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Susan Docherty
Abraham – Filling in the Gaps

Fr Peter Conley
Newman: A Saint for All Seasons

Rev Geoffrey Calvert
The Christianity of the Picts

The AGM on Zoom: a report

Book Reviews
100 Years of Pax Romana

Spirituality Page
A Day and a Night in the Desert

Contents

Comment	1
Abraham in Early Jewish Tradition	2
A Saint for All Seasons.....	8
Newman Bursary	12
The Christianity of the Picts and their sculpted stones	13
Journey through the desert	18
The Breaking of Bread.....	20
Letter to the Editor.....	21
Endangered by Covid-19	22
How to hold meetings online.....	23
Annual General Meeting on Zoom, January 16th	24
Pax Romana 1921-2021	26
Membership Report	26
Three Book Reviews	27
Spirituality Page	32
Easter Thoughts	34

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Comment

Will the Newman Association be crushed by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic or will we be able to reinvent ourselves? For the time being most circles are dormant but there are hopes that it will be possible to resume activity by this summer, or more probably during the autumn. The virus will continue to pose a threat, however, and the Association will need to make more use of online communication. The Association's central Council is seeking to make Zoom facilities available without charge.

The Newman has been forced to restructure itself in the past. In the 1970s it was hit financially by the shrinkage of membership revenues after *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 and the impact of high inflation. The Carlisle Street headquarters building in London was closed and there were no longer paid staff to handle the administration. The Association changed to a decentralised structure in which the senior officers worked from home. This placed a heavy burden on some of them, especially the Secretary and Treasurer, although by the late 1990s this was starting to become considerably easier with the arrival of the internet and the ability to send out messages and documents by email.

With the start of the 21st century new opportunities were presented by the internet, for example the chance to establish a regular newsletter which could be sent over the internet to circle secretaries and others without incurring heavy postage costs. But while young people responded eagerly to online innovations the Newman's mainly elderly members were less keen. A website was established but probably not enough resources were put into it. By 2018 it was more or less dormant although it has been successfully reactivated within the past year or so. The important omission is that there has never been any Newman presence on the social media which has made it very difficult to draw in young people.

Pressure for change

Now the virus has further intensified the pressure for change. Last June's scheduled AGM had to be deferred because of social distancing laws until January this year, when it was successfully staged on the Zoom video link application. Other Zoom meetings have been arranged, some by Council and others by individual Circles. It rather looks as though the old-style Council meetings will never be fully reintroduced on a regular basis, involving as they did long train trips by Council members starting very early on Saturday mornings.

The internet has its limitations. Appearing in a tiny box on a flickering laptop computer screen will never adequately replace the historical social attractions of the Newman, involving meetings, discussions, services and parties. But will there be the compensating chance to expand in other directions? Some members would like to see a revival of the old specialist groups which were so active in the Association's younger days, in fields such as theological studies and ecology. There could also be more book discussion groups, on a nationwide basis. Importantly, it would be possible to reach out more effectively to our unattached members who are numerous but have no local Circles to sustain them.

Next year the Association will celebrate its 80th birthday but, unfortunately, many individual members will pass the same anniversary, if they haven't already done so. Reaching out to the young is a leap across generations.

Barry Riley

Abraham in Early Jewish Tradition

by Susan Docherty, Newman University Birmingham



Professor Susan Docherty

Introduction: Reception History

Reception History is a burgeoning area of the current academic study of the Bible, and investigates the re-use of the scriptures across the centuries, in art, music and literature, as well as in theological writings and formal commentary. The figure of Abraham has a particularly long and rich “after-life”, as his crucial role (Genesis chapters 12-25) as founder of the nation of Israel and covenant partner with God has generated centuries of study and reflection within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The key to Paul’s argument in the Letter to the Romans, for instance, is his understanding

that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised (Gen 15.6; Rom 4.1-25), and the narrative of the aborted sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen 22.1-19) has inspired great artists from Caravaggio to Chagall. This article will explore the reception of Abraham in a genre of early Jewish interpretation known as ‘Rewritten Scripture’.

Rewritten Scripture

The “Rewritten Scriptures” are a type of ancient Jewish biblical commentary, although they do not use the familiar format of verse-by-verse explanation. Instead, they literally rewrite large sections of the biblical narratives, embroidering some episodes with additional material, while heavily summarising, or even omitting altogether, others. This enabled their authors to smooth over passages they found problematic and fill in any perceived gaps in the original accounts. Their approach exhibits a similar combination of faithfulness to the original and creative licence as that which

characterises the retelling of scripture in films such as *The Ten Commandments* or *The Passion of the Christ*.

Three surviving examples of this form of interpretation will be considered here. They are all available in English translation (e.g. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, by Geza Vermes; and *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2*, edited by James Charlesworth, from which



The Genesis Apocryphon

all the quotations here are taken). The first, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, was lost to us for hundreds of years until a single fragmentary copy was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was written in Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his first followers, probably in the second century BCE. The second example is the *Book of Jubilees* which is a Hebrew text dating from about the same time. It remained extremely popular among Jews and then among Christians for several centuries, right into mediaeval times, even forming part of the biblical canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to this day. Thirdly, the *Biblical Antiquities* was originally composed in Hebrew in Palestine towards the end of the first century CE but is now extant only in a Latin translation. It is a particularly important indicator of the way major biblical figures were understood by Jews in New Testament times.



Abraham and Sarah

The Scriptural Abraham: Gaps and Problems

Several of the key events in the scriptural life of Abraham raise problems for later readers, both ancient and modern. The most obvious example of such a difficulty is the narrative called by Jews the *Aqedah*, in which the patriarch is commanded by God to offer his only son Isaac as a human sacrifice (Gen 22.1-12). This episode has always prompted deep theological questions about what kind of God would make this demand, and what kind of father would be as ready as Abraham was to comply with it.

Another problem emerges within the narrative of Abraham's journey to Egypt with his wife Sarah during a time of famine in Canaan (Gen 12.10-16; cf. Gen 20.1-8). As they reach the border, Abraham tells Sarah to pretend to be his sister and basically abandons her to a life in Pharaoh's harem in order to protect himself. When we encounter this text today, we might be struck by Sarah's lack of agency as she is sold into sexual slavery for the benefit of her husband, but this aspect of the story seems to have worried the ancient interpreters less than the implication that Abraham was deceitful and cowardly, telling lies and hiding behind his wife's skirts. These were not qualities considered desirable in a nation's founding ancestor!

The rewritten scriptures also demonstrate a great interest in Abraham's early life. His abrupt appearance on the scene in the Book of Genesis is rather unsatisfactory as no introduction is provided to his character or to the details of his life before his family's move from the city of Ur (Gen 11.31-12.5). In what follows, the solutions offered by the rewritten scriptures to these three problems and gaps will be explored.

I: Abraham's Origins

In *Jubilees* especially, the scriptural account of the early life of Abraham is embellished, and particular characteristics are ascribed to him in order to illustrate his suitability to receive the covenant promises. Thus he is said to have possessed from an early age a facility for learning and a knowledge of many subjects, including agriculture and carpentry, and even of the Hebrew language, despite growing up in Babylonia (or Chaldea):

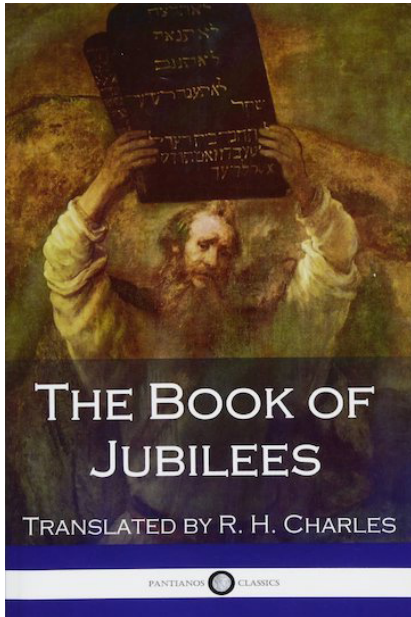
... his father taught him writing... and... Abram taught those who were making the implements for oxen, the skilled carpenters. And they made implements above the ground facing the handle of the plough so that they might place seed upon it... And they sowed and tilled all of the earth just as Abram commanded them... And I [God] opened his mouth and his ears and his lips and I began to speak with him in Hebrew, in the tongue of creation. And he took his father's books – and they were written in Hebrew – and he copied them. And he began studying them thereafter. And I caused him to know everything... (*Jubilees* 11.16-27).

