



THE Newman

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Newman's Letters and Life-Writing

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Editorial Committee: Barry Riley (Editor) • Anne Duddington • John Duddington • Josephine Way • Dr. Marie Rose Low • Dr. Christopher Quirke

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The Newman Association Charity No. 1006709

President: Winifred Flanagan

Hon. Secretary: Sophie Rudge: 27 Dee Banks, Chester, CH3 5UU, Tel 01244 311375, to whom general enquiries should be addressed.

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Cover picture: *St Apollinaris: a mosaic in the apse of the Basilica of St Apollinaris in Classe*

Comment

The awkward word synodality is back in fashion. Pope Francis has launched the two-year process leading to a synod terminating in October 2023. It is beginning with diocesan discussions which should be completed by next February. This initial stage, Pope Francis has said, is important because it involves “listening to the totality of the baptised”. Speaking in September he said there was “much resistance to overcome the image of a Church rigidly divided between leaders and subordinates”.

At the beginning of October our own Cardinal Vincent Nichols issued a Pastoral Letter to the Parishes in the Westminster Diocese saying that invitations would be given to parishes and schools. The Cardinal declared it to be “a lovely initiative of Pope Francis” but he added that the process would focus “not so much on discussing ideas but on sharing experience” which could be seen as an attempt to steer the debate into safer areas. The hierarchy, after all, have good reason to be suspicious of an opinion-gathering process which is likely to prove hard to control.

The Governance structure of the Roman Catholic Church was most recently defined in *Lumen Gentium*, one of the key papers of the Second Vatican Council in 1964. The bishops were to be the shepherds of the Church. The laity should accept Christian obedience. The leaders, on the other hand, when aided by the experience of the laity, “can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters”.

The faithful in the pews

For most of us Catholics, however, our experience is of clericalism, in which control is exercised almost entirely by ordained bishops and priests. Parish councils have sometimes come, but have often disappeared again. The role of the laity is in flower arranging and church cleaning, though also in managing parish websites. If lay people are given greater consultative powers they may well put forward uncomfortable proposals for fundamental reforms such as the ordaining of women priests (or at any rate women deacons). The faithful in the pews will certainly wish to get to grips with the Catholic Church’s biggest current structural problem, the shortage of priests because the established priesthood is unable to accept that few young men today are willing to accept a vow of celibacy. For existing priests it is brutally hard to accept that one’s sacrifice may have been in vain.

The Church of England provides a clear example of the potential consequences of synodality. The Anglicans set up a General Synod in 1970 on a permanent basis and it includes a large and powerful House of Laity. The Synod helped propel the Church towards women priests and, even worse, women bishops. During the late 20th century the Anglicans seemed to be moving closer to Rome but that convergence stalled and a frustrated Pope Benedict created ordinariates for Anglicans in 2011.

In his pastoral letter Cardinal Nichols invited Catholics to take up Pope Francis’s invitation “in whatever ways you can”. This open appeal may indeed stimulate his flock to “dream about the church we are called to be,” as he hopes. But it may also encourage people to ask awkward questions about why the Cardinal shocked many of his laity in May by giving the twice-divorced Boris Johnson permission to be married in Westminster Cathedral.

Barry Riley

Ten Things I Keep in Mind as Editor of The Tablet

Adapted from a talk given to the Ealing Newman Circle by Brendan Walsh, on September 23rd 2021.

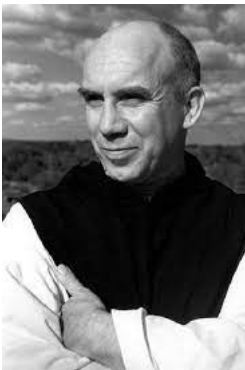
Ten years ago Catherine Pepinster, then Editor of The Tablet, called me to ask whether I would like to have a go at being part-time editor of The Tablet's books pages. At the time I was living in Youghal, County Cork, having a few months earlier left my job as editorial director at Darton, Longman and Todd. A few weeks later I started work at The Tablet's offices in Hammersmith, for two days a



Brendan Walsh

week. I had been a reader of The Tablet for about thirty years and I had written the odd book review and article, so I knew some of the people working there. Five years ago, the Board of directors asked me to take over as editor.

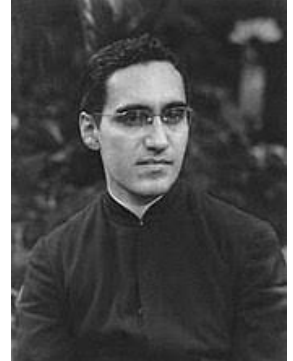
I felt like the cat that had got the cream. Like a lot of Tablet readers I had a close emotional relationship with the weekly; it was intelligent, even a bit highbrow, but compassionate, engaging and interested in everything and everyone, particularly the things going on in the corner of the picture. And there was no bossy shepherding of people into heaven along tightly-prescribed routes; there was a sense of being plugged into one of the great streams of human civilisation. Of course, The Tablet has an angle of vision. People say it is "progressive" or "liberal", or whatever; no-one likes to be confined by labels, but this is part of the Tablet's sensibility. But it is a living, growing personality – faithful, honest, generous, inquisitive, irrepressibly reform-minded. Catholicism is as much a matter of the imagination as of the intellect, a way of



Thomas Merton



Dorothy Day



Oscar Romero

living and loving as much as a body of teaching. And the Tablet's vision of Catholicism isn't inhospitable or narrow; it is vibrant and dynamic, and it welcomes arguments and debates. Pope Francis has described the Church as "being alive, knowing being unsettled and lively; it has a face, and is not rigid; it has a body that moves and grows. It has a soft flesh; it is called Jesus Christ."

There is a row of postcards on my bookshelf at work, a personal selection of icons: there is Dorothy Day, the anarchist who went to Mass every morning; there is Thomas Merton, the bold peacemaker, who did what he was told by his Abbot (well, most of the time); and there is Oscar Romero, whose defence of the poor cost him his life. The doctrine of the Church was their indispensable map; it was not their destination. Its moral teachings are not electric fences to prevent us straying into wickedness, but springboards to propel us towards happiness and flourishing. We need the rules and we need the referee with his whistle; but it is the game that matters.

The exuberance of God

Popes come and go; papal preoccupations alter and seesaw. The genius of Catholicism is precisely that it is not seeking to find rest in one register or settlement, but it lives in the flashes of movement between them. This is the exuberance and profligacy of God. Whatever sort of Catholic we are, or think we are, we need the other sort. As Charles Peguy pointed out, if we arrive at heaven alone, God may look at us and ask: "But where are the others?"

We combine deep attachment to the Church with fierce independence; a light in the gloom and, sometimes, a wasp at the picnic. I was asked to provide a title for this talk and I thought, why not think of ten simple rules I might put up on the wall of my office to help me from going off the rails.

One. Remember that you are a caretaker, a custodian. In *Traditionis Custodes*, the document on the traditional Latin Mass that Pope Francis recently issued - not greeted with universal warmth - the Pope described a bishop as a *traditionis custos*. It is tempting for bishops to think *it all depends on me*. That is a mistake that editors can make as well. An editor of The Tablet should remember is that he or she is a link in a long chain. We inherit something, we polish it up, we might rearrange the furniture, we flatter ourselves with things like strategic reviews and relaunches, but what we are doing is keeping a tradition refreshed and renewed. We should look back with attention and gratitude and grace, to receive what is handed on to us; and we should look forward expectantly, wishing to convey undiminished and even with a little added glow the treasure with which we have been entrusted.

In a press conference aboard the papal plane on the way back to Rome after one of his visits overseas the Pope once talked about Catholic fundamentalists who have a nostalgia for returning to the ashes. Catholics are inheritors, custodians of tradition. But tradition is the guarantee of the future and not the container of the ashes. It's like the roots of a tree that give us the nutrition to grow. You will not become like the roots, you will flower, give fruit and be seen to become roots for other people. The tradition of the Church is always in movement, he said; the tradition does not safeguard the ashes.

As you know, we are about to begin a synodal process. And when Pope Francis spoke in Rome last Saturday about synodality he asked people to leave their doors and windows open. "Do not limit yourselves to considering only those who attend or think

like you do. Allow yourselves to go out to meet and be questioned. Let their questions be your questions. We must allow people to walk together, a spiritual legion. Do not be afraid to engage in dialogue. And let yourselves be upset by dialogue."

When I think about the role of editor as a custodian of tradition and about the synodal turn the Church is taking I am aware that at the Tablet we have to walk a tightrope; we have to reflect that spirit of synodality, of living with attention, being a place for dialogue between Catholics of very different views, and at the same time having our own clear, distinct position. Our feet are firmly planted in the ground of the Second Vatican Council: our voice is one of reform, delivered with vigour and style but with curiosity and charity and humility. But we can listen to and connect with a wide readership across the Church, while maintaining our loyal base. The Tablet, rooted in its own traditions of independence, is also a living thing, a magazine of surprises.

Second, a simpler thing: there was a wonderful feature in The Tablet earlier this year – it was in June – where a writer, Morag MacInnes, a Scottish writer, remembered her friend, the brave, gentle Orkney poet George Mackay Brown. His work is permeated by his Catholicism. And he once asked, "How do I, as a poet and a writer, present holiness to a Godless generation? Especially as I know nothing about it myself?"

How do we put before the world holiness, forgiveness, reconciliation, when it is no longer familiar with that kind of language? I think that is part of the task of the Tablet. A place of trustworthy, professional reporting, vivid, smart, compassionate comment and analysis, that is able to speak the language of the world and the language of heaven. We have to be bilingual.

A need to be inquisitive

Three. Don't be a know-all. It is quite helpful if you are an editor that you should not know too much, not be too clever. I think you need to be inquisitive and just a little slow-witted. If you know the answer to everything, if you can immediately see the logical flaws in everything you read, your magazine might be right but it will not intrigue or unsettle. What we do is to publish thoughtful and well-written work that explores new ideas and raises interesting questions. I don't know the answer to all the big questions. And good writers help me think those things through. I think that's quite good for readers too. They have a place where good, smart people are saying different things. I think if I was smarter and was sure I had all the answers the paper would be trotting out the same ideas in article after article. No. Better to have things in the paper every week that will annoy some readers. Most readers prefer a paper with tension and movement; not just writing that only ever tells them what they want to hear.

