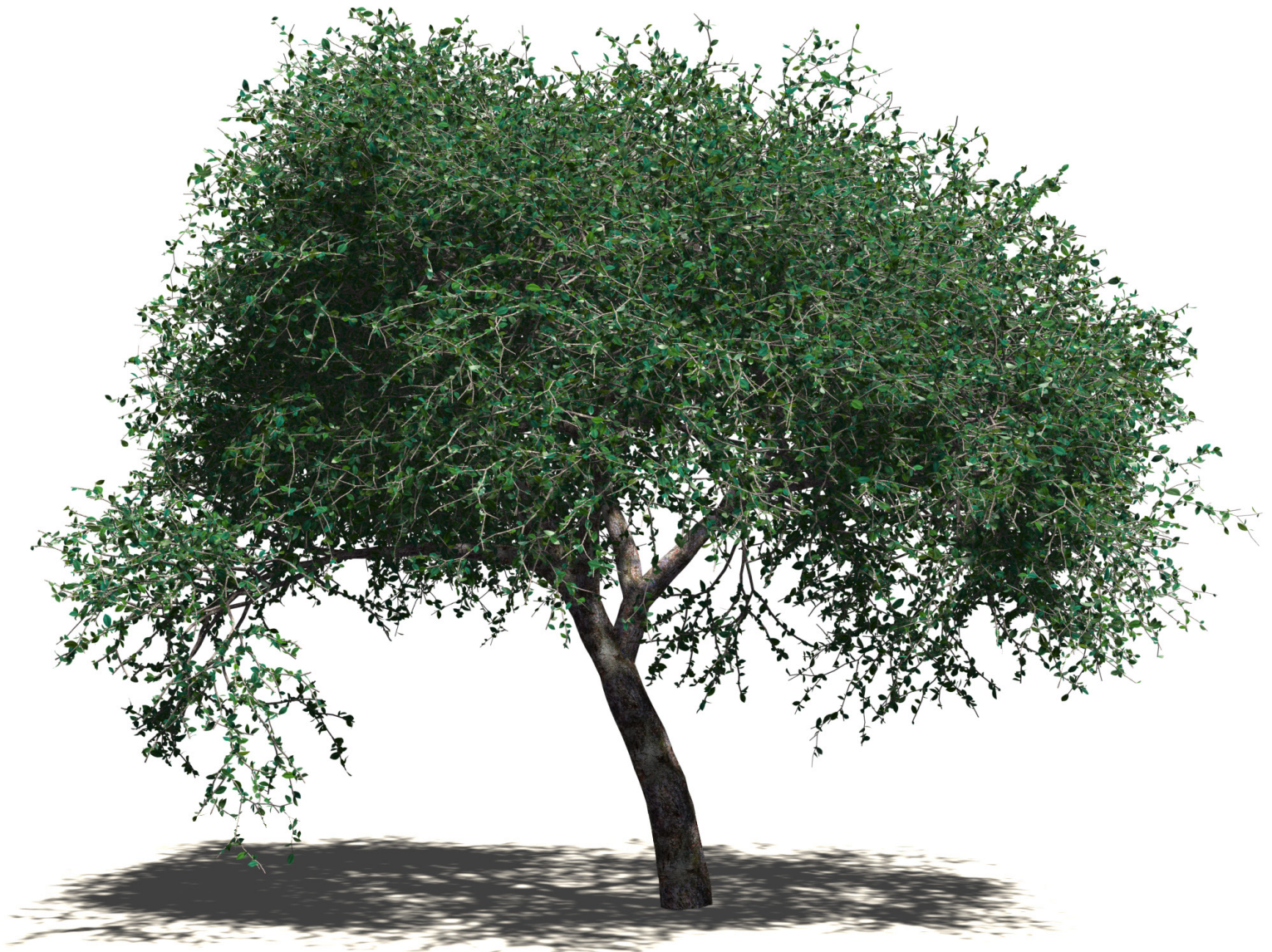


FELLOWSHIP & FAIRYDUST



SAINTS
& SAGES

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"The Saint is a medicine because he is an antidote. Indeed that is why the saint is often a martyr; he is mistaken for a poison because he is an antidote."

- G.K. Chesterton

In every time and place, there have been those whose holiness and insight have marked them out as an example to be followed. Their reach has been universal, like rain falling upon the seeds of spiritual growth, both for their contemporaries and the generations that came after them. They provide timeless guidance for living a life of wholeness that encompasses body, mind, and spirit in the service of God and in solidarity with our fellow man, springing up through the ages to confront the conditions that faced them, and continue to face us.

Sometimes they helped change the world through actively advancing causes of social justice; other times they did so through the contemplative preservation of wisdom. We hear their stories, and read their writings, as if they were still among us today, pointing the direction of the pilgrim's path. They shape our collective consciousness, comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. They take us by the hand and lead us out into the desert, or far across the sea, or to any "thin place" where heaven and earth, temporality and eternity, can meet.

Within the Catholic Church, the canonization of a saint follows a grueling process to determine the heroic virtue of the candidates, as well as to verify miracles said to be obtained through their intercession. This process does not "create" saints, but rather recognizes that as such and raises them to the full honors of the altar. Yet even those faithful departed who are not officially canonized, but do enjoy the splendors of heaven, are considered saints as a part of the "great cloud of witnesses." There are similar concepts held, though in a less official context, in other Christian branches, including within Eastern Orthodoxy and various Protestant denominations. It might be accurately said that sanctity is the universal vocation of all Christians.

Other faith traditions have their own figures who they hold as being worthy of honor and emulation in religious life, having become "friends of God" or attained "oneness with the universe". There is the Jewish tzadik, the Islamic walī, the Hindu rishi or Sikh guru, the Shintoist kami, and the Buddhist arhat or bodhisattva. We can find areas of common ground in the wealth of wisdom literature either composed by or involving these figures.

In this issue, we explore the lives and legacies of various saints and sages who have inspired our contributors. We explore the rich body of work they have bequeathed us, both through their lives and writings, from which we may understand who they were and who we may become. The articles featured here aim to offer new perspectives on figures you may know, while introducing new ones, in the spirit of interfaith dialogue and fellowship.

Blessings,

Avellina Balestri

Editor-in-Chief

Wesley Hutchins

Managing Editor

THE HANDS OF JOSEPH TREMBLED

Kerstin Koepl

The hands of Joseph trembled
As he went about his task.
Mary's tale was strange and left
A question he dared not ask.
"The Child is of God Himself."
He knew Mary spoke the truth,
Yet he wondered as he thought
Of the Lord as a mere youth.
He missed a nail as he mused
And it dropped down to the sod.
Who was he to fancy that
He could rear the Son of God?

The hands of Joseph trembled
As he awakened from a dream.
He'd seen an angel in his sleep
And heard a heavenly theme.
"Fear not," the angel told him.
"To take Mary as your wife.
Her Child is the Savior Who
Will restore the dead to life."
At once, his fears fell from him
And his dread was made to still,
Yet he marveled at the role
He was given in God's Will.

The hands of Joseph trembled
As he held the little Child
And looked on the Face of God;

A Baby, beautiful and mild.
His heart throbbed with a father's love
And a tear came to his eye
As he rocked Our Lord in his arms
And heard Him gently sigh.
Pure joy shone in Mary's face
But all else was forgot,
For beside that Child, shepherds, kings
And even angels were but naught.

The hands of Joseph trembled
As he laid his tools to rest:
His workbench, nails, saw, and wood.
The end came nigh of the test,
So he lay down one last time.
Any sorrow was put to flight
As Jesus and His Mother
Remained within his sight.
For how could pain or even death
Bring fear or even start
To trouble one who'd lived so
Close to the Sacred Heart?





THOMISM AND ITS PLACE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: A HISTORICAL BRIEF

Martina Juričková

Introduction

It is not easy to define Thomism as an unequivocal school of thought because the various thinkers, who advocated it throughout its 700-year history, never identified themselves as members of a unified movement. Likewise, the opinions on whom to name as a Thomist and what are the criteria of determining the content of Thomistic teaching have been often disputed and changed with the ages. Cessario¹ provides the simplest definition of Thomism as “a body of tenets in both philosophy and theology that derive from and are held to represent faithfully the doctrine of [...] Thomas Aquinas.” Wheisheipl states that representatives of this philosophy not only illuminate Aquinas’s teaching but develop it and try to use it to address the theological concerns of every age².

In a broad sense, the term “Thomist” used to be applied to anybody who in parts derived their philosophy from Aquinas, often combining it with elements from other schools of thought, creating different kinds of Thomism

and sometimes even resulting in a notable diversion from the holy priest’s teaching. Actually, almost every Christian tradition from the late medieval period was to some extent influenced by Aquinas’s ideas.

In a strict sense, Thomism applies only to those who pristinely adhere to the central principles of Aquinas’s philosophy and theology as presented in his works.

Thomas was born in 1225³ in Roccasecca, Italy, into the family of lower aristocrats Landolfo and Theodora d’Aquino. Thomas was the youngest of their nine children and expected to enter the Benedictine monastery in the near Monte Casino and eventually become its abbot, like his uncle. Thus, at the age of 5 he was sent to be educated at the monastery. He spent 8 years there and then continued his studies at the University of Naples where he became acquainted with both Aristotle’s philosophy and the Dominican order, two things that determined the course of his following life.

**Thomas
Aquinas**

In 1243, to the great disappointment of his family, he secretly joined the Dominican order, receiving the habit a year later. A legend says that his parents, upon finding this out, imprisoned him in their house and even tried to use a girl-seducer to persuade him to return to the Benedictines and continue the family tradition. They held him captive for two years and released him only at the urging of Pope Innocent IV and King Frederick II.

Afterwards, he pursued his studies with the Dominicans in Naples, Paris, and Cologne, being ordained in 1250. He assumed a university teaching post in Paris, and under the tutelage of Albert the Great, completed doctoral studies in theology. As a student, Thomas was modest and quiet, the thinker type, often misperceived as dim-witted, but his genius showed up in his thesis. His tutor remarked that "his bellowing in doctrine will one day resound throughout the world!"⁴

During the 1250s, he became a renowned professor and instructor, devoting himself to investigating the possibility of reconciliation between theology and philosophy, which was the major object of conflicts and disputes in society at that time, and also between the various monastic orders. His critical abilities earned him admittance to the *consortium magistorium*, along with the Franciscan doctor Bonaventure. This happened on 15 August 1257.

In 1259, Aquinas returned to Italy, where he started writing his most famous work, *Summa Theologica*, after refusing to rewrite and update his former commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, which he had compiled during his last years at Cologne.

In order to understand his need for providing some theologico-philosophical guidelines, the overall social situation needs to be considered. The 13th century was not only a time of conflict between the ecclesiastical and

civil authorities (in Italy represented by Pope Gregory IX and Frederick II, the King of Sicily and Emperor of Rome, both of whom the Pope excommunicated for invading the States of the Church) as much on the state scale as on university grounds; but also of the ongoing antagonism between the East Church and the West Church; conflicts between diocesan clergy and religious orders; the orders among each other (Franciscans, Benedictines, Dominicans) or even within themselves; plus the aforementioned opponency between faith dealt with by theology and reason and natural law dealt with by philosophy, especially between Augustinian theology and Aristotle's philosophy. Aquinas's works in some way address all of these matters.

The biggest problem with the theology-philosophy conflict was how to unite the knowledge obtained through revelation with the information people received by observing the principles of the nature using their mind and senses. The most radical was the Averroists' opinion⁵ that these two kinds of knowledge directly oppose each other, which Aquinas rejected, claiming that they both come from God, thus they are compatible and ultimately should lead to the same results. Further, Aquinas also had to fight those theologians who utterly rejected the teaching of classical Greek philosophers, or condemned the possibility that eternal truths could have been in some other form revealed also to Gentiles and thus they could be redeemed. This he discussed in his work, *Summa contra Gentiles*.

Aquinas's greatest advantage was that he "united an uncommonly comprehensive knowledge of theology with a sharply disciplined philosophical mind."⁶ The size of the body of his works is amazing, considering that he compiled most of it in the span of only about 20 years.

Between 1268 and 1272, he was

The History of Thomism

again recalled to teach in Paris, afterwards returning to Naples. During the Feast of St. Nicolas in 1273, he had a mystical vision, a voice coming from the crucifix praising him for what he had written for God's glory, after which he altogether gave up on writing. He declined in health, but when Pope Gregory X summoned him to participate in the council at Lyons that was planned for 1 May 1274, he set out to walk there in January. This invitation was thanks to Aquinas's former compendium of arguments that was supposed to be used by the papal theologians to carry a dialogue with the East Church, and the aim of this council was to achieve mutual understanding with the Greeks. However, Aquinas's health rapidly worsened and he stayed at the Cistercian monastery in Fossanova, Italy, where he died on 7 March 1274. He was first buried there, but on 28 January 1369 his remains were removed to Toulouse.

Thomas Aquinas was canonized on 18 July 1323 by Pope John XXII, and in 1567, Pope Pius V proclaimed him a *Doctor of the Church*. He is the patron saint of schools, students, and theologians, often assigned the title *Doctor Angelicus*.

Thomas Aquinas, though he was a respected theologian, nonetheless, did not perceive himself as a head of some newly founded school, nor did he have any immediate disciples among his students. But the refinement of his work attracted, and still does, many followers. Leonard A. Kennedy lists a total of 2034 Thomists active in the period between 1270 and 1900. Kennedy's catalogue shows a continuous interest in Aquinas's works even in the periods of declension in the active practice of theology, carried on mainly by the Dominicans, followed by Jesuits, and from the 19th century even by an increasing number of non-religious people. Moreover, it indicates that any eclipse in its practice

that has ever occurred was just a result of the overall regression from religion; rather than by incapability of the philosophy to appeal to or address the current social situation; it was caused by external factors, such as conflicts within the ecclesia, its splitting and formation of new reformatory denominations (e.g. different forms of Protestantism), the outbreak of the French Revolution, Enlightenment, wars, or pandemics.

Historians usually recognize three or four⁷ periods in the development of Thomism: first, the era of early Thomists and defenders (13-15th century); second, the era of commentators (15-17th century); third, the post-Reformation era (17-18th century); and fourth, Neo-Thomism (since the 19th century).

Aquinas had many critics already during his lifetime, mainly from the lines of such theologians who opposed any possibility to consolidate the Greek or Arabic philosophers with the Christian religion. The chief opponents of Thomism were Franciscans. In 1277, their Parisian bishop, Stephen Tempier, issued a condemnation of 219 propositions he believed to contradict the traditional Augustinian theology, including 20 by Thomas, by which his reputation much suffered. This condemnation was adopted even by the British church. However, Aquinas's teaching was immediately defended by some Dominicans, including Aquinas's former teacher Albert, this leading to the withdrawal of his theses from the condemnation.

Ever since his teaching was adopted and promoted by the Dominican order, which soon expanded to England, founding convents in Canterbury, London, and Oxford. Thanks to them, by the end of 13th century, Thomism had taken firm root in the British Isles, flourishing especially in Oxford until the Anglican schism (Dominicans then returned to Oxford only at the beginning of 20th century). However, the

Dominican-Franciscan conflict there was intense. Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury John Peckham in 1286 excommunicated the Dominican priest Richard Knapwell for promoting Thomistic views⁸, and Pope Nicholas IV (also Franciscan) refused to reverse it. This prompted the Dominicans to all the more actively advocate Aquinas's teaching. Another outstanding British Dominican was Thomas Sutton, who completed two of Aquinas's unfinished commentaries on Aristotle.

After Aquinas's canonization, Thomism enjoyed rapid growth, being supported by professors who understood the breakthrough it achieved in Christian theology. It was also recognized as a source of practical wisdom for everyday life. Aquinas's theology was validated in 1325 by Parisian bishop Stephen Bourret.

The Great Western Schism and a plague of Black Death in the 14th century caused a decline in the practice of intellectual and theological life in Western Europe. Conversely, Thomism began to grow in the Eastern countries, such as Bohemia, Poland, Scandinavia, and Byzantium, eventually reaching as far as Russia and China by the 17th century. The spread of Thomism became even easier with the invention of the printing press and the political consolidation of a major part of Europe under the rule of Habsburgs who exercised a strong commitment to the Catholic Church. By the end of the 15th century, the *Summa Theologica* was being used as a standard textbook of theology, especially in universities where Dominicans taught. During

the Renaissance, as a time of return and revival of ancient Greek philosophy, Aquinas's work was valued for its relation with Aristotle, and Dominican Thomism exerted some influence also outside the framework of the Order. However, not all humanists liked that, for example, the famous Erasmus of Rotterdam sharply criticized Aquinas.

Another recession of Thomism from active life happened during the turbulent time of Protestant reformations in the 16th century. However, the works of former as well as contemporary Thomists (such as the most important ones: John Capreolus and

Thomas Cajetan) were used to help preserve the true faith and fight the reformers' heretic ideas. During this time, Thomism clarified its position and began to be perceived as the official Catholic theology, what reflected also in the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which embodied the Counter-Reformation movement. A majority of the theologians summoned

supported Aquinas's teaching and had influence not only on the decrees of the council but also on the *Roman Catechism* issued by Pope Pius V, himself a Dominican, in 1566.

The Council marked a period of Catholic Reform and revival of Thomism. Many new monastic orders that were founded at this time adhered to Aquinas's teaching, though maybe not in its entirety. For example, St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, was influenced by his Dominican teachers and promoted a kind of eclectic Thomism. The Jesuits became the second greatest advocates

By the end of the 15th century, the *Summa Theologica* was being used as a standard textbook of theology, especially in universities where Dominicans taught.

of Aquinas's theology in the 17th and 18th centuries, though they sometimes conflicted with the Dominicans over certain points in it.

Unfortunately, this theological revival lasted only until the revolutionary wave that spread over Europe, starting with the French Revolution in the late 18th century, followed by Napoleonic occupation, when many of the religious houses were closed. Another threat was presented by the modern non-Catholic philosophers, whose influence started to become notable even in Catholic universities and seminaries. The Age of Reason demanded the abandonment of medieval scholasticism in favour of natural sciences and speculative philosophy, represented by such names as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and others. Catholic philosophy at this time became largely apologetical, trying to incorporate the modern knowledge in some form of theological rationalism. However, these new theological attempts did not have solid enough foundation to prevent them from falling into heretical ideas.

It was the Dominican Order, now most active mainly in Italy, who still carried on Aquinas's true theology and first called for the need to return to his teaching at seminaries. Four people are especially singled out for their contribution to the revival of Thomism, or establishment of the so-called Neo-Thomism: Vincento Buzzeti, who recognized the value of Aquinas's teaching in refuting the modern philosophical positions that were ill-suited to elucidate Christian theology; and his disciples, the Sordi brothers and Joseph Pecci, brother of Gioacchino, the future Pope Leo XIII.

The Sordi brothers joined the Jesuits and formed a secret society to discuss the revival of scholasticism, trying to persuade their fellow brothers that Aquinas was a trustworthy guide for renewing Catholic theology. The first Jesuits to accept it were those

at Roman College where the young Gioacchino also studied, and he, too, was moved toward Aquinas. Becoming a bishop, he later attended the Provincial Synod of Spoleto in 1849, which requested the papacy to issue a condemnation of current errors. This was accomplished by Pope Pius IX in 1864⁹, and the errors were the main concern of the First Vatican Council. The council's constitution, *Dei Filius*, was influenced by the studies on Aquinas of another Jesuit, Kleutgen.

Upon his accession to papacy, Gioacchino, now Leo XIII, issued an encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in which he "called for the restoration of St. Thomas' basic doctrine as the only sound Christian philosophy capable of answering modern needs."¹⁰ This was in 1879, the same year that he founded the Roman Academy of St. Thomas. Leo promulgated Aquinas's philosophy in every way possible and used it in his next encyclicals to solve modern problems.