This claim is partly a type of early propaganda, celebrating the great history of the Jewish people, and the contribution of their ancestors to society and culture.

In a second extensive addition to the scriptural account, Abraham is credited with saving the local population from starvation by turning away flocks of crows sent by the chief of the evil spirits to eat all the seed which they planted before it had taken root:

And Prince Mastema sent crows and birds so that they might eat the seed which was being sown in the earth in order to spoil the earth so that they might rob mankind of their labours. Before they ploughed in the seed, the crows picked it off the surface of the earth... And they ate their seed. And the years began being barren because of the birds... And the seed time arrived for sowing in the land. And they all went out together so that they might guard their seed from before the crows. And Abram went out with those who went out. And the lad was fourteen years old. And a cloud of crows came so that they might eat the seed, and Abram used to run up to them before they settled upon the earth. And he would call out to them before they settled upon the earth to eat seed, and he said, "Don't come down. Return to the place whence you came." And they turned back. And he caused the cloud of crows to turn back seventy times in that day. And none of the crows settled on any of the fields where Abram was, not one. And all who were with him in all of the fields saw him as he was calling out... And his reputation was great in all the land of Chaldea. And all who would sow came to him during that year. And he used to go with them until the seed time passed. And they sowed their land and harvested in that year enough food, and they ate and were satisfied... (*Jubilees* 11.9-22).

In this narrative, Abraham takes on some of the attributes of Joseph, another ancient Israelite who was able to provide the inhabitants of a foreign land with sufficient food



(Gen 37.56-57). It is also reminiscent of the stories about the miracles supposedly worked by Jesus as a boy found in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels of Thomas and James.

The main theme in the expansive prequel to Abraham's life in *Jubilees*, however, is his strong rejection of the idolatry practised by his own family and his ancestors (*Jubilees* 11.16-17). This hostility culminates in his setting fire to his local temple, an event which causes his brother to lose his life when he tries to save the statues it contains from the flames. This incident prompts the break-up of his clan, as his immediate family depart from Chaldea for Haran, a move which is unexplained in scripture (*Jubilees* 12.12-15). It also provides a way of dealing with the troubling fact that the father of Israel was not a native Israelite and so must have been brought up to worship foreign gods, something strictly forbidden in the scriptures (e.g. Exod 20.1-6; for attempts

within other biblical books to deal with this same problem, see Josh 24.2; Jud 5.6-9).

This story is rooted in a verbal similarity between the place name "Ur" and the Hebrew word for "flame", and this same connection between Abraham, idolatry and fire is reflected in the *Biblical Antiquities* as well. Here, Abraham and eleven others, including his kinsmen Nahor and Lot, are shown refusing to participate in the making of bricks for the construction of the Tower of Babel, even when threatened with death, because they regard it as an idolatrous enterprise. As a consequence, Abraham is thrown into a furnace, but he remains completely unharmed, while thousands of those who gather to watch his killing are themselves burned alive:

The people of the land seized them and brought them to their chiefs and said, "These are the men who have violated our plans and refuse to walk in our ways." The leaders said to them, "Why were you not willing, every one of you, to contribute bricks together with the people of the land?" Those men answered and said, "We are not contributing bricks with you, nor are we joining in your wishes. We know only the Lord, and him we worship. Even if you throw us into the fire with your bricks, we will not assent to you." ... They took him and built a furnace and lit it with fire. They threw the bricks into the furnace to be fired. Then the leader Joktan, dismayed, took Abram and threw him with the bricks into the fiery furnace. But God stirred up a great earthquake, and burning fire leaped forth out of the furnace into flames and sparks of flame, and it burned up all those standing around in front of the furnace. All those who were consumed in that day were 83,500. But there was not even the slightest injury to Abram from the burning of the fire.... (*Biblical Antiquities* 6.4-5, 15-17).

This narrative recalls the bravery and resistance to idolatry of Daniel and his

companions (Dan 1.1-3.30; 6.1-28). Abraham's righteousness and trust in God's power to protect and save him are rewarded, and these qualities explain his election as God's covenant partner. They also serve to heighten his function as a role model for a new generation as they face similar dilemmas about how far to accept the idolatrous practices of their gentile neighbours.

II: Journey into Egypt

Abraham's morally questionable behaviour on his arrival in Egypt during a time of famine (Gen 12.10-20; cf. Gen 20.1-18) is glossed over in *Jubilees* (13.12-13) and ignored completely in the *Biblical Antiquities*. The author of the *Qumran Genesis Apocryphon*, however, chooses to justify this incident by inserting a lengthy addition describing a warning dream received by Abraham near the end of the journey:

I, Abram, dreamt a dream on the night of my entry into Egypt. And in my dream I saw a cedar and a palm-tree... Some men arrived intending to cut and uproot the cedar, and to leave the palm-tree by itself. But the palm-tree shouted and said, "Do not hew down the cedar, because both of us are from one root..." And the cedar was saved thanks to the palm-tree, and was not hewn down. I woke up from my slumber during the night and said to Sarai, my wife, "I have had a dream and I am alarmed by this dream." She said to me, "Tell me your dream so that I may know it." And I began to tell her the dream..., [and the interpretation of] this dream... "... they want to kill me and leave you alone. This favour only must you do for me: in every place we reach say about me, 'He is my brother'. And I shall live under your protection and my life shall be spared because of you..." Sarai wept that night because of my words... (*Genesis Apocryphon* 19.14-20)

The couple are pictured discussing the dream together and both understand it as a divine message that Sarah (the palm tree) must pretend to be the sister of Abraham (the cedar) in order to save his life. This is designed to make clear to the reader that the patriarch's deception was necessary and was approved in advance by both God and his wife. As is frequently the case in the rewritten scriptures, this supplementary material connects different biblical characters and events. Abraham's symbolic dream, for instance, links him to Joseph and Daniel, who are also saved from harm at the hands of foreign rulers by their ability to interpret dreams (Gen 40.9-19; 41.17-36; Dan 2.1-49; 4.4-27).

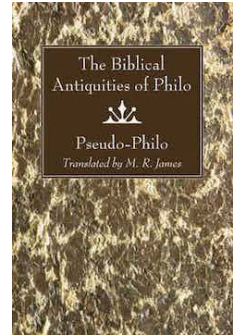
III: The Sacrifice of Isaac

The author of the *Biblical Antiquities* displays a particular interest in the near-sacrifice of Isaac, and offers a reason for the divine instruction that Abraham must offer up his son – it is prompted by the jealousy of certain angels:

And all the angels were jealous of him [Abraham], and the worshipping hosts envied him. And since they were jealous of him, God said to him, "Kill the fruit of your body for me, and offer for me as a sacrifice what has been given to you by me." And Abraham did not argue, but set out immediately. And as he was setting out, he said to his son, "Behold now, my son, I am offering you as a holocaust and am delivering you into the hands that gave me to you." But the son said to the father, "... have I not been born into the world to be offered as a sacrifice to him who made me? Now my blessedness will be above that of all men, because there will be nothing like this; and about me future generations will be instructed

and through me people will understand that the Lord has made the soul of a man worthy to be a sacrifice." (*Biblical Antiquities* 32.2-3)

This account disassociates God from any connotations of cruelty or capriciousness. It is an interpretation widespread in Jewish tradition, and it fits with the suggestion in Genesis that this episode was a test of the patriarch (Gen. 22.1; see e.g. *Jubilees* 17.15-18; *Genesis Rabbah* 55.4; 56.4; *b. Sanh.* 89b). This explanation also brings out a parallel between Abraham and Job, another righteous biblical character who was tested at the prompting of Satan. The other important emphasis in the *Biblical Antiquities* is the claim that Isaac is fully aware of what is about to happen, and gladly and voluntarily accepts his fate. It is probable that New Testament accounts of Jesus' willing embrace of his death were influenced by these early Jewish readings of the *Aqedah* narrative.



