

# Oremus

## Westminster Cathedral Magazine



**St Agatha is one of the female martyrs of the early centuries who witnesses to the primary importance of faithfulness to Christ above all other commitments in our lives.**

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*Oremus*, the magazine of Westminster Cathedral, reflects the life of the Cathedral and the lives of those who make it a place of faith in central London. If you think that you would like to contribute an article or an item of news, please contact the Editor.

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The martyr St Agatha is included on the altar of St Anthony in the Stiftskirche Sankt Georg in Grauhof, Germany. She is often depicted, as here, carrying her breasts, which were cut from her during torture, on a platter. The tradition of making shaped cakes on her feast day, such us Minne di Sant'Agata (Breasts of St Agatha) or Minni di Virginì (Breasts of the virgin), is found in many countries.

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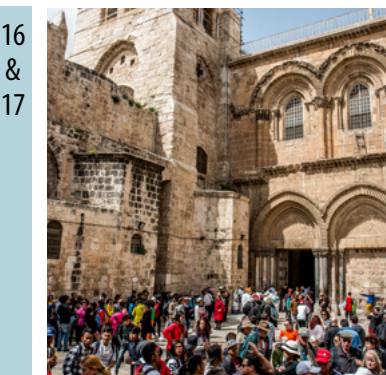
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# Fatima – A Third Film

Jo Siedlecka

**The incredible story of the apparitions of Our Lady to three young children near Fatima, Portugal, during the First World War, and her appeal for prayer and repentance as the path to peace, is brought vividly to life in this new film by award-winning Italian director Marc Pontecorvo.**

Harvey Keitel plays a fictional character, a somewhat cynical professor Nichols who interviews Carmelite Sr Lucia, (Sonia Gragg) the only child visionary to have survived to adulthood. When he asks her why Our Lady chose her, she answers simply 'It was necessary.' Her memories are told in flashbacks.

In 1917 the recently established fiercely anti-Catholic Republic of Portugal was exhausted by the war. In early scenes of the film we see the young Lucia (Stephanie Gil) with her mother, Maria (Lucia Moniz) in the town square listening as the mayor Arturo (Goran Visnjic) reads out the list of local casualties. They are desperately concerned over their plight of Lucia's elder brother Manual, who is serving in the army.

When Our Lady first appears to Lucia and her two younger cousins, Jacinta (Alejandra Howard) and Francisco (Jorge Lamelas), as they are tending their family's sheep, she does not say who she is – but asks them to return on the 13th of the month – and not tell anyone. Little Jacinta (Alejandra Howard) spills the beans and soon the news is everywhere. Both Maria and the local parish priest, Fr Ferreira (Joaquim De Almeida), are understandably doubtful and try to convince the children to admit it was just a game. As the crowds following them increase, the Mayor becomes very concerned – as a representative of a government hostile to religion, the last thing he needs in his town is Our Lady of the Rosary attracting thousands of people.



*The three Child Seers: Francisco, (Jorge Lamelas), Jacinta (Alejandra Howard) and Lucia (Stephanie Gil)*

But in spite of long interrogations the children stick to their story. And Our Lady promises the children an event which will prove they were telling the truth. The film concludes with the 'Miracle of the Sun' which took place on 13 October 1917. In this extraordinary phenomenon, more than 70,000 people, including secular reporters and government officials, said they witnessed the Sun appearing to 'dance' or zig-zag in the sky, careen towards the Earth, and emit multicoloured light and radiant colours. According to these reports, the event lasted approximately 10 minutes.

Defying the government, the local community built a small chapel on the site, which continued to attract pilgrims. Francisco and Jacinta died from the Spanish Flu on 4 April 1919 and 20 February 1920 respectively. It would be another 13 years before the Catholic Church completed its investigations, and declared the miracle 'worthy of belief' on 13 October 1930. The Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima now, of course, attracts more than four million pilgrims

a year. However, the film does not mention the particular devotion to Our Lady of Fatima of Pope St John Paul II. When he was shot at close range by an assassin on 13 May 1981, he attributed his survival to Our Lady. During one of three visits to the shrine he placed one of the bullets that had struck him in the crown of the statue.

The film concludes with a beautiful performance of an original song *Gratia Plena* performed by Andrea Bocelli and composed by Paolo Buonvino. There is also a quote from Albert Einstein, who once said: 'There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle'. There have now been two other films about Fatima: the more sentimental Warner Bros. Hollywood-style *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fatima* released in 1952, and *The 13th Day*, beautifully made on a very small budget in 2009. Both are worth watching for the different insights they give.

*Watch a trailer here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1f\\_9\\_TGlpl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1f_9_TGlpl)*

# Fr John writes



*Dear Parishioners, Friends and Readers of Oremus*

As it happens, this edition of *Oremus* magazine contains several pieces with overlapping content. Continuing the coverage of Cathedral History, we look at the varying fortunes of our connections with Canada. For the first 40 years there seems to have been nothing and then the Baptistry received

an altar in honour of St Anne (Canada's patron saint). It is an ancient tradition to have an altar in a baptistry, but after only 20 years it was removed. Poor St Anne then remained unhonoured until Canada regained a connection through the Canadian Air Force Memorial above the Confessionals of the South Transept, when St Anne, now joined by and opposite to St Joachim, appeared in mosaic at the eastern end of the South Aisle. Do look out for them when next you are sitting in the confession queue. Meanwhile, the In Retrospect page reprints an article on 'Catholic Canada' from the 1922 Cathedral Chronicle, written in a somewhat 'Church Triumphant' style.

During these two years of pandemic and intermittent lockdown when the opportunities for significant travel have been virtually non-existent, pilgrimage has dropped out of our normal Catholic experience, and so I have taken the opportunity to reproduce a piece written 15 years ago by the late Patrick Rogers, himself a keen traveller to marble quarries worldwide in his former role as Cathedral Historian. He writes of how different experiences on pilgrimage have shaped his spiritual understanding and I hope that reading what he has to say will rekindle your desire to seek God through pilgrimage. To go with his piece, I have included Jo Siedlecka's notice of a new film about the events of Fatima. That is not only, of course, one of the world's great pilgrim shrines, but also a mother house for the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Victories who serve us so faithfully and unassumingly here at Clergy House and in the Cathedral.

There is a certain contrast between the Book Notice on the back cover, which looks at Janine di Giovanni's account of how Christians have come under increasing pressure to abandon their ancient settlements in a number of Middle Eastern countries, and the story on the preceding page of how a kidnapped and long-imprisoned Syrian monk is working to restore and rebuild not only a ransacked and desecrated shrine and monastery, but also to recreate a viable community to which exiled Christians might return, 'Our country', as he terms it. We should pray for God's blessing on the work, since it embodies the theological virtue of hope in a region where that has so often been forfeited through violence.

No shadow of Lent looms over February this year, so there is no need to look gloomy or tighten your belts yet – that will come in the March edition.

*Fr John Scott*

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# San Benedetto al Po in Trafalgar Square

The National Gallery



*The Consecration of St Nicholas*

**The National Gallery is to bring a 16th-century altarpiece back to the chapel for which it was created, for the first time in over 200 years, through a new digital experience. Visitors to the Gallery will experience Veronese's painting *The Consecration of Saint Nicholas* as it would have been seen in its original Italian church setting in 1562 by using virtual reality headsets. The free digital exhibition will be available in 20-minute ticketed sessions that are available from the Gallery's website from late January.**

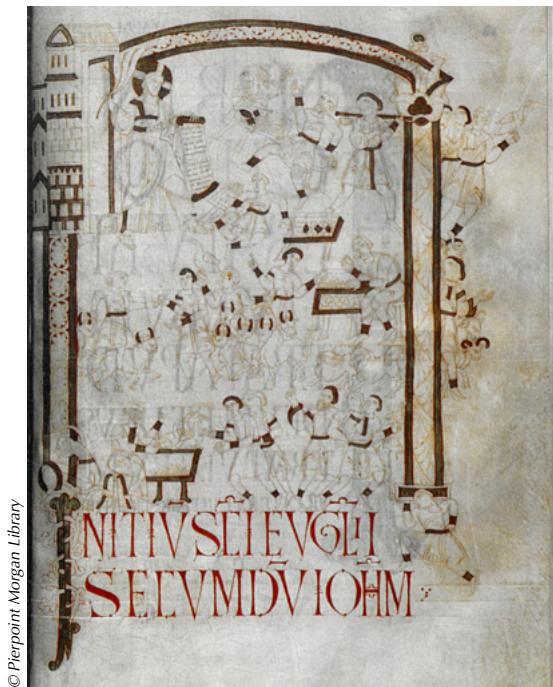
Through this innovative experience, visitors will be able to see the painting in its original chapel in the church of *San Benedetto al Po*, near Mantua, and explore the beautiful frescoes and architecture that once surrounded it. Visitors

will be able to choose from one of two virtual guides who will lead them through the experience: our curator, Dr Rebecca Gill, who explores the painting and frescoes, or the historical figure of Abbot Asola, who commissioned the painting from Veronese and reveals the threat facing the monastery at the time. Virtual Veronese, which creates a 3D model of the chapel, began as a research and development project looking at how the Gallery can share research with a wider audience by using immersive technologies to explore new ways of telling its stories.

*The Consecration of Saint Nicholas* was commissioned in 1561 as an altarpiece to hang in San Benedetto, the abbey church of one of the largest and most important Benedictine monasteries in Europe. The church itself had been radically remodelled and enlarged in 1539 by Giulio Romano, Raphael's prime pupil and himself a great painter and architect. The altarpiece remained in place until the 1820s, when it was removed from the church during the Napoleonic Wars. The painting shows St Nicholas' consecration as bishop, as told in the Golden Legend. On the eve of the election of a new bishop at Myra, a voice revealed that a pious youth called Nicholas had been divinely chosen and would be the first to appear at the cathedral door in the morning.

Veronese depicts the entrance of the cathedral, where the senior bishop consecrates Nicholas, who kneels wearing a robe of emerald green, flanked by two older priests in white surplices. An angel descends with a bishop's mitre and crosier, proving that Nicholas has been chosen by God. The turbans worn by two of the witnesses show the story is taking place in Asia Minor. The consecration of St Nicholas is included in cycles of paintings of his life, but this is one of only two other independent images of the subject produced before the end of the 16th century. It seems to have been chosen to illustrate the importance of the call to the priesthood, and of God's authority vested in a bishop. St Nicholas kneels at the lowest point of the deep 'V' shape formed by the figures. The brilliant green of his robe is included elsewhere, creating a pattern of colour which, with the repeated rich pink, blue and white, draws our eye around the composition. Tiny dots and brushstrokes of white and yellow suggest the striped gold fabric covering the shoulders of the senior bishop. Streaks of white and grey define the folds and form of the foremost priest's brightly-lit white robe. Veronese paints just enough detail and then allows our eyes to do the rest.

