

mind of God in order to ‘defend’ God against human ‘charges’? Few readers will be persuaded by every step of Murray’s case; all, however, should find here serious food for thought.

MARGARET ATKINS

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN – A MIND ALIVE by Roderick Strange (*Darton, Longman and Todd*, London, 2008) Pp. 264, £10.95

In early October 2008, Cardinal John Henry Newman’s grave at Rednal near Birmingham was opened. Brass, wood and cloth artefacts from his coffin were found, but there were no remains of the body of the Cardinal who, if the impending cause for his beatification is successful, could become England’s first canonised confessor since the Reformation. While this discovery does not affect the progress of his cause, it is a shock and, in some respects, a disappointment for those who have a deep devotion to Newman and who, in keeping with the Catholic tradition of the veneration of relics, might have travelled to the Birmingham Oratory to venerate the relics of such an influential man, convert, priest, Oratorian and cardinal. Nevertheless, it does remind us that while Newman may not have left us his body, he has left a corpus of writings, and indeed it is this corpus that has generated such interest in the man and thus in his cause. Newman devotees already think of him as a “doctor” of the Church, although only time will tell whether that is a title the Church will bestow on him. His immense corpus of writings came from a “mind alive” and in search of God.

At this exciting time of the expectation of Newman’s beatification, Roderick Strange, the rector of the Pontifical Beda College in Rome, and former Catholic Chaplain at Oxford University, the university so loved by and so much a part of Newman’s formation and life, gives us a very touching and personal reflection on the influence Newman has had on his own life and thought. The book is intended and useful for anyone curious about Newman and is in the first place a biography. As such it is extremely readable while also providing good introductory and systematic glimpses into the thinking of the Cardinal. Not claiming to be exhaustive, Mgr Strange hopes that those “who only have time to read one book about Newman will find this one”. I would recommend it not only for such people but also for those seeking to consolidate their knowledge of Newman’s life and thought.

After the biographical sketch the book goes on to illustrate the “interplay of dogma and theology” in Newman’s writings, using as examples the issues of infallibility, Mariology, the laity, and ecumenism. It is perhaps somewhat of a cliché to say that Newman’s ideas about such things as the importance of the laity in the Church, the limits and role of infallibility and ecumenism, Mary’s unique privileges, and the development of faith and doctrine, were all unappreciated in his day, and Mgr Strange does attempt to illustrate once again how Newman’s treatment of these issues, which to a greater or lesser extent were to feature in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, shows that his “lively mind” was ahead of its time. Newman was not a man who never experienced persecution for his beliefs, as even the briefest sketch of his life must illustrate, and yet he continued to live by conscience and with the passion that gives his life and works their immense value.

One might offer a short personal reflection in response to Mgr Strange’s reflections. Cardinal Newman is not often thought of as a “pastoral” (to use a popular term) priest. He is thought of as simply an academic, an Oxford fellow, cardinal and theologian. Yet this perception is not entirely justified. Newman was most definitely a pastor, both as an Anglican and as a Catholic, something that

is evident from the fact that a large portion of his writings consists of parochial sermons. He also spent most of his life as a Catholic at the Birmingham Oratory, a busy parish. He describes the “object” of the Congregation of the Oratory as “the formation of good secular priests, who shall at once be a blessing to the population among which they are placed, and a standard of the parochial clergy or missionaries”. It exists to bring people to God, to foster holiness. In his chapter, “Mary, the Mother of Jesus”, Mgr Strange notes how it was not Newman’s explanation of Mary’s title as Mother of God that caused unease, but rather the devotion that it fostered, and it is this devotion that Newman strongly defends (and also tempers). He was deeply concerned with the faith of Christians and their path to holiness, as is well illustrated in the chapter entitled “Preaching a Living Faith”. The fact that Newman adopted as his motto *Cor ad cor loquitur* (Heart speaks to heart), gives an indication of how dear the souls of the faithful were to him. Like St Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratory, he sought to catch souls on the “fishing rod of personal influence”. His unfair reputation as a “dry” writer is shattered when one looks, for example, at his poem *The Dream of Gerontius*, dripping with devotion and passion, and which Mgr Strange explores beautifully as a conclusion to his book.

Mgr Strange recounts that when he was already a priest and continuing his studies at Oxford he was asked why he did not quote Newman more often in his preaching. On reflection he says he came to realise that “in fact I was quoting him frequently, but rarely word for word. His influence goes deeper. My debt is incalculable, my gratitude profound”. In testament to this, he brings many aspects of the Cardinal’s thought together in this book to make it accessible to those who have not explored Newman’s writing in depth. With its simplicity and personal touch this book is a wonderful addition to the Newman world, and the author’s devotion to the man who may be a saint is tangible.

GREGORY MITCHELL CONG ORAT

THE NEW SCM DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY, edited by Philip Sheldrake (SCM Press, London, 2005). Pp. 657, £50

There are few theological disciplines that divide opinion as much as Christian spirituality. For many theologians, the discipline lacks credibility, both because they feel that it should be a natural part of other theological disciplines, particularly moral theology, and because much of what is written in the field is of poor quality. Anyone who is interested in spirituality must quickly get used to sighs and eye rolling from many fellow theologians. But their suspicions are often justified. A trip to the ‘spirituality’ section in any good bookshop can be a disheartening experience. There are many books available, but few are rooted in the Christian theological tradition, and those that claim to be often reduce the Christian life to some sort of therapy, or are simply poor. There are few good books also that treat those great masters of the spiritual life. It is rarer still to see good editions of the spiritual classics for sale.

Nevertheless, the study of Christian spirituality has never been more necessary. Most of our pastoral encounters involve people who are struggling in the search for God. The struggles are so often related to problems in the moral and spiritual life, and those who are to be engaged in pastoral work of any kind need to be able to draw on the spiritual wisdom that has accumulated in the Church over two thousand years. A familiarity with this wisdom requires careful study of the lives and works of the masters of the spiritual life, the major spiritual movements that they have inspired, along with knowledge of the theology on which they draw. Such study has benefits for those whom we try to help, and also for the