Despite his efforts, many young clerics wanted to update the Church teaching to match the spirit of the age, and after Leo's death, their ranks still multiplied. This led the new Pope Pius X to issue a list of modernist errors and several decrees on the proper training of clergy. In his encyclical *Motu Proprio* from 29 June 1914, he insisted that *Summa Theologica* be used as a textbook of theology in all institutions providing cleric degrees. A month later, the Congregation of Studies provided a list of 24 fundamental theses¹¹ that were understood as the principal teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and safe directive norms for the Church. Both these recommendations were confirmed as essential on 7 March 1916.

The outbreak of World War I, which caused further major faltering of faith and trust in religion as well as humanity as such in the general public, only added to the need to provide some clear yet firm theological guidelines

that would "serve the universal call to holiness."¹² So the *Code of Canon Law* issued in May 1917 under Pope Benedict XV finally declared Aquinas's teaching the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, also requiring "all professors of philosophy and theology hold and teach the method, doctrine and principles of the Angelic Doctor."¹³

Although the Apostolic Constitution presented a detailed curriculum of studies for seminaries which was imposed with the fullest apostolic authority, this was not fully implemented in all such institutions, and there was formed some kind of "theological underground", mainly in France, that called for novelization of theology, leading to the popularization of Transcendental and other kinds of Thomism influenced by evolutionism and

existentialism. Fortunately, these new versions did not affect the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965, nor the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The position of Thomas Aquinas in Catholic theology was reaffirmed by several other encyclicals, such as Pope Pius XII's *Humani Generis*, or most recently John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio*.

During the late 20th century, the historical study of Thomism has been popularized not only in Europe but also in America. Aquinas's work is still being studied in high ranked universities in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Cracow, and others. In the words of Cessario¹⁴: "Thomism remains an active intellectual tradition in both secular and religious circles," even in the 21st century.

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3. Probably. The year of his birth is uncertain, different sources range it from 1224 to 1226.
4. *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Biography.com
5. Averroism was a philosophical school based on the works of 12th-century Arab philosopher Averroes, original name Ibn Rushid, that represented a radical interpretation of Aristotle reconciling his philosophy with the Islamic faith. Typical is their belief in monopsychism and panpsychism.
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7. Some of them join the first two periods into one; others join the last two periods.
8. In the background there were some political machinations.
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LYDWINE OF SCHIEDAM: A SAINT FOR OUR TIMES

Guy Jackson

Living in the modern world, it's easy to base our self-worth on our achievements. Whether because of celebrity culture insinuating that our lives are more worthwhile the more people know about us, consumerism suggesting that the summum bonum is being able to afford more and better things, or social media offering endless carefully curated snippets of people living their "best lives", we often fall into the trap of supposing that a life without constant achievement and progress is a life wasted.

As always, however, it seems like what the world demands, the world conspires to prevent. The last two years alone have seen millions of people's educations and careers go off track, perhaps irreparably, thanks to various lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, and the threat of future restrictions remains omnipresent even in countries with large majorities of vaccinated individuals. Nor is the fallout from COVID the only obstacle people have to face – deindustrialisation, outsourcing, PhD overproduction, creden-

tialism, degree inflation, housing shortages... So many things hinder us from following the traditional path of worldly happiness – marriage, children, career success – that, if this is really the way to find meaning, we must conclude that many young people will, through no fault of their own, be simply unable to live a meaningful life.

That's where St. Lydwine can help us. Lydwine was a woman who, in worldly terms, achieved practically nothing. Born in Schiedam in Holland in 1380, Lydwine was a beautiful girl with a sweet and cheerful temperament. It seemed that her parents would have no trouble finding her the good match that they desired. Lydwine, however, wanted to live for God alone, and begged him to make her ugly so that she might avoid following her parents' wishes. Her prayers were answered when, at the age of fifteen, she contracted an illness that left her thin, hollow-faced, and greenish in colour. It didn't stop there: when she became strong enough, she went outside skating with her friends, fell over,

and broke a rib. This injury gave rise to a tumour, causing her so much agonising pain that she was unable to get out of bed. (Lydwine was later made the patron saint of skaters because of this incident.)

Although her family brought in several doctors, none were able to cure her. Lydwine's symptoms worsened; she suffered at various times from vomiting, fever, gangrene, ulcers, infestations of worms, blindness in the right eye, toothache, blood flows from the mouth, ears, and nose, gallstones, cancers, and dropsy, among other things. So hid-

eous did she now appear that many of her former friends ceased to visit, unable to bear the sight of her. But despite her horrific appearance, Lydwine's wounds were reported to give off a sweet smell, like that of cinnamon.

Lydwine suffered most during the first four years of her illness, when, in addition to her physical distress, she was tormented by the thought that God had rejected her, that she was damned, that all her prayers were worthless. She became so miserable that the mere sound of laughter was enough to make her weep with envy. Consolation finally came in the form of a good and holy priest, who told Lydwine that her sufferings were of a supernatural origin, sent by God to help expiate the sins of the world, and that she was being called to imitate Christ in suffering for the sake of others.

After this, although her physical

torments did not abate but instead became worse, Lydwine began to receive great spiritual consolations, to such an extent that she even started complaining that she was not suffering enough, and declared that, if a single Hail Mary could free her from her pain, she would not say it. She had visions of Mary and the Angels and Christ crucified. She saw and conversed with her Guardian Angel, who took her soul to visit her parish church, Eden, Purgatory, and even Heaven. Here the saints would encourage her, telling her that her sufferings were temporary, but her

joys would be eternal. Lydwine wept afterwards at the thought of how many years she still had left to live.

Some time after she started having these ecstasies, Lydwine's stomach burst, and she had to have a pillow pressed on her to keep her intestines in place. Whenever it was necessary to move her, her carers would

bind her body together lest it disintegrate. She was barely able to eat, consuming as much in thirty years as a normal person would in three days. In a vision she saw that her body represented in microcosm what the whole of Christendom, wracked by wars and schism, was then suffering. (This was the period known as the Great Western Schism, in which two, and sometimes even three, men claimed the papal tiara, and the Catholic Church seemed in serious danger of breaking up irreparably.)

News of Lydwine's sufferings soon



spread, and many people came to see her, some to be inspired by her holiness, others to gawp as if at a freak show. Oftentimes people would stay with her round the clock, trying to prove that the stories of her not eating were all false, and that she was having food brought in secretly when no one else was present. Once a priest, who suspected that her mystical gifts came from the Devil, sought to test her by giving her unconsecrated Hosts. Lydwine, who had been warned of the ruse beforehand in one of her visions, rejected them at once. Other sceptics were confuted when Lydwine was able to give detailed descriptions of their homes or religious communities hundreds of miles away.

When Lydwine died at the age of fifty-three, her wounds miraculously vanished, and she became as fair and fresh as in her youth. Many people came to see her body laid out, and many miracles were attributed to her both at this time and subsequently.

Veneration of her started immediately and her hometown of Schiedam became an important pilgrimage site, although she was not officially canonised until 1890.

Why do I consider St. Lydwine's example to be especially relevant to us? Because, in purely human terms, she achieved nothing at all, being entirely bedridden and dependent on others for over two-thirds of her life. But despite her initial sorrow over her calamities, Lydwine didn't let herself sink into self-pity, although probably few would blame her if she did. Instead she offered up her sufferings to the Lord, and so attained to far greater holiness than she could have done as part of a more conventionally successful life. So if you are sick and unable to work, or trapped at home in lockdown, or unemployed with no job in sight, don't despair – ask St. Lydwine to help you offer up your sufferings for Christ, and you may find yourself achieving far more valuable than worldly success.



MY BUDDY ST. ANTHONY

Ray E. Lipinski

Day in day out, it's always the same
I never stop calling this patient saint's name
I lost my keys, I lost my phone,
I lost my wallet, even the garden gnome

But it never fails when I call him out
He stops my frustrations and worrisome pouts
Tony, Tony turn around ...
What once was lost, please make found

And just like that it never fails
My tears are dried, and I stop the wail
My item appears usually right in front of me
Oh to St. Anthony, thank you to thee

Next day comes and starts all over again
My wallet, my keys, my ball point pen
Do I have my phone, where is my book?
I know Anthony is sighing, did I take another look?

Of course, I did not, I just call on his name
Anthony to the rescue, it's our little game
One day he's going to just charge me a fee
Or a Divine referral to get checked for ADD

But one thing's for sure next to the Heavenly gate
St. Anthony finds my item without haste
He's my one true bud that keeps me sound
The original purveyor of the lost and found

So when you've lost that item for the umpteenth time
No need to worry, stress or to whine
Just simply repeat Tony Tony turn around ...
What once was lost please make found

So I'll turn around, twirl and laugh to myself
And most likely my item is there on the shelf
I'll roll my eyes, but smile with glee
Because St. Anthony is always looking out for me.

The reason for invoking St. Anthony's help in finding lost or stolen things is traced back to an incident in his own life. As the story goes, Anthony had lost a book of psalms that was very important to him. Besides, the value of any before the invention of printing, the psalter had the notes and comments he had made to use in teaching students in his Franciscan Order. A novice who had already grown tired of living religious life decided to depart the community. Besides going AWOL he also took Anthony's psalter. Upon realizing his psalter was missing, Anthony prayed it would be returned to him. And after his prayer the thieving novice was moved to return the psalter to Anthony and also to return to the Order, which accepted him back.

RABIA'S HEART OF ONE LOVE

Noor Yusuf

Introduction

Rabia al-Adawiyya I first discovered when I was very young. From the moment I read about her, I was instantly enamoured with an admiration that has never faded. She is among the earliest of the Awliya (the Friends of God) and the most celebrated.

There are many ways in which the Awliya took their example from the Holy Prophet Muhammad (upon him peace): his attendance to community, his service, his kindness to people, his leadership and strength of character. These are all creation-facing. The aspect that Rabia so profoundly embodied of him (s), was not something that faced creation, but something that faced Creator. I will relate here some of the narrative of Rabia and how she embodied the Prophet's (s) intimate relationship with his Lord, and his love for Allah.

Rabia is considered the progenitor of the Sufi way of divine love. Of ecstasy and rapture and deep longing for union. At this time, the way of wilaya – Friendship with God – was very much about asceticism and fear; not a fear

of distress, but a fear of the magnificence of Allah. There were those who would sway, like the living warriors left of Badr, out of an ever-present consciousness of their Lord and His might. This way of being, the weeping, the sobriety, came itself as a reaction to the changing of the times in the short centuries after the passing of the Prophet (s), where people increasingly began to turn to the trappings of materialism and ever more heedlessness. Many of the righteous felt the need to return to the way of the Sahabah, to live forsaking the world, preferring the poor to the rich, and the meek to the powerful. What's more, it was also a pietistic movement in response to some of the worst tragedies to befall to Muslim people in our early history; of them all, the devastating shock of Karbala and the egregious loss of life of the family of the Holy Prophet (s).

So this primary path of being God-fearing was the way of the earliest Awliya. And no doubt they loved their Lord with every fibre of their beings but, before anything, they looked to

Allah as *Maliki Yawm al-Din*. Sovereign Lord, Master of the Day of Judgement. Rabia brought a different way of walking the path of wilaya: to look to Allah as *Al-Rahman Al-Rahim*. Loving, loving, deserving of the utterest love. She brought a lot of *jamal* to something that was previously much more about *jalal*.

In her words: 'My Beloved is with me away... Seeking union with You has healed my soul, O my Joy, O my Life forever. You were the source of my life and my ecstasy. I have separated myself from all others; my hope and my desire is only to unite with You.'

The stories of Rabia, as to their provenance – the origin and reliability of their sources – is primarily from *Tadhkirat al-Awliya* by Farid al-Din Attar, the biographer of many early Sufis. However these stories are not like the Hadith. They have not been rigorously authenticated. That is not to say though that we can't take anything from them. They are teaching tales, not the bases

of law. They are stories of character – the characters of people who really lived, and were truly great. There is very much to take from these stories. We actually receive most of our stories of Rabia from Abda bint Shuwal, her murida who pledged herself to her service, and was present during many of Rabia's mystical encounters and prayer vigils.

There is much recorded about Rabia that I won't mention here; her interactions with her contemporaries amongst the *Awliya*, or her *Karamat* (miracles). I will very much be focusing on her relationship with her Lord

and how it paralleled the love between the Prophet (s) and his Lord.

Rabia came from a saintly and noble, but impoverished, household, the fourth of four sisters born to her parents. But very soon her parents died and her sisters were scattered. As a young girl she found herself all alone, with no means and no family, completely isolated. And very soon, captured and sold into slavery. This is where Rabia's story, as we know it begins. With the turn of fate that forced her into the hollows of the world, that led her into being a slave, the hardship and terror of it – there also came the turn of fate that elevated her towards

the heavens and into the embrace of Allah.

She turned completely towards Allah. Complete reliance. This is more than what we think of when we usually talk about reliance on Allah. This is not reliance with insurance in the background: a family, a home, some financial provision, however modest. This is not reliance with

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insurance of self: that you are grown and in the most basic ways capable, self-sufficient. Perhaps you cannot provide for yourself, but at least you have strength and energy. Rabia was a girl. This is like a child's complete dependence on their parent: to feed them and clothe them, to watch over them while they sleep, to protect them from harm, to comfort them when they cry. The great and the small dependencies, all of them. Rabia's reliance on Allah was like this. There was *no-one* for her to turn to for anything except Allah and she turned to Him alone for anything and everything. It is no won-

der then that, in the later stories, she is so defiant against help from people when they offered it.

One night, as every night, she stood for long hours in prayer. It happened that the master whom she served saw her that night and heard her conversation with her Lord. She said 'O God, you know the desire of my heart is to obey you; that the light of my eye is in the service of your court. If the matter was left to me, I would not cease for one hour in attending to you. But you have me made subject to another.' The depth of her prayer was so moving that the Master of the house was struck by it and, in the morning, set her free. That moment her prayer was answered and her ability to serve Allah and no other was never taken from her for the rest of her life.

Rabia was often very unwell. She spent frequent periods suffering from sickness and physical weakness, from her youth into her old age. Once when she was ill, a friend of hers came to visit and he saw a Basran merchant at her door, with a purse of gold, weeping. He asked the merchant of his tears and the merchant said, 'I weep on account of this saint of our time. If her blessings on us were to cease, mankind would perish. I brought some money for her but I'm afraid she will refuse it. Will you ask her on my behalf?' So her friend went in and asked but Rabia looked at him sidelong and said, '*Shall He who provides for those who revile Him, not provide for those who love Him? He does not refuse one who speaks unworthily of Him; how then should he refuse one whose soul is overflowing with love for Him? Ever since I have known Him, I have turned my back upon mankind. Make my excuses to the merchant. I would not have my heart in debt to anyone.*'

Another friend of hers found her in a state of poverty and was pained by the sight of it. He said 'I have rich friends and I could bring you some-

thing from them.' She said to him, '*you make a great mistake. Is it not the same One who gives daily bread to me and to them? Will He forget the poor because of their poverty or remember the rich because of their riches? Since He knows my state, what have I to remind Him of? What He wills, we should also will.*'

In many stories, Rabia appears fierce and even sharp in insisting that she needs no aid except what her Lord will give her, not for anything. The people of her time certainly regarded her as deeply pious but I am sure they considered this aspect of her perhaps a little excessive – I definitely used to wonder about it when I would read the stories. But by this time in her later age, after a lifetime of relying on no-one but Allah, she knows better than anyone that this is all she needs. He is all she needs. There is nothing Allah would not provision her with if it was His will that she should have it. And if He willed that she should not, she not only accepted this but was entirely content with it. By this time, she would have come to balance and resolution with how destiny and taqdir worked. Not only would she have been completely at ease with them, she would also have been pleased with them, for she knew deeply that Allah was Al-Hakim – the Wise, Al-Razzaq – the Providing, Al-Rahman – the Loving. She trusted Allah as a child whole-heartedly trusts their parent, and she loved Allah with the intimate love shared between beloveds.

Over time this relationship grew in stages of friendship and love, deepening and deepening into the fire of *Ishq* – passionate, self-immolating love. Attar, her biographer, calls her 'that woman on fire with love.' It sounds awesome and terrifying but in the words of Kalabadhi: 'he is burnt, who feels the fire, but he who is fire, how shall he be burnt?' Rabia was fire, full of *jalal* – tremendous majesty – in her intense manner of love and yet full of

**Friendship
and Love**

**Parallels
between
Ahadith
Qudsi and
the Munajat
of Rabia**

jamal – gentle softness – in the utter beauty of her bond with her Lord, and the incomparable delight she found in being with Him. Over the course of the development and ongoing cycles of her love, she occupied every role and relationship dynamic that a human may have with the divine:

- Dependency of a child to parent – or ward to Guardian
- Companionship of Friend to Friend
- Faithfulness of Intimate to Intimate
- Adoration of Lover to Beloved
- Obedience of a servant to Master
- Veneration of mortal to the Immortal
- Bewilderment of the human to the Divine
- Subsistence of creation in Creator
- Annihilation of self in God

I would now lay before you two stories of love in parallel. One told across the Munajat, the intimate conversations, of Rabia and her Lord. The other told across some Hadith and Ahadith Qudsi, narrations that the Prophet (s) relates from Allah Himself. The Ahadith Qudsi are some of the most revealing of the personal relationship Allah has with His creation, as well as the profound connection He has with the Messenger of Allah. See now the connection between the story of Allah and His Prophet, and Allah and His Friend, and see how the Friend followed in the way of the Prophet because: *in kuntum tuhibbuuna Allaha, fattabi'uny, yuhbibkum Allah*. If you love Allah, then follow me, and Allah will love you.

Let me relate, as an opening to this interspersed story, the Hadith of Al-Mala al-A'la. The Prophet (s) said, 'My Lord appeared to me in the most beautiful form. He asked me What do the highest assembly (– the angels in the presence of God –) what do they argue about? The Prophet (s) said 'I do not know.' Think of such a thing, such

a beatific vision as that in the concealment of night. Even if Rasul Allah did know the answer, in such a state before his Lord in such a form, what words could be uttered. 'Then' narrates the Prophet 'Allah placed his hands between my shoulder blades and I felt its coolness at my breast. And everything became known to me.'¹ (Tirmidhi)

Rabia would keep this closeness of company with her Lord. She did not like to sleep, preferring to spend that time with Him. At night, she would keep awake and go to her roof to begin her prayers. She would say: *O my Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed. The kings have shut their doors and every lover is alone with their beloved, and here I am alone with You.*

Allah's response as the Prophet (s) conveyed to us: 'Our Lord descends each night to the earth's sky when there remains the final third of the night, and He says: Who is saying a prayer to Me that I may answer it? Who is asking something of Me that I may give it them? Who is asking forgiveness of Me that I may forgive them?'² (Bukhari)

When the Fajr light began to appear, Rabia would say: *O God, the night has passed, the day has dawned. You have given me life and cared for me. For you is all glory. If you were to drive me from your door, I still would not turn away, for the love that I bear in my heart for you.*

The response to that, at the end of that same hadith: *And so Allah remains there, asking, answering, till the light of dawn shines.*

A stranger once approached Rabia, in what manner we don't know, but he frightened her and she fled from him. She ran in such haste that she fell and broke her wrist. Fallen on the ground, her tear-stained face buried in the dust, she called '*Lord God, I am a stranger, orphaned of my mother and father, a helpless prisoner fallen into*

captivity, my hand broken. Yet for all this, I do not grieve. All I need is Your good pleasure, to know whether you are pleased or not.'

This call of hers, not even a prayer, but words of bravery, words of dedication, of continued faith in the face of hardship, and assurance that no matter what, all she cares is for her Lord's pleasure. This exactly follows the call of Rasul Allah after the terrible assault on him at Taif. He said: O Allah! I complain to You of my weakness, my scarcity of resources, and the humiliation I have been subjected to by the people. O Most Merciful of those who are merciful. O Lord of the weak and my Lord too. To whom have you entrusted me? To a distant person who receives me with hostility? Or to an enemy to whom you have granted power over me? So long as You are not angry with me, I do not care. Your respite is a greater relief to me ... (I seek refuge in the light of Your Face by which all darkness is dispelled and every affair of this world and the next is set aright, lest Your anger or Your displeasure descends upon me.) I desire Your pleasure and satisfaction until You are pleased. There is no power and no might except by You."³ (Mu'jam al-Kabir, Tabarani, with a slightly weak chain but cited by many great ulamah.)

