

THE Newman



THE JOURNAL OF THE NEWMAN ASSOCIATION

September 2015

Issue No. 96

£3.00

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Gerard Manley Hopkins and Priest-Poets

David Jasper

Aspects of John Henry Newman

Albert Radcliffe

The Persistence of Idolatry

Report on Hawarden AGM
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Printing: Silver Pines Services, Sevenoaks

Articles, comments, etc.: Should be sent to Barry Riley by email at editor@newman.org.uk – items should be sent in Word format as an attachment or as an embedded text within the email. Hard-copy items may be sent by post to 17 Mount Pleasant Road, London W5 1SG. Tel: 020 8998 5829. Articles should not normally exceed 3,000 words.

Copy Deadline: for next issue is **November 15th**.

The Newman: is published by the Newman Association, 20-22 Bedford Row, London W1K 4JS. **Website:** <http://www.newman.org.uk>. Unless the Editor is informed in advance that contributors wish to refuse permission for online use of their material, The Newman Association may use on its website any article or other material contributed to *The Newman*. Unless the article has been previously published elsewhere with copyright assigned, copyright will reside with the author, The Newman and the Newman Association. In this case an author may republish his or her material elsewhere with the permission of the Association and printed acknowledgement of its prior appearance in *The Newman*.

Email: info@newman.org.uk

British Library Reference Number: ISSN-0951-5399

Back numbers: copies of a number of previous issues of *The Newman* are available from the editor - see contact details above.

The Newman Association Charity No. 1006709

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Cover picture: *Terra cotta head of Gerard Manley Hopkins* by Rosanne Keller, 1990

Comment

Next month bishops from around the world will reconvene in Rome for the second and final session of the synod on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family*. Decisions will eventually emerge from the discussions but although they will be modernising in nature they are unlikely to be revolutionary.

During and after the first session there was an enormous amount of press speculation about attitudes to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. But the *Lineamenta*, or preliminary document, devotes only two short paragraphs to these subjects. Maybe some of the bishops will have been shaken by the result of the Irish referendum on same-sex marriage earlier this year but the focus of the synod will remain almost entirely on the permanence of marriage between men and women and the basis of the proper pastoral approach to the needs of divorced and remarried Catholics in a modern environment.

The fundamental anomaly remains that marriage and the family will be discussed at this Synod by men (not women) who have had little or no direct personal experience of family life since they were children. Unmarried priests in parishes, however, have to relate all the time to engaged youngsters on the one hand and divorced and remarried people on the other. As far as the latter are concerned many of the priests turn a blind eye at the Communion rail. But a divorced Catholic recently described divorce to me as “the most unforgiveable sin of all”. Unlike for murderers and rapists there is no solution in the confessional.

Some bishops are looking for ways of circumventing this inflexibility. There has been discussion, for instance, of a possible distinction between “Spiritual Communion” and “Sacramental Communion”. Also, annulment offers an escape route but it is a real hot potato. Should such decisions on the validity of marriages be delegated, on the basis of subsidiarity, to local bishops? Not all bishops seem very keen, partly because they do not want the responsibility but also because it would be impossible to apply a universal standard. Delegated annulment could amount to a global postcode lottery. However, Pope Francis has just announced proposals to streamline the annulment process.

How dangerous is it for the Church to be getting out of touch with the real world? The conservative approach is that the laity should seek better formation and be more adequately informed about the Church. But should the Church, too, be better informed about modern culture?

There are several previous examples to be pointed to. The Church largely ignored the intrusion of bio-technology into sexuality and fertility, with profound consequences. Similarly the Church has mostly ignored the consequences of greatly lengthened life expectancy which is influencing the attitudes of young people to lifelong contracts. But the Church fears that if it modernises it will destroy its links to its inherited wisdom and will cripple its authority, the magisterium upon which depends its claims to infallibility. The great danger, however, is that the *magisterium* – the infallible judgment of the Pope in combination with the bishops – will prove to be incompatible with the *sensus fidelium*, the belief of the faithful as a whole. In such a contest the magisterium will win; but it will turn out to be a pyrrhic victory.

Barry Riley

Gerard Manley Hopkins and Priest-Poets

By Michael Burgess

This is an edited version of a talk delivered at St Beuno's, the Jesuit spirituality centre in North Wales, immediately following the Newman AGM at Hawarden on June 13th

Traditionally there are six things that God does not know: what a Benedictine does with his time, what a secular priest does with his money, what a Franciscan is going to say when he goes up into the pulpit, what a Dominican has said when he gets down from the pulpit, how many orders of women's communities there are – and finally, what a Jesuit is thinking. It reminds me of that Anna Massey film where she plays a nun in charge of a girls' class and singles out one of the girls in her charge. The girl has been rumoured to have been reading and even thinking about her faith. "Thinking about your faith? What right have you to think about your faith?" queries the nun. "That's what the Jesuits are there for." I mention that film scene because we are meeting in this Jesuit house of St Beuno's, aware of how the Society of Jesus was one of the great forces in the Counter-Reformation, powerful in its teaching and work in schools, powerful as confessors to kings and queens, and powerful in missionary work.



Gerard Manley Hopkins

By the 19th century in this country – and we are looking at that period with Gerard Manley Hopkins – the Jesuit loomed in popular Victorian fiction often as a villain of the blackest dye, gliding with a noiseless step into the room, as one novel expresses it. In the Protestant and Anglican imaginations there was a deep suspicion, fear and even hatred of the Jesuits. And yet it was that order that Hopkins entered. He lived here at St Beuno's from 1874 producing some of his happiest poems, and it is a popular belief that it was in this room that the Rector asked Hopkins to produce what became his greatest poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

The Jesuit contribution

In the last months of 1881 he wrote several letters to Canon Richard W Dixon, his great friend and fellow poet, on the subject of the Jesuit contribution to literature and culture and on his own vocation as a poet: "Our society values and has contributed to literature, to culture, but only as a means to an end....for genius attracts fame and individual fame St Ignatius looked on as the most dangerous and dazzling of all attractions." But Hopkins went on to list several Jesuit poets: "There was a certain Fr Beschi who in southern Hindustan composed an epic which has become one of the Tamul classics and is spoken of with unbounded admiration by those who can read it. But this was in India, far from home, and one can well understand that fame among

Hindu pundits need not turn the head of an Italian. In England we had Fr Southwell, a minor poet, but still a poet...then, what a genius was Campion himself! Was not he a poet?"

We could widen the boundaries of this phenomenon of the priest-poet beyond the Society of Jesus back to the Middle Ages: to the great hymn writers, Adam of St Victor and St Thomas Aquinas. We could point to the flowering of priest-poets in the 16th and 17th centuries: John Donne ordained in 1615, George Herbert turning from the pursuit of worldly ambition to become a priest at Bemerton near Salisbury, Robert Herrick, Thomas Traherne, and Thomas Vaughan, the twin brother of the more famous Henry Vaughan and Rector of Llansantffraid in Wales.

In the 19th century, in an age when Tennyson and Browning used poetry to voice Victorian doubts about Christianity and the Christian God, there were priests for whom poetry could express their Christian faith: John Keble, John Henry Newman, Frederick Faber, Richard Watson Dixon, Stephen Hawker in Cornwall and Hopkins himself.

In the last century we could point to Andrew Young, who began his ministry as a

Presbyterian minister and was ordained into the Anglican Church in 1939, and the two important Welsh poets, Euros Bowen, who ministered in a parish near Lake Bala, and R S Thomas, who was a parish priest in north-west Wales. And in our own century: Peter Levi who died in 2000, David Scott in Winchester, Rowan Williams, Peter Walker from Llandudno who is the national poet of the Church in Wales, and Rachel Mann, priest and poet in residence at Manchester Cathedral.

For all of them priestly ministry and poetic creativity inspired each other. The poet's seeing eye illuminated all that priesthood involved: vocation, God, prayer, suffering and pastoral ministry. Karl Rahner, the great Jesuit theologian, wrote an essay in volume 3 of his *Theological Investigations* entitled *Priest and Poet* in which he explored this phenomenon of the two vocations and how they can become one and the same. The essay in fact began its life as a preface to a volume of poems by the Jesuit Jorge Blagot.

Rahner sees the unity of the two vocations lying in the concept of the word. To the poet, he writes, is entrusted the word and he uses words creatively. For Rahner, the poet is the one capable of speaking these primordial words in powerful concentration. And what is a priest? Someone entrusted with the efficacious word of God himself, bestowed as a gift and as mission – the word spoken by God who is Jesus. The priest is entrusted with this primordial word of God in such a way that he can speak the word *Jesus* in its absolute, concentrated power. The priesthood releases poetic existence and



Michael Burgess

sets it free to attain its ultimate purpose, at the same time discovering in the grace of poetic power a charism for its own perfection. Thus the priest calls upon the poet, so that the poet's primordial words may become the vessels of the divine word, in which the priest can effectively proclaim the word of God.

The essay is a fascinating one, and I have only stated it summarily. But Rahner is showing the possibility of two vocations existing in a tension that is creative – if you like, grace perfecting nature. The Word Jesus answering the words the poet utters in questioning longing. This is indeed how many priest-poets have seen their vocation. Robert Southwell, who died in 1594, in his preface to *St Peter's Complaint*, wrote how poetry was a gift to exercise our devotion, not just the fawnings and follies of love. "With David, verse to vertue I apply" to make hymns of spiritual love, however much he was aware of singing the canticles of the Lord in a strange land. George Herbert in the dedication to *The Temple* wrote:

*Lord, my first-fruits present themselves to thee;
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
And must return. Accept of them and me,
And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.*

Robert Herrick, who served in the rural parish of Dean Prior in south Devon in the 17th century, wrote in the *Argument to the Hesperides* that his aim was to see the world as a unity: sacred and secular are one in God their creator and redeemer.

*I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds and bowers,
Of April, May, of June and July flowers....
I write of Hell; I sing (and ever shall)
Of Heaven, and hope to have it after all.*

Thomas Traherne, who was a parish priest in Herefordshire in the mid-17th century, used words in his poetry and *The Centuries* to capture his delight in the world, a delight which is childlike and immediate, a delight which sees God in all things. For Andrew Young, words are used to show similarly that the things of creation are spiritual experiences. For Euros Bowen, writing for the most part in Welsh, nature was a treasury of images and the poet was like a sacramental priest, making images and words sacraments to show forth their author, God. Rowan Williams in his volumes of poems focused often on remembering – the Holy Land, a group of girls at the bus stop, Tolstoy at a railway station – and the act of remembering is like the anamnesis at the mass. Remembering somehow makes them present and shows them in their more than ordinary, their extraordinary uniqueness.

The spiritual dimension to poetry

Canon Dixon, a constant friend of Hopkins, by contrast seemed to have seen poetry in a much more utilitarian fashion. In a letter to Hopkins, he said he wrote poetry to keep accidie (apathy) at bay while serving in his Carlisle parish of Hayton. Hopkins of course was much more aware of the spiritual dimension to poetry and so he continually urged his friends Robert Bridges, Richard Dixon and Coventry Patmore to publish and to consider that the poet represented that kind of spiritual force I have shown in those priest-poets: a spiritual force that speaks for the good of the nation and the world.

We can see this creative tension of language and words on the one hand, reaching out to the mystery of God, who is, on the other hand, here with us as the divine word made flesh in much that Hopkins wrote. Throughout his Journals, we realise how he was fascinated by words and language – by dialect words to describe the cutting of corn, for example; by the pronunciation of Latin; by rumination about the nature of words; and by his concepts of instress and inscape. “He gave us eyes to see them and lips that we might tell”; those words from the popular hymn seem to me to sum up the vocation and achievement of Hopkins the priest-poet. Eyes to see and lips to tell – Jesus, the Lord of all that is, perfects the creation which the eyes look upon. Jesus, the Word, perfects the words of the poet which he uses to describe that reality.