Four. Be brave. Journalism is about trying to serve the truth, doing our best to tell our readers what is happening. What was said, what was done, when and where it happened, without imposing our interpretation on things. Trying to get as near to the



truth as possible. Why do I think we have to be brave? It is because much of the media is in the hands of wealthy owners or powerful interests, people with an agenda, who want to use the media to put over their version of events. They want readers to see the news in a certain way. We don't pretend we don't bring our interests and prejudices to our story-telling. But we seek to be independent. We want our readers to trust our stories, to have a sense that they can make up their own minds about what they are reading. Whether it is good news or bad news for the Church, just tell it as straight as you can. There is plenty of room for opinion in a newspaper but in the news section you should not be able to guess, from reading the news story, whether the person who wrote it voted Tory or Labour at the last election, or whether they are right wing Catholic or left wing Catholic, or whatever.

Journalists are like a pack; there is group-think in journalism. The difficult thing is to report as freely as you can, and that means not only not following the pack - it also means not automatically assuming that the pack is wrong. That is another trap - the contrarian trap. Sometimes what most people are saying is wrong; sometimes what most people are saying, as far as you can tell, is accurate. Just try and look at what is happening with your own eyes; ask around; ask people who were there; and make your own best judgement of what happened. Be honest when it isn't clear what happened. Think for yourself, follow the evidence, plough your own furrow.

Five. Take risks. When I first got the job of Editor of The Tablet I went to see the Chair of the Trustees. She had an important job in the City and her office was at the top of a skyscraper. She had one piece of advice for me. "Take risks," she said. I always remember that, and I have been very grateful for it.

Our take on what is happening

Six. Be humble. None of us is impartial. Don't kid yourself that you don't come to a story with baggage. All storytelling comes from a perspective. You are always putting things in a certain order of importance. It is our take on what is happening, and we never see the whole story. And I don't think we should be frightened of that: we interpret things from a Catholic perspective, that's where we have our feet planted in the ground. We honestly seek the truth, we try to tell the truth as best we can, but we bring to that search for truth our own story, our own roots, our own values, our own way of seeing the world. Good readers understand that. I don't think it is something to be disguised. You are an honest storyteller but we bring our own history to our journalism. You just have to be alert to the dangers of that, and then be alert - but be comfortable within your Catholic skin.

Seven. Just tell the story. We sometimes have phone calls from "sources", from senior people in the Church: leading figures in church agencies, senior clergy, influential opinion-formers. They always begin by saying they respect The Tablet's independence. They always say, "I'm not trying to interfere with what you are saying". They are usually well-meaning. They should always be listened to. They might say, "I read the story about such-such a leading Catholic school last week ...", or "I read the leader you published last week that was critical of the church charity, or bishop or cardinal ...". And they will say "What are you trying to achieve? What is your strategy here? That story was not really ... helpful."

I think part of the job of the editor is to avoid the temptation of being too strategic,

of thinking too much about whether this or that story will harm the Church, or help build the Kingdom of God. We should find out as best we can what has happened, check it out carefully, check all the sources, be sure you are not being set up or used. "If your mother tells you that she loves you, check it out," as we say. But if you are sure the story stands up, if your instinct tells you it's a good story ... just tell it. It could be damaging to somebody you admire; it could be that "your team" is shown in a bad light. But remember that - in the long run - the truth never hurts the Church. Just tell the story ... and let the cards fall.

Eight (I'm throwing a few lessons in here). Shut up and listen. Pay attention. Be prepared to hear things you don't want to hear. Be quiet, watch, be still. And surround yourself with good people. The first rule of life, as we all know, is "Choose your parents well". Choose the journalists around you well. I have surrounded myself with really good professionals. And make your place of work reflect your values. I am always banging on about our values. Well, make sure you reflect that in how you work together with colleagues and contributors and readers and subscribers. Deal justly. I'm lucky. Our journalists go the extra mile. There is professionalism, and there is friendship.

Nine. Remember that every story is about people, about individuals, about families. However cynical and world-weary journalists might get we must never forget that everyone we interview, every name we quote, is a real person. When we stand before a person, we stand before someone who has his or her struggle, just as we all have, someone in whose face we can see the face of Christ.

Ten. Tell the whole story. We all know that this is a time of shame in the Church, of humiliation. Tell that story completely straightforwardly, simply tell people what we think is happening. Don't hold anything back, even though people sometimes say, not another story of the scandal of abuse. But tell the whole story of the Church. The stories of courage, heroism, of sacrifice, of lives of simplicity and goodness, of love unto death.

If you look at the news pages of the Tablet every week you will see the extraordinary paradox and sign of contradiction of the Catholic world. There can be twelve stories from around the world on the Briefings page: a priest arrested for murdering his bishop, a priest risking his life to protect his people from murder; a Cardinal charged with stealing money made from a shady property deal, a religious sister kneeling in front of gun-wielding soldiers, pleading with them not to shoot at demonstrators. Our job is just to put it all out there. All human life is there. Tell the whole story. And, blimey, what a story it is. The greatest every told.

Eleven (a bonus rule!). Be joyful, be thankful, be hopeful. Remember the world we are



Brendan Walsh, seen on YouTube talking to members of the Ealing Circle

writing about is charged with the grandeur of God. Everything is significant; everything matters. This a difficult time for the media, for all sorts of different reasons, but there will always be a yearning for a good story, for good storytellers. People will always want to know what is happening. People are getting their stories these days in so many different ways, from so many different platforms, and it is important that our content is presented in a way that it is easy to access. But my sense is that in a world in which there is so much opinion and noise and blather, in which people don't know who to trust, if you can establish a place where people do trust what you are saying, even if they know there is always an interpreter, always an angle, if they know you are trying to deal honestly, trying to tell people what is going on in the world as truthfully as you can, there will always be always be an appetite and a place for that.

What I do is incredibly satisfying and great fun, and I believe it has a great future. I am full of excitement and hope.

Brendan Walsh

Newman, Letters and Life-writing: "The charm of reality"

In 1886, as an elderly man, Newman humorously confesses to Lord Blatchford that he has always had "the love of order, good in itself but excessive." This ability not to take himself too seriously is also shown in middle age. Newman laments from Dublin to Fr Austin Mills in 1852 that:

When I got here, I found that the housekeeper, who would not let any other of the servants do it, had arranged, not only my clothes, but all my papers for me. I had put my letters in various compartments according to my relations towards them – and my Discourse papers, according as I had done with them or not. She had mixed everything, laying them most neatly according to their size. To this moment I have not had courage to attempt to set them right – and one bit, which was to have come in, I have from despair not even looked for. And so of my linen; I had put the linen in wear separate from the linen in reserve. All was revolutionised. I could find nothing of any kind. Pencils, pens, pen knife, toothbrush, boots, 'twas a new world – the only thing left, I suppose from a certain awe, was, (woe's me,) my discipline. Mind, everything was closed up, as far as they could be without lock and key, which I had not. She then came in to make an apology, but was so much amused at her own mischief, as to show she had no deep sense of its enormity.



Fr Peter J. Conley

Newman regularly sorted out his letters, both those received and copies of those he sent; he cut up and pasted them in quarto books for safe keeping. He used them as the prime source materials for his *Apologia* of 1864. Hence, Newman enquires of R.W.

Church: "You might have letters of mine to throw light on my state of mind, and thus by means of contemporaneous authority."

The older he became the more Newman focused on tidiness in his affairs. As he admits to Henry Bedford:

I am engaged in what I am bound to do before I die, and which is so long a work, that my great fear is that it will be too long for my life.

When I was fifty, I said, "I must finish it before I am 60" – when sixty, I said "I must do it before I am seventy". I have no right to leave the letters and papers of private friends for the last forty or fifty years for other eyes than my own – on the other hand, I cannot destroy them in a heap without discrimination – and this involves, as you may understand, a great work. And I can get on very slowly, with my other engagements, in making my way through them.

A man cannot do more than he can do – We are poor creatures – and must be content to be such.

A means of communication

Newman recognised both the strengths and weaknesses of letters as a means of communication. Consoling George Ryder over his sick daughter he states: "I would rather speak than write...I wish letters could express feelings better."

In attempting to resolve his difficulties in relating to Fr. Wilfred Faber, Newman concedes:

It is endless writing. The only effect of your letters would be if I answered them, to make me word mine more exactly, to define my terms and to correct past inaccuracies of language, but not to alter my opinion or my distinct meaning.

Nevertheless, as Alan G. Hill concludes:

Letter-writing always held a high place in Newman's scale of priorities. It was not for him a marginal or leisure-time activity but an integral part of his mission, and he devoted all his powers of mind and genius for human understanding and sympathy to it.

Despite their in-built limitations, Newman believed that letters facilitated a virtual "living" encounter between author and recipient across time and space. Therefore, he maintained that they would always represent the most authentic form of biography. Hence, the letters (and other works) of an ordinary person or saint ought to drive the "story" along. As a result, any contextual information should be kept to a minimum so as to let an individual speak for his or herself.

While Newman expressed a "debt of gratitude" to biographers he urged caution lest they interrupt the dialogue between souls:

A saint's writings are to be the real "Life;" and what is *called* his "Life" is not the outline of an individual, but either of the auto-saint or of a myth. Perhaps I shall be asked what I mean by "Life". I mean a narrative which impresses the reader with the idea of moral unit, identity, growth, continuity, personality. When a saint converses with me, I am conscious of the presence of one active principle of thought, one individual character flowing on and into the various matters which he discusses, and the different transactions in which he mixes.

Newman makes a comparison between the structure provided by the correspondence of a saint and one formed by a group of second hand accounts about them:

Commonly, what is called "the Life," is little more than a collection of anecdotes brought together from a number of independent quarters; anecdotes striking, indeed, and edifying, but valuable in themselves rather than valuable as parts of a biography; valuable whoever was the subject of them, not valuable as illustrating a particular saint.

Three decades later, Newman's opinions had lost none of their passion:

The Oratory Bm May 28th, 1869

My dear Sister M. Fr. Raphael,

In thanking you for your kind and welcome letter, and the message to me which it contains from Mother Provincial, I take the opportunity also of acknowledging the receipt of the Copy which your Community has sent me of their Memoir of their dear Mother Margaret...

It is a great encouragement and refreshment to the reader to have had placed before him something real; and, – useful as it may be for devotional purposes (which I am not denying) in the case of some minds, – certainly speaking for myself, I cannot abide the practice so common of cutting up a Saint into virtues and of distributing him into pigeon holes, which serves to destroy the special value of biography over didactic composition, and without intending it, goes far to deny to Holy Church her prerogative of being "circumdata variate". Whether Mother Margaret was a rose, or lily, or carnation, in our Lord's garden, I cannot tell; but she was either the one or the other, not all of them at once – not a generalisation or idea of man, but a great work of God...

Lastly, it is quite wonderful to me how so carefully selected and condensed a history could have been written and published with such speed.

Begging your good prayers ever, I am, My dear Sister M.F. Raphael

Most Sincerely Yrs in Xt

John H Newman of the Oratory.

