceful and ennobling work. They can show him how work can become an act of worship, a means of personal fulfilment according to God's plan and a service rendered to one's fellowmen. From being an instrument of ambition and greed, it can be transformed into an act of adoration and obedience, and can become a source of health, joy and peace⁷.

Cardinal Newman admired and personified in his own life St Benedict's spirit of peaceful and constant work. In his opinion, early monasticism was characterized above all by a flight from the world which then seemed to be crumbling in its christian supports under the threat of barbarian forces. The monk of old sought a life 'free from corruption in its daily work, free from distraction in its daily worship'⁸. The labour of Benedictine monasteries was conducive to recollection of mind; it did not squander physical or mental energy. In fact, Newman regarded subjects that distracted or excited the mind as uncongenial to traditional Benedictine peace⁹. The reason

suarum vivunt, sicut et Patres nostri et apostoli. Pauperum et peregrinorum maxime susceptioni cura sollicitate exhibeatur, quia in ipsis magis Christus suscipitur; nam divitum terror ipse sibi exigit honorem» (*S. Benedicti Regula* 48, 1. 7; 53, 15). We take the Latin text of the *Rule* of St. Benedict from the critical edition: *La Règle de Saint Benoît*. 6 vol. Par Adalbert de Vogüé et Jean Neufville. (Sources Chrétiennes, n. 181-186) Paris 1971-1972. Henceforth abbreviated: *RB*.

⁶ « Searching for his workman in the crowd ... the Lord goes on to say: 'What man is there who desires life and covets many days that he may enjoy good?' » (*RB, Prologue*, 14-15).

⁷ Cf. Piero Bargellini, *S. Benedetto e l'urgenza del suo insegnamento*, in *Vita cristiana* 17 (1948) 107-111; Homily by Pope John Paul II in the Vatican Basilica, January 1, 1980: « *Lo spirito benedettino è in antitesi con qualsiasi programma di distruzione*. Esso è uno spirito di recupero e di promozione, nato dalla coscienza del piano divino di salvezza ed educato nella unione quotidiana della preghiera e del lavoro » (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 gennaio, 1980, p. 3).

⁸ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Historical Sketches*. London 1906, Vol. II, p. 375.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 423-24. « So Newman will claim for the Benedictine tradition, that it offers a *pattern of life* which will ensure that peace and foster that interior life; he points out how, in spite of exceptions — yet exceptions will prove the rule, such as the abbey of Bec, renowned for its theologians, Anselm and Lanfranc — most of the great Benedictine filiations have always considered manual work as one of the elements of monastic life, and have preferred, even in intellectual work, those tasks which best dispose the mind

was that he considered monastic work as essentially bound up with prayer, penance, praise and union with God.

A similar dedication to humble and hidden work, performed with a cheerful spirit, was characteristic of the sons of St Philip Neri: « the work of the Oratory is a tranquil work, and requires peace and security to do it well »¹⁰. For the English Congregation of the Oratory, Newman chose a populous district of Birmingham, where there was plenty of hard work to be done among the poorer working class and uneducated immigrants, and where he was far removed from the praise and admiration of the great names of society. In this respect, Newman simply imitated St Philip Neri who gathered the young, the poor and the careless into his Oratory in Rome and guided them in the ways of conversion and holiness, allowing no special rules for his Congregation other than 'mutual love and hard work'¹¹. Newman had a similar wish for his Brothers: he prayed that they would get neither praise nor glory, neither calumny nor persecution, from the men of their day, but « that you should work for God alone with a pure heart and single eye, without the distractions of human applause, and should make Him your sole hope, and His eternal heaven your sole aim(and have your reward, not partly here, but fully and entirely hereafter »¹². One is forcefully reminded of the Rule of St Benedict which asks nothing more of the monks than a simple and hidden life, made up mostly of divine praise and human toil, peaceful in its poetic atmosphere, simple in its daily routine, lived out in the presence of God with a strong faith and a growing love, constantly employing the 'tools of good works': « Quae cum fuerint a nobis die noctuque incessabiliter adimpleta et in die iudicii reassignata, illa mercis nobis a Domino recompensabitur quam ipse promisit: Quod oculus non vidit nec auris audivit, quae praeparavit Deus his qui diligunt illum »¹³.

for the divine office and contemplation, that is to say, the study of the Scriptures and of those who have understood them best, the Fathers of the Church » (Jean Honoré, *The Benedictine Vocation in the Church according to Cardinal Newman*, in *The Clergy Review* 64 (1979) 278).

¹⁰ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Sermons preached on Various Occasions*. London 1908, pp. 241-42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹³ *RB* 4, 76-77. « When they have been used by us steadily day and night, and have been handed in on the day of judgment, then the reward will be paid over to us by the Lord, which he himself has promised: 'No eye has seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor. 2) » (We use the English translation of the Rule by Dom Bernard Basil Bolton OSB, *The Rule of Saint Benedict for Monasteries*. Ealing Abbey 1969. Cf. p. 14).

Newman himself was very much aware of the work he had to do in life and of its importance in God's eyes. During a visit to Sicily in 1833, as he lay dangerously ill with typhoid fever, he was convinced that he would not die, since he had a 'work to do'¹⁴. At another dark moment of his life, in 1861, he confided to one of his spiritual daughters: « I do not know why one should wish to live, except to do His work... Pray for me that I may not be taken away till I have done all the work which He intended I should do »¹⁵. This divinely-appointed work constitutes man's mission in life — the only thing that binds him to this world. Newman meditates on this truth as follows:

« God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission — I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his — if, indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling »¹⁶.

Newman asked no more of his followers (and the same is essentially true of St Benedict) than a genuinely christian life leading to the perfection of baptismal grace. Consequently, there are many instances where Newman, even as an Anglican curate, encourages his parishioners to a manner of christian living that in its essentials would not be alien to what a consecrated religious aspires to. He warns them of the dangers of riches and of fixing their hearts on the pleasures and pastimes of this world. He urges them to avoid secular excitements and ambitions, the pursuit of power and distinction and the applause of the crowd. These things engross the mind and bind the heart; they leave little time or interest for God and

¹⁴ Cf. John Henry Newman, *Autobiographical Writings*. Edited with Introduction by Henry Tristram of the Oratory. London 1956, pp. 118. 122. 127.

¹⁵ *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*. Vols XI-XXXI; I-III. Edited at the Birmingham Oratory with notes and an introduction by Charles Stephen Dessain of the same Oratory, and Collaborators. London 1961-1979, Vol. XIX, p. 502.