Giorgio Vasari, the 16th-century artists' biographer, praised this painting highly in his *Lives of the Artists*. It was commissioned for the abbey church following the 1539 reconstruction, with Veronese agreeing on 27 December



© Pierpont Morgan Library

One of the treasures from the monastery of San Benedetto al Po is this illuminated manuscript of the gospels, dated to before the 12th century and named the 'Evangelinary of Mathilde von Tuszien'. It was purchased by the Pierpont Morgan Library in 1911. The leaf shown here is the beginning of the Gospel according to St John.

1561 to paint three altarpieces with subjects from the lives of Ss Nicholas, Anthony the Abbot and Jerome. A transcription of a lost document recording the commission says they were to be painted in the best available colours and specifies the cost of the work. As Veronese received final payment for the altarpieces on 30 March 1562, he either started before the commission was formally recorded or worked at incredible speed, the three paintings only taking him three months. The original architectural frames, which may have been designed by Giulio Romano, are lost. The altarpiece was taken from the abbey and sold on the orders of Napoleon Bonaparte, when the French general took Mantua in 1797. It was then purchased in 1811 by the governors of the 'British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom'. It was the first old master painting to be acquired by them, and they intended it to adorn a 'future National Gallery'.

The digital experience is accompanied by a recording of Gregorian chant, performed by *Veneti Cantores*. The piece of music is taken from a choral book that was produced at *San Benedetto al Po* in the 1560s and is, therefore, contemporary with the altarpiece. Dr Rebecca Gill, Ahmanson Curator in Art and Religion (August 2016 - March 2020), at the National Gallery comments: 'Through this project we are able to bring architecture into the Gallery and allow our visitors to explore for themselves something of what it might have been like to stand in front of Veronese's painting some 500 years ago'.

This experience is for visitors aged 13 years or over, is free to enter, and available to visitors who have booked Gallery Entry tickets as well as tickets to other Gallery exhibitions.

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# For Couples and Families

Pope Francis

## **Dear Married Couples throughout the world**

I am writing to express my deep affection and closeness to you at this very special time. Families have always been in my thoughts and prayers, but especially so during the pandemic, which has severely tested everyone, especially the most vulnerable among us. We are being asked to apply to ourselves the calling that Abraham received from the Lord to set out from his land and his father's home towards a foreign land that God himself would show him (cf. Gen 12:1). We too have experienced uncertainty, loneliness, the loss of loved ones; we too have been forced to leave behind our certainties, our 'comfort zones', our familiar ways of doing things and our ambitions, and to work for the welfare of our families and that of society as a whole, which also depends on us and our actions.

Yet our Christian faith makes us realize that we are not alone, for God dwells in us, with us and among us: in our families, our neighbourhoods, our workplaces and schools, in the cities where we live. Like Abraham, all husbands and wives 'set out' from their own land at the moment when, in response to the vocation to conjugal love, they decide to give themselves to each other without reserve. Becoming engaged already means setting out from your land, since it calls you to walk together along the road that leads to marriage. Different situations in life, the passage of time, the arrival of children, work and illness, all challenge couples to embrace anew their commitment to one another, to leave behind settled habits, certainties and security, and to set out towards the land that God promises: to be two in Christ, two in one. Your lives become a single life; you become a 'we' in loving communion with Jesus, alive and present at every moment of your existence. God is always at your side; he loves you unconditionally. You are not alone!



© Alfredo Borba

The Holy Father in St Peter's Square

Know that your children – especially the younger ones – watch you attentively; in you they seek the signs of a strong and reliable love. Children are always a gift; they change the history of every family. They are thirsty for love, gratitude, esteem and trust. Being parents calls you to pass on to your children the joy of realizing that they are God's children, children of a Father who has always loved them tenderly and who takes them by the hand each new day. As they come to know this, your children will grow in faith and trust in God. To be sure, raising children is no easy task. But let us not forget that they also 'raise' us. The family remains the primary environment where education takes place, through small gestures that are more eloquent than words. To educate is above all to accompany the growth process, to be present to children in many different ways, to help them realize that they can always count on their parents. An educator is someone who spiritually 'gives birth' to others and, above all, becomes personally engaged in their growth. For parents, it is important to relate to children with an authority that grows day by day. Children need a sense of security that can enable them to have confidence in you and in the beauty of your life together, and in the certainty that they will never be alone, whatever may come their way.

We are becoming increasingly aware of the laity's identity and mission both in the Church and in society. You have the mission of transforming society by your presence in the workplace and ensuring that the needs of families are taken into due account. I encourage you to be active in the Church, especially in her pastoral care of families. Never forget that the family is the 'fundamental cell of society'. Marriage is an important part of the project of building the 'culture of encounter'. Families are thus called to bridge generations in passing on the values that forge true humanity. New creativity is needed, to express, amid today's challenges, the values that constitute us as a people, both in our societies and in the Church, the People of God.

Marriage, as a vocation, calls you to steer a tiny boat – wave-tossed yet sturdy, thanks to the reality of the sacrament – across a sometimes stormy sea. How often do you want to say, or better, cry out, like the apostles: 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' (Mk 4:38). Let us never forget, though, that by virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, Jesus is present in that boat; he is concerned for you and he remains at your side amid the tempest. In another Gospel passage, as they rowed with difficulty, the disciples saw Jesus coming to them on the waters and welcomed him into their boat. Whenever you are buffeted by rough winds and storms, do the same thing: welcome Jesus into your boat, for once he 'got into the boat with them... the wind ceased' (Mk 6:51). It is important that, together, you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Only in this way will you find peace, overcome conflicts and discover solutions to many of your problems. Those problems, of course, will not disappear, but you will be able to see them from a different perspective. Recognize your own weakness and powerlessness in the face of so many situations all around you, but at the same time be certain that



*Families, of course, come in all shapes and sizes, as in that of Susan B. Anthony in 1896*

Christ's power will thus be manifested in your weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). It was precisely in the midst of the storm that the apostles came to know the kingship and divinity of Jesus, and learned to trust in him.

With these biblical passages in mind, I would like to reflect on some of the *difficulties and opportunities* that families have experienced during the current pandemic. For instance, the lockdown has meant that there was more time to be together, and this proved a unique opportunity for strengthening communication within families. Naturally, this demands a particular exercise of patience. It is not easy to be together all day long, when everyone has to work, study, recreate and rest in the same house. Don't let tiredness get the better of you: may the power of love enable you to look more to others – to your spouse, to your children – than to your own needs and concerns. Let me remind you of St Paul's hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3). Implore the gift of love from the Holy Family and reread Paul's celebration of charity, so that it can inspire your decisions and your actions (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). In this way, the time you spend together, far from being a penance, will become a refuge amid the

storms. May every family be a place of acceptance and understanding. Think about the advice I gave you on the importance of those three little words: "please, thanks, sorry". After every argument, 'don't let the day end without making peace'. You might also recite together a brief prayer each evening before going to bed, with Jesus at your side.

For some couples, the enforced living conditions during the quarantine were particularly difficult. Pre-existing problems were aggravated, creating conflicts that in some cases became almost unbearable. Many even experienced the breakup of a relationship that had to deal with a crisis that they found hard or impossible to manage. The breakdown of a marriage causes immense suffering, since many hopes are dashed, and misunderstandings can lead to arguments and hurts not easily healed. Children end up having to suffer the pain of seeing their parents no longer together. Keep seeking help, then, so that you can overcome conflicts and prevent even more hurt for you and your children. The Lord Jesus, in his infinite mercy, will inspire you to carry on amid your many difficulties and sorrows. Keep praying for his help, and seek

in him a refuge and a light for the journey. Discover too, in your parish communities, a 'house of the Father', where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.

Remember also that forgiveness heals every wound. Mutual forgiveness is the fruit of an interior resolve that comes to maturity in prayer. Christ 'dwells' in your marriage and is always waiting for you to open your hearts to him; our human love is weak and needs the strength of his faithful love. With him, you can truly build your 'house on rock' (Mt 7:24).

Before concluding, I address a word to young people preparing for marriage. Even before the pandemic, it was not easy for engaged couples to plan their future, due to the difficulty of finding stable employment. Now that the labour market is even more insecure, I urge engaged couples not to feel discouraged, but to have the 'creative courage' shown by St Joseph, whose memory I wanted to honour in this Year dedicated to him. I also greet grandparents, who during the lockdown were unable to see or spend time with their grandchildren, and all those elderly persons who felt isolated and alone during those months. Families greatly need grandparents, for they are humanity's living memory, a memory that 'can help to build a more humane and welcoming world'.

May Saint Joseph inspire in all families a creative courage, so essential for these times of epochal change. May Our Lady help you to foster in your married lives the culture of encounter that we so urgently need in order to face today's problems and troubles. Live out your vocation with enthusiasm. Never allow your faces to grow sad or gloomy; your husband or wife needs your smile. Your children need your looks of encouragement. Your priests and other families need your presence and your joy that comes from the Lord!

And please, do not forget to pray for me, even as I daily pray for you.

Fraternally,

Francis

Rome, St John Lateran, 26 December 2021, Feast of the Holy Family

# On Being A Christian

Tobias Runeson

**Being a Christian is, contrary to popular belief, not a matter of unsubstantiated wishful thinking or an abandonment of reason and intellect. In fact, the Christian tradition is by far the greatest intellectual tradition in all of Western society and the arguments for God and the Christian faith are much more comprehensive than most people today might imagine. You might not agree with all of these arguments or find some of them less convincing than others, but if you have discarded Christianity as superficial or groundless, then you have either been deceived or simply not looked closely enough.**

## Contemporary Deceptions

There are two things that particularly seem to be hindering people of our time from seeing matters of religion and Christianity with a discerning mind. One of them is the concept of scientism, the idea that anything that cannot be proven by application of the scientific method can properly be held as true. The logic of this overgrown reliance on the natural sciences is that since God cannot be seen by looking further into space or by an experiment in a laboratory he simply does not exist. In academic and intellectual circles this concept of scientism has been dispelled for many years, since it is simply self-refuting. The claim that everything within our existence could be established with the scientific method is a philosophical statement and itself impossible to prove by scientific method. This claim itself should thus show that our reality as human beings is subject to more than just proof by the natural sciences. Nonetheless, this illusion of a 'waterproof worldview' still seems to persist among us today.

The same could also be said about another self-defeating and equally troublesome concept, relativism. This idea claims that there is no such thing as an absolute truth and that what might be true to you might not necessarily be true to someone else. The fact that this statement itself is a claim of absolute truth seems to go unnoticed by those who hold to this view as they fail to see the inconsistency of their claims. The validity of relativism as an intellectual position is untenable, but it has a significant hold on the minds of many people; truth can be relative much of the time, but also absolute when it suits us.

As Christians, however, we believe that it is not just possible, but absolutely crucial, to make claims as to what is true. That should obviously be done in a peaceful and respectful manner, but there is great power in asserting the reality of our existence and freedom to be found in doing so. This pursuit of truth, however, strikes at the heart of the big questions of life and comes with far-reaching consequences for anyone who dares to approach these matters. Many people, when faced with the weight of the



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*The way into the Church, of course, is through Baptism*

Christian argument, fail to understand its implications in a balanced way, not because of the theoretical considerations themselves, but because of the practical consequences that would be involved for their personal lives. If there is a God, who is the source of our life, that means that we are not just accountable to ourselves but also to God. For other people, it might involve both changing their perception of what being a Christian is and their aversion to identifying themselves as such. In these instances, the intellectual smokescreen of scientism or relativism may perhaps seem to offer a convenient evasion.

