

*Newman and Life in the Spirit: Theological Reflections on Spirituality for Today*. Edited by John R. Connolly and Brian W. Hughes. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. xi + 236 pages. \$35.00 (paper).

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*Newman and Life in the Spirit: Theological Reflections on Spirituality for Today* succeeds, in a way perhaps not intended. The stated goal of this edited collection of essays is “to develop and highlight various themes and insights and theological principles that inform his [Newman’s] spirituality” (8).

Acknowledging that Newman himself never systematically addressed the issue of spirituality in a specific dogmatic work, the editors note that his thoughts and insights on the topic are scattered broadly throughout his works, and that one must “read a great number of them to discover patterns to his insights regarding a holy life” (7). The good news is the authors of these collected essays have done just that; this is a blessing for all, but perhaps more so for a reader who has significant interest in but may be new to or unfamiliar with the impressive volume of work by the great cardinal.

The introduction is particularly helpful, as it offers a summary of all ten essays, an apology for the work, and guidance for how one might approach it. The introduction includes comments on Newman’s notion of spirituality, its relevance for today, the ways in which Newman was reform minded, a rationale for the book, and the book’s relationship to other works. These preliminary remarks afford the reader a very helpful context for approaching the book in an informed manner.

Spirituality, as significant as it is in the life of a believer, is often a challenging subject to adequately address. This work intends to reveal, in a broad manner and from various angles, what spirituality entails in the life and work of John Henry Newman. It embraces the challenge to make his spiritual life, both lived and addressed in his works, meaningful for the contemporary Christian.

A variety of his works are cited throughout, as well as significant supporting evidence from an admirably wide and varied collection of scholarly sources. While the themes that emerge are many, two of the more considerable seem to be (1) that Newman’s spirituality was anything but individualistic and “otherworldly,” but was ecclesial and focused on community; and (2) that his spiritual insights are, as the editors insist, “certainly both intellectually and practically relevant for today” (7).

This volume of collected essays brings to light a number of recurring themes that ground and unify these diverse and insightful submissions. These themes include the organic nature of life and thus of faith; the idea

of the necessity of reform and conversion in the spiritual life (as any aficionado of Newman knows, “change” was a constant theme in his life and works); the necessity of a “concreteness” in the spiritual life (springing in part, no doubt, from his lifelong immersion in a philosophical ambient of British Empiricism); and since history is the place in which the major events of Christianity occur, the unmistakably incarnational nature of spirituality.

This collection of essays witnesses that for Newman, spirituality is a characteristically “both/and” enterprise; it has both an “ascent” and a “descent” dynamic. To employ an allusion to the Transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of his three disciples, after his manifestation in glory, they descended the mountain—suggesting that spiritually, for the true disciple of Jesus, life in the valley (everyday ministry to others) is just as significant as the heartening experience of Jesus’ manifested glory on the mountain’s top.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the deepest and most pervasive theme that emerges in this work is the significance for the spiritual life of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity and, in particular, that of the Holy Spirit; this truth, for Newman, is foundational to the spiritual life. This work seems to affirm Newman’s conviction that each member of the Body of Christ possesses a *phronesis*, an “illative sense” or “instinct” about matters of faith. At baptism, the faithful are indelibly imbued with the Holy Spirit, individually and communally, which is, of course, the underlying conviction of Newman’s work *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, and his central conviction regarding the spiritual life.

These collected essays are an important contribution to the larger body of scholarship regarding Blessed John Henry Newman. His incarnational spirituality and the importance of the spiritual life for each baptized Christian, modeled in his own life and works, were foundational to the work of Vatican II. His example, on the one hand, cries out against a static spirituality or any sort of “restorationist” (e.g., pre-Vatican II) spirituality. On the other hand, his clearly ecclesial spirituality, enveloped in an appreciation of doctrine, revelation, obedience, and church history, also rails against innovations or any newfound gnostic teaching that would carry the faithful far from the “Bark of Peter.”

This work affords significant insight and engenders an appreciation of both the importance of the great cardinal’s spirituality and its relevance for the believer today.

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