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Is the Church's Teaching on Marriage Changing?					
Clare Watkins					
Radical Renewal or Nothing New?					
in the Presence of us					
<i>Francis J</i>					

according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by

in the Presence of us

Erica Hunter

The Church of the East in Danger

Barbara Hungin

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Cover picture: *A British certificate of marriage*

Comment

Immigration is the topic of the day. This issue of *The Newman* includes a very thoughtful and compassionate article by Barbara Lungin entitled *Who is my Neighbour?* which clearly sets out the basic responsibilities. Yes, we know that as Christians we should be welcoming and respectful of human dignity. We do not wish to consign migrants to indefinite imprisonment in squalid transit camps.

Yet there is another side to this. We also need to protect our own culture from being overwhelmed. Even if we overlook those risks the new generation of populist politicians will certainly not do so, and the Brexit majority last June was a clear signal that the UK will not willingly give up control of its borders.”.

The Referendum vote hinged primarily on the subject of economic migrants within the EU. It did not have encouraging implications for the UK’s response to the potentially much bigger issue, the attempted movement of populations on a scale of many millions into Europe from, primarily, the Middle East and Africa, but also regions much further away. Many of these desperate people are seeking to flee persecution, famine and death. There are economic migrants too, trying to escape poverty and lack of opportunity but not under any immediate personal threat in their homelands; some of them are seeking to hide amidst the crowds of refugees.

The big picture, here, is that Europe is a region of low population growth. But the neighbouring continents have much higher birth rates and already millions more young people than they can offer homes and decent jobs to. Europe therefore acts as a magnet. Should we be welcoming? The trouble is, we must also be aware of the problem of moral hazard: if Europe opens its borders it will be seen in the troubled surrounding regions as offering a huge opportunity for local despots to drive out their unwanted populations. This is the basis of the Civil War in Syria and also the aggression by the Islamic State; millions of people are being driven out because they embrace what are regarded as the wrong culture or religion or nationality (see the article in this issue on the Church of the East).

The collision of morality with practicality, of Christianity with national identity, is all too familiar to us. There have been many waves of desperate immigrants in the past: the Protestant Huguenots in the early 1700s, the European Jews in the 1930s, people of many nationalities in the 1940s immediately after the Second World War and the Ugandan Asians in the 1970s. In the end these groups have all been satisfactorily integrated. The difference today is in the sheer scale of the actual and potential arrivals: officially, just over 1 million people in aggregate have arrived as economic migrants from the EU in the past ten years, and the potential inflow from the Middle East and Africa could be far larger still. Already 8 per cent of British residents are foreign-born (and 27 per cent of children born in the UK in 2014 had foreign-born mothers).

In practical terms governments will address the problem by imposing arbitrary quotas or conditions: how many ‘points’ can would-be immigrants score on a checklist? In moral terms there may be no satisfactory answer because the scale of the potential immigration will threaten our national identity.

Barry Riley

Is the Church's teaching on marriage changing?

By Fr Martin J Clayton

Earlier this year, Pope Francis published his response to the work of the recent Synod on Marriage and the Family. In this paper I aim to situate his response within the context of an evolving body of magisterial teaching. Of course, the Synod's agenda was wider than points of doctrine. Francis had invited the Church to reflect on the vocation and mission of the family in today's world. Yet it was almost inevitable that the big question became, "Will there be any change in the Church's teaching?" Popular interest, fuelled by the media, homed in on this. Some voices called for change in response to new situations and insights; others rejected even the possibility of change. Battle lines were drawn up within the Synod itself. My own conviction was that we had to go beyond polarised mindsets and entrenched positions. Otherwise, whatever the outcome, we would have a "synod of winners and losers": a wasted opportunity, and pastorally unhelpful. At the same time, the question of change is an important one. It deserves to be addressed in the light of the Synod's discussions and the Pope's post-synodal document. Is the Church's teaching on marriage changing? Did the Synod open a door to change? If so, how, and in what directions?

Doctrinal change

Perhaps we should glance at a more basic issue first. *Can* Catholic doctrine change? This was the question John Henry Newman faced as he found himself drawn towards Rome. The Roman Church claimed to be the faithful custodian of an unchanging "deposit of faith". Newman was increasingly convinced by this claim. His intellectual integrity demanded that he must reconcile his conviction with the stubborn fact of historical variation in the Church's teaching, practice and worship. He needed to demonstrate – to himself, first of all – that there was nothing incoherent about Catholicism's claim to preserve intact the changeless and unchangeable truth, revealed by God in Jesus Christ, and committed to the church of the apostles. A comparison with the growth of living organisms led Newman to formulate his hypothesis of doctrinal development, with its seven "notes" or rules-of-thumb by which the authenticity of any specific reconfiguration of the original "deposit" could be judged. His famous statement that "a great idea ... changes ... in order to remain the same" sums up the paradox of continuity-within-change¹. Newman did not see his *Essay on Development* as a definitive response to what is undoubtedly a profound theological issue. However, Vatican II endorsed his insights in its document on Divine Revelation. Doctrinal development is rooted in the truth that "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son"².

Newman's analogy with living organisms is fortunate. It corrects a static understanding of revelation and tradition. By the time of his conversion the "deposit of faith" had been effectively reduced to a collection of magisterial statements, while "tradition" was little more than verbal repetition of formulae. The New Testament suggests a more vital and dynamic approach, centred less on "truths", more on "the truth". The object of Christian faith is fundamentally the living person of Jesus Christ. The majestic opening of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of him as the "ex-expression" into creation, and the

“im-pression” within creation, of the Father’s reality as God³. And so Vatican II asserts that, in Jesus Christ, God “fully reveals and communicates both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of humankind”⁴. And at the same time – again in the words of the Council – Christ, precisely as the *Incarnate Word*, “fully reveals humanity to itself, and brings to light our vocation as human persons”⁵.

Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today, and for ever” (*Hebr 13:8*). After Pentecost, the life, the ministry and teaching, and especially the redemptive death and exaltation of Christ, along with the implications of this for a new way of living, form the *kerygma*, the content of the apostolic preaching, which finds normative expression in the New Testament. The apostles and their successors were servants of the truth entrusted to them: their task was to present it in its integrity. But fidelity to this ministry could not be reduced to a mere repetition of words. The gospel had to be proclaimed within a variety of new cultural contexts, each with fresh challenges and opportunities. Certain implications of the *kerygma* took on greater urgency, while others receded into the background.

Preaching itself yielded new insights into the one unchanging message. The Church’s turning to the Gentile world was a particularly decisive step: it demanded a re-shaping of the *kerygma*. But while Paul, the great “apostle to the Gentiles”, can speak about “his” gospel, he went to great lengths to assure himself, and his hearers, that his own preaching in this new context was fully consonant with apostolic teaching. Even before writing his *Essay*, Newman was aware that within the New Testament itself there was development of doctrine⁶. He was able to satisfy himself that this same journey of organic development had continued in the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit who worked especially, though not exclusively, through those officially entrusted with the “deposit of faith”.

Christian Marriage: an evolving theology

Across the centuries, the Church’s understanding of marriage has been subject to change within continuity. Marriage possesses an unchanging and normative “profile”, rooted in the teaching of scripture⁷.

1. Marriage is grounded in God’s creative design. It is one of his “original blessings”. The God-given mutual attraction between men and women leads to the formation of unique human relationships: mutual, exclusive, stable, sexual and fruitful.
2. Marriage has a sacred, symbolic capacity. Under the Old Covenant it was capable of signifying God’s union with his chosen people. The Christian dispensation reveals marriage as an image of the bond between Christ and his Church, and a means by which Christ’s salvation is realised in and through the Church. It is both a gift, and – in its fully Christian perspective – a particular vocation determined by the pattern of Christ’s self-sacrificial love.
3. As a reality of this world, however, marriage has a precarious aspect: it is subject to the effects of human limitation, weakness and sin.
4. The New Testament sets marriage against the horizon of God’s Kingdom. For all its goodness and its symbolic potential, marriage is not an “absolute” value: it stands alongside other ways of realising the Kingdom and, in the individual case, it may be renounced in favour of an alternative path.

These perspectives, received from the apostolic Church, were taken up by the great theologians and preachers of the 3rd to the 6th centuries. It was an exciting and fruitful time for the shaping of Christian doctrine, and those who did the shaping used the cultural and intellectual resources available to them. The influence of contemporary philosophies, however, led to an ambivalent attitude towards marriage. In the West especially, Augustine's teaching was to colour the Church's approach for many centuries to come. For Augustine, the sexual aspect of marriage was an insurmountable obstacle. Physical sexuality belonged to the animal domain. Moreover it was deeply wounded by sin, and so human sexual activity was tainted. It could be "justified" only by God's plan for the human race to continue through his institution of marriage.

Given the witness of scripture and apostolic tradition Augustine could scarcely deny that marriage had a sacred character. Yet it was sacred, thanks to the three "good things" that redeemed it: mutual fidelity, the loving acceptance of children, and what Augustine termed the *sacramentum*, the unbreakable bond established by God. Positively, the teaching of Augustine and others served as a bulwark to the basic values and goodness of marriage across succeeding centuries. Also, it laid the foundation for a more developed understanding of marriage as a sacrament in our modern sense of the word. Yet a serious "de-formation" of the original biblical perspectives had been introduced into the Church's thinking about marriage⁸.



St Augustine

The 10th to the 13th centuries saw the development of Canon Law. The received teaching on marriage became crystallised within a predominantly legal framework. Marriage would now be understood primarily in juridical terms. The nuptial union was rooted in a mutual bestowal of rights and a mutual acceptance of duties, and it was brought into being by a contractual act. Given the prevalent view that marriage's primary purpose was to "legitimise" sexual activity in order to conceive children, the essential object of the marital contract had to be the exclusive right of each spouse over the other, to engage in "acts ordered towards generation".

The remaining Augustinian "goods" were secondary: fidelity and permanence ensured the social setting needed to rear and educate children. Canon Law would play an important role in safeguarding certain aspects of marriage, ensuring the right and freedom to marry, and responding (within its juridical limits) to marital breakdown. But an evaluation of marriage in legal categories alone fails to embrace its full reality.

A changing perspective: the centrality of the nuptial relationship

It is against this background that we ask, "Is the Church's teaching on marriage changing today?" In taking Pope Francis' recent Apostolic Exhortation as a springboard for reflection I must emphasise that my intention is not to undertake a detailed analysis of the document, or even a general presentation, but to situate the Pope's teaching within the context of a changing approach to marriage.

Francis draws heavily on the *magisterium* of his recent predecessors, and on the teaching of Vatican II. It is a body of doctrine that had begun to emerge and unfold only in relatively recent times, under the influence of numerous pressures. Among these were the seismic upheavals that shook much of Western society during the 19th and 20th centuries. The rapid expansion of industrialisation, the birth of new economic systems, political turmoil, the trauma of war on an unprecedented scale, and the emergence of new social and cultural patterns, presented huge challenges to the traditional architecture of marriage and the family. New ways of thinking called into question the institutional-legal mindset through which the Church's teaching had long been filtered. The Church itself had begun a process of "returning to the sources", rediscovering its roots in scripture, and re-evaluating the ways it had interpreted and presented its traditions. All this impacted on the Church's classical understanding of Christian marriage.

Two significant themes have emerged. Firstly, *a growing affirmation of conjugal and familial love, in all its aspects, as central to the reality of marriage*; and together with this, *an evaluation of marriage in specifically human-personal terms*, with all that this implies. These developments have begun to provide a new way for the Church to present the truth, goodness and beauty of Christian marriage⁹.