A more creative approach

Intriguingly, while Newman suggests to Copeland that he write a history of the Oxford movement utilising the letters of himself and others, he also proposes a more creative approach:

I know how hard it is, to write an account – so, what I would recommend you to do, is to write piecemeal, and in the way of letters, whatever comes into your head, never mind the want of connexion.

I am sure, if you wrote a series of letters to me, by way of remembrance or to E. Caswell, or to your brother, or to an imaginary personage, they would be the ground work of a more important work.

Newman has in mind the magnetism of the 18th and 19th century best-selling epistolary novels. He explores the same theme in a letter to Jemima:

It has ever been a hobby of mine (unless it be a truism, not a hobby) that a man's life lies in his letters. This is why Hurrell Froude published St Thomas a Beckett's Letters, with nothing of his own except what was necessary for illustration or

connections of parts. It is the principle, I suppose, of the interest which attaches to such novels as *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Evelina* etc. And it is exemplified in one of the popular novels of the day, *The Woman in White*, in which I cannot detect any merit except what lies in the narrative being a living development of events as exhibited in supposed letters, memoranda, and [[quasi-legal]] depositions.

A much higher desideratum than interest in Biography is met by the method, (as it may be called,) of Correspondence. Biographers varnish; they assign motives; they conjecture feelings; they interpret Lord Burleigh's nods; they palliate or defend. For myself, I sincerely wish to seem neither better nor worse than I am.

What Newman longs for is to experience, as closely as possible, the original writer who is the subject of any retrospective publication. As he remarks to Mrs Sconce about a book of her father-in-law's letters:

I thought it particularly kind of you to send me so interesting a work. I have been much pleased by what I have read of it – and letters always have the charm of reality. I have before now given this as the reason why I like the early Fathers more than the Medieval Saints viz: because we have the letters of the former. I seem to know St. Chrysostom or St. Jerome in a way in which I can never know St. Thomas Aquinas. – and St. Thomas of Canterbury (himself medieval) on account of his letters as I can never know St. Pius Vth.

Newman's caveats

This potential to "enrapture" meant that Newman often both commended and recommended letter collections. He also added caveats. To Mrs Maxwell Scott he tentatively suggests in respect of her late father:

I wonder whether his *letters* would form the staple of a Memoir. They are the best of all materials, and I am sure, would exhibit him most happily. In that case you would only need a slender line of narrative to string them together. My only fear would be, that, as he got into more and more work, his letters became shorter. Of course, there is this fear too, viz that those which showed his qualities at most advantage would be the most private. However, the first step, I think, would be to see if his letters can be turned to use. You would know this by the letters, which he has left behind him, of his correspondents.

Newman's steer is an important one. He fully acknowledged that the Victorian genre of memoir was a respected means of grieving for family, friends and relatives. His *Letters and Diaries* are full of him gratefully accepting these texts and sometimes commenting upon rough drafts. Nevertheless, his deep-seated uneasiness about being subject to such a process remained.

On June 1st 1874 he wrote the following guidance to Ambrose St John:

Had I my will no Memoir should be written of me, except such a thin running notice as would suffice to hold together a series of my letters. Letters I don't mind, for they are facts, and belong, for good or bad, to the personality of the writer of them; but a Memoir, or at least a Life is more or less the produce of the imagination, a conclusion from facts, more or less theoretical and unauthoritative. Besides, for the most part, Lives are padded, or spun out, that they may give an adventitious interest, from a continuous narrative, and complete a volume.

Ambrose St John, however, died on May 24th, 1875. Just over a year later, on June 16th 1876, Newman amended his instructions to allow for a fuller treatment of his life to be given: "Since writing the above, I have lost Ambrose St. John. This misfortune, together with a growing interest in my subject, has led me, on transcription, to turn my Sketch J.H.N. into a much fuller and more finished composition than it was originally."

Newman turned to Anne Mozley, the sister-in-law of his sister Jemima. On July 2nd, 1887, in response to a newspaper article, he outlines her role:

Dear Mr Longman

I have no thought and no chance of publishing an autobiography. I have never liked such work, and now my increasing infirmities make such an attempt impossible; especially my difficulty in writing.

If you would allow me to ask you to let me speak to you in confidence, I would say that I have put all my papers and copies of letters up to 1845 in the hands of a great friend, a Protestant, making no conditions, (as to pecuniary matters etc) except that I am not to see the resulting work and it is not to be published in my life time.

In 1874 I wrote a sort of sketch or skeleton to connect the successive events together. But I made the property over, as a point of honour, to my friend. I will mention my wish that you should have the engagement, but I cannot do more than recommend.

I am on a very different work – the new edition of my translation of Athanasius – if I live.

Very truly Yours John H Card. Newman

Ultimately, Longmans, Green and Co. did publish the *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman – During His Life in the English Church with a Brief Autobiography*, Edited at Cardinal Newman's request by Anne Mozley in Two Volumes (1891).

Given Newman's method of preservation, it is apt that the following note was physically pasted into each copy of the opening volume:

The Executors of CARDINAL NEWMAN will feel much obliged if any lady or gentleman who may be in possession of any of the Cardinal's letters or papers will kindly communicate with the Rev. W.P. Neville, the Cardinal's literary Executor, The Oratory Edgbaston, Birmingham.

This appeal, eventually, opened the way for the production of thirty-two Volumes (over 20,000) of Newman's Anglican and Catholic letters gathered as part of the process which led to his canonisation in 2019. Subsequent editors were mindful of Anne Mozley's observations upon Newman's approach:

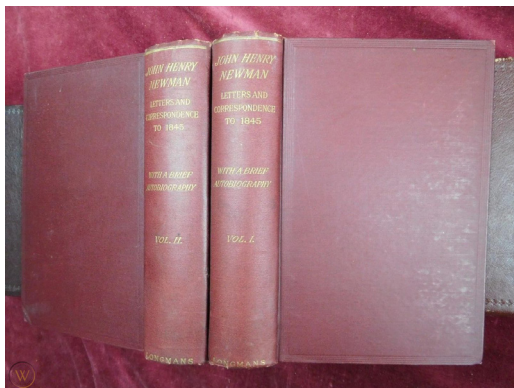
His high estimate of letters as records and custodians of the truth of things made him from early youth a preserver of letters; though his esteem for his correspondent might be the more prominent motive. In early days a postscript often speaks of arranging letters as one of the tasks of the closing year. The task, as he would perform it, would help to fill in the details of that map of the past



Anne Mozley

which in its outline was so vividly marked in his memory. The habits of his life, as being congenial to his nature, were early formed; just as the turn of thought, the tastes, the more powerful bends of his mind, may all be traced to an early dawn.

Few persons preserve their letters; it is, indeed, a rare habit; but there was in Newman's letters to his friends, as in his character, a weight and distinctiveness, whether of



An early edition of Newman's letters in two volumes

subject or mode of treatment, which secured them an exemption from the common fate after perusal; and, once escaping this, their value increased with years, and, in fact, as time went on, they were felt to be history.

Fr Peter J. Conley

Fr Peter Conley popularises the life and thoughts of St John Henry Newman for the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

Notes

1. JHN to Lord Blatchford, 5 October 1886, 5 October 1886, Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, ed. Charles S. Dessain et al; 32 Vols. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), Letters and Diaries is hereafter cited LD. LD, XXXI:167.
2. JHN to Fr. Austin Mills, 3 June 1852, LD, XV:95.
3. JHN to R.W. Church, 23 April 1864, LD, XXI:101.
4. JHN to Henry Bedford, 18 November 1873, LD, XXVI:388.
5. JHN to George Ryder, 20 April 1850, LD, XIII:466.
6. JHN to J.W. Faber (1), 15 May 1849, LD, XIII:149.
7. A.G. Hill and I. Ker (eds.), Newman after a Hundred Years (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 129.
8. JHN, Historical Sketches Vol II, (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1840), 227.
9. Ibid; 228.
10. JHN to Augusta Theodosia Drane, 28 May 1869, LD, XXIV:261-262.
11. JHN to W.J. Copeland, 23 January 1863, LD, XX:399-400.
12. JHN to Mrs John Mozley, 18 May 1863, LD, XX: 443. See Samuel Richardson, Clarissa Harlowe (1747-8), Fanny Burney, Evelina (1778), Wilkie Collins, The Women in White (1860).
13. JHN to Mrs Sconce, 15 October 1865, LD, XXII:73.
14. See JHN to John Edward Bowden, 19 June 1869, LD, XXIV:271. In respect of The Life and Letters of Frederick William Faber, D.D., Priest of the Oratory of St Philip Neri, London 1869.
15. JHN to the Hon. Mrs Maxwell-Scott, 10 December 1877, LD, XXVIII:277.
16. H. Tristran (ed.) John Henry Newman Autobiographical Writings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957), 23.
17. Ibid; 24.
18. JHN to Charles James Longman, 2 July 1887, LD, XXXI:217-218.
19. Anne Mozley (ed.) Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman During his Life in the English Church with a Brief Autobiography (London/New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1891), Vol I & II
20. A. Mozley (ed.), Vol I, B.
21. Ibid; 2.

Ravenna: A World of Mosaics

By Barry Riley

Amidst all the Covid-19 uncertainties it was something of a miracle that the Newman Pilgrimage to Ravenna, the thirteenth in a series starting back in 1997, ever took place on schedule in mid-September this year. Only in the nick of time on August 31st did the Italian Government relax its quarantine requirement which would have made the Pilgrimage impracticable. One person who had booked dropped out at the last minute in the face of the formidable testing and certification requirements. But on Monday the 13th eleven brave Newman members travelled to Ravenna, together with our Chaplain Mgr Pat Kilgarriff and the organiser Anthony Coles.

Ravenna today is a modest city, overshadowed by grander nearby locations such as Bologna and Venice. But it played a key part in the early history of the Roman Catholic Church. As Rome itself faded under pressure from Goths and other barbarians Ravenna in the year 402 became the capital of the Western Empire. Under rulers such as Justinian and Theodoric some astonishing religious buildings were created and were largely decorated by the mosaic walls and ceilings which remain so impressive today.

Ravenna's marshland

Moveable artistic treasures such as paintings and sculptures are often whisked away to distant galleries in places such as Rome, Florence or New York, but it is hard to transport mosaics or frescoes. However, they need to be carefully looked after and regularly restored as walls crumble and buildings sink over the centuries, as they often do in Ravenna which is built on reclaimed marshland.

Perhaps the most impressive of the many sumptuous buildings is the Basilica of S. Apollinare in Classe. Apollinare arrived from Antioch at the end of the 1st century and became Bishop of the new Christian community around the port of Classe which was developed as a major Roman naval base but which later silted up. The Basilica was built in the first half of the 6th Century and is notable for the spectacular mosaics in the apse, with an unusual green colour theme. S. Apollinare raises his arms in prayer and stands in the middle of a line of twelve sheep symbolising the faithful.