¹⁶ *Meditations and Devotions of the late Cardinal Newman*. London 1911, p. 301.

divine worship. They keep a man on the surface of reality and prevent him from penetrating the deeper meaning of things. The remedy advocated by Newman is a peaceful and prayerful life with fidelity to daily work:

Quite contrary is the Christian temper, which is in its perfect and peculiar enjoyment when engaged in that ordinary, unvaried course of duties which God assigns, and which the world calls dull and tiresome. To get up day after day to the same employments, and to feel happy in them, is the great lesson of the Gospel; and, when exemplified in those who are alive to the temptation of being busy, it implies a heart weaned from the love of this world... Men of energetic minds and talents for action... are but soldiers in the open field, not builders of the Temple, nor inhabitants of those 'amiable' and specially blessed 'Tabernacles' where the worshipper lives in praise and intercession, and is militant amid the unostentatious duties of ordinary life »¹⁷.

One would almost think that Newman envisages a monastic peace and seclusion for the busy christian in spite of his worldly activities. He was simply going to the essentials of the Gospel message, the same thing done by St Benedict in his Rule for monasteries. Peace of heart and prayerfulness do not depend on where one is but on how one lives. Every person has to appreciate his daily labour and to learn the great secret of how to accomplish it with spiritual profit. For every christian, religious and lay, has his work to do in life, a mission received from his creator, and which no one else can perform for him. On a number of significant occasions, Newman preached on the text from the psalm: « Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening »¹⁸. When that work is accomplished in the evening of life, God will be man's reward. Christians, however, like the labourer of the eleventh hour, have been called in the world's evening; hence, they have much to do in

¹⁷ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*. In eight Volumes. London 1907-1910. Vol. II, pp. 351-52. Cf. the Sermon: « Religious Worship a Remedy for Excitements », *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 336-349.

¹⁸ *Ps.* 104 (103), 23. The very first sermon Newman wrote as a young Anglican curate was on this same text: cf. *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 77. He also chose the same text for a sermon of January 23, 1842, entitled « The Work of a Christian », at a moment when he had already begun to doubt the tenability of his position in the Anglican Church (*Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*. London 1909, pp. 1-13). Finally, for his last sermon as an Anglican, September 25, 1843, he chose the same text (« The Parting of Friends », *Ibid.*, pp. 395-409).

a short time. The accomplishment of their mission is the work of a lifetime: it demands the finest energy of youth and a persevering effort into old age. « O may we ever bear in mind that we are not sent into this world to stand all the day idle, but to go forth to our work and to our labour until the evening! *Until* the evening, not *in* the evening only of life, but serving God from our youth, and not waiting till our years fail us. Until the *evening*, not in the day-time only, lest we begin to run well, but fall away before our course is ended... The *end* is the proof of the matter »¹⁹. Words worthy of a legislator to monks setting out on a course of perfection, to be attained through daily work and worship; yet they are those of the Anglican Newman to his parishioners at Littlemore.

The atmosphere in which christian work is to be performed, whether by a monk or an Oratorian brother or a true christian layman, is one of peace, if not external, at least interior peace of soul, and of detachment from worldly cares and material gain. The heart of Christ's disciple must not be caught up in the work of his hands: daily labour must not imprison a man and take away his freedom for God alone. The early Benedictine monks, Newman observes, had no magnificent plan of work beyond the daily round of duties: 'they let each day do its work as it came'²⁰. They lived in obscurity and were men of continuous prayer and meditation, their forms of worship were simple and they freely admitted laymen into their communities. In such characteristics Newman professes to recognize the Oratory of St Philip Neri.

The peacefulness which these eminent figures associate with work does not mean that the christian must not be enterprising and efficient. He is active and busy in his daily duties but his labour is not excited activism that keeps him shallow and distracted. The more active he is, the deeper his faith and love should be. The secret of his work is detachment from personal profit and a supernatural attitude. It is the basic orientation, the love of his heart, what he *is*, that gives his activity its value and enduring quality: 'our work, finished or unfinished, will be acceptable, if done for Him'²¹. Whatever our daily activity may be, it should not become a barrier between us and God. It should gradually take on a certain transparency that invites the worker to look to something beyond the material structure. The matter we handle and the products we turn out are, of course, important; yet we may begin works that we hope will

¹⁹ *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*, p. 11.

²⁰ *Sermons preached on Various Occasions*, p. 225.

²¹ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VI, p. 269.

last for centuries, and still have our heart set on Christ, not on the work of our hands²². The true believer does not seek to be glorified in his works.

Newman expresses the christian attitude to worldly duties in the words 'watching yet working'. This twofold duty applies to work of any kind, whether it be in the secular city or in the framework of Benedictine solitude. Watchfulness, which is akin to the eschatological tension typical of the pages of the New Testament, is a distinguishing feature of a true follower of Christ. It enables him to see the Saviour's presence in all things and keeps him on the lookout for His coming. Thus, work is compatible with the most sincere and radical search for God. The following words by Newman to his parishioners could well be taken to heart by any son of St Benedict:

« As it is possible to watch for Christ in spite of earthly reasons to the contrary, so is it possible to engage in earthly duties, in spite of our watching... We may form large plans, we may busy ourselves in new undertakings, we may begin great works which we cannot do more than begin; we may make provision for the future, and anticipate in our acts the certainty of centuries to come, yet be looking out for Christ... There is no inconsistency, then, in watching yet working, for we may work without setting our hearts on our work. Our sin will be if we idolize the work of our hands; if we love it so well as not to bear to part with it. The test of our faith lies in our being able to fail without disappointment »²³.

²² « They, then, watch and wait for their Lord, who are tender and sensitive in their devotion towards Him; who feed on the thought of Him, hang on His words; live in His smile, and thrive and grow under His hand. They are eager for His approval, quick in catching His meaning, jealous of His honour. They see Him in all things, expect Him in all events, and amid all the cares, the interests, and the pursuits of this life, still would feel an awful joy, not a disappointment, did they hear that He was on the point of coming » (« Waiting for Christ », *Sermons preached on Various Occasions*, p. 35; Cf. pp. 31-46). Cf. also the sermons: « Watching », *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. IV, pp. 319-333; « Waiting for Christ », *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 234-254.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 268. 269. « Christliches Leben ist seinem Wessen nach auf ein in der Zukunft liegendes Ziel ausgerichtet. Dieses Ziel wird mit der Ankunft Christi und der damit beginnenden Erfüllung und Vollendung der Schöpfung erreicht. Die der Ankunft des Herrn entsprechende Haltung beim Christen ist die Haltung des Wachens, Wartens, Ausschau-Haltens, also die eschatologische Haltung. Sie gehört neben Glaube, Liebe und Gehorsam zu den Grundhaltungen christlicher Existenz und ist im wesentlichen mit der Tugend der Hoffnung gleichzusetzen. Die eschatologische Haltung übt einen starken Einfluss auf das Handeln des Menschen aus. Vor allem bestimmt sie die Stellung des Christen zur Welt. Sie verschafft ihm die innere Freiheit im irdischen Bereich. Gleichzeitig verleiht sie ihm in ihrem Verlangen nach letzter Vereinigung mit Christus die ihr charakteristische Dynamik » (Hieronymus Dittrich, *Realisierung des Glaubens. Grundzüge christlicher Lebensgestaltung nach John Henry Newman*. Paderborn 1966, p. 185).