Conclusions

The figure of Abraham is embellished in these scriptural retellings, so that his righteousness, piety and achievements are foregrounded, and more information is provided about his actions and his innermost thoughts. The approach taken by these early interpreters may hold some lessons for commentators and believers today.

- First, they reveal that it is not only modern readers who are aware of contradictions, gaps or other problems within the scriptures. For these authors, however, such difficulties do not negate the value or ultimate meaning of the sacred texts, but instead prompt a closer engagement with them, and a search for solutions and explanations.
- Second, these commentators did not understand their role as involving merely the slavish repetition of the scriptural words. Rather, they believed that they were empowered to communicate the deeper meaning of the narratives they retold in a way which made sense for their contemporary audiences. They felt able, therefore, to update the original material where necessary in the light of changing theological and social norms. Employing a similar combination of faithfulness to scriptural authority and creative freedom might make it possible for the Bible to speak more effectively to today's pressing issues like climate change, or to those who may feel excluded from it by their gender, for example, or their sexual orientation.
- Third, these writers often draw on other scriptural characters – like Joseph, Daniel and Job – to flesh out their portrayal of Abraham. They understand scripture as something which is best read as a whole: not as a series of isolated and unconnected proof-texts. This is so that each episode can be seen as part of a coherent over-arching narrative about God's relationship with human beings.
- Finally, these texts demonstrate that there is more than one well-informed, scripturally-rooted and sincerely-held view about who Abraham was; diversity within the interpretation and reception of the Bible is quite legitimate, therefore, and has a long and distinguished history.

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A Saint for All Seasons

by Fr Peter Conley

The Vision of Holiness

St John Henry Newman remarked that our commitment to living out the truths of faith is not something to be “worn on and off like Spring fashions” as he explains:

...what is religion but a habit? And what is a habit but a state of mind which is always upon us, as a sort of ordinary dress or inseparable garment of the soul? A man cannot really be religious one hour, and not religious the next. We might as well say he could be in a state of good health one hour, and in bad health the next. A man who is religious, is religious morning, noon, and night; his religion is a certain character, a mould in which his thoughts, words, and actions are cast, all forming parts of one and the same whole. He sees God in all things; every course of action he directs towards those spiritual objects which God has revealed to him; every occurrence of the day, every event, every person met with, all news which he hears, he measures by the standard of God's will. And a person who does this may be said almost literally to pray without ceasing; for, knowing himself to be in God's presence, he is continually led to address Him reverently, whom he sets always before him, in the inward language of prayer and praise, of humble confession and joyful trust. (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, VII, 15).



Fr Peter Conley

These are the attitudes which we seek to renew throughout the Church's year, remembering that Christmas and Easter, as Newman says, are joined by a spirit of penance. This is not just an approach to Advent or Lent, but an important dimension of being Christian disciples in Ordinary Time as well. Therefore, Newman advises us to be fully aware of the dynamics of self-denial. So that we do not become discouraged if we set the bar too high. Even a modest spiritual exercise naturally becomes more difficult. He likened this process to a stone which, if it is constantly dropped, becomes hollow. (*Sermons on Subjects of the Day*, 4). He notes that God's grace increases our capacity to maintain any commitment we make.

St John Henry offers a very practical meditation which helps us to grow in faith, hope and love:

If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say, first – Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God's glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect. (*Meditations and Devotions Part Two*, 'A Short Read to Perfection').

Newman saw the Church's worship as the nearest experience to Heaven we can have on earth. This is because, by participation, we sing the song of the angels and saints. So that our lives may speak with the cadences of eternity and the joyful rhythm of sacred days.

Diary Dates for Disciples

Ordinary Time

Whatever set of circumstances we find ourselves in, Newman believed they are important for the salvation of ourselves and those around us. He recognised that the eyes of faith are needed to ponder every scene in this way:

God knows what is my greatest happiness, but I do not. There is no rule about what is happy and good; what suits one would not suit another. And the ways by which perfection is reached vary very much; the medicines necessary for our souls are very different from each other. Thus God leads us by strange ways; we know He wills our happiness but we neither know what our happiness is, nor the way. We are blind; left to ourselves we should take the wrong way; we must leave it to Him... O my God I will put myself without reserve into Thy hands. Wealth or woe, joy or sorrow, friends or bereavement, honour or humiliation, good report or ill report, comfort or discomfort, Thy presence or the hiding of Thy countenance, all is good if it comes from Thee. Thou art Wisdom and Thou art love – what can I desire more? (*Meditations and Devotions*, Part 3).

In a letter to his friend Mrs Froude, Newman reveals the delicate spiritual journey each person is making:

I am quite sure you wish to please God, and would do any thing He told you. On the other hand, I know well He does not tell us everything at once – but first one thing, and then, when we act upon that, another. No-one ought to enter the Church without faith – no one can have faith for it by wishing or willing it, at the moment. Faith is a Gift of God; we can gain it by prayer, we cannot gain it at once; but we can gain it at last. I will quarrel with no one simply for not entering into the holiest and happiest of states on the spur of the instant – faith must be preceded by reason – but I will quarrel with him much, if he does not earnestly and continually ask of God the illumination which leads reason to faith. (*Letters and Diaries XV*, p.307-8).

This requires us to foster a contemplative outlook which seeks the face of Christ in all things. As Newman concludes:

...it is simply this, thinking habitually and constantly of Him and of His deeds and sufferings. It is to have Him before our minds as One whom we may contemplate, worship, and address when we rise up, when we lie down, when we eat and drink, when we are at home or abroad, when we are working, or walking, or at rest, when we are alone, and again when we are in company; this is meditating. And by this, and nothing short of this will our hearts come to feel as they ought. (*Parochial and Plain Sermons VI*, 4).

Advent and Christmas

In one of his seasonal sermons, Newman warns us not to use “unreal” or bland words. We can imagine his objections to the greeting card slogan “Happy Holidays” instead of

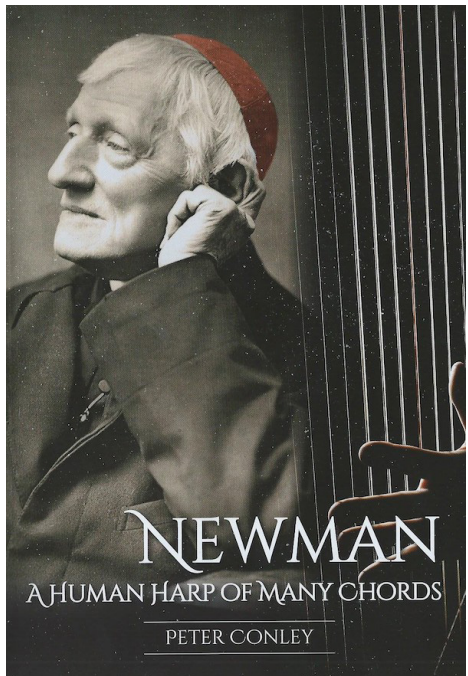
a direct reference to Christmas. He recommends that during Advent we meditate on each article of our faith: "All that we can hope is, that we are in the way to understand it; that we partly understand it; that we pray, and strive to understand it more and more. Our Creed becomes a sort of Prayer." (*Parochial and Plain Sermons V, 3*). This formula focuses our attention on the vision of Christ's coming in history, his presence among us in Eucharistic Mystery and the anticipation of his return in glory. Newman has these themes in mind; he recognises that our appreciation of the deep meaning of Christianity is affected by a combination of the limits of individual circumstances and sinful choices.

What I have been saying comes to this – be in earnest, and you will speak of religion where, and when, and how you should; aim at things, and your words will be right without aiming. There are ten thousand ways of looking at this world, but only one right way. The man of pleasure has his way, the man of gain his, and the man of intellect his. Poor men and rich men, governors and governed, prosperous and discontented, learned and unlearned, each has his own way of looking at the things which come before him, and each has a wrong way. There is but one right way; it is the way in which God looks at the world. Aim at looking at things in God's way. Aim at seeing things as God sees them. Aim at forming judgments about persons, events, ranks, fortunes, changes, objects, such as God forms. Aim at looking at this life as God looks at it. Aim at looking at the life to come, and the world unseen, as God does. Aim at 'seeing the King in His beauty'. All things that we see are but shadows to us and delusions, unless we enter into what they really mean.

