

John Henry Newman and the Laity

In a series of lectures given in 1851 entitled
“Present Positions of Catholics in England,”
Newman wrote:

“What I desire in Catholics is the gift of bringing out what their religion is.

I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious,
but men (and women) who know their religion,

who enter into it,

who know just where they stand,

who know what they hold and what they do not,

who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it,

who know so much of history that they can defend it.

I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity.

I wish you to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason,

to get an insight into the relation of truth to truth,

to learn to view things as they are,

to understand how faith and reason stand to each other,

what are the bases and principles of Catholicism

and where lies the main inconsistencies and absurdities of the Protestant theory.

You ought to be able to bring out what you feel and what you mean,

as well as to feel and to mean it;

to expose to the comprehension of others the fictions and fallacies of your opponents;

to explain the charges brought against the Church,

to the satisfaction, not, indeed, of those who are biased against her,

but of people of sense, of whatever cast of opinion.”