What I think gives Hopkins his unique potency in vision and poem is that ability to look and see, and see to the heart of all that is. In 1872 Hopkins chanced upon Dun Scotus’ concept of *haecceitas*: the *thisness* of every individual being in God’s creation. This was a eureka moment or a Damascus experience for the poet. He wrote that “it may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God”. It was a mercy for it harnessed his observation of the infinite detail of the natural world to his love of Christ. Hopkins looked and looked, and he somehow unravelled the complex beauty of creation by taking the time to stand and stare: to look, to ponder, and to find the words that express the reality he was seeing.

We gather here 126 years after his death, and I think that is what can provide a beacon and a light in this hectic pace of life and movement and progress which many call “the hurry syndrome”. We easily get caught up in it, and it leads to an offhand way with words. It is the cult of immediate satisfaction that marks our world and prevents us from taking the time to look and think and express. Hopkins looks at sunsets and then he mines his repository of words to find exactly and precisely the ones that will convey the special quality of each sunset. As a result he likens them to yellow lilies, golden candle wax, the flowers of the wild mallow, pink and mauve, crimson ice and oil. It is part and parcel of his delight and wonder at creation around him.

At Stonyhurst after a shower of rain he was often to be seen running down the path that led to the college to stare at the quartz in the pathway, glistening in the sun. “The slate slabs of the urinals even are frosted with graceful sprays,” he wrote in 1870. “I have particular periods of admiration for particular things in Nature – for a certain time I am astonished at the beauty of a tree, its shape, its effect. Then, when the passion so to speak has subsided, it is consigned to my treasury of explored beauty, while something new takes its place in my enthusiasm.”

Hopkins, it seems to me, is a vital voice in our world today. His Journals are bejewelled with exquisite cameos celebrating the uniqueness and variety of creation – exactly because he has taken the trouble to look and write about it. Walking near his home he notices the skyline: “All the length of the valley the skyline of the hills was flowingly written all upon the sky. A blue bloom, a sort of meal, seemed to have spread upon the distant south, enclosed by a basin of hills.” As he followed Scotus’ principle of individuality, he delighted in describing landscapes and skies like that, or closer at hand, trees and plants and birds. His kingfisher sonnet is a glorious celebration of the originality of things: “kingfishers, dragonflies, tumbled over rim in roundy wells stones ring”.

For Hopkins all this glory of the world, around which he describes and celebrates, is nothing if it is not the work of God. Each aspect of created beauty is a sign of the perennial newness of God in “the dearest freshness deep down things”. That is the insight of this priest-poet. The inscape, the individuality of each thing in creation, points the beholder to the work of God. Priest and poet complement one another as he realises that the true inscape is Christ himself. The world possesses, either manifestly or secretly, a Christlike form.

It was for the sake of this vision that Hopkins, after a silence of seven years, began again to write poetry: the vision that in all matter, in the works of creation, and even in shipwreck and destruction, we can see Christ. The poet can reach out to the mystery of God, who, proclaims the priest, comes to us in the Word made flesh. Hopkins the poet uses words in his awareness that the Word Jesus makes sense of all we see and know around us. This theological understanding is at the heart of the great poem that broke the “elected silence” – *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

Poetic energy

A chance remark by his superior at St Beuno's that it would be good to have a poem on a disaster at sea that had claimed over sixty lives in December 1875 released the poetic energy of Hopkins (to the bafflement of Bridges and others, it has to be admitted). But Hopkins went on to write about fifty more poems in the thirteen years between *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and his death. More than thirty are sonnets of one sort or another, and most of the poems develop and explore his fascination with words and rhythm: poet and priest inspiring one another in his own creative life.

In the poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland* Hopkins describes how in the midst of the shipwreck the tall nun, Gertrude, mouths the words that all words aspire to: “O Christ, come quickly”. She says “yes” to Christ and so he makes his mercy and mastery in her, enabling her to see into the heart of the mystery of suffering. She glimpses meaning in what was apparently a meaningless tragedy – by turning to the Word, who gives power and coherence to human life, the crucified Word, who triumphed through suffering and conquered through death. Christ is the Word who brings meaning and purpose to past and present, this world and beyond. The poet says that when, like the tall nun, we realise this, then we can pray “O Christ, Christ, come quickly”. In that encounter the word can become flesh and dwell in us. And so the words of the poet Hopkins raise us up to Christ the crucified word, and, proclaims Hopkins the priest, Jesus the crucified word descends to us – to Easter in us.

According to Christopher Devlin, who edited a book on Hopkins' devotional works*, Hopkins was very much a typical 19th century convert who brought with him into the Roman Catholic Church a “hero ideal” which led to bouts of self-loathing and anxiety over the purity of his motives. Devlin wrote in the introduction to his book, published in 1959, that “Hopkins the Jesuit behaved to Hopkins the poet as a Victorian husband might to a wife of whom he had cause to be ashamed”. It hinged on that balancing act he tried to effect between his Jesuit vocation and his poetic creativity.

John Henry Newman played a major part in that journey of Hopkins that led him from Highgate school to Balliol College and then into the Jesuit order. At Oxford Hopkins was drawn to Pusey and Newman, and we know that when he arrived at Balliol his first visit was to Littlemore, where Newman had retired and where he was received into the

Roman Catholic Church by Fr Dominic Barberi. In September 1866 Hopkins wrote to Newman, who was by then at Birmingham. That letter led to a meeting on September 20th to discuss Hopkins' own future. To Bridges he reported that Newman had been genial and almost unserious with sensible advice about his future. Newman wrote that your "first duty is to make a good class" (*ie gain a First in his final exams*). "Show your friends at home that your becoming a Catholic has not unsettled you in the plain duty that lies before you."

Cardinal Henry Manning would have advised Hopkins to leave Oxford immediately, but Hopkins followed Newman's advice. He was received into the Roman Catholic Church by Newman at the Oratory in October 1866 and then graduated the following year with a first-class Honour in Greats. Hopkins joined Newman at the Oratory school where he began learning the violin, possibly after hearing Newman play in a quartet. In 1868 he resolved to become a priest and Newman was again a wise counsellor for his future vocation. He wrote to Hopkins, who was thinking of becoming a Jesuit: "I think it is the very thing for you. You are quite out, in thinking that when I offered you a 'home' here, I dreamed of your having a vocation with us. This I clearly saw you had *not*, from the moment you came to us. Don't call 'the Jesuit discipline hard', it will bring you to heaven. The Benedictines would not have suited you."

The Jesuits did their best to sustain Hopkins: they never forbade him to write poetry and they tried to give him appropriate work. But it would be true to say that the Jesuit way of life wrecked his health and his confidence. He was happy here in Wales, for a time in Oxford and now and then at Stonyhurst, and those places produced his world embracing, joyous verse. But the frequent and unpredictable moves of Jesuit life upset him; from 1877 to 1884 he had seven different posts. As he set himself to preaching and teaching he found he was no good at either, and the final five years at Dublin compounded the sense of failure. He looked at his life and its fruits and found little to rejoice in. Dublin brought out depression and illness. Christopher Devlin is right in saying how this was inevitably the hero ideal of converting coming face to face with his own frailty and self-doubt.

The burning of the poems

"The massacre of the innocents" when he burnt his poems in the spring of 1868 was a symbol of the surrender of his old vocation to the new. "I burnt them before I became a Jesuit and resolved no more, as not belonging to my profession, unless by the wish of my superiors". But it was never an unconditional surrender: his friends had copies of the poems burnt in the massacre. He went on as we know to write more verse, yet the guilt remained with him.

For John Henry Newman I sense there was no such struggle between the vocations of priest and poet. We have that great outpouring of poems when he was abroad in the 1830s, yearning to be back in this country, when he penned *Lead kindly light*. He wrote that "obvious ideas become impressive when put into metrical shape" and 109 poems formed the major part of *Lyra Apostolica* of 1836. Then there was silence, and Newman was realistic enough to say in 1843 that "the muse is resting". The muse awakened again, however, at the Oratory and in 1865 he wrote his great poem *The Dream of Gerontius*.

The poems of Anglican days and the more recent poems were published in one

volume in 1868, *Verses on Various Occasions*. Gladstone thought highly of them and the poetry was the subject of an Oxford lecture by Sir Francis Doyle. Newman wrote: "I have been so little used to praise in my life that I feel like the good woman in the song 'Oh, cried the little woman, sure it is not I!'" But at heart he thought of the poems as ephemeral for all the impact they made in print. Newman had other, more important, things to focus on and which consumed his time and commitment. That sense of being called to do work for God where the individual found himself was a strong motive in Newman's life. For Hopkins it was different: the calling as a Jesuit brought a struggle with his own interests and creativity.

That is why a favourite image of Hopkins is the bird flying free in the air, and there are many poems which capture the image of the bird soaring high and not weighed down by duty and obedience. If Hopkins thought that he had achieved his poetic best in *The Windhover*, it was because of that intense evocation of the bird in the air as "daylight's dauphin" who in "brute beauty and valour and act" spirals upwards with "air, pride, plume" against the buffeting wind. The poet sees the bird hovering on high and then pouring forth all his most dangerous power as he swoops to the earth again.

In *The Windhover* the bird is an image of Christ, but at an early stage the ascending bird became his own signature: "Let me be to thee as the circling bird". Later the "bare-gale skylark" imprisoned in his cage became a symbol of Hopkins bound to earth and his vocation. In the sonnet *The Sea and the Skylark* the lark ascending and pouring out its song above the roar of the tide and the shallow town of Rhyl is again a picture of the poet who longed to be like the bird, free flying. And as a free flying bird, Hopkins was aware that he was an oddity: he was influenced by Duns Scotus when the norm for religious thought was Thomism. He preached occasionally in the industrial cities but he was aware that he never had the common touch. That is why he yearned to fly high like the windhover; but he was always called back to earth, to obedience as a Jesuit.

What stands out with Hopkins is his unique voice. "No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness – now it is the virtue of design, pattern or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped", he wrote to Bridges in 1879. Hopkins knew himself to be a beginning. "If you do not like it, it is because there is something you have not seen and I see", he wrote about his musical compositions, and he could have applied those words to his poetry.

A unique voice

The comparison of Hopkins and other priest-poets shows how they all live in that same world of grace and nature, but somehow the voice of Hopkins sounds out as unique. There was nothing quite like it in the Victorian age. And I want to end by looking more closely at how Hopkins achieved this distinctive voice and insight. As Rahner said in his essay, priest and poet complement one another, and so Hopkins the poet with his all-seeing eye glories in creation and then mines his storehouse of words and images to express that joy and glory, not for their own sake, but to read the inscape and see in all around the manifestation of God.

We sense that special voice in Hopkins as we meet in this place where he was possibly at his happiest. This "pastoral forehead" of Wales inspired some of his most exultant and exhilarating poems and showed him that, for all his scruples over obedience

and vocation, poet and priest could spark each other off in creative spirit. Sight and words go hand in hand to convey the vision of God in creation, and so the sonnet *The Windhover*, dedicated to Christ our Lord, draws out the image of a bird in the sky in an immense ascending intensity. The bird soars upwards and then drops down to catch its prey.

For the poet, that moment of collapse is more majestic than the dominance of the air; it is the moment of beauty and triumph. Just so Christ, his Lord, a spent coal, collapses on Calvary, injures himself for us and lets flow the gold-vermilion, the healing blood. He may have found this image not just in walking the fields and lanes around St Beuno's, but also in St John of the Cross, where the image of the falcon soaring into the sky is an image of the soul chasing its quarry Christ. But all this theological understanding has to be unpacked from what looks like a nature poem. The Cross of Christ is fundamental to the poet's theology, but it is only expressed openly in the dedication.

It seems to me that at the heart of his poetic achievement in soaring to the heights of ecstasy and plumbing the depths of despair are the shipwreck poems – *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and *The Loss of the Eurydice*. Two ships, one with the five nuns, the other with young sailors, founder and are shattered by the roaring sea. In the same way, says the poet, all worldly images and symbols founder and collapse as they yield a final picture of the sacrament of this world perishing and ascending to God; death leading to resurrection, and "a shipwreck" becoming a harvest (stanza 31 of *The Wreck*).



