

Newman and Life in the Spirit. Theological Reflections on Spirituality for Today. Edited by John R. Connolly and Brian W. Hughes. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. Pp. xi + 236. \$35.

“Today the Catholic Church needs a personal approach to Christian spirituality wedded to social concern” (5). The rationale for this book is the enduring significance of Newman’s spirituality for Christian living today. Newman never wrote a treatise specifically on the topic of spirituality. So the authors have gathered his insights scattered throughout his works under various themes: (1) his “four conversions” as “a process both gradual and careful” (20); (2) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as “the foundation of Newman’s spirituality” (43); (3) historical consciousness in the development of doctrine; (4) sympathy; (5) the power of imagination in real assent that leads to action; (6) incarnational spirituality marked by Christ’s presence; (7) Mary as “the model of faithful reception of the divine Word” (131, emphasis original); (8) the transition from “other-worldly” to “this-worldly” holiness (134); (9) the power of “personal influence” in the communion of saints, especially, for Newman, Philip Neri (171); (10) oratorian spirituality embodied in the early church’s *disciplina arcani*, the mystical adoration of the Trinity (194).

The book is the result of research by participants in an interest group on the spirituality of Newman at the Catholic Theological Society of America conventions (2011, 2012, 2013). Each chapter is well written and informative, valuable both for Newman novices and the well-versed. The analysis of Newman’s less well-known “Oratory Papers” (1846–1878) gives insight into Newman’s mysticism and practical wisdom. “For Newman, all genuine spirituality is marked by a strong personal engagement in one’s own process of becoming the person one already is in the eyes of God” (188). Mystical adoration of the Trinity corresponds to playing the role God assigns to each one in life: “He then is perfect who does the work of the day perfectly” (197, citing Oratory Paper 28).

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Flannery O’Connor: Writing a Theology of Disabled Humanity. By Timothy J. Basselin. Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2013. Pp. xi + 146. \$29.95.

Basselin introduces the potential intersections between theological and disability studies in O’Connor’s works. With a literary critic’s insight, B. surveys O’Connor’s grotesque characters—initially on the periphery and often despised—for the mystery and the mirror that many of them embody in their abnormality. In O’Connor’s fiction, the mirror image of the grotesque exposes the hypocrisy of the central characters, often reckoning divine judgment upon themselves, while a divine grace emanates from the grotesque characters in their midst.

To contextualize his thesis on O’Connor’s theology of a disabled humanity, B. explores O’Connor’s reflections on the introduction she wrote for the biography of a

very sick young girl (*Mystery and Manners* [1957]). Mary Ann was not a fictional grotesque but a child of three with facial deformities, persistent tumors, and cancer treatments, cared for by the sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Home in Atlanta until her death at age twelve. Writing that introduction, B. argues, O'Connor gained new insight into both her preoccupation with the fictional grotesque other—as person, moral failure, and sin—and her own adult onset as grotesque from lupus-related disabilities.

O'Connor's work promises fruitful theological reflection on disability, particularly in defiance of polite society. Beware, however: B.'s ready association of pain, suffering, and disability with either a romanticized Job-like acceptance of disaster/evil/grotesques or moral failure and sin is problematic. Disabilities studies reject these associations for their reduction of people with disabilities to their instructive value—the mirror image exposing pretense—for “the normate” (a term coined by Rosemarie Garland Thomson) and nondisabled as opposed to the inherent value belonging equally to all. Similarly, B.'s subtitle labeling—“a theology of disabled humanity”—regrettably can disqualify the difference, identity, and real difficulties (injustice, discrimination, and stigma among other social sins) that people with disabilities experience with frequently scandalous effect. Nevertheless, B. offers an as yet under-utilized approach to mine the subtexts of O'Connor's work.

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Spirituality Seeking Theology. By Roger Haight, S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014. Pp. xiv + 194. \$26.

Examining the decline of Christianity in Western churches, Haight suggests an innovative project to make Christianity and its doctrines once again intelligible, meaningful, and applicable to its faithful today. Between the world of spontaneous Christian living and that of theologians, H. asserts, there exist various dynamics in a “vast sphere of conscious witness and reflection on Christian practice” (1). Prior to theologizing, however, the experience of following Jesus remains the primary source that leads to self-consciousness and language, and serves as a basis for reflection and doctrines. H. therefore proposes that spirituality seeks a theology.

Such a dynamic is reflected not only in the overall structure of the book, but also in the flow of what I see as three movements. Chapters 1 to 3 explore the narrative of the universe and its human species from complementary perspectives of both spirituality and modern sciences. Chapters 4 to 7 focus on Jesus of Nazareth, a mediator of transcendence, and various aspects of his stories of ministry as well as his call to others, all of which remain the principal content and inspiration of Christian faith and practice. The final two chapters (8 and 9) show how Christian narratives and doctrines were constructed and developed during the post-Jesus period. Throughout these last chapters, H. accentuates the dialectical relationship