When one recalls the 'great works' accomplished by Benedictines in cultural, religious and educational spheres throughout the centuries, and how they 'anticipated in their acts the certainty of centuries to come', by their humble monastic toil, one cannot but notice exemplified in them the ideal of christian work proposed by Newman: 'watching yet working', or in other words, 'working and praying'.

In another sermon that has some remarkable resemblances to a monastic text, Newman explains to his congregation how daily labour can be performed in a christian spirit. Basically it is a matter of following St Paul's exhortation « to do all for the glory of God »²⁴. If a man is to work in this fashion he must first of all be satisfied with the particular routine that makes up his daily duty. People who determine to live religiously are at times liable to give way to the temptation to omit or disregard worldly duties on a false pretext of spirituality. Newman unmasks this pretence, and demands that a person accept what is irksome when it is a duty, that he persevere in humble tasks that come his way, without asking for a change, in a spirit of penance. St Benedict urges his brothers in a similar way: « Si cui fratri aliqua forte gravia aut impossibilia iniunguntur, suscipiat quidem iubentis imperium cum omni mansuetudine et oboedientia ». And if a monk should find a duty quite beyond his strength, he may humbly lay the case before his superior, but should the latter remain unchanged in his decision, then 'sciat iunior ita sibi expedire, et ex caritate, confidens de adiutorio Dei, oboediat'²⁵.

Having illustrated how daily work enables a christian 'to let his light shine before men' according to the Gospel recommendation and to accept the humiliation which toil and fatigue entail, Newman proceeds to show how labour, if accomplished in a spirit of faith, can bring a man near to God. The christian worker « will see God in all things. He will recollect our Saviour's life... He will feel that the true contemplation of that Saviour lies *in* his wordly business; that as Christ is seen in the poor, and in the persecuted, and in children, so is He seen in the employments which He

²⁴ I Cor. 10, 31. Cf. « Doing Glory to God in Pursuits of the World », *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VIII, pp. 154-171.

²⁵ *RB* 68, 1. 4-5. « If it happens that orders are given to a brother which are too heavy or impossible, let him receive the order of his superior with perfect gentleness and obedience... Then, after his representations, if the superior remains firm in requiring what he has ordered, let the subject realize that it is better so, and out of charity, trusting in the help of God, let him obey » (*The Rule of Saint Benedict for Monasteries*, p. 76).

puts upon His chosen, whatever they be; that in attending to his own calling he will be meeting Christ; that if he neglect it, he will not on that account enjoy His presence at all the more, but that while performing it, he will see Christ revealed to his soul amid the ordinary actions of the day, as by a sort of sacrament »²⁶. This same divine presence is the atmosphere of monastic work. We shall see later on how St Benedict considered it in the setting of a constant search for God and how it gave even to common utensils a sacred character.

Another blessing of daily labour mentioned by Newman in the same sermon is one that is traditionally monastic: a remedy against the evils of idleness and against vain and useless thoughts. As we already saw, St Benedict began the chapter of his Rule on Work with a typically terse phrase: 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul', from which he deduced the necessity to occupy the hours of the day with some profitable work. Newman expresses the same idea but is somewhat more explicit and elaborate in his statement: « Idleness is the first step in the downward path which leads to hell. If we do not find employment to engage our minds with, Satan will be sure to find his own employment for them »²⁷.

Finally, old age and retirement from work offer the possibility of greater recollection and prayerfulness. It is a time to prepare for heaven, an opportunity to be desired by every religious man « not in order to *begin* to fix his mind on God, but merely because, though he may contemplate God as truly and be as holy in heart in active business as in quiet, still it is more becoming and suitable to meet the stroke of death (if it be allowed us) silently, collectedly, solemnly, than in a crowd and a tumult »²⁸.

If Benedict and Neman pay so much attention to the 'spirit' of work, it is because they realized that beyond the many 'works' that a christian has to accomplish day by day in the course of his duty, there is one basic 'work' that knows no timetable and that never ceases. It is the work of one's own conversion which in this life is never ending. All the stipulations of St Benedict's Rule aim at placing the monk in a situation where he is ever obliged to proceed with this fundamental work of life. The Patriarch gives a long list of 'instruments' or tools of good works to be used²⁹ in fulfilling

²⁶ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VIII, pp. 164-65.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166. Cf. *RB* 48, 1.

²⁸ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VIII, p. 170.

²⁹ Cf. *RB* 4, 1-74.

the one basic duty that is all important. Newman, perhaps with a greater sense of urgency than St Benedict, because he realized that the evening of this world's life was more advanced and threatened by a rationalistic and secularizing onslaught more insidious than that of the barbarians of old, exhorted not only his Oratorian brothers but also every sincere christian to turn from shadows and vanities and to set out on the road of personal conversion and sanctification — the most important work of any christian. To put off to a future day the duty of repentance and renewal would mean to reserve « for a few chance years, when strength and vigour are gone, that WORK for which a *whole* life would not be enough »³⁰. Newman, too, suggested some 'instruments of good works':

« If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say — first — Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising — give your first thoughts to God — make a good meditation — say or hear Mass and communicate with devotion — make a good thanksgiving — say carefully all the prayers which you are bound to say — say Office attentively, do the work of the day, whatever it is, diligently and for God — make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Say the Angelus devoutly — eat and drink to God's glory — say the Rosary well, be recollected — keep out bad thoughts. Make your evening meditation well — examine yourself duly. Go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect »³¹.

Constant Prayer

Work, then, takes its value not from its material production or from scientific advancement, but from the 'worker'. More important than labour is the human person who is at work. The duty of the worker is not so much to 'do' something as to arrive at self-knowledge and wisdom and to 'become' something by means of the experience of serving through work. Work is then seen in a divine perspective: subservient to man and to the image of God in creatures. It becomes a reflection of God's own unending work in man's soul.

The christian does not work for work's sake or merely for a

³⁰ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. I, p. 12. The emphases in the text are Newman's.

