

Pax Romana 1921-2012: a brief history

The aim of this article is to look back at some of the history of Pax Romana and its links with the Newman Association. It is not intended to be a detailed history of the Pax Romana movement.

Shocked by the horrors of the 1914-18 War, a group of Catholic students from Europe, Argentina and Java (Indonesia) met in Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1921 to establish an organisation which, they hoped, would enable students to live in peace with each other. This "International Union of Catholic Students" was the origin of Pax Romana which continued to grow in numbers of members and of member federations for several years.

In 1919 Fr Martindale SJ had started to establish Catholic Societies in the English universities and, in 1922, the 'University Catholic Societies' Federation' was formed. The new federation sent two delegates to the 1922 Pax Romana congress in Fribourg and to a study week in Vienna. The 1924 congress in Budapest was attended by thirty UK delegates including Hugh O'Neill and his wife who were on their honeymoon! A similar number attended the 1925 Bologna congress including two delegates from Glasgow. The assistant chaplain to the Italian federation was Fr Montini, later to become Pope Paul VI. At the 1927 congress in Warsaw and Krakow it was agreed that the next congress should be held in the UK.

The next year the 8th World Congress was held in Cambridge with 130 delegates from 22 countries with the theme *Broken Bridges*. Professor Edward Bullough presided and the speakers included Hilaire Belloc and Fr Fulton Sheen who had travelled from the USA for the conference. At the end of the meeting a special train with three dining cars was chartered to take delegates to Oxford and provide lunch on the way! The following day delegates travelled to London by boat and train and proceedings concluded with a visit to Eton and St George's Chapel Windsor organised by Fr Ronald Knox.

The events leading up to the start of the 1939-45 War were disastrous for the vision of the organisation's founders. As early as 1931 the Italian federation was closed by the government and the following year the German federations were forced to withdraw from Pax Romana. In spite of the rising tensions across Europe, Pax Romana still held its annual congress. Philip Daniel was selected as the UK student delegate to a Pax Romana conference in Ljubljana in late 1939 but the conference had to be abandoned. The 1939 International Council, which was held in New York and Washington, coincided with the outbreak of war.

The Council gave the new President, Joaquin Ruiz-Gimenez, with Abbé Gremaud (the Secretary-General) and Edward Kirchner (USA), responsibility for Pax Romana during the hostilities. A wartime office was established in Washington in facilities provided by the Catholic University where contact was maintained with Pax Romana and student groups in North and South America. There was even some contact between the Newman Association and the Washington office during this period. The main emphasis of the work of the Fribourg secretariat (for which it received funding) was to aid student prisoners, internees, refugees, and the malnourished in Europe.

At a very practical level the Newman Association, founded in 1942, hosted a small scale Pax Romana by providing a meeting place at Hereford House in London for Catholic servicemen from Poland, Belgium, Holland, France, Czechoslovakia and other countries who had escaped to England at the start of the war. A Regional Assembly of Pax Romana was held in London in 1945 with delegates from twenty-one nations and, in the Newman Archives, there is a scrapbook of press cuttings about the Assembly with numerous articles and pictures in newspapers such as *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, very different from the type of publicity we would receive nowadays!

At a congress in Fribourg in 1946 Pax Romana was revived but with different statutes to allow a similar structure to that adopted in the UK at the formation of the Newman Association with a graduate branch, the International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (ICMICA-MIIC), and a student branch (IMCS). These statutes were approved on behalf of the Vatican in 1947. The first ICMICA Secretary General was Ramon Sugranyes de Franch from Barcelona who remained in this post until 1958 when he became President until 1965. Amongst the International Presidents of this era were Sir Hugh Taylor (1952-1955) and Kevin McDonnell (1965 -1966) both from the UK. Also in 1958, at the IMCS (student) congress in Vienna, there was a large UK contingent and Bryan Wood (UK) was elected as President. In 1961 John Bryden, on a post-doctoral fellowship in the USA, replaced Ed Kirchner as the acting representative of Pax Romana to the UN for a few months.

In 1955 a joint Congress with IMCS was held at Nottingham University, Eric Poyser was a member of the Congress Committee and Geoffrey Jansen-Smith the Organising Secretary with Philip Bagguley as his assistant and part-time interpreter. With almost 1000 delegates accommodation was a serious problem which was eventually resolved with the help of the university's licensed landladies. The Congress opened with Mass in the Cathedral celebrated by Archbishop O'Hara, the Apostolic Delegate, and the speakers included Sir Hugh Taylor. The then Archbishop of Westminster was quoted as saying that the Congress was the most important Catholic intellectual event in England since the reformation!