Everything is washed away and leaves us turning to God and his mercy. The only haven is heaven, and so there is only one thing to cling on to: not words or images or the beauty of this world – the world of the poet – but as the priest says, "Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head" (stanza 28 of *The Wreck*). The words of the poet reach out to encounter the Word proclaimed by his priest; and that Word is the key to the future, as it is to the present and the past:

*Ah! there was a heart right!
There was single eye!
Read the unshapeable shock night
And knew the who and the why.*

And here at St Beuno's today we rejoice in that single eye and heart right of priest and poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Canon Michael Burgess is an Anglican priest, and Rector of two parishes in the Chester diocese.

*The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, OUP (out of print)

Aspects of John Henry Newman

By David Jasper

The following brief essay makes no claims to any kind of completeness, and in its attention to Cardinal John Henry Newman also reflects my own particular concern with the nature of the relationship between literature and theology. For not only do I regard John Henry Newman as one of the most important religious thinkers and churchmen of the nineteenth century (and I deliberately prefer not to call him more precisely a “theologian”), but I believe that he is that *because* he is also a poet and man of literature (after all he wrote two novels, one of which, at least, betrays a capacity for an impish sense of humour that we do not often associate with the grave Cardinal). These two things cannot finally be separated. And so I will begin by briefly discussing how Newman understands language itself as a “living power”, and from this move on to his own practice as a poet and centrality of this to his whole life.



John Henry Newman

We shall then move to consider briefly his most important work, *The Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, of 1870 which finely articulates the origins and nature of religious assent and belief. From there I will move slightly backward in time to his 1864 *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in which he traces the passage of his movement from Anglicanism to his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845. Finally, I will say something about his 1859 article “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine” and the manner in which Newman might claim to be the presiding genius of the Second Vatican Council some one hundred years later.

A liberty of speculation

In the *Apologia* Newman cites three English Romantic poets as providing in their language and poetry a “philosophical basis” for what he calls “Church feelings and opinions.” They are Robert Southey and William Wordsworth, but above all, Samuel Taylor Coleridge whom Newman described as “a very original thinker, who, while he indulged a liberty of speculation, which no Christian can tolerate, and advocated conclusions that were often heathen rather than Christian, yet after all inspired a higher philosophy into enquiring minds, than they had hitherto been accustomed to accept.”¹ At the heart of all proper, and above all theological, discourse, it might be said, is the careful and precise understanding of the nature and use of language. For Coleridge and for Newman, language was not analytic but rather what has been called “fiduciary”. Words are literally living organisms. In the words of the Newman scholar John Coulson: “In religion, as in poetry, we are required to make a complex act of

inference and assent, and we begin by taking *on trust* expressions which are usually in analogical, metaphorical, or symbolic form, and by acting out the claims they make: understanding religious language is a function of understanding poetic language.”² Let us just take one of those “forms” – the symbolic – as we attempt to describe and understand the nature of what we might call religious language. It was famously described by Coleridge in his 1815 work *The Statesman’s Manual* thus, as he seeks to evade what he calls “a starveling and comfortless religion”: “a Symbol... is characterised by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative.”³ In Coleridge it is hard to separate words from “things” – and in the thought and spirituality of Newman and the Oxford Fathers this takes us close to – and indeed almost into the heart of – the sense of the sacramental: words are felt as acts and through them we come to approach the real presence of the sacrament. For both Coleridge and Newman the theology of the Fourth Gospel and the understanding of the *Logos* as Divine Word made flesh were crucial. And so what of Newman’s poetry? On the Feast of All Saints 1836 a small collection of poems entitled *Lyra Apostolica* was published – the work of six poets closely connected to the Oxford Movement, by far the greater number being by Newman, 109 out of a total of 179. Other contributors included John Keble, Isaac Williams and Robert Isaac Wilberforce. At its best Newman’s poetry blends finely with doctrine in a liturgical moment such as we find in perhaps his best-known poem, taken from the later *Dream of Gerontius* (1865), familiar today as the hymn “Praise to the holiest in the height.” The poems of *Lyra Apostolica* are a deliberate blending of religion with Romanticism, clearly looking back, for example, to works such as Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” and Coleridge’s “Aeolian Harp”. Newman is never purely the theologian or the church historian, at this stage at least, being deeply indebted to the pastoral poetic tradition of George Herbert and John Donne. Like them he is still at this stage an Anglican, but already his Catholic sensibility is expressed in his verse. In the fourteenth poem of *Lyra*, entitled “The Cross of Christ”, Newman uses the same scansion scheme as the better-known “Lead, Kindly Light” (number 25 in the collection) which has the effect of slowing the tempo down in the second and fourth lines of each verse:

*Whene’er across this sinful flesh of mine
I draw the Holy Sign,
All good thoughts stir within me, and collect*



David Jasper

Their slumbering strength divine.⁴

The making of the sign of the cross, perceived as a “Romish” practice that would give offence to low church Anglicans, becomes here a slow, devotional action, as does its effect in releasing the “strength divine” and its consequences, felt in the last two lines of the stanza:

*Till there springs up that hope of God's elect
My faith shall ne'er be wrecked.*

At this stage in his life Newman can still rage against the Roman Catholic Church as (in the title of this poem) “The Cruel Church”, placed in a section of the book entitled “Disappointment”:

*O Mother Church of Rome! Why has thy heart
Beat so unruly towards thy northern child.⁵*

Yet there is a sense here of longing which almost even now (nearly ten years before Newman’s conversion) finds a home in the Mother Church even in its cruelty. And in the next poem (No. 174), the Church of Rome becomes the Good Samaritan and the place which resolves and calms the passions – if only the doctrinal and creedal difficulties concerning it could be resolved. Even now, it might be said that poetically and aesthetically, though not yet theologically, Newman is already home. The poem begins with an outburst:

*O that thy creed were sound!
For thou dost soothe the heart, Thou Church of Rome,
By thy unwearied watch and varied round
Of service, in thy Saviour's holy home.
I cannot walk the city's sultry streets,
But the wide porch invites to still retreats,*

Where passion's thirst is calmed, and care's unthankful gloom.⁶

Already Newman has found in Rome apostolic consistency (“the unwearied watch”) and integration (“varied round of service”), and the necessary *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) which was finally to trigger his conversion, is not far away, a theological meditation on an achieved poetic sensibility. The poet precedes the intellectual resolution, the words of the liturgy alive with truths beyond formulation. So Newman writes:

*Whene'er I seek the Holy Altar's rail,
And kneel to take the grace there offered me,
It is not time to ask my reason frail,
To try Christ's words, and search how they may be;
Enough, I eat his Flesh and drink his Blood,
More is not told – to ask it is not good.⁷*

From these humble words it is a natural step to Newman’s greatest and most creative work (in my view), *The Grammar of Assent*. What this complex and demanding work addresses with unparalleled sensitivity and intelligence is the nature of the process of how we come to believe and give assent, analysing on the way the function of the conscience in our knowledge of God and the role of what Newman calls the Illative Sense – that is the faculty of judging given facts by processes outside the limits of strict

logic. In brief, we believe not through a process of logic but by the accumulation of possibilities until finally it makes better sense to assert belief than express disbelief. Newman's discussion is lengthy, precise and demanding of careful thought, but it is rooted in his history as a preacher in Oxford and the key to *The Grammar of Assent* is really to be found in his *University Sermons*, preached in Oxford between 1826 and 1843. Newman is never an abstract theologian, but yet he emerges without compromise from the intellectual and theological debates of the eighteenth century, above all from the work of Bishop Joseph Butler and his *Analogy of Religion* (1736) – Butler being a devout churchman who addressed the issues of his time with a steadfast refusal to oversimplify or to ignore the complexities of the human situation. Thus, although he is one of the greatest masters of English prose, Newman is never less than demanding on his reader, but in equal measure, and more, rewarding of the effort. He celebrates the power of the human mind, and demands that we, as his readers, use that power to its fullest extent. The failure to do so will have its inevitable consequences. Thus he writes:

*It is the mind that reasons, and that controls its own reasonings, not any technical apparatus of words and propositions. This power of judging and concluding, when in its perfection, I call the Illative Sense.*⁸

Thus Newman grants much to his readers – and demands much from them. It is an important principle when we come to refer to his close attention to the role of the laity in matters of doctrine, in which matter he was (and indeed still is) far ahead of his time. Yet Newman can also be winsome and thoroughly readable, and not only in his fiction and poetry. A formidable controversialist, he was never more thorough than in his rebuttal of Charles Kingsley published as the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864). Kingsley, an Anglican priest and at the time Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge (an excellent reminder that holding such a distinguished academic chair does not necessarily guarantee academic brilliance) had accused Newman in scathing terms that have become the more celebrated for the response that they provoked. Kingsley wrote in a review of J. A. Froude's anti-Catholic *History of England*:

"Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole ought not to be; that cunning is the weapon which heaven has given to the saints wherewith to withstand the brute male force of the wicked world which marries and is given in marriage. Whether his notion be doctrinally correct or not, it is at least historically so."⁹

Relentless in debate

The remark was both unjust and unwise on almost every level. It was an old jibe against Roman Catholics and familiar enough to Newman (who had engaged in similar accusations himself in his Anglican days), but now Newman, as a Roman Catholic himself, was relentless in debate. His response was one of the most articulate and readable analyses of the development of a religious position ever penned in English. More than a personal history, the *Apologia* is an acute account of the nature and place of Christianity in the modern world.

Before we turn, briefly, to the work itself, we need to know that Kingsley, never a man to know when he was beaten, pursued his quarry in another pamphlet entitled *What*,

Then Does Mr. Newman Mean? which he began with a typically categorical statement: "Dr. Newman has made a great mistake."¹⁰ Typically angry and intemperate, Kingsley accused Newman of being a Papist even when he was still an Anglican and thus was deceitful as well as being dishonest.

Newman's response in the *Apologia* was beautifully measured and based upon the principle that he had carefully established in the book *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* that had carried him from Anglicanism into the Church of Rome. It was the simple proposition that in order to remain constant we must always be prepared to change, and, as he had insisted in his pamphlet known as *The Tamworth Reading Room* (1841), "man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal" responsive to what Pascal had famously described as the reasons of the heart.¹¹

The *Apologia* carefully traces the developing history of Newman's religious opinions to the point when, in 1845, he had reached a position of *certitude* – which he describes as a reflex action: "it is to know that one knows". At this point he could do no other than become what, in fact, he already was – a Roman Catholic. It was not an easy decision nor was it without deep personal cost. In a quiet and telling sentence he speaks of his necessary rupture with the one place that, above all others, he loved on earth. "On the morning of the 23rd I left the Observatory. I have never seen Oxford since, excepting its spires, as they are seen from the railway." It was thirty-two years before he was to return to Oxford.

In the early account of his intellectual and spiritual history (between 1839 and 1941) Newman writes of the influence upon him of the Romantic poets, and of the novels of Sir Walter Scott as they "reacted on his readers, stimulating their mental thirst, feeding their hopes, setting before them visions, which, when once seen, are not easily forgotten, and silently indoctrinating them with nobler ideas, which might afterwards be appealed to as first principles."¹² Newman was no high-and-dry theologian dependent on dogma or dry logic. His theological thinking begins in the heart and in vision, though once he begins to think, he does so with precise and careful steps. His was a feeling intelligence, rooted in history (he was from the very start an advocate of the deep study of the early Church Fathers) but yet utterly contemporary.