## The Realms of Faith and the Nature of God

Whatever your stance is on faith and religion though, the fact is that in the face of life's big questions we are all 'believers' of a sort. When dealing with matters such as God's existence, how mankind came into being or what happens when we die, none of us can fully know. To claim that a religious person in that context is someone who abandons reason and intellect and settles for the 'lesser grounds' of faith and belief is a misunderstanding of the nature of faith. A better understanding would be that it is not something that replaces reason and intellect, but rather that it takes over when we reach the boundaries of our limited intellectual capacities. There are aspects of our existence as human beings that simply go beyond our ability to fully grasp and leave us in the hands of faith. That does not make us unreasonable, but reflects the nature of our existence. Just because something is beyond our grasp to fully understand does not make it impossible to believe. A dog does not understand the full nature of his master and his master's dealings in many situations, yet that does not disprove the existence of the

master. In a similar way, it is not unreasonable to expect that there is a being of greater complexity than ourselves even as we necessarily struggle to comprehend the full nature and essence of such a being.

Furthermore, many who discard the idea of God seem to do so based on a misunderstanding of what Christianity actually teaches about him. God is a person, but his nature goes beyond the boundaries of our material world. To discard the idea of God because he cannot be seen in our material universe is in some ways like denying that there is an architect responsible for a house just because the architect himself could not be found in an examination of the actual construction. As the architect does not build himself into his actual construction, God is not to be found as a material part of the universe. Instead, Christianity teaches that God is the creator of this universe and thus not a material part of the creation himself. He himself is not a being among many, but rather the act of being itself, the one from whom all things originate and by whom all things are sustained.

### **Evolution, Conscience, and Right and Wrong**

When looking at the arguments for God and the case for Christianity, there are many different types of arguments and ways to approach the matter. One area where many people seem to believe that the Christian faith has been made obsolete is through the biblical account of creation, the 'Big Bang' theory and the theory of human evolution. We need to assert clearly that there is nothing in the biblical or Christian tradition to hinder the belief that God should have created our universe through some initial great explosion and then continued its development by some sort of evolutionary process. In fact, the first scientist to propose what has come to be known as the 'Big Bang' theory was an astronomer and professor of physics, Georges Lemaître, who also was a Catholic priest. Furthermore, the theory of human evolution also has support within the Christian tradition and was alluded to as early as the 4th century, 1500 years before Charles Darwin, by St Augustine, a who wrote that the world could have been made by God with certain 'potencies that unfolded in the progress of time'. These theories about the origins of our existence are thus not in conflict with Christian belief or worldview. These theories, however, only attempt to explain the *how* of our existence and not the *why*. When faced with the question why there is something, rather than nothing, the natural sciences still come up short and we are all still 'believers'. 'The survival of the fittest does not explain the arrival of the fit, as has been said. We are either left with the miracle of God creating something out of nothing or the impossible statement that something exploded out of nothing on its own.'

The Big Bang theory without the presence of a transcendent God has therefore always been an unsatisfying intellectual standpoint. Furthermore, the theory of human evolution is so fantastically improbable that it rather makes a case for God and not against him. The popular suggestion of simply adding more time to the timeline of our development is not a solution to this staggeringly complex process but rather just adds to awe over the very

existence of the human race. Cosmologists John D Barrow and Frank J Tipler argue that there are 10 vital steps to the course of human evolution. Each of these steps, however, is so highly improbable that before each of them could occur the sun would have ceased to be a main sequence star in our universe and would have disintegrated the earth in the process. The theory of independent human evolution is thus so overwhelmingly unlikely that, without the intervention of a god or transcendent power, it makes a desperately far-fetched case.

Other arguments for God and for Christianity exist in the arena of philosophy. Some of these arguments relates to human conscience and our inherent understanding of right and wrong. This is something that all of us continually experience in our everyday lives and that we mostly just take for granted. The philosophical implications of this sense of moral requirement, however, reaches far deeper than what most of us normally reflect on. For something to be right or wrong, there has to be someone or something either to follow or to err against in the first place. Right and wrong implies that a certain thing was set up to work in one particular way and not in another. That is the continual experience of our day-to-day lives; we get upset when we recognise that someone else oversteps these boundaries of what we know to be appropriate human behaviour and we feel guilty when we ourselves fail to live up to these standards.



*St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury 1033-1109, famously wrote about the relationship of faith and reason*

To a Christian this is evidence that we are created by God who is good and who has designed us to live in accordance with the nature and character of who he is and what he has created. We are not simply creatures with the sole instinct of self-preservation, but highly moral beings who can develop a profound sense of right and wrong, and an inherent understanding that we are called to love and care for one another. On the other hand, if we as human beings simply exist by a long row of fortunate events, then there is no explanation to why humanity lives with this universal sense pressed upon us of what is right or wrong. Why would we feel guilty about our actions if we are not ultimately accountable to anyone for our lives anyway, and how can there be right and wrong if we simply are here by chance and with no lasting purpose to our existence?

*Tobias Runeson was received into the Church in 2018. This piece will be concluded in the March edition of Oremus.*

# Cardinal Wiseman – An Eminent Victorian

Dr Michael Straiton KCSG

**'He found them a persecuted sect; he left them a Church.'** So wrote Cardinal Wiseman's biographer, Wilfrid Ward, after the Archbishop's death on 18 February 1865.

In the first half of the 19th century the Catholic Church in England was changing. A few thousand recusant Catholics had survived the Penal Laws that had kept them in subjection for three centuries, until repeal was effected by the Catholic Relief Act of 1829. The number of Catholics was small, until they were joined by Anglican converts and hundreds of thousands of starving Irish, who had fled to England to escape the devastating Irish Potato Famine of 1845-8.

Pope Pius IX addressed this new situation by restoring the Catholic diocesan hierarchy in 1850, appointing Nicholas Wiseman as the new Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster to head the restored life of the Catholic Church. He chose the right man for the purpose.

Nicholas Patrick Wiseman was born in Seville in 1802 to a family of wine merchants that originally had come from Ireland. He was baptised in Seville Cathedral, after which his mother placed the baby on the high altar and dedicated him to the service of God. After the father's death, the family returned to Ireland and Nicholas was sent to Ushaw College in Durham for his education. From there he was then sent to the English College in Rome, where he obtained a doctorate in theology and was ordained a priest. He was then appointed Rector of the College when he was only 26 years-old. He pursued Oriental Studies and was then appointed Professor of the same subject in the Roman University.

The young Rector's academic life was cut short when the Pope asked him to lecture to the growing number of English residents in the city, which proved a great success. Eventually Dr Wiseman became convinced that he should relinquish his work in Rome and devote the rest of his life to the service of the Church in England. He was consecrated bishop in the Chapel of the English College in Rome in 1840 and travelled to England. Noted as a popular scholar and critic, fluent in many languages and informed on questions of scientific, artistic and historical interests, he resumed his public lectures. He founded the Dublin Review, a journal that gave English Roman Catholics higher ideals of their own religion. It was in one of his articles in the Review that he quoted St Augustine of Hippo against the 4th century Donatist heretics, an exclusive sect that refused to accept back into the fold penitents who had fallen away during the persecution instigated by the Emperor Diocletian. John Henry Newman, still a member of the Church of England, spotted the phrase *securus judicat orbis terrarum* – 'the



Cardinal Wiseman keeps a watchful eye on the dining room table of Clergy House

secure judgment of the whole world' that meant the Catholic Church. This essay pulverized Newman's theory of the *Via Media* which claimed that the Anglican Communion was the legitimate heir to Early Christianity.

After returning to London, Bishop Wiseman became one of the Vicars Apostolic who looked after the Church across the country. He worked hard in the vast, teeming slum-ridden mass of the 19th century metropolis, opening seven religious communities of men and women, two orphan houses, schools and four new missions in the heart of the poor population. He wrote: 'in a little more than a year, 15,000 persons have been reclaimed by the Retreats given in courts and alleys. In one place, the very worst street in London, we boldly planted a mission among thieves and prostitutes and the change was visible ...'. Having no cathedral, he used the church of St Mary Moorfields, where he introduced the Roman ceremonial, liturgy and vestments to London.

On 29 September 1850, Pope Pius IX restored the Catholic diocesan hierarchy and appointed Wiseman as the first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. The then wide anti-Catholic sentiment in England led to uproar. *Punch* issued

a satirical cartoon in 1851. However, reasoned articles by the new Cardinal calmed the situation after a time. The first provincial Synod of Westminster was held at Oscott, Birmingham in July 1852, at which were assembled all the English Catholic bishops, Wiseman, their newly-appointed Cardinal Archbishop, a large gathering of priests and other dignitaries of the Church, including nearly all the Oxford converts to the priesthood. It was on this occasion John Henry Newman delivered his address 'The Second Spring', one of the greatest oratorical occasions of his career.

As a distraction from the cares of office, Wiseman wrote a work of fiction, *Fabiola or the Church in the Catacombs*, presenting Christian principles against the background of a pagan world. This was an instant and spectacular success, being translated into Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Hungarian, Danish, Polish, Slavonic and Dutch. The King of Prussia could not sleep one night and read it straight through, whilst the Archbishop of Milan described it as: 'the first good book which has had the success of a bad one'.

The Cardinal had a serious shortage of secular priests to work under his own direction in London. He had recently ordained a senior Anglican clergyman, Henry Edward Manning, who had converted to Catholicism in 1850, who became his close assistant. The Cardinal was still undecided as to what form his work in the Church should take, and decided that he might establish in England a community on the lines of the Oblates of St Charles, an order of priests founded in the 16th century by St Charles Borromeo for work in Milan on the very lines which Wiseman was looking for in 19th century London. After visiting Milan to study the work of the congregation, Manning drew up a Rule and the Cardinal sent him to Rome where it was approved. The new community of priests first met in 1857, in the church of St Mary of the Angels in Bayswater which the Cardinal had made over to them, with Manning as Superior. The Cardinal and Manning understood each other perfectly, seeing eye to eye on everything. During the Cardinal's declining years, Manning became his close and loyal assistant and



*The Cardinal rests in St Edmund's Chapel in the Cathedral crypt, his galero still hanging dustily above him. The requiem candlesticks were lit for the anniversary of his near neighbour, Cardinal Manning, who kindly lent them for purposes of this image.*

was unsurprisingly later to succeed him as Archbishop of Westminster, continuing to work tirelessly for the welfare of the poor.