The opening words of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation are *Amoris Laetitia*: "The Joy of Love". His point of departure is not an abstract principle but a human experience. At the very outset he indicates the approach he will adopt: he will look at marriage through the prism of conjugal and familial love, rather than from a predominantly institutional-legal stance. It is a shift of emphasis that had been emerging, slowly and hesitantly, from the time of Pope Leo XIII. Sometimes considered the first of the "modern" popes Leo was deeply concerned about the Church's mission in a changing world. His famous 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* laid the foundation for what we know as Catholic Social Teaching.

Less well-known is his encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*. Issued in 1880 it was



Pope Leo XIII

the first papal encyclical on marriage, and it too became the catalyst for a developing body of Church teaching. Leo acknowledged a fact of human experience: conjugal love, rooted in God's love, is at the heart of married life¹⁰. The *magisterium* of Pius XI and Pius XII endorsed this truth. But the official definition of marriage remained on the contractual-institutional level. The relationship of nuptial love was not seen as *intrinsic* to the *purpose* of marriage¹¹. Influenced by personalist philosophies during the inter-war years a number of theologians were pressing for a new perspective. They understood marriage less in legal-social terms – as an institution governed by particular purposes – and more in terms of an interpersonal relationship. Love was not merely a desirable, even a necessary quality,

“added” to marriage. Rather, the exclusive and fruitful self-gift of each spouse to the other was the very essence and meaning of marriage¹². The Church’s official response was initially unfavourable¹³. Yet the “newer” approach to marriage remained a powerful undercurrent. It infiltrated the thought of Pius XII¹⁴ and, finally, it was explicitly embraced at the Second Vatican Council.

In contrast with the “classical” approach, the Council’s Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* addressed marriage in a way that was more deeply personal, more truly theological and more richly experiential. The contractual and institutional aspects are affirmed, certainly. But for its description of marriage the Council adopted the more biblical term *foedus*, “covenant”. And the nuptial covenant is precisely one of interpersonal love (48*). The very essence of the married state is “an intimate communion of life and conjugal love” which “finds its source in divine charity itself”, and is “patterned on Christ’s own union with the Church” (48*). Further, this love – precisely as conjugal – is “uniquely expressed and perfected” by sexual union (49*). For Christians, the symbolic character of marriage takes on sacramental value: it is “caught up into divine love, and is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ and the salvific action of the Church, in such a way that the spouses are effectively led to God” (48*).

Did Vatican II change Church teaching? On one level, certainly it did. Building on the *magisterium* of previous decades the Council found a new way of speaking about unchanging truth, and corrected inadequacies that had coloured the Church’s teaching for centuries. The Council affirmed the nuptial relationship as primary and constitutive. It is the relationship that receives the status of a legal contract. It is the relationship that is given a particular institutional shape within the structures of society and the Church. It is the relationship – including its sexual dimension – that is sacramental.

Doctrinal tensions: “historical consciousness”

Gaudium et Spes is the contemporary Church’s *magna carta* for marriage. The post-Conciliar popes adopted and developed its stance¹⁵. Within this continuity, however, tensions have surfaced. Aspects of magisterial teaching appear – to some, at least – to be not fully consistent with the Council’s approach. Certain Roman declarations have been likewise criticised. Those who detect ambiguities cannot always be accused of irresponsible dissent or failure to respect the *magisterium*.

The root of this situation is, I believe, a tension unresolved by the Council itself: the tension between ideal and reality. It is a tension inherent in moral reflection. For all its goodness, beauty and theological depth – so powerfully highlighted by the Council – marriage is a fragile reality. It is subject to human limitation, particularly in our contemporary Western culture. It is easily damaged by failure and sin. Tragically, marital relationships sometimes collapse. The Council was acutely aware of this, yet its treatment of marriage did not address the reality of “human shortfall” beyond affirming the Church’s responsibility to “guide and encourage” all who try to “preserve and foster the dignity and sacred value” of marriage¹⁶. There is a timeless element in the Council’s presentation of the lofty ideal of marriage.

Drawing on the conciliar and post-conciliar *magisterium*, Francis reaffirms and repeats, without compromise, the normative truths about marriage. But he informs his teaching with greater “historical” awareness. Philosophers such as Martin Heidegger recognised

“time” as an essential dimension of what it means to live in this world. Human reality is more than a static “fact”: it is also a “project” under construction. Every situation has an element of uniqueness, forming a point of transition between a past and a future; such perspectives accord well with the scriptural vision of life as a pilgrimage.

The biblical notion of “signs of the times” – strongly embraced in fact, by Vatican II – also finds its place here. The Christian “project” requires a constant discernment of what must be done here and now to respond to God’s saving purpose which is realised precisely within time and history¹⁷. Pope St John-Paul II had already referred to a “law of gradualness”¹⁸. Francis gives it a more central place in his teaching. Life is a journey through stages of growth and personal decisions: the response to the claim of what is good and true unfolds within time.

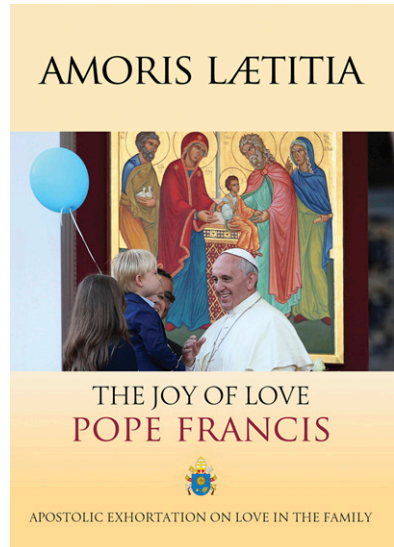
For Francis the “law of gradualness” also suggests that an individual may not always be able to internalise, adequately evaluate, or fully carry out an objective demand in the here-and-now. While acknowledging this, he is careful to repeat John-Paul’s warning: “gradualness” does not mean “gradualness of law”, as if objective moral truth could sometimes cease to exert a normative claim, or could be disregarded on occasions. But he does insist that the Church must embrace people where they are.

A pastoral direction

In this way, *Amoris laetitia* adopts a predominantly pastoral approach, an approach that may be summed up in the two words the Jesuit Pope often uses: accompaniment and discernment.

In search of this “more”, Francis looks in two directions. Firstly he insists on the Church’s duty to be far-reaching and pro-active in promoting and supporting the values of marriage. He asks that particular attention be shown to those preparing for marriage, as well as to married couples and their families at every stage and in all circumstances of life, especially in times of difficulty and crisis. Secondly, Francis insists that the Church must effectively embrace those whose situations are objectively outside God’s design for marriage, including the divorced, and those in second unions after divorce¹⁹. Here, the Pope’s language differs somewhat from that of his immediate predecessors.

He seems aware of this, and he repeats that the Church must in no way draw back from its primary task of presenting the full truth about marriage. Yet he clearly asks the Church to move away from a one-sided reliance on objective precepts alone. Typically he wants us to look at people through the eyes of God’s mercy. He favours a process of discernment within the complexity of “unlawful” situations – not all of which are identical, as John-Paul II and Benedict XVI have already acknowledged. Francis admits that there are those who would favour a more rigorous pastoral approach, with less room for confusion. In fact, he draws on traditional principles found in the moral



theology of Thomas Aquinas and Alphonsus. To show understanding in the face of exceptional circumstances need not imply a denial of objective demands; and it can happen that, in particular situations of objective wrong, no grave personal fault exists. Undeniably, he is open to the possibility of change in certain areas of pastoral practice. This is especially so with regard to the divorced-and-remarried, whose current situation as a specific group within the ecclesial community is rather anomalous, even though the recent *magisterium* has significantly distanced itself from the condemnatory stance of earlier times.

The divorced-and-remarried are “in good standing”: far from being excluded from the Church’s life, they are invited to share in its activities and mission. Although objectively in disharmony with the full significance of marriage their state may not, necessarily and in every case, radically contradict it in all respects. Separation may not always be the right solution; and where this is so, a couple should not be denied the companionship of a shared life. But in this case they must make a choice: they must abstain either from a fully sexual relationship, or from reception of the Eucharist.

John-Paul II had already spoken of the need for a careful discernment of individual situations, and had insisted that the divorced-and-remarried receive special pastoral care. But he re-affirmed current discipline without suggesting what this might mean in practice²⁰. My impression is that Francis sees here a state of doctrinal and pastoral tension that calls for resolution, in a way that may open new doors in particular cases, without rejecting the truth of the intrinsic permanence of the nuptial relationship as affirmed in scripture and tradition. To expand this further would be outside the scope of this paper.

Is Church teaching changing?

Is the Church’s teaching on marriage changing? I have attempted to show that there has indeed been change, in Newman’s sense: change-within-continuity, and change to ensure continuity. I believe Pope Francis’ teaching engages positively with this continuity, and will enable the Church to put itself even more fully at the service of marriage in today’s world. It also opens the way towards further honest and open discernment, on the level of doctrinal and moral theology, church law, and pastoral practice, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through whom “the Father continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son”.

This is an edited version of a talk to the Manchester and North Cheshire Circle in June 2016. Fr Martin Clayton is Parish Priest of Our Lady of the Sorrows, Bamford, Derbyshire.

NOTES

- * Paragraph numbers in *Gaudium et Spes*.
- 1 J H NEWMAN, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Ch I, Sect I,7. The same paragraph concludes with the often-quoted statement that “... here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”
- 2 VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum* 8.
- 3 Hebr 1:1-3. Christ is described in terms of the effulgence (*apaugasma*, the radiance flowing out from a source of light) of God’s glory, and the image (*charakter*, the exact impression made by a seal in clay or wax) of God’s very reality (*hypostasis*). What God essentially IS is made visible in Christ: to see Christ is to see what the Father is like. “To have seen me is to have seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

- 4 VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum*, 6.
- 5 VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- 6 J H NEWMAN, *University Sermons* 15.
- 7 See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1602-1620.
- 8 For a summary of Augustine's influence see J MAHONEY, *The Making of Moral Theology*, pp 37-71, esp. pp 58-68.
- 9 See L ÖRSY, *Marriage in Church Law*, pp 13-37 for a concise overview (to 1983) of doctrine and legislation, precisely from the viewpoint of change and development.
- 10 NEUNER-DUPUIS, *The Christian Faith*, #1820.
- 11 In *Casti Connubii* (1930) PIUS XI drew on the Tridentine Roman Catechism to speak of the nuptial union as the "primary cause and reason" of marriage – but, he insisted, this was true of marriage only "in its wider sense" as an intimate life partnership, not "in its stricter sense" as an institution destined for the procreation and education of children. NEUNER-DUPUIS, #1829.
- 12 The German theologian (and professor of moral theology at the University of Wroclaw) Herbert DOMS is worthy of special note. In *Vom Zweck und Sinn der Ehe* (1935) he argued that marriage is first and foremost an interpersonal relationship. The reality of marriage can be adequately understood only when its institutional purpose (*Zweck*) is seen as rooted in its personal meaning (*Sinn*) for the spouses themselves. (It may be asked if Doms was not also reacting against Nazi ideology, with its insistence on the overriding duty of married couples to populate the Third Reich.)
- 13 PIUS XII (Address to the Roman Rota, October 1941) and the CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY OFFICE (Decree de finibus matrimonii, March 1944) upheld the "classical" stance by insisting that the fostering of conjugal love was essentially subordinate to the procreative aspect of marriage. Institutional purpose was prior to personal meaning.
- 14 The magisterium of Pius XII reveals a growing doctrinal ambiguity. For example, his cautious acceptance of the Ogino-Knaus "rhythm method" of avoiding conception implicitly questioned the classical subordination of nuptial love, in its sexual expression, to a solely procreative purpose. (Allocution to Italian Midwives Vegliare con sollecitudine, October 1951) Developing the thought of his predecessor, Pius XII often referred to the nobility of nuptial love, including its power to transcend even the limitations of mortality.
- 15 In his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) PAUL VI affirmed the intrinsic unity of the relational and fruitful dimensions of nuptial love. JOHN-PAUL II embraced the conciliar approach throughout his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1980) and in a series of weekly catechesis. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) BENEDICT XVI spoke in a remarkable way about the "human and divine promise" inherent in human *eros* as it directs man and woman towards the unique and definitive bond of marriage, and so fulfils its own deepest purpose.
- 16 VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes* 47.
- 17 St Paul adopted the term *dokimazein*, implying "assessment", "approval of worth", to speak of grace-filled discernment in the Christian moral life. A key text is Rom 12:2. His response to various questions in I Cor 8 and 9 are examples of such discernment. In continuity with this theme is the rich but often overlooked teaching of St Thomas Aquinas on *prudencia* (the right use of reason in practical matters) informed by the Spirit's gift of counsel, which enables believers to plan, judge and decide upon actions in keeping with God's will.
- 18 JOHN-PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 34, to which Francis refers in *Amoris Laetitia* 293-295.
- 19 In what follows I refer particularly to Ch 8 of *Amoris Laetitia*, which Francis devotes to "accompanying", "discerning" and "integrating" imperfection and weakness.
- 20 JOHN-PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 84. In 2007 BENEDICT XVI re-affirmed this teaching in *Sacramentum Caritatis* 29.