The laity in the Church

It was in this spirit in 1859, while he was Editor of the journal the *Rambler*, that Newman felt it necessary to address the question of the laity in the Church. The result was the article in the July issue entitled "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine." Typically, Newman begins by stating very precisely what he means by the word "consult". In ordinary English, he suggests, this "includes the idea of enquiring into a matter of *fact*, as well as asking a judgment."¹³ Thus, for example, a doctor *consults* the pulse of his patient, but not in the same sense as the patient *consults* the doctor in the first instance. And it is as a doctor consults the patient's pulse that the Church consults or "regards" the faith of the laity in matters of doctrine. Newman is not referring to any consultation of the faithful as regards their opinion or advice – rather his concern is with a matter of fact, that is, their *belief* is sought for "as a testimony to that apostolical tradition, on which alone any doctrine whatsoever can be defined."¹⁴

Newman makes no apology for his precise use of vernacular language (as opposed to scholastic Latin) for otherwise, he writes: "I do not see how the bulk of the Catholic people are to be catechised or taught at all."¹⁵ But then there is the question of why the laity are to be thus consulted. Newman's answer is quite clear: "because the body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their *consensus* through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church."¹⁶ Thus such an apostolic channel of tradition should never be treated with disrespect, even while the hierarchy, he maintains, maintain sole responsibility for "discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of that tradition." Newman himself, never one to flinch from controversy with bishops when he regarded them as simply wrong, consistently has recourse to the *consensus fidelium*. When W. B. Ullathorne, the Bishop of Birmingham, remarked that the faith of the laity may, perhaps, be referred to as a "reflection" of the Church's teaching, Newman dryly commented: "Well, I suppose a person may *consult* his glass, and in that way may know things about himself which he can learn in no other way."¹⁷ Famously, Newman suggests that in the fourth century, the great age of Augustine, Ambrose and Athanasius, "the divine tradition committed to the infallible Church was proclaimed and maintained far more by the faithful than by the Episcopate."¹⁸ And frequently during the course of the Arian controversy (which he had studied deeply for his early work of 1833, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*) "the body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission, while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism."

The issue of infallibility

For Newman the Church was an organic body of which each constituent portion had its proper function and none of these can with safety be neglected. Here I pass over the crucial issue, for Newman, of infallibility, except to remark that the difference between the infallibility of the Church and that of the pope was no merely academic question, and the former was a matter of absolute certitude.

In this brief essay there are many things of central importance to an understanding of Newman that I have passed by in silence. Not least, for me, there is his profound and humane (in the best sense of the word) understanding of the nature of a university – a teaching that has been sadly neglected by the universities of our own time, to their tragic loss and cost. But it would not be claiming too much to say that it was John Henry Newman who was, from afar, the presiding genius of the Second Vatican Council. Let us take but one example, in the light of what has already been said. *The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) might seem to breathe the spirit of Newman's essay "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine." In many respects this is, indeed, the case. But here, and with the greatest diffidence, I suggest that if Newman had had the opportunity to edit the *Decree*, the final document would have been theologically tidier, more consistent and linguistically tighter. But I leave it at that!

Newman was never a top-down thinker. He thought deeply from within his subject, from within language itself, and from within himself and his faith. Although he was preoccupied with theology I suggest that he was not finally a theologian in the narrow sense of the word. His thinking could be untidy at times (he was no philosopher either) but his thought and his sense of language were rigorous and tight. Although he

was not a great poet, he was certainly one of the greatest of writers of English and his pen could be caustic and cutting as well as witty and urbane – and woe betide anyone who crossed pens with him, as Kingsley found to his cost.

He was certainly not without a sense of humour, even against himself. The portrait, in his semi-autobiographical novel *Loss and Gain*, of the rather foppish young Oxford student whose mind is set so highly on matters of piety that he fails to appreciate the beckoning charms of the young ladies as he makes his way down Oxford High Street, is clearly a self-portrait wickedly depicted against himself. But, above all, Newman was a churchman – from start to finish. From his early days as an Evangelical, to his long struggle with and within the *Via Media* of Anglicanism, the necessary but still touching parting of friends on his conversion – the severance from Keble, Pusey and others as the Oxford Movement began to break up¹⁹ – that was necessitated by his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, to his final elevation to Cardinal at the end of his life, Newman was singleminded in his devotion to the Catholic and Apostolic Church of which he was one of the greatest sons whose wise and devout voice we miss today, much to our own cost.

This talk was given to the Glasgow Circle in March, 2015. David Jasper is Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of Glasgow.

- 1 John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 1864. Ed. Ian Ker (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 100.
- 2 John Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition: A Study in the Language of Church and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 4.
- 3 S. T. Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*. Ed. R. J. White. *The Collected Works*, Vol. 6. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 30.
- 4 *Lyra Apostolica*. Fourth Edition (Derby: Henry Mozley and Sons, 1840), p. 14.
- 5 Ibid. p. 234.
- 6 Ibid. p. 235.
- 7 Ibid. p. 37.
- 8 John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. 1870. Ed. Ian Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 223.
- 9 Charles Kingsley, review of J. A. Froude, *History of England*, Vols. vii and viii, in *Macmillan's Magazine* (January, 1864).
- 10 Charles Kingsley, quoted in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Appendix B, Ed. Ian Ker, p. 375.
- 11 J. H. Newman, "The Tamworth Reading Room," quoted in Elisabeth Jay, Ed. *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 152-85.
- 12 *Apologia*, p. 99.
- 13 J. H. Newman, "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine," quoted in Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 480.
- 14 Ibid. p. 480.
- 15 Ibid. p. 481.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid. p. 482.
- 19 Movingly described in David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends* (London: John Murray, 1966).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, HAWARDEN, JUNE 13th 2015

On Saturday 13th June 2015 41 Members and Associate Members of the Association met at Gladstone's Library, Hawarden, for the Annual General Meeting. Arrangements for the meeting and a subsequent visit to St. Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre had been made by Carole O'Toole and fellow members of the Wrexham Circle.

The formal business of the day included reports from the President, Acting Secretary and Treasurer, and the election of new Officers of the Association and of Council members.



Gerald Williams, President

Gerald Williams, the President, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Carole and her helpers for organising the day. In his report, he stressed that the Association can be rightly proud of its achievements in fulfilling its mission to educate the laity. The Newman Association is a good brand! The various Circles had put on a total of 145 talks in the previous year, and had additionally organised or helped to organise a variety of other activities. Notable among the latter were the London Newman Lecture given by Dr James Le Fanu on Neuroscience and the Soul and the inaugural Manchester Newman Lecture given by Dr Anna Rowlands on the subject of Catholic Social Teaching and Electoral Politics.

The Association, in conjunction with the National Board of Catholic Women, had sponsored a Study Day *Catholic Perspectives on Poverty* at the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University (reviewed in the May issue of *The Newman*), and through the Hertfordshire Circle had also jointly organised a successful Modern Visual Art Conference in October 2014. Coventry Circle, again jointly with the National Board of Catholic Women, will run a Conference on Receptive Ecumenism on 14th November 2015.

The President recognised, however, that ongoing success is not guaranteed, and drew Members' attention to the forthcoming residential Circle Officers' Conference in October 2015, which has the provocative title of *The Newman Association – Is It Worth Saving?* The aims and objectives of the Conference and a series of preparatory questions for Circles to discuss and address at the Conference have been given in a briefing document published in the May issue of *The Newman*.

The President concluded by thanking once again Carole O'Toole and the Wrexham Circle for organising the AGM, Council members for their support and willingness to travel sometimes long distances to attend Council Meetings, and all those present for attending the AGM.

Acting Secretary Chris Quirke reported that he had kept the statutory records up to date at Companies' House and The Charity Commission. He had prepared agendas, dealt with correspondence and emails, and made arrangements for the AGM. Chris explained that he is Acting Secretary only, having served in the role for more than the period allowed by the Constitution, and should now be replaced. He thanked John Potts for assisting him in the role of Minutes Secretary, and he went on to say that with most communications now being electronic, the role was not as onerous as one might think. Most emails can be deleted immediately, and few require replies.



Chris Quirke, Acting Secretary

One of the issues to be addressed at the Circle Officers' Conference is the willingness of Members to take on roles within the organisation nationally and locally, and Chris reiterated that in accordance with the Constitution he should now retire from the Secretary's role and hand over to a successor.

Anthony Baker has been Acting Treasurer since Peter Havard had to retire from the role through ill-health. He thanked Peter for the clarity of the system that he had set up. (Sadly, we must report that Peter has since died). In his report Anthony noted that the Balance Sheet was showing a gradual slight decline, but this was not an issue at this stage, while on the Income & Expenditure side subscription income remains relatively stable. Anthony explained the reasons for the movements in other areas of the accounts and the background to some of the extraordinary items of expenditure. He noted that it was very gratifying that the Modern Art Conference organised by Herts Circle had earned a profit (some of which had been returned to the Circle). The accounts were adopted unanimously.



After adoption of the reports and accounts, business proceeded to the election of Officers and Council. Gerald Williams was re-elected as President. For want of a candidate, Chris Quirke agreed to continue as Acting Secretary, with assistance from John Potts as Minutes Secretary. Anthony

Baker stood down from the role of Acting Treasurer, and was replaced by Kevin Ryan as Treasurer. Otherwise the meeting confirmed the election of Officers and Council in accordance with the ballot papers sent out in preparation for the meeting.

The President closed the Meeting by thanking once again Carole O'Toole and her team for organising the day.

After lunch at Gladstone's Library members transferred to St. Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre for a talk by Rev Michael Burgess on Gerard Manley Hopkins, who had lived at St. Beuno's from 1874 to 1877, and had composed some of his most famous works there: e.g. *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

The day concluded with the celebration of Mass by our chaplain, Fr. Fabian Radcliffe.

A Memorial Book of deceased members prepared by Gloucestershire Circle was placed on the altar for the Mass.



Members' cars parked outside St. Beuno's

John Potts

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14TH

Learn to Learn – Receptive Ecumenism in Action

A Conference Sponsored Jointly by the Newman Association and the National Board of Catholic Women



The Keynote Address will be given by **Dr Clare Watkins** a lecturer in Ministerial Theology at the University of Roehampton
The Panel will include David Cornick (Churches Together in England) & Callan Slipper (Church of England)

Bishop William Kenney will chair the opening session
Christ the King Community Centre, Westhill Road, Coventry CV6 2AA

The conference fee is **£30 (£25 before September 30th)** from Kevin Lambert c/o Diamond House, 13 Stoney Road, Coventry CV1 2NP, kevin@newman.org.uk
Please make cheques payable to The Coventry Circle of the Newman Association

North Merseyside Newman Circle's Visit to Rome, March 11th–15th 2015

Four members from the North Merseyside Newman Circle, Howard Curtis, David Giles, Michael Burke and Peter Firth (who are also both Catenians), spent an unforgettable four-day visit in Rome, having organised the trip themselves for less than £275. Most importantly they were able to meet up with their chaplain, Monsignor Peter Fleetwood, who was on a six-month transfer from Oscott College to the Venerable English College in Rome.

Monsignor Peter first showed the group around the college with all of its historical significance. One of the many highlights was the visit to the archives, with artefacts dating from the mid-16th century when the former English Hospice of the Most Holy Trinity and St Thomas (1362-1579) was converted into the *Venerabile Collegio Inglese*. It became a seminary for Englishmen fleeing from the terrors of the Reformation.

After training as priests, these brave men made their way back to England to maintain contact with the Catholic faithful, as they attempted to resist the spread of Protestantism. Many of these returning recruits found themselves adding to the ever-increasing list of English Catholic Martyrs, one of whom was St Ralph Sherwin. He appears as the first entry in the *Liber Ruber*, the so-called Red Book, perhaps, the most valuable item in the archive. Many of those early seminarians suffered the same fate, executed as martyrs - often the result of trumped-up charges of treason.

Being allowed access to this unique primary source of English Catholic history, the visitors from Liverpool were also able to handle a tiny late 17th century handwritten private prayer booklet from their local area – apparently the possession of a lady who, it seems, was able to slip it into her apron pocket, undetected, at a time when Catholics were still not able to practise their faith openly.

The group were told that the archive is in the process of being professionally catalogued for the first time since its inception. When completed this unique collection will provide an extremely valuable resource for historical researchers to



explore over 500 years of an essential part of English Catholic history. This cataloguing has only been possible because of the generosity of a Swiss benefactor who has enabled Dr Maurice Whitehead of Swansea University and an Italian archivist to undertake this long-overdue, essential ordering of the college's records.