The last few years of the Wiseman's life were clouded by increasingly poor health. He developed diabetes, which led to heart trouble and secondary skin infections. Towards the end he bore with great courage and fortitude erysipelas of the face, which led to carbuncles which had frequently to be lanced and then burned with caustic, particularly one that was pressing on the right eye. There was never a word of complaint. By the time of his death on 15 February 1865, he was so greatly respected across the country that his funeral procession to Kensal Green was described in *The Times* as comparable to that of the Duke of Wellington. The translation of the Cardinal's remains to his tomb in St Edmund's Chapel within the crypt beneath the high altar of the recently-built Westminster Cathedral took place on 30 January 1907. Here he lies next to his friend, assistant and successor, Cardinal Manning, also translated from Kensal Green. To Wiseman the Catholics of England owe an immense debt of gratitude.

*Dr Michael Straiton is Vice-Chairman of the Friends of the Holy Father, set up in 1980. Further information about the Friends is available on the website, [www.thefriendsoftheholypfather.org](http://www.thefriendsoftheholypfather.org) or from the Hon. Secretary, 23A Vincent House, Vincent Square, London SW1P 2NB.*



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# The Head Sacristan Writes



**The eagle-eyed amongst you may have noticed that we have not for some months been using the 'Metropolitan' Processional Cross, as we usually would for Masses celebrated by our Metropolitan Archbishop and Cardinal. The reason for this is that the stave of the cross is in a perilous state, and urgently requires restoration before it can be used again. The matching candlesticks also require attention.**

The processional cross was presented by the Catholic Women's League in 1912 to Cardinal Bourne. It is by the notable London silversmiths Blunt & Wray. It must be their finest work: sterling silver throughout, the stave chased with scrolls and trellises, set with moonstones and amethysts, some of which are sadly missing. The cross is also chased, and set with enamels, including the arms of Cardinal Bourne. It is engraved with

a dedication, and of course has its famous dangling Alpha and Omega.

It is a splendid piece, and a very significant part of the Cathedral's patrimony, so it is essential that we have it restored to use again as soon as possible. The silversmiths J. McCarthy of Artillery Row have offered us the very reasonable price of £2,500 to fully restore the cross, including repairing a broken piece, replacing the missing stones, and re-enforcing the stave, as well as restoring the two candlesticks. Since this fine firm is located in the parish, it would be particularly appropriate if they were to undertake the work.

If anyone is able to make any contribution towards the cost of this project, please contact Richard Hawker, the Head Sacristan at [headsacristan@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:headsacristan@rcdow.org.uk), or via Clergy House.

## English Priest Holes and Irish Mass Rocks

**When, in this country, we think of Mass being celebrated in secret during the centuries of Catholicism being illegal, it is likely that country houses and priest holes will come to mind. In Ireland it is different, as that country knew a tradition of Mass being celebrated outdoors where people could come together in remote locations, with suitable rocky outcrops being used as altars – 'Mass rocks'. The locations of some of these are well-known these days, but the advent of the pandemic has given them a new significance.**

In many instances, a stone would be taken from a church ruin, and relocated to a rural area, with a simple cross carved on its top. Because the activity was illegal, services were not scheduled and parishioners were obliged to spread the word informally. Some of the Mass rock places may also have been used for patterns, the celebrations of the feast day of a local saint. From 1695

to about 1750, life was difficult for Irish Catholics; churches were closed, bishops banished and priests forced to leave the country. Even with this risk, priests continued to celebrate Mass for the people in these outdoor locations, passed down orally, because including them on 17th- and 18th-century maps would have legitimized the Catholic faith.

The Mass rocks are an important part of Irish heritage, according to Dr Bishop of the University of Liverpool, who notes: 'They are the symbol of the penal laws, of Catholic heritage. They are what kept the faith alive throughout the penal era. If Gaelic communities hadn't gone to the Mass rocks, the faith would have died out'. Currently there are about 400 Mass rocks recorded, many of which are inscribed with a cross. Dr Bishop believes there are probably 'many, many more'. 'I suppose there comes a point where certain generations are less interested in the sites and less interested



*The Mass Rock of Badgerhill*

in their religion and their heritage, partly because a lot of them are not physically recorded anywhere, so if somebody knows of one and doesn't pass that information on, then the knowledge of that Mass rock is lost. When some say that they find Mass no longer relevant, I think of the Mass rocks, and the love of the Mass that inspired priests and people to gather there in all weathers, and in spite of great danger.'

In recognition of this, ACN Ireland has, in the last year, arranged for Mass to be offered on a Mass rock in each of Ireland's 26 dioceses, with the intention of the revival of the faith across the country.

# Reaping the Fruits of Reconciliation

Fr John Scott

**We can often experience our memory as being very selective; I have friends who will remind me of something I said a long time ago of which I have no recollection whatsoever. As we get older, we may well spend more time revisiting and perhaps reassessing our past. Memory is vital for this and it is a natural faculty. However, it can also have a life of its own, picking on particular actions or events and continually recalling them to our attention, even though these memories are not in truth the most important ones.**

This is all relevant when we come to seek reconciliation with God. It may be that our memory keeps bringing back something particular from our past, and this action of our memory makes us question ourselves: Did I confess this? Did I confess it properly? Why does this memory keep coming back? Perhaps I am not forgiven? To these questions there is a clear answer: If we bring our actions to God in reconciliation, then they are forgiven. Ah, you say, but was I really and truly sorry for what I said or did? Here we need to understand that, as human beings, we do indeed express different levels of sorrow – sometimes very sorry, sometimes not so sorry. With God, it is different, since he does not do things by halves, as if he were to say, that person is not very sorry, so I will only forgive them a bit. God's giving is always whole and entire, exactly as we see it in Jesus' own self-offering.



© Afrank99

*A memory stick, at least, will not play guilt games with us*

What, then, is our memory up to? It is playing a guilt game with us, continually seeking to hold us back in the past, as if it resents God's goodness towards us in reconciliation.

Imagine a monkey dancing round you, holding a stick and poking you painfully with it – that is what our memory is doing and will continue to do, unless we take it in hand and apply some spiritual discipline to this natural faculty. The monkey, to continue the image, must be taken and caged, so that it cannot harm us.

If my memory plays these sort of tricks with me, how can I apply spiritual discipline to it? Each time that it throws up something from the past which troubles us, we must challenge it with an act of faith in God's reconciliation, with a phrase such as 'And that has been given to God, so that it does not need to affect or control my life any more'. Even if our memory reminds us of something a thousand times, we must repeat our challenge a thousand and one times, until our memory learns the futility of carrying on as it has been used to doing. So when we use this form of challenge to our memory, we are doing two things – applying discipline and making an act of faith, so that by these means we become able to accept the fulness of reconciliation which God has already given to us.

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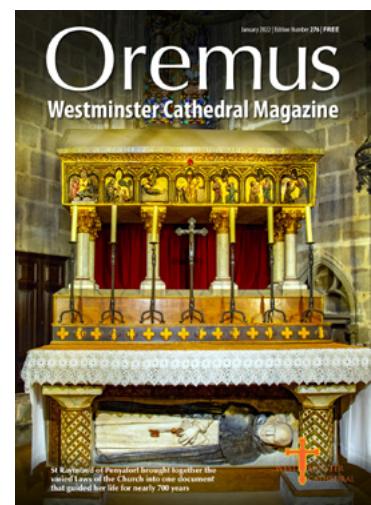
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# Our Search for God, or His for Us?

*The late Patrick Rogers wrote this personal piece in 2007 as a reflection on pilgrimage. After a couple of years of pandemic and with uncertainty about travel still much in the air, our appetites for encountering God through pilgrimage may need to be whetted again.*

'Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote...  
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimage.'

**Thus begins Chaucer's Canterbury Tales about a group of medieval pilgrims preparing to leave London for the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury. Six hundred years later, with Spring not far off, some of us are planning to go off on pilgrimage. Here in the Cathedral, Fr Sławomir Witowń is taking parishioners to Fatima in May, Fr Dwayne Bednar will be leading a group to the shrines of Ireland in June, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor will be taking the diocese to Lourdes in July and Mgr Mark Langham has organised a visit to the Holy Land in November. There will be many more – some organised by firms and advertised in the Catholic newspapers and others undertaken by parishes, groups of friends or individuals.**

So who is a pilgrim? In my experience, like Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, they are a pretty mixed bunch. But what unites them is that they are looking for something, and usually they are not quite sure what. I believe that a pilgrim is someone who in their own way is searching for God. Someone who accepts that he or she is not self-sufficient and for whom this world is not enough, that winning the lottery will not necessarily bring complete and lasting happiness. Someone who realises that in this world they will always be seeking, will never really find what they are looking for. Someone who, like the Israelites in Babylon, looks to a far country as their real home.



At twilight, pilgrims to Lourdes cross the river Gave carrying their candles

So what happens on a pilgrimage? I can only say what has happened to me. My first pilgrimage was, appropriately enough, to the greatest of all the shrines, to the Holy Land where Christ lived and worked, a place to which Christians have journeyed from all over the world since the time of Constantine the Great in the 4th century. I remember waking up on our first morning to the sound of birdsong by the Sea of Galilee, and then watching a bright blue kingfisher outside the little Church of the Primacy beside that sea, while swallows flew in and out of the windows during our first Mass. Later, in Jerusalem, at another Mass, I received Holy Communion in the room where the dead Christ was laid, in the church of the Holy Sepulchre – an overwhelming experience.



© Dennis Jarvis

*In Rome, the Catacombs of Domitilla bring pilgrims close to the Christians of the Early Church*

Then to Rome, the second of the great shrines, where the bones of St Peter and St Paul lie together with thousands of other Christian martyrs. I attended Mass in the Catacombs where so many of those martyrs are buried. And after Rome, to Santiago de Compostela, in north-west Spain, where the body of St James the Great is said to have been buried. The long-distance footpath to this, the third of the great medieval shrines, is known in France as *Le Chemin (or La Route) de Saint-Jacques*. In between Le Puy and Conques, in a village called Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole, I was roughly seized by the parish priest after early morning Mass and ordered to repeat the words *Sur Le Chemin de Saint-Jacques sois ma lumière, Seigneur. Sur le chemin de ma vie, sois ma lumière, Seigneur* (On the way of St James be my light, O Lord. On the way of my life be my light, O Lord). He refused to let me go until I was word perfect.



In medieval times England was called 'Our Lady's Dowry' and had a great shrine in her honour at Walsingham. Like so many others, it was destroyed by Henry VIII's men but it lives on, in the peaceful Norfolk countryside, and is still an important place of pilgrimage. But other Marian shrines, notably Lourdes and Fatima, have become more popular internationally. On my first visit to Lourdes I saw a small boy, so ill and exhausted that his face was grey, gazing at me from over his father's shoulder, and I felt a great wave of compassion and love and suddenly understood what Lourdes is all about. The next day I went with my sisters to the Grotto for the first time, and the sun shone down through the clouds in great shafts of light and the wind blew the leaves along the river Gave and around the Grotto in great swirling gusts, and I felt an immense sense of peace.

