

Passion for Truth, the Life of John Henry Newman, review by Gregory J. Sullivan (Amazon, May 25, 2012)

Father Juan Vélez's new biography of John Henry Newman, *Passion for Truth*, is an elegant contribution to the various portraits of this great and holy man. Fr. Velez has written a long but very readable life, emphasizing the moral integrity and personal sanctity of Newman

Fr. Vélez, an Opus Dei priest and trained physician, has previously written on Newman. His 2010 work (with Mike Aquilina), *Take Five: Meditations With John Henry Newman*, is an excellent short work for spiritual reading and as companion for mental prayer. *Passion for Truth* is an ambitious book that works carefully through Newman's correspondence to provide a narrative of a man whose theological concerns with the Anglican church became one of the defining dramas of the entire Victorian period.

Fr. Vélez succinctly presents Newman's youth and education. Moreover, his seminal role in the Oxford Movement is chronicled with care. Fr. Vélez emphasizes Newman's fierce struggle to follow the evidence, wherever it might lead, to find the truth of the faith. And it led, ultimately, to Rome, a move that cost him a great deal in friendships. What is shocking is how poorly treated Newman was by Catholic leaders following his celebrated conversion. After one slipshod challenge to Newman's orthodoxy, Fr. Vélez reports the damage:

"This episode saddened Newman and made him retire from public life. He was more cautious with projects that involved [certain members of the hierarchy], and wished to be left alone. From 1859 to 1864, he did not publish any works Instead of having his bishop judge, someone would denounce him directly to Rome. It was a time of interior suffering for Newman. He felt he was not using his talents and was thwarted from doing so. This injustice and others, which he experienced years later, helped to purify his intentions and took him to a new height of spiritual life in which he became more detached from others' opinions. He accepted these injustices as the spiritual Cross that he was asked to bear."

But accepted or not, there were many injustices. It was as if the Catholic Church in England had no idea what to make of the holy genius who had suddenly become one of her own. Still, Newman restored his reputation with the publication in 1864 of his riveting autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. It was during this period he wrote what many consider his profoundest book, *Grammar of Assent* (1870). Eventually, Newman enjoyed the full embrace of the Church, which was effected with his being made a cardinal in 1879.

Late in his life, Newman instructed future biographers: "I don't want a panegyric written of me, which would be sickening, but a real fair downright account of me according to the best ability and judgment of the writer." Fr. Vélez has ably satisfied this requirement. *Passion for Truth* will not, of course, replace Ian Ker's magisterial biography, but it certainly deserves a place on the same shelf. This book is a welcome version of the epochal life of a truly great man.