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Infallibility of the Laity: The Legacy of Newman

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NEWMAN ON THE LAITY

INFALLIBILITY OF THE LAITY: THE LEGACY OF NEWMAN,
by Samuel D. Femiano, C.S.B. New York: Herder and Herder,
1967. xviii, 142 pp.

This volume is a useful supplement to such studies as *Newman the Theologian* by J. H. Walgrave, O.P. and *Newman on Tradition* by Günter Biemer. The latter has, it is true, incorporated into his study citations from the manuscripts of the Newman Archives in the Birmingham Oratory. But Father Femiano's additions from this source bring vividly to life the misunderstandings experienced by Newman on account of his views on the development of doctrine and his championing of the role of the laity in the Church.

How much of Newman's correspondence and how many explanatory paragraphs in articles were required to set at rest the suspicions aroused by the word "consult" in his article, "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine". "If we do not use the vernacular, I do not see how the bulk of the Catholic people are to be catechised or taught at all. English has innovated on the Latin sense of its own Latin words; and if we are to speak according to the conditions of the language, and are to make ourselves intelligible... we shall necessarily run the risk of startling those who are resolved to act as mere critics and scholastics." Elsewhere Newman adverts to the consternation caused in Rome by his statement that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was to be held with "implicit faith", a perfectly legitimate English usage for "to be believed absolutely and unconditionally". When this was translated into Latin, he was assumed to deny that the Church explicitly taught the dogma of the Trinity. Small wonder that the Roman "refutations" based on Latin versions of disputed passages in his writings both discouraged Newman from further observations on the infallibility of the laity and prevented his views from being seriously studied by the Roman theologians. If between the two councils of the Vatican those views had been taken seriously, today's crisis in the Church might be of lesser magnitude. For Newman, the Word of God is given to the whole Church, possessed variously by the whole Church in faith, and manifested by the body of the faithful or laity in its own way.

From the Newman Archives comes the following memorandum of the interview of Father Newman with Bishop Ullathorne which resulted in Newman's giving up the editorship of *The Rambler*. Newman wrote the memo immediately after the interview: "He thought... our Laity were a peaceable set; the Church was *peace*. They had a deep faith; they did not like to hear that anyone doubted... I said in answer, that he saw one side, I another; that the Bishops etc. did not see the state of the Laity... He said something like, 'Who are the Laity?' I

answered (Not those *words*) that the Church would look foolish without them."

The book is equipped with an Index of Names, Index of Subjects, Index of Works of Newman. It is regrettable that these indexes (taken over bodily from the author's typescript?) are useless, since they have no connection with the pagination of the book.

JOSEPH F. MURPHY

CHINA'S LEFTIST WRITERS 1919-1942

THE GATE OF DARKNESS: STUDIES ON THE LEFTIST LITERARY MOVEMENT IN CHINA, by Tsi-an Hsia. Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1968. 266 pp.

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to the late Professor Hsia for this book on writers with a communist persuasion in China, roughly spanning the period 1919-1942. It is a stimulating collection of essays in which one finds literary criticism aided by history and biography in a splendid effort to assess the significance, literary or political, of the writers chosen for this set of studies, and the impact of the social and political changes of this period on the individual writer. This method of study, the interdisciplinary method, is an academically profitable one and ought to be developed to practical perfection.

Professor Hsia chose as his materials of study the lives and works of a number of literary figures of the time who turn out to be none-to-great, from the literary point of view, whatever their socio-political status, except perhaps for Lu Hsun who everyone (now including Mao Tse-tung) agrees stood out among all of them then. His choices produced an uneven picture from the best literature to the quite ordinary, but this is justified by the general assumption that the writers of the period were, as a rule, not literary giants. As no writers in their context at that time escaped involvement in politics, a strong criterion for literary quality of work put forward by the studies (as suggested by a couple before it) is how much of literature had gone into a literary piece in spite of such involvement. Based on this criterion, the writers studied here have been judged as great, notwithstanding their political ideals, like Lu Hsun, or positively mediocre because of the same reason (Chiang Kuang-tsu).

There are six essays altogether. The first deals with Chu Ch'iu-po (1899-1935), the second with Chiang Kuang-tz'u (1901-1936), the third and fourth with Lu Hsun (1881-1936), the fifth with five young writer-