It is not an easy thing to learn that new language which Christ has brought us. He has interpreted all things for us in a new way; He has brought us a religion which sheds a new light on all that happens. Try to learn this language. (*Parochial and Plain Sermons V, 3*).

Newman's prose continually invites us to reset the trajectory of our sights on the Lord's birth and its significance when he concludes: "Let us receive the truth in reference...that it may bear fruit within us."

The coming of Christ as a human person, like us in all things but sin, reveals that God understands us from the inside. In an epiphany sermon, Newman examines this through the gift called our Conscience. Here we meet God. This encounter helps us identify right from wrong. Then, in freedom, we choose,



using practical wisdom, how to apply the Church's teaching, revealed through the Holy Spirit, to particular situations.

Lent and Eastertide

Newman hints that the pace of the New Year can overtake us when we need to balance urgency with prudence. Hence, he writes to his friend William Copeland on Ash Wednesday, 14th February, 1866: "Your Christmas Turkey was wonderful – but, time passes so quick, it is now a matter of history. We are steaming to Easter, and it will be upon us before we know where we are." (*Letters and Diaries XXII*, p.155).

Newman recognised that Lent is a season to live out the wisdom of reflecting before acting. While acknowledging the sinful consequences of our not doing so in the past and present. He explores candidly the struggles we have in striving to be holy by fulfilling the basic responsibilities of each day:

I am not speaking of cases of extraordinary devotion, but of what every one must know in his own case, how difficult it is to command himself and do that he wishes to do; - how weak the governing principle of his mind is, and how poorly and imperfectly he comes to own notions of right and truth; how difficult it is to command his feelings, grief, anger, impatience, joy, fear; how difficult to govern his tongue, to say just what he would; how difficult to rouse himself to do what he would, at this time or that; how difficult to rise in the morning; how difficult to go about his duties and not be idle; how difficult to eat and drink just what he should, how difficult to fix his mind on his prayers; how difficult to regulate his thoughts through the day; how difficult to keep out of his mind what should be kept out. (*Parochial and Plain Sermons V*, 15).

St John Henry taught that by Lenten penances we are able to join the great sacraments of baptism, where we are born again in Christ at Christmas and eucharist which honours the risen Lord.

As Newman energetically states:

A true Christian, then, may be defined as one who has a ruling sense of God's presence within him...so that he habitually realizes that all his thoughts, all the first springs of his moral life, all his motives and his wishes that all that is in him should be bare to God. (*Parochial and Plain Sermons V*, 16).

Paschal mystery

Pope Francis described Peter's running to Christ's tomb as "the beginning of the resurrection of his heart." This reminded me of the expression that one must let Jesus "Easter in us" to become missionary disciples. Newman anticipates what we might call paschal mystery thinking in two of his homilies. He begins by outlining how necessary it is for us to desire a renewed faith:

We cannot change ourselves; this we know full well, or, at least, a very little experience will teach us. God alone can change us; God alone can give us the desires, affections, principles, views, and tastes which a change implies: this, too, we know. (*Parochial and Plain Sermons V*, 16).

Newman's reflections emphasise the importance of the post-resurrection period for the vitality of the early Church. The disciples re-interpret the whole of Jesus' life in light of it, as we are invited to do:

What a time must that forty days have been, during which, while He taught them, all His past teaching must have risen in their minds, and their thoughts, then must have recurred in overpowering contrast to their thoughts now. His manner of life, His ministry, His discourses, His parables, His mystery of His grief and joy; the agony, the scourge, the cross, the crown of thorns, the spear, the tomb; their despair, their unbelief, their perplexity, their amazement, their sudden transport, their triumph – all this was in their minds; and surely not the least at that awful hour, when He led his breathless followers out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. (*Luke 24, 50-51*). (*Parochial and Plain Sermons VI, 16*).

St John Henry proclaims this with wonder, awe and in rapt expectation of receiving the Holy Spirit's gifts along the way, and so must we. Newman's vision of holiness makes him our Saint for all Seasons.

Fr Peter Conley is the Assistant Priest at St Joseph the Worker Parish, Canley, Coventry and Assistant Chaplain at Warwick University

Newman Bursary

The Tyneside Circle of the Newman Association is establishing a bursary for the academic year 2021-2 for any full-time student at any of the four universities in Tyne and Wear to set up a discussion group to address the question: "What should the Church do to attract young people?"

The aims of the project are to increase knowledge of the Newman Association among young people in the region, to strength ties between these universities and the Tyneside Circle, and to gain a better knowledge of what young people think about the Church.

The successful candidate must be a practising Roman Catholic and will be expected to report back to the Newman Association by the end of July 2022 with a document report of 3000 words to be published in *The Newman* (subject to editorial review) and delivered as a talk to the Tyneside Circle of the Newman Association.

The value of the bursary will be £500, to be paid in two instalments, £200 at the beginning and £300 at the end when the report has been completed. Applications should be made in 3 documents: a 300-word outline of the plan for the discussion group, a CV of no longer than one page and a reference from an academic or a priest. These should be sent as attachments in an email to Terry.Wright@ncl.ac.uk

The Christianity of the Picts and their sculpted stones

This is an edited and simplified version of a slideshow given to members of the Hertfordshire Circle in January 2021 by Rev Dr Geoffrey Calvert



Picts were based in North and East Scotland

The Picts are without doubt a mysterious people. This is partly because they have left us no written records of their own, except for lists of kings. Almost everything written about the Picts was written by others. What we do have, though, are stones – hundreds of sculpted stones. These are what we are left with to try to perceive something about the spirituality of the Picts. It is very odd to have, in their later stages, an undoubtedly Christian people, whose spirituality is mysteriously opaque.

So who are we talking about? Roughly, they were inhabitants of what is now Eastern Scotland above the Tay, taking in Tayside, Angus, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Easter Ross during the middle and later first century AD. They appear to have spoken a Brittonic

form of Celtic, akin to that spoken in Wales and Brittany. They became Christian in the middle and late First Century, and produced an incredible corpus of sculpted art, much of it very distinctively Pictish. Their land was never incorporated into the Roman Empire, and so much of the mental image we have of them derives from Roman historians, who regarded them as aggressive and violent barbarians. Actually, they seem to have been true Iron Age Celts, given to raiding, quarrelling and seeking status through prowess as warriors, but capable of breathtaking artistic achievement.

The earliest stones we have are called symbol stones, for obvious reasons. This first one is in the Museum at Forfar, and shows one of the classic Pictish symbols, the double disk and Z-rod. We frankly



A symbol stone from the 5th-7th centuries



A 9th century stone at Aberlemno have no idea what this symbolises, although the best guess is that it refers to a clan or family. It dates roughly to the 5th-7th Centuries AD.

A hunting scene

Next is a Class 2 Pictish stone, at Aberlemno. This dates to the 9th Century AD, and is clearly now Christian, often referred to as a Cross-lab.

The other side of this stone, though, has the familiar double disc and Z-rod, with a crescent and V-rod, which is another widely-used symbol. Underneath, however, is a depiction of hunting scenes. The Picts evidently loved hunting. The question is, though, why there is a hunting scene on a self-evidently Christian stone? Is it simply a reflection of aristocratic status, or is there some kind of Christian metaphor? The short answer is, we have no way of



The Churchyard Cross

knowing!

Also at Aberlemno is this, the Churchyard Cross, one of the most exquisite pieces of Pictish art. The cross itself is inlaid with some of the classic Celtic patterns we see elsewhere, but it is flanked by fantastic, sinuous, interlaced animals. These are evidently Sea-Horses. Note the interlace symbol of the Trinity, the three-in-one.

Here are interlaced animals, with feet sticking out in all sorts of improbable places! What we don't know is the theology behind these carvings. Are they just exuberant celebrations of nature, or is there something deeper?