And finally to the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, which many pilgrims approach across the square on their knees. We stood waiting for five hours for Mass among tens of thousands of people, a significant proportion from Eastern Europe. But most were Portuguese from the surrounding countryside and were very wet, for it had rained heavily during the night and was still raining and they often had only a blanket to protect them. And so the Mass started and at the sign of peace a young Portuguese girl suddenly seized me and kissed me hard on both cheeks. So, of course, I kissed all the old ladies around me and everyone broke into broad smiles. For we had one God and one faith and were one people, though from many different lands.

What do you need on pilgrimage? Not much. 'Fullness to such a burden is that go on pilgrimage' as John Bunyan put it in *Pilgrim's Progress*. The medieval pilgrim wore a long tunic, a cloak, a broad-brimmed hat and perhaps a pair of sandals. He carried a leather pouch, a gourd of water and a staff against wolves and thieves. All you need besides is an open heart and an open mind. For going on pilgrimage is like reaching out to God. He will do the rest. *Ultreia et Suseia!* (Let us go forward and beyond!)



*At the end of the day's walking, pilgrims on the Camino await the opening of their hostel for the night*



## A Promotion of Trees

The image shows the sanctuary of the Cathedral all prepared for the celebration of Christmas. This year the trees were moved up from their previous location on ground level by the sanctuary balustrade so that they now flank the baldacchino, whose front two columns are enhanced by the display of the reliquaries of (left) St Thomas Becket and (right) St Edmund of Abingdon. Fresh candles in the big six candlesticks, interspersed with a second shorter set, enhance the vertical aspect, whilst the very length of the high altar does not permit its significance to be in any way diminished in the overall view. We hope that Mr Bentley would be pleased.



## Cardinal Manning, Protected

We confess that at Christmas we do not treat the Clergy House Common Room's bust of Cardinal Manning with the grave dignity which it deserves. He always wears a Christmas hat and, this year, a tinsel clerical collar to keep him warm against the draughts from the open windows. However, to preserve him from catching Covid from the Precentor, a face mask was added in token of our concern for his welfare.

## A Missal Desk Brought Out from Storage



The Missal Desk that was used on the sanctuary during the Christmas season to display the Infant Jesus is recorded as having been given to the Cathedral in 1923 by Sydney Ernest Kennedy (1855-1933), who collected European works of art as well as Chinese porcelain. As can be imagined, it is of considerable weight, resting on four feet which are fashioned as symbols of the Evangelists. There is an accompanying metal missal cover, which we will show in a future edition of *Oremus*.

## SVP's Nativity Performance

Here is an alternative view of the sanctuary, taken during the Grand Finale of the SVP School Nativity. The singing this year was particularly infectious, whence the swaying and arm-waving that can be seen, not to mention the quantity of congregational photography. At any rate, a good time was had by all.



# The Canadian Air Force Memorial



*The Chi-Rho memorial in the south transept; the nails are not as shiny now as when they were first installed*

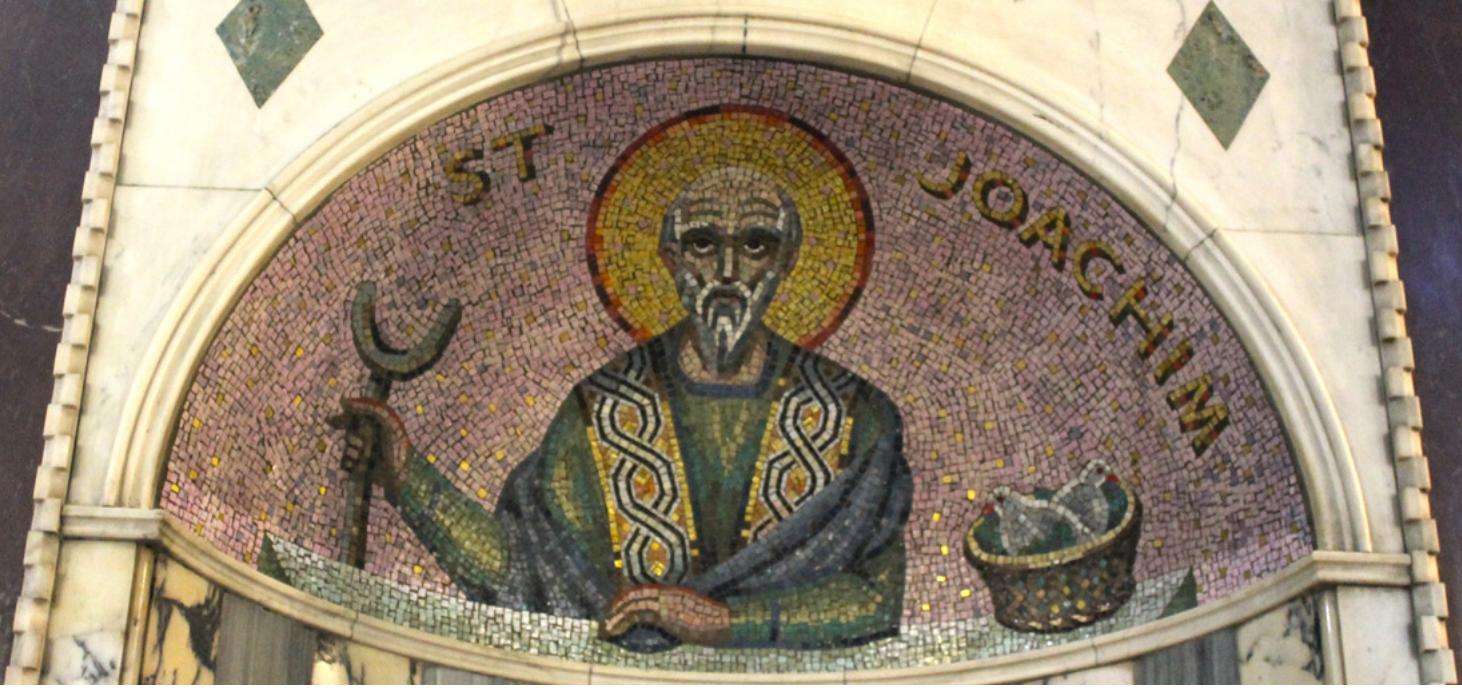
Patrick Rogers

The most unusual memorial in the Cathedral must be the *Chi-Rho* made of thousands of nails between the confessionalals in the south transept. It commemorates the men of the Canadian Air Force who died in the Second World War. The first Canadian memorial, completed in 1947 and dedicated in 1948, consisted of an altar in the Baptistry in honour of St Anne, Our Lady's mother and Canada's Patron Saint. The altar, funded by £1,000 raised for the purpose, was set against the west wall below the windows and was clad with ornamental marble with a central cross on the frontal.

In 1967 Winefride de l'Hôpital, biographer and eldest daughter of the Cathedral architect, J F Bentley, died. Both she and an unmarried sister, Miss H M Bentley, who also died about this time, left bequests for the further decoration of the Cathedral. It was decided to use the money to complete the marble revetment of the Baptistry and work started in 1969. With Canadian approval, it was also decided to remove the Baptistry altar and transfer the dedication to a new marble altar facing the congregation in the centre of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

These decisions were, of course, taken in the light of the changes introduced after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), one of which was the suggestion that the celebrant might face the congregation during Mass. However, a permanent new altar in the centre of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel would have radically altered the appearance of the Chapel and obscured the fine marble floor. The temporary altars introduced after Vatican II for use in the Cathedral (of which one remains for use in Cathedral Hall when Mass is celebrated there) were on aluminium frames, and so could be removed when not required.

When the scheme for the new memorial altar was abandoned, the next plan was for a plaque in the south transept. The man chosen by the Cathedral Art Committee to design it was David 'Birdie' Partridge, a naturalised Canadian born in Ohio in 1919. After serving in the Canadian Air Force as a flying instructor in 1942-1945, Partridge began as a painter and printmaker. In 1958 he produced his first three-dimensional sculpture comprising different sized nails; he developed and perfected this technique during his 10 years in London from 1962. He was deeply influenced by



*St Joachim is on the liturgical north side of the side aisle and so receives some afternoon light, even in winter*

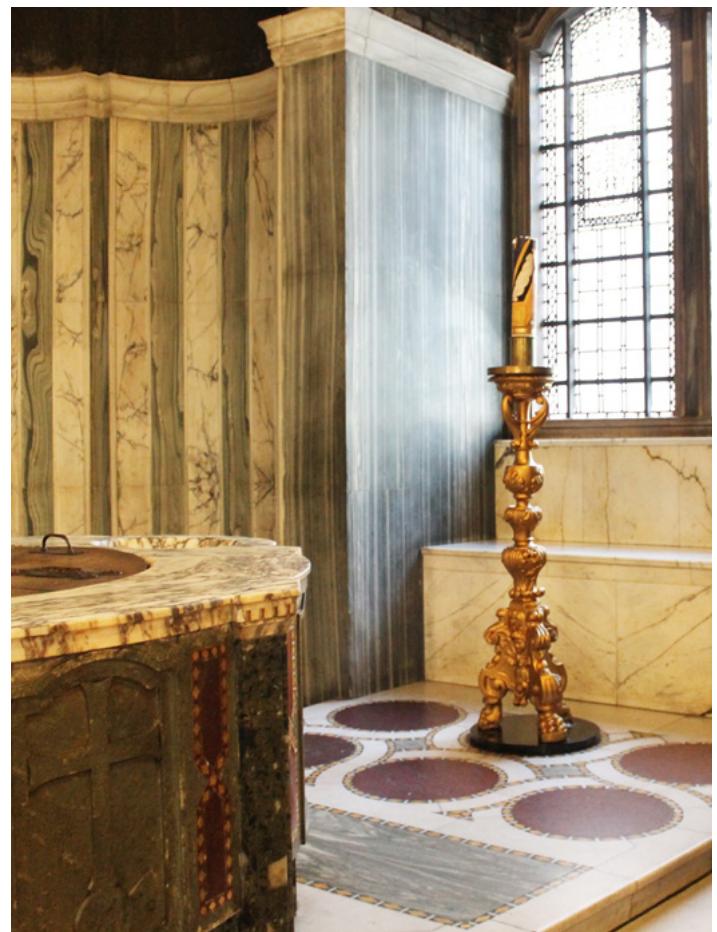
early studies of geology and palaeontology and by hours of flying over Northern Ontario during the war, and this is reflected in his works now to be seen in galleries in Canada, Australia and the United States. His *Vertebrate Configuration* is in London's Tate Britain.



*St Anne has her niche immediately above the waiting penitents*

The current Canadian Air Force memorial in the south transept was installed in 1972. It takes the form of a *Chi-Rho* (the first letters of Christ's name in Greek) in thousands of shining nails of many different lengths. The central 'X' may also be viewed as commemorating the runways of a wartime airfield and the triple circle as the roundels or 'bullseye' markings on Canadian aircraft. The nails themselves may be taken to symbolise the 17,101 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force who never returned from the war. The inscription below is by Edward Wright. It reads: 'To the Glory of God and in cherished memory of their beloved comrades this panel is erected by the Catholics of the Royal Canadian Air Force overseas. RIP.' As the memorial sits immediately above one of the consecration crosses, a candle burns below it on 1 July each year, when we commemorate the Dedication of the Cathedral.