SS Peter and Paul in the Baptistery of the Arians

Some of the best mosaics are to be seen, however, in quite small buildings such as the Neonian Baptistry decorated at the behest of Bishop Neone in the mid-5th century and the Baptistry of the Arians which dates from the late 5th century. By this time, under Theodoric the Ostrogoth, Arianism had become the official court religion. Arians believed that Christ was not fully divine and although this doctrine had been



The Magi in the New Basilica of St Apollinaris

of the day including Emperor Justinian, Empress Theodora and also Bishop Maximian who consecrated the Basilica in 548. Viewing these mosaics proved testing for necks and eyesight: the smarter pilgrims had brought binoculars.

Nestling nearby, and of the same age, is the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, a daughter of Emperor Theodosius who died in Rome in 550. Historians are doubtful that she was ever buried in this mausoleum but a great deal of talent and money was expended on decorating the inside of this very small building. Galla Placidia ruled Ravenna and the West for many years, later acting as regent for her son Valentinian whose body may actually have been buried in the Mausoleum

Enormous thanks are due to Fr Pat who said Mass for us every day, usually in a side-chapel at the elegant tenth century Church of San Francesco, where the marsh water floods the crypt and goldfish can be seen swimming beneath the altar. It seemed odd to observe him reading the Gospel at Mass from a smartphone screen but an app weighs nothing whereas a Daily Mass Lectionary could help tip the airport check-in scales beyond the 23kg weight limit. The readings app is available on Google Play; today's pilgrims need to be tech-savvy as well as devout.



Fr Pat saying Mass in the Duomo

Fr Pat's compact but highly relevant sermons were much appreciated. He also gave us two lengthier discourses, one being on the role of the Arians in the early Church, a subject which greatly interested our patron St John Henry Newman who wrote a book, which is still in print, called *Arians of the Fourth Century*. Fr Pat's other lecture was stimulated by a commemoration which coincided with our visit, the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri, the Divine Poet, in Ravenna on September 14th. The main local celebrations were held on the Sunday, the day before we arrived, but through the week there remained crowds around Dante's tomb, where a bell was tolled every evening at 6pm. Dante's remains have been moved about over the centuries but are now preserved in a small, neoclassical temple dating from the 1780s.

Fr Pat described him as one of the two giants of world literature, the other being William Shakespeare. Dante's great work was *The Divine Comedy* or *Divinia Comedia*. He described the work, which is divided into three parts, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, as "profoundly Christian". In this fantasy narrative Dante, and companions such as the Roman poet Virgil, eventually arrive in Heaven and enjoy conversations with saints ranging from Thomas Aquinas to St Peter.



straining the necks

Back in the real world, however, we faced obstacles such as a constant requirement at each site to wear facemasks and present our NHS Covid Pass which showed we had received two vaccinations. The pedestrian area in the City Centre, which included our hotel the Centrale Byron, was useful in that we were not bothered by cars. But it also meant that on arrival we had to trundle our cases about half a mile along heavily-cobbled streets. And there was a constant risk from the numerous bicycles; curiously, on our one wet day, many of the cyclists were riding along holding umbrellas, which seems to be a uniquely Italian habit.

We enjoyed two excursions by coach to other locations, the first being a trip on Wednesday through part of the Po Delta National Park. We were told to look out for flamingoes in the lagoon but it seemed they had all flown off elsewhere. We did, however, see the strange structures in the rivers used to catch the plentiful eels. Our bus soon took us to the former Benedictine Abbey of Pomposa. Here Guido d'Arezzo invented modern musical notation in the 11th Century. The Benedictines decamped as long ago as 1650 but the Abbey has been well-restored by the Italian Government. It features a large church and an impressive campanile which is now nearly 1,000 years old and rises to 48 metres.



Dante's tomb

On the Thursday we went on a longer expedition to Bologna, a substantial city which has more than four times the population of Ravenna. It is notable for its colonnades (which were useful for us on a rainy day) and its towers, some of which lean noticeably but are not as famous for their tilt as the one in Pisa. One of the key religious buildings is the Basilica of St Dominic where the saint, who died in 1221, is buried in an elaborate multi-layered white carved stone shrine, small parts of which were contributed by Michelangelo. Gruesomely, his body was separated from his head which is contained in its own casket. Subsequently we visited the 14th Century



St Dominic's head is in here



Basilica of San Petronio where we saw some notable painted frescoes in the side chapels, including a fearsome depiction of Hell, with a huge devil eating sinners one by one.

On our last full day, Friday, we had to face up to our own penitential sufferings as we were required to fill in a Passenger Locator Form online and then endure, at a pharmacy, another swab test for Covid, the second of three tests which were required in all for the journey. One more awaited us at home, but fortunately all proved to be negative. However, our final Saturday morning turned out to be more relaxed as we toured the Cathedral Museum, which contains some notable items including the remarkable ivory throne of Bishop Maximian, and then Fr Pat celebrated Mass in the rather grim 18th Century baroque Cathedral (no mosaics there).

We must greatly thank the pilgrimage organiser Anthony Coles, who overcame all sorts of obstacles before and during the journey and finally hosted a splendid concluding lunch at the Trattoria al Cerchio, where we sat outside in the late summer

sunshine. The forecast thunderstorms never arrived and several delicious courses were served. Finally, the restaurant produced a bottle of its iconic Ciliega Rosolio liqueur, a Po Delta speciality based on cherries: Rosolio translates as “dew of the sun”.

The Newman’s 13th Pilgrimage included 13 pilgrims who travelled on the 13th of the month at 13.30pm. But pagan superstitions had absolutely no power over us.



Book Reviews

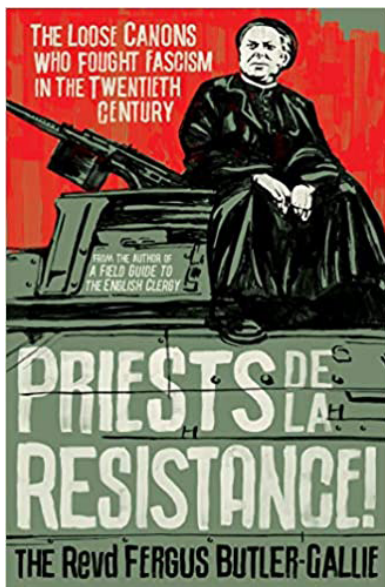
***Priests de la Resistance!* By Fergus Butler-Gallie (Oneworld Publications, 2019), 273 pages. (Paperback £9.99) ISBN 978-1-78607-830-8**

There is a tremendous story to be told about individual instances of Christian witness in the Second World War but this is too often obscured by debates about the attitude of churches on the institutional level. This engaging and readable account does a good deal to redress the balance and is not only concerned with resistance to the Nazis but also with others who have, for instance, opposed racial discrimination in America and the military dictatorship in Brazil. The individuals are all Christians but come from a wide variety of backgrounds and traditions so giving the book a markedly ecumenical flavour.

So we have the aristocratic figure of the 'Lion of Munster', Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen, whose fearless preaching against, in particular, the Nazi policy on involuntary euthanasia of the disabled led to Hitler abandoning the scheme, at least officially. Then we have the less well-known figure of Jane Haining who was matron of a home run by the Church of Scotland for destitute Jewish girls in Budapest. When Britain declared war on Hungary in 1941 her superiors begged her to return but she refused saying: "If these girls need me in times of sunshine, how much more do they need me in times of darkness".

She continued looking after her girls until she was eventually denounced to the Nazis and was taken to Auschwitz where she died in 1944. Incidentally, if you are curious to know how the Church of Scotland ended up running a home in Budapest, read the book! Dietrich Bonhoeffer, well-categorised as "thinker, fighter, pastor, spy" is one of the subjects and I personally recalled some years ago standing on the very spot where he was hanged, tragically just before the end of the war, on 9th April 1945 in Flossenbürg Prison. It is unbelievably chilling to think that he was executed when the Americans were just a short distance away, advancing on Nuremberg.

One name new to me was that of the Catholic priest Canon Félix Kir, very much a bon viveur, who in his sixties became a most unlikely hero. When France fell to the Nazis in 1940 Canon Kir simply assumed the vacant post of Mayor of Dijon, where he was based, and through various stratagems helped over 5,000 prisoners to break out of German camps. A favourite ploy was to approach the camp armed with a list of names, on headed mayoral notepaper, of those whom he wanted released. The guards assumed that he must have had higher authority for these requests and meekly complied. Canon Kir was subject to an assassination attempt by the Germans in 1944



but miraculously survived and lived to the ripe old age of 92.

Many other names flit through these pages including those of Prince Philip's mother, Princess Alice of Greece, and representatives of the period after 1945 such as the American pastor Fred Shuttlesworth who chaired the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights to campaign against racial discrimination in the Deep South. His activities inevitably brought him to the notice of the Ku Klux Klan and on Christmas Night 1956 his house was dynamited and destroyed. A policeman, himself a Klan member, advised him to "get out of town as quick as you can" to which Fred Shuttlesworth gave the memorable reply: "I wasn't raised to run". Nor did he, and he continued his struggle until he died in 2011. The airport at Birmingham Alabama is now named Birmingham-Shuttlesworth Airport.

The "Scarlet Pimpernel"

One fascinating chapter deals with the exploits of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" of the Vatican, Mgr. Hugh O'Flaherty. The story is well-known and is related here with verve but I must enter a note of disagreement with the author over his portrayal of Pope Pius XII in the story. He is described as "paranoid" over the prospect of opening the Vatican to Jews at the risk of deportation and as generally somewhat weak. This is not the place to discuss the question of the attitude and actions of Pope Pius XII towards the Jews and indeed the war in general but we do need a more balanced picture; else, why would an Israeli Consul say after the war that "The Holy See, the Nuncios and the entire Catholic Church saved some 400,000 Jews from certain death". The numerous personal interventions of Pius XII, for instance on behalf of Hungarian Jews in 1944, bear out the part he played personally in all this.

One of the themes, and indeed the final message of this fascinating book, brought out in the epilogue, is that of strength through weakness and the famous lines in St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians in which God tells him that "my strength is made perfect in weakness". As the author says, the moments of ultimate weakness "were often the moments when these individuals' principles and faith proved most strong". This is a memorable story of the courage of often unlikely heroes in often seemingly impossible circumstances.