³¹ *Newman the Oratorian* His unpublished Oratory Papers edited with an Introductory Study on the Continuity between his Anglican and his Catholic Ministry by Placid Murray, O.S.B., Dublin 1969, p. 360.

financial return. Earthly currency would be a poor reward for the fatigue of human hands and of the human spirit. The only just wage is one that brings spiritual profit as well as material gain.

To work in a truly christian manner we must also pray. St Benedict understood this inborn need of man: he legislated for prayer and work as the two basic means leading man to Him, of whom the whole life of the religious was meant to be a continuous search. Gradually these two realities — work and prayer — were to become integrated in a life of uninterrupted searching for God in whose presence the monk was constantly to live. Work was intended to become a prayer, and the seven daily hours legislated for prayer were to enshrine the most important *opus* of each day.

Manual or intellectual work, however, must be subordinated to prayer. The latter is sovereign in the life of man: he cannot be too busy to pray, just as he cannot be too busy to love, to have time each day exclusively for his Beloved. No one really can dispense a person from praying, just as no one, not even God, can exempt a man from the obligation of loving: « Fratres qui omnino longe sunt in labore et non possunt occurrere hora competenti ad oratorium — et abbas hoc perpendet, quia ita est — agant ibidem opus Dei, ubi operantur, cum tremore divino flectentes genua. Similiter, qui in itinere directi sunt, non eos praetereant horae constitutae, sed ut possunt agant sibi et servitutis pensum non neglegant reddere »³².

The hours foreseen for communal worship and for personal prayer — the latter to be gauged not so much by its length as by its intensity: 'with the purest devotion'³³ — tend to produce what we

³² RB 50, 1-4. « If brethren are working really far away and cannot get to the oratory at the right time, and the Abbot considers that this is the case, then they should say the Office at the spot where they are working, kneeling down in reverence to God. Similarly those who have been sent on a journey must not let the regular hours pass them by, but say them privately as best they can, not failing to fulfil their daily task of service » (*The Rule...*, p. 57). To the youth of Norcia, Pope John Paul II said during his visit there last March: « Come voi avete ben sperimentato, la conquista di spazi interiori, che offrano a Dio il giusto posto nello spirito umano, tutto quell'impegno, insomma, che potremmo contraddistinguere col primato dell'«ORA», del «prega», non è assolutamente in contrasto, ma anzi concede respiro e dona intuizione creativa alla vera apertura verso la sfera sociale, verso il sofferto dovere quotidiano, verso le vive forze del lavoro e della cultura, animando così di fervido afflato, di spirito di servizio il grande e travagliato mondo del «LABORA» (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 24-25 marzo, 1980, p. 5).

³³ « cum omni humilitate et puritatis devotione supplicandum est » (RB 20, 2). On the prayer life and its contemplative aspect in the teaching and spirit of St Benedict, cf. V. Stebler, *Der benediktinische Weg zur Beschauung*. Olten 1947; Justin McCann, O.S.B., *Saint Benedict*. Revised Edition. New York 1958, pp. 125-141; Adalbert de Vogüé, *La Règle de Saint Benoît et la vie contemplative*,

call the man of prayer who is moulded in the quiet atmosphere of his monastic home. His prayer, which in a sense can be called continuous, is one of the heart: it is union of love more than speculative understanding or prolonged thought. Is it invigorated by times of formal prayer and worship, and it is sustained by the awareness of living in God's presence.

Prayer for St Benedict was the greatest work of all. However, he did not conceive it as a matter of separating some hours of the day for worship and private meditation, and then getting on with other tasks, more concrete and practical, in the time that was left over. God does not enter our lives like a thief to steal our time: He is always present, not to take away but to donate and to enrich, to bestow the fulness of value and meaning on each moment of our existence, if we only open up to His light and love. At formal prayer, however, this 'opening up' is our sole occupation and God is then sovereignly at work in our lives.

Gradually life becomes an expression of this divine experience. Prayer is no longer a matter of a fixed number of hours but is co-extensive with life itself: twenty four hours of the day with God, chanting, working, resting, suffering and loving. Prayer is then life, and life is a prayer. The man who arrives at this stage spends all his time for God; he has time for Him. This is what was called *vacare Deo* in traditional monastic language and it was considered the noblest work of all: *negotium negotiorum*³⁴. In this context work is simply a particular expression of the prayer and praise that make up the round of each day.

Prayer and life, then, do not demand so much a temporal poise and balance as a spiritual integration in the man of prayer and action. This is St Benedict's ideal which Newman admired so much: « that wonderful union of prayer, penance, toil, and literary work, the true 'otium cum dignitate' a fruitful leisure and a meek-hearted dignity, which is exemplified in the Benedictine »³⁵. As we saw, the Benedictines were to admire the same trait in Newman's life.

In fact, we can affirm that Newman's life was one of prayer. This life-long habit originated from a keen awareness which he had

in *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 27 (1965) 89-107; *Ibid.*, « *Orationi frequenter incumbere* ». *Une invitation à la prière continuelle*, in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 41 (1965) 467-472.

³⁴ « *Otiosum non est vacare Deo, imo negotium negotiorum omnium hoc est* » (*Guigonis Epistola ad Fratres de Monte Dei*, Lib. I, c. VIII, 21: *PL*, 184, 321).

³⁵ *Historical Sketches*, Vol. II, p. 408.

from an early age of God's presence and holiness. Even as a child he acutely felt the 'unreality' of material and visible things, and the underlying realness of invisible and spiritual beings: angels, his immortal soul, God. When he was only six years old he used to ask himself *why* he was and *what* he was. At the age of fifteen he speaks of himself and of his Creator as of « two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings »³⁶. From this awareness of God's presence and holiness, and of his own complete dependence on Him, there arose the need to pray and to give praise.

Newman, for all his intellectual ability and greatness, prayed in such a natural fashion that even the simplest of souls could make his prayers their own without embarrassment. He wrote down and continuously used lists of intentions — friends, converts, the dead, children, those dear to him and those who opposed him — for which he prayed on different days of the week. He did not formulate prayers and colloquys that would have given the impression of higher graces. The words he penned were the expression of what he genuinely felt and believed. He was cautious of artificial feelings; he preferred real sentiments, real words, real decisions, no matter how commonplace they might be. We find him struggling against distractions and dryness, and having recourse to litanies, novenas and the traditional prayers formulated by the Church. He asks God for fervour, too, for he longed to pray with ardent devotion. He does not intend by that an unprofitable emotion but a share in God's own eternal love poured into the soul by the Holy Spirit:

« In asking for fervour, I am asking for effectual strength, consistency, and perseverance; I am asking for deadness to every human motive, and simplicity of intention to please Thee: I am asking for faith, hope, and charity in their most heavenly exercise. In asking for fervour I am asking to be rid of the fear of man, and the desire of his praise; I am asking for the gift of prayer, because it will be so sweet; I am asking for that loyal perception of duty, which follows on yearning affection; I am asking for sanctity, peace, and joy all at once... Lord, in asking for fervour, I am asking for Thyself, for nothing short of Thee, O my God, who hast given Thyself wholly to us... Thou art the living Flame, and ever burnest with love of man: enter into me and set me on fire after Thy pattern and likeness »³⁷.