When Rabia lay there in the dust, after she made this call, she heard a voice call back to her and say: 'Do not grieve. Tomorrow a station will be yours such that all the angels, and those who are nearest to God in heaven, will envy you.' If this was the response to her, what must have been the response to Rasul Allah when he lay hurt and injured? Perhaps we don't know what the response was, but that does not mean one did not come: consider that the Mi'raj occurred soon afterwards. But how much is left unsaid of the private moments between God and Prophet. The Ahadith Qudsi are non-Quranic revelation: there was no

duty on the Prophet (s) to share them, yet he did, but how many moments of gentle care, that was a kept a secret between them? Are the most intimate moments of beloveds ever shared?

Allah responds to us, He is always responding to us. He says, 'I am with my servant when they remember me ... if they walk to me, I run to them.' Allah is our companion, our constant companion, her constant companion, He guarded her. One night, somewhere in a deep vigil of prayer, she fell asleep, covered over with a cloth, a blanket. A thief broke into her house, but she, an ascetic, had nothing there for him to steal. So finding nothing, he seized her blanket and made for the door. But the door was blocked. In shock he dropped the blanket and the doorway became clear again. Yet each time he lifted the cloth to steal it away, the door was barred and he had no escape. Then a voice called out. "Man," the Voice said powerfully, "do not pain yourself. She has been in Our service for so many years that even the Devil fears to sneak around her. How should a thief dare to sneak around with her blanket? Be gone, scoundrel! When one friend is asleep, another Friend is awake and keeping watch!"

When the Messenger of Allah (s) slept, on a break from an expedition, a man, an enemy came over him, sword in hand. The Prophet awoke to find this blade over him and the man said, 'who will protect you from *me* now?' Instantly the Prophet said 'Allah.' And suddenly the enemy was struck, as though by thunder, into some paralysis and he fell to the ground. Then the Prophet rose and lifted the sword over him and said, 'who will protect you from *me* now?' But he is of course our most merciful Messenger, and he forgave the man, who then was healed of his paralysis.⁴ (Sahihayn)

This trust is not conditional. This faith is not based on consequence. Neither the Messenger nor the Awli-

ya would flinch from their faith if it seemed they were unprotected. Many times it seemed they were. The protection, the guarding of Allah, does not come in the preventing of illness and injury and loss. These are a part of the experience of life but throughout them, you have Allah with you. And He guards the heart that turns to Him. He guards its faith. He guards its love for Him. For as long as you care, even only slightly, about the love of Allah, then Allah loves you. Even if you did not care, Allah would still be with you, giving breath, giving nourishment. But wouldn't you prefer to have not only His guardianship, but also His love?

See these two conversations between Lord and Prophet, and Lord and Friend.

When the Messenger of Allah rose beyond the spheres of the heaven, Allah took him into His exalted presence and we do not know what happened, for that too was kept a secret. But in that holiest, most sanctified of communions, Allah disclosed Himself to Muhammad as he had to no other creation.

Now when Rabia had set out across the desert on her way to make the pilgrimage, but the way was long, and she was alone and struggling. And even then, that was little beside her bewilderment at her own actions that she should be travelling to a house of stone when she knew Allah resides in no house. She said: *O my Lord, my heart is perplexed. Where shall I go? I am only a piece of clay and that Ka'bah is only a stone. I need You here, won't You show Yourself to me?* Allah answered her with words inspired to her heart: 'O Rabia, when Moses desired to see My Face, I cast a few particles of My glory onto the mountain and it shattered. Be content here with My Name.'

Allah exalted knew that despite her burning love for him, her soul was not that of Rasul Allah, and she would not

be able to bear the vision for which she asked. But still he spoke to her, and said 'take My Name as your contentment' - and within that, there are many secrets.

But look at these tones of gentleness with which Allah speaks to her. And yet, always inspiring in her heart a need to love him more. Does a beloved one not always wish to be loved all the more? Do they not, even in their gentleness, hint that the love can reach even deeper; that if you reach out towards them, open towards them even more, they will also reach out towards you all the more.

And do lovers not prize the love between themselves above all else, hold it as the most sacred trust? We each understand that, for the sake of protecting that love, growing it, we must sacrifice all else in its way; anything that might obstruct it or damage it or cause it to be lost. And at times, when that love is threatened, one lover may pose a question to the other: how much is my love worth to you? Would you choose me above all else? Such a question would fire up the protective streak in the other and whatever had been confusing them before, whatever had brought about such a threat to their love, would be immediately thrown away and the love guarded at all costs.

You see here Allah as Al-Ghayyur, jealously guarding the ones he loves. 'Jealousy' - the word is not quite right. This is the problem. Words fail before describing the indescribable. We can only use what words we understand, strip away from them whatever base meaning relates to us, and elevate them to what is more befitting of God. Ghayyur was translated earlier in these nights as 'intensely protective, lovingly possessive.' The Prophet (s) warned of being too careless in your proclamations of love.

'Say not that you love me, lest
You are taken by a test;
Poverty will reach your door
Ere the tide can meet the shore.'

Let the heart, devoted, hide
Lest its love be tolled and tried.
Those whose souls are strong with faith
Must endure the trials of fate.

If you trust in adamant,
Prove yourself as valiant.
Save yourself the tribulation:
Silent keep in exclamation.

If you wish Allah to take you as one of His beloveds, you will need to prove your love. He will throw everything at you to see if you will continue running towards Him. And if you do, if you prove that His is the only love that can fill your heart, *He will fill it.*

You see such an illustration of this in yet another conversation between Rabia and her Lord. Rabia had been fasting for many days. She was about to break her fast with a bowl of food but first went to light a lamp in the house. After lighting it, she found a cat had dropped the food onto the ground. So instead she went to fetch a jug of water to drink but, when she returned, the lamp had burnt away its oil and gone out, and then the jug broke and spilt all the water. She sighed heavily and said: *O my Lord, what is this you are doing to me?*

Have a care, so a voice came to her ears, *If you desire it, I will cover you with all the pleasures of this world. But I will take concern for Me out of your heart, for such concern and the pleasures of this world cannot dwell together in one heart. O Rabia, you have a desire and I have a desire. I cannot combine my desire and your desire in one heart.*

The fear of losing her Lord's love struck so deeply into her core that she said it was in that moment that she separated herself from any attachment of the world and its people. She had a

heart that could contain only one love and it was the love of Him.

The choice of Allah above all others as the one and only subject of the heart's whole adoration. This is from the Messenger of Allah (s). This was his choice.

When Gibril was sitting with the Prophet. Another angel descended from the sky and joined them. Gibril said 'This angel has not come down to earth since the day he was created.' Then the angel said 'O Muhammad, my Lord has sent me to you. Do you wish to be a Prophet King or a Servant Messenger?' A Prophet King is a Prophet; it is a station occupied by other Prophets. But you can know the intent of the question by the answer that is given. Rasul Allah said he would choose to be a Servant Messenger.⁵ (Musnad Ahmad but narrators are Sahih). He humbled himself before his Lord. Deeper than that, it is to say as Rabia later said 'what does a servant know of desire?' And as an extension, what does a servant care? A lover seeks no greatness, only to be loved by their beloved.

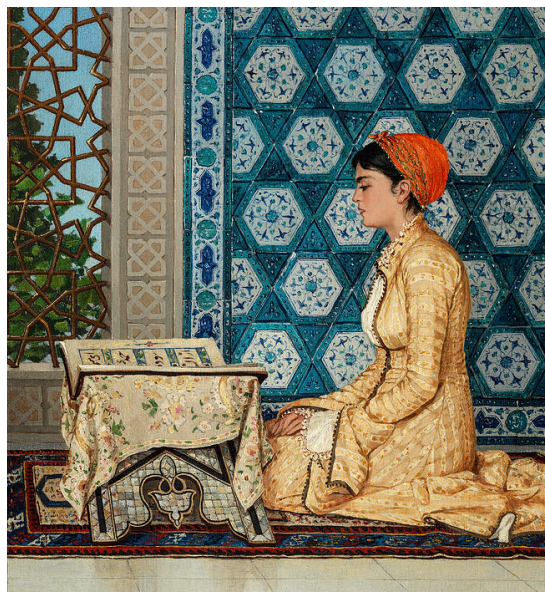
When kingship was offered by the Quraysh to the Prophet (s) in exchange for him ceasing delivering his message, he said, 'If you were to put the sun and moon in my hands, I still would not cease.'⁶ (Sirah of Ibn Hisham). He could have become the

king, and then still continued, and no-one could have opposed him. But of course, he is our trustworthy Messenger, not one to break promises. Even so, this statement of his was making the choice that he would choose Allah, every time over everything.

This wholehearted devotion was something that Rabia deeply embodied. One could say she was among the most sought-after women of Basra, and many men came to her proposing marriage, from the governor of Basra, to other Awliya Allah. But she denied them all and she did not shy from saying that her heart

belonged only to her Lord. Her ardent fidelity to was to this one, overpowering love. She said, *'My existence is in Him and I am altogether His.'* It is not the case that a heart cannot love another if they love Allah. We need no other example than that of the Prophet (s) himself who married and loved – and of all, he had

the greatest love for his Lord. These loves, be it between parent and child, or husband and wife, or close friends – these loves are all manifestations of Allah's love come to us, and they are beautiful manifestations. For Rabia, though, she wanted no intermediary in this love, no manifestation, and this was her way. It is not the way of many others, it is the way of some, but it was her way – we each have our own way, our own course of love towards Allah. But ultimately every one of these ways leads to Allah. Our love is always firstly and lastly for Allah.



At the end of his life, Rasul Allah (s) said in a khutbah: 'Allah has given me a choice between the delights of this world or that which is with Him, and I have chosen that which is with Him.' Then the sahabi Abu Bakr (r) began to weep because he knew what it meant, that the Prophet (s) would soon pass. On seeing his tears, Rasul Allah in his gentleness said, 'Were I to choose a bosom friend, I would have chosen Abu Bakr, but he is my brother and my companion. God has taken *me* as his bosom friend.' He meant in this 'there is no intimate friend for me except Allah.'⁷ (Bukhari).

Throughout Rabia's life, all she yearned for was that return to her Lord. Many of the Awliya of her time feared death; they feared to go before their Lord burdened over with sin. But to Rabia, the dream of return was one filled with ecstasy. Allah has said 'if my servant longs for the meeting me, I long for

the meeting with them.' Rabia longed deeply for this. Sometimes she would find herself in such pain, yet there would be no sign of sickness on her. She said 'my sickness is from within my breast ... the only cure is Union with my Friend.' When at last the day of death came for her, a wedding day if there was any, she said to those around her, 'rise and go. For a moment, leave the way free for the messengers of God most high.' Think of this moment, think of this moment. When the tear between the worlds appeared and the light of heaven eternal seeped into the

room and covered her with its golden glow, and at long last she felt herself bathed in the mercy of the All-Merciful, in a way that can only be known by a spirit entering into the fullness of their souls, at the doorway between life and death. In a dream later, she was seen, and the dreamer asked what was said to her when the angels of the grave came. Rabia said, 'they asked me Who is your Lord? I said Return and tell your Lord that, notwithstanding thousand and thousands of Your creations, You have not forgotten a weak old woman. I, who have only you in all the world, have never forgotten you, yet you should ask me Who is your Lord?'

And here you see the lover standing before the Beloved, vow of fidelity utterly fulfilled. She address Allah Himself, saying Ha ana Rabbi. I have given you all my love. Now give me yours. From outside the room, the people heard her say 'La ilaha illa Allah. Muhammadu Rasul Allah.' And then a Voice recited over her: O Soul at peace, Return to your Lord, contented and pleasing. Enter amongst My Beloveds. Enter into My Garden.'

The Prophet (s) said, "When Allah loves a slave, he calls out to Jibril and says: 'I love them, so love them. Then Jibril loves him. After that Jibril announces to the inhabitants of the heavens that Allah someone, so love them; and the inhabitants of the heavens also love them and then make people on earth love them.'"⁸ (Sahihayn).

This is for any servant. This is certainly for Rabia. Imagine what it must be for Rasul Allah. When The Prophet (s) lay in his dying moments and the Angel of Death sought permission to enter, sought permission – as he has not done for any other – to take his soul, our Prophet said, '*ila rafiq al-a'la*. To the Friend on high!'⁹ (Nasai). What an awakening into that world, that must have been. The union of Prophet and His Lord. The union of God and His Beloved.

To be *Muhammadi*. What does it mean to be *Muhammadi*? It doesn't only refer to following the Prophet (s), enacting his sunnahs, imbibing his character. That is body and heart. They are important. But we are a people who strive for the eternal; we are people who believe in the *soul*. To be *Muhammadi* is about the state and image of your soul. How much does your soul resemble the soul of the Messenger of Allah. The Muhammadan soul is the most perfect thing in all creation, the most perfect balance of Allah's *jamal* – His mercy and gentleness – and Allah's *jalal* – His strength and majesty. It is the most perfect manifestation of Allah's Names and attributes. It is created of the *Haqiqa Muhammadiyya* – the very essence of the ability to know Allah. Every single thing in creation contains something of this *Haqiqa Muhammadiyya* and, of them all, Muhammad Rasul Allah contains the most. We cannot have the same soul as him, but we can aspire to mould our spirits into his likeness, to grow our spirits ability to perceive Allah in the fullest possible ways.

When one hears the stories Rabia, there is often the question of the absence of the Prophet (s). Why so much mention of Allah but so little of the Rasul? She said once, 'I saw the Prophet in a dream and he said to me 'O Rabia, do you love me?' I said 'O Prophet of God, who is there who does not love you? But my love of Allah has so possessed me that no place remains for loving or hating any save him.'

First, she said 'who is there who does not love you?' And that, such a sweet statement of love, such a tender sigh of the spirit. Of course, of course. Who could not love you, O Rasul Allah? If there was ever anyone to be loved, it would be you. Of course I love you.

But then, the second part 'but my love of Allah ... no place remains for any save Him.' By the time she has reached

**Becoming
Muhammadi**

**Fana fi'
al-Rasul
and Allah**

the stage from which her stories are narrated, she has become Muhammadi. And when one inhabits a truly Muhammadan state, they have attained *Fana fi'l Rasul*, 'Fana' self-annihilation 'fi'l Rasul' in the love of the Rasul. This can also be a complete identification to the Rasul. And when they have attained *Fana fi' al-Rasul*, all that remains is *Fana fi Allah*. Annihilation in the love of Allah. The highest point of *Fana fi al-Rasul* is becoming Muhammadi. When one is Muhammadi, one's turning is to Allah. Their entire existence is subsumed in and for Allah.

True love

In her separation from the world, Rabiya seems very different from the Prophet (s), who was not only loving towards Allah but also towards creation. Rabiya's heart was for her Lord but she did not turn coldly on everyone else. No. She gave of another kind of love, and it was present in her every action and interaction. Rabiya's interactions were many – so many that it may have seemed she was very much within the world, were it not for the brilliance of her state that was apparent to all. She interacted with her friends, her students, the thieves who tried to steal from her, in her letters, in the marketplace – and in every interaction, there is openness, there is compassion. If she had not this compassion for people, she would not truly then have had true love with her Lord: to love Allah is to love all his creation too.

To receive so fully in love can only result in giving fully of love. That is what makes love true. True and good are one thing. There is no truth that comes from evil because Allah is pure goodness. Real truth is what comes from Allah. *A Ruia Saliha* – a true dream, a true vision, a true experience, encounter – is not merely something predicted that materialises. It is much

greater than that. It is something that discloses to you some knowledge of God – whether intellectual, a realisation, or an inspiration, or an emotion, or some deep-soul awareness that is none of those things and yet all at once. It is something that is revealed to you of your Lord, *to draw you nearer* to Him in connection, in faith, in love. If you receive something in love like that, it is true. And you know when you have understood it correctly – you haven't misinterpreted it, you haven't seen wrong – when it then comes out of you again in love.

This is true love. True love permeates one's being until all that comes forth from them, shines forth from them, *is* love. If they exist in love of their Beloved, if they truly reflect that light, then that light is all that is visible from them and it touches everything into which it comes into contact. Someone told me once: 'for whom does the sun rise?' and I said 'for Allah.' And he said, 'yes, and yet its light touches everything on the earth.' To truly love Allah is to become *love of Allah* – your mortal purpose becomes your immortal purpose. You shed the self from your soul. Everything that makes you distinct deconstructs and returns to the One until you are clear, and there is not a single thing left within you to obstruct the light of God from passing through you to all else. And then you become what you always were: nothing. Nothing but a mirror of God.

Then given that, look at the Prophet (s) as *rahmatan lil alamin*, the mercy to all of the worlds. The greatest giving of love from the greatest receipt of it. What could he be but the mercy to all of the worlds, if he was the Beloved of Allah?



St. Francis Taming the Wolf
Alice Robertson

ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA AND BARON VON HUGEL: AN ENCOUNTER IN ETERNITY

Sean Earner

There of pure Virgins none
Is fairer seen,
Save One,
Than Mary Magdalene.
Gaze without doubt or fear
Ye to whom generous Love, by any name, is dear.
Love makes the life to be
A fount perpetual of virginity;
For, lo, the Elect
Of generous Love, how named soe'er, affect
Nothing but God,
Or mediate or direct,
Nothing but God,
The Husband of the Heavens:
And who Him love, in potency great or small
Are, one and all,
Heirs of the Palace glad,
And inly clad
With the bridal robes of ardor virginal.

*From Deliciae Sapientiae de
Amore by Coventry Patmore*

The Sign of Magdalene

God proclaimed His creation good. With this decree He has put, in the mouths of babes and the simple, a direct retort against the Gnostic slander of the world and the tempting murmuring of the sorrowful heart. Even in the vale of tears, in the Babylonian exile, we know deep within that when all things are made new, something of this present goodness will be preserved in the general redemption of all flesh. Something distinctively our own will survive, through all the age of the ages.

That has been signified in the poetry and art of the Church by the figure of Mary Magdalene, the sinful woman redeemed, collapsing many women from the Gospel proclamation into one name. Saint Paul assures us that the sorrows and martyrdoms of the believers on earth fill up whatever is lacking in the suffering of Christ, the second Adam. This being so, then the repentance of Mary Magdalene and her spiritual heirs, completes whatever was left unfinished in the Ave of the Blessed Mother, the second Eve. The experience, the evidence, and the glory of the renewed virginity of the fallen confirms to us the reality of the past, present, and future workings of the Maiden Queen in the body of the Church.

It is common to view the sin and the repentance of Mary Magdalene in terms of dealing through the complexities of sensuality - a rich and powerful

theme. But the restored and spiritualized virginity that Catherine stands for goes beyond that. She represents the hope that worldliness itself (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life) can be made whole. The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes have often been meditated upon by Catholic writers, particularly in the wake of the development of the Theology of the Body. But pride of life, the joy

of existence and the self, deserves greater attention. The glory, sprezzatura and swagger of a great soul— even these are not without the gleam of a divine promise. This condemned land of the psyche might one day be drained of the abysmal sea and reclaimed. Despite the vast difference in character and circumstance, the paired subjects of this piece embody the Magdalene spirit. Both have something of the waters of this creation about them, even as they step up onto the dry

land of the New Israel.