And St Anne, the patron saint of Canada? With her husband, St Joachim, they appear on either side of the near end of the south aisle – in niches, watching over the queue for Confession, and also in the first little mosaic tableau on the left of the Lady Chapel.



*The site of St Anne's altar is now a wide ledge below the Baptistry window. The Paschal Candlestick can be seen standing on what was, perhaps, the footpace of the altar? A design drawing shows a crucifix and four candlesticks on a ledge at the base of the window, whilst the altar itself has a marble frontal of three panels, the centre of these having a cross within a circle in contrasting colours.*

# In retrospect: from the *Cathedral Chronicle*

## Christ – A Box-office Success

It is quite remarkable that after the 'death of God,' a musical celebrating Christ should be played in the West End of secularised London, and give every indication that its success will equal that of the two most successful current West End musicals: Hair and The Canterbury Tales. Godspell often echoes Hair in its idiom, but avoids its banality. In its *joie de vivre* and sheer gaiety it is evocative of The Canterbury Tales, but hardly possesses the unity of coherence of the Tales nor the sophistication that lies behind so much of Chaucer's material. Indeed, at times, Godspell's simplicity is child-like and brings to mind a script written for a children's drama. Yet, it yields nothing to Hair or The Canterbury Tales in its acting, singing or choreography. The lyrics are devotional in content – factors which have not prevented their 'making the charts.' Above all, it is memorable for its infectious gaiety and good humour which creates a marvellous sense of unity amongst audience and cast which is symbolised in the sharing of wine on the stage during the interval.

## Central Questions Unasked

While it purports to be a musical based on the St Matthew's Gospel, it would be more accurate to describe it as a dramatisation of episodes from the Gospel. Its most serious defect is a lack of unity. For instance, while the crucifixion is splendidly dramatised and the carrying off of the dead Christ to the sounds of 'Long live God' is as moving as it is ambivalent, nevertheless, the whole episode is inexplicable in the context. There is hardly a hint in the earlier section of the play of the root of the catastrophe. Compared to Jesus Christ, Superstar, Godspell lacks psychological insight; there is nothing in it comparable to the song of Mary Magdalene in Superstar. In general, its characterisation is somewhat thin and the probing note of Superstar: 'Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ/Who are You? What have you sacrificed?' is never heard. In fact, the central character is so poorly delineated that the power of the Gospel proclamation – 'Jesus is the Christ' – tends to be lost.

*from the February 1972 Westminster Cathedral Journal*

## A Glimpse of Catholic Canada

We landed under a cloudless sky and to the rhythm of the early morning peal of bells. It was a week-day and no holiday, and yet, when we had managed to scramble through the Customs and dash into the first available church, we found a remarkably large congregation attending Mass. This, of course, is as it should be, but for a newcomer it stamps a country as Catholic when business men and women, with portfolios and dispatch cases, are seen crowding in for Low Mass on a day which is neither a Feast of Obligation nor of Devotion. Montreal is rich in churches, and it does not take very long to discover them. One hardly turns a street corner without coming up against a fine Catholic edifice. On the other hand, a Protestant temple advertised for sale is by no means an infrequent sight in this populous city.

The principal monument is Notre Dame Church, erected little more than a century ago, close to the site of the first chapel built by the French colonists in 1642, which served as parish church for the early settlers on the island of 'Mont Royal'. The beauty and vastness of this glorious basilica is said to be unsurpassed by any other in North America. The architect was an Irish Protestant, James O'Donnell, whose zeal for the beauty of the House of God finally won for him the light of the true faith. He died a Catholic and was buried in the crypt of the church.

Hardly less impressive is the new Cathedral of St James, with its great frontage, and its almost incessant bell reminding the busy city that all work and no prayer does not lead very far. Night prayers said from the pulpit every evening at 7.30pm are largely attended, and it is pleasing to note that much is rendered by the people as well as by the priest in Latin. But what struck us in particular in the many churches of Montreal which we visited was the fervent devotion of the faithful to St Peter. His statue is greatly in evidence, and there is always someone kneeling at its feet. Merely to kiss the image and gain an indulgence thereby does not appear to satisfy the Montrealer who will spend several minutes in prayer before the figure of the first Pope. There is a lesson to be learnt from the Canadian Catholics who cling so tenaciously to St Peter and to that for which he stands. *Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia* has almost become a trite saying, but throughout Catholic Canada we have been told there is a deep devotion to the Papacy, and is not this the explanation of the rapid strides which the Church is making in this great Dominion?

*from the February 1922 Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*

## CATHEDRAL HISTORY – A PICTORIAL RECORD

### Cardinal Nichols leaves Archbishop's House for his Solemn Reception as Cardinal Friday 28th February 2014



© Marcin Mazur

Paul Tobin

**In previous years when the Archbishop of Westminster entered the Cathedral via the West Doors on special occasions (e.g., Enthronement or Reception on return from Rome as Cardinal) he would have been driven the short distance by car from Archbishop's House. In 2000 Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor was the first Archbishop of Westminster to eschew the use of a car for the short journey, choosing to walk up the centre of Ambrosden Avenue in procession to the West Doors.**

His immediate predecessor, Cardinal Basil Hume OSB (Archbishop of Westminster 1976-1999), entered the Cathedral by way of the Sacristy, as he had not yet been ordained as a bishop; his episcopal ordination took place immediately before his Installation. He did set a precedent, however, by walking back to Archbishop's House after the ceremony - something both his successors have continued.

On the evening of the Rite of Reception of Cardinal Nichols, following his return from Rome as a newly-created Cardinal, the weather was so unpleasant that in order for him to make the short walk from Archbishop's House to the West Doors, it was deemed sensible to provide him with appropriate covering to protect his scarlet mozzetta and cassock. A traditional cardinal's red cloak was found, which in bygone days was worn with an accompanying red hat (a *Saturno*, whose use was abolished in 1969). These were worn regularly when travelling to a church to be received solemnly at the main door.

In the first image Cardinal Nichols is seen holding the biretta that he received from Pope Francis at the Public Consistory in St Peter's Basilica. Behind him, slightly obscured, is his then Private Secretary, Fr (now Canon) John O'Leary, whilst on the Cardinal's immediate left, holding an umbrella, is Br (now Fr) Barnaby Johns OSA, then Diocesan Communications Officer. In the second image is the cardinalatial *saturno* of John Carmel Heenan, Eighth Archbishop of Westminster.

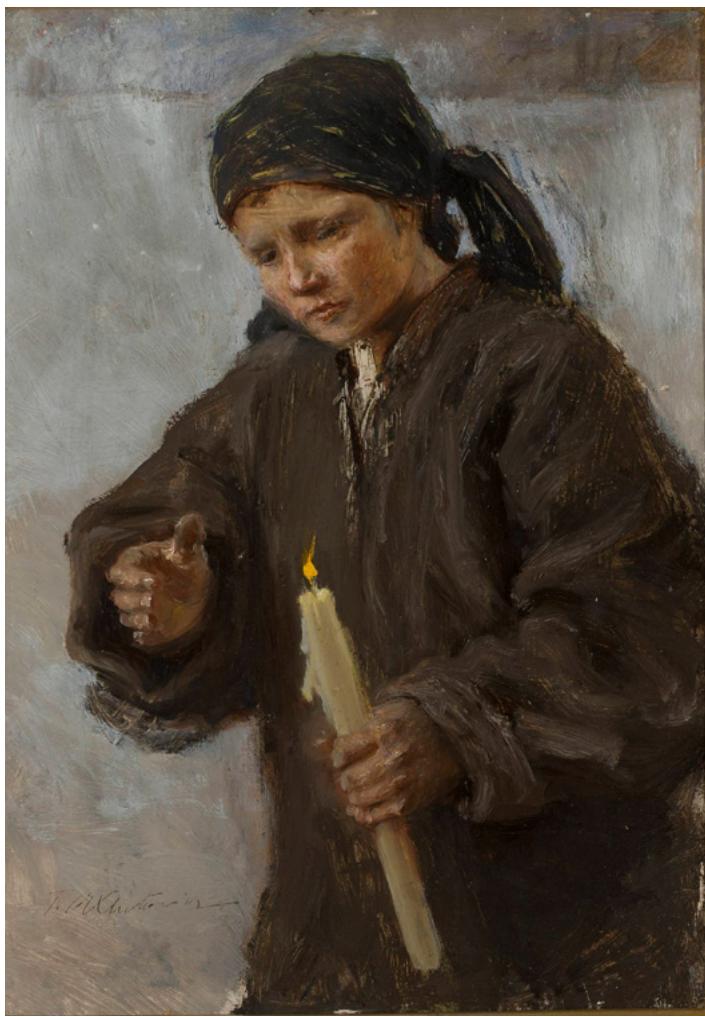


© Paul Tobin

## Candlemas

*John Boyd S.J.*

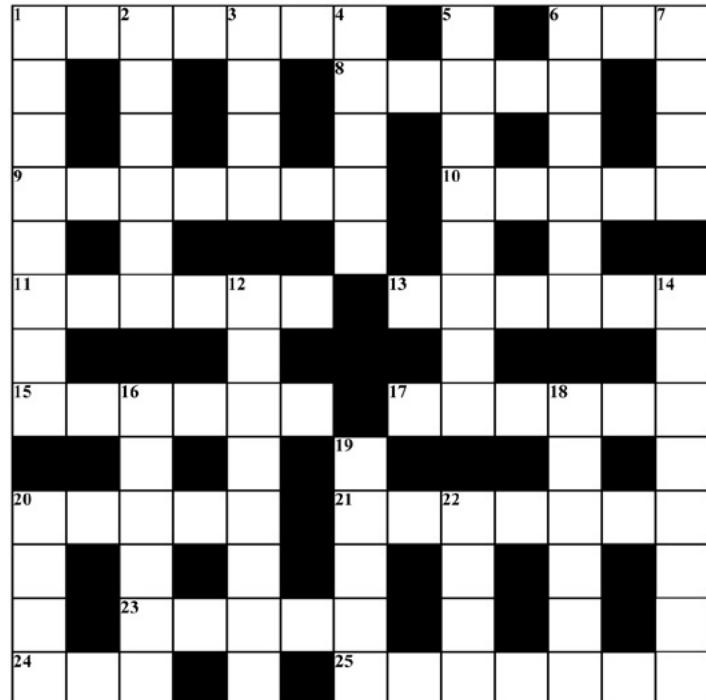
Beewise we gather our wax all year  
 From bramble sorrow and thistle tear,  
 Briar sadness and spine of pain:  
 Bitter flowers that bloom again!  
 But deadest winter brings a day  
 When thorns have lovelier bloom than May;  
 When candles are fashioned and lit by One  
 Who fashioned her wax to be lit by the Sun,  
 Then watched her Candle burn: the price  
 Of sin-consuming sacrifice.  
 Today she shares the Flame anew  
 To make us priest-and-victim too.  
 And Mary-mothered flames and Flame  
 Live their sacrificial Name.