The group were invited to join the staff and current seminarians (who nowadays include men from other parts of the world, as well as England) for evening meal. Another visitor to the college that day was Cardinal Vincent Nichols who came over to talk to the four somewhat surprised guests. Cardinal Nichols was born and educated in Crosby where their Newman Circle meets and holds its talks. He spent some time enquiring as to the current range of activities, together with making suggestions for future visits to consider in relation to John Henry Newman for whose canonisation he has been an advocate. He was also Chairman of the governing body of Newman University College (now a university) in Birmingham, as well as overseeing the attempted removal of his 19th century predecessor's remains to the Oratory in Birmingham city centre in 2008. Cardinal Nichols was happy to be photographed with the group as a memento of their visit.

The meaning of Conscience

Monsignor Peter also arranged for a visit to the International Centre of Newman Friends, not far from the Vatican, where they met Sister Irene, an Austrian nun from the Order of "Das Werk". Amongst other duties she is responsible for running the library, dedicated to the study of John Henry Newman. There the group met two Indian priests and one African nun, who are engaged in research for different university degrees, including the meaning of Conscience, a matter close to the heart of the blessed cardinal. A photograph with Sister Irene recorded yet another notable part of the visit.

On its own the group visited other historic religious buildings, including the church of Scala Santa, the basilicas of Santa Maria Maggiore, San Giovanni in Laterano, Santi Quattro Coronati and San Clemente - the last of which included the current church and its underground former medieval church, both of which were built over a 2000-year-old pagan temple. With careful planning, the group managed to hear Mass in English every day at a combination of English, American and Irish services across Rome.

On their last full day, the Monsignor organised a relaxing walk. This went through the Jewish quarter of Rome where the group learnt about other parts of the city's history. Prior to the formation of the 16th century ghetto, Jewish families had often been very supportive of the papacy. In contrast, within the walled enclosure, Jews had a hard time, including being forced to hear weekly sermons as well as the Passion every year on Good Friday. However, during WWII Pius XII ordered all religious houses to take in Jewish families, with the chief rabbi of Rome becoming a Catholic after the war. Crossing the small Tiber Island, the walk took in the church of San Bartolomeo all'Isola. This is dedicated to 20th century Catholic martyrs, including victims of repression in San Salvador, Nazi Germany and many other parts of the globe. This informal tour concluded with visits to the cardinal churches of Santa Maria in Trastevere and San Crisogono with its underground palaeo-Christian basilica.

Four days of activity-packed events left the visitors from Liverpool both with memorable experiences of their trip to Rome and extreme gratitude for those who had made it so enjoyable.

Peter Firth

Chairman, North Merseyside Newman Circle

Peter Laurence Havard, 1939 to 2015

Eulogy given by Mark Havard on July 3rd at St Pius X, Alderley Edge, Cheshire

I am here to talk about our brother, Peter, the third of the five children of Robert and Grace Havard. Peter was born and brought up in Oxford. Our father was a doctor and member of the famous Inklings literacy circle which met in Oxford from the early 1930s until the early 1960s and included the brightest lights of twentieth century Christian literature – C S Lewis and JRR Tolkien. Peter was doubly a middle child in the family, but in spite of that, or perhaps because of it, he succeeded in surpassing all of us in academic distinction, since he was a Wrangler, a title achieved by obtaining a first in mathematics at Cambridge. He was also the most reticent and even most self-effacing among us. However, my sister Mary Clare reminds me that he was quietly determined when he wanted to be. Like all of us he was deeply affected and hurt by the early death of our mother who died when he was only 11.



His chief high point and time of achievement came after his triumph at Cambridge, when he had started working in Edinburgh. Through the Newman Centre there he met Pam. They became friends, fell in love and married. Pam and Peter meant everything to each other. They relied on each other, supported and helped each other and were, in every way a cohesive team. Together they built their lives and faith through thick and thin, and in the same way they built their family, Anna and Clare. If you want to see the crowning achievement of Pam and Peter's lives, you have only to look at the families and lives of Anna and Howard and of Clare and Francis, Charlotte and Imogen. This is their lasting heritage. Peter and Pam lived near John and Anne in Edinburgh for a number of years and the four of them remained close while they lived. They shared in the purchase of a holiday cottage on the coast of Berwickshire and worked together on its maintenance as well as sharing in its use.

Peter's professional career was spent with one company, ICL. Partly because of his personal humility, partly because none of us ever fully understood the technical intricacies of computer operating systems, and partly because of competitive commercial security, not one of us has a true appreciation of all he achieved professionally in the computer business. What is known is that he was the company's "go-to" expert. If there were major operating system problems, he was the person to fix them. He was the man who would put out fires and unravel glitches. He retired comparatively young and spent a great deal of the rest of his life engaged in volunteer work. Mary Clare tells the story that, soon after he retired, Peter put a small advertisement in the local newsagent's window advertising his services to anyone who was having problems with a personal computer. It was a little like Stephen Hawking offering tutoring services in arithmetic for nine-year-old students!

Throughout his life Peter's love of God and of his neighbour were at his centre. So during those years of retirement he worked tirelessly for this church: by playing the organ and singing in the choir and by organising its accounts and in all the other ways Father Thomas has described to us. He was very active in a charity that took disabled people on canal trips and in working for the poor in the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. He also was particularly dedicated to the work of the Alzheimers' Society. During the last years of his life he was the National Treasurer for the Newman Association of the UK and organised and maintained the books for the whole organization.

He was a very competent keyboard player, both on the piano and the organ. I remember, when he and I were at school at Ampleforth, he played the solo part in a very challenging piano concerto. I was unable to attend but I remember the music master telling me afterwards: "Not every note was exactly correct, but all the mistakes were truly musicianly ones!" He also took up photography and quite a number of his photographs were artistically outstanding.

Our brother Peter is very dear to us and we are going to miss his humour, his intelligence, his goodness, and his kindness. Life was not always easy for him but the great blessing of his life was Pam and his family. His greatest sadness was losing Pam recently and it is good to know that they are now together again. However he had the consolation of the care and attention Anna and Clare and their families gave to the last months and hours of his life so that when he died it was in the care of those who were closest to him. Our love and sympathy go to Anna and Clare whose loss is greatest and who did so much for their father and for our brother. They and their families form the lasting legacy Peter leaves to all of us.



The Inklings – a young Peter, in the early 1960s, sitting next to C S Lewis. Also in the group is Peter's father Robert.

A note by Mary and Mike Monaghan

Peter was Treasurer of the Manchester and North Cheshire Circle for some fifteen years. It was characteristic of him that he never drew attention to his long service or complained about it. And the Circle simply relied on his steady, unassuming and totally competent handling of our albeit simple financial affairs. He was a valued member and was much missed when he moved to Bristol. We were all saddened to hear of his death not very long afterwards.

A note by Anthony Baker

I got to know Peter when he became Treasurer after the 2012 AGM in Oxford. A gentle man, reserved but humorous, Peter never struck poses or offered sharp opinions. He was a delight to work with. Although the Association finances were in good shape he reorganised their presentation to Council, so we now have a clear idea where we stand and where the “chafing points” are. When he became seriously ill in the autumn of 2014, I acted as treasurer. In the midst of debilitating treatment Peter took great trouble to pass things over and to guide me through a powerful spreadsheet accounting package of his own design. That package has proved a boon, for my time and no doubt for years to come. Its quiet, unseen but effective control, reflecting the qualities of the man, may prove to be Peter’s lasting Newman memorial. May he rest in peace.

Concerning Circles

New Members

We can welcome the following new members, who have been elected at recent Council meetings. They are attached to Circles as shown.

Miss G. Bienkowski (Edinburgh), Rev. Deacon P. R. Collins (North Merseyside), Mr J. Cushley (Glasgow), Sister F. C. Mahan (Coventry), Mr W. O’Hara (Cleveland), Mrs S. A. Rush (Coventry), Mr J. & Mrs C. Sibbald (Edinburgh).

Requiescant in Pace

Your prayers are asked for the following members who have died recently:

Miss A. G. Baverstock (Unattached), Mrs S. Campbell (Glasgow),

Mr R. B. Curtis (Unattached), Fr. R. Darwen SJ (Unattached),

Mr P. Havard (Manchester & N. Ches.), Miss G. M. Partridge (Croydon).

Peter Havard was a previous and greatly valued Treasurer of the Newman Association. An obituary of Peter appears elsewhere in this journal.



ADVANCE NOTICE

London Newman Lecture

The Reverend Dr Giles Fraser

Thursday, March 10th, 2016, Title: to be announced

6.00 for 6.30 start at Loyola Hall, Heythrop College, Kensington Square, London

Full details will be published in the January 2016 issue of *The Newman*

The Persistence of Idolatry

Canon Albert Radcliffe discusses the process through which an ideology can become an idolatry by excluding God and inducing people to become trapped in a form of worship. This text is based on a talk he gave to the Manchester and North Cheshire Circle in July 2015.

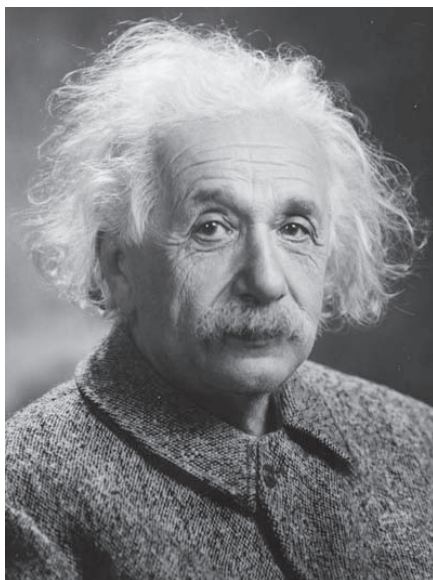
The Ten Commandments are clear: Thou shalt have none other gods but me. Another reinforces it: *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image. Also thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*, that is, empty the Lord's Name of its worth.

In this way idolatry was identified as the father of many sins: murder, adultery, theft etc. It was blamed for the destruction of the northern kingdom and the exile of the southern. Thereafter, in becoming an Israel of total dedication to Torah righteousness, the complete avoidance of idolatry became the defining characteristic of Judaism.

We can imagine the shock, then, when Jesus hinted that the Sadducees and some Pharisees had turned the Torah itself into idolatry! How else are we to understand his saying that the *Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath*. [Mk2:27] Besides rendering God's Name vain, idolatry did the same for our humanity too. The challenge of the Kingdom, even to rabbinic humanism, was so radical that it could not be ignored. In the Kingdom of God, the world is upside-down. The meek, not the rich and powerful, inherit the earth; the persecuted and not the persecutors, are rewarded. The opposite of idolatry, the way of the world, was the kingdom, the heart of Jesus' preaching.

When Einstein was working on his theory of relativity he performed what physicists call a *gedanken* or *thought experiment*: he imagined he was riding on a beam of light. Other famous scientific "thought experiments" are "Schroedinger's Cat"¹ and "Maxwell's Demon"². I suspect Jesus got the idea for his Kingdom *gedanken experiment* from the Magnificat. With lines like *He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away* Mary was singing that the world was idolatrous, spiritually and morally upside-down; while its opposite, the Kingdom, is the world turned the right way round. Hence the reversal of *The Sabbath is made for us, we are not made for the Sabbath*. This insight of Jesus is a test for identifying idolatries.

Today, "isms" that destroy our humanity stand revealed as idolatries. It is why I can



Albert Einstein

identify Jesus as a Jewish and myself as a Christian humanist. Nationalism? It's fine, until it becomes an idolatry. Capitalism? Likewise, though neither "ism" is free from idolatry for long.