In a sacramental world, our sense of linear time is constantly overthrown. In the order of the living God, the past is not even past, nor the future arrived. In the offering of the present moment, we constantly stumble upon long dead or long awaited truths. We wander in woods of symbols, who whisper to us tales of our ancestors and children yet unborn. Cosmic friendships disrupt our normal sense of time, making us sense the resurrection of the



**St. Catherine
of Baron Von
Hügel:
Companions
in Aeternum**

dead as a reality that is already at work in our fallen state

My discovery of Catherine of Genoa occurred this summer when meeting with a homeless man who I saw outside a local Starbucks and 7 Eleven compound in my neighborhood. I thought only to give him some money but he repaid me with a rich conversation about life, politics, books, and religion. It was a meeting of souls that I had not anticipated but turned out to be a favorable moment that unloosed both of our minds and hearts. In passing, I mentioned my personal devotion to Catherine of Siena. He said that he never read about her, but he had read Catherine of Genoa on Purgatory. Suddenly I was intrigued. Upon returning home I researched this saint and downloaded *The Life and Doctrine of St. Catherine of Genoa* and read the biographical portion of it eagerly in a day.

One light leads to another. Looking for a secondary source on her, I stumbled upon Friedrich von Hügel, a Catholic intellect who I had no prior knowledge of but who apparently enjoyed a stature like John Henry Newman in his day. I ordered his magnum opus *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in St. Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*. This unexpected pairing of two figures separated by centuries formed a pattern in my mind. And with my first introduction to them both in 2021, a third voice was added to the polyphony.



Catherine was born in 1447 to Jacopo Fieschi and Francesca di Negro, both of noble lineage. They were a family already bound intimately to the history of the Church. On her father's side of her family were two popes — Innocent IV and Adrian V. Catherine was inclined to holiness from a young age, especially to the mystery of the Cross and the suffering Christ. When she was thirteen, she wished to enter the convent, but the nuns declined her because of her youth, and with that rejection the inspiration never recurred again.

We can only guess at the disappointment and frustration this event inflicted on this young soul so full of love to give. Shortly thereafter, a new cross was imposed on her at age sixteen, when her parents set her up in an arranged marriage to a local nobleman, Giuliano Adorno, who turned out to be full of wrath, adulterous, and prodigal with his household's wealth. The sorrows of the next 10 years wore her down. For the first five years she sought to silently obey husband. The next five years she looked for the worldly pleasures of a woman of her age and station in life. These were distractions from her spiritual emptiness. It seems that the gratifications she indulged in were not decadent in nature though the testimonies on this point are ambiguously silent. But relative to the holy aspirations of her youth, they were years of wandering in the dark woods. She was losing herself in her efforts to

Catherine of Genoa: Her Life

save herself. And her heart was filled with weariness and melancholy. Then one day, on the recommendation of her sister (a nun) she went to a particular confessor. As soon as she knelt down, she was pierced with divine love and a consciousness of her own sin, throwing her into an ecstasy. She murmured "no more world, no more sin." And as her first biography states, "And at that moment if she had possessed a thousand worlds, she would have thrown them all away." From then onward she lived in a state of continual knowledge of God's presence that never abandoned her again in life. She was in a state of perpetual refinement of the clear life of the Lord in her heart, leading her outward to devote herself to the city hospital and its sick. She became the center of a circle of friends and relations (including her converted husband), and when, in 1510, she died in sanctity, perhaps of Love as some contemporaries said, she left behind already an ardent cultus that would transmit her legacy (Capes, 2021).

Her Doctrine

Despite the relative simplicity of her arc in life, Catherine of Genoa is a rich subject for contemplation. She is a sign of living out sanctity in the World. In her life of total abandonment to Christian charity that does not despise the human condition, she stands for the dignity of the life of the laity, purity of love as an achievable state, and, in the end, of theosis within the sacrament of the present moment.

To the late medieval/early modern era where the assumption was that the cloister was the highest and most sure state for holiness, Catherine of Genoa's exceptional piety as a lay married/widowed woman was a radical and fruitful challenge. Nevertheless, she was more consecrated in heart than most members of religious orders. She was part of a general movement in that era among all branches of Western Christianity to show the sanctity of the mundane and what in a later epoch

would be called the universal call to holiness. This notion was not hidden by her contemporaries, but rather dramatically illustrated in a story they have passed down where a friar tells the future saint that he was more fitted for God's love because of his renunciation, in contrast to her, who was "wedded to the world." In response came an outpouring of the Spirit:

"An ardent flame of pure love seized the blessed Catherine, with which her heart was so inflamed, that she rose to her feet and fervently exclaimed:

"If I believed that your habit would add one spark to my love, I would not hesitate to tear it from you, if I could obtain it in no other way. Whatever you merit more than I, through the renunciation you have made for God's sake, and through your religious life, which continually enables you to merit, I do not seek to obtain; these are yours; but that I cannot love God as much as yourself, you can never make me believe." She uttered these words with so much fervor and effect, that her hair burst from the band that confined it, and fell disheveled over her shoulders, so that, in her burning zeal, she seemed almost beside herself; and yet so graceful and decorous was her bearing, that all persons present were amazed, edified, and pleased; and she added: "Love cannot be checked, and if checked it is not pure and simple love (The Life and Doctrine of Catherine of Genoa)."

The Second Eve redivivus with a wild yet measured beauty. This is all the more daring because she is a woman speaking to a man in a position of ecclesiastical authority. In this we can see a prophecy of the spirit of Vatican II, with its renewed call to lay holiness to balance out the heavyweight of a complacent clericalism, as well as a greater appreciation for the religious life of women in general.

Even more profoundly, in de-

fense of the extraordinary hidden in the ordinary, Catherine raised up the epistemological standard that the day-to-day operations of the soul were the touchstone of the knowledge of its creator. Special revelations were less important than what the order of creation chanted in each passing moment.

"So long as anyone can speak of divine things, enjoy and understand them, remember and desire them, he has not yet arrived in port; yet there are ways and means to guide him thither. But the creature can know nothing but what God gives him to know from day to day (The Life and Doctrine of Catherine of Genoa)."

Central to the doctrine of Catherine of Genoa was Pure Love as a possible state of being in the world. Even if she had not lived in Augustine in Carthage levels of excess in her pre-conversion phase, she had still divided her heart with affection for many things and persons. Key to her new life, however, was radical concentration of her soul on God and God alone. Catherine even sought to renounce the ordinary and licit joys of piety in her desire for the essence of her One and Only Lord:

"At one time, on receiving [Holy Communion], she perceived such an odor and such sweetness, that she believed herself in Paradise, when suddenly she turned towards her Lord, and humbly said: "O Lord perhaps thou wouldst draw me to thee by this fragrance? I do not desire it; I desire nothing but thee, and thee wholly; thou knowest, that from the beginning I have asked of thee the grace that I might never see visions, nor receive external consolations, for so clearly do I perceive thy goodness, that I do not seem to walk by faith but by a true and heartfelt experience (Ibid.)."

By a wonderful paradox, the less she wanted to receive the comforts of God in her pursuit of His stripped Being, the more she found them, like a

cup overflowing:

"[St. Catherine of Genoa] wished to love God without soul and without body, and unsustain by them, with a direct, pure, and sincere, love; but the more she shunned these consolations, the more her Lord bestowed them upon her (Ibid.)."

Those who seek no signs will receive them in abundance. For all that will be added to those who seek the kingdom of heaven first. And with this filled her with a spirit of fortitude that made her despise all anxieties and temptations, regardless of their source.

"Whoever believes that anything good or bad can befall him, which can separate him from God, shows that he is not yet strong in divine charity; for man should fear nothing but to offend God, and all beside should be to him as if it were not."

To embrace this Pure Love is not just a change of affection but a change of the soul's being. As explained in her own words:

"When God sees the Soul pure as it was in its origins, He tugs at it with a glance, draws it, and binds it to Himself with a fiery love that by itself could annihilate the immortal soul. In so acting, God so transforms the soul in Him that it knows nothing other than God; and He continues to draw it up into His fiery love until He restores it to that pure state from which it first issued. These rays purify and then annihilate. The soul becomes like gold that becomes purer as it is fired, all dross being cast out. Having come to the point of twenty-four carats, gold cannot be purified any further; and this is what happens to the soul in the fire of God's love (Ibid.)."

Finally, this embrace of single minded dedication to God did not end in the mere absorption of the soul with its lover, but inspired towards an outward facing evangelical and charitable zeal. The soul does not want rest in herself but looks to inspire all human beings, all creatures, with the same

fiery passion for their maker.

"This is the beatitude that the blessed might have, and yet they have it not, except insofar as they are dead to themselves and absorbed in God. They have it not in so far as they remain in themselves and can say: 'I am blessed.' Words are wholly inadequate to express my meaning, and I reproach myself for using them. I would that everyone could understand me, and I am sure that if I could breathe in creatures, the fire of love burning within me would inflame them all with divine desire. O thing most marvelous! (Ibid.)"

Related to the doctrine of Pure Love was Saint Catherine's focus on becoming ever more united to, and like, God, as a reality already available before the beatific vision within the New Jerusalem. This drive to theosis was experienced both as a radical loss of all the normal senses and the grace of being Lord of all things, as is eloquently expressed in the following passage:

"I see without eyes, and I hear without ears. I feel without feeling and taste without tasting. I know neither form nor measure; for without seeing I yet behold an operation so divine that the words I first used, perfection, purity, and the like, seem to me now mere lies in the presence of truth. . . . Nor can I any longer say, "My God, my all." Everything is mine, for all that is God's seems to be wholly mine. I am mute and lost in God...God so transforms the soul in Him that it knows nothing other than God, and He continues to draw it up into His fiery love until He restores it to that pure state from which it first issued (Ibid.)."

The first stage of this absorption into the Godhead was to see the divine at work in all elements of her life. Each moment, each deed, was a manifestation of the Divine Master, as her biography recounts:

"[Catherine of Genoa] knew no longer whether her mere human acts

were good or bad, but saw all things in God. But this desire for union with God carried her beyond this acquiescence to God being closer to us than we are to ourselves. It took the form of a bold shameless desire by the soul to achieve a true glorious metamorphosis of its being into what it loved (Ibid.)."

"All things which have being, have it from the essence of God by his participation: but pure love cannot stop to contemplate this general participation coming from God, nor to consider whether in itself, considered as a creature, it receives it in the same way as do the other creatures which more or less participate with God. Pure love cannot endure such comparison; on the contrary, it exclaims with a great impetus of love; my being is God, not by participation only but by a true transformation and annihilation of my proper being (Ibid.)."

In her lowliness Saint Catherine reached the summit of all earthly ambition. And in her nakedness of will she was clothed with the highest honor. The world that she had renounced in her first moments of conversion was restored to her, not as a fantasy of ultimate power but as a gift of love that she wanted to share with all. She was a Caesar of the spirit who knew something beautiful that was hidden from all mere earthly kings.

Catherine's call to sanctity to live in but not of the world raised up the status of the laity. It held up the possibility of pure love on this side of the grave. And finally, it presented a means of elevating the soul to God that was open to all with eyes to see and ears to hear.

In the context of Counter-Reformation and Baroque era Catholicism, she won the hearts of people in all stations of life as a simple but beautiful soul that transmitted the spirit of the Lord to those who had suffered from the excesses of distraction or subtlety. But her influence was not exhausted in the

**Hügel:
The Faithful
Dissident, the
Pious Scholar**

16th and 17th century. Catherine also won over the 19th century intellect and heart of Baron von Hügel, one of the leading models of the modern Catholic intellectual.

Friedrich von Hügel was born in Florence, Italy, in 1852, to Charles von Hügel, an Austrian ambassador and a Scottish mother, Elizabeth Farquharson, a convert to Roman Catholicism. In 1867 he moved with his family to England and made it his primary home for the rest of his life (de la Be-doyère, 17).

In 1873 he married Lady Mary Catherine Herbert, a convert to Catholicism (Ibid. 9). They had three daughters, one of whom became a Carmelite nun. Hügel remained an Austrian citizen until he found himself labeled a "hostile alien" after the UK declared war on his birth homeland of Austria, with the advent of World War I (Ibid. 279). He applied for naturalization and received it without difficulty, such was the success of his adaptation to the environment of England.

Hügel was intimately tied to the international culture of Continental Europe. A true polyglot and multidisciplinary scholar despite never earning a university degree, he was a master of the prose of the English language. In Italy, Hügel frequently met two future popes, Achille Ratti and Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XI and Pius XII (Ibid. 125). The former aided Hügel with his research for *The Mystical Element of Religion*. Hügel, despite the prejudices of the English audience, sought to transfer the highest of German

thought and philosophy to his adopted nation. In 1925, several years after the World War which ended the European high culture that had shaped him, he passed away, widely respected by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

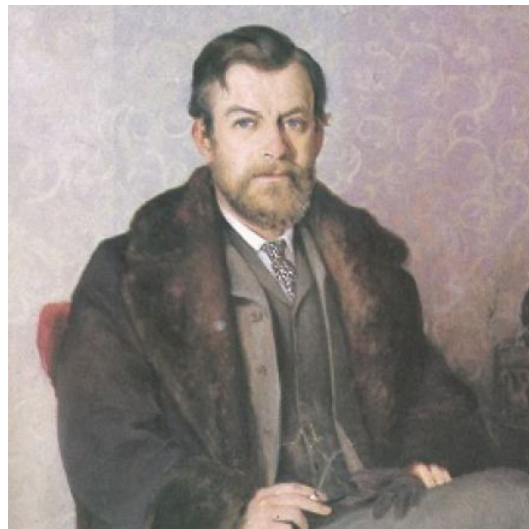
Hügel has been classified as a modernist theologian. But unlike many modernist theologians, then and now, he remained unfailingly loyal to the Church. And his loyalty was not a mere dead compliance with an atavistic heirloom. He was an enthusiastic participant in the sacramental, liturgical, and theological life of his inherited faith. His criticisms of the reigning

interpretation of dogmas and mundane governance of the Church came from a place of love and unwavering fidelity

Key to Hügel's understanding of religion and the Catholic faith in particular were the three components/states of supernatural nature: the historical-institutional, the intellectual-speculative,

and the mystical-experiential. These were articulated as part of his theoretical approach to understanding Catherine of Genoa (Hügel, 50-53).

Essential to religion, including the Christian revelation, was its occurrence within a particular time and place. Human beings are temporal creatures and, equally, they must be saved in a temporal fashion. Further, man, as a social animal, must have the mediation of social forms, giving him a horizontal relationship with his fellows in addition to the vertical one with God. All of this amounted to what Hügel described as the essential enduring childhood



**The Three
Religious
Elements
of Hügel**

phase of the human soul

The subsequent adolescence of religion was the intellectual element, in which the individual and the society sought to understand the nature and purpose of what they did and believed. From this came the rationalization of orthopraxy and orthodoxy--not as mere arbitrary rules but as rooted in the eternal truths of God, self, and the nature of things.

Finally, at the pinnacle of the religious experience, was the mystical, direct encounter with the Divine. Before the soul had only heard by second hand reports the nature of her true homeland; but now she sees with her own eyes. The mystical is the experiential encounter with God that both discloses the supernatural and the receptivity of the human to the same higher reality. The mystical is not the excess of religion, but its living heart, which justifies all the other phases of the life of faith. It is the full-fledged adulthood of the spirit.

Importantly, none of these phases were independent of the other. Each provided the scaffolding for the next. The higher states gave their blessing to the ones below them. The point was not to separate the mystical as the "real" religious content from history or the intellect. To do that would be the path of perfidy, one-sided pathology, and, ultimately, disintegration. The aim of Hügel was to see all these parts as creating an organic whole, supporting each other and together aiding the life of all. This is in keeping with his status as a piously loyal modernist, someone who is honest about the contradictions of life without denying the signs of the Sovereignty of the Divine Life that lets nothing go to waste.

All of these different elements Hügel found richly expressed in the life of Catherine of Genoa, who was the subject of his magnum opus, the product of many years of research, meditation, and prayer.

In many ways, Hügel and Catherine of Genoa could not be further from each other. Hügel was a refined and respected intellectual. He was a happily married man with children, possessing vistas of experience that were not available to the subject of his vast biography. Yet, Hügel was drawn to this saint nevertheless. To him, Catherine embodied religious unity in the three-fold merging of the elements of spiritual life. She never ceased to obey the institutions of Holy Mother Church and many of her deepest religious experiences came from the sacraments:

"Catherine's states of absorption in prayer, such as we find ever since her conversion, were transparently real and sincere, and were as swift and spontaneous as to appear quasi involuntary. They were evidently, together with, and largely on the occasion of, her reception of the Holy Eucharist, the chief means and the ordinary form of the accessions of strength and growth to her spiritual life (Ibid.226-227)."

At the same time she enthusiastically used the Franciscan and Neoplatonic/Dionysian theological paradigms of her age and context to articulate her understanding of God. She was reflective about what her life meant in terms of the articulated theology of the Church. And above all she cultivated the individuality of the mystical life, the direct experience of God, an experience that grew up organically within the boundaries placed by historical and speculative religion. The differences and similarities between the two pedagogy were eloquently if indirectly expressed by Hügel himself:

"Catherine's teaching, as we have it, is, at first sight, strangely abstract and impersonal. God nowhere appears in it, at least in so many words, either as Father, or as Friend, or as Bridegroom of the soul. This comes to no doubt, in part, from the circumstance that she had never known the joys of maternity, and had never, for one moment, ex-

perienced the soul-entrancing power of full conjugal union. It comes, perhaps, even more, from her somewhat abnormal temperament, the (in some respects) exclusive mentality which we have already noted. But it certainly springs at its deepest from one of the central requirements and experiences of her spiritual life; and must be interpreted by the place and the function which this apparently abstract teaching occupies within this large experiential life of hers which stimulates, utilizes, and transcends it all. For here again we are brought back to her rare thirst, her imperious need, for unification; to the fact that she was a living, closely knit, an ever-increasing spiritual organism, if there ever was one (Ibid. 229)."

What can be further argued is that both Catherine and Hügel were united by the sign of the Magdalene. Each had been touched by the world - Catherine by the frivolous life of a noblewoman of her class and day, Hügel by the advantages of his privilege and the life of the mind of a late 19th century/early 20th century scholar. But

they translated their worldliness into a richness of spirit that was emptied out daily in love of God. Their lives were an offering of a free spirit to the Lord that did not involve a desecration of nature but nature perfected. Some are not so blessed. Some indeed must give up their eyes and limbs to enter the kingdom of Heaven. And on this side of eternity, there is no assurance whether that is not us.

The very existence of souls like Catherine and Hügel shows us that it is possible to harmonize the strength and beauty of the spirit with the love of God. I like to think of such harmony as being analogous to the majestic human figures of Michelangelo, resplendent in their baptized beauty. To conclude with a terrible but hopeful irony of Saint Catherine of Genoa herself:

"I see God to have so great a conformity to the rational creature that if the Devil could but rid himself of those garments of sin, in that instant God would unite Himself to him, and make him into that which he, the Devil, attempted to achieve by his own power (Ibid. 261)."

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EDMUND THE MARTYR

Avellina Balestri

"And then the heathens became madly incensed because of this faith, for he always asked Christ to his help. Then they shot at him with missiles, as if for their sport, until he was entirely surrounded by their shots, like the spines of a hedgehog, like Sebastian was."