The Newman Association was well represented at the 40th and 50th Anniversary celebrations of Pax Romana which were held in Fribourg in 1961 and 1971. The Newman delegation included John Bryden, Philip Daniel and Kevin McDonnell.

One problem facing the new organisation was that many former member federations of Pax Romana in Communist-controlled Eastern Europe were either banned or had their activities severely restricted. As an example the KIK movement in Poland, later to be very active in the downfall of the Communist regime in Poland, was not allowed to send a representative to any Pax Romana meeting until the Roehampton meeting in 1983. For many years Eastern European countries were represented by exiled communities in the West such as the Polish Veritas group in the UK.

Early in its history a number of ICMICA specialist secretariats were established, some such as the Jurists are still in existence and proved invaluable in the revision of the statutes mentioned below. Other groups such as the Teachers and Economists now have a largely independent existence. Unfortunately the membership of the Secretariat for Scientific Questions became very small and its activities ceased in

2009 with the death of Dr Peter Hodgson from Oxford. A new secretariat on gender issues was formed at the Nairobi Assembly in 2008.

Human rights have been a key concern for Pax Romana since its foundation and there has been close co-operation between ICMICA and IMCS in establishing and maintaining representation on appropriate international bodies. Currently Pax Romana is represented at the UN in New York, Geneva and Vienna and at UNESCO and the Council of Europe. At the recent Assembly in Vienna, Elizabeth Pomberger, who was friend of Pam Mottram, retired as the Pax Romana representative at UN Vienna after 27 years' service.

In its early years ICMICA was very Eurocentric but with a strong North American link. However in the 1970s the number of federations from Asia, Africa and South America had grown and a formal structure was developed with a Vice President and committee from each continent. Hence the European Liaison Committee was established in which many Newman members have been active over the years.

In the late 70's the Newman Association was a member of the International Council of Pax Romana with Philip Daniel as the representative and in 1983 Philip organised an International Assembly which was held at Roehampton College. As with the Nottingham Assembly, the organisers had serious logistical and financial problems but the event proved very successful with almost 300 delegates. Archbishop Derek Warlock's homily at the inaugural Mass was based on the conference theme *Christian commitment to liberty and peace*. One interesting feature of the Assembly was a public meeting on this theme in Westminster Cathedral Hall. Bill Kenyon, who was Treasurer of ICMICA, put his name forward as International President but, at that time, Pax Romana ICMICA was still an official international Catholic organisation under the oversight of the Secretariat of State of the Vatican. Accordingly it had to submit the names of candidates for the position of President to the Secretariat to obtain a '*nihil obstat*' before the election and Bill's candidacy was rejected by the Vatican. After the Assembly Philip Daniel retired and he was replaced on the International Council by Tony Mottram.

The International Assembly planned for 1991 was to have taken place in Yugoslavia but that was the year that the country disintegrated and the Assembly was deferred; the International Council held its normal annual meeting in Fribourg in 1991 and a replacement venue for the Assembly agreed as Bilbao in July 1992. At the Bilbao Assembly, Tony Mottram was elected unanimously as Chair and it was hoped that he would become the International President but he withdrew his nomination. The 50th Anniversary Assembly was held in Assisi in 1997 with Eileen Cheverton and Tony Mottram as the Newman delegates. Tony left immediately at the end of the Assembly but Eileen stayed on and was on the hillside above the town when the earthquake struck bringing down the famous ceiling of the basilica.

In September 1998 the Newman Association organised a European Conference at London Colney with Judith Bennett, Veronica Lawler, Eileen Cheverton and I on the planning committee assisted by many others. The conference was preceded by what was probably the last Science Secretariat conference which was prepared by Peter Hodgson and was also notable for being Professor Lucien Morren's last

