



Reviews

THE PROPHETIC CHURCH: HISTORY AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT IN JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND YVES CONGAR by Andrew Meszaros, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, pp. xiii + 268, £65.00, hbk*

The papers from the Catholic Theological Association conference on John Henry Newman in September 2010, coinciding with the beatification by Pope Benedict XVI on a chilly damp afternoon in a Birmingham park, appeared in *New Blackfriars*. They included “‘*Haec Traditio proficit*’”: Congar’s reception of Newman in *Dei Verbum*, section 8’ (March 2011: 247–254), anticipating this book, the KU Leuven doctorate thesis by Andrew Meszaros, currently lecturing in systematic theology at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth.

Yves Congar drafted that section of *Dei Verbum*. In a much wider perspective, this book takes it for granted that development of doctrine actually happened at the Second Vatican Council, that Congar was a key figure in achieving it, and that his theorization of it was indebted to decades of reading Newman. Nor has the topic passed into history. Far from it, in the fifty years since the Council closed, there has been much discussion, even controversy, over the relationship between continuity and rupture, tradition and *aggiornamento*, both at the Council itself and in the aftermath, engaging professional theologians but also affecting Catholics in general.

In a sweeping comment, Pope Paul VI described Vatican II as ‘Newman’s Council’. With rather more substance Cardinal Avery Dulles SJ called it ‘Congar’s Council’.

Three of Congar’s books turned out, unexpectedly, unintentionally, to set the agenda — on Catholic ecumenism (1937), on reform in the Church (1950), and on the laity (1953) — one after the other casting a darkening shadow over his reputation for orthodoxy, until in 1956 he was sent by the Master of the Order into exile with the English Dominicans in Cambridge. In 1958, however, Congar was in the first cohort of theologians called by Pope John XXIII to collaborate at the preparatory stage, then to work throughout the Council, drafting and redrafting the texts that were finally promulgated. His two volumes on tradition (1960–63), and three on the Holy Spirit (1979–80), along with many essays on ecclesiological themes, consolidated his immense contribution to reshaping Catholic self-understanding (with a good deal awaiting effective assimilation).

Newman would presumably not have attended the Council. Summoned to the First Vatican Council as one of the Pope’s theologians he declined

on the grounds of age and incapacity (he was 67). The Bishops of England and Wales would have hired him but assuming he would obey the Pope's summons appointed someone else. He was pressed — pestered even — by Bishop Thomas Brown (Newport) to go as his personal theologian. He refused, repeatedly, telling one correspondent that it would interfere with the book he was writing on certitude: the *Grammar of Assent* as it became. To his old friend William Monsell he wrote that as 'a broken-kneed poney' (*sic*) he had no place 'in such ecclesiastical gatherings'.

As *My Journal of the Council* (2000) records, Congar, in his late fifties, and already in much worse physical condition than Newman ever was, committed himself completely to work on the draft texts, but seems to have been a lonely figure, at least as depressed by his experience in Rome as Newman would have been at Vatican I.

In chapter 1 Dr Meszaros establishes that Congar knew Newman's work quite well by the 1940s. While acknowledging that his competence did not rival the scholarship of Louis Bouyer and Jean Guittou, he was planning an anthology of Newman's ecclesiology along the lines of Otto Karrer's two volumes *Die Kirche* (1945). According to Meszaros, Congar was unusual, in that he was comfortable as a Thomist, yet at ease with Newman, unlike 'strict observance' Thomists at the time. Chapter 2 shows how, with mentors like Ambroise Gardeil and Marie-Dominique Chenu in the 1930s at Le Saulchoir, the appeal of Newman's work originally lay in his sensitivity to the historical dimension of life, thought and of course Christian doctrine.

Chapter 3 takes us into Congar's account of the development of doctrine, alluding all along to Newman's ideas, highlighting rational theological argumentation, concluding with contemplation — how development is worked out, so to speak. Chapter 4, turning to the intra-ecclesial context, deals with the contingencies of history, noting Congar's appreciation of the 1877 Preface to the *Via Media* in which Newman (after the Council) spells out the intrinsic tensions between the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices in the Church (instantiated in devout people, professional theologians, and popes, prone respectively to superstition, rationalism and tyranny). Chapter 5 takes us to the external historical factors that affect the development of Catholic thought and practice. Here we begin by considering the dogma *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* and how it developed as the indigenous peoples of the 'New World' were 'discovered' by European invaders in the fifteenth century — leading eventually to the happy doctrine of 'invincible ignorance' and to the question of the salvation of non-Christians (about which see Congar's article in this journal, July 1957: 290–300, while he was still under suspicion).

Finally, in chapter 6, in the light of Congar's work, illuminatingly expounded, with substantial inspiration from his (rather eclectic) reading of Newman, Dr Meszaros proceeds to unfold his own version of how

doctrines, complex and zigzag as they develop historically, are also the result and even continuation of God's self-communication.

Just how radically Congar changed Catholic ways of understanding doctrine would have appeared even more pointedly, even hilariously, if Meszaros had incorporated more of his survey of the Neo-Scholastic reception of Newman on doctrinal development (*Gregorianum* 2016: 123–50), such as by the Louvain Dominican M.-M. Tuyaerts. One minor lacuna in the formidable bibliography is 'Newman and the Second Vatican Council' (1967) by B.C. Butler, who as Abbot President of the English Benedictine Congregation took part in the Council. M.-M. Olivie (page 58), listed in the index, is the Toulouse Dominican Marie-Martin Olive (page 46/7), unindexed, whose advice Congar sought in 1946 when deepening his knowledge of Newman: Olive translated Newman's *Grammar of Assent* (1907).

FERGUS KERR OP

ROMANS [CATHOLIC COMMENTARY ON SACRED SCRIPTURE] by Scott W. Hahn, *Baker Academic*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2017, pp. xxxi + 299, \$22.99, pbk

Scott Hahn will be familiar to many readers for his apologetical and popular works. Here he brings his exegetical skills to bear on the *Letter to the Romans*. This volume will be well received by those actively engaged in pastoral ministry and parish life. Adopting a division of the letter sympathetic to the *Catholic Sunday Lectionary* and the *New American Bible Revised Edition* (NABRE), Hahn's commentary offers careful interpretation of the texts, and lucidly and faithfully presents the Apostle's argument. The pithy summary of the passages and cross references to Old Testament and New Testament, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and *Lectionary*, provide opportunity for readers to engage the tradition for themselves. The volume begins with a thoroughgoing introduction, and ends with worthy reading suggestions, a good glossary and index – though the glossary entry for 'gnostics' needs to acknowledge the lack of uniformity among those followers of 'an aberrant form of Christianity' (p. 295).

The commentary includes Hahn's judicious selection of ancient Hellenistic Jewish and traditional Catholic sources to support his interpretation. Many readers will find the occasional appearance of Catholic writers in sidebars of interest and help, particularly when they disagreed among themselves: e.g., Augustine and Chrysostom on the meaning of 'all Israel' in 11:26 (p. 208). There is scope for still more insights from the ancient authors to be drawn into this commentary: e.g., for Origen,