

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

September 15, 2010 at 10:35am

Hijacking Newman

by Dennis Coday

NCR Today

John Cornwell's essay in the *Financial Times*, The papal hijacking of Cardinal Newman, is creating quite a stir. Cornwell's biography of Newman, *Newman's Unquiet Grave: The Reluctant Saint*, is the book of choice this week in the NCR Book Club, with a review by Jesuit Fr. Peter L'Estrange.

Cornwell's thesis in his essay is that "John Henry Newman has always been a source of inspiration to Catholic liberals for his tendency to see both sides of every question and to follow conscience wherever it may lead," and this makes his imminent beatification "paradoxical."

Cornwell says that the case for Newman's beatification was "dragging on fitfully" until Pope Benedict XVI put it on the fast-track two years ago.

But why had Benedict, a rigid conservative, seen fit to hasten the beatification of a man who has an iconic stature for liberal Catholic intellectuals throughout the English-speaking world? All becomes clear with Benedict's revision of John Henry Newman's legacy. Pope Benedict and Catholic officialdom are presenting Newman as an exemplar of unquestioning papal allegiance. The Cardinal has been pontifically hijacked.

... Addressing the bishops of England and Wales in Rome this February, [Benedict] declared that Newman was an example to the world of opposition to "dissent." It was like saying that Churchill had been a Trotskyite all along.

Read the full essay here: [The papal hijacking of Cardinal Newman.](#)

John Allen will be filing reports throughout the Papal visit to the U.K. Sept. 16-19. Stay tuned to NCR Today for updates.

Stories in this series on the papal visit to Scotland and England:

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All this week in his Distinctly Catholic blog, Michael Sean Winters is interviewing a variety of Newman scholars:

- Fr. Joseph Komonchak, taught ecclesiology at Catholic University, wrote his dissertation on Newman
- Christopher Pramuk, Assistant professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati
- Ian Ker, Professor at Oxford University and author of a Newman biography
- The Very Reverend Richard Duffield, the Provost of the Birmingham Oratory
- Archbishop Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and Primate of England

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