³⁶ *Apologia pro vita sua, being A History of his Religious Opinions*. London 1908, p. 4.

³⁷ *Meditations and Devotions*, p. 431. On Newman's teaching and practice of prayer, cf. Thomas P. Ivory, *The Teaching of J. H. Newman on Prayer*, in

Although Newman used and found help in the traditional prayers of Catholic devotion, he nonetheless lived and appreciated above all the liturgical prayers and celebrations of the Church³⁸. His effort to have a worthy Eucharistic liturgy, which he exhorted his parishioners to attend, is evident throughout his life. As a young Anglican curate he managed to get the whole congregation singing the psalms. Later on, as a parish priest of the Anglican Church, he conducted daily Matins in St Mary the Virgin's and started an early Communion Service there on Sundays³⁹. His sermons, apart from their length, are models of liturgical preaching⁴⁰. More than any other prayers, Newman appreciated and loved those of the Roman Breviary, which he used assiduously from the time he first received a copy — that of his friend Hurrell Froude — in 1836. While still a member of the Church of England, he regarded the Breviary of such 'excellence and beauty' that it could well 'raise a prejudice' in favour of the Roman Catholic Church for an unwary Anglican⁴¹. Its prayers and the arrangement of readings, intercessions and psalms throughout the hours of the day, appealed to him. The abun-

Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 52 (1976) 162-192; C. Stephen Dessain, *Why Pray? A Defence of Prayer largely drawn from the writings of Cardinal Newman*. Langley 1959; Placid Murray, *Newman the Oratorian*, pp. 59-19, Henry Tristram, *With Newman at Prayer*, in *John Henry Newman. Centenary Essays*. London 1945, pp. 101-125.

³⁸ Dom Pierre Miquel's assessment could be misleading: « Chez Dom Guéranger le sens de l'Eglise sera toujours très vif et son amour de la liturgie n'en sera, pourrait-on dire, qu'un corollaire. Chez Newman l'amour du culte divin sera généralement subordonné à une piété plus subjective qui se cristallise dans le célèbre: *I and my Maker. God and myself* » (*La vie monastique selon Saint Benoît*. Paris 1979, pp. 289-290). Cf. A. J. Boekraad, *Newman en de Liturgie*, in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 62 (1978) 353-372.

³⁹ « I have now said enough to let you into the reasons why I lately began Daily Service in this Church. I felt that we were very unlike the early Christians, if we went on without it; and that it was my business to give you an opportunity of observing it, else I was keeping a privilege from you » (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. III. p. 310; cf. this whole sermon entitled « The Daily Service », *Ibid.*, pp. 301-317). For Newman's appreciation of common liturgical worship and how he exhorted his parishioners to attend, cf.: « Religious Worship a Remedy for Excitements », *Ibid.*, pp. 336-349; « Worship, a Preparation for Christ's Coming », *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 1-12; « The Gospel Palaces », *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 270-279; « The Visible Temple », *Ibid.*, pp. 280-294; « Offerings for the Sanctuary », *Ibid.*, pp. 295-312; « Attendance on Holy Communion », *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 146-159; « Reverence in Worship », *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 1-16; « Condition of the Members of the Christian Empire », *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*, pp. 256-274.

⁴⁰ Cf. Placid Murray, *Newman the Oratorian*, pp. 30-42.

⁴¹ *Tracts for the Times*. By Members of the University of Oxford. London 1840, Vol. III, Tract 75, p. 1. Cf. the whole Tract in which Newman gives a history of the Roman Breviary and translates some of its Offices: pp. 1-207. Cf. D. H. Moseley, *Newman and the Breviary*, in *Worship* 34 (1959-1960) 75-79.

dance of inspired writings it contained delighted him, although he did complain of how the Roman usage had curtailed the use of Scripture as originally read in the monastic Office. He would have certainly acclaimed the new *Liturgy of the Hours*, with its more abundant biblical and patristic readings, published after the Second Vatican Council.

In particular, Newman relished the Psalter — « that wonderful manual of prayer and praise, which, from the time when its various portions were first composed down to the last few centuries, has been the most precious *viaticum* of the Christian mind in its journey through the wilderness »⁴². During the years of suffering and search for the truth before his entry into the Roman Catholic Church, Newman used the Breviary in his semi-monastic community at Littlemore. In this period of trial and testing, he turned for consolation and strength to the inspired words of the psalms, making his own their lamentations and supplications, their hopes and their exultation. Therein he saw portrayed the perennial state of the Church and of its loyal members: weakness and persecution on the one hand, triumphant strength and prosperity on the other. Although constantly tried by opposition, doubt and suspicion, the followers of Christ are never wholly abandoned and are always loved by God. He meditated upon verses like the following and repeated them to his congregation:

« Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil doers... The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.. The Lord also will be a defence for the oppressed. The poor shall not alway be forgotten; the patient abiding of the meek shall not perish for ever. Up, Lord, and let not man have the upper hand... When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid; and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him... Teach me Thy way O Lord, and lead me in the right way, because of mine enemies »⁴³.

As a Catholic, Newman's love for the Roman Breviary and its inspired psalms continued. Private devotions and prayers were good

⁴² *Historical Sketches*, Vol. II, p. 459. Cf. Lawrence F. Barmann, S. J., *Newman on the Psalms as Christian Prayer*, in *Worship* 38 (1963-1964) 207-214.

⁴³ *Ps.* 37 (36), 1. 29; *Ps.* 9, 9. 18-19; *Ps.* 27 (26), 2. 3. 11. Cf. *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*, pp. 262-270.

in their place, but the Breviary and the Eucharistic liturgy « besides being the voice of the Church, have a grace and a tenderness, which are not to be found in the mass of devotional books which are in the hands of the laity »⁴⁴. In the Oratory which he founded at Birmingham the daily recital of the Divine Office was not simply a rule for him that had to be observed, but rather a source of spiritual joy and support. One of his Oratorian friends who had lived with him for years has left us the following testimony: « He had always been greatly attached to the recital of the Office, and he rejoiced especially in the recurrence of the Sunday and other longer offices; his favourite parts of which never palled upon him as subjects for conversation »⁴⁵. When in old age, declining eyesight forced him to discontinue the daily recitation of the Breviary, he found it a severe trial.