Radical renewal or nothing new?

Pope Francis's post-synod teaching on marriage and family (*Amoris Laetitia*)

By Clare Watkins

"Has the Church's teaching changed with *Amoris Laetitia*? No." This was the clear statement made and elaborated on by the Bishop of Portsmouth, Philip Egan, in his pastoral letter following the promulgation of this important Apostolic Exhortation. For Bishop Philip Egan – as for, no doubt, many others – the sense of no changes being made to Church doctrine, law or practice is a cause for some relief, a basis for a confident assurance that the Faith is what it always has been. For others this sense that *Amoris Laetitia* changes nothing has been a source of disappointment and frustration: those whose hopes centred on somehow giving a more positive and inclusive place to the divorced and remarried, the co-habiting, those in same sex relationships and so forth, can be left with the question: "Was this all a fuss about nothing?"



One of the reasons these questions can be felt so especially keenly is down to the unprecedented sense of involvement that many have felt in the process. "On Love in the Family" or *Amoris Laetitia* (to use its Latin title) is the fruit of three years of debate, reflection and speculation, which has involved church leaders, laity, and wider society. Not only have there been two Synods, but also consultation with the wider Church, as some of the most sensitive, personal and, so, powerful aspects of the living of our Catholic faith have been reflected on. And, in a society such as ours, many want to see "the results": who has "won" in the sometimes controversial debates around the divorced and remarried, the co-habiting couples, the same sex couples and their places in the Church community? Thinking about, teaching about and theologising about these most fundamental aspects of our human life – relationship, sex, and marriage – is always fraught with difficulties.

Whilst the tone set by Pope Francis has been consistently open, mature and compassionate, all too often in our communities there has been real hurt and lack of sensitivity in how these matters have been addressed. So perhaps the first lesson to learn is that the reading of *Amoris Laetitia* must be carried out, to quote Cardinal Baldiserri, "with the logic of pastoral mercy" – where mercy is understood not as some paternalistic and superior removal of a just punishment, but rather as that form that God's love takes when confronted with our pervasive, and universal, human weakness and brokenness. The logic of the text is, fundamentally, one of love in the face of human struggles, one of grace that meets people in our mess and muddle.

Of course Bishop Egan, with whose words I began, is – in one sense – absolutely right: this is not a document that "changes Church teaching" – nor was it ever intended to be. However, what I want to suggest through this short presentation is that what *Amoris*

Laetitia does is actually rather more radical than that. For it returns us instead to the root (*radix*) of what it means to live as Christians in all the ordinariness of humanity – to live as the Body of Christ, which is a “family of families”, an embodiment of love in real, practical, flawed relationships.

It does this by speaking of the *realities* of marriage, family and relationship in a way which I think is shaped by three strong, fundamental themes: incarnation; discernment; and a culture of God’s merciful love. These are the tenses I wish to demonstrate in our time together, and to think about in terms of the real difference they might make to the life of the Church and the lives of the many people who currently feel at odds with that ecclesial living. However, before going into more detail here, an overview of the content of the Apostolic Exhortation will be helpful.

An overview of the document

It is very striking to see a kind of map of the territory through which the Exhortation leads its reader. The path taken does itself, I believe, tell us something about the way we are here being encouraged to think, speak and act in matters of faith, marriage, family and relationship. To begin with, we can note that the clear reaffirmation of Church teaching in these matters, as received from John Paul II, Paul VI and Pius XII, is to be found in the third chapter. What is significant, I think, for the way this is to be read, is the route that is taken to get to this point.

So, in chapter 1, Pope Francis sets the tone of his message by rooting it in Scripture. He does this not only by referring to “biblical teaching” on marriage and family, but, more predominantly, through a more narrative account of scripture accounts of human families – an account which not only celebrates human relationships and their reflection of God’s grace in Creation, but also recognises the scriptural testimony to family life as “a path of suffering and blood”. (19) * What we see here is that, right from the start, Pope Francis is concerned with the realities and complexities of his subject – realities and complexities that are properly a core part of God’s revelation of love in the scriptural narratives.

Right from the start our consideration of faith and family is to be undertaken as an attentiveness to “realities”, in the sure and scripturally-based knowledge that it is in these realities, even as they are subject to the Fall, that the story of God’s redeeming love is to be seen. As Pope Francis boldly asserted in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Realities are more important than ideas!”

It is from this scriptural reflection that the text then moves to consider not, first of all, Church teaching, but rather the contemporary experiences of families in all their grounded, concrete complexity (Chapter 2). This rooting of theology in practices and lived experience is characteristic of the Latin American Liberation Theology which has been so much a part of Francis’s thought – and this is especially true of Argentinian Liberation Theology, with its emphasis on popular religious culture, the lives of the poor and ordinary Christians as an environment for seeing and understanding the work and love of God. So, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father speaks warmly of popular devotion. It is this same sense of the importance of “the fleshy”, the human being with a face and story all their own, that underpins the humility and love with which the ordinary, flawed experiences of marriage and family are spoken of in the second

* This and other numbers in the text refer to paragraphs in *Amoris Laetitia*.

chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*.

It is for this reason, too, that reflection on the concrete and material needs of marriages and families is also given significant space in this chapter. It is made clear that we cannot simply wax lyrical about the theological beauty of marriage and family without facing, as a priority, related issues of social justices: “dignified and affordable housing”, access to affordable health care, just working conditions and hours. All these are seen as basic to our discussions of the family, as well as care for the particular stresses brought about by migration, disability and care for the elderly and inform. (44-48).

The questions of marriage and family are, first of all, questions of the just ordering of societies. These real and practical demands precede the work of speaking doctrinally, morally and theologically about these deeply human ways of life. So this is the path we take to revisiting first ecclesial teaching on marriage and family (chapter 3) and then the biblical and theological tradition around the living of loving relationships in chapter 4. Here again, the lens through which we are to read is clearly that of God’s merciful and constant love.

In introducing chapter 3 as a summary of Church teaching on the family Pope Francis sets the scene, remembering how the Synod Fathers “began with the gaze of Jesus and they spoke of how he ‘looked upon the women and men whom he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps in truth, patience and mercy as he proclaimed the demands of the Kingdom of God’”. (60) Having made this summary in this key of compassion, the document comes to what, for many readers, is the heart of the whole text – Chapter 4’s reflection on I Cor 13: 4-7.

Each phrase of these verses is reflected on at length, particularly relating it to the work and vocation of love with married and family life. These powerful and moving meditations remind us of something that is, perhaps, too easily forgotten: that it is “the official teaching of the Catholic Church” that marriage is about *love*! And this love is profoundly of the Gospel; it calls us into a daily practice of friendship, characterised by three simple human words – please, thank you and sorry (133ff); and it is celebrated in the pleasures and passion of sexual love as a created and graced good. (142)

Chapter 5 speaks of the welcoming of children as gifts into the marriage relationship, reaffirming church teaching on openness to life, before the path leads us to consideration of pastoral practices in chapters 6-8 – the questions which so many were (and are) painfully and immediately conceded with. Particularly notable here is the way in which Chapter 6 makes clear the limits of what can be done in this – or any – papal document. It recognizes the importance of context and particularities of cultures in relation to speaking to these human social realities of love, relationship and domestic living – again, in tune with Pope Francis’s background in liberation theology in Argentina. It is this attentiveness to realities that means that the Exhortation cannot give a “pastoral plan” to all local churches for all circumstances.

Thus, all that it is proper for the Pope to do here, in reflecting with the Synod of bishops, is to offer some general reflections on “significant pastoral challenges.” It is important to note here that of major concern among these pastoral challenges are questions of *formation* - formation of couples for marriage (a lifelong matter, not simply reducible to a marriage preparation course) *and* of seminarians and priests. In particular, what is signalled as crucial in all such formation is a practical realistic



approach, equipping people not simply with doctrines, but with skills, and inter-disciplinary understanding.

For example, speaking of seminary training the document argues that:

"Seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation

in the areas of engagement and marriage....It is important for families to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and to keep them well grounded in reality." (203)

It is, of course, in chapter 8 that so many of the difficult questions that were the focus of so much media and ordinary Catholic attention are treated. It is also here that we see some of the most characteristic and renewing features of this document – features which, I would argue, militate against any over-simple sense that "nothing has been changed" by *Amoris Laetitia*. Here, again, the key things to attend to are the ways in which the Pope exhorts us to attend to these challenges and difficulties – with love, and in a spirit of accompaniment. It is in this context that the much-reported "law of gradualness" is referred to (293ff), emphasising the ways in which we are all on journeys towards holiness, even whilst living broken and sinful lives. The key is to enable what is already good and of God to grow, rather than merely condemning what is not yet perfect. So: *"...the Church does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage."* (292)

For it is precisely from these elements – of love, fidelity, friendship – upon which the Church has no monopoly, let us remember, that the couple and the family can grow God-ward. The Holy Father goes further, underlying the realities of God's grace at work, even in what might appear to be (or actually be) situations flawed by sin. A number of quotes illustrate this powerfully:

"...there is a need "to avoid judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations" (296)

"The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations. Hence it is can no longer simply be said that all those in any "irregular" situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace. More is involved here than mere ignorance of the rule." (301)

"It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual's actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being." (305)

What we have here, I believe, is at least the beginnings of a renewed understanding of the nature of "law" and "rule" in the living of holiness. This renewed understanding is not entirely new, as the frequent references to Thomas Aquinas in this section make clear; but in our own context of emerging from an over-rational modernity, it can call us back, and forwards, to a graced, compassionate and transformative engagement with the realities of our world, within which God is, surely, at work.

Incarnation and the sacramentality of even broken human living

It is at this point that I want to bring our overview of *Amoris Laetitia* to a close by suggesting consideration of three themes which can be seen as emerging from the text: incarnation; discernment; and a culture of God's merciful love.

Turning first to incarnation, it can be seen that this a text that is permeated by that sense of "realities" which was such a strong theme in the Holy Father's first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. There he boldly reflected on his conviction that "realities are more important than ideas". In *Amoris Laetitia* this is given a particular focus, as the realities of marriage and family relations shape the document's message.