The other side of this cross-slab is more mysterious, but more interesting to speculate on! Below the Pictish symbols at the top is what is unmistakably a battle scene, where Celtic warriors are defeating men wearing distinctive Anglo-Saxon helmets reminiscent of the Coppergate helmet found in York. There are really four options for interpreting this scene.

- 1) It commemorates a real battle, for which there are one or two candidates.
- 2) It symbolises the Christian faith as a battle with evil.
- 3) It is an attempt to portray a Biblical battle.
- 4) It is any one of these according to who was using it as their sermon illustration!

So how did the Picts become Christian? St Bede tells us that the Southern Picts were evangelised by St Ninian, from his base at Candida Casa, or Whithorn, while the Northern Picts were evangelised by



Including a battle scene



The Latinus Stone



Animals, with a solitary bowman

St Columba from his base on Iona. There are a number of issues with the neatness of Bede's scheme, but it is something to work from.

The early Christian credentials of Whithorn are bolstered by this next carving, the Latinus Stone. It reads: "We praise you, the Lord! Latinus, descendant of Barravados, aged 35, and his daughter, aged 4, made a sign here". It dates from the 5th Century AD, and it is the oldest Christian memorial in Scotland.

Somewhere in this area seems to have been a monastery in the late 5th or early 6th Century, whether at Ninian's Whithorn, or along the coast in the Rhinns of Galloway.

The early mission to Bede's "Southern Picts" has a distinctly Roman, and monastic, flavour which we will see reflected later in the carvings.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Pictish carving, which continues from the Symbol Stones on to the Christian ones, is the depiction of animals. My favourite of the animal pictures is on a stone in the St Vigean's Museum*. It is just a riot of animals, doing what animals do, with a solitary bowman in the bottom left, looking very threatened by a wild boar!

During my extended study leave I spent a week on the Tarbat peninsular in Easter Ross, sometimes known as the Iona of the West. It has been known for a long time that there must have been a Pictish religious centre on the Peninsular, because of the three splendid stones.

My personal favourite is the Nigg Cross Slab, preserved in Nigg Old Church, very near the ferry which connects Ross and Cromarty, for the aficionados of the Shipping Forecast.

I visited the Tarbat Discovery Centre in Portmahomack, in St Colman's Church. Here in 1984, crop marks seen in aerial photographs revealed an enclosure very like that on Iona. Excavations in 1994 and 1994 showed that this was the sight



The Nigg Cross Slab

of the sought-after monastery, dating to around the period of Columba's Mission. Also found at the site were the bodies of some of the monks, evidently killed in some kind of raid. Vikings are the obvious culprits, but there is no evidence either way. The Picts themselves could be very violent too.

The discovery I found most fascinating about Portmahomack, though, was evidence



Masonry in the crypt at Portmahomack

of the processing of the processing of calf-skins into vellum, used for Illuminated manuscripts such as the Lindisfarne Gospels. In the crypt at Portmahomack is to be found probably the only upstanding Pictish masonry.

I hope I have been able to give you a flavour of what we know, but probably more of what we don't know, about Pictish Christianity. It certainly gives a whole new perspective to the idea of "Celtic Spirituality".

**St Vigean's Stones and Museum is located in the village of St Vigean's, Angus.*

Journey through the desert

by Kevin Lambert

I wrote the following for a different audience, hence it is an accurate if sanitised account of part of the Newman Pilgrimage in 2007 *From Egypt to the Promised Land*.

We had explored Cairo and our aim for the next day was to cross the Sinai Desert, view the famous icons at St Katharine's Monastery, climb Mount Sinai (7,700 feet) and watch dawn break from the summit – using our imagination of Moses receiving the ten commandments.



We left Cairo early and stopped for lunch near the Suez Canal, then turned south beside the Gulf of Suez. It was a hot day and in spite of time pressures the temptation of the sea and sandy beaches became too strong: we stopped for an impromptu paddle. The scenery changed abruptly when we turned inland to a sandy desert with dried-up river beds and occasional scattered oases along the valley. In one of

these dried-up river beds the coach developed a puncture. Fortunately there was an oasis nearby and even a rudimentary garage! We all dismounted from the coach and scattered across the small oasis, much to the consternation of our armed guard who had escorted us throughout Egypt.

Eventually the tyre was repaired and rather late in the day we set out for our final destination, St Katharine's Monastery in the middle of the Sinai Desert. It was getting dark when we reached St Katharine's and we were obviously not welcome. We were



able to see the Well of Jesse and the "burning bush" but to our eternal disappointment, and much grumbling, we were not allowed in the church to view the icons. Still, we had seen inside this fortress-like building which has provided a sanctuary from the surrounding desert for over a thousand years.

We were not expecting very high standards from our hotel, after all it was hundreds of

miles from anywhere, but my wife's description of a "run-down holiday camp" says it all. After a meal I went straight to bed and slept until a wakeup call at about midnight, because ten of us had signed up to climb Mount Sinai. There were only ten from our party but there were many more from other groups.

A group of Bedouin came to offer their camels, at a price, for the trek up the mountain but something else caught my immediate attention. It turned out to be a metal detector gateway, the sort you would expect to see at an airport – not on a remote mountainside, several hundred miles from civilization!



We all dutifully filed through this gateway, but the Bedouin and their camels seemed exempt. (I have often wondered how you would get a camel through a metal-detecting gateway; it could be a similar problem to getting a camel through the eye of a needle!)

The path up the mountain was boulder-strewn but well-marked, and I soon learned, the hard way, that camels have right of way. The Bedouin provided impromptu coffee stalls, one almost on the summit itself. Gradually the light improved and somewhere on the eastern horizon we could see signs of dawn. It was a disappointing sunrise, but we had accomplished what we set out to do. In daylight, and going downhill, the path was so much easier and I seemed to be down in no time.



A late start

On arrival at the Monastery I found our tour guide waiting impatiently. He had plans for an early start but some of the slower members of our party had other ideas. Eventually I persuaded our driver to return to the hotel so that some of us could, at least, have a shower and some breakfast. When the last of our party had been rounded up we were ready to start our trek across the last part of the Sinai Desert. We could have spent all day on this journey. We did not see any other traffic apart from a few camel trains and the scenery was stunning. Red sandstone cliffs rose above sandy desert as far as the eye could see and there was not a human habitation in sight. All too soon, we arrived at Nuweiba on the Gulf of Aquaba for our departure by catamaran for the next stage of our journey to Jordan, Petra and Mount Nebo.

There was no need for the hurry: our guide had confused the time of our ferry and we had to wait many hours in a disgusting shed for our catamaran. So much had gone wrong in Egypt that I said "this the end of Newman Pilgrimages". Fortunately I was proved wrong!

The Breaking of Bread

How could we know your meaning Lord?

How understand your strange command?

Yet it was you who told us this,

You whom we'd come to love and trust

And know to be the Lord.

How could we eat your flesh and drink your blood

When you were there amongst us living still?

An understanding only came,

And came but dimly then,

When cruel men had slain you on a cross

Leaving us all bewildered and afraid.

Only when you returned, and walked with us,

And broke the bread, did revelation truly come –

A revelation for all time and for the world.

John Mulholland

29 October 2020



Letter to the Editor

Finding Space in a Crowded World

Dear Sir

I found your article in the November issue most thought-provoking. Your selection from Pope Francis's wise words does not however mention Pius XI's 'subsidiarity', thereby overlooking the reason why its opposite (diverse nations drawn into top-down political unity by shared currency and international investment) is causing "a new and dramatic setback" to the "slow and demanding march towards" the Catholic and United Nations aim of "an increasingly united and just world" . .

With my seven children, world population has long been on my mind, our contribution making up for a British average below two per mother but ending when our family overcrowded a much bigger house. Pope Paul's *Humanae Vitae* was too 'black and white' in its top-down condemnation of contraception. Things are not just 'good' or 'evil' but there are shades like 'mistaken' or 'wicked' in between. What makes things wicked is persuading others to make mistakes; what makes them evil is persuading people that bad is good. Contraception certainly is not good, but it can become a necessary evil, and Christ's advice was not to judge others in case you pass judgement on yourself - which Pope Paul seems to have done. Why is it evil to forego having children for the sake of others?