The Passion of St. Edmund

I am a Christian king; the rood is my rod.
I am a Saxon chief; my sires were wolves.
My crown is gold-gilt; the Christ's thorn-wound.
What I would give for a blithe exchange!
Hail, Lord, slave-silent and ashamed
Who left His heaven and bore my hell,
Raised high that I might be drawn up!
God's Son, a warrior, bound to the Tree
A princeling young, trampling down Death
Burning unconsumed, His heart;
Bursting elder skins of wine
Redder than the first dawn's glow.
Temple toppled, curtain tore,
And Mary triple vigil kept
Until the tomb-tied corpse arose,
The first fruits of a sweeter Spring
For them that have their being in Him.
Spurned by His own, the scepter passed;
Now heathens have been christened clean,
Disciples throughout mid-earth made,
Blood-bought and burdened joyously.
From East and West, we come to feast,

A share in the bread, a sip from the brim,
 And the Lamb is our bounteous liege.
 At fifteen years, in throne I sat;
 The oil on my forehead shone
 Baptized anew, and born to rule
 I was like Adam, Steward of God,
 Image-bearer, breathing clay
 Forming words, and freeing worlds,
 Bestowing names that mark out men
 But Adam fell by bitter food,
 And crowned himself a garden-god
 Like the serpent, weed-winding,
 And leaf-clothed, he wore his woe
 But naked I lie upon chapel floor
 Humble before the Savior stripped,
 The Word which opened not His mouth.
 I wish His heart to fill my breast,
 Stern as soldier, meek as monk,
 And give me good news for the poor,
 For I would bind the leper-sores
 And banish bribes from silver tongues
 This to my people I would give:
 Justice, and a listening ear
 Heeding complaint, upholding right
 The Word of God upon my lips
 Like David, with his psalm-strung lyre,
 Wrought in my books and memory.
 For thirteen years, peace reigns with me
 But destiny will close its grip.
 War-wolves ride the ragged waves
 And at my borders howl
 These heathen hosts of thunder born
 Serve gods who read the ancient runes
 Betraying life to see their death
 And know the day of doom.
 But my God has already died
 And robbed the grave of gloom.
 There is nothing left to fear
 Beneath the Easter Son
 Nothing, but to follow Him
 Down into caverns deep
 Where the Light has pierced a path.
 Oh, dreadful blessing, glorious weight!
 How can this king endure it,
 And leave his folk undone?
 We fight, but are cut down like corn;
 The raiders reap their cruel rewards
 Slaughtering my thanes in sleep
 Ravaging wives, enslaving youths
 My strength cannot redeem their loss
 For it is severed at the root

I weep for those who served me well
 And forswear my own escape
 It was ne'er my way to flee
 And outlive those I loved
 But Christians must forgive their foes
 And pray that sinners live
 So I throw down weapons keen
 And face the foe unarmed.
 They strive to make me puppet king
 To pour libations to the trees
 But I have other wine to spill,
 A higher Nature to obey,
 My garments they divide,
 And my body they beat down
 Muddied, the mighty lord
 Broken, the bloodied warrior
 Club-crushed, bone-bruised
 Dragged through frozen field,
 A sacrifice for harvest rich.
 My eight and twenty years are spent,
 And the ground cries out for food.
 I shall not live in sword songs
 That drench the drinking halls,
 Yet let my name still make a mark
 Within my Maker's mind.
 Bound am I to living oak,
 Sacred wood of heathen rite.
 Arrows fly like winter flocks,
 Beaks breaking skin and soul
 I am a beast, not a man
 A spectacle with spikes,
 A thistle with thorns.
 They watch me, my subjects,
 Weeping for their children
 They mock me, my enemies
 For worshipping weakness
 I cry out to my liege, the Lamb
 To give me strength in slaughter.
 "Jesus!"
 God saves!
 "Jesus!"
 Son of David!
 "Jesus!"
 Take pity on me!
 If You be the Christ, save me!
 Not this body, no...
 This shall be rent, and rot
 But this spirit, knit to Thee
 May yet have song to sing,
 And when the world is made new
 Weave me whole again.

Let it be that one man dies
And the nation lives again.
This, then, I give my people
This alone I leave my people
The head hewn from my neck,
An offering to my people
A sacrifice for my people
Watched over by wolves,
The symbol of my people
The power of my people
I give them a new birth of blood!
I give them a martyr!



NUSAYBAH: BRAVEST OF BELIEVERS

Adeel Ahmed

A Village in Arabia, Circa 7th Century

In the training yard, a middle-aged man and a teenage boy circled and lunged at one another, the air cracking as their weapons clashed.

"I yield!" cried the boy, as he began to lose balance, overwhelmed by the sheer force of his opponent's strikes.

The man grunted, poking him hard in the side and causing him to crumple to the ground. "See? That's what happens when you keep skipping practice. You should be spending less time listening to that prattling old woman in the orchard, and more time preparing your defense against me! Want to shame me by getting shredded like wheat in your first battle?"

"I would not wish to disgrace you in that way, Ustad Murad," the teenager mumbled, "but the lady Nusaybah is a wise woman, who teaches us about our great Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him."

"You don't go to her out of piety, but for the love of her war stories. I say she's making most of it up on the fly." Murad out of the side of his mouth. "A hag with delusions of grandeur, that's

what she is."

"She is a companion of the Prophet, who blocked him from his enemies' swords with her own body!" the boy insisted. "How can you say such things about her?"

"Qasim," sighed the teacher. "You are young, and believe everything you hear. I am a veteran myself, and know for a fact that fabricated tales of glory come in by the cartload, especially from camp followers."

"But I have seen gifts and letters in her home from Caliph Umar himself!"

Murad circled his shoulders uncomfortably. "Well... maybe she's got him bewitched too with her tall tales."

Besides, when was the last time any of the boys he taught had asked to hear his own war stories? No, they just took him for granted, and fawned over that shriveled shrew.

Murad was in a sour mood when the lesson ended and he returned to his small hovel at the end of the street. He had never managed to purchase anything finer with his meager earnings, and felt decidedly disgruntled by

it. Soldiers surely deserved better for their service to the ummah.

A plump, buxom woman sat at a table, resting her head in her arms.

"Haven't you finished making supper yet, wife?" he barked.

"Murad, please, I have a headache," she murmured

"It's always a headache with you, Aaliyah! Maybe it's just your excuse to be lazy while I work training these rich brats all day to bring in the bread!"

"I can't help it," she said, almost weeping now. "The pain makes everything blur..."

"How do you think I feel?" he snapped. "I should be the one complaining of headaches, when all my students do is idolize the old hag across town."

His wife lifted her head a bit. "Lady Nusaybah? She teaches girls how to be healers and instructs them in the deen. I didn't know the boys went to her as well."

"Don't ask me what charm she's put on the little sand snakes," he

huffed, prying some camel shanks out of a pot. "Ugh, like leather, as always! Whoever taught you to cook should be banished to infidel lands!"

His wife reddened with shame, and Murad felt a touch of guilt. He knew it was not fair to punish her like this for failing to bear him any children. But the idea of having no sons to carry on his name haunted him, and made him feel as if he were less of a man. He could see nothing to praise in her after that.

"No time to eat a proper meal anyway," he muttered. "I'll be late to pray Magrheb at the masjid."

"Lady Nusaybah is going to be

lecturing afterwards," Aaliyah informed him. "Perhaps you would prefer to pray at home."

"What is that to me?" he shot back. "I will let not one keep me from praying in my own community! I'll just finish my salaah and leave before she starts babbling."

Murad turned his head left and right as he finished in Sunnah prayers. He saw an old woman out of the corner of his eye. She had only one arm. It had to be Nusaybah. He stood up, ready to leave the mosque as she went to take her place on the podium.

"Today I want to talk about my time as a soldier," she said.

And then Murad could not help but stay. He wanted to know what made people so starstruck with her compared to everyone else that had bled for Islam. He sat among the men as the old woman continued.

"It is often hard to talk about those early times when we first followed Rasulullah," she

sighed. "Most of us that starved during the blockades and fought tooth and nail for our survival found the cost greater than the consolations."

"What cost? Surely sacrificing comforts for the sake of Allah and his prophet is a source of honor," one young man insisted.

"Do you think that made it hurt any less?" She shook her head. "The moment we accepted this new religion, our own families and neighbors declared us enemies. They took our provisions and drove us into the desert. We had no choice but to fight our own kin. Most of us did not have the op-

And then Murad could not help but stay. He wanted to know what made people so starstruck with her compared to everyone else that had bled for Islam.

portunity to sit in the company of the prophet. I was one of the lucky ones, but even I can only count our meetings on one hand. He was busy leading a new nation, an army, a congregation. He even struggled to find time to spend time with his own family."

"And yet you saved his life, did you not?" another man queried.

"It was unexpected, though a part of destiny nonetheless. I grew up honing my skills with swords and bows, practicing amongst the boys. My tribe scoffed at me for it, but respected my progress as well. After taking my shahadah, I marched with my fellow Muslims only with the intention of serving the needs of the wounded as a camp follower. But I armed myself for protection just the same. We had already lost a sister in Badr named Romassa, and I didn't want to take my chances. But I had never killed anyone, nor had anyone try to kill me, until the Battle of Uhud. It was overwhelming, a mass of nameless faces flushed with bloodlust surrounding us. I was at the holy prophet's side when they broke through our ranks and cut us off. They went straight for our beloved Nabi. I had never been so terrified in my life. I wanted to run, to save myself. But the instinct to protect him, to shield him from their blows, was stronger. Maybe it was one of the angels making use of my form. But whatever compelled me, I took the strikes meant for him, and so have gained fame of which I am unworthy."

One of the women called out to her, "You deserve the fame!"

"Do I? No, it was Allah's will, to preserve His messenger, and I merely the instrument. We all have a purpose to fulfill. My two sons did nothing less. They wanted to fight for Islam as well, and I could not deny them their request. Both were slain in the cause. They died bravely, martyrs for our ummah. But for a mother, losing her children is far worse than losing the

beat of her heart."

Murad and everyone else in the crowd grew silent, solemn.

"The pain was worth it in the end," whispered Nusaybah, "All of it was...the war with my own tribesman, the scars I received, the arm cut from my body, and even my children awaiting the day of resurrection. But I pay that price anew every day." She locked eyes with Murad. "The least we can do in these times of peace is to form closer bonds with one another, as we are brothers and sisters in faith."

Murad turned his gaze down, regretting ever having insulted this woman behind her back. Her voice was so wise, her eyes so sincere, he could no longer doubt her story. He knew now that his own jealousy had been blinding him.

"Perhaps we all have different sides to us, and many roles to fulfill," she remarked wistfully. "I was a mother, then I became a warrior. I nurtured, and I fought. The prophet, peace be upon him, was as staunch a man as ever stood proclaiming the message in the streets, or swinging a sword on the field of battle. And yet he was tender with his loved ones, helping his wives with their chores and playing with his children. Balancing the different aspects of oneself is a difficult task. The nafs can easily rise up and take control. All those impulses, emotions and egos coming to the front. The prophet was not an ascetic, but he led a life of simplicity, putting a tight grip on his impulses. We need that example to steady us when we could not trust our own hearts. Perhaps we would all do well to more closely follow his example instead of merely praising him with our lips."

As the lecture concluded and the congregants left, Murad approached Nusaybah sheepishly. "I...I have always struggled with my passions...my anger, my pride. But these things made me strong. They made me fight well for

our religion. How then could they not be gifts from Allah?"

"Fighting and killing in anger is not wise," she stated. "The prophet's nephew Ali is a man of great wisdom, and he was said to avoid killing when anger took hold of him. Our prophet himself said the greatest jihad is the one against our nafs."

Murad bowed his head. "So our passions are to always be denied then?"

"If you control them, they can be turned to healthy purposes. But if they control you, the Shaitan will drag you to the fire. There is such a thing as righteous anger. But you must train that emotion, just as I see your arm is strong from practice with the sword. There is such a thing as noble pride, but it must be sheathed in humility and service to others. Do you understand?"

Murad nodded. "Yes, I understand."

"Very well then." Nusaybah patted him on the arm. "Now if you will excuse me, I need to do wudu. I like to perform zhikir at this time, and it takes me...some additional time." She pointed to her empty sleeve.

Murad swallowed. "Might I...have the honor of assisting you?"

She smiled. "Very well, young man."

Qasim's movement had grown tighter, more deliberate since Murad had last sparred with him. The boy was even switching stances without getting caught.

"Very good," said Murad, saluting the boy. "You've improved. Must be practicing again, eh? Did your father give you a lecture about wasting his money on me?"

Qasim smiled. "Lady Nusaybah told me that I should pay special attention to everything you taught me. When a few of my friends and I showed off with

sticks for her, she said that she liked our fighting style, and thought that we only could have learned the skill from a veteran such as yourself."

Murad smiled softly. "She said that, did she?"

The boy nodded.

"You know, I was wrong to speak badly of her to you," he confessed. "I set a very poor example to those in my charge. The Quran warns us that backbiting is among the greatest sins, yet I have been guilty of it far too often these days. It was especially unforgivable given all that she has suffered for our deen."

"Lady Nusaybah believes anything can be forgiven the one who supplicates," Qasim said. "And she clearly has nothing but respect for you and your service."

"She is truly among the noblest and bravest of believers," Murad said, "and I am proud to have fought for the same cause as her."

"You did battle with the Byzantines, didn't you?" asked Qasim, wide-eyed. "You've never told me about it before."

Murad chuckled awkwardly, rubbing his neck. "Well, you never asked before. But there was that one time..." He paused. "Umm...this may have to wait. I need to be getting home to help my wife with her cooking. She has headaches, and though the poultices from Lady Nusaybah have been helping, she needs to get her rest." He folded his hands behind her back. "She...needs to be treated as she deserves. It's long overdue." He reached out and patted the boy's shoulder. "Care for camel shanks and rice? You're welcome to come with me, if you don't mind helping with the dishes."

The boy nodded. "And will you finish telling me about the Byzantines?"

"Yes, about them...there I was, ten to one..."

Author's note: Nusaybah's descendents would ultimately move to Jerusalem, and during the reign of Salahuddin Ayubi, they became the caretakers of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. To this day, they serve as a neutral party to hold the keys, mediating between Eastern and Western Christian factions seeking entrance. They take their lineage to Nusaybah seriously, as well as their position as arbiters.

THE STORY OF ST. CHAD

Graeme Restorick

"Chad" is a popular given name in the US (although not, strangely enough, in his own country in modern times) that has become associated with the Chad vs. Virgin meme, where Chad is depicted as hyper-masculine alpha male and 'dudebro' whose success in life and popularity in society is contrasted with the failure and weakness of his virgin counterpart. It is thought that this meme originated amongst the self-loathing 'incel' community of 'involuntary celibates' who typically associate their own virginity with being losers, which is ironic, given that St Chad himself was almost certainly a virgin himself who lived a humble and saintly life who was notable for his advocacy of aesthetic virtues including chastity and abstinence from the sensual pleasures of life.

But who was St Chad, the man whose existence is probably the reason why his given name is still a relatively popular given name down to the present day?

The name 'Chad' means 'battle' in the old Brythonic Celtic tongue

(Brythonic being part of the family of languages that include Welsh and Cornish). Chad was one of four brothers, including his elder brother St Cedd, and his younger brothers Caelin and Cynibil, all of whom had Romano-British names despite them coming from the ranks of the Northumbrian nobility. The reasons for them having Celtic names instead of Anglo-Saxon ones is unclear. It may be that the Romano-British peoples were already Christianized by this time whereas the Anglo-Saxons were still largely pagan, and their parents wanted names that were associated with Christianity rather than their heathen compatriots, although this is merely speculation.

Most of what is known today about Chad and his brothers is known from the writings of the Venerable Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk whose book "An Ecclesiastical History of the English People" is one of the main sources of information about the history of this period. Bede himself was taught by Trumbert, who was himself taught by St Chad and thus Bede had access to

a firsthand account of St Chad's life

All of the brothers were monks and clergyman, St Cedd was a saint in his own right, and Caelin and Cynibil were also notable contemporary churchmen. Both Cedd and Chad received their early education from the Irish monk St Aiden of Lindisfarne at the Northumbrian priory on Holy Island he had founded and which much later became infamous due to the Viking raid in 793 AD that heralded the dark days of the Viking era in the British Isles.

St Aiden is widely credited with introducing Christianity to the Northumbrians, and it was probably under his direction that he was sent to the Anglo-Saxon monastery of Rath Melsigi in County Carlow in Ireland to continue his Christian education. Some time in the 650s, after some time studying in Ireland, he returned to England and helped his brother Cedd establish the monastery at Lastingham in what is now North Yorkshire.

Cedd died there of the plague in 664, and Chad took over as Abbot of the monastery at this time and also served as Bishop of York from this year until 669. Throughout this period, Chad worked tirelessly to move the Northumbrians away from paganism and towards Christianity.

The Synod at Whitby took place in the same year that Chad took over as Abbot and as Bishop of York. At this Synod the Northumbrian clergy agreed to move away from Celtic practices and conform to the Roman Rite and accept the supreme author-

ity of the pope in ecclesiastical matters. The evidence suggests that St Chad did not wholly conform to the new direction that had been decided, which caused some consternation to Bede who was writing half a century after the Synod and appears to have been somewhat embarrassed about St Chad's Celtic adherences. St Chad himself was criticised by some of his contemporaries for maintaining some of these Celtic practices and Bede leaves blank a considerable portion of his life blank, possibly because they contained details not considered flattering to an age when the authority of

the papacy over the Northumbrian Church was taken for granted.

Nevertheless, when in 669 the Archbishop of Canterbury Theodore of Tarsus (who had been appointed to this position by Pope Vitalian and thus possessed papal authority) demanded that Chad step down as Bishop of York so that Wilfrid

(a key figure at the Whitby Synod who had advocated for the Roman position) be appointed in his place, he humbly obliged without protest or resistance. This humility did however impress Theodore who confirmed his ordination as Bishop although maintained that he should step down as Bishop in order to allow Wilfrid take his place.

Following a brief retirement back to the monastery of Lastingham, Theodore recalled Chad in order to appoint him as Bishop of the Mercians after the Mercian King Wulfhere, a pagan convert to Christianity request-



ed a new Bishop to oversee Mercia's religious affairs. The humility that had impressed Theodore also became a source of frustration to him when he repeatedly refused to ride a horse to cover the long journey into Mercia and to carry out his ecclesiastical duties in governing a large diocese until Theodore ordered him to be physically lifted onto a horse by his assistants.

From then until his death in 672, Chad travelled around Mercia preaching and converting the local population and establishing several monasteries with the intention of them carrying out missionary work among the local population. Soon after his death he was according to Bede, almost immediately canonised. A shrine to him was built at Lichfield and eventually the Cathedral of Lichfield was established to house his relics there.

From the time of his death and throughout the Middle Ages, his shrine became a place of pilgrimage for those seeking out the miracles of healing attributed to him. In 1538, in pre-emption of Henry VIII's destruction of his shrine during the Reformation period Chad's bones were removed to a place of safety. After ending up in France, they were eventually returned to England and finally, in 1841 they were installed in the new Roman Catholic Cathedral dedicated to St Chad in Birmingham.

Carbon testing of the bones took place in 1985 which confirmed that all except a third femur bone which was present belonged to an individual that lived and died during the 7th century, which provided reasonable confirmation of the authenticity of Chad's relics. They remain enshrined in the Cathedral to this day.



ST. GABRIEL POSSENTI AND THE SANCTITY OF FIGHTING

Nathan Stone

Familiarity breeds contempt, according to the old saying. Outside that, familiarity breeds something worse—complacency. Part of my own personal theory as to why Christianity has suffered a reversal of fortunes in the 20th and 21st centuries is because one of the central cores of the faith—the Scriptures—has become old hat. The commands to love your neighbor as yourself and to pluck out your own eye if it causes you to sin with the declarations that prostitutes and tax collectors (the lowest of the low for Jews of the 1st century) were entering the Kingdom of God before the Pharisees were bundles of lit dynamite when Christ uttered them; they were landmines when they were recorded by the evangelists and repeated to the early Christians in the catacombs; and they were sharpened pikes to the Christians who heard and read them after Constantine and Theodosius. Today, two thousand years later, they have become as familiar as and as boring as a sunrise. A few words into the readings and our minds usually switch to autopilot after we recognize which verbal

pattern is being repeated to us. It's all very bloodless and respectable.

And the familiarity has spread beyond the message to the Messenger, a logical result when the Word is the Message. G.K. Chesterton famously (and accurately) described orthodoxy as a boulder balanced on its tip; if pushed too much in any direction, the whole thing was bound to collapse. The same thing has happened to Christ. The proclamation of being the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God have swallowed up entirely His being the Lion of Judah; the Prince of Peace Who came not to bring peace but the sword. It is telling that we are more familiar with iconography of Christ carrying a lamb on His shoulders than we are of Him with a sword issuing from His mouth. And in an age awash in moral therapeutic deism, it was predictable that the over saturation of Christ as Good Shepherd—gentle, peaceful—would devolve into saccharine depictions of “Jesus is my homie.”