In all these places, and throughout the document, there persists a care for concrete realities, leading to a consistent call to the church to develop "a healthy dose of self-criticism", especially when tempted to "an excessive idealism." Such idealism can all too often put people off marriage and family, precisely because of its apparent failure to engage with the realities which people experience. (36)

There are a couple of problems with this emphasis on "realities". The first is that it can sound like we are assuming that the Christian traditions around marriage and family, and the truth they seek to express are, somehow, not quite "real" in the way actual experiences are. In fact, the realities of practice and experience, and the realities of true teaching and insight, are held together throughout the text, reflecting that authentic Catholic instinct for an incarnational, sacramental realism.

So, when it comes to improving preparation for marriage, or the training of clergy (chapter 6) we are presented with a vision of a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach to married and family life. Deepening of understanding in this area must always involve "a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation." (202) Guidelines for marriage preparation of couples are thoroughly practical, equipping them with skills of communication and reflection. These skills are not seen as distinct from doctrine and theology, but rather as an authentic and necessary means of embodying the Christian tradition in living, contextually appropriate ways.

A second problem for some, here, is that this deep sense of integrated faith and practice in marriage and family resists any very simple black and white responses. It is not clear "who wins". But for this document this is not a problem, but rather a graced and proper *complexity*, entirely in keeping with our Catholic faith. We believe in God who has spoken to us in human history, in the lives of ordinary men and women; we believe that God's fullest "Word" is, in fact, the life of a real person, lived in a particular time and place, with his own family – Jesus; and we believe in the lively presence of God's Spirit in all the muddles and joys and grieving of human lives. This is the proper complexity of graced reality, which is at the heart of *Amoris Laetitia*.

The call to discernment

With this complexity – that proper and lovely "muddle" especially familiar to those of us who are parents – comes a particular demand, addressed to all in the Church, which comprises my second theme: the call to *discernment*. This word is found thirty-two times in the Exhortation, the majority of these occasions being found in chapter 8 ☒ "Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness" – the chapter which speaks most clearly of "irregular", fractured or difficult situations in marriage and family.

“Discernment” is used here to describe that careful attentiveness to the particularities of people’s lives and relationships, in the light and love of the Holy Spirit, and with a learned care for the Christian tradition.

This call to discernment can be recognised as *the* most significant and transformative teaching of *Amoris Laetitia*. It is a call which doesn’t “change teaching/ doctrine”, but does transform the ways in which we teach and learn as a church together. And this, perhaps, changes everything. Discernment ensures a sensitivity to each particular set of situations for each couple, family, person, rejecting as “reductive” any approach which simply measures actions against a general rule: “that is not enough discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being.” (304)

It is Pope Francis’ commitment to concrete realities, God’s presence among them, and the subsequent call to discernment, that enables him to encourage us all to see “the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer respond” to Church teaching on marriage. (292) Even in “irregular”, broken situations the prayerful discernor of God’s Spirit will recognise love which “in some ways reflects God’s own love”. (294)

The renewal of Church culture

Such a fundamental call for renewal of Church culture in relation to the real situations of people’s domestic relationships brings challenges, of course. Discernment requires humility, attentiveness to traditions, experiences and context, and prayerful sensitivity to the Spirit; a discerning Church is one in which both laity and pastors seek to grow in spiritual maturity, together. More prosaically, the discerning Church is one in which we cannot simply and exclusively look to Rome for a single solution, an “easy recipe” which can then be applied to every particular situation. (§299)

Local Church communities will need to reflect together, in maturity and attentiveness, for the truly radical nature of this text to be received into the life of the Church. If we respond joyfully to Pope Francis vision and call in *Amoris Laetitia* I believe we will see something quite remarkable and lovely: the renewal of the whole Church through the loving contemplation of “domestic Church” in the ordinary, flawed living of love in our households.

This talk was given to the Hertfordshire Newman Circle in June, 2016. Dr Clare Watkins is a lecturer in Ministerial Theology at the University of Roehampton.

Advance Notice

London Newman Lecture 2017

Thursday, March 2nd

Frank Field MP

6.00 for 6.30 start at Loyola Hall,

Heythrop College, Kensington Square, London W8 5HN

Full details will be published in the January 2017 issue of *The Newman*



Who is my neighbour?

An exploration of sanctuary and migration in the light of Catholic Social Teaching

By Barbara Hungin

During this last year we have seen many images of people in a desperate state fleeing their homes. Europe seems caught between an open-hearted response to an image of a tiny body washed up on a shoreline, and complicated cycles of fear about the arrival of strangers. Europe is being forced to confront the reality that ours is a generation that will be marked by the movement of displaced peoples of a proportion we perhaps could never have imagined. Certainly not since the Second World War. People are on the move – more so than ever.

When the numbers of those seeking asylum increased, many more began to be dispersed round the country. In 2002 Teesside had a significant amount of housing that was not occupied – of course in the least desirable estates! When people were dispersed they often arrived through the night. Coaches would leave London and arrive on Teesside in the early hours of the morning. Members of Stockton parish church met the new arrivals and provided hospitality until arrangements could be made for housing the next day. The system has now changed in that people are initially sent to Holding Centres and then to wherever there is housing. Our nearest centre is Wakefield.



My first involvement was as part of a group that started a Saturday morning Drop In. We provided refreshment, conversation, advice, activities. It was the power of peoples' stories that drew us into a commitment both to those we met and to the wider campaign for justice. New arrivals are angry and frightened, disempowered and frustrated. The burden of proof they have to provide to the Immigration Department comes as a shock. To be questioned about the most horrible things that they have endured – and questioned by people from a different culture – adds to their trauma. (This is especially true for women who have suffered sexual assault).

The asylum process

Though attempts have been made to make the asylum process quicker and more efficient there are still a significant number who face destitution when their initial application and appeal has been refused.

The work of Justice First (a Teesside Charity which I chair) focuses on helping those with no recourse to public funding to avoid destitution, by re-engaging with the legal system to have their support re-instated, and provides the opportunity to make a thoroughly researched presentation of their case for asylum. Rightly there remains considerable concern within the churches over the inter-related issues of destitution, detention and deportation. Access to health care is limited. Changes to legal aid make it harder to access legal representation in immigration cases, opening the path for unscrupulous advisors. Continuing bureaucratic inefficiencies in the Home Office leave people in limbo for years

on end. The situation in reality is dramatically different from the impression created by tabloid newspapers and others whipping up anxiety or hatred towards such people.

I am grateful for the contribution of two authors in the preparation of this talk: Anna Rowlands, Professor of Theology – Institute of Catholic Studies, Durham University. Daniel G. Groody – a priest and Professor of Theology at Notre Dame University in USA.

This crisis is both old and new: intense waves of migration have been a hallmark of European history. What has also shifted over the last two decades is the story that the European nation state has told itself about its relation to the migrant who seeks entry. The granting of asylum has Christian theological roots traced way back to the notion of territorial asylum found in Judaism's temple and later the city-based practice of asylum: a tradition for the protection of the innocent from harm.

After all, the "Judeo-Christian tradition is steeped in images of migration and the seeking of refuge" – from the migration of Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, through Moses and the tribes of Israel in the Desert – to Mary and Joseph and much of Jesus' ministry.

This Jewish teaching is rooted in both a prohibition against harm and an injunction to love the stranger as yourself. Christianity inherited this understanding and intensified the link between the care offered to those in distress and salvation. Both traditions teach that the stranger, exile and person in distress carries to the settled community a form of divine message, often difficult to decipher and troubling. Anna Rowlands suggests that in relation to the admission of migrants, European states are caught between the principle of liberality of provision (a right to have a claim heard, legal support in some form, housing and some basic welfare provision) and a political desire to limit the possibilities of claiming such provision. There is thus a contradiction between the abstract rhetoric of inclusion and a concrete standing temptation to exclude, using extreme forms of coercion in the case of the asylum seeker.

At Justice First we certainly experience the process as very adversarial.

I have also welcomed the opportunity to reflect on broader issues of sanctuary and migration which are at the heart of the day to day service issues that we offer. In the light of gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching how do we see the situation today in terms of the experiences of those who are seeking sanctuary here or indeed, migrating for a number of reasons?

A pre-election document

Before the General Election last year Terry Drainey (Bishop of Middlesbrough), and Paul Ferguson (Bishop of Whitby), along with other faith leaders, signed a pre-election document affirming their commitment to seek the common good, stating:

"that people who are poor and at risk are specially deserving of fair treatment, protection and dignity; that it is our duty to promote peace as the fruit of justice, to honour people of all cultures and faiths, to serve those who have experienced injustice or persecution and to welcome people who are in need of a safe refuge."

Wouldn't that be great as a political manifesto? Political debates about migration in general and immigration in particular seem to revolve narrowly around two concepts: numbers and control. By approaching the crisis in human rather than statistical terms it becomes possible to share the reality of the individuals at its heart.

The basic questions are:

Why do people leave everything that is familiar to them and flee?

Where does the prevalent hostile attitude come from?

A commonly short sighted view is imposed by several factors – political timidity, lack of bureaucratic room for manoeuvre, newspaper scare-mongering, constant repetition of the numbers game and the popular perception that most people are “worried about immigration”. This has an effect on peoples’ reactions to those seeking sanctuary here. We have a task and an opportunity to challenge stereotypical views. How do we make this about people rather than abstract numbers?

An important moral theological question arises: if we cannot (or do not try to) agree on what we are FOR in terms of the moral good we aim for, are we not pushed endlessly towards a negative cycle of reaction through which we find unity only in what we are AGAINST, and make public policy to suit? The absence of an attempt towards the common good is never theologically neutral: in the absence of an orientation towards the good, evil takes hold. Is this partly how we can understand the cycles of fear that drive us towards building higher walls, and the increase in the use of detention?

The run-up to the referendum

Fears, suspicions and stresses are all exploited. In the run up to the referendum, migrants and those seeking sanctuary were themselves not at the heart of the debate. They were talked about, misrepresented, scapegoated and even demonised. We want human, helpful and hopeful conversations based on fact not supposition. Talking of people as a “breed apart” is negative and unhelpful.

This is particularly ironic in that so many politicians are descended from refugees and migrants. Looking back at our own family history, my grandfather was a migrant. I am married to a migrant; my daughter-in-law is a migrant.

It is also important to recognise that given a choice, refugees would rather stay at home. The search for life – not a better life, just LIFE – justifies their journey.

To quote one man from Afghanistan, “I knew the journey would be dangerous, but it is more dangerous to stay where people take a bomb and kill themselves and others. This happened every day.”

In 2014, in a courageous speech at the National Justice and Peace Network Conference, Sarah Teather brought our attention to the prevalent attitude amongst some members of the present government who reacted to hostile media opinion by finding ways of making the environment more difficult for immigrants and refugees. These included bringing in proposals requiring landlords to verify the immigration status of their tenants and GPs of their patients. As she said it would not be long before anyone who “sounded a bit foreign” would be under scrutiny and if people could not go to their GPs they would end up at A&E departments which is contrary to everyone’s wishes and certainly won’t save money.

She was herself angry that there were no alternative voices on Immigration focusing on what people have to offer our communities. Sarah herself, having left politics, is now the Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service based in London. Recently in a Tablet article, she wrote:

“We’ve got ourselves into a position on asylum, where we imagine that everyone who comes to our shores is coming to take something from us. “They” arrive in poverty and

take “our” resources. But we are missing a trick. Think about the volunteers here. They are destitute and yet they give back with an extravagance of generosity. Our reading of what is scarcity and what is abundance is a bit skewed. And we are missing what we benefit from by making people welcome.”