And if Jesus could criticise his own people for turning their religion into an ideology, what might he say of the Christian Church? The same, of course: all ideologies are idolatries. Whenever people are made to fit ideas, it is like getting Sabbath observance the wrong way round. My favourite example of an ideology becoming an idolatry that devours its children, like the god Moloch³, is *Modern Management Practice* which illustrates perfectly the way in which a process is first understood in order to control a process, but which then, instead of serving "us", manipulates "us" into serving it. The result is that wherever we look, in education, say, or the health service, those who serve these supposedly scientifically-managed systems are stressed and treated like objects. Management as idolatry is even making its way into the churches!

Cognitive dissonance

When the social psychologist Leon Festinger heard in 1955 that there was a group that believed that California was about to be destroyed, but that members would be rescued by a UFO, he tagged along to see what would happen when the spaceship failed to arrive. The cult's beliefs clashed with their experience, in what he called *Cognitive Dissonance*. He concluded in his study that the dissonance was resolved either by members reinterpreting their beliefs, that is, losing their faith or alternatively by defiantly ignoring the evidence, and simply asserting their convictions more loudly than ever. As an anthropologist once told me: *"When the tribe is dying, the dance gets faster"*.

Reinterpretation is the liberal option, loss of faith the tragic one, while defiant reassertion is the approach we know as fundamentalism, a sometimes violent reaction which – when it subordinates people to belief – is idolatrous. Each of these coping strategies has its temptations and a dominant psychology and spirituality. The liberal mind is tempted by intellectual superiority and contempt; loss of faith is often accompanied by despair while the paranoia of an extreme fundamentalist may express itself in acts of terrorism. Idolatry is what drives today's news!

As the language of Genesis is so often symbolic we have to reach beneath the surface to what is really being said. Its stories we know: God creates the first man and places him in Eden with a warning not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he does death will result [Gen. 2:15-17]. Knowledge can be lethal. *"Of course you will not die"*, said the serpent, *"for God knows that, as soon as you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God himself, knowing both good and evil"*. [Gen. 3:5] Here we have the irony that the Father of Lies is telling the truth! When Eve tempts Adam also to eat the fruit of the tree their eyes *are* opened and their spiritual vulnerability is experienced as physical nakedness.

If we take these stories literally we miss their meaning: that moral and spiritual knowledge is often more dangerous than human beings can cope with. Idolatry is rooted in human nature. It is a possibility in all knowledge. Then, in the story of the Tower of Babel, matters get worse. *The Lord came down to the city and the tower which they had built and he said....now they have started to do this nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach* [Gen. 11:6]. In Eden, eyes were opened in God-like knowledge and knowledge became a moral temptation and a spiritual trap. Now, at

Babel, theoretical knowledge becomes unlimited practical knowledge. *Nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach.*

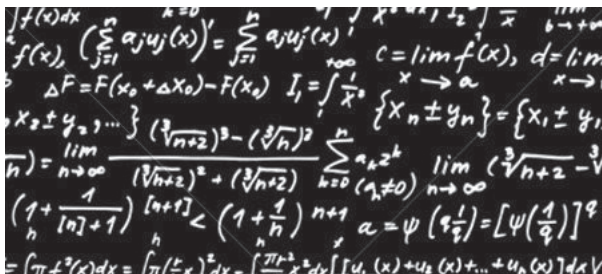
I remember at the age of fourteen explaining nuclear fission to my grandmother. She was as horrified by Hiroshima as were Einstein and Szilard⁴. As an assault by human beings on their own humanity, the Manhattan Project (to create the atom bomb) had become idolatrous. Experimental science had become an idolatry. *"Nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach"*.

Science, that is, *experimental* science, launched by William Gilbert [1544-1603] with his experiments with magnets, is with theology, poetry and military history one of my chief interests and delights. It grieves me to think that, like religion and theology, science too can become idolatrous, but it's sadly the case, as I was reminded when watching Brian Cox's series, *The Human Universe*. In the last episode, as he pondered what was needed to shape the future of the human race, he dismissed something he called "superstition" and asserted that all that we needed were science and reason. I groaned and wished he had kept to cosmology, just as I wish Richard Dawkins would keep to genetics. Even if they admit that science can be put to inhuman, and therefore idolatrous, use as in the racially-biased Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments⁵, many atheists continue to put a blind faith in the innate moral purity of the scientific enterprise.

And when it comes to an equally misguided faith in the moral purity of reason it is as if psychologists had never established that in human affairs reason is often subverted by human emotion. Science and reason are not the reliable guides many think them to be. In his book *Straw Dogs, Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, John Gray, the philosopher, agrees: *"Straw Dogs"*, he writes, *"is an attack on the unthinking beliefs of thinking people.... Humanists like to think that they have a rational view of the world; but their core belief in progress is a superstition, further from the truth about the human animal than any of the world's religions."* [page xi]. A little further down the same page he says: *"Secular believers – held fast by the conventional wisdom of the time – are in the grip of unexamined dogmas."* Only in mathematics is reason anything like as pure as many atheists would like to think; and the problem with reason in mathematics is that it can be unexpectedly self-limiting. This was demonstrated in the early 20th century by Gottlob Frege's [1848-1925] failure to establish arithmetic in a formal, incontrovertible manner, on an axiomatic basis of self-consistent logic and set theory. To be accepted as secure an axiom, or foundation principal, should emerge in mathematical enquiry free from contradiction. Frege's was a magnificent attempt, but finally a failed project.

His first volume was a great success but while the second was in the press it was sabotaged by Bertrand Russell who pointed out that the fifth of Frege's axioms led to a contradiction that

brought the whole project tumbling down. The axiom concerned famously allowed the formation of "a set of all sets that are not members of themselves". Sets are not normally members of themselves; for example



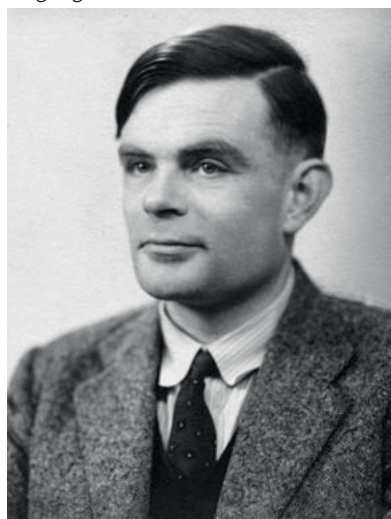
The image shows a dense collection of handwritten mathematical expressions and set theory notations. Visible elements include:
 - A summation formula: $f(x) = \sum_{j=1}^n a_j u_j(x)$
 - A limit definition: $c = \lim_{x \rightarrow a} f(x)$
 - A difference formula: $\Delta F = F(x_0 + \Delta x_0) - F(x_0)$
 - A set definition: $\{x_n \pm y_n\} = \{x_1 \pm y_1, x_2 \pm y_2, \dots\}$
 - A limit involving a square root: $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{(\sqrt[n]{n+2})^2 - (\sqrt[n]{n})^2}{(\sqrt[n]{n+2})^2 + (\sqrt[n]{n+2})}$
 - A limit involving a power: $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right)^{n+1}$
 - A limit involving a power and a function: $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right)^{n+1} = \psi\left(\frac{1}{q}\right) = \left[\psi\left(\frac{1}{q}\right)\right]^q$
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the set of Newman Association members is not itself a member of the Newman Association. For non-mathematicians this sort of abstraction is not easy to understand, but fortunately the contradiction involved is made clear by an illustration known as *Russell's Barber Paradox*, where "sets which are not members of themselves" becomes "men who do not shave themselves"!

The Paradox goes like this: there is a village which has a barber who only shaves men who do not shave themselves. So, who shaves the barber? He cannot shave himself, because he only shaves men who do not shave themselves; and a man from the village cannot shave him, because then he would be a man who does not shave himself and so must be shaved by the barber, and he can't shave himself because....and you see why the founder of modern mathematical logic was thrown by the contradiction. It meant that the axioms of arithmetic cannot be derived from purely logical axioms. It was as if there was a hole in the seamless robe of logical proof.

Then even more holes were discovered in the fabric of mathematical logic. In the early 1920s another mathematician, David Hilbert (1862-1943), proposed resolving the crisis by a formalisation of all of mathematics in axiomatic form, together with a proof that this axiomatising of mathematics was self-consistent. Unfortunately, in 1931, another mathematician, Kurt Gödel, [1906-78] demonstrated the failure of this proof with his famous *Incompleteness Theorem*.

In attempting to explain this theorem I can do no better than quote the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. "A formal system is a computable list of axioms stated in precise language with precise inference rules. Gödel's Theorem states that for any consistent formal system *M* containing a certain part of arithmetic, a sentence in the language of *M* can be constructed which is neither provable nor refutable in *M*." [p320]



Alan Turing

And then, in 1936, along came Alan Turing [1912-54] with his analysis of the *Halting Problem* in computers. Here was another hole in the fabric of rational thinking as mathematics. Briefly, the Halting problem is that of determining, from a description of an arbitrary computer program and an input, whether the program will finish running. It is undecidable. All of which brings idolatry into the mathematical world that Turing made possible, a world dominated by computers and their *algorithms*, those step-by-step procedures for calculating something. For example, to do long division children are taught an algorithm, an "if this then that" sort of system. In fact, ours is a world almost entirely run on algorithms! I once chatted to a military man about robot sentries that can challenge unauthorised entry.

A distant handler would decide whether to let pass, arrest or shoot, though decision-making algorithms could, if allowed, decide for themselves. In short, algorithms are now capable of making ethical decisions!

In November 2014 *New Scientist* carried a four-page article on the growing use of automated robot systems in modern warfare, and discussions have been held by the UN to discuss if and how robot weapons, “killer bots”, should be brought under the Geneva Conventions. Robots are now where Adam was! *You may eat of any tree in the garden, except...* But we humans ate the forbidden fruit long ago and cannot now un-eat it.

Mathematics is a spiritual quest and increasingly it is making our decisions for us. Do we think that banks make their financial decisions without the use of algorithms? Even stock exchange traders have systems whose algorithms trade millions of pounds in millionths of a second while their human minder sleeps; while systems with algorithms designed to identify possible signatures for the presence of the Higgs Boson examined trillions of reactions in the collisions of particles within the Large Hadron Collider.

On September 26th 1983 Stanislav Petrov, Deputy Chief of Combat Algorithms, was on duty at the Soviet Union’s Early Warning System when the computer read-outs warned of an incoming missile strike from the United States. In breach of instructions Petrov dismissed the signal as a false alarm. A minute later the siren sounded again, then three times more. Petrov, frozen to the spot, had his doubts and still reported a systems failure. After twenty minutes the first missiles should have struck Moscow, but nothing happened. With apologies to Bertrand Russell, we had had a close shave, lucky that the Deputy Chief for Combat Algorithms believed that algorithms were created to serve us and not we them.

The role of mathematics

The myth of the Tower of Babel, *Nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach*, is partly about the human desire to control the world, and since the days of Galileo and Newton science and technology have depended on the role of mathematics. To understand scientifically means reducing processes to equations and algorithms. For many atheists this results in an unrealistic view of reason as being sufficient for our need to control. But it is just here that we need to note that, in so far as something cannot be understood it cannot be predicted, and what cannot be predicted cannot be controlled. When these are self-organising systems are located in a self-organising universe, what chance does human reason have?

All of which brings us beyond ordinary, unaided human intelligence to AI, Artificial Intelligence; to the way in which the algorithms that make this possible are changing the very nature of our humanity. We must now reckon with the realisation that not only is reason not what many think it to be but that, because of our growing dependence on them, automated systems – that is, robots – are changing the identity and nature of the very humanity they were created to serve. Those the Sabbath existed for would soon be very different creatures from what they were in Jesus’ day.

Already we are what many commentators call “enhanced human beings”. We have already entered into a profound relationship with automated systems. For the moment they are physically exterior to us, though we can no longer manage without them. Already our civilisation is that of human/machine hybrids. Like medieval creatures with lions’ bodies and eagles’ wings we are becoming “chimera” or composite beings. With the arrival of cochlear implants human enhancement became interior to the body and the journey towards our becoming cyborgs, or human/machine creatures began.