This is why only fragments of Scripture that still have some power to jostle us out of that autopilot setting

are the ones that do not click with our modern sensibilities and perceptions. The whipping of the money changers, the command to treat your brother like a tax collector if he refuses to stop sinning, the statement that anyone who loves his family more than Christ will not enter the Kingdom still shock us to some extent because they do not square with the "Jesus is my homie" paradigm. It seems too harsh, angry and unloving for God to do.

When an imbalance occurs, a counter action that can restore that lost balance is necessary. Gabriel Possenti is one of the necessary counter-balances.

Most of the usual circle of saints with which we are inundated today follow a usual pattern of sanctity, part of which is the eschewing of violence. Many saints are remembered precisely because they renounced their former lives of brutality; St. Ignatius de Loyola, St. Christopher, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Martin of Tours are four prominent examples. They fit with our modern conceptions of what following God entails. St. Gabriel breaks this mold. According to the story:

After freeing a young woman from would-be rapists, St. Gabriel Possenti confronted the onrushing brigands waving revolvers. At that moment, Possenti fired at a lizard that happened to be running across the road and dispatched it with one shot. Thus having demonstrated his excellent handgun marksmanship, he was able to take command of the situation and ran the now-frightened brigands out of town.

In that one action, St. Gabriel shatters multiple, modern understandings of Christianity that, actually, have nothing to do with Christianity. A saint is not supposed to show anger; St. Gabriel reminds us of what Thomas Aquinas taught six hundred years previous—that anger towards the right things is holy and the lack of anger against the right things is the real sin. The modern

saint is supposed to be weak (termed "meek") forsaking all physical means of righting wrongs; St. Gabriel dispatches it as he did the lizard. The saint is supposed to be an over saturation of St. Francis, loving all creatures to the point where they will do what he asks of them, as the mosquitoes did for St. Rose of Lima and the rats did for St. Martin de Porres; St. Gabriel demonstrates that there is an hierarchy to love, as there is an hierarchy to everything. But the greatest fantasy that the young saint killed as surely as if he had put a bullet through it is the idea that the saint is an unearthly, almost elven creature.

I will admit that I went through a period where I didn't care to read about the saints, especially the children saints. St. Dominic, St. Tarsus, St. Gemma Galgani never seemed to be people that (to use the dish ragged excuse) "I could relate to." They had been too perfect, too holy, too stained glass even when alive. I liked having an extra blanket on my bed in wintertide and here was St. Dominic willingly going without any so as to offer his sufferings to God. The very thought of conflict of any kind put me in a panic and here was St. Tarsus being martyred for the Eucharist. There was too wide a gap between where I was and where they had been at even younger ages than myself. Of course, being able to "relate" to a person is the poorest measurement we can use between ourselves and others because it asks the wrong question. The issue isn't whether we can relate to someone but whether we should imitate someone. That question never even rises because when we make the issue whether we can relate or not, we are focusing all the attention on ourselves and not on the other person.

However...

It is also true that people are more willing to imitate and less likely to pervert the question when the person

asked to be imitated is a flesh and blood human being and not a stained glass window. This isn't to argue that St. Dominic et al were stained glass windows but that they have been presented as such by various writers over the time because it is easier. St. Gabriel doesn't allow this to happen with his life because his life was never one that could be described as being "perfect" in terms of sanctity. He loved to dance and party and gamble and play music and he loved the girls; at one time, being engaged to two different ones at the same time with the knowledge of the other. Not a particularly sinful man but what we would call a frivolous one. And the best part is that he did not completely change when he dedicated his life to Christ and became a Passionist. To be sure, he did change; gone was the frivolous life-style centered solely on the world but remaining was the masculine energy, the drive to act, to take a risk that had been expressed in dance, cards and wooing before. Just as the medieval code of chivalry had channeled manhood to the protection of the weak and defenseless for the greater glory of God, St. Gabriel's nature was molded into that of a 19th century knight, complete with weapons and damsels in distress. It was Aquinas' adage—grace perfects nature—played out on the world's stage.

And in that, one of the frames that encompasses many of the lies surrounding Christianity today is broken. The idea that a saint must be a non-threatening, never angered figure who perpetually speaks of the modern idea of "peace" (everyone being nice to each other) has led to the emasculation of Christianity. The old poems describing Christ not as prince or king but

warrior have been forgotten; the old, martial hymns like "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and "The Son of God Goes Forth to War," and "O God of Earth and Altar," have been quietly tucked in the dust bin; and even some of the incidents in the Bible are skipped over (when was the last time we read or heard about Samson killing a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone or Judas Maccabeus slaughtering the Hellenistic armies?) This is one reason why more women than men proclaim themselves Christian; Pew Research, in years past, found that Christian congregations around the globe are more women dominated—53% to 46%—while in the US, the split is 61% woman, 39% man. If being a Christian means not just giving up what we want (a demand it makes on all its adherents) but eradicating the drives that nature has implanted in us—for men, the drive for strength, to protect, to act, to risk—and not simply allow grace to sharpen them, it's understandable why so many men have decided it's not for them. Christianity has not been tried and found lacking; it has been tried and found not strenuous enough.

It's into this paradigm that St. Gabriel barges in, guns blazing, reminding us of the necessity and the holiness of masculinity that recognizes when quiet words and prayers are not enough when the dragons are about to devour maidens and he had the imagination enough to both recognize the dragons and that dragons require a knight with drawn sword as their answer. If St. Paul was correct when he described us as the Body of Christ, each with our own part to play, St. Gabriel knew that on occasion, he must be the fist and that a hand incapable of becoming a fist is flawed.

SEVEN MOMENTS IN THE DEATH OF JOHN BRADBURNE

Incipit lamentatio

Aleph. A sun in Africa–
rent beard
red band
atop the cracking
open earth's
head
spilling
Blood on the fields
Ululation of light
scream
parturition
clogs the dawn waters
with a martyrdom
of afterbirth

*

Bet. Baba Vedu
*Is this how you pray
Baba John?*
He does not dance
for them
Jesus' restless jester
rejected leper
spilling blood
on the fields
from the bullet
holy habit
-prayer
It is a light

converging three-in-one
a wish answered
a seed cracking open
Come, sweet death, on Wednesday

*

Gimmel. God's will – a coin tossed
on the spur of the moment,
unlame leper *Mtemwa'd*,
clutching the ash over black
limb-stump
of the dying rejected
leper. *Gentle*, Solomon, leper
King martyred
convert and repent
nothing. Not your fearful
skin, your sun-filched
eyes sacrificed
to divine volition, coin-tossing
those blank vaults
into a fat interest of souls.
Good and faithful servant,
Christ's character
Die, cast into the bleach of morning
and make clean.

*

Dalet. Dawn, fearful
witness stock-still in silence,
blues to the rigor mortis of sky.
Signs of love – stigmata, the leper's,
bare in tattered weeds,
peace for all, to all,
blamed on no cut-off corner
of the world.

*

He. was not the light, this man John.
His finger healed no wound,
neither, for that matter, his death.
Touch of the match, mercurial... in *odio*
fidei? or a casualty of war, coin
tossed on the spur of the moment, killed
by men in the desperate blackness of apartheid,
by Cecil Rhodes and his maxim guns,
by a white regime that thought him low,
as the ashen black lepers among whom
he lived – whom he loved? A voice. Cries.

In the wilderness a chorus soft like ribbons.
Hand of Christ, cradle the head.
Rest, Baba John, and hear
the world whisper, the Word breathe
from the glutted soil, still in silence.
The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.

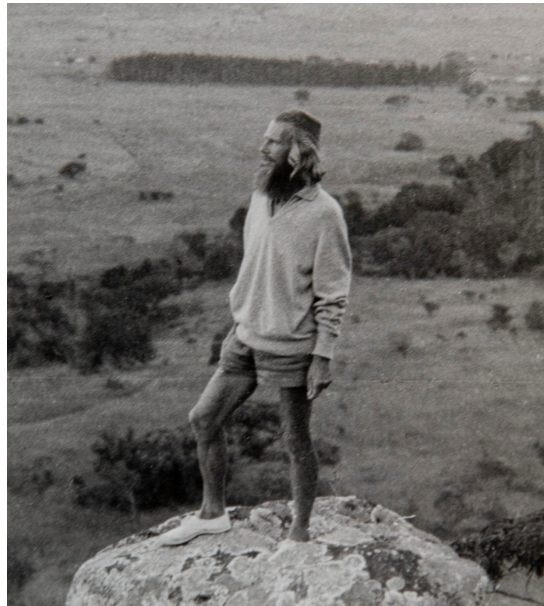
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Vav. Verrucose purple spill
jacarandas, pour petals like tear drops.
Vermillion ichor
the soil; limbs emerge
and quicken
in the dried-eye day.
Very God, Creator
Lord become creature—
reach out from
the eternal butterfly stroke
of the Cross
the tawny figure
fallen among the reeds.
Rise with the reed
in the dewfall of morning,
matted earth
pressed like plugs
into heaven's
wounded welcome.
There is a breeze
a voice
soft like ribbons
and a pullulation of petals
in the crystal blues of autumn.

*

Zayin. Zimbabwe-
Rhodesia question
1979
pondering
war pondering
ninety years
of the way
shadows fall
like the stroke
of the butterfly wing-
tautening lines
stretch
the bush
a disintegrated
white on black

never reaching an end
as every day
for fifteen years–
for ninety years–
a sun rises
–A new sun has risen
dripped in the dewfall
of morning crowned
bathed clean
the afterbirth
of martyrdom shining
Love
for good as well as evil men



TOLKIEN & TEILHARD, CREATION & EVOLUTION: ALTERNATIVE SAGES OF THE MODERN AGE

Warren Herman

Finally, after a long day in the lab, one kid had the guts to ask the question we were all wondering about. We had run a gel electrophoresis on a sample of DNA, and we were looking at the results, bands of DNA bunched together, trapped in the gel. "What does this say about us?" the kid asked. The scientist who was serving as our teacher gave an answer no one was expecting. "Oh no, you've been working with virus DNA today." A few of us burst out in exhausted laughter. All that hard work and expectation, and we weren't even doing what we thought we were doing. This happened when I was a kid taking a summer workshop at the Cold Spring Harbor Lab in Long Island, New York. One time, I even saw James Watson, who discovered the Double Helix Structure of DNA, give a talk there. But that day, working on those gels, shows something that J.R.R. Tolkien and Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, would both appreciate. Work happens in the context of a story, in the context of a narrative. We thought we were working on our own DNA, and that we would learn something about ourselves; that's what

was driving our work. Guiding narratives are very important, they provide not only context, but motivation. We probably wouldn't have worked as hard or have been as interested if we had known that we were just working on some viral genes. Tolkien and Teilhard were both, in their own ways, masters of narrative. In different ways, they give us two alternative visions of the world, two contexts in which we can situate our efforts in life. They may not have yet been placed side by side, or framed as opposite sages of the modern age, but this is what I believe them to be. These are two men who faced the modern world, and found different solutions to it by creating narratives. Tolkien's approach was one of creation and sub-creation, and Teilhard's was one of evolution.

I think if you are like many people, you have found a kind of synthesis between your faith and evolution. But what is the nature of this synthesis of the Bible and evolution? I think that many people arrive at a view of the Bible which, to my knowledge, is not really stated in any specific theological

school of thought. It amounts to "the earlier it is in the Bible, the more it is myth and not history." Things like Genesis are thought to present a framework of meaning, but again and again, we hear the refrain "The Bible isn't a science book." Even more sophisticated presentations are made in which the literary genre is taken into account, and Genesis is seen as the ultimate refutation of falsehood in a mythic form, yet remains non-historical. It may be the myth to end all myths, but a myth it remains. Most people end up with a firm sense that Genesis is not to be taken historically, and get a mixed sense of Exodus, where some elements are seen as more or less historically accurate. Again, this is because of a sense that two things are true; the conclusions of modern evolutionary theory, and the conclusions of the ancient faith. This simple framework seems to make sense of these things in a basic way.

Yet, no one wants to die for this framework, and it doesn't give direction to life. It isn't something anyone would want to sing songs about. Thinking "the older books of the Bible are mythic truths, and the books get progressively real as you get toward the back cover" isn't a great a guiding story. It is an uninspiring mutt of an idea, in which real solutions are posed in history to fictional or mythic problems. In contrast, the raw power of evolution, the inexorable march of progress from nothing to something, from matter to life, from life to humanity, and from humanity to something superhuman has in itself the seed of a great and guiding story. A story replete with death, struggle and destruction, and multiple inexplicable moments, but a story that gives direction. So does the ancient account of a world made by God, and two perfect first parents, who lost their perfect integrity of body, mind, and soul through a fateful choice, tasting death as a result.

And the story of the God-Man who came to die instead, and share with all his divine life, so that all might be not only deathless, but partake forever in the dance of divine love, living here and hereafter as his Church. This too is a guiding story.

In these times, where newer stories are yet to be digested and older ones are doubted, there are some who have crafted stories that guide us. Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is one of them, and in his admittedly non-fictional works he sought, in a way, to wed the march of evolution to the logic of the incarnation of Christ. He made it into a new guiding narrative, a synthesis of both. Then there is J.R.R. Tolkien, whose admittedly fictional story serves as something of a moral and spiritual touchstone for many, even if they don't believe in Christ. In a way, these two very different storytellers face up to the advances of the modern world by crafting two very different kinds of stories. Fr. Teilhard explicitly gave voice to a new guiding narrative of evolutionary Christianity, while Tolkien gave us a great literary work, an example of creation in action. Their stories, in a way, can help us to live in this modern world. They can become a way for us to face the facts, and ask the questions, and above all, to live with wonder and joy.

And one fact is that the world has changed; few believe in a very traditional model of creation and divine providence. Nearly everyone thinks that the universe and even the Earth it is exceptionally ancient. Nearly everyone thinks that all life evolved, even arising spontaneously out of non-living matter without divine intervention. But even though there is a consensus in the culture, we have to really and actually ask the question; has there been cosmological and biological evolution, or was the world created directly? Or was there some mixture of the two? In the time of Tolkien and Teilhard,

the ideas of modern science might have actually seemed more powerful than they do today. This is because their dominance is now so complete and truth so unquestioned that, like a recognized champion fighter, they need only to stand up, and potential opponents cower in fear. In the day of Tolkien and Teilhard, there was probably more of a sense that modern ideas and discoveries were dealing apparent knockout punches to the traditional ideas of the origin of humanity and the universe. The modern ideas about the vast scope of the universe, its exceeding age, and the non-miraculous origin of life have totally saturated modern minds and are nearly unquestioned facts. And for people of faith, this dominance is accepted, and it the radical challenge of modern cosmology is downplayed. But in the times of Tolkien and Teilhard, I think it would be safe to say, that at least in some minds, there was a

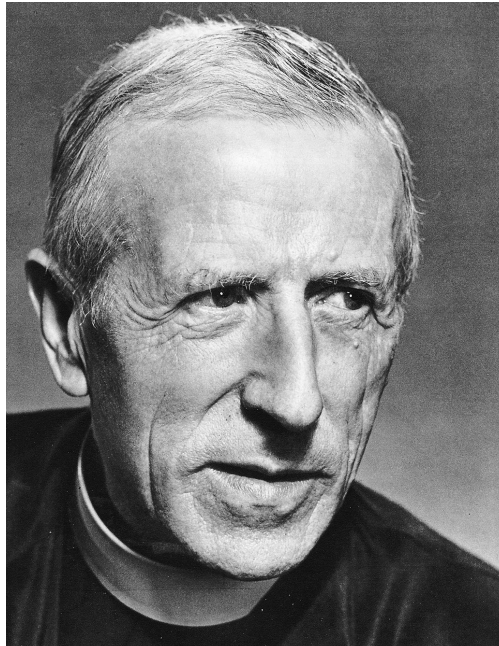
sense that this new conception of the cosmos posed a powerful challenge to faith. Fr. Teilhard himself noted the problem of this new vastness of the universe in his own writings. He astutely realized that in this evolving cosmos, a person of faith needed to find how to keep Christ at the center, and Fr. Teilhard did so by recontextualizing creation and redemption as the evolutionary process. This might be an oversimplification of the material he presented to the world, but it remains the substance of the narrative

he offered. He offered a spiritualized evolution to the world, restoring a type of Christian meaning to a world in which people could no longer believe in creation. That is the work of Teilhard, one of the sages who gives us a way forward through the modern age. The work of Tolkien, in bringing us Middle Earth, of reworking the hero's quest with Christian values, of crafting the languages of elves and imaginary nations, is much more well-known. It is not an explicit position taken in favor of creationism and tradition against

the modern world, but a vital practice of creativity itself, under the assumption of a Creator. Teilhard was a sage of evolution, and Tolkien, one of creation.

Evolution does seem like a heavy-weight champion of an idea. Smart people believe in it because there are similarities between species, and these is an overall logic and coherence to it, as long as all the elements of the theory are true.

Nevertheless, perhaps the main problem is the thing that fuels the whole process, the mechanism of mutation and natural selection. Finding a problem with this mechanism would be akin to finding out that a champion fighter took steroids, and his power was something inflated beyond its normal bounds. Even the simple question of what came first, the chicken or the egg, is utterly baffling if really contemplated from the standpoint of natural selection. Would anything less than a fully-developed egg have been ef-



fective at sheltering an embryo? If the slightest thing is wrong with the egg, it would not function. What about the clotting ability of blood? How would this ability have developed? Would not anything less than a full, or at least adequate clotting ability have led to death? It is now known that the famous experiment that made us all think that cells could have spontaneously arisen in a kind of chemical soup has serious flaws. It is a simple fact that nothing resembling a cell comes from the chemicals now thought to compose the early atmosphere. The fact that Darwin's finches never became anything other than a finch is not even noticed, and new studies that reveal interbreeding between these species, and fluctuating beak sizes over time, reveal that many of the birds cannot be considered to even be different species, any more than dog breeds can be thought of as different kinds of animal. Most other textbook supports to macroevolutionary ideas fall to similar simple refutations from the progress of science. Nevertheless, it is this apparent evidence for evolution, and explanatory power of evolution which compels textbook authors to continue to present this narrative, and drives deep thinkers like Fr. Teilhard to integrate it into their faith in a pervasive way. However, if we can see serious problems posed by science to the evolutionary narrative, then we can wonder again about the unthinkable. I myself can no longer honestly think that evolution occurred in light of an in-depth review of the evidence that was shown to me in high school and even college biology classes. Many, from Dr. Stephen Meyer of the Discovery Institute, to Hugh Owen of the Kolbe Center for the Study of Creation, have raised questions, and forged coherent opposing perspectives to evolutionary orthodoxy.

But Tolkien also has something to say, if not in terms of some scientific or

philosophical statement, but in his life of creativity itself. Tolkien didn't only see God as creator, but lived his life in the enjoyment of what he seems to have understood as a principle of sub-creation. His work of making a fantasy world was an act of worship of the one who made the world, and made Tolkien himself. Tolkien's world is one that is essentially, top-down and created by God, whereas Fr. Teilhard's is one that is bottom-up, rising toward God. It is possible for an agile mind to try to synthesize these two views, but such a synthesis is only needed if many of the scientific challenges to evolution, which are not public knowledge and against public opinion, can be dismissed. This may not prove to be as easy as many science textbooks would have us believe. After reading many of the clear critiques of most of the evidence presented for evolution, I can join the ranks of those scientists who see biological, mathematical, not to mention philosophical and theological, flaws in the theory. And depending on whether or not we think that macroevolution is true, it is clear that we must make a choice between Tolkien and Teilhard.