© National Museum of Warsaw

For the Candlemas by Teodor Axentowicz

To submit a poem whether by yourself or another for consideration, please contact the Editor – details on page 3.



Alan Frost February 2022 – No. 96

### Clues Across

- 1 Instrument in percussion section of orchestra (7)
- 6 Reverse Latin heart for extinct bird (3)
- 8 Relationship of St Winifred to St Beuno (5)
- 9 Where Florence Nightingale set up her Crimean War hospital (7)
- 10 Depiction of Mary cradling her Son taken down from the Cross (5)
- 11 Nelson's support structure in Trafalgar Square (6)
- 13 Saint and 7th c. Pope, also venerated by Eastern Orthodox (6)
- 15 St ----- Campion, inspiring and brilliant martyr of Tyburn (6)
- 17 & 23 Across: Famous book by Thomas Paine that sought to justify the French Revolution (6,2,3)
- 20 Scottish girl's name meaning 'great', could be translated from 'Sarah' (5)
- 21 'Thou dost my very God -----', O Bread of Heaven', hymn (7)
- 23 See 17 Across
- 24 University Academic, particularly at Oxford or Cambridge (3)
- 25 Observed by monks in refectory during meals (7)

### Clues Down

- 1 Murder of Chicago mobsters in February 1929 known as 'The St Valentine's Day -----' (8)
- 2 Formal sequence of gestures, words and perhaps music, particularly that of the Mass (6)
- 3 ---- Lisa, one of Leonardo's most famous paintings (4)
- 4 Blacksmith's item, providing popular Chorus from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (5)
- 5 Italian composer of *The Pines of Rome* and *The Fountains of Rome* (8)
- 6 Sincerely confess one's sins (6)
- 7 Place of Christ's first public miracle (4)
- 12 The marriage of one man to one woman (8)
- 14 Unused, because out of date (8)
- 16 Thomas ----- Trappist U.S. monk and prolific author (6)
- 18 Cardinal, buried near the Cathedral pulpit (6)
- 19 Religious images, particularly in Orthodox churches (5)
- 20 ---- of Orleans, title given to St Joan of Arc (4)
- 22 Little tragic heroine of Dickens' Old Curiosity Shop, near The Strand (4)

### ANSWERS

Across:	1 Marimba	6 Roc	8 Nicce	9 Sculptari	10 Pieta	11 Column	12 Riassum	13 Agatho	15 Edmund	17 Rigbys	20 Morag	21 Concet	22 Neill	23 Of Man	24 Don	25 Silence	Down:	1 Avril	5 Respihi	6 Repent	7 Cana	12 Massacre	2 Ritual	3 Mona	4 Anvil	18 Henehan	19 Icons	20 Maid	22 Neill	16 Merlon
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St Theodore of Tarsus (602 – 690) has his own feast day on 19 September, but in Westminster he is commemorated with two other Archbishops of Canterbury, Laurence and Dunstan, on 3 February. He grew up in Tarsus, but fled to Constantinople after the Persian Empire conquered Tarsus and other cities. After studying there, he relocated to Rome and was installed in 668 as Archbishop of Canterbury on the orders of Pope Vitalian, bringing with him a rich knowledge of both Greek and Latin culture. Accounts of his life appear in two 8th-century texts and Theodore is best known both for his peacefully-effected reform of the English Church and for the establishment of an influential school in Canterbury.



*This image of St Theodore is outside his church in Crawley, West Sussex*

# The Month of February

## The Holy Father's Prayer Intention

### For Religious Sisters and Consecrated Women

We pray for Religious Sisters and Consecrated Women, thanking them for their mission and their courage; may they continue to find new responses to the challenges of our times.

**Tuesday 1 February** Ps Week 4

Feria  
5.30pm Chapter Mass

### Wednesday 2 February

#### THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

5.30pm Solemn Mass (Men's voices)  
*Victoria* – Missa O magnum mysterium  
*Tallis* – Videte miraculum  
*Byrd* – Senex puerum portabat a 4  
Organ: *Widor* – Finale (Symphonie II)

### Thursday 3 February

Ss Laurence, Dunstan and Theodore, Archbishops of Canterbury  
*The Blessing of St Blaise on throats will be given after each Mass*

**Friday 4 February** Friday abstinence  
Feria

### Saturday 5 February

St Agatha, Virgin & Martyr  
11am Mass for Consecrated Life  
(**10.30am** Mass cancelled)  
4pm Mass according to the 1962 Missal (Latin Mass Society, Blessed Sacrament Chapel)

**Sunday 6 February** Ps Week 1

**5th SUNDAY IN O.T.**  
12pm Solemn Mass (Full Choir)  
*Victoria* – Missa Simile est regnum cælorum  
*Palestrina* – Perfice gressus meos  
Organ: *Walton* – Orb & Sceptre  
3pm Organ Recital – Anthony Gritten (Royal Academy of Music)  
4pm Solemn Vespers & Benediction  
*Lassus* – Magnificat primi toni

## The Cathedral is open from 7.30am and closes in time for 7pm.

**Monday to Friday:** Morning Prayer 7.35am, Mass 8am, Mass (Latin, unless there is a Funeral) 10.30am, Mass 12.30pm \*, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament 1.15-4.30pm, Sung Vespers 5pm (Latin, Choir, except Tuesday, English, Cantor), Solemn Mass 5.30pm (Choir, Tuesday Boys' voices, Wednesday Men's voices).

**Saturday:** Morning Prayer 7.35am, Mass 8am, Mass 10.30am (Latin, sung), Mass 12.30pm \*, Sung Vespers 5.30pm (English, Cantor), Sung Mass 6pm

**Sunday:** Mass 8am, Sung Morning Prayer 9.30am, Sung Mass 10am, Solemn Mass 12noon (Choir) \*, Solemn Vespers and Benediction 4pm \*, Sung Mass 5.30pm, Mass 7pm

\* Live streamed via the Cathedral website

*Holst – Nunc dimittis*

Organ: *Tournemire* – Diptyque (L'Orgue mystique XI)

**4.30pm** Mass for the Deaf Service (Cathedral Hall)

### Monday 7 February

Feria

### Tuesday 8 February

St Josephine Bakhita (St Jerome Emiliani)

\* Day of Prayer for Victims of Trafficking and those who work to combat it

### Wednesday 9 February

Feria

### Thursday 10 February

St Scholastica, Virgin



*The death of St Scholastica*  
by Luca Giordano

### Friday 11 February

*Friday abstinence*

Our Lady of Lourdes

\* World Day for the Sick

**8.30am – 5.30pm** NHS Blood Transfusion Service in Cathedral Hall

### Saturday 12 February

Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday

**2pm** Mass of our Lady of Lourdes (offered with Intention for the Sick)

**6pm** Victoria Choir sings at Mass

### Sunday 13 February

Ps Week 2

#### 6th SUNDAY IN O.T.

\* Racial Justice Day

**12pm** Solemn Mass (Men's Voices)

*Palestrina* – Missa Nasce la gioia mia

*Victoria* – Laudate Dominum

Organ: *J S Bach* – Prelude in B minor (BWV 544)

**3pm** Organ Recital – Paul Stubbings (St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh)

**4pm** Solemn Vespers & Benediction

*Victoria* – Magnificat primi toni

*Byrd* – Diliges Dominum

Organ: *J S Bach* – Fugue in B minor (BWV 544)

### Monday 14 February

**Ss CYRIL, Monk and METHODIUS, Bishop, Patrons of Europe**



Statue of Ss Cyril and Methodius on Radhošť, Czech Republic

© Pudelek

**Tuesday 15 February**

Feria

**Wednesday 16 February**

Feria

**Thursday 17 February**

Feria

(The Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order)



© Art Institute of Chicago

The Madonna with the Seven Holy Founders, by Agostino Masucci

**Friday 18 February** Friday abstinence

Feria

8.30am – 5.30pm NHS Blood Transfusion Service in Cathedral Hall

**Saturday 19 February**

Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday

10.30am Said Mass

11.15am Diocesan Synodal Gathering

(12.30pm Mass cancelled)

**Sunday 20 February** Ps Week 3**7th SUNDAY in O.T.**

12pm Solemn Mass (Full Choir)

Byrd – Mass for five voices

Duruflé – Ubi caritas et amor

Gabrieli – O sacrum convivium

Organ: Vierne – Final (Symphonie III)

**3pm** Organ Recital – Charles Andrews (Temple Church, London)**4pm** Solemn Vespers & Benediction

Bevan – Magnificat octavi toni

Tallis – O salutaris hostia

Organ: Widor – Toccata (Symphonie Gothique)

**Monday 21 February**

Feria

(St Peter Damian, Bishop &amp; Doctor)

**Tuesday 22 February**

THE CHAIR OF ST PETER THE APOSTLE

**Wednesday 23 February**

St Polycarp, Bishop &amp; Martyr

**Thursday 24 February**

Feria

**Friday 25 February** Friday abstinence

Feria

**Saturday 26 February**

Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday

6pm Chiswick Parish Choir sings at Mass

**From the Registers, in 2021**

Data Protection Regulations do not permit the names of those receiving sacraments in the Cathedral to be published without explicit consent being granted. However, for statistical purposes and for wider interest, these are the figures for the calendar year 2021. The figures for the years 2020 and 2019 are given in brackets for comparison and show some of the effects of the pandemic.

**Baptisms:**

Male 25, Female 21 (totals 31; 64)

**Confirmations:**

Male 31, Female 37 (totals 43; 376)

**Funerals**

(celebrated in the Cathedral):

Male 8, Female 9 (totals 10; 17)

**Marriages:**

10 (9; 4)

**Convalidation of a marriage:**

1 (0; 0)

**Sunday 27 February****8th SUNDAY in O.T.**

Ps Week 4

**12pm** Solemn Mass (Full Choir)

Mozart – Missa brevis in F major (K.192)

Palestrina – Exsultate Deo

Organ: Dupré – Toccata (Symphonie II)

**3pm** Organ Recital – Jason Richards (St Stephen's, Rochester Row)**4pm** Solemn Vespers & Benediction

Lassus – Magnificat octavi toni

Monteverdi – Beatus vir

Organ: J S Bach – Concerto in C major (BWV 594)

**Monday 28 February**

Feria

**Key to the Diary:** Saints' days and holy days written in **BOLD CAPITAL**

**LETTERS** denote Sundays and Solemnities, **CAPITAL LETTERS** denote Feasts, and those not in capitals denote Memorials, whether optional or otherwise. Memorials in brackets are not celebrated liturgically.