However, a dangerous and damaging trend that we see publicly is: The promotion of otherness.

One of the ways of promoting “otherness” is categorisation and labelling. What labels do we use in this country: migrants, immigrants, illegal immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and even “bogus” asylum seekers and so it goes on. These labels are largely political, legal and social constructions. And they convey values and judgments.

The difficulty arises when people are identified principally and primarily in terms of their political status rather than their human identity.

The universal message of modern Catholic social teaching is directed to all nations and all peoples and it is concerned with all aspects of the human being and the full human development of every person.

Catholic Social Teaching

To quote Bishop Lynch – the member of the Bishops’ Conference who has pastoral responsibility for migrants:

“At the heart of Catholic Social Teaching is the principle that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. A migrant’s legal status is quite separate from his or her human dignity. A human being’s worth is defined and determined by their God-given dignity not by the papers they do or do not carry.”

I was very affected by the words of one man who came to this country from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His experience led him to state: “People seeking asylum - their first name is asylum seeker and their second name is “wrong person”. Seeking asylum is what I DO, not WHO I am.”

Daniel Groody argues that part of the task of a theology of migration is to challenge the dehumanising stereotypes created by these labels and build up what John Paul II called a “culture of life”. A passage from Hebrews is relevant here: “Continue to love each other like brothers and sisters and remember always to welcome the stranger, for by doing this some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”

The gifts that each of us bear enrich us and therefore the gifts that the stranger brings to our midst enrich us deeply and profoundly. These strangers are God’s messengers to us. Migration is not only a social reality with profound implications but also a way of thinking about God and what it means to be human in the world. This can be a compelling force in understanding and responding to migrants and refugees. Human life cannot be understood apart from the mystery of God.

Daniel Groody states: “No aspect of a theology of migration is more fundamental, nor more challenging in its implications, than the incarnation. Through Jesus, God enters into the territory of the human condition in order to help men and women lost in their earthly sojourn, find their way back home to God.” God migrates into a world that is poor and divided because it is precisely in history’s darkest place that God can reveal hope to all who experience pain, rejection and alienation. Jesus himself was

scapegoated and willing to undergo the worst human indignities.

The parallels with those seeking asylum are compelling. They, too, leave their homelands, undergo dangerous journeys and take up residence in a foreign land which not only entails emptying themselves but radically surrendering everything they own without any assurance that what they lose will come back to them.

Without adequate consideration of the humanity of the refugee it is impossible to construct just policies ordered to the common good and to the benefit of society's weakest members. Within Catholic Social Teaching the moral health of an economy is measured not in terms of GNP but in terms of how the economy affects the quality of life in the community as a whole.

A theology of migration seeks to understand what it means to take on the mind and heart of Christ in light of the plight of today's refugees. Daniel Groody asks: "Who do we see in the vulnerable stranger? A mirror of ourselves; a reflection of Christ and an invitation to human solidarity?" Misunderstandings and injustice occur when refugees are perceived primarily as problems in themselves rather than as symptoms of deeper social ills and imbalances. They are perceived as matters of national security rather than responses to human insecurity and as social threats rather than as neighbours. They seem to be used as scapegoats for problems that have caused them to flee their own country in the first place.

A Civilisation of love

Theology and Catholic Social Teaching provide a more adequate framework for responding to the most vulnerable members of society and for building a civilisation of love. Jesus' fellowship with sinners, his concern for those outside the Law and his praise of the righteous Good Samaritan raise important questions about law, its purposes, uses, misuses and abuses. Jesus recognises the value of law but compassion requires a reading of the Law that gives primary consideration to meeting human needs. Through sharing a meal – Jesus frequently crossed borders created by narrow interpretations of the law – He reached out in particular to those who were marginalised racially, economically, religiously and morally. His mission was to bring everyone into one community.

In his Lampedusa sermon in 2013, and in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis has offered much wisdom: He emphasises that while there is a crisis of political will, a political crisis in the case of migrant response also always reveals a crisis of civil society: for it is civil society which is responsible for the generation and sustaining of practices of compassion. Are we willing to confront this dual crisis which has political and spiritual components?

He reminds us that the task of accompaniment is core to the intellectual theological and pastoral mission of the Church: but this will require a willingness not just to "be with" but to suffer with others.

While the Church has good reason to support the legal structures that recognise refugee need, this perhaps ought not to limit our imaginations and our memories about what protection and accompaniment of the stranger on the move might mean. Papal encyclicals point rightly to the multifaceted causes of displacement – environmental, economic and political – and to the need for systems for the management of migrant flows which recognise this humanitarian reality and respond with political and economic creativity.

Seen in the light of government policy there is a stark mismatch. What we are seeing now is a raft of new regulations to make the immigration law much tougher despite the arguments against the measures put forward by many MPs of all parties.

One of the particularly confusing elements of recent legislation is the need for people who wish to present a “fresh claim for asylum” to go in person to the Liverpool Office. Regardless of where you are living in Britain you have to go to Liverpool. (There is of course no Home Office funding available for travel to get there). With the publicity comes the statement: “We will give people at least 10 days’ notice of an appointment which will give them time to raise the money to get here.” That is a huge challenge for people facing destitution.

Risk and vulnerability

We have the opportunity to look at things very differently. The refugee can be seen not just as a passive recipient of charitable giving but as a bearer of the gospel. This is often encountered by moving out into places of risk and vulnerability. So many that I have met give expression to the courage needed to move forward amid the risks, tensions,



Syrian refugees in Greece

vulnerabilities, and sufferings. The closer people move toward union with God and communion with others, the more such union will manifest itself in breaking down walls that divide, exclude and alienate. The passage in Matthew 25 is central to this: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink”.

Christians played a significant role in the formulation of human rights charters and their subsequent incorporation into international and national legislative frameworks in the last century. It is vital that these are not put at risk through thoughtless rhetoric or ideological compulsion, or indeed from neglect.

A theology of migration is a way of speaking about the significance of the incarnation in light of the issues of contemporary society and the injustices of the current global economy. The incarnation has much to say about a God who crosses borders in order to forge new relationships and the challenge to all human beings to do the same. The Christian vision is that the whole earth belongs to God and that humanity has stewardship, not ownership of it. Lines drawn on maps dividing territory from territory are a consequence of human behaviour (or misbehaviour) and not of divine order.

A call for “open borders” has no traction in current migration debates but the Christian dream and long-term desire for universality should inform our challenge to the hard-hearted character of the current discussion/propaganda/and in many cases misinformation. A theology of migration seeks to foster human dignity in the poor and vulnerable, to challenge any structures and systems of society that divide and dehumanise and to uplift all efforts to build a more just and humane world. Reducing people to their legal or political status not only denies dignity to those in need but also dehumanises those who have the opportunity to help. I think this is what can happen to staff at Lunar House in Croydon, at other Home Office Centres and at the

Immigration Detention Centres.

A theology of migration seeks to understand what it means to take on the mind and heart of Christ in light of the plight of today's refugees. Hopefully Christians begin with the vision of a society where all are truly valued, and to ensure our politics becomes a politics of hope and not a pessimistic retreat into xenophobia and finding someone on the edges to blame. It is also our task to ensure that we become a country rooted in both justice and compassion for the most vulnerable and exploited of our citizens.

To conclude with hope: There are many people and organisations working courageously and creatively on behalf of refugees and those seeking asylum. Their experience and dedication are significant force for good and illustrate what can be achieved – particularly when working together.

I will finish with a quote from Elie Wiesel (Jewish-American Professor and political activist) from his experiences of Auschwitz: "If I see a person or persons suffer and the distance between us does not shrink then my place is not good, not enviable."

Barbara Hungin is Chair of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Middlesbrough Diocese. This article is based on a talk she gave to the Manchester and North Cheshire Circle in May 2016.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

May 20th, 2016

By their fruits you will know them. (Mt. 7.16)

As a relative newcomer to the Newman Association I hesitate to comment on its standing in our world. Yet reading through the interim reports of the Working Groups (*The Newman*: May 2016) I detect a certain anxiety about the Association's purpose and its role in the foreseeable future.

The Mission Group must be seen as central to this enquiry, the other Groups (Finance, Communications and Membership) surely troop along behind. The Mission Group (now renamed the Development Group – Ed.) concludes that the Association's main objective is to promote open discussion and greater understanding in today's Church. We must infer that the "greater understanding" will be about the "Church" itself, whatever we mean by that term (see Paul Vallely's article in the same issue). I joined the Association simply to explore my faith and to deepen my understanding of it – except that it isn't simple! *Credo ut intelligam*.

It's enough isn't it? We do not need to "promote" ourselves. The Association doesn't need to be marketed. People will be drawn to us by the quality of our study and the charisma (one hopes) of the members. But how will outsiders know about the Newman Association? you will ask.

By their fruits you will know them. We must share with the world what we learn from each other. We hear learned talks and produce erudite articles to a high degree of excellence. Perhaps we could distil some of that learning into a series of readable short papers or tracts expressed in plain English for others to understand. Indeed, others may come to know about us in this way. It might even prove a source of revenue!

But who is going to write and produce these tracts? Ah, there's the nub; let discussion begin.

Michael Bridson, Surrey Hills Circle

Report on the 74th Annual General Meeting, June 11th 2016

On Saturday 11th June 2016, 50 Members and Associate Members of the Association met at the Friends' Meeting House, Manchester, for the Annual General Meeting. Arrangements for the meeting and subsequent Mass at St. Mary's (the Hidden Gem) had been made by the Manchester and North Cheshire Circle. Harcourt Concannon, Chairman of the Manchester and North Cheshire Circle, at the invitation of the President, Gerald Williams, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He spoke warmly of the long secular and Christian history of Manchester, and the city's involvement in key events in UK social history. The Friends' Meeting House had, indeed, been used to treat the wounded after the Peterloo Massacre.



The formal business of the day *Members hurrying through the Manchester rain to Mass* included reports from the President, Acting Secretary, and Treasurer, and the election of new Officers of the Association and of Council members.

The elections were uncontested and, in addition to those members of Council continuing in post, the following persons were elected:

President – Mr. G. Williams

Vice-Presidents – Mr. W. Russell, Sir Anthony Holland

Treasurer – Mr. K. Ryan

Secretary – Mr. B. Hamill

Council Members – Dr. M. Jameson, Mr. K. Lambert, Mr. A. Mthobi, Mr. J. Potts.

The detail of the day's business is contained in the formal minutes of the AGM.

The President paid tribute to Dr. Chris Quirke, who had served as Secretary for a full term, and as Acting Secretary thereafter, but would now be standing down as Brian Hamill had volunteered to serve as Secretary.

The President also made special mention of two recently deceased members, Mr. Peter Havard, and Mr. Michael Vadon. Peter Havard, of Manchester & North Cheshire



Gerald Williams, President

Circle, had served as Treasurer, and had instituted effective changes to the structure and presentation of the accounts. Michael Vadon, Ealing Circle, had been a Past President of the Association, and had acted latterly in the capacity of Examiner. Requiescant in pace.

The President mentioned some forthcoming events and activities:

The Palazzola Pilgrimage, between September 16th and 22nd, would now include a talk by Prof. Maurice Whitehead, and possibly one on St. Philip Neri. The number of pilgrims was likely to exceed 40.

A Conference on *Laudato Si'* in the South East was being planned as a joint venture



between the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton and the Newman Association. Details would be announced once arrangements were fully in place.

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.

John Potts

Inside St Mary's, the Hidden Gem

Reports from Working Groups

Membership Group: The President gave a report on the Membership Group, whose task had been to find a way of retaining the identifiably Catholic nature of the Association, while extending full membership to other Christians, these being the clear wishes of the Conference delegates.

