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really believe or mean that "God meant it for good". In retelling the story of Moses and the burning bush, he imagines that it is Zipporah who plants the concept of monotheism in Moses' head. We should also appreciate that Milton models for us the importance of painting vivid pictures, or, as Paul S. Wilson puts it, of "making movies". We need more such invitations and modeling of making biblical stories come alive.

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Newman and Conversion

Ian Ker, editor

University of Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1997
153 pages, \$18.00 US Paperback

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Newman's reception into the Roman Catholic faith in 1845, this volume consists of papers by the experts: Ian Ker, Sheridan Gilley, Avery Dulles, Ronald Begley, John Macquarrie, Cyril Barrett, Aidan Nichols and Terrence Merrigan. The papers were given August 1995 at an International Conference at Newman's own Oxford college, Oriel. They are not for everyone. Newman's ideas do not meet and convince us readily. We have to meet them. To do so, we must bridge the distance from unfaith to faith, and from Protestantism to Catholicism. The distance is greater for those reared in anti-Roman prejudices.

Newman, too, once travelled that distance. His crossing over took time, commitment, education and personal influence. "Great acts take time," he said. Most of us think of conversion as an important moment in an individual's life; and Newman experienced such a moment as an adolescent. Later he challenged such a *momentous* conversion as only a "notional assent" to religious truth, a contemplation of a personal experience. His first "real" conversion took twelve years to mature, and when it came it involved his whole person. It demanded commitment and a regulation of his life to new principles (95).

Newman emphasized the element of "time" in the conversion experience. Conversion was the result of the mind ever seeking and gradually becoming educated in religious knowledge. In *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, he spoke of "cumulative reasoning" involved in religious knowledge. Accumulating "informal inferences", the mind gathers knowledge about God whom it is actively and positively seeking. Also, "true

conversion is ever of a positive, not a negative character.” Newman therefore preferred to err on the side of more — more beliefs, more miracles. This positive predisposition made him truly catholic, foreshadowing present-day pluralist arguments for inclusivity and inculturation.

Was Newman a reactionary or a modern? A hundred years on, Newman seems modern indeed. Cyril Barrett, SJ, compares his ideas to Wittgenstein’s language games. Both saw spiritual (moral) reason related to human language, inseparable from particular symbols, images, experiences and emotions. Terrence Merrigan finds Newman relevant to the pluralist discussion of the alterity of other traditions. Newman, who never wished to deconstruct, who spoke of religious stories and rites without letting on whether or not he believed them as objective facts, seems to anticipate post-structural criticism.

To Oxford rationalists of the 1830s and 1840s, Newman’s declaration of the actual presence of Christ’s blood in the sacrament rankled of supernaturalism and magic. His reasoning seemed to them circular, going nowhere new. Time exposed the rationalists to be romantic idealists while Newman’s views seem to anticipate the newly appreciated circularity of pluralist relativism and post modern discourse theory.

However, the contributors all agree that Newman is never wholly compatible with modern criticism. He cannot be because even though he existed in the modern world, he was disagreeing with its intellectual premises. He recognized early in life that liberalism’s anti-dogmatic nature threatened that which he loved with all his mind and all his heart — the Church. Since religion depended on dogma, that is to say, “settled opinion” in relation to principles and truths, it could not survive in a world in which all opinions were equally true, none holding authority.

As Newman studied the Fathers, and later, Roman Catholicism, he saw their world set into relief by the brilliant light from the enemy camp. This historic insight influenced the peculiar shape of his conservatism, always conscious of and holding up for contemplation the means through which beliefs were naturally and positively acquired, the forms of assent that allowed them to be passed on from generation to generation.

His discovery of the concrete Catholic Church after 1845, helped him refine his conservatism. He came to think of Catholicism and Protestantism as two different religions. The former, reflecting liberal assumptions, held “religious opinion”, the latter were more natural in their devotion. To them “objects of belief are simple facts” (48). To Catholics everywhere religion was an external reality, liberating from egocentricity. This objective aspect produced immense heterogeneity, but in it was the source of its vitality. “Things that admit not of abuse have very little life in them (49).

For Newman then the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism rested in the conflict between objective and subjective. Macquarrie shows that Newman would have rejected Kierkegaard's view that "faith increases in direct ratio to the risk of being mistaken" (84). Being on the side of objective faith does not make him anachronistic. Newman is modern because he contemplated the consequences of liberalism, and because he saw the pitfalls of relegating religion to the subjective and irrational. Bent on preserving religious knowledge gained over the centuries, he considered the present with a perspective taken from the past, not vice versa. This perspective taught him that it was impossible for Christian religion to exist apart from the outward institutional form in which its history was encased and regenerated.

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The Royal Priesthood. Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical

John Howard Yoder

Edited and introduced by Michael G. Cartwright

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994

388 pages, \$23.00 US Paperback

Best known for his small classic, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972; rev. ed., 1994), the recently deceased John Howard Yoder was a Mennonite/Anabaptist historian, ethicist, translator, theologian, ecumenist, and sometime bible scholar. Though prolific, he never published the theological *magnum opus* that these days qualifies a thinker for the status of "great". Yet his thought was rigorous and cohesive enough that peers could speak of his "systematic challenge" to established theology. On the other hand, Yoder undercut old assumptions in so many other areas that it is fitting his work should also force a reconsideration of what a "great" Christian thinker is.

The 17 essays in *The Royal Priesthood* provide partial documentation of Yoder's almost 40 years of writing, thinking and speaking on ecclesiological and ecumenical subjects. A select bibliography of Yoder's other published and unpublished ecclesiological and ecumenical writings is included. While most of the papers were published previously in journals or in other books, three appear here in print for the first time: "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics versus the Wider Wisdom"; "The Imperative of Christian Unity"; and "Catholicity in Search of Location". But all the essays in this volume will force readers (evangelical and mainline alike) to re-