Newman's life became more spiritual, more refined, more hidden in peaceful study and constant prayer as the years went by. When considering the vocation that he and his Brothers were called to, in the footsteps of St Philip Neri, he stated that the duty of the Oratorian was to pray. Therefore, he considered himself doubly bound to persevere in prayer⁴⁶. The clearest memory which from the earliest times the Brothers of the Oratory kept of their Father was of him being absorbed in writing or reading, or if not so engaged, then in silent prayer, with a Rosary in his hands⁴⁷. In other words, they remembered him above all as a man who worked and prayed: *orans et laborans*.

Si revera Deum quaerit

Work and prayer have their indispensable role to play in christian living. They are the hinges of the Benedictine life: their integration into a harmonious and vital unity is the challenge of monastic maturity. Newman, too, understood the essential importance of work, of the exact accomplishment of one's mission in life; yet he saw that the activities of daily duty had to be unified in a life of

⁴⁴ *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Vol. XXV, p. 16. Some years earlier, as a Catholic he had spoken of the Roman Breviary as « that most wonderful and most attractive monument of the devotion of saints » (*Apologia pro vita sua*, p. 74).

⁴⁵ Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*. Based on his Private Journals and Correspondence. 2 Vols. London 1912, Vol. II, p. 533.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Meditations and Devotions*, p. 320.

⁴⁷ Cf. Wilfrid Ward, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 532-3.

prayer and gain spiritual strength from periods of praise and intercession.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that however essential and central prayer and work may be to the Benedictine or Oratorian vocation, they do not constitute its most fundamental reality⁴⁸. This underlying something which give prayer and work, the *opus Dei* and manual toil, their vitality and unity, springs from the abiding Presence of God in all things. It manifests itself in a twofold attitude, typical of St Benedict and of Cardinal Newman, namely, *a sincere and uninterrupted search for God* and *a conscious living in the sight of the Invisible*. This twofold characteristic is the basis of the resemblances between the Great Patriarch and the Oxford convert.

The whole Rule of St Benedict has this underlying presupposition that the monk endeavours to live in God's Presence. It is an awareness that has more to do with the heart than with the mind. It is like an atmosphere that surrounds him or a pleasant memory that stirs his heart. It is part of a life of faith, a life in which the invisible is more real and impressive than the material objects that catch the senses. This mental attitude that captures the divine Presence is one of being on the look-out for God, of being attuned to the signs of his Presence. It may not always be a delightful experience; at times, a paralyzing numbness and aridity may darken the soul and turn it in upon its own nothingness and misery. Nevertheless, God reveals himself to the soul that is on the alert and that perseveres. The divine Presence grows on a man until it is something he cannot escape.

This sense of God's Presence has been called 'the pivot on

⁴⁸ We are aware that the phrase *ora et labora* does not give a full picture of Benedictine spirituality, and that other elements are essential: a constant search for God, the place of the Abbot and the centrality of Christ. The following anonymous note appeared in the Italian edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* recently: «Soltanto 'ora et labora?' Non c'è chi ignori l'enorme rilievo che nella Regola di S. Benedetto godono la preghiera e il lavoro: coniano il motto 'ora et labora' la tradizione cristiana ha ben codificato la fisionomia del monaco e del monastero benedettino. Non poche altre linee, però, andrebbero aggiunte, perché il quadro diventi più leggibile e risulti più eloquente. Per es., il tradizionale 'ora et labora' è particolarmente deficitario proprio in ciò che invece nella spiritualità benedettina è centrale, vale a dire a riguardo della figura e dell'opera del Cristo nella composizione interiore — ed anche esterna: vedi, per es., i capp. 2 e 7! — del monaco, rapporto costantemente richiamato dalla *Regola*. Non meno perniciosa l'assenza totale della fisionomia e funzione dell'abate, della «comunitarietà», ecc. E la stampa, particolarmente abbondante in quest'anno di centenario, ma non per questo più informata, continua a richiamarsi e a fondarsi su questo binomio la cui lettura materialistica risulta tanto insufficiente da divenire falsificante» (18 maggio p. 7).

which the whole spirituality of St Benedict turns'⁴⁹. It changes the monk's attitude towards work, reading and prayer: «apertis oculis nostris ad deificum lumen, adtonitis auribus audiamus divina cotidie clamans quid nos admonet vox»⁵⁰. The very tools he uses or the scenes of nature he contemplates, take on a sacred meaning and importance as a result of this divine Presence that permeates them; «Omnia vasa monasterii cunctamque esubstantiam ac si altaris vasa sacrata [cellararius] conspiciat»⁵¹. Thus his life has a superior unifying principle which is this presence to God and to the Holy. It does not matter what precise office the monk is given: whatever he does, he is and knows he is 'in the school of the Lord's service'⁵². Benedictine solitude is not loneliness, its liturgy is more than a beautiful chant, its daily work, penance and prayer become a service of God and of others: 'servitutis pensum non neglegant reddere'⁵³. Whatever the monk does or wherever he is, he bears in mind that God searches his heart and loins' und 'understands his thoughts from afar'⁵⁴.

Newman admired the evangelical simplicity, the implicit trust in God and the peace of soul of this Benedictine way of life. He compared it to the innocent, fresh and poetic years of childhood:

«Where shall we find a more striking instance than is here afforded us of that union of simplicity and reverence, that clear perception of the unseen, yet recognition of the mysterious, which is the characteristic of the first years of existence? To the monk heaven was next door; he formed no plans, he had no cares; the ravens of his father Benedict were ever at his side. He 'went forth' in his youth 'to his work and to his la-

⁴⁹ Cf. Paul Chauvin, *Saint Benoît nous parle*. Paris 1936, p. 18.

⁵⁰ *RB*, Prologue, 9. «Our eyes wide open to the divine light, our ears alerted, let us hearken to the voice of God which warns us every day» (*The Rule...*, p. 1). «E Benedetto seppe certamente interpretare con perspicacia i segni dei tempi di allora, quando scrisse la sua Regola, nella quale l'unione della preghiera e del lavoro diventava, per coloro che l'avrebbero accettata, il principio della aspirazione all'eternità» (Homily of Pope John Paul II during Mass at Norcia, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24-25 marzo, 1980, p. 2).