He stated that members of the working group had failed to reach agreement and this situation had led to the resignations from Council of Harcourt Concannon and Arthur McLay. The President publicly issued an invitation to both to rejoin Council. The President stated that the Fourth Meeting of Council 2015/2016 had discussed the matter, and had also been split evenly on the subject, requiring the President to make his casting vote in favour of the status quo.

Subsequently, Fr. Fabian had liaised with the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales to ascertain whether there was any issue in Canon Law, and what reaction we might get from the BCEW in the event that members still retained an appetite for change. On a show of hands, those present at the AGM favoured a change in the membership rules.

Communications Group: Anthony Baker gave a brief report for the group. The group had a number of members, and had worked mainly through emails. There had been

no face-to-face meetings of the group.

The main output from the group was a matrix of communications, internal and external, between Council, Circles, and third parties.

There had been a number of comments during the AGM about activity at parish level (i.e. support and promotion of the Association by the clergy) but in fact there was much that we could do ourselves.

The full report of the group is available from Anthony Baker.

Finance Group: Kevin Lambert reported for the group. They had been much exercised by the question of allocations from the centre to Circles, and had addressed questions such as:

- Should the £350 allocation be raised?
- Should active Circles receive more than others to fund their greater level of activity?
- Given the level of balances in Circles' accounts (£17,000), should Circles always require an allocation?

A second area of discussion had been the requirements of the centre. The group acknowledged that the legal identity of the Association existed at the national level, but discussed what the basic services and funding should be for central operations:

- £4,000 a year would cover a skeleton service, meaning no website and no Newman journal
- £15,000 a year was required for the full service currently provided

The group recognised that the choice would be made by the membership, and the level of subscriptions required was the prerogative of the AGM. The group was split on this question.

(In discussion it was pointed out that a change in subscriptions could take two years from an initial proposal, through ratification by an AGM, to implementation.)

An interim proposal from the group was that is that:

- An annual budget should be set for Council
- Performance against the budget should be reviewed through the year
- A review of exceptional expenditures should be undertaken with a view to eliminating any no longer deemed appropriate
- The size of Council should be reviewed with a view to reduction in numbers of people and associated costs.

Mission Group: Peter Firth reported for the group. He opened by saying that the group believed that its title was potentially confusing – the term Mission could relate to the overall mission of the Church, to the mission of the Newman Association, to the mission of the group (to look at recruitment and increasing membership), and to corporate approaches to “mission statements”. The group had therefore renamed itself the “Development Group”.

The group had arranged two face-to-face meetings, but only one had proved necessary, which had been very productive. He recommended such a meeting to the Communications Group. Peter had drafted a report which had been made available to the website.

The group's conclusions were:

- The purpose encapsulated in the strapline, *Promoting Open Discussion and Greater Understanding in Today's Church* remained valid
- The life of the Association resided in the Circles, but given the legal identity of the organisation, there was necessary central activity, causing tension between the centre and Circles
- Faced with an ageing demographic we needed to target specific groups
- Our marketing, promotion and communications to these target groups needed to present our "product" and our USP (Unique Selling Proposition). A fuller exposition was given in the report
- The Development Group had been questioned by the Finance Group about any use of the Association's reserves. It was the view of the Development Group that reserves should not fund operational deficits; rather, they were for projects that would enable the Association to recruit and grow
- There was much good practice carried on in Circles. Such practices should be collated into a Resource Pack and made available to Circles
- A map of Circles plotted against the overall map of Great Britain showed great deserts of inactivity, particularly in the east and south-west of England: we should be aiming to extend our reach into these areas
- Collaboration with other organisations that complemented our purpose (e.g. Living Theology) should be explored for mutual benefit.

Finally, Peter noted that the group had latterly unearthed a report from a 2011 sub-committee that reached much the same conclusions and recommendations as theirs. It had not been implemented, and seemed to have slipped from the collective memory, as it had not been referred to at the Hinsley Hall Conference. It was imperative that any accepted recommendations from the current work should be implemented

Conclusion

The President concluded by stating that he hoped to see all accepted recommendations from the Working Groups implemented, and thanked everyone who had volunteered as members of the groups, especially those who had led them.

He stressed that the Conference could only bear fruit if the membership was willing to take on the responsibilities of finding new members (this was indeed a duty), and to take up offices in their local Circles. The President stated that incoming Council would address the reports at its second meeting.

Newman Association Strategic Plan for Growth 2017-20



The Next 75 Years

John Potts

A Portrait of John Henry Newman

Following lunch at Friends' House after the AGM members were entertained by a talk on Newman's letters. This was given by Monsignor Roderick Strange who has distilled down the Blessed John Henry's huge output, filling 32 published volumes, into one 600-page book which he has entitled *John Henry Newman, A Portrait in Letters* (OUP).

He said that it was hard for us, living in a time when letters have been replaced by emails and blogs, to realise the significance such postal communications had in Victorian England – when Newman was, for instance, writing controversial letters to Charles Kingsley and others. After all, the Penny Post was launched in 1840, when Newman was in his late 30s, and at that time some big towns had three posts a day so, Mgr Strange said, “you could have an answer back the same evening”.

He said that it was not possible to present a comprehensive life story through a limited choice of letters but he wished to create a personal depiction of the great churchman. He rejected the title of “Selected Letters” and eventually opted instead for “A Portrait in Letters”. He wished to provide a sense of the personality of the letter writer. There were letters included to family and friends, biographical and humorous letters but also terse letters laced with anger and sarcasm. He found references to Newman spending time burning letters.

“Also, I included famous letters, important letters,” such as to Kingsley and the notable letter to Bishop William Ullathorne in 1870 on papal infallibility at the time of the First Vatican Council, supposed to be a private letter but leaked into the public domain. “I hope that a more rounded picture of the individual does emerge,” said Mgr Strange. He

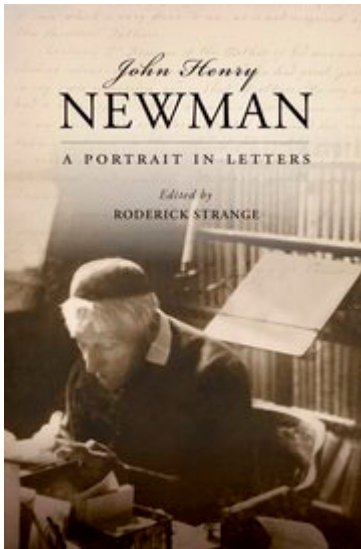
had set the letters out in chronological chapters, reflecting the major phases of Newman's life, but he had also taken particular care to reflect different aspects of his personality.

“Newman was a formidable letter writer,” he said. “Have I read them all? Well, I've been *through* them all. I over-selected at first, so then I had to whittle the selection down.” Roderick Strange has written two previous books on Newman and he said that the latest compilation came out of studies that he undertook after a request from the Oxford University Press in 2009 when he was serving as Rector of Beda College. Earlier he was for a time Catholic Chaplain at Oxford University. Currently, after leaving Beda College in 2015, he is attached to the University of Roehampton.

Barry Riley



*Monsignor Roderick Strange
at Friends' House*



The Church of the East: An ancient and endangered church

by Dr. Erica C D Hunter

The cumulative effects of the Gulf War waged in 1991 and the Allied Invasion of Iraq of 2003, together with the rise of *Da'esh* (otherwise known as ISIS), have impacted dramatically on the *Assyrian Church of the East* and its Uniate branch the *Chaldaean Catholic Church*. As well as a great loss of life, the events have precipitated massive displacement with Christians making up an estimated 40 per cent of all people fleeing Iraq. Many settled in Syria only to be embroiled in the civil war that is currently raging. Others took refuge in the territories administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq (Kurdistan).



In June 2014 *Da'esh* forcibly expelled the entire Christian population of Mosul as well as the villages on the Nineveh plains. Displaced from their traditional homelands, and with little prospect of return, many refugees now continue to live in makeshift conditions whilst they continue their search for stability and security that they see as primarily being available in the West. Thus, whilst the communities in Iraq have waned, the Western diaspora of the *Assyrian Church of the East* and the *Chaldaean Catholic Church* in North America, Britain and Europe has grown considerably. With the uncertain and unsettling situation that continues to unfold in Iraq and Syria, there are now real fears that the ancient Christian communities in those countries will only be an historical memory.

Under the Sassanids (225-635 AD)

The origins of Christianity in Iraq are shrouded in the mists of antiquity. However, Acts II.9 mentions the residents of Mesopotamia amongst the witnesses to the Pentecost. The title of “founding father” traditionally has fallen on the shoulders of the apostle Addai (whom legend associated with the advent of Christianity in Edessa). By the early third century there were sizeable communities. In 225 Ardashir, the incoming Zoroastrian king who established the Sassanid dynasty, founded more than twenty bishoprics in the Tigris-Euphrates area and stretching eastwards, across Iran, to the Caspian Sea. These populations were supplemented by an influx of large numbers of Christians who were deported from the Byzantine realms as a result of military incursions into Syria by the Sassanid monarch, Shapur I, in 256 and 260. Many of these Christians were Syriac-speakers, sharing a common language with their “brethren” in Mesopotamia. They also brought with them the legacy of the classical Hellenistic sciences, particularly philosophy and medicine.

Theodosius I's declaration of Christianity as the official state religion of the Byzantine Empire in 380 had major repercussions for Christians living in the Sassanid territories in the “land beyond the Euphrates”. Because of their shared faith the Sassanid monarchs suspected that Christians in Mesopotamia nurtured loyalties with the Byzantines. The two empires or “mega-powers” were mutually suspicious, and on numerous occasions engaged in acts of war, but their boundaries were not

hermetically sealed; trade and cultural contacts continued, as well as diplomatic missions. Theodosius I sent his ambassador Marutha of Maiperqat to the Sassanid monarch Yazdegird I (399-421) to request that the persecution of Christians be ended. The mission was successful and Yazdegird I recognised the Christians as a minority group with Isaac, the bishop of Seleucia (the capital city of the Sassanid empire) as the sect's theocratic head. He was responsible for his community, collected taxes and represented them in state matters. For this privilege, the Sassanian monarch had a say in the ecclesiastical appointment and could (as did happen) veto it.

The Christians in the Sassanid Empire "across the Euphrates" lived under a different, and often hostile, government compared to their Byzantine brethren but accepted the major theological decisions of the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) that culminated in the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed". At the end of the fourth century Byzantine and Mesopotamian Christians commonly upheld the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed and major festivals, including Christmas. The *Assyrian Church of the East* and the *Chaldaean Catholic Church* still do today.

Further negotiations between the Sassanid monarchs and the Byzantine emperors led to the signing of a treaty in 422 that guaranteed the freedom of worship to Christians in the Persian realms. In 424 the "Synod of Dadisho" declared the patriarchate in Seleucia-Ctesiphon to be autocephalous and independent of the pentarchy of five patriarchates – Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople – all of which were in the Byzantine territories. This separated the Persian Church from the "western" Byzantine church and preceded the Council of Ephesus in 431 that saw the expulsion of Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, who would become synonymous with the Church of the East (a.k.a. the Nestorian Church).

The theological evolution of "the Church across the Euphrates" into the "Church of the East" was gradual and did not take immediate effect after the decisions of 431. The Diophysite theology of Nestorius, Theodore (the Interpreter) of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus, which became the hallmark of the Church of the East, only became embedded in the late fifth/sixth centuries when the divisions between the Alexandrian and Antiochean theological traditions crystallised, partially fueled by the political division between the Byzantine and Sassanid empires.