So the problem moved on; we had the Club of Rome spelling out the equivalent of a Covid 'R' factor greater than 1, Pope John Paul II applauding the Green Revolution, and Pope Francis becoming aware of the pollution problem but blaming consumerism alone rather than the influence of population growth. We now have educated people taking the law into their own hands, so in some countries birth rates are below replacement levels, while consumerism increases because, with fewer people, more get richer. In control theory terms this correction is known as 'overshoot'.

Starvation amidst plenty

In some countries population becomes stabilised by wars and enforced emigration, and in China top-down controllers have kept the birth rate down by rationing, but in some other countries 'R' is kept high for political reasons. This leads to uneven population growth and starvation in the midst of what on the whole is still plenty. Your article does a splendid job of detailing what observers can see happening here.

Why I am commenting on this as a scientist is that science is about discovering what one can't see, so that conditions necessary for them to act are not being provided. In the case of birth control and economies that involves not just unimaginable global targets but meaningful local ones, like roughly how many people doing what should we aim to have in our village, and information not only on births, marriages and deaths but on pregnancies, so that we have time to choose to coordinate our child-bearing and educational provision in the future.

Let me stress that this is about principles, not blueprints. The principles need to be discussed and they are not. If we can't learn to discuss this among ourselves, how will the message ever get through to politicians?

Dave Taylor, Worcester Circle

Endangered by Covid-19

Various Newman events have been postponed or are threatened by pandemic regulations but have not been cancelled. This page gives a brief reminder of the activities which it may become possible to stage in due course.

Newman Pilgrimage to Ravenna, September 13th to 18th 2021

About 15 people have so far booked for this Pilgrimage which is still going ahead but remains threatened by the course of the pandemic in both the UK and Italy. Flights can be booked but a great deal will depend on regulations in Italy and the UK at the time of the Pilgrimage, including any requirements for quarantine.

The Next AGM for the year 2020-21

Last year's 2019-20 AGM in Newcastle had to be postponed until January this year and held on Zoom. The Association has retained a provisional booking with the County Hotel, Newcastle, and a meeting there this year is still intended, but the timing will depend upon Covid-19 regulations and the progress of the Newman's current application for the status of Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).



Manchester Newman Lecture

The Situation of Christians In the Arab World
Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald



London Newman Lecture

Freedom, Authority and the Challenge of the
'Isolated Conscience'
Austen Ivereigh



How to hold meetings online

For more than a year now the local Circles of the Newman Association have been unable to hold normal meetings because of Covid-19 restrictions and although the lockdown is gradually being relaxed it remains far from clear when it will be possible for normal service to be resumed. A few Circles have, however, been experimenting with the Zoom application which enables video and audio communication using the internet. It is difficult to reach all of the membership because many do not have the necessary computers or smartphones but an opportunity exists.

It is easy enough for anybody to set up a Zoom meeting independently without buying membership or otherwise paying a fee but this basic service is limited to meetings with a maximum length of 40 minutes. And because it often takes several minutes to open a meeting involving the connection of a number of participants the effective practical duration can be significantly less. The Newman's Council has therefore approved the opening of a dedicated Newman account through which meetings of an unlimited length will be possible. This floating licence is available for all Newman Circles to make use of. At the time of writing, however, only the Hertfordshire and Manchester/ North Cheshire Circles have done so.

Access to the floating licence is possible by contacting Michael Hamill, the Newman's webmaster and technical consultant. He will supply the required codes but he will ensure that there are no clashes: it is not really possible for two circles to use the connection on the same day. If demand from the circles turns out to be heavy then it might be possible for the Association to buy a second monthly licence but that is not under consideration at present. Alternatively individual circles could buy their own licences if they expect to be heavy users of the service. The Pro licence costs £11.99 a month and can be used for meetings of up to 100 people with effectively unlimited duration. This might be cheaper than hiring premises in the normal way.

Michael Hamill can be reached on myk@smartsgroup.co.uk
Barry Riley



A screenful of Newman members

Annual General Meeting on Zoom, January 16th

The Annual General Meeting of The Newman Association which was originally scheduled to be held in Newcastle on June 13th 2020 was eventually held online on January 16th 2021. The Covid-19 epidemic had made it impossible for members to meet in a physical location and so a conference on Zoom was arranged. This was experimental but the AGM proceeded successfully at 2.30pm on a Saturday afternoon after an initial resolution to hold the AGM remotely was passed by 33 votes to one against. There was an early intervention by Arthur McLay, the Glasgow Circle



President, Winifred Flanagan on Zoom

member who had strongly opposed parts of a new constitution proposed by Council at the AGM in St Albans in June 2018. This time he argued that the change to charitable status should not have been presented to a Zoom-type meeting. "It should have been delayed until a normal AGM could have been arranged," he said.

The total attendance at the online meeting was approximately 40. In her report the President, Winifred Flanagan, thanked two officers standing down, Brian Hamill, Hon Secretary, and Kevin Ryan, Treasurer. Both, she said, had done the "heavy lifting" without which the Association could not exist as a legal entity. Ms Flanagan then looked forward to the future, saying that Pope Francis had opened the way for exciting possibilities. She looked forward to a "Synodal" Church which would be less "top-down" and would give lay men and women a more active role.

In his farewell report Brian Hamill, the Secretary for the previous four years, commented on a number of challenges. He was disappointed that only one member had come forward to join the central Council, putting pressure on existing officers and requiring responsibilities to be outsourced from non-members. Secondly, the updating of the Constitution had been delayed by the failure by some 5 votes of a resolution at the AGM in 2019. Although the change of status to that of Charitable Incorporated Organisation was going ahead the question of open membership would have to be dealt with in the future. Thirdly, the Covid problem had brought most Circle activities to a juddering halt but work was in progress to enable Circles to become active online.

A surplus for the year

The retiring Treasurer, Kevin Ryan, reported a surplus of £4,887 for the year 2019-20 but this was because of a rise in the value of the Association's investments by £7,451. Otherwise there would have been a deficit of £1,807. Due to ill-health he was being forced to give up the position of Treasurer and because no successor from the Association's membership was willing to take full responsibility Council had approved the appointment of David Swallow, the Independent Examiner, to take on the accounting part of the work. Anthony Baker, nominated as the next Treasurer,

would work with David Swallow on behalf of Council. Paul Wright would become Independent Examiner for the financial year 2020-21.

The meeting then turned to resolutions concerning CIO status. Resolution One concerned terms of office by charity trustees. It was passed by 33 votes for and none against.

Resolution Two provided that the existing trustees of the Newman Association would become the first trustees of the CIO. This was passed by 32 votes with none against.

Election results

The results were then announced of voting by members, using proxies, on three Special Resolutions. These stated that a revised constitution would be adopted, that the Association would apply to the Charity Commission for CIO status in England and Wales and that the Association would apply to the Scottish Charity Regulator for Scottish CIO status. All these three resolutions were passed by the same majority vote of 70 for and 4 against. John Duddington, a Newman member who had been advising Council on CIO status, said that he would approach the Charity Commission and the Scottish regulator for approval.

The results of the elections of Officers and Council members were then announced. These elections had been completed by proxy ahead of the meeting. For President, Winifred Flanagan was elected by 75 votes for and 2 against; for Secretary, Sophie Rudge was elected by 77 votes for and none against; for Treasurer, Anthony Baker was elected by 76 votes for and 1 against. These three would join on Council Alex Mthobi, Patricia Egerton and Harcourt Concannon who all had a year of their office terms to run.

As is customary the meeting closed with the approval of the sending of a greeting, with the Annual Report, to all the Archbishops of England and Wales and Scotland to keep them informed of our continued activities. Winifred Flanagan then invited the chaplain, Mgr Patrick Kilgariff, to complete the meeting with a prayer and a blessing.

Barry Riley



Newman members attending the online AGM

Pax Romana 1921-2021

Shocked by the horrors of the 1914-18 war, a group of Catholic students from Europe, Argentina and Java (now Indonesia) met in Fribourg in 1921 to establish an organisation which, they hoped, would enable students to live in peace with each other. I quote here from my article on the history of Pax Romana on pp18-22 of The Newman issue of January 2013.