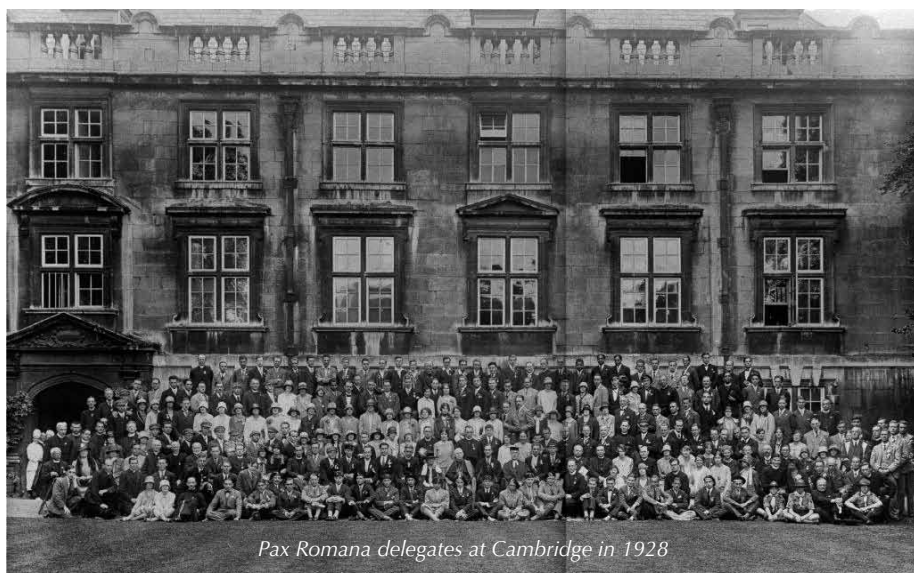
visit to the Newman Association. A special Newman Council meeting was held in 2002 to welcome the International President, Patricio Rode, who was on his way to the Rio+10 conference in Johannesburg. He later visited Kew Gardens with Robert Williams and Sister Denise Calder RSCJ, Secretary for Environmental Justice at the Bishops' Conference. Later Patricio wrote a report on the conference for the Newman Journal (January 2003). There was a meeting of the Jurists' Commission (SIJC) at Grays Inn in 2002 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Pacem in Terris* at which we welcomed the Secretary General, Anselmo Lee.

Following a decision by the Vatican, Pax Romana, like other international Catholic organisations, was required to revise its statutes. This proved a lengthy process and, eventually, the revised statutes were signed at a meeting at the offices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in the Vatican during a conference called to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of ICMICA in 2007. One advantage of the new statutes was that candidates for the International Presidency no longer had to be approved in advance by the Vatican.

At a European level the Newman Association has been very active and has regularly contributed a member of the European Liaison Committee. On one occasion, when Tony Mottram was a member of ELC, it became difficult to find an appropriate venue for a meeting and Tony offered the use of the Mottram household with committee members being billeted in the homes of various members of the Coventry Newman Circle. Eileen Cheverton was the ELC representative for many years and, as the only native English speaker, she found herself secretary of the group. At the 2004 Assembly in Warsaw/Krakow the Newman was, once more, elected to the international Council and the ELC and I became the representative.

Since that time I have tried to report the European and International activities of Pax Romana through the pages of this Journal. Probably the main Pax Romana event in recent years, as far as the Association is concerned, was the European Conference at High Leigh in Hertfordshire in 2009 which took the 20th Anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall as its theme. Last July in Cologne the student movement, IMCS, celebrated the 90th Anniversary of the original foundation of Pax Romana in 1921. Although the retiring IMCS Chaplain Fr Chris McCoy was from the UK there was no national student body from the UK even though there were representatives from student federations from around the world.

Early photographs and written records suggest that Pax Romana conferences attracted large numbers at a time when air travel was very expensive and very limited. There is no mention of how any secretariat was financed in the early years. Following World War II the church tax in the German-speaking countries provided a significant sum and in addition there were a number of very generous donors. Also, membership subscriptions from individual federations may have been more substantial than in recent times. Since at least the 1970s, however, ICMICA has moved from one financial difficulty to another. Until recently various Catholic aid agencies have supported ICMICA in the human rights advocacy at the United Nations. These funds plus membership subscriptions have enabled ICMICA to maintain a small International team and an office in Geneva and be recognised as



Pax Romana delegates at Cambridge in 1928

an important Catholic Non-Governmental Organisation in the field of human rights. Recently aid agencies have suffered from reductions in their funds and ICMICA itself has been affected by the inability of federations to pay their membership fees. At the Vienna Assembly in August 2012 steps were taken to reduce expenditure and to make greater use of modern technology in communication particularly via the new website www.paxromanawein2012.org.

The above is based on memory, back issues of *The Newman* and help from Newman and Pax Romana colleagues, particularly Bill Neville in Australia and Kevin Ahern in the USA. Philip Bagguley and John Bryden have provided useful memories on the Nottingham Congress and earlier Pax Romana meetings and Robert Williams identified a major article on the Roehampton Assembly in the January 1984 Journal (issue number 1). Invaluable information came from the memoirs of Hugh O'Neill which can be found in the Newman Association Archives. I would be grateful for any further information so that I can update the web version of this article. My email address is kevin@newman.org.uk.

Kevin Lambert

**In the Grip of Light: The dark and bright journey of Christian contemplation
by Paul Murray OP: Bloomsbury Publishing 2012**

The subtitle of this book introduces the idea of paradox which is intrinsic to the subject of contemplation. Those who have experienced the glorious presence of God, which is both bliss and torment, attempt to express in words what is impossible to describe. We search far and wide to find the God who all the time is dwelling within us. God is light but this dazzles us into blindness, and if we lose this vision we are plunged into impenetrable darkness.