The interests of Church and State in the Sassanid territories became interwoven and any show of sympathy with the Byzantine Emperors had serious consequences. A letter sent by Patriarch Babowai in 484 to Emperor Zeno was intercepted. When the Sassanid monarch Peroz (459-484) was informed of the patriarch's vacillating loyalty Babowai received the death sentence. Yet Christians did form a substantial part of the Sassanid population and the capital, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, boasted various churches and monasteries, including a convent dedicated to Mar Pethion. Some of these sites were excavated in the 1920s.

Early Islamic (Umayyid) – Abbassid periods (636-1258)

When Arab horsemen penetrated the eastern flank of Mesopotamia in 636 they met sizeable Christian communities in Hira, in the heartland of the now Shi'i region, near the cities of Najaf and Kerbala. Hira was a thriving stronghold of the Church of the East. Later Islamic sources record that the region boasted more than forty monasteries and churches, some of which have been excavated. In 762, the Abbassids founded their new capital,

Baghdad and fostered a thrust of Muslim intellectual enquiry where, as part of the spirit of scientific discovery, Christian scholars translated Greek works into Arabic.

The most famous of all scholars was the “Nestorian” Hunain ibn Ishaq (d. 873) who came from Hira. A native Arabic speaker, who was trained in Syriac and Greek, he laid down the basis of accurate translation techniques and the foundations of scientific and philosophical terminology in Arabic. He oversaw the translation of Aristotle and Plato and, reflecting his medical training, translated the works of Hippocrates and almost the entire corpus of Galen from Greek. He also was the personal physician to al-Mutawakkil (d. 861) whose caliphate corresponded with a sustained period of persecution of the Christian communities.

During this period Arabic became the *lingua franca* of Mesopotamia; areas of law and bureaucracy began to be Islamicised – the Islamic code of law, the Sharia, was undergoing a process of codification. On the economic front the *jizya* tax imposed on the Christians was a valuable source of revenue. These factors combined to result in an ongoing diminution of the communities of the Church of the East in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The Mongol Il-Khanate (1258 – 1335) and Timur-Lang (1335 – 1405)

The caliphate was terminated in 1258 when Mongol forces led by Hulugu Khan swept into Baghdad. Hulugu’s mother was a Christian princess who had been taken hostage



by Genghis Khan and given to his fourth son Tolui when he defeated the Keraits, a Turkic tribe that had been converted (in part) to Christianity by Church of the East missionaries who were very active in Central Asia from as early as the fifth century. The contemporary Armenian historian Stephannos Orbelian portrayed Hulugu and his mother as the “Constantine and Helen” of the time, for it seemed that they founded a new pro-Christian dynasty (the Khans didn’t actually embrace the faith themselves, but still adhered to shamanic belief).

Christian festivals were restored. In 1279 the mother of the third Il-Khan (Tegudar Ahmad 1282-4) revived the procession of the Epiphany that had ceased due to conflicts between the Christians and Moslems. The

eighth Il-Khan Oljeitu was baptised as Nicholas in Baghdad in honour of Pope Nicholas IV, but with his conversion to Shi’a Islam in 1291 the Mongol benevolence that had been previously shown to Christians ceased: savage persecutions signalled a major decline for the Church of the East that would continue throughout the medieval period.

The nemesis for the Church of the East came in the figure of Timur-Lang (Tamerlane), a zealous Muslim of Turkish stock who had established his capital at Samarkand. In 1393 he seized Mesopotamia, leaving 90,000 dead in Baghdad alone. In the early fifteenth century, compared



Timur-Lang

to the twenty-four cities that had dioceses at the arrival of Hulugu Khan, the only churches that remained in Mesopotamia, apart from Baghdad, were in Mosul, Erbil, Gezira, Tabriz and Maragha. All these cities, with the exception of Baghdad, were concentrated in the northern regions of Mesopotamia, signalling a dramatic shrinking and redeployment of the Christian population. This demographic pattern was maintained into the early twentieth century.

Christianity in the southern regions, including Hira, had disappeared. All the communities were concentrated in the north, on the Mosul plain and in Kurdistan, between Lake Urmia (modern Iran) and Lake Van (modern Turkey). Mosul and the surrounding villages had large Christian populations but the Church of the East communities were essentially confined to the northern, mountainous reaches of Kurdistan. These Aramaic-speaking Christians lived traditional, subsistence-level lives – sometimes in harmony with, at other times in conflict with – their Kurdish neighbours.

The Ottoman period (1516 – 1919)

In the early sixteenth century, Mesopotamia fell under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Turks whose administration classified Christians in two categories: the Greek rite (*Millet i-Rum*) and the non-Greek or Armenian rite (*Millet i-Arman*). The former applied to the Byzantine Orthodox Christians, the latter to the Armenians. As the main initiative of the “Sublime Porte” (the Ottoman rulers were sometimes named after a gateway in Istanbul) lay in extracting as much money as possible from their various communities, the Christians were able to lead relatively untrammelled lives providing they paid their taxes. In the Hakkari region of Kurdistan the patriarchate of the Church of the East had become a hereditary institution, in effect a theocracy with the title of *Mar Shimun* passing from uncle to nephew. The Patriarch, who was celibate and vegetarian, was the religious and secular head of the community, responsible for collecting taxes and for internal legal jurisdiction.

However, dissatisfaction with the system of a hereditary patriarch led to the emergence of the Chaldaean Catholic Church from the Church of the East in the mid-sixteenth century. At first its existence was tenuous but allegiance or union with Rome was eventually secured in the mid-18th century. The arrival of this Uniate church seriously diminished the numbers of the ancient, traditional Church of the East. However, the early 19th century saw an influx of Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries eager to revive and restore the forlorn and destitute communities of the Church of the East whom they considered to be “proto” Protestants. The Russians also established an Orthodox mission centre, printing press and church at Urmia as well as parishes and schools throughout the region. In 1827 an estimated 20,000 East Syrians, belonging to the Church of the East, crossed the border into Russia where there are still communities today.

Breakdown in the twentieth century

The breakdown of the Ottoman Empire had severe and long-lasting repercussions for the Church of the East. Following the large-scale massacres and episodes of destruction of 1915, which has been dubbed the year of the *Seyfo* (sword), the entire community of the Church of the East left Kurdistan in 1918 and descended to the plains of Mosul. Only about 50,000 survived the long march as many thousands died *en route* of exposure and hunger in the terrible conditions. The community became homeless refugees under the British mandate in Iraq and in the 1920s large numbers

settled in refugee camps at Baquba, east of Baghdad, where during the Mandate period many served in the British forces as the “Assyrian Levies” earning an outstanding reputation for loyalty. They clung to the dream of attaining independence in their old homeland in the Hakkari region of northern Kurdistan and were unable to integrate into the emerging new Iraqi nation.

In 1933, following further massacres, the League of Nations accepted that the community should have a homeland outside Iraq. Various suggestions, including resettlement in Brazil, Cyprus, Sudan and British Guiana came to nothing, but the 1930s opened a new era for the Church of the East. The patriarch, the Mar Shimun XXI, who was educated at Westcott House, Cambridge, was stripped of his citizenship and deported to Cyprus, then settling in Chicago which became the hub of the *Assyrian Church of the East*.

By the mid-twentieth century the *Assyrian Church of the East* had undergone monumental change: great loss both of life and lands had precipitated displacement and dispersal. Large diaspora communities had sprung up in other parts of the Middle East as well as in Europe, Australia and North America. This new map was replacing the centuries-old demography and new trajectories were beginning to be forged. Mar Shimun XXI simultaneously consolidated and expanded the dioceses in the Middle East, making numerous visits to the Assyrian communities in Iran, Lebanon and Kuwait.

In 1962, a diocesan seat was established in Teheran. Two years later, Mar Shimun XXI visited Teheran and in the same year, responding to the invitation of Pope John XXIII, sent two delegates to the Second Vatican Council. This was a momentous breakthrough since it was the first time since the Council of Ephesus in 431 that the *Assyrian Church of the East* had participated in a Western council. On the other hand, Mar Shimun's decision to introduce the Gregorian calendar and other so-called “Western” reforms led to schism and the emergence of the *Ancient Church of the East* in 1964.

Following the death of Mar Shimun XXI a new Patriarch, Mar Dinkha IV, metropolitan of Teheran and Iran, was consecrated in 1976 in the Anglican church of St. Barnabas in Ealing in London. Mar Dinkha IV maintained the patriarchal residence was in Teheran until the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 when he was forced to move to Chicago. From this American base he has continued the trajectory begun by Mar Shimun XXI “to lead the Church out of its isolation” and establish it as a global entity. In 1984, he met



Mar Dinkha IV

the Pope, exchanging speeches of goodwill. Further ecumenical developments took place in 1994 when a dialogue was initiated followed by the signing of a common Christological declaration by Mar Dinkha IV and Pope John Paul II in December. Despite accord with the Roman Catholic Church, opposition by the Coptic Orthodox

Church continues to deny the *Assyrian Church of the East* membership of the *Middle Eastern Council of Churches*. Mar Dinkha IV also laboured strenuously to reconcile the 1964 schism involving the *Assyrian Church of the East* and the *Ancient Church of the East*; this reunion was partially achieved in 1995 when a substantial portion of the Indian branch of the *Ancient Church of the East*, under the leadership of Mar Aprem, rejoined the *Assyrian Church of the East*.

Regrettably the *Assyrian Church of the East* was not included in the consultations sponsored by the *Pro Oriente Foundation* between 1971 and 1988. However, the ecumenical initiatives that took place in 1990 between the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Dinkha IV and Mar Raphael Bidawid, the Chaldean patriarch, led to new initiatives. In 1994, the "Common Christological Declaration" by Mar Dinkha IV and Pope John Paul II put the erstwhile differences between the two Churches into their historical and linguistic perspective, admitting that failure of communication and ecclesiastical politics were to blame. Eventually the two prelates met at the Vatican in October 2014. However, Mar Dinkha IV died in the US in 2015, aged 79.

Despite the accord established with the Roman Catholic Church, robust opposition, principally by the Coptic Orthodox Church, has to date continued to deny both branches of the *Church of the East* membership of the *Middle Eastern Council of Churches*. In October 1998, Pope Shenouda III, the late Patriarch of the Coptic Church presiding over the executive committee of the Middle Eastern Council of Churches, rejected the membership of the Assyrian Church of the East on the grounds of its adherence to the "Nestorian heresy".

The situation in Iraq, 2003 onwards

Until 2003 an estimated 8-9 per cent of the population of Iraq was Christian. In mid-2006 the level of violence escalated following the bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra and all Christian communities have endured a never-ending cycle of terror: churches have been bombed, while priests and citizens have been kidnapped and killed. This level of violence – which persists today – has caused an



Mar Dinkha IV meets Pope Francis in 2014

exodus from Baghdad to safer environs. Although the Church of the East has traditional communities in Iran, people prefer not to go there, but have headed to Syria where many have applied for asylum either in the USA, Canada, Australia or Europe where the UK and Sweden host large communities. Of all refugees leaving Iraq 40 per cent are Christian. Those who cannot leave Iraq, due to limited economics means, go to Kurdistan where the KRG authorities have permitted a

limited “right of return” on the basis of historic tribal and family affiliations.

There has been tremendous growth at Dahuk in the north and in the capital, Erbil, which already hosted a Christian diocese in the second century. However, the recent influx of refugees from Mosul and the Nineveh plains in 2014 has strained the resources of the KRG beyond capacity. The onus of supporting the tens of thousands of homeless people has largely fallen on the shoulders of various churches and organisations. *The Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organisation* (www.theacero.org) actively raises funds amongst the expatriate communities in the diaspora to help the displaced members of its communities; the building of Sawra camp village in the Dohuk region of Iraq is amongst the latest achievements.