The new organisation, which soon adopted the name, Pax Romana, grew rapidly and held its first international congress in 1922. At the same time, the "University Catholic Societies' Federation" was formed in the UK and two delegates were sent to the Pax Romana congress. The two groups continued to grow and interact but the outbreak of war in 1939 severely limited the scope of Pax Romana!

In the UK, the graduate section of the University Catholic Societies' Federation became the Newman Association in 1942 and the revived Pax Romana followed the same pattern at the 1946 congress, splitting into separate graduate (ICMICA-MIIC) and student (IMCS) branches. Hence Pax Romana celebrates two anniversaries, 1921 and 1946. The 90th anniversary in 2011 coincided with a European Assembly in Cologne while the student branch were celebrating the anniversary with fellow students from around the world. One notable absence was the UK except for the retiring International Chaplain Fr Chris McCoy!

Plenary Assembly

The Pax Romana Plenary Assembly has been rearranged to a virtual assembly; the revised dates are from **11th to 12th December 2021. This assembly will mark the centenary of the initial foundation of Pax Romana.** I expect further information will be available during the year and I can be contacted at newsletter@newman.org.uk
Kevin Lambert

Membership Report

In recent months we have welcomed Ms Elizabeth Hines as a new member for Hertfordshire Circle, and Canon E Stewart, the Chaplain to Coventry Circle, as an honorary member.

However, in these difficult times for the whole country, we have been made aware of the deaths of the following members (noting the Circle with which they were most recently associated):

Miss S Ross and Mr J Stevens (Herts); Ms P MacDonald (N Merseyside); Mrs C Wiggins (Wimbledon); Mrs M Grimm and Mr D Bartley (London); Mrs N C Green (Ealing); Dr O Urwin (N Staffs); Mr J A Vivian (N Glos); Mr D Cairns (Tyneside).

May they rest in peace, and may the Lord comfort their families and friends.

Patricia Egerton (Membership Registrar)

Three Book Reviews

***Newman: A Human Harp of Many Chords* by Peter Conley. Alive Publishing, £9.99**

From St John Henry Newman's formidable lifelong library of letters, sermons, tracts, hymns, poems, books and diaries Fr Peter Conley has assembled a fascinating collection of observations, insights and wisdom.

Was Newman a cold, remote, saintly figure? Well, not exactly: he liked billiards, played the violin and read novels. Indeed, he wrote two novels himself: one was *Loss and Gain*, published in 1848, shortly after his conversion to Catholicism in 1845. It described the experiences of Charles Reding, an Oxford undergraduate embroiled in the religious turmoil which was gripping the university city in the 1820s. That sounds a touch autobiographical.

An early poem

The title of Fr Conley's concise book is derived from an early poem written by Newman in 1927. "Come, add a string to my assortment of sound", it continues. "Widen the compass of my harmony." Fr Conley discovered from his research that Newman had a sweet tooth, a love of coffee and of all things horticultural. Living in Birmingham he punctuated his conversation with the phrases of the local "Brummagem" as he called them.

This book opens with St John Henry's own thought on saints, as expressed in a reflection on the life of St Philip Neri, founder of the Oratorian Congregation where Newman found his spiritual home in 1848 after investigating and rejecting several alternatives. He wrote that it was important to understand the lights and shades of the saintly character. On St Philip, sometimes known as God's jester: "To find a saint sitting down to cards or reading a heathen author, or listening to music or taking snuff, is often a relief and an encouragement to the reader, as convincing him that grace does not supersede nature."

Newman was in his prime in the immediate aftermath of the creation of the Penny Post and letters were his primary medium of communication. He saw writing letters as a major part of his pastoral ministry, and wrote for hours each day to a huge assortment of men and women of all ages and social backgrounds. Most of his letters were carefully filed away.

Fr Conley also provides other intriguing insights into Newman's way of life. He tended to spice all kinds of food with curry powder, for instance, and he also liked barley sugar, damson tarts and almond cakes. In one letter he expressed annoyance at the slow arrival of a violin being delivered by N W Rail; he was a good enough violinist to enjoy playing Beethoven string quartets.

Education of the laity

Members of the Newman Association will treasure St John Henry most of all for his promotion of the idea of the educated laity. Learning, he said, was vital if men and women were to be able to fulfil their vocation to be living witnesses to Christ. He praised people "who know what they hold and what they do not, who know their Creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that

they can defend it”.

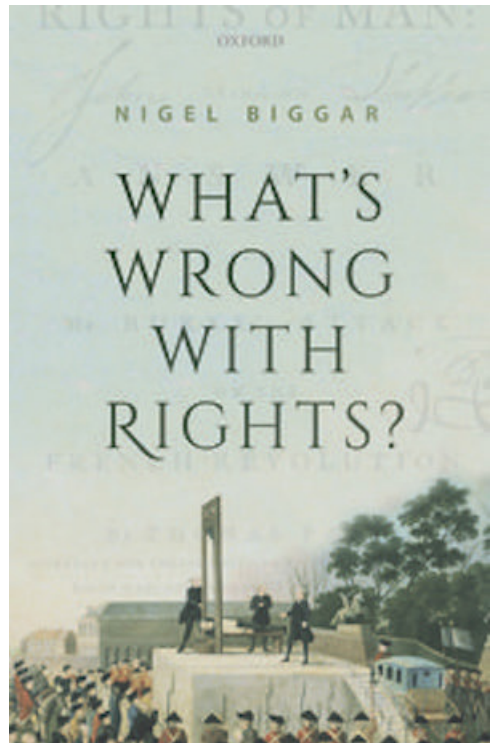
That 1827 poem concluded: “Join thyself in fellowship of name with those whose courteous labour and fair gifts have given me voice, and made me what I am.” Fr Peter Conley has certainly provided some courteous labour and the nature of St John Henry Newman is elegantly spelt out in this book.

Barry Riley

***What's Wrong with Rights?* by Nigel Biggar (Oxford University Press, 2020), 334 pp. + bibliography and index (Hardback £30.00) ISBN: 978-0-19-886197-3**

This stimulating assault on much of contemporary 'rights-talk', written from a Christian perspective by the Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford, is welcome on several grounds. First it brings clarity to an area where much muddled thinking has often prevailed; second because, whilst by no means anti-human rights, it forces one to re-examine current theories of human rights, including one's own; and finally because, whilst securely grounded in the historical and religious basis of human rights, it also engages with current applications of what the author sees as fashionable and often misguided human rights theories. In the process one finds oneself alternatively agreeing and disagreeing with the author but each time through having one's own ideas both forcefully and elegantly challenged.

The first chapters take us through four views of natural rights theory beginning with the “Sceptical Tradition”; then looking at natural rights theory before and after 1776 (pre- and post- the US Declaration of Independence); and then in Chapter 4 to the modern Roman Catholic tradition. Much of this is detailed and at times technical material but worth reading as it leads on to the author's central thesis. Before coming to this, however, one ought to note in Chapter 4 his exposition of the work of Jacques Maritain, the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* of Pope Pius XI, the war time broadcasts of Pius XII and *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII. In this connection he mentions, rightly I think, that although the popes have spoken of individual rights and the common good



they, as he puts it, are not much help in establishing how they relate to each other.

In connection with *Pacem in Terris* I would have liked to see what he made of Pope John XIII's point that although we have rights we ourselves also have duties arising out of those rights which we owe to ourselves. Thus at para. 28 he states:

The natural rights of which We have so far been speaking are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person. These rights and duties derive their origin, their sustenance, and their indestructibility from the natural law, which in conferring the one imposes the other.

This is then followed at para. 29 with examples:

Thus, for example, the right to live involves the duty to preserve one's life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it. This very effectively cuts across the sterile debate about whether rights are just selfish individualism: they are not.