There is a real way that, because of the differences in presentation of their elegant narratives, and the seeming necessity of some kind of synthesis with evolution, that a sensitive thinker could draw upon both the fantasy world of Tolkien, and the evolutionary worldview of Teilhard, without perceiving the contradictions. After all, this is perhaps merely a way living out of the tacit tension, the secretly uneasy truce that already exists in between faith and evolution in most minds. Nevertheless, this essay has been an attempt to cast Tolkien and Teilhard as what I believe them to be; two irreconcilable visionaries, to heralds of two new kinds of spirituality for a new world. If evolution is true, then Teilhard is true, if creation is true then Tolkien is true. This has not

been a systematic attempt to showcase the evidence for and against macroevolution, nor has it been a systematic presentation of the ideas of either thinker. It is merely a point of departure, a call to further inquiry, a signpost on the way. It is a proclamation that we ought to see that Tolkien and Teilhard are opposite options. Aside from their deep acquaintance with war, the fact that they reacted to the modern age, and the way in which they posed great narratives to humanity, there is very little similarity between them.

Tolkien veiled his views under the cloak of story, Teilhard proposed a new global narrative into which all could enter.

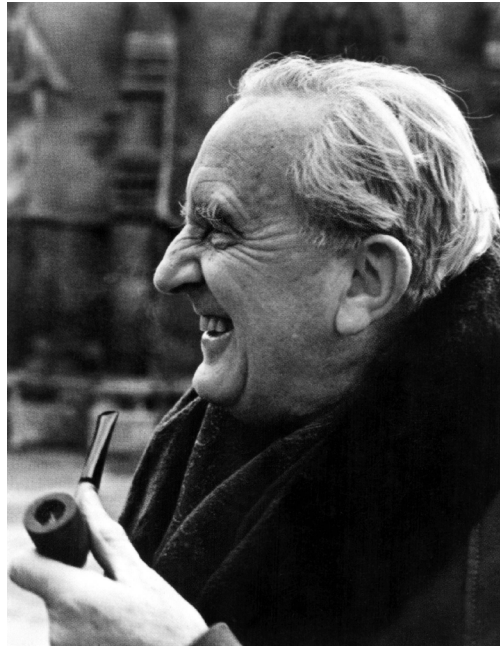
It is my hope that this essay has drawn attention to the uneasy synthesis between the guiding narrative of faith, and the guiding narrative of evolution. But above all, it is my hope that this essay reveals Tolkien as something of a unique spiritual teacher for

our times. Tolkien maintained that he hated allegory, and favored a kind of applicability of his writings to various situations. Nevertheless, this applicability has not yet been taken in the sense that his writings can be seen as a treasure of faith and not just literature. They are not taken as seriously as they might be as containing blueprints for a life based in a kind of creativity, and rejoicing in life. This is what I believe that they can be for our time. As we have seen, his characters, at least those whom we would wish to emu-

late, reveal a kind of creative approach to life. They sing songs, even in the midst of great trials and challenges. They hum and muse as they are going about their lives in a kind of creative celebration. There is a sense of whimsy which matches their wisdom, and purifies it. All work and no play may make not only a dull boy, but a servant of evil.

In the end, we can realize that Tolkien and Teilhard were both sages of wonder, trying to reenchanted a world that had lost its way. Tolkien was a

messenger of Fantasy Catholicism, while Teilhard was a herald of a Science-Fiction Catholicism. Teilhard lived a life which contained creative effort and adventure, traveling the world, often on paleontological digs associated with evolution. He was known to wonder at the miracle of life in the smallest of creatures and in matter itself. But what if his wonder was misplaced, such that in all his astute view of all



things, he had found something that was merely strange and surprising, rather than wholesome and wonderful? There is a difference in what could be called 'warmth' between science fiction and fantasy, and this same difference of warmth is apparent in the kind of wonder at life to which we are invited by each of these sages.

We must choose which kind of wonder we wish to embrace, and what work we are to do in light of that wonder. This essay began in a lab, with a kid asking, concerning the results of an

experiment "What does this say about us?" Perhaps the fact that Tolkien and Teilhard, the voice of Fantasy Faith and the voice of Science Fiction Faith are both storytellers can itself help decide which one of them was closer to the truth. We can reflect on which one of them had a worldview that was consistent with the simple fact that each of them was a storyteller. Does creation or evolution better explain the need for a guiding narrative? If we see Tolkien and Teilhard as sub-creators, organizing things into new syntheses, and recognize in them the human inability to live without the sweep of a great story, does this not reveal something

of the shape of their human hearts? Does this not reveal them as sub-creators? Does this not make it somewhat unlikely that such beings are products of an unguided march of evolution, but rather, storytellers made in the image of the great Author of life? In the end, I think it is Tolkien who calls us into a world of true wonder, and makes the most sense of our need for narrative. Tolkien and Teilhard are two sages of the modern age, but I believe that it is in mining the spiritual riches of Tolkien's work, that we will find an authentic path forward as sub-creators for Christ.

FREEDOM TO DO WHAT EXACTLY?

Andrew Likoudis

Aristotle states - "Freedom is the ability to do what one ought. To act always as ones' desires dictate is not freedom but slavery, and slavery to a hard master. Even an animal or a slave can live according to its desires." Author, Christian apologist, and Oxford-Cambridge professor C.S. Lewis dealt extensively with this philosophy and made it his own, working it out through exchanges and debates with his contemporaries and friends which comprised his literary enthusiast group, the Inklings. His influence extended most notably to, fellow author and Oxford colleague and professor, J.R.R. Tolkien. This counter-cultural transcendent notion of true freedom, (the strength of character to choose rightly,) which, according to Lewis, is drawn from an awareness of, and adherence to the intrinsic and universal code of morality is manifested prominently in his writings, personal life, and politics.

True to his beliefs, Lewis's integrates these fundamental concepts into his many varied works. He deems

their universality to be essential, and urgently impresses this idea upon his readers. Ironically, his writings are often miscategorized as solely fantasy or children's literature. While he was certainly in favor of using fantasy elements in his books, as his membership with the Inklings, (a primarily fantasy-driven-discussion group) makes clear, much of what he wrote tended to be more intellectual & scholarly. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, specifically *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* are the best known exception to this general rule, but even this book has a more complex "sacramental" reality behind it and was written for wider audiences than just children. Its popularity alone proves this to be true. His incorporation of Christian mysticism and symbolic elements and characters was meant not only to capture the audience's attention, but rather to transport them to a greater contemplation of sublime realities, portraying the characters themselves as "texts to be read" (Muth). A great example of this is captured in the scene in which,

Aslan who represents Christ, allows himself to be sacrificed on the stone table in order to redeem Edmund after he ate the Turkish delights that the White Witch offered him, - referencing Adam's abuse of freedom in eating the fruit in the garden of Eden and subjecting himself to the law of sin and death. Lewis even went so far as to make explicit references to the "Lord Adam and Lady Eve" through the character of Aslan"(Williams). Lewis, like many medievalists was keen on the idea that God created the perceptible world as a shadow or reflection of the imperceptible, as a means of revealing Himself to mankind in a way that he might perceive and understand Him without being overwhelmed by the reality and enormity of the truth (Muth). When man follows the moral code, or acts virtuously, and thereby remains in step with nature's innate goodness he perceives objective reality as it truly is rather than a distortion. Virtuous behavior is an exercise of this "freedom faculty" and puts man in touch with his Maker.

When C.S. Lewis addresses freedom, he has great appeal to universal audiences because he both challenges and offers a vision of hope. The general concept of freedom, especially to Americans, is an integral one. It shapes the path that society takes and determines the means as well as the end that is chosen. It is a foundational principle, that if distorted or abused, could lead the country toward destructive ends, but if understood properly, it is the means by which its greatest hopes, dreams and aspirations are answered. Contrary to what the root of the word suggests, freedom is not necessarily free. America was built by sacrifice and responsibility and is blessed to have a constitution that has as one of its prominent tenets a provision that accords freedom (or Liberty) as a right. This is not the case with all countries. For example, the residents of Cuba

are not free to express certain beliefs about their government, or to travel abroad. And in some Middle Eastern countries, women are not allowed to be outside of the home without the accompaniment of a man, whether it be a husband or a brother.

In many cultures, freedom is often seen in relation "from" something else. A few examples might be freedom from chains or freedom from systematic oppression. What's a bit less mainstream is the concept of freedom "to" or freedom "for"; Freedom for change or growth, freedom to pursue excellence, freedom to fulfill the right desires, freedom to give and receive love - arguably the highest good in our world according to many, including Lewis, who also believed that those wedded to a certain image of themselves by pride had an excruciating difficulty of attaining (Williams). He was also of the mind that true freedom was bestowed by grace and couldn't be acquired solely through human effort and self-mastery, due to the perversions of love and desire common to man, - though he firmly insisted that the beginning of freedom was built upon a full assent and attempt to adhere to God's moral law (Gruenler). Popular mischaracterizations seem to have diluted the true meaning of this subject. People often forget or simply haven't learned that freedom can be forfeited through abuse or neglect. The misplacement of freedom that is so prevalent to the fallen side of our human condition is the definition of license, freedom's counterfeit. Lewis would transmit these themes far and wide. In doing so he gained much attention and notoriety from both within UK and abroad.

Lewis, although a very eligible bachelor for most of his life, assumed that he would never marry, but in his late 50s he met and married Joy Davidman, one of his ardent fans who had traveled from America to meet

him. A prodigy of sorts in her own right, who had broken the scale on her IQ test as a child, earned her master's degree in English literature from Columbia University at 20 years old and was by then in her 40's (Dorsett). Lewis's new partner was also keen on this sense of universal morality and is quoted saying about society – "Can we reasonably expect happiness from an insatiable appetite which, no matter how it stuffs its belly, is still psychologically like *Oliver Twist* in the poorhouse, holding up an empty bowl and begging, "I want some more"? Isn't it possible that our dream of the good society contained, from the beginning, a hidden violation of the Tenth Commandment "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods"?" It could also be added that this sort of mentality has crippled the West and done irreparable damage in the form of enslavement to its passions and lack of concern for neighbors who are not so well off. Blaise Pascal, another author and

Christian apologist, but from the 16th century, explains Joy's insight with his pre-dated quote stating: "it is not good to be too free, it is not good to have everything one wants." (Pascal) Pascal is here only affirming what Christ Himself said in John 10:18 when he stated: The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." In other words, rather than assenting to every desire, Jesus is showing that freedom is also

**The reason my
Father loves me is
that I lay down my
life - only to take it
up again. No one
takes it from me,
but I lay it down of
my own accord.**

exercised when limitations are freely accepted and in so doing, the freedom is paradoxically maintained.

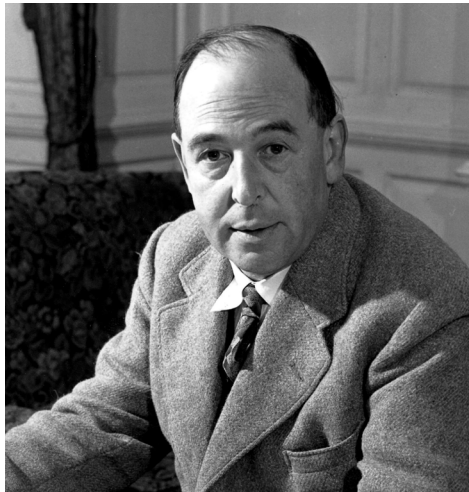
Another facet of this idea which Lewis strongly professed was that conversion of one's neighbor was the highest charity and the greatest good one could do for the freedom of the individual and society alike. He wished to ensure that his neighbor could find this freedom for virtue and meaning in his own life. It could be argued that this was his primary focus in writing to the extent that he did. His example of broadcasting the talks during World War II that made up *Mere Christianity* shows this. He ultimately based this

freedom in his own faith, and proved that religious belief enabled the most all-encompassing version of freedom. It is also one of Lewis's greatest successes, selling over 3.5 million copies, further affirming this supposition. Joy, Lewis' wife, is remembered saying about her husband "I suppose it's unfair, tricks of argument that leave wounds,

but with this sort of thing that Lewis does, what I feel is a craftsman's joy at the sight of a superior performance" (Huie). Other examples of this freedom as an aspect of conversion or as a result of Lewis' apologetics include the well-known scene in the *Great Divorce* where the ghost is challenged to let the angel kill the lizard on his shoulder which represents his accumulated vices before he can enter the kingdom of heaven. In the *Silver Chair* likewise, Puddleglum, in a surprising twist of character development, exercises his freedom to choose what kind of life he wants to live, despite the witches

mind tricks leaving Puddleglum and companions into believing that Narnia is not real. In a brilliant monologue, Puddleglum famously states: Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things--trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play-world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia. So, thanking you kindly for our supper, if these two gentlemen and the young lady are ready, we're leaving your court at once and setting out in the dark to spend our lives looking for Overland" (p. 432). He clearly stands by his convictions and understands that even if they are wrong, at least he is living out his freedom in the highest order of values that he knows.

Interestingly enough, and probably one of the main reasons for his immense success, Lewis was very careful not to force his views on others, but rather his work was always that of careful, thoughtful, and friendly suggestion. He was strongly against any sort of imposition and in fact, is



recorded having said "Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victim may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience" (Huie). Certainly this approach can extend to other areas and in fact, it may not have ever been intended for speaking to his views on evangelization or general promulgation of the faith, but regard-

less, it fits and is one that he never compromised. This statement also coincidentally sums up a good deal of his political values and views on the role of the state. Lewis found the idea of theocracy ridiculous and heavy-handed, so there again, this disdain for moral busybodies in favor of preparing individuals for virtuous

exercise of freedom is evident. He insisted on the virtues of a limited government, which allowed the greatest freedoms for individuals. Lewis also believed that Christianity was too often thrown into politics where it did not belong. His views on religion's distinction from government can be summed up in his own words "Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in,' aim at earth and you will get neither." (Wehner) Phillip Yancey a well-known scholar of Lewis, is recorded as stating: "C.S. Lewis observed that almost all crimes of Christian history have come about when religion is confused with politics.

Politics...allures us to trade away grace for power, a temptation the church has often been unable to resist."

Lewis and Davidman had a happy-yet-short marriage of 4 years before Joy died of a recurrence of cancer. Lewis was left in a state of shock and sorrow. He wrote, under the pseudo-name N.W. Clerk, his memoirs in *A Grief Observed* about his marriage, Joy's death, and the agony that followed. Lewis struggled profoundly during this period with reconciling the suffering he felt at his loss and his faith in God. But with time and through writing down what was essentially a stream of consciousness, he eventually found peace. His honesty and transparency, really makes this book enormously insightful as to what Lewis had to go through, his prose being even more impeccable in this instance than in most cases (Boothe).

Lewis was ironically only a convert to the Christian faith himself, after being an enthusiastic atheist for the early portion of his life due to the loss in his early childhood. His reluctance to remodel his beliefs was arguably the most prominent aspect of his conversion, save for the grace by which he claimed to have been rescued from the clutches of the world and death. He fought long and hard to avoid conversion if at all possible (Schwartz). He rationalized, minimized and battled with the full extent of his intellect and will, until gradually he determined it was futile and was quoted saying "I gave in and admitted that God was God"(Huie).

Lewis's name is often lumped together with many other literary masters such as his contemporaries Virginia Woolf and James Joyce (Watson). In a way though, this serves to obscure his message, - a message of the acceptance of love, responsibility and universal morality which is glaringly important to be recognized and maintained, especially when society seems

to have lost its sense of direction and morality seems to have all but disappeared from the public sphere. Lewis's message is an offer and a challenge for society to accept the implications of a common moral imperative and to work diligently toward the betterment of the common-good without so much focus on self.

Lewis's political savvy, though not explicit, was often subtly inferred and wisely scattered throughout his manuscripts along with his Christian philosophy of the world. He was not fond of the idea of being seen as a political pundit or figure. Interestingly, he was called upon soon after Winston Churchill became prime minister to receive the honorary privilege of being designated as the "Commander of the British Empire" (Scheiderer). He respectfully declined the offer. Lewis's main concern and view was with that of the *polis*, the Aristotelian view which combined many diverse but overlapping spheres of social and political thoughts on topics ranging from families and education, to business and government. It was a comprehensive worldview which only the most educated scholars possessed. Lewis's view combined ideas from Rousseau, to Marx, to Locke, to the Ancient Greeks. It was this trait especially that made him look attractive and useful to the political elites of his time. Fortunately, Lewis had the insight to avoid this arena *professionally* at any cost. Had he not, his literature may never have translated through time, reaching the enormous audiences that they have. Although his political views were never a main focus, his ways of thinking, along with his discreet contributions, made a major impact on the political landscape of his time. His eclectic outlook has certainly changed the face of what is considered classic.

While Lewis was certainly a prominent figure in England during his lifetime, he most likely would never

have imagined the worldwide impact he would make after his death, when most of his works were discovered. Critics and fans alike, are in awe after reading one of his classics. The notion that death is inescapable does not hold true for authors like Lewis, whose

teachings on ever-important topics such as freedom, truth, and morality will constantly be referenced. His life and works will remain an integral part of the curriculum for generations to come, and similar to the Greeks', will be passed down eternally.

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IMMACULATE PERCEPTION

Danny Oscar Rutilio

What does it mean to see in the Transcendence of He
who brought forth ex nihilo?
For Mary's eyes
Are a window
Through which Transcendence
Eminently resounds
The Song of Symphony...
All of Being is now transfused with the
Logos' harpists' caress...
All is ablaze
In the furnaces of purification;
In this Middle Earth ...
My weeping as
An army terrible with banners...
There unfurling
Presaging the Dawn;
In an innocence more daring than any blasphemy!
And so I gather my weeping
And stand before Galadriel's gaze
Daring to ask for nothing and everything!
Whatever she would grant me...
Her eyes Pierce me
With the Knowledge of the Lance
That pierced Miram's son
Yeshua's heart.

THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

Leah Fisher

Twelve years of chaos, seven of war. His eyes searched out the window in silence. Ever since the day when Death had knocked on every door, it had never been as it was. There was something apocalyptic about the scene, echoes of what would one day come and the leader who would guide the nations towards folly.

His stomach twinged with hunger as he considered the war-torn land, laid barren by the bombings and the robbing of its men. He could still taste the fading flavor of the potato-salad and bread that had once nourished him, if only a little. He was grateful for that and for the hope that was within him. It was Sunday, a week past Easter, and he had maintained, as he always did, a healthy form of optimism.

The light of the morning brought with it the sound of the coming artillery, the foreign advance breaking through the defensive lines as surely as the sun's warm rays broke through the grayness of the clouds to cast their glorious brightness. Soon it would all be over.

He closed his eyes to the world

and thanked God for His answer to the prayers which he had never wished to pray. The destruction of his nation was not a cause for celebration, but the eradication of evil was another matter. They had to be punished. Their sin had mounted to the Heavens and come before God for recompense. The blood of the earth which they had spilled called up to God for vengeance and innocence itself cried out for wrath.

It would be a blessed thing to see his own surrender. The lines were drawn up long ago, and he his side had chosen: the salvation of the world for the destruction of his nation. For, such was the judgement of God. Now, if only the question could be answered of whether he would live to see it. It seemed almost irresponsible to wonder, but he could not have helped it where he stood. Freedom was near, no matter how it might find him. Death was but an end to dying, which all the world was already, anyway. But freedom? That was something different, something sacred, revealed only in God.

"Well, Pastor, how about a sermon?" prodded the proud voice of an Englishman with his spirits high.

His eyes sprang open in alarm. Had he just asked a sermon? His heart quivered to think that he might preach again. How could it be allowed him? He drew in breath deep to his lungs and trembled as he turned to face the upright man with the mustache and monocle.

"Dear Best, I couldn't possibly." He spoke with great remorse, his heart turning within him for pain. In truth, there was nothing that he would have wanted better, but he was sensitive to the lives of the others and would by no means force them.