John Duddington

***Seeing the Pandemic with Eyes of Faith* by Fr Ivano Millico Catholic Truth Society 2021; pp 82, £5.95**

This is a slim book, as indicated by the page numbers and price, but it is not slim on some basic Christian insights. It is written by a priest of the Westminster Diocese and comprises short biographical vignettes of six historical figures, plus the one "poetical/scriptural" figure of Job. Fr Ivano picks out parts of their lives which teach the not overly original truth that an illness or catastrophe can lead to great opportunities for progress in the spiritual life and then on into the life of the Church. The chosen seven are St Therese of Lisieux, St Carlo Borromeo, Abbé Henri Marie-Joseph Huvelin, St Ignatius Loyola, St John Henry Newman, Job, and Mary, Mater Misericordiae.

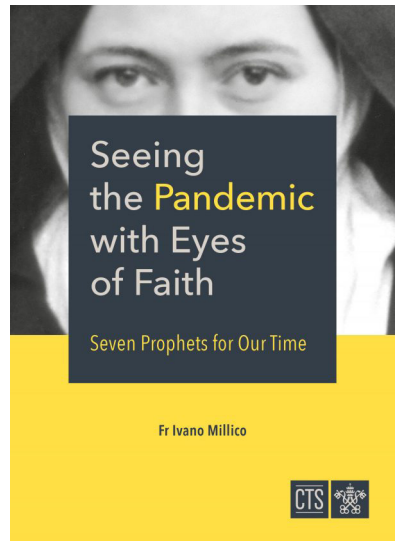
The distinctive and original note of the book is how it links in with the present state of the world caught in the grip of the Covid pandemic. As catastrophe was a means to greater spiritual understanding for these seven, so the pandemic can be seen as the catastrophe which can become the way to a better world. He quotes Pope Francis' declaration: "We are experiencing a crisis. The pandemic has put all of us in crisis. But let us remember... after a crisis a person does not come out the same. We either come out of it better, or we come out of it worse". So, for Pope Francis and Fr Ivano, we are being challenged by the pandemic to become better rather than worse, but certainly one of them.

After the biographical details there is a commentary on how each of the persons mentioned came to look at their lives through their own crisis and, in some instances, short prayers by or to them are included at the end of their section. There are a number of paintings or photographs to highlight the aspect of Eyes in the title. This theme is outlined in the Introduction by mentioning Pope St Gregory the Great's reference to the Eyes of the leaders and the Backs of the Faithful in his *Regula Pastoralis*. Gregory himself had to cope with a virulent plague in Rome and, in that respect, Francis follows in his footsteps.

Newman's three events

Taking the chapter on St John Henry Newman as an example, Fr Ivano outlines three particular instances in his life when this theme was played out, referred to as "conversions". The first occurred in 1816 when, to the background of his father's early death and the subsequent change of his family circumstances, Newman experienced a deep and lasting awareness of the sovereign presence of God in his life which reoriented his spiritual trajectory. The second was his mental breakdown at Oxford in 1827 owing to overwork which he had to recognise as a result of his excessive self-esteem – a salutary lesson for one so gifted. The third was his illness on his Sicilian trip in 1833 when he was brought to understand the one thing necessary was to follow the path on which he perceived God was leading him – "the one new dimension" in Louis Bouyer's words – but also, in the context of this book, the recognition that all his Sicilian suffering had to be interpreted in a supernatural light to allow its truly positive outcome to be fully realised.

This, as I said, is a slim volume with a simple but telling message for our times. It is well-written in a contemporary style, devoid of the frills of conventional hagiography. A delightful book to read.



Brian Hamill



Blessed Nicholas Postgate

The wind from the North Sea was chill,
A sign of the winter to come,
As he trekked yet once more
Over moors he knew well,
His white hair blown behind by the wind.

Four score years before, he'd been born
In a poor cottage close to the Esk,
Where, in secret, his parents arranged
That, in Baptism, God's grace he'd receive,
And after Saint Nicholas they named him.

Egton Bridge on the Esk
Was his fond boyhood home
And he knew all the byways around,
But, as manhood approached,
A strong calling he felt
To leave both his parents and home.

To Douai in Flanders he went,
To the college for training of priests,
Then, ordained, he returned to his homeland
For those still true to the Old Faith,
Who yearned for the Mass and the ministry
Which only a priest could provide.

Back in England at first he had served
In the recusant gentry's safe homes,
Where, as chaplain disguised in a low servant's garb,
He had served them all well for many a year
Till the call of his own folk he'd felt
And a much harder life he then chose.

For twenty years now he had lived
In 'The Hermitage' which he called home,
A one-room shack high on the moors,
Whence he walked to his far-scattered flock
To take them their spiritual food.

Bound for Littlebeck that gusty day,
Called to baptise the Lyths' new-born son,
He was going to a family known to him well,
Whose home was a warm and welcoming place,
As he'd found many times in the past.

But in far-away London a rumour was spread
Titus Oates was the source of the lie –
That the Papists were plotting to murder the King,
Hysteria resulted which fuelled the mob
To burn Catholic homes and hunt down their priests,
Each with a price on his head.

As Nicholas baptised the infant
One John Reeves, a stranger, burst in,
A priest hunter scenting his prey,
He seized the old man and led him away
To face trial for high treason in York.

To none he'd done harm, to none given hurt,
And to many he'd brought peace and joy,
But his priesthood was treason
In England those days,
And the penalty for it was death.

He was guilty as charged, so the trial was brief,
Through the streets they then dragged him away
Tied on a hurdle so that all should observe
The condemned man go forth to his fate.

On the Knavesmire they hanged him,
Took him down still alive,
For the barbarism must be complete,
Disembowelled his body, then tore it in four
The price which a traitor must pay.

Envoi

These days each year many folk gather,
They come both from far and from near,
To the Rally held in 'Postgate Country'
Where, at Mass, thanks are given for Nicholas,
And his own sweet hymn sung at the end.

John Mulholland

Feast of St. Joseph, 2021

*This poem is gratefully
dedicated to my recusant
forebears from the Esk
Valley.*



St Hedda's, Egton Bridge

Nicholas Postgate (c1597-1679) was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1987. The Postgate Rallies are held in the open air in July each year, alternately in Egton Bridge and Ugthorpe, two places closely associated with his life.

Membership Report

We have been notified of the deaths of the following members: **Mrs Nora Sowerby** (Cleveland Circle) and **Mrs Moira Redfern** (Ealing Circle). May the Lord grant eternal rest to them and to all deceased members of the Newman Association, and may he comfort those who mourn them.

We welcome as a new member **Mrs Helen Merritt** (Herts Circle).

The present total number of members is 536.

Patricia Egerton (Membership Secretary)

This article was found amongst the papers of Eric Harber of the Hertfordshire Circle who died at the age of 87 during the summer. After a sometimes turbulent early life in South Africa, where he was a campaigner against Apartheid, Eric came to the UK in the 1960s and became a lecturer in English. For much of the past 40 years he worked on a theory that Shakespeare was influenced by Samothracian mythology, and in 2020 he published a book called Shakespeare, Christianity and Italian Paganism.

Mystery in Christian Thought and Experience

By Eric Harber

A summary of some aspects of a few mystical writers encountered over the years

This short note offers the background that contributed to elements of Neo-Platonism that might be found in the poetry of Henry Vaughan who was born, the son of a curate, in the early seventeenth century. Platonism survived many centuries in tandem with Christianity as a way of offering the soul a path to the transcendent world of Infinite Being.

A discussion of Platonism would need to begin with a mention of Plato's representation of "forms" or "ideas" which he saw to be the ultimate basis of reality. He saw the apparent world of the senses as untrustworthy. We do not encounter the true nature of things – let alone ideas like "justice" or "beauty" in the ordinary world – but grasp at their "shadows". The analogy he used was that we are like people sitting in a cave seeing the transient materiality of things as shadows on the wall of the cave, which come from behind us, where the substance of these shadows existed in their true presence. Such as are initiates, needed to seek the light – the source of all good. So influential were not only Plato's "ideas" but the dualism of body and mind his thought initiated and the dialectical manner of his argument that these have lived on in philosophical discourse throughout the centuries, even influencing those who disagreed with him. One might say that he both invented the art form of philosophical drama and showed the way to a transcendent spirituality. The poet Yeats who passionately believed in an integrated life for human fulfilment disparaged Plato's thought when he wrote in his poem *Among School Children*:

Plato thought nature but a spume that played

Upon the ghostly paradigm of things

There was a long Neo-Platonic "tradition" as it is called which lasted hundreds of years and reappeared as strongly as ever a thousand years after Plato, modified by Christianity. Early Neo-Platonist theology, if that is the right word for it, did not offer a reciprocal relationship between the transcendent One and the individual as existing in the world; not until the Christian Platonist Marsilio Ficino. He wrote that the One Being should be seen as a Person that invited terrestrial, human life into an awareness of his love that inspired a response. The theology of his predecessor of many centuries earlier, Plotinus, showed the power of the Ultimate and ineffable One to trickle down, as it were, not

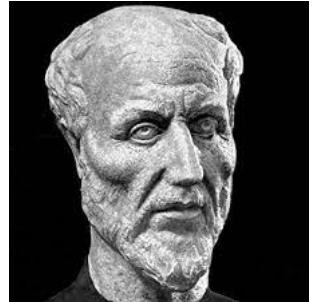


Eric Harber

expecting a reciprocating response (though perhaps it was implied).

Plotinus believed that the "One" is the "Good" that is completely absolutely and unconditionally good. As the power which is the cause of life, it gives subsistence to all life: as the power which is the cause of all knowledge, it produces all knowledge; as the power which is the cause of beauty, it produces all beauty.³ (*The Six Books of Proclus of the Theology of Plato* tr Thomas Taylor London Vol 1 Book 1)

In the Enneads there is a tell-tale reference to the attempts by what Plotinus calls "those ancient sages" to secure the presence of divine beings by the erection of shrines and statues. {They} showed insight into the presence of the All; they perceived that though the Soul is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, something reproducing it and serving it like a mirror to catch an image of it'. 4 (IV.3.11 Mackenna). There is no suggestion that they succeeded in communicating with this ineffable Being



Plotinus

Plotinus allows that in the Supreme Being there is Love, and should be, but he goes only so far as to say that "Lovable, very Love, the Supreme is also self-love in that he is lovely no otherwise than from Himself and in Himself" 5 (VI.8.15). There is no suggestion that this Love is communicated to material beings. He even says that "god's Being and his seeking are identical". And: there is no coming to be as some extern (ditto). In Christianity this "extern", the objectification of Love, is the Beloved Son or, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoso believed.

