

At the close of this thoroughly researched book Chapman concludes that the contrast between a patriotically conceived and temporally defined catholicity is now, for English Anglicans, the principal obstacle to reunion with an international, spatially catholic Roman Catholic Church. It looks as if, for future ecumenical advance in this context, the ‘hermeneutic of continuity’ of Pope Benedict XVI, which reassured patristically-minded christians that papalism does not mean disruptive innovation, needs to be combined with a going back to the sources of specifically English pre-Reformation catholicity.

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**NEWMAN AND HIS FAMILY** by Edward Short, *Bloomsbury T&T Clark*, London and New York, 2013, pp. xviii + 425, frontispiece and un-numbered b/w illustrations, £21.99, pbk

Will there ever be enough books on Newman? This is the middle one of a trilogy, the same author’s *Newman and his Contemporaries* (2011), and *Newman and his Critics*, to follow. The author sets out to examine each one of Newman’s close family, and to see how they influenced him, or were influenced by him. For comparison he draws a surprisingly wide range of literary sources for similar relationships – an original and intriguing device, though at times one does wonder how relevant, for instance, is the discussion of James Joyce on the grounds that he, too, had a father. The trail does sometimes lead us rather far from the matter in question, as in the discussion of Newman’s mother’s great-grandfather who engraved the designs for Houghton Hall and other early eighteenth-century buildings (p. 93 and illustration).

How much did her Huguenot ancestry affect Jemima Newman’s attitude to the Catholic Church? The question is perhaps worth asking, though one suspects that after five generations indignation might have cooled. The deeply-rooted hatred of catholicism still found throughout English society needs no tales of the enormities of Louis XIV to keep it alive. All Newman’s family, whether religious or not, shared the common distrust and dislike of all things Roman and papal. Indeed Newman himself admits it was long, long before he could shake off the gnawing suspicion that the pope might, after all, be the Anti-Christ of the *Apocalypse*. We must remember that for the average English family of the nineteenth century, the idea that one of them might become a ‘Roman’ Catholic would be greeted with much the same enthusiasm as an American family in the 1950s would show to one had joined the Communist Party.

The reaction to Newman’s gradual move towards, and into, the One Fold of the Redeemer, was predictable, in that his mother died without the least comprehension of where her son was bound, and his two sisters could not cope at all with his conversion. Harriet broke off all relationship; Jemima kept in touch by post but would not meet him lest he corrupt her family. She did at least understand that it was the search for truth that motivated him. No wonder Newman always tenderly remembered the third sister, Mary, who died young. She was never troubled by his religious opinions because she died before he had any; she remains sweet and charming forever. The chapter about her finds virtually nothing to say, so is filled out with reference to other Victorians who had sisters, Henry James, Tennyson and Carlyle.

Someone who deserves fuller treatment, among Newman’s sisters, is Maria Giberne. That she is not one of the family is not her fault – Frank indeed proposed to her and was rejected, but if John Henry had offered she would have

accepted him at once. How different English religious history would have been, as John and Maria Newman settled down in a Sussex rectory and raised a boisterous family! They were devoted to each other, as is obvious from the long and intimate correspondence they kept up until her death. So devoted that they can tease each other – Newman’s line ‘you are not an ostrich’ is surely affectionate banter rather than, as Short takes it, ‘losing his patience’ (p. 177).

The brothers did keep in touch, Charles because he wanted money, Frank because he enjoyed arguments. It is never clear exactly why Charles went to the dogs, though women and drink were obviously part of it. In itself, the fact that he found Robert Owen’s rather curious brand of socialism attractive does not mean that it was impossible for him to hold down a job. Frank adopted more extreme and more radical views, and held responsible academic posts very successfully. In many ways the chapter on Frank is the most interesting because he was, after all, the only one of Newman’s siblings who thought and wrote. Far indeed from the Catholic, or indeed any other Church, Frank is credited with inventing the word, as well as the idea of ‘euthanasia’. In fact his teaching on social morality is now widely accepted, taken for granted indeed, among the illiberal and intolerant post-Christian atheists of our day. Frank came to a position of refusing all religious doctrine, while using religious moral principles to oppose religion. As a result, rationalists both then and now, have convinced themselves that christianity is actually immoral. John Henry enjoyed arguing with him as much as Frank did, and they kept up a vigorous correspondence as well as meeting from time to time. The chapter on Frank needs little padding – although it is surprising to find the record that Frank died in Weston-super-Mare dignified with a footnote quoting Evelyn Waugh on a seaside holiday in the same place (p. 149).

An unexpected entry to the family gallery is John Rickards Mozley, the second son of Newman’s sister Jemima. He and Newman corresponded about religion and philosophy, and Newman enjoyed arguing with his nephew as much as with Frank. John Rickards was the sort of sceptical Victorian rationalist who dabbled in Magic (p. 331). His attack on the Catholic Church is the familiar one, that corrupt and sinful clergy invalidate the message they are supposed to be preaching. Newman answers it neatly, ‘Our Lord Himself foretold that His net would contain fish of every kind’ (*Letters & Diaries XXVII*, 56, quoted on p. 365). But this chapter, more than most, rambles on to talk of many writers and thinkers whose connection with Newman is more and more tenuous.

No one can pretend that it is easy to understand the vast range and scope of Newman’s thought. It is perhaps more difficult for those who are not English, who have not had the same classical education, the same social and intellectual background as the Oxford men of the 1820s. Ford Madox Ford, quoted on p. 97, remarks ‘the first characteristic of great writing is a certain humility’. For our generation, even in Oxford, Newman is now a citizen of a foreign country, and we need to explore that country around him in order to begin to understand him. Hence the value of reading his predecessors and contemporaries, whether in contact with him or not. But writers who came after him, even if they testify to his abiding influence, cannot of themselves bear on our appreciation of Newman himself.

So I remain unsure about this book. I suspect it would be much better if it were much shorter, but then does not that apply to almost every book ever written?

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