Circumstances in Iraq are still very bleak and are compounded by ongoing strife in Syria where many of the faithful have taken refuge. However, the *Assyrian Church of the East* might be sustained by the great trajectory that has seen it through all the vicissitudes of the past two millennia. It has always lived under the dominion of political masters of different religious persuasions.

These lessons of resilience and stamina, in the face of adversity – lessons that have been practised countless times – might hold good, as might also the memory of mutual collaboration and enrichment that has taken place down the centuries. These historic memories, as hard as they might be to sustain in the current dark days, demonstrate an innate capacity of the *Assyrian Church of the East*. Hopefully this trajectory might provide a cue for its survival in its ancient homeland: Iraq.

Dr Erica Hunter is Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christianity at the Department of Religions and Philosophies at SOAS (The School of Oriental and African Studies). This talk was given to the Wimbledon Circle in March 2016.

Concerning Circles

New Members

Recruitment has gone well during the summer and as a result we can welcome the following new members, who have been elected at recent Council meetings. They are attached to Circles as shown.

Mrs C. Cadogan (Cleveland), Mrs J. P. Garbet (Eastbourne & Bexhill), Mrs V. Grant (Hertfordshire), Professor H. Höpfl (Cleveland), Ms L. Kennedy (Glasgow), Mr C. P. Lynch (Edinburgh), Dr A. A. Macdonald (Aberdeen), Dr S. M. Martin (Hertfordshire), Mr P. E. & Mrs G. M. McGivern (Wrexham), Mrs E. Petch (Cleveland), Mrs K. A. Rush (Cleveland), Mrs C. Sergeant (Eastbourne & Bexhill).

Requiescant in Pace

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

Miss M. V. Artis (Worcester), Mr G. B. F. Freeman (Coventry), Mr M. Hammond (Coventry), Mr P. V. Hazlewood (Coventry), Mrs J. Mackie (Hertfordshire), Dr J. Markham (York),

Mr L. Page (Worcester), Mrs B. Toomey (Croydon).

Subscriptions

There are just a few subscriptions outstanding for this year. The Membership Secretary will shortly send out reminder letters for these.

Spirituality Page

Fleeting Moments

We all experience fleeting moments in life when we feel that we have encountered the divine or have some profound sense of belonging to Creation. This may be when we sit in a garden and look at the beauty of the flowers, or when we are transfixed by some wonderful piece of music or when we unexpectedly meet a friend whom we have not seen for a long time. It can also be, of course, when we pray and feel that we are in communion with God.

These are precious moments but all too often we pass on quickly and do not stop for long enough to really take in what it is that has so moved us. This is what the Welsh poet R.S. Thomas was writing of in his poem *'The Bright Field'*:

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it.*

As he goes on to say: 'But that was the pearl of great price,'
And so he concludes:

*Life is not hurrying on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

God is timeless, He is ever-present, but, as R.S. Thomas is pointing out, too often we live either in the past or in the future when we ought to experience the intensity of a present moment and feel the presence of God just as Moses did when he saw the burning bush. At such moments we need to heed the voice of the Psalmist:

'Pause awhile and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted over the earth'. (Ps. 46.10).

Anne and John Duddington



R.S. Thomas

Advance Notice

Manchester Newman Lecture 2017

Monday, April 3rd

Damian Howard SJ

6.30 for 7.00 start at Friends' Meeting House, Manchester

Full details will be published in the January 2017 issue of *The Newman*



Book Review

***A Long Way from Galilee* by Kevin Clarke; Melrose Books, £8.99**

Typical Newman members will find much in this book to respond to, as Kevin Clarke surveys the modern Catholic Church, to which he is very loyal but which he sees as the source of much frustration. Essentially he wishes to draw inspiration from the very early Church – hence the reference to Galilee in the title – and he dreams of dismantling much of the vast bureaucratic structure which has grown up ever since.

Frequent references to the *Penny Catechism* betray his background as a Catholic boy growing up in the 1950s, followed by the exhilarating transition to the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Much later in life he studied for an MA in Contemporary Theology and Canon Law at Heythrop but this does not appear to have satisfied him in his search for a much simpler and less authoritarian Church, as in Galilee where all members shared authority, not just the top elders of the day.

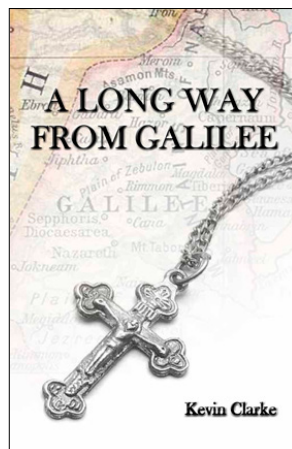
An important focus is on why Catholics are lapsing in such large numbers, which he says implies difficulties with a number of today's teachings. With modern catechesis, he suggests, "people do not know *what* they think, only what they *ought* to think". He opens with an assault on the Catholic obsession with sin and guilt, when instead the approach should be positive rather than negative.

Later he turns to the nature of the priesthood as a basic target. There is, he argues, a wrong balance between ministry and authority and it is time for an investigation of the priesthood – although he is not very clear on who the examiners should be. He suggests that the probe should be conducted by a "widely representative group of the faithful within each local Church" which implies a remarkable step towards subsidiarity. Today's hierarchy regards itself as unaccountable to Church members in general – and yet the original Church had no such top-heavy structure. It is time, he pleads, to de-emphasise the *magisterium* as a technique with which to browbeat the faithful and instead to revive the *sensus fidelium* as the bottom-up voice of the Church.

To start with, he believes, the Mass should be reinvigorated. "Today's poor level of attendance points to a serious lack of awareness in official circles of people's needs and sensitivities." Why, he asks, are the faithful expected to jump up and down as many as 13 times? He has been tempted to put up a notice at the back door of the church telling the miserable congregation: "Smile! You have just spent an hour with Jesus." But apparently he has not yet done so; at least, I have not seen it.

Kevin is currently Chair of the Ealing Circle. This means he is closely in touch with the concerns of Newman members, who are of a certain age, but are perhaps rather distant from the preoccupations of young people. He also says little, if anything, about the potential future role of women in the Church. If the Church is ever to be renewed it is surely the young and the females who will have to do it for the most part.

Barry Riley



Circle Programmes

Aberdeen

Contact: Margaret Smith, 01224 314566

All Circles

16-22 Sept Pilgrimage to Rome

Birmingham

Contact: Winifred Flanagan, winifredflanagan@gmail.com

7 September Evangelisation & Youth

Mgr Mark Crisp

5 October Blessed John Henry Newman and Vatican II

Fr Guy Nicholls C.O.

2 November Music & Poetry

7 December Seminar Discussion

Mgr Pat Kilgarriff

Cleveland

Contact: Judith Brown, 01642 814977, browns01@globalnet.co.uk

28 September The scandal of Christian disunion

Fr Nicholas King SJ

26 October In spirit of Mary Ward (IBVM): working in Albania

Dr Elizabeth Walmsley

23 November Married priests: their time has come

Mike Kerrigan

Coventry

Contact: Colin Roberts cjroberts08@talktalk.net

6 September Autumn Mass and Party

27 September The year of Mercy

Fr Paul Keane

19 October Morning Prayer

Chapel of Unity - Coventry Cathedral

30 October Joint Mass with students and friends at Warwick University

1 November TBA

22 November The challenge for ecumenism

Pastor Albrecht Köstlin-Büürma

3 December Advent Mass

Croydon

Contact: Arthur Hughes, arthur.hughes116@gmail.com

Ealing

Contact: Kevin Clarke Kevin.Clarke@keme.co.uk

20 October Amoris Laetitia

John Wilkins

17 November Pope Francis

Jimmy Burns

19 January The scandal of Christian disunity

Fr Nicholas King

16 February A Jewish view of the Catholic Church

Rabbi Jason Rosner

20 April Older & younger generations' views of the Catholic Church

Carmody Grey

Eastbourne & Bexhill

Contact: John Carmody, 01323 726334, johnmh22@outlook.com

10 October Rehabilitating or forgetting prisoners

Canon Keith Pound

2 November Circle AGM

Edinburgh

Contact: Lyn Cronin, lyncronin@btinternet.com

21 September Newman's legacy

Mgr Roderick Strange

19 October John Henry Newman: a video of his life and thought & discussion

16 November "Listening for the Echo"

Father Jim Lawlor

14 December Going where we do not know! The mystery of its doctrine.

Jeff Bagnall

Glasgow

Contact: Arthur McLay, mclay@btinternet.com

Hertfordshire

Contact: Maggy Swift, 01582 792136, maggy.swift@btinternet.com

25 September Experiencing Ashrams

Susan Cooke

7 October Mass at the Abbey for Blessed John Henry Newman, then sandwich lunch

8 October The Diocese of Westminster Pilgrimage of Mercy to St Albans Cathedral

23 October Exploring the Silent Spirituality of severely disabled children

Sue Price

12 November Musical Evening

Matthew Wood

27 November The talk will be on an ecumenical theme

Canon John O'Toole

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

3 October Exploring Christianity

Tim Borthwick

7 November The Christmas Story: Searching the Gospels

Father Peter Edmonds SJ

5 December What is the Gospel?

*Fr Paul Browne OSB***North Gloucestershire**

Contact: Stephanie Jamison, 01242 539810, sjamison@irlen-sw.com

4 October One Man, two Vocations, towards a Married Priesthood *Chris McDonnell*

1 November Exploring Faith through Poetry

Dr Sarah Richards

6 December St Thomas – a man for all seasons?

*Bishop Robert Evens***North Merseyside**

Contact: John Potts, john_potts41@hotmail.com

18 September Visit to "Dome of Home"

22 September From the Beginnings to the Nicene Creed

Michael Tunnicliffe

20 October A Call to Action

Martin Bennett

17 November Orthodox Christianity

*Fr. Francis Marsden***North Staffordshire**

Contact: Vincent Owen, 01782 619698

29 September C. S. Lewis

Dr Francis Celoria

15 October APC Scripture Day

Bishop David McGough

13 November Discussion Evening

*Vincent Owen***Rainham**

Contact: Marie Casey, bmcasey@btinternet.com

11 September York Courses – The Psalms – Psalm 130

9 October York Courses – The Psalms -Psalm 13

13 November York Courses – The Psalms – Psalm 23

11 December York Courses – The Psalms – Psalm 127

London & SE Circles

3 December Advent Day of Recollection

*Rev. Julian Burling***Surrey Hills**

Contact: Gerald Williams, guillaume30@btinternet.com

Tyneside

Contact: Ann Dunn, jadnew@btinternet.com

28 September The Beginnings of Devotion to Mary

*Michael Porteous*30 November Catholic Education in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle *Joe Hughes***Wimbledon**

Contact: Bill Russell, 0208 946 4265, william_russell@talktalk.net

15 September A Married Priesthood?

Michael Kerrigan

17 November St John Southworth

*Anne Marie Micallef***Worcester**

Contact: Heather Down, 01905 21535, hcdown@gmail.com

Wrexham

Contact: Maureen Thomas, maureenthomas@uwclub.net

30 September The Pallium Project

Heather Burnley

28 October The Movement for Married Clergy

Mike Kerrigan

25 November Women in the Bible

*Maureen Thomas***York**

Contact: Judith Smeaton, 01904 704525, judith.smeaton@btinternet.com

19 September Women priests in the Catholic church?

Brian Hamill

17 October York Newman Lecture

Professor Thomas O'Loughlin

11 November Prayer and conversion

Fr. John Carlisle

12 December Christmas Meal