It is tempting to wonder if Plotinus has Christianity in mind when he refers to the 'extern'. The Platonist tradition had to wait for Ficino's *universalis providentia Dei* to create the order – for all living and inanimate things to come into being through the power of what he called a "temperantia divina" using "idola" or "animae rationales", templates, that reflect the intention of the Divine. This is done *per amatorium quondam instinctum* through the exertions of a loving power. So Ficino gives a purpose to what would otherwise be Plotinus's self-enclosing "Love".

"Man never rests in his present habit of living: he alone is a pilgrim in these regions and cannot rest on the journey as long as he aspires to his celestial homeland, which all seek, although we proceed on sundry paths on account of the diversity of opinion and of judgment". (Allen and Hankins 2001–06, 14.7, vol. 5, p. 272–73)

English – or Welsh – mysticism in the seventeenth century which was embedded in the tradition of Christian Platonism was represented by Henry Vaughan who was in part inspired by the Anglican Cleric George Herbert. Vaughan received both Catholic and Protestant influences. His brother Thomas dabbled in alchemy. Henry and Thomas Vaughan were sent to school under Matthew Herbert, rector of Llangattock, to whom both wrote tributes. Their two brothers' intimate acquaintance with hermeticism may have dated from those years. Matthew Herbert inspired a devotion to church and monarchy that the boys would have already learned at home. Like several others among Vaughan's clerical acquaintances Mathew did not favour the interregnum. He

was imprisoned, his property was seized, and he narrowly avoided banishment.

Thomas Vaughan was admitted to Jesus College, Oxford, in May 1638, and it has long been assumed that Henry went up at the same time, although it has been claimed that he made his first entry into Jesus College in Michaelmas term 1638, aged 17 years. Thomas had attended the lectures of a certain William Cartwright who, as a playwright and something of a theologian, mocked Puritanism. In Vaughan's early writing there is an affirmation of Cavalier ideals and a gesture of defiance against the society which had repudiated them.

Homage to the Silures

As the Civil War developed, Vaughan was recalled home from London, initially to serve as a secretary to Sir Marmaduke Lloyd, a chief justice on the Brecknockshire circuit and a royalist. Vaughan served briefly in the Royalist army and, upon his return, began to practise medicine. Vaughan took his inspiration from his native environment and chose the descriptive name "Silurist", derived from his homage to the Silures, a Celtic tribe of pre-Roman south Wales that strongly resisted the Romans. This name is a reflection of the deep love Vaughan felt for the Welsh mountains of his home in what is now part of the Brecon Beacons National Park and the River Usk valley, where he spent most of his early life and professional life.

By 1647 Henry Vaughan, with his wife and children, had chosen life in the country. This is the setting in which Vaughan wrote *Olor Iscanus* (The Swan of Usk). However, the collection was not published until 1651, more than three years after it was written.

There is a distinct difference between the atmosphere Vaughan attempts to convey in this work and in his most famous work, *Silex Scintillans*. *Olor Iscanus* is a direct representation of a specific period in Vaughan's life, which emphasises other secular writers and provides allusions to debt and happy living. A fervent topic of Vaughan throughout these poems is the Civil War and reveals Vaughan's somewhat paradoxical thinking that in the end does not indicate whether he participated or not. Vaughan states his complete satisfaction at being clean of "innocent blood", but also provides what seem to be eyewitness accounts of battles and his own "soldiery". Although Vaughan is thought to have been a royalist, these poems express contempt for all current authority and a lack of zeal for the royalist cause.

Vaughan was initially greatly indebted to George Herbert who provided a model for Vaughan's newly-founded spiritual life and literary career, in which he displayed an intimate spiritual awakening that he shared with Herbert. Some say the two are not even comparable, because Herbert is in fact the Master. While these commentators admit that Henry Vaughan's use of words can be superior to Herbert's, they believe his poetry lacks Herbert's profundity. Herbert's poetry has a unique receptiveness, not to say eagerness, for a heightened spiritual awareness. Herbert's influence is evident both in the shape and spirituality of Vaughan's poetry.

For example, the opening to Vaughan's poem *Unprofitableness* is reminiscent of Herbert's *The Flower*:

How rich, O Lord! How fresh thy visits are!
How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! ev'n as the flowers in spring

Herbert is calm. He gently dramatises the alienation he has felt, which God appears to play an active part in causing. But he quickly accepts his responsibility: he rejects his worldly self-confidence for its vanity, which he contrasts with the reconciliation that follows. Vaughan is different. The varied experience of the world around – his love of nature – becomes a vivid allegory, encouraging his mysticism.

Vaughan's true voice

He was loyal to the themes of the Anglican Church and religious festivals, but they are the touchstone; he found his true voice in the more mystical themes of eternity. He was "poet of revelation" who uses the Bible, yet also Nature and his own experience to illustrate his vision of eternity. This gives Vaughan's poetry a modern sound in its simple diction which so effortlessly becomes symbolic, as in the opening to *The Water-fall*:

With what deep murmurs through time's silent stealth

Vaughan drew on personal loss in two well-known poems: *The World* and *They Are All Gone into the World of Light*. Another poem *The Retreat*, combines the theme of loss of high spiritual innocence before the corruption of childhood, which is yet another consistent theme of Vaughan's.

Happy those early days, when I
Shin'd in my angel-infancy!
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, celestial thought;
When yet I had not walk'd above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back (at that short space)
Could see a glimpse of his bright face;

Vaughan expressed his strong religious awareness in rapt terms that begins with a homely stepping-stone. It blends the visual impact that looking at the sky would make with a sense of the vastness of the moving stars.

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light
All calm, as it was and bright
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd; in which the world
And all her train were hurl'd.
There is in God – some say
A deep but dazzling darkness, as men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear.
Oh for that night, where I in Him
Might live invisible and dim!

This poem is the consummate expression of Vaughan's awed sense of his soul's expansion beyond the veil of the Finite into the Infinite, yet with a desire for an intimate union with it.

From Rabbi Shtisel to the Tridentine Mass

By Harcourt Concannon

“Shtisel” is an Israeli soap opera series first broadcast on Israeli television in June 2013 . It was then taken up by Netflix in 2018, proving so popular that a second series was shown, making 24 episodes in all. As it enjoyed an unexpected popularity Netflix is now showing a third season.

Its success, both on Israeli television and Netflix, was unexpected. Indeed, more than unexpected it was unlikely, because the story concerns a religious group family living in the heart of a Haredi community in Geula, an ultra-orthodox district in Jerusalem. The “Haredian” umbrella includes the Hasidic, a subgroup of Haredi. The story is thus about is a small self-centred group, distinct from normal Israeli society, which follows its own rules.

Other religions also show tensions from the preoccupations of small groups within them. Belief, especially when driven by tradition, is a stronger driver of emotions than logic is. There are parallels with some of the divisive arguments now being seen within the Catholic Church.

While the religious practices of orthodox Judaism and the life of the Haredi world are at the very centre what happens in the series, they are not its essential subject. This presents a challenge to reality: the reality is that the Haredi have a parallel life to normal Israeli society. More than that, there is a general feeling of resentment, even of hostility, in Israel against the ultra-Orthodox; a tension between a general dislike of the advantages the ultra-orthodox obtain through their political influence.

The world of Shtisel is one that although close geographically, is nevertheless far away in most other respects. Maybe Shtisel does in a way represent what the state of Israel is really for, but it also represents a way of life that most Israeli citizens have no interest in following. But if all of this presents an underlying sense of conflict, it is one that is overshadowed by the main theme of the series, which is about is the changing and developing relationships between people. For instance, if there is a scene where Rabbi Shulem Shtisel, the father and patriarch of the family, comes home and greets his son Akiva, the religious obligation to kiss the mezuzah on entering the room, and for prayers before eating will always be demonstrated, the ritualistic and cultural mores of heredity life beautifully captured.

One of the important characteristics of the series is its language. The Netflix presentation is the Hebrew original shown with English sub-titles. However, the



Hebrew language used in the dialogue makes extensive use of Yiddish, and those who are Hebrew speakers comment on how this gives an authentic feel to the dialogue. I was struck by some connections to apparently very different issues within the Catholic Church. The link between authenticity and language

has, of course, a major resonance in the Catholic Church and one, in the Roman Rite of the Western Church, that turns on the place of Latin. The issue is in several dimensions, one about the link between Latin and the authentic language of the Mass and the other about the nature of the vernacular language used to translate the Bible, the Mass the liturgy and so on.

So far as Latin and the Mass are concerned, the main argument is not so much about a Mass in "Latin" as such, but about the demand to use one particular form of Latin Mass, the one proclaimed by the Council of Trent. However, Trent abolished a host of traditional local and regional forms of Latin mass to replace them with a new standardised Mass in Latin. The Tridentine mass is historically authentic in that sense, as a modernising project of the sixteenth century. One might therefore think that if one was interested in up-to-date authenticity, the key Latin Mass must surely be the Mass of Paul VI, the Mass in Latin promulgated in 1969 after the Second Vatican Council and described as the "ordinary" form of the Mass (as against the Tridentine Mass described as the "extraordinary" form).

However, the dispute is only and (at best) partly about the Latin itself. The real issue is about the change of the religious practices that were part and parcel of the Tridentine Mass: and therefore the new role of lay people in proclaiming biblical readings at Mass or as ministers of Holy Communion, the acceptance of female altar servers, allowing the host to be received in the hand. Rabbi Shtisel would surely argue with the Catholic traditionalists that the old Latin text and its associated practices go together.

Rabbi Shtisel would be sure that the integrity of the traditional language and the religious practices that are associated with it are indissoluble. He would not be interested in the case for the Church to adapt, to change its practices to enculturate in today's world. He would probably want, with the Catholic traditionalists, to go further and argue that departure from the old text and its associated practices was a case of the "baby being thrown out with the bathwater".

A devotional approach

Shtisel is an interesting window on a religious life that is in many ways alien to our times. But maybe there are some things that a Catholic might learn from the programme. Knowing how to walk as a Haredi, knowing how to speak as a Haredi, knowing every aspect of the daily behaviour of a Haredi is everything to religious observance. This is a devotional approach to religion that once had many parallels in the everyday practice of Catholicism, that is nowadays largely unknown to the average Catholic. So, given the steady decline of practising Catholics, how far is there a meaningful connection between the two? How far does following everyday devotional religious practices relate to keeping the faith? Does the one depend on the other? For instance, in Shtisel everyone entering a room is shown to habitually touch the Mezuzah, which is a piece of parchment firmly attached to the doorway and containing Torah verses.

Once most Catholic households had symbols that had a similar purpose, to be seen or passed on entering or leaving a house and calling for a symbolic response such as the sign of the Cross. Such Catholic "reminders" are now uncommon and is it a coincidence that with their passing has also passed the main body of religious observance? Rabbi Shtisel would have no doubt at all of the right answer.