⁵¹ *RB* 31, 10. «All the monastery utensils and all its belongings he [the cellarer] is to regard as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar» (*The Rule...*, p. 40). Cf. P. Miquel, *La vie monastique selon Saint Benoît*, pp. 31-34.

⁵² «Dominici schola servitii» (*RB*, Prologue, 45).

⁵³ *RB* 50, 4. «Not failing to fulfil their daily task of service» (*The Rule...*, p. 57). Cf. *RB* 49, 5: «Ergo his diebus [quadragesimae]augeamus nobis aliquid solito pensu servitutis nostrae, orationes peculiaries...» «Therefore during these days [of Lent] let us add a little to our usual round of service by way of private devotions...» (*The Rule...*, p. 56).

⁵⁴ Cf. *RB* 7, 14-17.

bour' until the evening of life; if he lived a day longer, he did a day's work more; whether he lived many days or few, he laboured on to the end of them. He had no wish to see further in advance of his journey than where he was to make his next stage. He ploughed and sowed, he prayed, he meditated, he studied, he wrote, he taught, and then he died and went to heaven »⁵⁵.

It was that same vision of a life spent in God's presence which Newman advocated for all christians. Any monk would be happy to be able to make his own the following description of christian life and union with God:

« The Christian has a deep, silent, hidden peace, which the world sees not, — like some well in a retired and shady place, difficult of access. He is the greater part of his time by himself, and when he is in solitude, that is his real state. What he is when left to himself and to his God, that is his true life. He can bear himself; he can (as it were) joy in himself, for it is the grace of God within him, it is the presence of the Eternal Comforter, in which he joys. He can bear, he finds it pleasant, to be with himself at all times, — 'Never less alone than when alone'. He can lay his head on his pillow at night, and own in God's sight, with overflowing heart, that he wants nothing, — that he 'is full and abounds', — that God has been all things to him, and that nothing is not his which God could give him »⁵⁶.

Newman would almost define a true christian as one who had this awareness of the divine Presence. It is bound up with the exercise of the three theological virtues which give the basic orientation to the life of a believer. It enables a person to rise above the censures of worldly men, think little of what they prize, keep free from the general rush to accumulate wealth and be constantly guided by a higher wisdom. Above all, it keeps a man present to God, present to what is Holy, and awakens in him a silent reverence for all of God's creation. It helps, in no small fashion, to create inward peace and to enkindle that sense of wonder, respect and admiration which belong to innocence and wisdom, and which form part of the Benedictine spirit. Newman would have every christian share in this treasure: he places before his congregation an ideal that, in its essentials, is not far removed from that which inspired St Benedict

⁵⁵ *Historical Sketches*, Vol. II, pp. 426-27. Cf. Jean Honoré, *The Benedictine Vocation...*, pp. 275-76.

⁵⁶ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. V, pp. 69-70.

and the monks of old: « In all circumstances, of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, let us aim at having Him in our inmost heart; let us have no secret apart from Him. Let us acknowledge Him as enthroned within us at the very springs of thought and affection »⁵⁷.

This conscious presence to God in daily life is a quality typical of Benedict and Newman. It conferred on their work and outlook a radical approach, an utter unworldliness, a wholehearted dedication. St Gregory the Great says of St Benedict in his solitude: 'solus in superni spectatoris oculis habitavit secum'⁵⁸. His life was that of a person who lived as if he saw the invisible God. This familiarity with the unseen world is reflected in every page of the Rule and must be kept in mind to understand his attitude to liturgical and personal prayer, to manual and intellectual work.

Newman was also a man who through long experience was very much at home with things unseen. He too lived as if he saw the Invisible. The material things of sense and nature seemed to him to be merely a veil hiding more abiding realities. Those who lived with him shared in his vision of the unseen: he seemed to enkindle in them the awareness of God's nearness, and focus their attention on the invisible realities of faith⁵⁹. The deepening of this pervading spirit of faith, with a consequent appeal for unworldliness and holiness of life, was the dominant note of all his preaching. The following description of Newman in the pulpit gives us an idea of the spiritual magnetism of this man who lived daily in the awareness of a divine presence:

« The look and bearing of the preacher were as of one who dwelt apart, who, though he knew his age well, did not live in it. From his seclusion of study, and abstinence, and prayer, from habitual dwelling in the unseen, he seemed to come forth that one day of the week to speak to others of the things he had seen and known... After hearing these sermons you might come away still not believing the tenets peculiar to the High Church system: but you would be harder than most men, if

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-26.

⁵⁸ Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*. Tome II. Texte critique et notes par Adalbert de Vogüé. Traduction par Paul Antin. (Sources Chrétiennes, N. 260). Paris 1979, Lib. I, c. II, 5, p. 142.

⁵⁹ Father William Lockhart who lived with him at Littlemore said that Newman 'rooted in the hearts and minds' of the young men under his care 'a personal conviction of the living God' (Cf. *Correspondence of John Henry Newman with John Keble and Others. 1839-1845*. Edited at the Birmingham Oratory. London 1917, p. 390).

you did not feel more than ever ashamed of coarseness, selfishness, worldliness, if you did not feel the things of faith brought closer to the soul »⁶⁰.

Conclusion

If St Philip Neri learned from St Benedict what to *be*, as Newman claimed⁶¹, it is no wonder that there should be a spiritual affinity between them and their sons. Quiet work and constant prayer in the abiding presence of God and uninterrupted search for Him are some basic peculiarities that make the Oratorian follower of Cardinal Newman's spirit resemble the way of life of the sons of St Benedict.

Work, however, was not a goal in itself for either St Benedict or Newman. It was an instrument of good, a means of 'becoming' wise and perfect. They both considered 'being something' as more important than 'producing' or 'doing things'. In fact, both of these heroes of Christianity were convinced that only the person who is united with God, who *is* what he preaches or teaches, can effectively influence and change the world. The labour of many people is curtailed in its effectiveness by the self-seeking and self-glorification that inspire it. In the detached and perfect soul, Christ works unhindered and His influence is effective beyond all human effort. « If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples »⁶².

Persons who *are* holy as distinct from those who engage in many well-intended activities, bear an untold influence for good on others. They speak of God at the level of their *being*, and not merely at the external level of speaking or acting. In a University Sermon, Newman remarked that « we shall find it difficult to estimate the moral power which a single individual, trained to practise what he teaches, may acquire in his own circle, in the course of years... the attraction, exerted by unconscious holiness, is of an urgent and irresistible nature »⁶³. Therefore, he urged those who came into contact with him to value work and avoid idleness, but even more so to 'be-

⁶⁰ J. C. Shairp, *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy*. Edinburgh 1886, pp. 247-48. 249.