**What Happens and When****Catholic Grandparents' Association**Hinsley Room,  
Second Sundays 12-3.30pm**Charismatic Prayer Group**Cathedral Hall,  
Fridays 6.30-9pm**Divine Mercy Prayer Group**St Patrick's Chapel,  
Sundays 1.30-2.30pm**Filipino Club**Hinsley Room,  
First Sundays 1-5pm**Lectio Divina**Hinsley Room,  
Monday 7-8pm**Legion of Mary**Hinsley Room,  
Monday 1.30-3.30pm**Nigerian Catholic Association**Hinsley Room,  
Fourth Sundays – 1.30-3pm**RCIA group**Hinsley Room,  
Wednesday 7-8.30pm**Rosary Group**Lady Chapel,  
Saturday 10-10.25am**Walsingham Prayer Group**St George's Chapel,  
First Tuesdays 2.30-4pm**Yoruba Association**Hinsley Room,  
Third Saturdays 1.30-3pm

# Enhancing Faith

Maria Sandoval, Year 6



**During my time at St Vincent de Paul School my religion has been greatly strengthened by our many faith-based traditions. One of our foremost practices is connected with the feast of the Miraculous Medal, which takes place on 27 November. It is very meaningful to us, because the image of the Miraculous Medal is our school badge. We are so fortunate to have such a precious symbol on our school uniform. Every year, St Vincent de Paul pupils receive a Miraculous Medal and a booklet which includes information about the medal and its significance, as well as prayers to Our Lady. This year I have received my eighth Medal, due to the fact that I have been lucky enough to have attended SVP School since Nursery.**

Another important tradition is the May Procession. The Year 3 pupils participate in the Procession dedicated to Our Lady. All of the children dress in their First Holy Communion clothes, which makes it a very special and

prayerful time. The Procession is similar to a wedding, there is one girl who represents Mary, and two bridesmaids who tend to her. Other pupils either throw petals across the floor or accompany the girl who plays Holy Mary. We also sing hymns to Our Lady.

We have another tradition, which is the Advent Garden Service that the Year 4 pupils perform. We light our Advent Wreath and the children sing songs from their countries all over the world. Each candle has significance and this is explained through the dramatization. This is followed by the Year 4 girls who gracefully perform a ballet dance which concludes the service.

Furthermore, one of our most significant traditions is the Nativity Performance. It takes place every year in December on the main sanctuary of Westminster Cathedral and it is a public event! Every pupil in the school participates in this joyful Christmas production. The main Christmas message is to love and care for others and to celebrate the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I can recall the story of Christmas more easily when I stand before the Crib or when I participate in the Christmas production.

Another extremely important event is the Passion Play, which Year 5 undertakes. It is also open to the whole school community and occurs close to Passion Sunday, again on the main sanctuary of the Cathedral. The Play depicts the whole story of the Passion of Christ. During this holy season of the year, my faith increases by remembering the Passion of Our Lord, because when I find things difficult, I remember that Jesus went through much more hardship and pain than I ever have. Throughout the time of Easter, we have to remember how God sacrificed his only-begotten Son to die on the Cross for us. That is why we should cherish that act of unconditional love and care.

Moreover, one of our daily traditions is class worship, and every day we have two pupils who lead our collective worship. We also have assemblies, which happen weekly, where we focus on prayer and scripture passages from the Bible. We are a Catholic school; this is our main area of study, but we also study other religions in Religious Education. Recently we have been studying Judaism. It is so interesting to learn about and have respect for other religions. St Vincent de Paul School has really strengthened my faith and relationship with Jesus, and I hope that I remember the message my school has given me throughout all of my life.

# Mar Elian – A Saint for Reconciliation

Fides

**The ancient monastery of Mar Elian, on the outskirts of the Syrian city of Quaryatayn, which was ransacked and desecrated by jihadist militiamen in 2016, could soon return to being a place of prayer and peace. Fr Jacques Mourad, a monk of the community of Deir Mar Musa, who was himself kidnapped in Mar Elian on 21 May 2015 and lived long months of imprisonment, first in isolation and then together with more than 150 other Christian hostages from the city, recently made the announcement.**

He said that the rebirth of the monastery will be made possible thanks to an agreement between the Syrian-Catholic archieparchy of Homs, Hama and Nabk and the monastic community of Deir Mar Musa, founded by Fr Paolo Dall'Oglio, the Jesuit priest from Rome who has not been seen since he was captured by Islamic State in Raqqqa on 29 July 2013, when Daesh took over the city. In his message, Fr Jacques asks everyone to pray so that the parishioners of Qaryatayn will be able to discern 'God's will for the future of this important geographical area of Syria, our Country'.

The plan for the rebirth of Mar Elian envisages the replanting of vineyards and olive groves on the land around the monastery, together with the reconstruction of the surrounding walls and access doors. 'We will try to encourage the return to Qaryatayn of the Christians who lived there and who were forced to flee during the war, supporting the reconstruction of their homes, the revitalization of crops and activities that guaranteed their economic independence before everything was devastated by the conflict. If this first phase proceeds well, the actual reconstruction of the monastery and the parish church will be carried out, as well as the archaeological recovery works around the tomb of the Saint, which will not be easy after the devastation suffered.' Currently only 26 Christians remain in the Qaryatayn area, who are fewer than the 10,000 Muslims there. But Fr Jacques is hoping that many more Christians will return to the area where they lived for centuries before they were forced to flee by IS. Before the conflict, the ancient Sanctuary of Mar Elian, dating back to the 5th century, had been closely linked to the monastic community of Deir Mar Musa and was flourishing, with the Christians there living peacefully alongside the Muslim community.

In February 2015, Fr Jacques was kidnapped by jihadists, who soon took control of the entire area. The tomb of Mar Elian was brutally desecrated, as Islamic

State tried to erase what they believed to be the heart of the monastic complex. But the relics of Mar Elian, scattered around the tomb of the Saint, were not lost. In particular, the bones of the Saint had been found, collected and taken to Homs in April 2016, after the end of the jihadist occupation. Fr Jacques comments: 'We know that the old sanctuary was razed to the ground, that the archaeological site was devastated, while the new church and the monastery were set on fire and partly bombed, but', he said 'when we return to Mar Elian, we will put the relics of the Saint back in their place. The life of grace will blossom again around the memory of the saints. And it will be a great sign of blessing for our whole Church'.

A Google search for 'Mar Elian' will produce more background and information on this saint and his shrine, a shared focus for communities of different faith in Syria over many centuries.



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**DIRECTORS**

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 Westminster Cathedral  
 for many years*

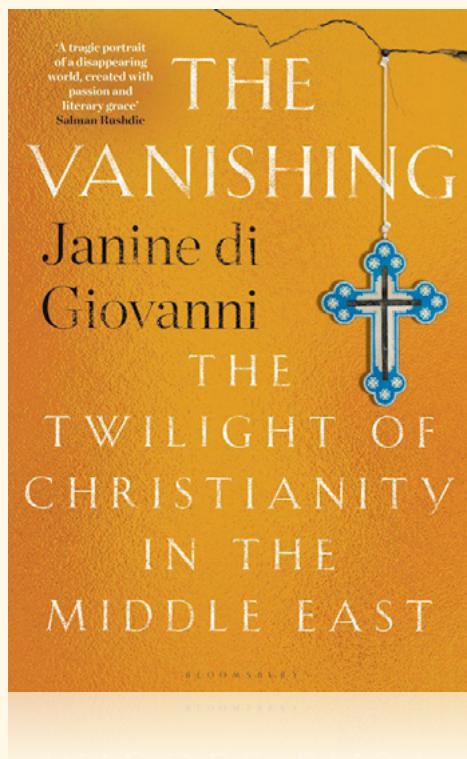
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# The Twilight of Christianity in the Middle East?



*The Vanishing: The Twilight of Christianity in the Middle East;*  
Janine di Giovanni; London 2021,  
Bloomsbury Publishing; pp xiv + 252;  
hbk £20; ISBN 978-1-5266-2583-0

Fr John Scott

di Giovanni has given us a book that is intensely personal whilst seeking to analyse present historical realities within the context of a region formed by the whole history of Christianity and its relationship with Islam. Herself an acclaimed war correspondent, we are taken on a journey to four areas, hearing of people encountered, lost and, sometimes, rediscovered over years which have seen, as she calls it, the twilight of so many Christian communities and consequent increase of exile and migration.

Her foci are Iraq, Gaza, Syria and Egypt, although she begins with her own experience of living under lockdown in Paris. She writes of her Catholic upbringing: 'the prayers I

hated as a child during Lent, when my classmates and I were forced to kneel for hours during Holy Week, passing caustic notes about the nuns or the priests. But these are also the prayers that have sustained me, consoled me and guided me in the many years I have roamed the world to record and document wars'.

She notes that more than 93% of the people in the Middle East identify as Muslim, with much of Iraq's and Syria's Christian population close to extinction, Egypt's Copts facing legal discrimination and fewer than 1,000 Christians left in Gaza, itself entirely Christian in the 4th century. Yet, in all this change: 'I slept in houses that were not so different from the ones that existed in ancient times – flat square buildings with ladders to the roof, where we would sleep in summer .. In Abraham's day, men would gather in the courtyards to chat, bargain and gossip, drinking from large urns with straws. In 2002, I saw men very much like their ancestors'.

But how do people survive under great pressure, as in Gaza and its refugee camps? The organist of the Church of the Holy Family explains: 'We are prisoners here. That's the best way to put it .. It is difficult for all Christians in Palestine, but Gaza is – well, Gaza is impossible. But we stay. It is my home'. In this land, the birthplace of Christ, Christians refer to themselves as 'living stones' referencing I Peter 2:5. So here they continue awkwardly, trapped between feuding political rivals, hopeless for the future of their young people. Fr Mario, the Church's priest, says of his early years there: 'I prayed for Gaza to get better every year. But every year it gets worse .. I am saddened to leave, but this year was the hardest of my life. People came to me every day to solve problems and you can't help everyone. If you give to one, you get everyone upset. These are not bad people. These are desperate people'.

Over in Syria, di Giovanni visits Maaloula and its Sunni Imam: 'Here in these mountains there are all different people, different religions .. but we decided adamantly that Maaloula would not be destroyed'. But a year later the fighters arrived with Russian rifles, shooting the citizens, silencing the prayers and shattering the unity; 'the vow the town made would be worth nothing'. The experience there underlines the problem across all these lands; the necessary compromises that were made years ago with authoritarian regimes that allowed Christians at least to stay in their traditional homeland and to enjoy a level of freedom, even protection. In Syria that meant Christian support for and trust in 'Mr Assad' – 'It was a common refrain in Syria, that the country was being used because of its geopolitical significance. It was "foreign forces" that were causing the war, they argued'.

Over in Egypt, Copts face similar problems, choosing between President Sisi and the Muslim Brotherhood. Zakher, a Cairo businessman and Copt, comments that bombing churches and having persecution reported in the media is used as a means of embarrassing the government, showing it to be powerless. But is there any other choice than to support the President? 'Over the Christmas holidays, the government insisted on wrapping Cairo's churches in enormous Egyptian flags, as if they were gigantic Christmas presents .. it symbolized a kind of protection, but worshippers saw it as a kind of threat: you are Egyptians first, Christians second.'

It will be clear that *The Vanishing* will not a cheerful read, but di Giovanni's ability both in description of circumstances and of individual characters leaves one with a sense of having met our fellow Christians who, in all this adversity, still display how faith and hope can combine to render life possible.