

FROM REPATRIATION TO REVIVAL : CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINE CONGREGATION, 1795–1850 by Alban Hood OSB, *St Michael's Abbey Press*, Farnborough, 2014, pp. xiv + 246, £24.95, hbk

The years of the French Revolutionary wars were a period of devastation for those who followed the *Rule* of St Benedict. The great monastic historian Schmidt commented that of the hundreds and thousands of monasteries which existed at the end of the *ancien régime*, only about thirty continued to exist at the restoration of 1815. It is perhaps surprising that the four small and relatively insignificant houses of English monastics (three of monks and one of nuns) that comprised the English Benedictine Congregation should have been among this surviving thirty. Since in 1789 all were located in France or the Low Countries – the eye of the storm – location cannot be adduced as the explanation. The story of how this came to be has, however, not been justly appreciated. In no small measure this is because it is a story which falls between the master narratives with which we have approached this whole period. The most famous (and seductive) of these narratives is Newman's vivid image of the Second Spring; with all bursting energetically into life around him in 1852, his rhetoric takes attention away from the English Catholics of an earlier day (whom he identifies as the *gens lucifuga*). Dom Alban helpfully opens his account of English Benedictine life with a survey of various other ways of looking at the ecclesiastical history of this period – and each one seems calculated to write out of the story the English Benedictine experience, as the monks and nuns he describes did not, by and large, march in step with the wider developments in English and European Catholicism as a whole, or in the history of religious life and monasticism. Within these pages we read a history that is marked by conservatism and tenacity, where those who are described always have half an eye on the past and its glories: even if they know that the return to France is impossible, the later English monks and nuns can sometimes sound like the Israelites addressed by the prophet Haggai as they contemplate what they see around them. The new directions that are evident in the Church in England are more often resisted than embraced; the most obvious example of this is the ongoing conflict between bishops and monks, but the English monks and nuns scarcely rushed to adopt the newer devotional trends that were emerging at the time.

The attention of both monks and nuns lay elsewhere. Dom Alban is surely right to make his first substantial chapter a survey of the way in which conventual life was re-established in a new and not always welcoming context (while at the same time being willing to point out that at least for their Catholic gentry hosts, the monks seem not to have been always gracious and grateful guests). The question of a return to France embodies what emerges as one of the themes of the book: the tendency towards the look to the past to provide a direction for the future was strong and the ties, both emotional and spiritual to that past

were deeply embedded. The compromise which led to the refoundation of the former Paris community of St Edmund's in the old home of St Gregory's in Douai illustrates all this, and since one of the principal causes of this refoundation was the availability of the funds to permit it points out another important dimension of the work of this period, which was that most of it was done on what felt like a shoestring to those doing it. The monks and nuns did what could be done with the resources available to them, and accepted that the results would not always be externally impressive.

A similar dogged (perhaps even stolid) conservatism pervades Dom Alban's description of the devotional life of the communities and their attitudes to their missions (as their parochial apostolate was known). Even at a time when the latter was experiencing a process of considerable expansion and change at the level of buildings and structures, the mindset of those running them was still firmly in the past. The weaknesses of this attitude of conservatism are exposed fairly and clearly by Dom Alban in his account of the controversies that rumbled on between bishops and monks; it is perhaps telling that all the monks who became bishops came to side against the monks in these disputes. The case of Bishop Baines, though the best known, is in many ways misleading: Baines's own biographer describes him as a 'restless prelate', and one may feel that maverick would not be too unfair a judgment. It is more telling that Ullathorne, one of the greatest of the nineteenth century monks, and one whose imagination and vision shines out from Dom Alban's pages, would also come to side against the monks.

Perhaps the one great exception to the picture of unimaginative conservatism that emerges from these pages is one of the neglected chapters of both monastic and English Church history – the English Benedictine mission to Mauritius and Australia. This story deserves to be better known, and this book will perform an important service in making it so. It is interesting as the one example in the present work of an enterprise driven by a vision of monasticism which reached out to something radically new. The English monks (and even a few nuns) who were involved saw themselves as doing something monastic, something which followed in the footsteps of Augustine of Canterbury and Boniface. At the institutional level this vision was not a long term success, but it is interesting to speculate about its influence on opening English monastic minds to the renewal in monastic life and thought which was to come upon the English Benedictines in the fifty years after those treated here.

Steady determined conservatism is not the most glamorous of virtues, and this book leaves one with an impression of many small steps being taken by men and women doggedly determined to take them even while knowing that they were small steps. Nevertheless, these small steps constituted a long walk to survival. The monks and nuns of the early nineteenth century have been well served by Dom Alban. Their story, one which it would have been easy to despise and which the

historiographical tradition has rather overlooked, is well told here, with an even-handedness and generosity of spirit that enables one to recover and appreciate their achievements without losing sight of their limitations. In an age where determination (and perhaps even doggedness) may well be necessary for ecclesial institutions to survive, it is not only monks and nuns who might find something important for their own self-understanding here.

LUKE BECKETT OSB

THE THOUGHTFUL HEART: THE METAPHYSICS OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, with a fully annotated reader's text of Newman's *Discursive Enquiries on Metaphysical Subjects* by William F. Myers, Marquette Studies in Philosophy No.85, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2013, pp.331, \$29.00, pbk

Newman's *Discursive Enquiries on Metaphysical Subjects* is a difficult text to present. It was never published in his lifetime and consists of notes and comments gathered over many decades in what for most of his life he called *The Philosophical Notebook*. (In this review it will be referred to simply as 'the *Notebook*'.) A dossier of citations, references, and fragments, often amended and cross-referenced, with some entries being later corrected or even deleted, it is rough work in which we can discern the shape and contents of a book on metaphysics that never appeared. The earliest entry is from 1859 and the latest is from 1888 (Newman died in 1890). One tends to think of Newman as a historian of thought and an apologist for religious faith rather than a philosopher in the 'professional' sense of the term. But this work shows that he was keen to engage with the thought of Kant and Descartes, as well as with that of earlier and contemporary English and Scottish philosophers, in developing his own arguments about God's existence, about miracles and about freewill, and in arguing against the views of John Stuart Mill.

In 1970 Edward Sillem published a transcription of the *Notebook* (*Nauwelaerts*, Louvain) but it is both difficult to find now and, because of the meticulousness and integrity with which the text is reproduced, difficult to use. Myers offers instead an organization of the material that is hypothetical but which, he hopes, will help the reader to make sense of Newman's thoughts and to appreciate the 'brilliance and originality of Newman's thinking even if that thinking is technically naïve at times and not always well-informed or accurate' (p. 9). Where Sillem respects the *Notebook* as a resource, Myers wants to respect it as a process.

Part One consists of Newman's main entries with a first set of footnotes, followed by explanatory notes from Myers and textual notes placed separately so as to allow a more straightforward access to the main entries. These are introduced by a Preface (from 1866) and an