Moral obligations

Biggar sees a deeper problem: the fact that rights are seen as legal constructs has led to the whole notion of rights being hopelessly confused with moral obligations. He feels that we are too happy to talk about *rights*, but very reluctant and shy to talk about *morality*. Taking the right to free speech as an instance, this may be abused by behaviour which, although not strictly illegal, is certainly immoral such as, in his words, gratuitous insult, wilful provocation and malicious provocation. The result will often be to call the whole notion of free speech into disrepute because I have not complied with my moral duty to use my right to it well.

Moreover, he notes that rights – and how they are labelled – can be used as a vehicle for promoting certain goods which may not in fact be universal goods at all. One example is from Canada where he carefully analyses a judgement from the Canadian Supreme Court that held that there was a constitutional right to euthanasia in certain circumstances. The court had used the term '*physician-assisted dying*' rather than '*physician-assisted suicide*' with its connotation of killing or even the stronger term '*killing on request*'. This then led one judge to agree that there is no ethical distinction between '*physician-assisted dying*' and other end-of-life practices such as palliative care. Put like this then, as Biggar says, the distinction may indeed sometimes be muddy as where a dying patient in great pain is given a dose of morphia to ease pain but also in the knowledge that it is likely to hasten death. However, if we use the term '*physician-assisted suicide*' and the '*death-risking treatment*' of, say, administering a large dose of morphia, then the distinction between the two is noticeably clear. Thus we see here, in what one might almost call underhand ways, a Rubicon crossed with euthanasia allowed.

There is much in this stimulating book with which I, as a Catholic and a lawyer, would disagree. I contend, in opposition to the author, that a system of natural law *does* exist against which secular law can be judged. However, this is another debate. Let me simply commend this book for its clarity of reasoning and its engagement with fundamental issues with which we should all, and especially in The Newman Association, be discussing.

John Duddington

The Ecumenical Chaplaincy of St Albans Cathedral
Personal Reflections and Recollections, by Pamela McElroy

Anne Riley writes: I have been reading this book, in which Pamela McElroy has gathered 30 testimonies which trace the development and achievement of the Ecumenical Chaplaincy of St Albans Cathedral, and I feel moved to share my own personal reflections and recollections.



St Albans Cathedral

The testimonies were gathered over a period of five years from interviews with key contributors, clergy and lay, about half of whom were current or former Ecumenical Chaplains. They were all asked the same questions, inviting them to reflect on their experiences and memories from which a narrative emerges of the development of the Chaplaincy from the point of view of those most involved. I was fascinated by their accounts and impressed by their vision and commitment to the cause of ecumenism. Pamela is an associate member of the Hertfordshire Circle of the Newman Association and is to be congratulated on creating a beautiful record of an important subject. The many photographs of both people and the Cathedral enhance the narrative and stimulate interest.

The chaplaincy was founded in 1983 following the papal visit of Pope John Paul II in 1982: Father Robert Plourde was in a parish in Gunnersbury and he organised a pilgrimage to St Albans in 1983 in thanksgiving for the Pope's visit and to pray for Christian unity. The ecumenical Christian Study Centre soon started leading eventually to the founding of the Ecumenical Chaplaincy.

The ecumenical chaplains were originally Anglican, Catholic and Free-Church and now include Lutheran and Orthodox members. Father Robert himself was the first RC chaplain and he began the practice of celebrating Mass in the Lady Chapel every Friday



Catholic Mass in the Lady Chapel

at 12 noon which continues to the present day; in fact in 2019 we were delighted to join the Hertfordshire Circle at one of these weekly Masses to celebrated the canonisation of John Henry Newman (and greatly enjoyed lunch afterwards in the Abbot's Kitchen!)

So what other memories did the book awaken for me,

living as I do in Ealing? Well, I recall that in 1979, Benedictine monks including those from our parish, Ealing Abbey, were invited to attend an historic ceremony for the re-interment of medieval abbots' bones at St Albans. This event marked the beginning of an ongoing relationship between St Albans and the Benedictines (Anglican and Catholic).

As members of the Ealing Circle, we have been aware of collaborations between the Cathedral and the Hertfordshire Circle of the Newman Association. We attended two jointly organised conferences: firstly in 2003, 20 years since the Chaplaincy



Left to right Canon Iain Lane, Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Reverend Elizabeth Welch and Archbishop Rowan Williams

was founded, *May They All Be One....But How?* The speakers were prominent representatives of various denominations including Archbishop Rowan Williams, Cardinal Walter Kasper and Rev. Elizabeth Welch. Secondly, in 2017 we attended the conference *1517 and All That* to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and to consider its relevance today.

Personal testimonies

It is significant that the Mission Statement of the Abbey includes the following: Becoming the people of God in this place as a Christian congregation, together with fellow Christian Churches. The importance of the Ecumenical Chaplaincy of St Albans Cathedral in furthering the cause of Christian Unity is clearly demonstrated in this book full of inspiring personal testimonies. It reminded me of the hopes we had for the progress of Christian unity following the Second Vatican Council and the visit of Pope John Paul II to this country. Sadly, I am disappointed that progress seems to have been slower than we hoped, and I pray that the testimonies presented here and the work of the Chaplaincy will re-ignite enthusiasm for this cause so dear to our hearts.

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Spirituality Page

Blessed Hermann the lame

We are all familiar with the *Salve Regina* and the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* but their reputed author still languishes in quite undeserved obscurity. For Hermann the lame was one of the most remarkable men of the Middle Ages and his life and achievements are a salutary lesson for us today.

He was born in Altshausen in Swabia, in the south of modern Germany, in 1013 to noble parents, his father being the local Count. But from his birth it was clear that he had serious disabilities; it is not entirely clear what these were but it is thought that he may have had a cleft palate and also cerebral palsy and very likely scoliosis. By the age of seven he could hardly speak and he could not move even a few feet without aid but it was obvious that his mind was sharp and clear. His parents took him to the abbey of Reichenau where his father told the Abbot that although Hermann could not speak "he can see things that I can't".

Thus began a remarkable career ending with Hermann, by then Abbot of the monastery, dying in 1054. He never managed to speak clearly nor could he ever move far unaided but he triumphed over his disabilities to lead a life distinguished by great intellectual achievements accompanied by transparent holiness. He was responsible for the introduction or reintroduction into the West from the Islamic world of various astronomical instruments including the astrolabe, and there is a wonderful story of his demonstrating its use to trace the path of the sun to enthralled students. He wrote poetry, a book teaching multiplication and division with the abacus, a chronicle of the world from the birth of Christ and a book on music.



Moreover, through all this his cheerful personality and positive outlook on life came through. In the words of Berthold, the chronicler of the monastery, he was *hilarissimus*, always laughing, and, in a revealing phrase, Berthold said that he "*Tota alacritate festivus*", that is, he made haste to be cheerful. Hermann was buried at his family home at Altshausen in Swabia, where relics of him may be seen to this day, but he remains relatively little-known, certainly in English-speaking lands. There is no modern biography of him, the only written account of his life being in a little book by Fr. Martindale entitled *The Household of God*. Published in 1935, this book also contains lives of two other saints, but Hermann deserves more study as his life has much to teach us today.

Now we have detailed laws about disability, endless policies and procedures, social services, health budgets, personal independence payments and a host of other ways which aim to ensure that those with disabilities are not discriminated against and lead as full and as rich a life as possible. There was none of this in the eleventh century but his parents, fellow-monks and doubtless others saw a person before them, a child of God, and they saw his potential. The question abides, and the answer may be a disturbing one: what would his fate be today?

To end on a positive note, as Hermann would wish, the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is perhaps slightly less well known than the *Salve Regina*. In the month of May, the month of Mary, it is appropriate to be reminded of his great prayer:

*Loving mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,
Yet remained a virgin after as before.
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,
have pity on us poor sinners.*

Anne and John Duddington



Easter Thoughts

It's all there in the texts,
How Peter went wrong,
Floundering in the water,

Denying He must suffer,
And again at his trial,
Fleeing the cross.

Only the women stayed,
Some by the cross,
More at a distance.

They fed him in Galilee,
Followed him to Jerusalem,
And now visited the tomb.

It was to them He returned,
While they told the twelve,
Who promptly took charge.

Still the women wait
But Peter remains
In denial.

Terry Wright