NEWMAN ASSOCIATION PILGRIMAGE

2nd to 9th OCTOBER 2022

(8 days, 7 nights)

PILGRIMAGE TO PADUA

This holiday/pilgrimage is to Padua, the city of St Anthony, in the Veneto region of Italy. The programme (subject to change) is as follows:

- Sun 02** Arrive Venice Airport and onward transfer (around 50 minutes) to the **Casa del Pellegrino** in Padua. Dinner followed by an optional evening stroll to the **Prato** (a traditional place for fairs and amusements reclaimed in 1775 and featuring 78 statues of famous men, all born in, or connected with Padua).
- Mon 03** Morning tour of the **Basilica complex of St Anthony** starting with an audio-visual presentation on the life of St Anthony, before a tour of the Basilica. Morning Mass and free time to visit the **Antonian Museum**. Lunch. Afternoon guided walking tour through the historic centre with visits to the *Palazzo Ragione* (built in 1218 by the Commune as a seat of government and law courts). Dinner.
- Tue 04** Full-day excursion to the area west of Padua to visit the **Basilica of Our Lady of Monte Berico** (with Mass) overlooking the Palladian city of **Vicenza**. Afternoon visit to the **Teatro Olimpico** (built in 1597), the only surviving Renaissance theatre in the world. Dinner.
- Wed 05** Morning visits to the **Church of the Eremitani** (15th century frescos of the Assumption and Stories of St James and St Christopher) and double-timed entry for the **Scrovegni Chapel** (Giotto's famous last work). The rest of the morning is free to visit the superb **Eremitani Museum**. Afternoon visit to the University 'Bo' (medical theatre where James Harvey discovered how blood circulated in the body and from where the first women graduated in 1678). Evening Mass. Dinner.
- Thu 06** Full-day excursion west of Padua to the **Euganean Hills** of volcanic origin and famous for its many spa towns. A morning visit to the gardens of the 17th century rural **Villa Barbarigo** at **Valsanzibio**. Afternoon visit to the Benedictine Abbey of **Praglia**. Evening Mass. Dinner.
- Fri 07** Morning excursion to visit the Sanctuary of the Walnut Tree at **Camposampiero** for Mass. Return to Padua via the Shrine of St Anthony at **Arcella** where the saint died. Afternoon excursion along the **Brenta Riviera** (the picturesque waterway that links Padua to the Venetian lagoon. A visit to the *Versailles of the Veneto* – the **Villa Pisani** at **Stra** frescoed by 18th century painter Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and once owned by Napoleon, together with its gardens and a maze. Dinner.
- Sat 08** Morning visit to the Basilica of **Santa Giustina** (where the relics of St Luke have recently been re-found) for Mass. The rest of the morning is free to visit the weekly market on the **Prato** and/or to visit the ancient church of **Santa Sofia** in the *Via Altinate*.
Afternoon visits to the **Oratory of George** (14th century family chapel of the Soragna family decorated with frescoes), the **Scuola del Santa** and the **Botanic**

Gardens (the oldest in Italy, founded in 1545). Evening Mass. Dinner.

Sun 09 Transfers to Venice Marco Polo Airport. For those on later flights there will still be much to see and do in Padua including Solemn Sunday Mass in the Basilica.



In **Padua**, we stay at the **Casa del Pellegrino**.

This popular three-star hotel is situated within the medieval city opposite the Basilica of St Anthony – thus making it very easy to visit the shrine (open 06.30 - 19.30 daily). The *Casa del Pellegrino* is a recent name for a hotel that dates back to the 18th century. Behind the 18th century façade this very friendly and very clean 3-star hotel offers 162 modern en-suite rooms (toilet and shower), air-conditioning and TV. Most rooms overlook the inner garden, while others overlook the Basilica of St Anthony. All rooms are accessible by lift. The large restaurant offers continental buffet breakfast and set menu main meals with ¼ Q wine and ¼ Q mineral water per person. The casa also has a snack

bar, as well as a small private chapel.

COST **£1195** per person (sharing); **£1295** per person (single occupancy)

Inclusive of:

7 nights en-suite accommodation; city tax (currently €2 pppn); continental buffet breakfast; seven dinners; two lunches; wine and water with main meals; all excursions, entry and guide fees; Mass offerings; tips to coach drivers.

The following items are not included:

travel insurance; flights/train travel to Italy; airport transfers in Italy (these will be pre-booked for you and you pay the driver); five lunches; entry and transport in free time; personal expenditure.

FITNESS

A reasonable level of fitness is required for sightseeing on this pilgrimage as there will be a lot of walking and standing around whilst sightseeing in and around Padua.

DATA PROTECTION

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, we will only use your personal information to administer your booking and to provide the services you have requested from us. We will supply your passport details to airlines for them to meet their requirements in terms of security and border control, and to hotels as required by Italian law.

HOW TO BOOK

Please complete (all sections) of the booking form and send this with your non-refundable deposit (of £200 per person) to **Anthony Coles, 18 Maresfield Gardens,**

London NW3 5SX (Tel: 020 7431 3414).

Please be advised this pilgrimage is limited to 24 people, so early booking is advised. The balance of the cost of this pilgrimage is then due ten weeks prior to departure. All cheques to be made payable to: Anthony R Coles Travel and Conferences.

Anthony R Coles, Travel and Conferences, 18 Maresfield Gardens, London NW3 5SX - Tel: 020 7431 3414 / Fax: 020 7794 7803 / arctc@btinternet.com

An application form and terms and conditions appear on the two sides of a separate sheet inserted into this issue of *The Newman*.

Newman Association Retreat

26th-28th November 2021

DOUAI ABBEY, Upper Woolhampton, near Reading, Berkshire, RG7 5TQ

Directed by our chaplain, Mgr Pat Kilgarriff, the retreat will take place from 4pm on Friday until Sunday afternoon, 28th November. The talks will cover Advent themes and there will be discussion and Bible prayer; with ample space for solitude.

Cost £140 full board; please return the form with a £50 non-refundable deposit or full payment with a cheque payable to the Newman Association or by BACS transfer to The Newman Association sort code: 01-10-01, account no: 88553396, Reference: Surname/Retreat

Form to: Mrs Sophie Rudge,
27 Dee Banks, Chester, CH3 5UU

Tel; 01244 311375 email ; sophierudge@btinternet.com

Please note numbers are strictly limited to 12 participants, so early booking is essential to guarantee a place. There are a limited number of double rooms where the cost will be £106 per person.

Retreat booking form

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel Email.....

Dietary Requirements

.....

Single/Double *Please circle*

Signed

God and Covid-19

By Mark Dowd

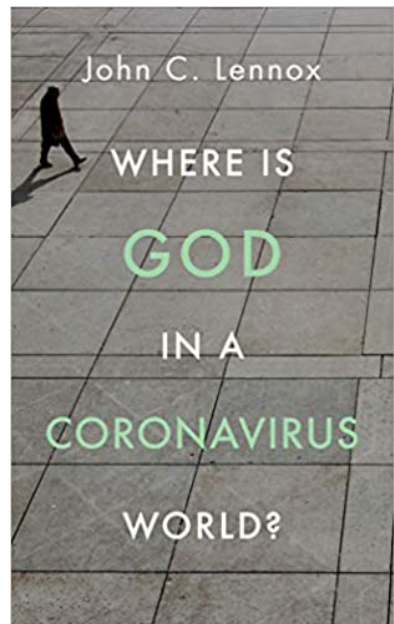
I tend to think of an innocent little child sitting on the bank of a river in Africa, who's got a worm boring through his eye that can render him blind." These words of Sir David Attenborough in an interview with *The Times* in 2008 have been especially uppermost in my mind these past weeks. "Now, presumably you think this Lord created this worm, just as he created the hummingbird. I find that rather tricky."

Tricky? Just a tad. The moral evil of mass murder, rape and torture by freedom-loving humans at least has a free will defence when we are asked to account for the presence of suffering in the world of a loving creator. But tsunamis, tornadoes and diseases such as Covid-19? Where is God in the activity of the spike protein of the coronavirus that penetrates cells in the human body and can lead to death by acute respiratory failure?

In a feat of great publication haste, Oxford University mathematician Dr John Lennox got *Where is God in a Coronavirus World?* into print by the second week of April 2020. Dr Lennox has taken on the likes of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens in public on many an occasion and is an individual who rides the twin horses of scientific enquiry and religious faith impressively. Lennox cites Genesis 3 and human rebellion as a key factor. He asserts that original sin is an adequate explanation for the existence of disease and death, as the moral corruption of our forebears "meant that God's very good creation became flawed and fractured". Not being a creationist who believes in a literal interpretation of the first book of the Old Testament, I don't find this altogether persuasive.

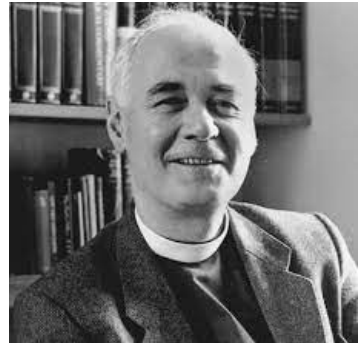
A study of complex evolutionary processes tells us that the thorns and thistles of the natural world existed long before the advent of *Homo sapiens*. Indeed, disease and death, according to Darwin's theory of natural selection, are integral parts of a development through which genetic information is eliminated, passed on and refined throughout creation. Modern humanity, as we know it, is the product of this very aspect of nature. And it's not just an insight from the biological sciences. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground, it remains only a seed but if it dies it bears much fruit," we are told in John's Gospel (12:24). Life and death are two sides of an inseparable coin. When the light of creation is shone, it always casts an inevitable shadow.

This was an insight I came across first-hand many years ago after the horrendous Boxing Day tsunami of 2004, which accounted for more than 225,000 deaths (about the current global fatality rate of Covid-19). Presenting a documentary for Channel



4, I visited Thailand, India and western Sumatra in Indonesia and heard from people who had lost dozens of family members. In my state of emotional upset I had railed against God and pondered how a loving creator could have fashioned something as destructive as tectonic plates.

On a subsequent journey to Lisbon to discuss the 1755 earthquake that occurred on All Saints Day and resulted in a huge loss of life, I pondered the question with Dr John Polkinghorne, Anglican minister and accomplished theoretical physicist. "Without those plates, land could not have been forced above the oceans. The surface of our planet would have been, perhaps, a green swamp, impossible for human life", he told me. He added that the movement of the earth's crust had, historically, probably been essential for human endeavours in agriculture, as key minerals and ores from beneath the surface had most probably enriched the soil and made cultivation of crops easier.