Who now serves what? Just as Jesus interpreted the Torah for his time so now we must begin to interpret afresh his teaching on idolatry if we are to avoid idolatry in an age in which our humanity is in danger of being reduced to AI and applied mathematics.

Since the 1960s there has been a name for this shift in human identity, *Transhumanism*, the recognition that science and technology are changing the nature of humanity itself. Its study is now pursued at many universities.

Transhumanism has become an international movement that aims to enhance our physical and mental capacities as well as to eliminate disease and disability. Its deeper, theological and spiritual relevance is its belief that the human species in its present form does not represent the end of human development. *Nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach.*

Most transhumanists appear to be atheists, but as the process it describes is slowly unfolding it is no longer a reality from which Christians can stand aloof. Among the theological issues raised is that of creatures made in the image of God recreating themselves in some self-made, part-human hybrid image. For those who take the future possibility of Cyborgs seriously there is also the question of the nature of the resurrection body, not to mention complications for the doctrine of the Incarnation. *Nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach.*

It may sound a silly question, but how do we know that we are not robots? We are unless we worship a non-algorithmic God. Only in that way do we escape creaturely “reproducibility”. If God does not exist then we are no more than easily-copied information. We are only fully human when we escape idolatry, the sin of being unable to enter into a relationship with the un-namable, non-algorithmic God.

To escape being only copyable organic robots we need a relationship with our creator, who cannot be reduced to algorithms because then he would be a creature! Only through worship can we escape being defined by algorithms. Becoming more than a complex bundle of algorithms is the work of prayer. Only in God’s upside-down, algorithm-frustrating Kingdom do I cease to be an idolatrous, copyable robot; unless, of course, *interoperability*, or the capacity of one information system to reproduce the contents of another, extends to my love and worship of God. But as this is a maths question that’s about more than maths, for the *moment we must leave our meditation on idolatry there!*

Albert Radcliffe, an Anglican, is a retired Residentiary Canon of Manchester Cathedral.

¹ Erwin Schroedinger in 1935 devised an image of a cat in a box to illustrate some of the uncertainties associated with quantum mechanics.

² In 1867 James Clerk Maxwell proposed the idea of a demon controlling flows of gas molecules between two chambers to assist understanding of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

³ Moloch was a god worshipped by the Phoenicians and the Canaanites (and sometimes by disaffected Israelites). In some circumstances parents would sacrifice their newborn children to Moloch.

⁴ Leo Szilard, a physicist, conceived the idea of the nuclear chain reaction in 1933.

⁵ A clinical study into syphilis conducted in Alabama between 1932 and 1972, during the later years of which period penicillin-based treatment was withheld from participants.

Letters to the Editor

Editor's note: a letter from Anthony Baker appeared in the May issue in response to the publication of Joe Fitzpatrick's article on Genesis in January. Another letter has now been received from John Potts, and I have invited Joe Fitzpatrick to make a short comment.

Re: How Genesis supports Darwin

Dear Sir

I have read Joe Fitzpatrick's paper in the January edition a number of times, and find myself in agreement with much of his interpretation of the mythology of the early chapters of Genesis as a description of the hominisation of man (development of consciousness) and rites of passage. I find myself disagreeing however with much of his theological exegesis.

Joe makes much of the absence of specific words like sin, disobedience, and rebellion from the text to conclude in effect that there was no original sin. He talks of lighting on his interpretation as a Columbo moment, but I feel it is rather the moment when he brings the whole edifice crashing down. For if there were no *felix culpa* of the Exsultet, then what need have we at all of the Redemption? That there was an act of disobedience (original sin) is clear from the text, whatever words are lacking.

Joe then proceeds to argue that Augustine's view of man's immortality prior to original sin is the irreconcilable difference between Christianity and evolution, but this is a something of a straw man: Joe himself quotes, later in his article, the text of Genesis where God expels man from the garden to prevent him eating of the tree of life and becoming immortal (Gen 3: 22-23). Rather, the threat to Christianity from evolution is polygenism. Section 37 (English translation) of *Humani Generis*, published August 12th 1950, specifically repudiates polygenism and re-asserts Adam as the sole protoparent. All the developments in evolutionary biology stemming from the publication of DNA three years later in 1953 tend to support a polygenous theory of man's origins.

It is in this area where I, neither scientist nor theologian, require help in reconciling Christianity and evolution, but Joe's approach is not it. John Potts

Genesis 3: A New Interpretation

Let me begin by thanking the two Newman respondents to my article on Genesis 3; I am entirely in favour of theological opinions and arguments being probed and questioned as a test of their adequacy. The letters of both John Potts and Anthony Baker project the view that the notion of Christian Redemption is somehow dependent on Original Sin, which I take to mean that if there were no Original Sin what are we being redeemed from? Well, if Redemption is dependent on Original Sin in this way, if this was the reason for the Incarnation and the central point of Jesus's mission on earth, why do we find no mention of a first or original sin in the gospels?

Why is it that Jesus never refers to "the sin of Adam" if he came to save us from the consequences of this sin? And why is it that, while the Hebrew bible depicts many instances of sinning, it never attempts to explain this by reference to the action of the human couple in Genesis 3? In my book I make no attempt to disguise the fact that human beings are morally flawed creatures – human beings do and have done terrible things to each other and to the earth. But I attempt to explain this by reference to

human beings' tendency to idolatry, our worship of things other than God, the central evil identified in the OT, prohibited in the first of the Ten Commandments, which is also roundly condemned in the New Testament.

John Potts refers to my observations based on Augustine's claim that humans were created immortal as a "straw man", and goes on to say that polygenism is the true "enemy of Christianity". I think he gives undue weight here to the statement of a Pope in an encyclical letter. Popes have made many observations on moral issues that have been retracted later: Pius IX scorned "democracy and progress" but his successor John XXIII sang democracy's praises in *Pacem in Terris*; today's Church condemns slavery in forthright terms but in the past Popes owned slaves and justified slavery as a fit punishment and a deterrent against the evil to which some were attracted by force of original sin!

It has been argued that in *Humani Generis* Pius XII strayed beyond his papal remit by drawing debatable scientific conclusions from a story that is myth. By contrast, if you once claim that humans were created immortal, as Augustine did, you have put Christianity on a collision course with science, since death or elimination is essential to the way evolution works. If human beings had been created immortal then the human species could not have evolved. It's as simple as that.

Finally, such respected Christian scripture scholars as Herbert Haag, Joseph Blenkinsopp and James Barr have all denied that the doctrine of Original Sin can be found in the Hebrew Bible.

Joe Fitzpatrick

137 Curly Hill, Ilkley, West Yorkshire LS29 0DS

Laudato Si'

Dear Sir

Laudato Si' is an amazing document and I am sure that we are all wondering how best to respond to it. Robert Williams* and I believe that the Newman Association – with participation from other interested bodies – should put on a major conference about it. This could be done in Hereford on the lines of the successful Belmont conference in 2004. There is local support and Robert is in close contact with the Anglicans who run a very successful programme of compatible events at Hereford Cathedral. However, perhaps we should be more ambitious. After all, the Pope has addressed the encyclical not merely to all Christians but to the world. One cannot overstate its importance. The Newman Council may feel that the conference should be held in London (or possibly in St Albans). This would attract a larger audience and it would be easier to get the best speakers.

What has recently been the cause and enthusiasm of a minority of Catholics has now been directed by the Pope to be a priority issue for Christians as a whole. May I ask that members interested should make known their support – or otherwise – for a conference to Council members in time for the September 26th Council meeting. Whatever is decided we feel that ecumenical input is essential; it is significant that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has played an important role in encouraging Pope Francis to issue the encyclical.

Aidan Reynolds, Abergavenny

*Robert Williams is a former editor of *The Newman* and the current Convenor of the Newman Association's Environment Interest Group

On reading a life of George Pell

The 2002 biography by Tess Livingstone* has been a revelation to this reader of what different conceptions people may have of the Roman Catholicism. For George Pell, the distinguished Australian churchman, now a cardinal, the Church is an authoritative institution founded by God, infallible in all it teaches. No development of doctrine is envisaged, and he would appear to understand the Church as the Hierarchy rather than as the People of God.

Therefore the principle of conciliarity – the collaboration of bishops – is right and proper, but that of subsidiarity – decisions to be taken at the lowest relevant level – totally unacceptable. His meteoric rise to the height of governance shows how his thinking is in accord with that of recent popes. Last year he was appointed head of the Vatican's new Secretariat for the Economy, with a brief to clean up the finances of the Roman Church.

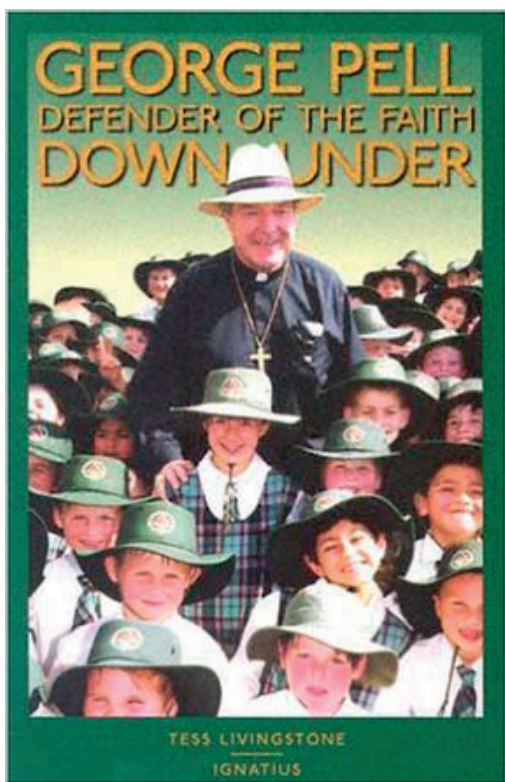
His biographer is an admirer; and it is fitting that people's lives should be written by those who appreciate all the good in them, so long as they do not omit any flaws, and there is a lot to admire in George Pell. From his schooldays he stood out as someone of integrity, courage and strength – patently a leader of men. He has a very warm relationship with, and is much loved by family members; his little niece could knock on the presbytery door and be invited to take tea with uncle "Georgie". He is courteous in debate, never reviles his opponents and his very real compassion is shown in his private call on a bereaved couple to bless their dead baby and in his unsung visits to AIDS sufferers.

A vigorous style

But his vigorous football-playing style, expecting to give and receive injury, is an indication of the way he governs, which has earned him many implacable enemies. A firm supporter of Vatican II, but aghast at some people's woolly version of the "Spirit of the Council", he is considered by some conservatives as not conservative enough, while some LGBT members actually chant "George Pell, go to Hell!" (hardly Christian, however great the provocation).

His reforms of Corpus Christi seminary were very badly received; in 1985, when he was rector, his "few small changes" were imposed without consultation and many students left in dismay; in 1996, as archbishop, it was the teaching staff who resigned. George Pell's vision of training for the priesthood prioritised the seminarians' relationship with God, through daily attendance at a fixed early mass and obligatory devotions to the Virgin Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. Others might see as equally important the freedom to develop their own unregimented prayer life and, above all, to develop a deep love for the people they were to serve, and not to impose church teaching regarding their private lives with no empathy for their lived experience.

His reaction to the clerical sexual abuse scandal, calling it "the worst blow to our prestige" seems to prioritise the institution above the welfare of children, and he declared that abortion was a greater sin because it destroys a human life. However he made strenuous efforts to deal with clerical sexual abuse, setting up the (eventually nationwide) organisation Towards Healing. On refusing communion to wearers of the rainbow sash (including, as it happened, the mother of a gay son) he explained that he did not condemn anyone but he could not ignore this open manifestation of disobedience to Church teaching. Inevitably such a stance attracted virulent accusations of homophobia.



Far worse was an anonymous accusation in 2002 that Pell, as a seminarian, had abused a 14-year-old at a boys' camp. Pell immediately and honourably stood down until cleared by the court, but it was an appalling blow. More recently an accusation has resurfaced that, when a man reported to him that his uncle, a priest, had abused him, Pell had asked "What will it take to keep you quiet?" offering him money and a car. The trouble is that, despite Pell's well-attested integrity, such an accusation is feasible with regard to someone with such an overwhelming loyalty to the institutional church, and he has many enemies out to get him.