⁶¹ Cf. *Sermons preached on Various Occasions*, p. 228.

⁶² *John* 15, 7-8.

⁶³ *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A. D. 1826 and 1843*. London 1909, pp. 94. 95.

come ' something rather than merely 'do' things, and to appreciate more deeply the power of prayer over the influence of simple activity⁶⁴.

This sterling quality is also manifest in Newman's preoccupation with reality and in his dislike for what was purely notional, idealistic or counterfeit. He loved real words, real persons, real truths. Decisions that were fruitful and productive of action came from real assents. Words were empty unless they descended into concrete acts. Some of his most striking sermons dealt with 'unreal words' and insincere actions. An unbending sense of realism in all things — in his intellectual investigation, in his personal conduct, in his search for truth, in his self-examination — was one of the leading principles of his life⁶⁵. His whole life was a sacrifice for truth.

St Benedict himself was a man who, like Newman, loved real words and real gestures. As St Gregory the Great said of him: « sanctus vir nullo modo potuit aliter docere quam vixit »⁶⁶. He did not draw up the prescriptions of his Rule in order to create a well-ordered and graceful exterior and so cover up interior deficiency and insincerity. He legislated, it is true, for weak and imperfect human beings, who he knew well were not sinless, but the scope of his monastic system was to enable the individual monk gradually to *become* what he professed. While assiduously employing the 'tools of the spiritual craft' that lead a man to perfection, the monk (as St Benedict reminds him) is not to wish to be called holy before becoming so, but to *be* holy first of all so that then it may be said of him with more truth⁶⁷. As for the Abbot, he is to be obeyed even though he does not act according to his words; nevertheless his duty is to give the example before the command, and to *be* what his name designates him to be⁶⁸. The same sense of reality is extended even to the material buildings of the monastic settlement: « Oratorium

⁶⁴ It should not surprise us to find this quality in Newman since he had such spiritual affinity to, and was such a genuine disciple of, St Philip Neri, of whom Fr Dessain has written: « He is one more lesson of how much more important it is to be than to do. Great activity may be effective for a time, but those who are filled with the Holy Spirit do good by their least word, and their influence endures » (Charles Stephen Dessain, *Cardinal Newman's Attraction to St Philip*, in *Oratorium* I (1970) 70).

⁶⁵ Cf. Francis Vincent Reade, *The Spiritual Life of John Henry Newman*, in *The Dublin Review* 217 (1945) 99-111.

⁶⁶ Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues...*, Lib. II, c. 36, 10, p. 242.

⁶⁷ « Non velle dici sanctum antequam sit, sed prius esse quod verius dicitur » (*RB* 4, 62).

⁶⁸ « Abbas qui praeesse dignus est monasterio semper meminere debet quod dicitur et nomen maioris factis implere » (*RB* 2, 1). Cf. *RB* 4, 61.

hoc sit quod dicitur, nec ibi quicquam aliud geratur aut condatur »⁶⁹.

Both St. Benedict and Cardinal Newman passed on this keen sense of sincerity and reality to their disciples. Their whole existence was to be an unceasing and all-pervading search for God, which demanded a « superhuman single-mindedness and pertinacity of purpose »⁷⁰, a search which underlay and unified their activity and their prayer. This honest and unfeigned search for God was more important for them than a state of perfection already attained. The goal, in fact, as they were fully aware, would only be reached at the end of this mortal life. What St Benedict demands of a novice « is expressed in dynamic terms (search, zeal) and with an explicit reference to God. It is not so much a matter of irreproachable conduct as of a wholehearted dedication to God and to His service »⁷¹.

Newman's prayer and desire for his Oratorian Brothers was that they should work for God alone without the distraction of human applause⁷². St Benedict asked for nothing more, and numerous commentators on his Rule have pointed to this candid and sincere search for God — *si revera Deum quaerit* — as the underlying principle of his legislation⁷³. We can truly say that Benedict and Newman were men for whom God alone mattered: this explains the radical dimension of their lives and the outright commitment they asked from their followers.

Therefore, whatever may be the differences of time, place, historical circumstances, character and spiritual background, these two

⁶⁹ RB 52, 1. « Let the oratory be just what it is called, and let nothing else be done or kept there » (*The Rule...*, p. 58).

⁷⁰ *Historical Sketches*, Vol. II, pp. 381-82.

⁷¹ Cf. *La Règle de Saint Benoît*. Tome VI. Commentaire Historique et critique par Adalbert de Vogüé. (Sources Chrétiennes, N. 186). Paris 1971, p. 1321.

⁷² Cf. *Sermons preached on Various Occasions*, p. 242.

⁷³ Cf. Columba Marmion's spiritual and doctrinal commentary on the Rule, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*: « ... to seek God: *Si revera quaerit Deum*. This is what he [St Benedict] requires, before all, of those who come to knock at the door of the monastery to be there received as monks; in this disposition he resumes all the others; it gives, as it were, the key to all his teaching, and determines the mode of life he wishes to see led by his sons » (St. Louis, MO., 1926, p. 1). Cf. also: « In questo contesto [*Regola LVIII, 7*], sembra che la ricerca di Dio non sia una fra tanti criteri elencati per la vocazione monastica, ma sia il criterio per eccellenza. Il candidato ha vocazione, se ricerca Iddio. Ma che cerchi veramente Dio, lo si può determinare, verificando se sia pronto al servizio di Dio, se segua con obbedienza le norme della Regola e le istruzioni dell'abate e, infine, se sia abbastanza umile per sopportare pazientemente, sull'esempio di Cristo, le umiliazioni. La ricerca di Dio, quindi, nella Regola, significa qualche cosa che determina tutto il senso e tutto il compito della vita monastica » (Gerardo J. Békés, *L'Insegnamento della Regola di San Benedetto. L'uomo alla ricerca di Dio*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20-21 marzo, 1980, p. 5, c. 4-5). Cf. Enrico de Sainte Marie, O. S. B., « *Si revera Deum quaerit* », in *Vita Monastica* 10 (1956) 173-7.

spiritual giants are at one on this basic point (from which numerous other similarities flow): they ask no more from their followers than a genuinely christian life, spent in a sincere, prayerful and active search for God, leading to the balanced perfection of the whole man. Such a life in God's presence, with fidelity to daily work, constancy in prayer and praise, was the formula wherein both founders expressed the spirit that made them friends of God and leaders of men.

No finer words can I find to express the harmony and quiet confidence, the peace and persistent prayerfulness of this ideal than those of the following prayer with which Newman concludes his sermon on *Wisdom and Innocence*: « May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done! Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last! »⁷⁴.

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⁷⁴ *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*, p. 307.