

This book throws an engaging new light on the transmission of ideas about the place in human life as well as in religious life of abstinence from sexual relationships, fasting from food and drink, poverty and detachment, as well as the limiting of contact with others in silence and solitude. It gives a carefully nuanced picture of the wise transmission of ideas and practices and shows how they changed in contact with different cultures and times.

BENEDICTA WARD SLG

CARDINAL NEWMAN FOR TODAY by Thomas J Norris, *Columba Press*, Dublin, 2010, pp. 230, £11.50

Fr Thomas J. Norris is Professor in Systematic Theology at the Pontifical University at Maynooth and a member of the International Theological Commission. *Cardinal Newman for Today* is an amplified reprint of his earlier *Only Life Gives Life*, and is intended to serve as an introduction for the educated general reader to the thought of John Henry Newman. With Newman's beatification a book like Norris's is certainly needed. If one were asked by an inquirer wholly unfamiliar with the Cardinal why Newman is an important and holy man the question would not be easily answered in a few words, but there is a need for something other than Newman's own writings or the various magisterial biographies to proffer as a substitute for the impossible one line answer to that question. The book takes its structure from Norris's understanding of Newman's theological epistemology passing from revelation, 'the roots' (chapters 1–3), through theology, 'the shoots' (4–6), to Christian life, 'the fruits' (7–9).

As Norris indicates at the beginning of Chapter 4, the most important object of Newman's 'courageous research', the concept of doctrinal development, has in the course of the twentieth century become the central issue of division within the Catholic theological academy. Is such development the extrapolation of the logical consequences of a fixed deposit accomplished once and for all at the death of the last apostle, and the tests of authenticity proposed by Newman exclusively diagnostic; or do such tests provide an independent warrant for a more occult process of growth in which the faith forever remains, in Norris's words, 'an unknown to be discovered'? The answer given to this question determines on which side of the great divide in the present struggle for the visible church a thinker places himself. Norris seems to concede that Newman placed himself in the doctrinal camp and yet he seems to want to put Newman on the other side of the fence.

At Norris's hands, Newman's support is constantly invoked for the theological revolutionaries of the second half of the twentieth century. Norris suggests, for example, that the Anglican Newman resembled Küng, and the Catholic Newman, Rahner, and he presents the Cardinal as the father of Vatican II, which latter Norris interprets as opposed to rather than completing Vatican I. This theme is reinforced by a vigorous defence of the hermeneutic of rupture as the key to the interpretation of the twenty-first Ecumenical Council offered rather incongruously in chapter five.

The question of the relationship between the essentially personal nature of Christian revelation and the propositional manner in which it is transmitted is of course a quite legitimate one upon which Newman may throw a good deal of light, but the fundamental theology Norris resolutely foists upon him seems to owe rather more to Friedrich Schleiermacher than to Newman himself. Newman's distaste for Liberalism is acknowledged but Norris refuses to express himself in the same terms, preferring to recast Newman's opponents as 'sceptics'. These are placed at one extreme of a spectrum through which Norris offers a *via media*. On

the other end ‘conservatives’, we are assured, have no living experience of Jesus because of their ‘shallow discipleship’ and lack of contact with ‘the originating experience of the Christian community’.

Norris constantly and rightly emphasises the importance of the Fathers in Newman’s intellectual development, conversion and theological epistemology. But admiration for the Fathers presents very different aspects depending on which side of Norris’s division between the fixed deposit and never ending story one places oneself. For it is precisely those elements in the patristic writings that the Fathers themselves found most frustrating and sought most earnestly to eliminate (a certain philosophical eclecticism and terminological instability) that so many moderns most admire. John Henry Newman is doomed to suffer the same reverse engineering in Norris’s presentation. Newman passed from a flirtation with the British empiricists to the confession that Aristotle is ‘the oracle of nature and of truth’. His intellectual journey began when he ‘came under the influence of a definite creed and received into [his] intellect impressions of dogma’ and its destination was a point at which he found himself with ‘no further history of [his] religious opinions to narrate’. Needless to say this is not the reason for which many of his contemporary admirers profess their enthusiasm and Thomas J. Norris is no exception.

Whatever one’s view of his case, one might object that in order to engage critically with Norris, indeed in order to engage this text even treated as an uncontroversial presentation of Newman (which it is not), one requires a level of theological literacy that would already equip the reader to dive straight into most of Newman’s major works directly. It would be less disingenuous therefore if Norris were to present his glosses on Newman as the arguments they are in essay form, rather than dressed up as an introduction for the initial inquirer.

As Norris explains, Newman’s conversion centred on the triumph of the principle of catholicity over that of antiquity. Not that Newman rejected the completeness of the revelation given to the Fathers but he rejected his own initial attempts to unpick both the theology of the ‘reformers’ and that of Trent and re-stitch it from its patristic elements. (Norris’s enthusiasm for this latter project seems to lead him to misrepresent the purpose of Tract 90). For Newman, the theology of the reformers could be discarded, but to do the same with later Catholic teaching would be to deny God’s providential protection of his Church: ‘securus judicat orbis terrarum’. The fact that Newman was more comfortable with a holistic concept of ecclesiastical infallibility than with its abbreviation into an Ultramontane positivism only reinforces the impossibility of allying Newman with any return to the sources that would entail the rejection of an intervening era of the Church’s history. For this reason one must judge that, while introductory works on Newman are much needed, Norris’s contribution does more to distort than to unfold the riches of its subject.

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HARVESTING THE FRUITS: BASIC ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IN ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE by Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Continuum*, 2009, pp. xv + 207, £9.99 pbk

This is a timely publication. Some forty-odd years after the first hopeful dialogues were held between the Catholic Church and four other Christian world communions – Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – Cardinal Walter Kasper has gathered together the fruits of the many documents resulting from these dialogues. The intention is to prevent the loss of what has been gained at a time when the ecumenical movement appears