Some particular actions of his have grieved liberal Catholics: banning a book questioning the teaching of the Church, banning the Third Rite of General Confession and Absolution and denigrating the inclusive language of ICEL translations. He also called for a celebration of *Humanae Vitae*

30 and welcomed Opus Dei into the diocese. Pell also declared that Jesus would punish those who sinned against his teaching on marriage.

But this is a man who faithfully served the Church all his life according to his lights and achieved great things. He worked for Caritas and recorded the terrible sufferings he saw in different continents; he was a member of the CDF for 10 years; he ran two major archdioceses, Melbourne then Sydney; he reformed the Catholic education of children, writing two textbooks. In addition he regularly heard confessions in the cathedral to keep in touch with his people and made himself available one afternoon a week for priests to come and see him informally. But for this reader the best indication of his worth is the sermon he preached to 20,000 sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in 2000. Picking up on the then recent film *Gladiator*, he described how the early Christians' loving community stood out against the barbarity of Roman Society and he inspired these young people to follow their example in today's troubled world.

I do not see eye-to-eye with the Cardinal on many counts but I cannot fail to admire the man.

Josephine Way

**George Pell: Defender of the Faith Down Under, by Tess Livingstone; Ignatius Press; out of print, but available secondhand (paperback) for £5.99 on Amazon*

Letter to Circle Secretaries

Dear All

The Newman Association....is it Worth Saving?

Newman Association Assembly: Hinsley Hall Leeds

October 10th and 11th 2015

I am pleased to invite you to send two representatives from your Circle to the above Assembly which will take place from lunchtime on Saturday October 10th until after lunch on Sunday October 11th 2015 at Hinsley Hall, Leeds.

The Newman Council has decided to host the Assembly so attendees will need to find their travel expenses, but not accommodation costs or a conference fee. Hopefully you will be aware of the Assembly from the publicity in the Newman newsletter and the article on pages 38/39 of the May edition of the Newman journal. Council has decided to arrange this Assembly following the success of previous Circle Officers' Conferences, and also to provide an opportunity for Newman members to assemble together to discuss the many issues which face the Newman Association as it plans for the future.

As outlined in the journal Saturday will be spent mainly looking at the challenges, which affect most Circles, for example, how to maintain and increase membership, how to attract younger members and encourage existing members to play an active role etc, and financial issues, basically how do we spend our money? The relationship between Council and Circles will also be discussed. Sunday morning will be devoted to future planning for the Association and the role of Newman Circles going forward: should we be more ecumenical, what role should we play in our parishes, should we be more of an evangelising or campaigning organisation? It may well be that the weekend will not provide all the answers, but it will hopefully start a meaningful discussion and at the very least provide food for thought!

I hope that you will discuss the topics chosen for debate with your Circle members so that representatives can then present your Circle's views to the Assembly. A full and informed debate over the weekend will prove invaluable to Newman Council members when deciding on the future direction of the Newman Association so that we can all ensure it not only survives, but grows and flourishes, playing an important role in parish life. Also the weekend will provide an opportunity for us to share good practice, ideas for growing membership, make useful contacts and get to know each other.

A full programme will be circulated nearer the date but I would be very grateful if you could let me know the names and details of the two representatives of your Circle by September 18th 2015. I look forward to hearing from you and meeting your representatives at Hinsley Hall

(replies, please, to Chris Quirke, secretary@newman.org.uk).

Best wishes,

Carole O'Toole
Newman Council Member

Spirituality Page

Knowing God



As many readers will know, this year sees the 750th anniversary of the birth of Dante and it seems appropriate to begin with a quotation from *The Divine Comedy*. Near the very end of the last book, the *Paradiso*, Dante sees the flashing light that fulfils the final vision of God and remarks:

*Eternal Light, You only dwell within Yourself
and only you know you; Self knowing,
Self-known, You love and smile upon Yourself!*
(Lines 124-126).

Similarly the nineteenth century hymn writer William Chalmers Smith wrote of the ineffability of God in his well-known hymn:

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,*

However, for the Christian this is not the end as our faith consists in the development of a personal relationship with Our Lord and with this an awareness of His presence. Indeed Chalmers Smith recognised this in his final verse when, returning to Dante's theme of the Godhead hid in light he says;

*"O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee,"*

In 1 Kings 19 we see how Elijah was led to this awareness. As Basil Hume puts it in *To be a Pilgrim* (St. Paul Publications, 1984 at page 40): "Things were going badly for Elijah. His life was threatened. He was afraid". So he went into the wilderness and lay down under a broom tree saying: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors". He then went off to sleep but was awakened by an angel who said: "Get up and eat". He saw a cake and a jar of water and, strengthened by having eaten the cake and drunk the water, he went for forty days and nights and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Then there came a great wind, "so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces". Sometimes God can come to us like that, in a dramatic way as he did to St. Paul on the road to Damascus. As Basil Hume says, sometimes he comes in this way to His Church where, as he puts it: "the barque of Peter is buffeted by the winds of change".

However, God more often comes to us in a gentler way as He did to Elijah this time. The wind was followed by an earthquake and then a fire but God was not in these. Finally there came a gentle breeze and silence. God was here.

May we, too, recognise that "still, small voice of calm" when it comes.

Anne and John Duddington

Circle Programmes

Aberdeen

1 October	Impressions of the Holy Land	Contact: Margaret Smith, 01224 314566 <i>Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB</i>
5 November	Communicating Truth and Reconciliation	<i>Dr Glen Reynolds</i>
3 December	Year of Mercy	<i>Fr Stuart Chalmers</i>

All Circles

10-11 October	Is the Newman worth saving?	<i>Circles Officers' Conference in Leeds</i>
14 November	Learn to Learn – Receptive Ecumenism in Action	<i>Joint conference with the National Board of Catholic Women</i>

Birmingham

		Contact: Winifred Flanagan, winifredflanagan@gmail.com
12 September	The Role of Catholic Lay Women 1760-1840	<i>Dr Marie Rowlands</i>
3 October	The Importance of Lay Catholic Intellectual Dialogue in Today's Church	<i>Canon David Evans</i>
21 November	Catholicism and the Welfare State	<i>Jim Coglán and other guest speakers</i>
12 December	A Vision for the Future	<i>A discussion for members and a guest speaker</i>

Cleveland

		Contact: Judith Brown, 01642 814977, browns01@globalnet.co.uk
16 September	Between a rock and a hard place? Balancing fidelity and mercy in caring for the divorced and remarried	<i>Dr Helen Costigane SHCJ</i>
21 October	Ethics and Catholic Social Teaching today	<i>Brother Robert Moore O.H.</i>
25 November	The Machiavellian Jesuits?	<i>Prof Harro Hopfl</i>

Coventry

		Contact: Colin Roberts cjroberts08@talktalk.net
1 September	Autumn Mass and Party	
29 September	Contribution of Consecrated Life to local community	<i>Sister Frances</i>
7 October	Morning prayer	
20 October	Home Mission	<i>Clare Ward</i>
1 November	Joint Mass with students and friends at Warwick University	
24 November	Parliamentary lobbying	<i>Liam Allmark</i>
12 December	Advent Mass	

Croydon

		Contact: Andy Holton, a.holton857@btinternet.com
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Ealing

		Contact: Anne Riley agriley@waitrose.com
17 September	Patterns of Ministry: Non-Stipendiary Ministry in the Anglican Church (Ministry in Secular Employment)	<i>The Revd Dr Margaret Joachim</i>
19 November	Who "Leaves" the Catholic Church? The Facts about Lapsation and Disaffiliation	<i>Dr Stephen Bullivant</i>
9 December	Christmas dinner	

Eastbourne & Bexhill

		Contact: John Carmody, 01323 726334, johncarmody44@hotmail.co.uk
3 September	Who, What and Why is Newman Today?	<i>Fr Nicholas Schofield</i>
9 October	Circle AGM after 12 noon Mass	<i>Fr Neil Chatfield</i>
2 November	Climate Change and the Future	<i>Ellen Teague</i>

Edinburgh

		Contact: Lyn Cronin, lyncronin@btinternet.com
30 September	Experience in Latin America – model for our Church?	<i>Fr. Henry McLaughlin</i>
14 October	What is it to be a Christian?	<i>Fr. John Farrell O.P</i>
18 November	The Church Here and Now	<i>Archbishop Leo Cushley</i>
9 December	Parish Experiences – general discussion	<i>A panel of lay people</i>

Glasgow

		Contact: Arthur McLay, mclay@btinternet.com
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Hertfordshire Contact: Maggy Swift, 01582 792136, maggy.swift@btinternet.com
 21 September No Salvation outside the Church? *Dom Henry Wansborough*
 9 October Circle Mass for Newman's Feast Day, followed by lunch
 25 October Work in the Prison Chaplaincy *Kim Davey*
 13 November An Introduction to the Problem of Evil *Dr Karim Esmail*
 21 November Musical Evening by Fitzroy Quartet
 7 December Introduction to Vatican II *Dr Claire Watkins*

Hull & East Riding Contact: Andrew Carrick, 01482 500181

LLanelli Contact: M. Noot, 01554 774309, marianoot@hotmail.co.uk

London Contact: Patricia, 0208 504 2017

Manchester & N. Cheshire Contact: Chris Quirke, 0161 941 1707 dcq@mac.com
 5 October The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christians Today *Prof George Brooke*
 2 November Laudato Si' - a reflection and a call to action *Dr Mike Monaghan*
 7 December The Bible's Final Chapter: the book of Revelation *Father Peter Edmonds SJ*

North Gloucestershire Contact: Stephanie Jamison, 01242 539810, sjamison@irlen-sw.com
 6 October
 3 November The Catholic Church & Interfaith Engagement *Fr Peter Slocombe*
 1 December Spirituality & End of Life Care *Revd Brenda Dowie*

North Merseyside Contact: John Potts, john_potts41@hotmail.com
 17 September Catholic Education *Archbishop McMahon*
 15 October Culture and the Catholic Faith in Modern Times *Canon Amaury Montjean*
 19 November On Another Mersey Wall: Stories from an Urban Ministry *Rev Ellen Loudon*

North Staffordshire Contact: Vincent Owen, 01782 619698

Rainham Contact: Marie Casey, bmcasey@btinternet.com

Surrey Hills Contact: Gerald Williams, guillaume30@btinternet.com
 12 September A recital by an Iraqi Catholic in support of IRAQI CHRISTIANS in NEED
 The plight of Christians in the Middle East, Africa and India *TBA*

Tyneside Contact: Ann Dunn, jadnew@btinternet.com
 30 September History of SVP Childrens camp, Holy Island *Michael Reynolds*
 25 November Christian Origins: How the Disciples Became a Church *Bernard Robinson*

Wimbledon Contact: Bill Russell, 0208 946 4265, william_russell@talktalk.net
 17 September Authority and Obedience in the Catholic Church *Quentin de la Bedoyere*
 12 November The Church's Dialogue with Other Faiths *Most Rev Kevin McDonald*

Worcester Contact: Heather Down, 01905 21535, hcdownd@gmail.com

Wrexham Contact: Maureen Thomas, maureenthomas@uwclub.net
 25 September Survivals to new arrivals: the origins of Catholic Recusancy *Kevin Down*
 30 October Ecumenism in the 21st Century – Where are we now? *Brian Hamill*
 27 November Central Asia – the Hidden Believers *Mrs Sylvia Mandeville*

York Contact: Judith Smeaton, 01904 704525, judith.smeaton@btinternet.com
 21 September The Courage of Dialogue *Eileen Fitzpatrick*
 19 October York Newman Lecture: Beyond sex and chocolate: poverty, injustice and the sense of sin *Professor Karen Kilby*
 16 November Experiences of a cruise chaplain *Fr. Angelo Phillips*
 December Christmas Meal