Dr John Polkinghorne

What is beneficial for the systemic whole has some very rough edges for individuals caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is nothing to do with divine punishment, or karma. It is the price to be paid for living in a complex natural world, which features both beauty and occasional barbed wire. This inescapable intermingling of positives and negatives isn't just reflected in closer studies of the natural world, it's also reflected in some of humanity's oldest religious cultural heritages. Take the god Shiva in Hinduism. He is both a deity of creation and destruction, and both these elements of eternal energy are contained in the classic dance, the *tandava*. Or take this beautiful poem from the eleventh century Muslim theologian, Al-Ghazali:

*Reflect! The order of life
Is a subtle, marvellous unique order
For nothing but death endears life
And only the fear of the tomb adorns it
Were it not for the misery of painful life
People would not grasp the meaning of happiness
Whomever the scowling of the dark does not terrify
Does not feel the bliss of the new morning...*

There remains a central question. Could not a loving, omnipotent creator have just twiddled the settings to keep all the sunsets and leave out the droughts, pestilence and disease? By sheer grace and good fortune, as that Channel 4 tsunami film reached its climax, I got the chance to pursue this very question in the most unlikely of locations. Some sixteen miles south east of the centre of Rome lies the papal summer palace at Castel Gandolfo. It is home to the Vatican Observatory run by a small community of Jesuits, and they were convening a week-long seminar on "God and Suffering", to be attended by some of the most gifted Christian scientists and philosophers on the planet.

We spent days on the terrace overlooking Lake Albano and I unleashed question after

question upon those gathered in this idyllic setting. Why didn't God just do a better job of it and leave out all the thistles? A consensual reply came forth. It is not to limit God and reduce his omnipotence if God cannot perform the logically impossible, for example, make two and two equal five. Might it well be that the intrinsic nature of a material world is simply that upsides and downsides are inevitably the price you have to pay for having anything at all?

"Well," I suggested, "what would happen if we discovered another planet in which the laws of nature were different and suffering had been eliminated for sentient creatures?" I was told that there was a fairly solid consensus that the laws of science would be applicable across the universe and, anyhow, in the absence of being able to single out such a suffering-free entity in the solar system and beyond, my question was merely hypothetical. I questioned more and more, until it came down to the crunch.

"Well, if God cannot create a material world with us in it, without suffering and death, then why create at all?" It is essentially the same dilemma facing any young couple as they ponder bringing new life into the world. They know their offspring will experience highs and lows, and they will, like all of us, eventually die. But it is exceptionally rare for anyone to suggest they should desist from becoming parents. But of course, God is eternal, and loving and omnipotent. Why, but why, did God then create? I put this to Professor Philip Clayton from the Claremont School of Theology in California and his answer is worth repeating in full.

Anyone who sees the depth of suffering in our world and answers that question simply, doesn't get it. I would love to imagine a God, who stood and wept and somehow at the last minute felt it was better to have us than to have the divine in eternal emptiness. You and I would probably not push the button on creation. And that God pushed that button and made creation hints at a mystery we do not understand. It hints at a resolution that we can only hope for. God will only be God if the outcome is something so far better than what we see around us that would make it all right. But I can only say that as a wish and a hope and not as an item of knowledge.

It seems we are back to the final parts of the Book of Job, when the haplessly virtuous but tormented figure asks God to make sense of all his trials and misfortunes.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?" God responds. "Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions?" (38:4-5) St Paul continues this theme in Romans: "Who are you O man to talk back to God? Shall the pot say to the potter: 'Why have you made me like this?'" (9:20)

Grieving families

Abstract discussions on theodicy are, of course, the last thing on the minds of grieving families and friends during this appalling pandemic. It was the Welsh theologian D.Z. Phillips who said that "it is easy for us, as intellectuals, to add to the evil in the world by the ways in which we discuss it". There are those among troubled believers, who, faced with such questions, simply shrug their shoulders and plead for a respectful silence. I honour that position. But I would also argue for a differentiated response, as this area is surely the greatest bar to the leap of faithful assent for many agnostics and indeed, atheists. We are creatures of reason. Aquinas always maintained that humanity could come to faith through natural law, via intellectual enquiry as well as through

biblical revelation. So these questions have their place, even if they are condemned ultimately to fall short.

These last weeks, reading every day about patients fighting for breath, oxygen levels, ventilators and the like, I have been thrown back on the importance of breath in so many religious narratives. It is the Ruach Elohim, the breath or spirit of God, that hovers above the waters at the dawn of creation. In the far eastern traditions of Buddhism, the *anapatasati*, the system of breathful meditation, is a key element on the path to enlightenment.

And finally, there is the image of a crucified and suffering God on the cross who breathes his last and gives up His spirit. How very apt that, in these Covid-19 anxious times, we vouch faith in a God who does not ridicule us or abandon us in our suffering, but in a God who sends his son to die through asphyxiation on a cross. A God who says, this is not the final chapter of the tale. Put your hand in mine. Walk through the darkness of the tomb and prepare for the unexpected – the new life of resurrection.

We look through a glass darkly.

I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief.

*Mark Dowd is a freelance writer and broadcaster. He is the author of *Queer & Catholic: A life of contradiction* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2017).*

A version of this article has appeared in the Jesuit online journal *Thinking Faith*.

Visit by Coventry Circle to Temple Balsall

The Coventry Circle, which held its own 65th AGM this year, celebrated the impending 80th anniversary of the Newman Association by visiting Temple Balsall, a small hamlet in the Midlands associated with the Knights Templar. Twenty members attended. We enjoyed a leisurely tour of the medieval buildings and gardens in glorious sunshine and rounded off the day with delicious cakes and tea.

The visit gave us a valued opportunity to honour one of our long-standing members, Maureen Carroll, who had just been awarded the British Empire Medal for services to her community of Balsall Common. It was therefore especially fitting to choose a venue so close to Balsall Common to recognise Maureen's commitment to her local community, her parish, our Circle and to the work of HCPT.

We were very fortunate in having as our guide Peter Larkin, who is the Chair of the Circle this year and is also a volunteer at Temple Balsall. We were able to benefit from Peter's knowledge of the site's history and architecture. He is particularly involved in the upkeep of the Walled Garden and he communicated his love of its rare trees and plants. It is



noteworthy that Peter is a published poet whose poems reflect spiritual and environmental concerns inspired by the natural world and the landscape of the Midlands.

The historic centre of the site is the Old Hall, a local headquarters for the Knights Templar dating from the 12th century. In the 17th century it became an alms house. Though partly converted into a cottage, and with its original walls encased in brick, it is one of a very small number of mediaeval aisled halls which survive. At the heart of the community of Temple Balsall is the Anglican Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin. It was built in the 14th century as a chapel of the Knights Hospitaller. Of particular note are the beautiful stained glass windows and the carved heads of knights just below the level of the ceiling. During the 19th century the Church underwent a major refurbishment by George Gilbert Scott.

Temple Balsall is a thriving Christian community. In 1674 Lady Katherine Leveson established a Foundation to teach children and to care for older people. The present work of the Foundation focuses on support and residential care, the school and the parish community of St. Mary's. There is also a Centre for the study of ageing, spirituality and social policy.



Our visit has left vivid impressions and memories: the beautiful late afternoon under a westerly sun with summer flowers still in full colour, the secluded tranquillity and stillness of the churchyard and garden. A sense of the past was afforded by the ancient timbers of the Old Hall, the low-hanging Bramley apples in the orchard, the teapot and fine collection of donated books in the shed in the Walled Garden and

the sound of laughter and animated conversation as we all sat around the table. But more than the sights and sounds, what impresses above all else is Temple Balsall's spirit of quiet contemplation and abiding sense of community.

Colin Roberts
Coventry Circle Secretary

Spirituality page

Jacques Fesch was born in 1930 in France into a wealthy family where his father was an avowed atheist and his mother nominally Catholic. He was expelled from school and although his father found him various jobs he lost them all by his laziness and disinterest in work. He fathered a child by his girlfriend, Pierrette, whom he married before his daughter was born but the marriage quickly ended in divorce and Jacques showed no interest in supporting his family. He later fathered a son by another woman who never knew Jacques as his father.

He then decided to sail to the South Pacific with the idea of buying a yacht and living an idyllic, pleasure-seeking life. His father refused him the money to buy the yacht and so on February 24th, 1954, he attempted to rob a currency dealer, Alexander Silberstein. He hit him on the head but Silberstein managed to call for help. A

policeman, Jean Vergne, ran to the scene but Fesch shot him dead. He was arrested, tried for murder and inevitably convicted and sentenced to death by the guillotine.

All of this seems totally unedifying and so it was. However, the real story of Jacques Fesch really begins here as in solitary confinement in prison he underwent a profound religious conversion. This did not happen at once but he gradually accepted the evil of what he had done and underwent a conversion, returning to the Catholic faith. This was through the ministry of three people: the prison chaplain, an old friend of Fesch who became a priest and his lawyer whose



Jacques Fesch

strong faith inspired Jacques. When in prison he wrote many letters and after he was guillotined on October 1st, 1957, his ex-wife Pierrette (who seems to have been a saintly person) and his daughter, Veronica, tried to publish them.

No-one was interested at first but they were eventually published with the help of a Carmelite nun, Sister Veronique, and a priest, Father Augustin-Michel Lemonnier. The English title of the book is *Light over the Scaffold: Prison Letters of Jacques Fesch; and Cell 18: Unedited Letters of Jacques Fesch*. He was 27 when he died.

Here are three extracts from the letters:

The first: *Do not ask God to save such and such a person, or to help this one or that, but ask him that you may love him, and that his will may be done. You must talk with him familiarly and explain to him that you want to love him well, but that you can't do it, that many things seem obscure and illogical to you, and that you would like to understand them a little better ... and do not hesitate, all day long, to invoke heaven.*

The second: *I am sad indeed. Is it a lack of humility that is making me insensitive? I could easily become violent, and at the least contradiction my hackles go up. Pride: the worst of evils and the one that most separates us from the Lord. I have plenty of reasons to be humble, but I'm not. The more I'm knocked down, the more I stiffen my neck and cling to the pride that is my form of courage*

And in a letter to his mother, written a few days before he died, he ended:

Remain calm above all, and submissive. Think of the Blessed Virgin, who remained for hours beneath the cross without rebelling! It is to her that you must entrust yourself. If God permits it, I will pray for all of you from heaven. Dear Mama, I don't know if tomorrow... well. I won't think about it. I'll write you a goodbye letter in any case. I embrace you with all my heart.

In 1993, the cause of Jacques Fesch was formally opened in Rome, giving him the title of Servant of God.

Anne and John Duddington



The tomb of St Dominic in the Basilica of St Dominic, Bologna (see page 15)