"Oh, hogwash! Come on, Pastor! It's Sunday, and we could all go for a service! I may not be an especially religious man, but I can say that it has been far too long since we've had one—" he raised his voice and gave an accentuated nod towards the godless Russian in the corner "—especially Kokorin here!"

The young man laughed to spite his soul and his dark eyes, so depressed and tormented, flashed with a divine spark of light, if only for an instant. "I'd hear it!"

The others answered him the same and insisted until he had agreed with eager heart to take up the old familiar task. He wrapped his Bible tight in his hands and stepped out in front of them. The group of prisoners waited in anticipatory silence as he tapped his fingers on the leather front and prayed so only God could hear. It had all become so strangely foreign to him. It had been so very long. In some ways, it felt, a lifetime.

In truth, he was happy beyond measure, but he knew not what to say. Still, he knew that this was from God, a gift — one way or the other. It had been a silent prayer of his, a desperate wish, to preach just one more time. He had thought the chance was lost for

him. There had been the order against speaking and then the drafting of the churchmen, and when he had made up his mind to work for the conspiracy, to him, that was the end. Who would hear an assassin preach, a traitor to the crown? Who could hear a man speak of love and peace who had sought to take another man's life, even the life of a tyrant, desperate for blood? It had been far outside of his hopes that he should be given the chance by men, much less by God. Yet, there he stood.

His thoughts wound back through the years. He remembered a conversation with his brother-in-law, how soft-hearted and earnest a man that he was. They had gathered late that night in the living room by the light of the flashing fire. He sat back in a comfortable chair with the solace of his best friend beside him. They three were discussing their work.

Hans stood staring deep into the flames, searching for their meaning, when at last his voice rose over the crackling wood. "What about Jesus' saying, 'Whoever takes up the sword will perish by the sword?'"

It was a grave consideration for each of them, but he knew he had to answer for it. It was something which had long been on his mind. "Yes. That is true, and we must allow it to be true. This time needs people who will do exactly that and let Jesus' saying be true. We take the sword and are prepared to parish by it. We are men guilty of blood, and we must accept that guilt as surely as we accept the call to intervene on the innocents' behalf."

He thought of Christ, counted among the guilty, numbered with the transgressors. There was a unique love which God had for the world, a love which was willing to be found guilty in the eyes of the world — mocked, rejected, pushed out of the world, and crucified by the very people he had come to save. Yes, there was a sermon there, one which had been

festering in his mind and had at times found its way out as poems or letters or notes, scribbled down on a page to be arranged at a later date. But that day it was a sermon, a sermon he had longed to preach, and he thanked God for the privilege to preach it.

"When we think of Easter, we think of a time when Death was overwhelmed and defeated, but if we backtrack just a little, we find a very different scene. We find a time when God himself was arrested and tried, falsely accused, judged by men, beaten, mocked, abused, stripped, scourged, and hung on a tree to die. Such is the hour of darkness.

"Satan thought it was a humiliation of him, but that suffering was the salvation of mankind. Why? Because this spotless, innocent man had taken the guilt of mankind willingly upon himself. His hands, unstained, were there stained with blood, because of the love that he had for the world. For the very people who hung him there and forced him from the world, he would die, and die there gladly.

"We know something of this suffering, of this love which God shares. As we hear the bombshells in the distance, as our expectant hearts jump with hope at the anticipation of freedom, we know that our lives could still be cut off at any moment, because this is the hour of darkness. Perhaps you have come fighting for your countries, for your loved ones, for your homes, but in doing so, you have fought to ransom the captives here, and now

here you are in the same set of circumstances as they are.

"Well, for Christ it was the same. He came to ransom every man, those who were condemned to death, but he is counted among the transgressors and he is himself condemned. He received the same punishment as those who truly had sinned, and he did so that their chains might be undone. We are healed by his stripes, through the nails which pierced him, and it is in the hour of darkness that we find our blessed hope in him.

"There are echoes of this hope today, echoes of deliverance, echoes of the resurrection. You can hear it in every blast of the artillery, that darkness has been defeated and the power of Death will soon be vanquished. Therefore, we submit ourselves to the will of God in hope, with the confidence that his love will bring an end to evil."

He went on and prayed, and he had scarcely finished his prayer when two men entered into

the room, strangers dressed in civilian clothes. They were wearing suits and ties much fresher than he wore, and the essence of evil raveled around them.

One of the two looked right at him and stared, his gaze like that of a predatory hunter, destined to kill. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer?"

He swallowed and straightened his stand. "Yes."

"Come with us," the man said tersely.

That meant only one thing: the



gallows. He bowed his head and drew his Bible close, considering the thing in silence. He thought that it was only through the love of life and the earth that one could really believe in the resurrection and a new world. Now he was confronted by the question, but his opinion would not change. He grabbed a hold of Best and walked him off into a corner. He would have to get a word back to his family.

"I would like to ask a favor."

Best dropped his sunken eyes in sadness. "Anything."

"When you get back to England, remember me to Bishop Bell. He's an

old friend. Please, tell him what happened to me. Ask him to inform my family, and when you do, I want you to tell him something from me. Please, tell him I said: This is the end. For me the beginning of life."

Best nodded and forced himself to smile. "Of course. Farewell, dear Bonhoeffer."

He smiled and gave the man a pat on his arm. "Safe home, dear Best, and may God keep you. Ending my life here in these conditions—" he glanced out the window and the light hit his eyes like a new day's promise "—that has a meaning that I think I can understand."

IMAM ALI (AS) AND IMAM HUSSEIN (AS): SAINTS AND GUIDES FOR ALL OF HUMANITY

Kawther Rahmani

*"Should poverty, illness and death not exist, man would not bow to anything."
- Imam Hussein (as)*

*"Be like the flower that gives off its fragrance even to the hand that crushes it."
- Imam Ali (as)*

Islam is composed of many arts, sciences and etiquettes. It is both a simple, Bedouin faith and an ethical, intellectual, philosophical, humanitarian way of living and being. One of the great etiquettes and qualities which is enjoyed upon the believers is honor and integrity. Honor is a seemingly rare quality these days. While the modern world can often seem like an increasingly dystopian Sci-Fi novel, we all can still hopefully recognize what is moral and good, and what is noble and kind.

These twin etiquettes of honor and integrity are the hallmarks of Islamic saints, the most important of whom are referred to in metaphorical allusions in the Quran, statements of faith in the call to prayer (*adhan*) and oft-told tales passed down through history not only

of honor and integrity, but bravery and courage in the face of mighty enemies, much like David, *alayhi salam* (peace be upon him), who is called *Dawoud* in Arabic, in his fight against Goliath (*Jalut*), in which he rose to the occasion at hand and fulfilled his God-appointed destiny.

From reading the Quran in melodious styles to announcing the beginning of prayer, recitation is one of the important arts in Islam. Besides the stylized and haunting musicality of conveying the basic readings of the Arabic words, to the layman there are different, seemingly cultural approaches to reading the Quran, such as the swift, angelic sounding Saudi style proliferating on the internet or the nuanced and sublime Egyptian style,

whose intense, mesmerizing vocal acrobatics pierce through recordings of all types and mediums, larger than life, life-changing, faith-affirming.

Recitation in Islam is a form of remembering and proclaiming many things, including faith, belief, holy scripture, or even the daily call to prayer. The recitation of the call to prayer is called the *adhan* (or *azan*), which comes from the Arabic root word '*adhina*, or to listen, hear or be informed about. By tuning everything out except its rhythms and words, one can experience a feeling of serenity and peace in place of anxiety and worry, reminding one not only of the time for prayer, but also to leave the world aside and return to Allah.

There are some regional differences in the melody in which the *adhan* is recited, but more importantly there are also some different key phrases between the Sunni and Shia *adhan*, one of which is controversial in both camps. In the *adhan*, God is said to be one and Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (pbuh), is said to be his prophet. The controversial and disputed phrase, *Aliyyun waliyullah*, which can mean that Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) is a spiritual helper or authority, refers to his closeness to God and being second in command to the Prophet (pbuh). However, the phrase can also mean that Ali (as) is a saint.

What is a saint? It is commonly known across all cultures and religions that saints are virtuous people that are close to God or who constantly search for His closeness in such a way that He is always near. In Islam, the word for saint is *wali*, or Friend of God. Sheikh Zoheir Ismail has defined saints in Shiite belief as "...people that have reached closeness to Allah due to their efforts in worship, developing their faith and knowledge, passing trials and tribulations and other such qualities" and has also written that "Shias not only accept the existence of saints but

advocate a path to realize that potential in every person. The most perfect Friends of God are the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and his Household (as) as well as the prophets (as) and all of those who follow their footsteps among the Friends of God."

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) briefly describes them further in a narration (*hadith*), "Be aware that the Friends of Allah are silent; their silence is remembrance, their look is meaningful, they speak and their speech is full of wisdom, and they walk and their walk is full of blessing. If there had not been fixed periods of life for each, their spirits would not have remained in their bodies, because of their eagerness for paradise and fear of chastisement."

While scholar and Sufi Martin Lings has written that "there is scarcely a region in the empire of Islam which has not a Sufi for its Patron Saint," the existence of and intercession of saints is still controversial in many branches of Islam. While other traditions such as Sufism and Classical Sunnism may agree with the notion of saints and their veneration, it is primarily Shiism which acknowledges the enduring high status of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), of which Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) is a part, as the foremost of creation which have no match, considering their intercession to be an integral part of the religion, and Ali (as) himself to be the foundation and pinnacle of spirituality.

Shia Muslims seek the intercession of saints like the Ahl al-Bayt (as) because of their high status with God. Their status is much, much greater than any other creation, so their intercession with God is sought by the faithful to help them in their worldly affairs and future afterlife.

Despite the immense trials and tribulations in which one can find oneself in their worldly affairs, it is the often the wisdom and sacrifices of the Prophet (pbuh) and his Holy Family, the Ahl al-Bayt (as), who experienced

even greater trials and tribulations, that helps to keep many Muslims strong and prevents them from casting their faith aside. The piercing truth of their statements, the way they lived their lives, their constant connection to God, their patience in adversity, their private and public prayers and petitions to God.

In Shia Islam, believers are admonished to recite constant blessings upon Prophet Muhammad and his Holy and Perfected Progeny (as) not only to thank them for their efforts and sacrifices on behalf of humanity and religion, but also to raise the spiritual status of the petitioner by invoking blessings on their names and receiving *barakat* (blessings) in return from Allah.

As mentioned previously, two such saints from the Ahl al-Bayt (as) are immortalized multiple times a day across the Shiite world in the call to prayer in which Muhammad (pbuh) is declared to be a prophet of Allah and Ali (as) is announced as as

spiritual authority or "Friend of God." A saint in Islam, as we said, is referred to as a "friend" or *wali* of God, but who is Ali (as), one of the foremost Friends of God of all time?

It is both a simple and complicated question.

In order to speak of him properly, one must mention his role in history, politics, justice, law, warfare, chivalry, and brotherhood, but even that is not all. One must mention where he was born – inside the Kaaba – and who he was related to, who hated him, who pushed him aside, who cursed him, who fought against him, and who cru-

elly killed him. His final words after being martyred and returning to his Lord were, "I have succeeded by the Lord (Nourisher and Sustainer) of the Kaaba (House of God)." Yet the orphans and the poor mourned the one who came every night to care for them, not knowing who he was, only that he no longer fed them and no one else came in his place. He was a successful warrior in defense of Islam and yet his literary abilities were such that a collection of his speeches, letters and aphorisms is called *Nahj al-Balagha*, or The Peak of Eloquence. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once said about him, "The truth is with Ali and Ali is with the truth."

Thus, it goes without saying that he is an important figure in Islam who cannot be overlooked, but the truth of the matter is that he often was and still is ignored both by a large majority of Muslims and scholars of both East and West. Even if we just briefly mention a portion of his ancestry and kin, his importance in Islam cannot be

denied, for he was the cousin, son-in-law, and friend of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the husband of his holy daughter Fatima (as), and the father of the noble youths, Hassan and Hussein (as).¹

Sunnis consider him to be the fourth caliph, while Shias consider him to be the first imam who was pushed aside after the death of his best friend, father-in-law and prophet by politics, greed and the desire for worldly status and leadership that usurped his Divinely-appointed office. The decision was not that of man, but of God alone, because sainthood and religious au-

... sainthood and religious authority in Islam are things which must be given by Allah Himself, they are not simply acquired by sheer force of will or desire.

thority in Islam are things which must be given by Allah Himself, they are not simply acquired by sheer force of will or desire. Allah alone knows our hearts, intentions and deeds, from where they derive and the states and stations in which they reside.

For those unfamiliar with him, and raised on pop culture mysticism, one might think of him as both a heroic or even Yoda-type figure, clearly exhibiting such astonishing abilities of insight, thought, rhetoric, valor, servitude, and spiritual understanding to such a heightened degree, that we can say, in the old 60s parlance, that his words *blow people's minds* to this very day. Where it came from – whether God or some secularist answer such as evolution or simple chance – is lost in the simple astonishment and speechlessness for the Worldly and even Otherworldly truths of which he speaks, which astound even the most committed of atheists or polytheists. His wisdom cannot be denied. For Shias, he is a Divinely-ordained protector of the Message from God, which began with the *Tawrat* of Moses (as) and the *Injeel* (Gospel) of Jesus (as) and was finalized in the Quran and the religion of Islam; he was blessed with bravery, courage, moral certitude, the sinlessness of infallibility and God-given wisdom in eternal service to his prophet and friend, Muhammad (pbuh).

At the age of ten, Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) accepted Islam, making him the third Muslim of his era, after Lady Khadija (Prophet Muhammad's wife, peace be upon her) and Prophet Muhammad himself (pbuh). For Shias, he is the Prince of Believers, unmatched in courage and bravery, except by his sons Hassan and Hussein (as) with the Prophet's daughter (as), and later, Abbas (as), with Umm al-Baneen (as) after the tragic demise of his first wife.

His bravery, honesty and integrity was such that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) utilized him in a myriad of ways

- from substituting him for himself in his bed when plots to kill him forced him to escape to another city to appointing him as a scribe of the revelations of the Holy Quran to writing down peace treaties, settling disputes, fighting in defensive wars to declaring him to be his successor after he died. When the Prophet needed him in battle, he called out, *Ya Ali Madad!* (O Ali, Help Me!), which, incidentally, Shia Muslims also use to cry out when in need to this very day.

Imam Ali (as) was not taken from humanity in battle, but in prayer, when the Judas-like figure of Ibn Muljam struck him in the head as he was at the mosque bowing his head in submission to Allah, conscious only of Him, in the early morning before dawn. Shias say the origin of modern terrorism lies in both what happened at the mosque that morning, and in what happened after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) died, due to revolt, vigilantism, and power-seeking in reaction to Ali (as) as a leader and guide of the nascent Islamic community, all despite being appointed by God in pre-eternity, and declared by Muhammad (pbuh) as his successor before a large crowd of believers in the hot desert sun on the way back to Medina after the Prophet's last hajj.

Sunnis often accuse the Shia of worshipping Ali (as) due to the sometimes extreme reverence that they exhibit towards him, while the Shia counter that they emphasize the name and holy personage of Ali (as) because he was ignored and overlooked, even cursed on the pulpit, despite being one of the pre-eminent believers of all time and despite his title of Prince of Believers (*Amir al-Mumineen*).

One of his famous quotes - "People are of two kinds: either your brothers in faith or your equals in humanity" - renders the idea that Islam equals terrorism an absolute lie. In fact, former United Nations Secretary-General

Kofi Annan mentioned this *hadith* as reflecting the general founding principles of the United Nations Charter of Rights at the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which took place at the University of Tehran in 1997, and where Imam Ali (as) was mentioned in the same vein as Confucius and Thomas Jefferson. Later, Mr. Annan called Imam Ali (as) the fairest governor in human history. In 2002, the United Nations Development Program released its Arab Human Development Report that advised Arab countries to take Imam Ali (as) as an example in establishing regimes based on justice and democracy and encouraged the seeking of knowledge.

It must be said that the Ahl al-Bayt (as), who have clearly been given special abilities by God, are not the beneficiaries of nepotism, but guides and preservers of age-old wisdom and traditions, who were created to be representatives of the Prophet (as) of the primordial religion ordained by God for all humanity from the beginning of time. For Muslims, Islam does not equal the exclusion of Jesus (as), but rather his inclusion, in an ongoing historical and religious narrative which begins and ends with Muhammad (pbuh) and the Ahlulbayt (as). Just as Joseph (as) was the successor of Jacob (as), no other living being but Ali (as) could fulfill that office which was originally designated by God. Anyone else would be a preposter. Anything else goes against the will of God.

The veil between truth and falsehood among human beings is not always as thin as we'd like to believe. A constant barrage of lies throughout history can obfuscate the truth, whether on a personal or communal level. It can often be hard to discern the truth, and thus the need for guides and protectors, for saints and sages, who can uphold the religion and who are eternally righteous, who can protect and explain tradition and guide the faithful.

Thus, we can see here, by briefly looking at the story of Joseph and Jacob (as), which is often mentioned by Muslim preachers and is also recounted in the Quran, that there is a parallel between the story of Joseph (as) and the story of Ali (as) and even that of the Shias themselves. Originally, there was only one Islam, but after the Prophet (pbuh) died, the desire for power, and the jealousy and hatred exhibited toward Ali (as) created schisms and factions that eventually turned into Sunni and Shia Islams.

Every member of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) is a personification of honor and integrity, but a special place is reserved in the heart of every Shia for Imam Ali (as) and his son Imam Hussein (as), who sacrificed his life in battle upon the plains of Karbala while standing up to an increasingly unjust and morally corrupt leadership, sixty-one years after the Prophet's (as) escape and migration from Mecca to Medina under the cover of night.

Imam Hussein (as) is so important to the legacy of Islam that there is a narration about him which is said about no other holy person in Islam - "Surely there exists in the hearts of all True Believers (*Mumineen*), with respect to the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, a fire that can never be extinguished." One can easily see this during the annual mourning seasons of his death across the entire world when hearts come alive with the fervor of his remembrance.

Imam Hussein (as) himself has said about Karbala:

"I have not risen out of self-interest, for the sake of seeking pleasure, corruption or oppression. I rise up only for the sake of the rectification of the nation of my grandfather, the Messenger of Allah."

Imam Hussein (as) was of noble birth, raised in the lap of holiness and sainthood of his father, Ali (as), his mother Lady Fatima (as) and his grand-

father, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). His heart and soul were blessed and purified by God, and he relied on Him completely, just as his father, mother, and grandfather had. He is quoted as saying in prayer, "O God, you are my trust in every calamity, you are my only hope in every hardship. You are the only promise in anxiety and distress in which the hearts become weak and human actions become feeble, in which one is deserted and forsaken by his friends."

Various other imams and members of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) have gone on record as saying that weeping over Imam Hussein (as) will cause God to erase and forgive all your sins, no matter how large or small, that one will be sinless upon return home from his visitation in Iraq, that one would be taken by the hand and led into paradise by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for men and Lady Fatima (as) for women, respectively, and that Imam Hussein (as) actually sees them weeping and seeks their forgiveness from God and asks his holy relations to seek forgiveness for them as well.

Still, generations later in Islamic history, descendants of Imam Hussein (as) and members of the Ahl al-Bayt, like Imam Sadiq (as), could not forget him, and would be reported to be found on the anniversary day of his death "pale and grief stricken, with tears streaming from his eyes like falling pearls." Imam Sadiq (as) himself has said that Imam Hussein (as) "sees those who come to his shrine and knows them by their names, their

father's names and their ranks in the eyes of Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, better than you know your own children."

There is a *hadith* narrated by Imam Ali (as) in which he recounted a story about Jesus (as) to a companion. Once, when he happened to pass by Karbala, Jesus (as) sat down and began to weep. His disciples who were observing him, followed suit and began weeping too, although they did not understand the reason for his sorrow. So they asked Jesus (as), "O Spirit of God! What is it that makes you weep?" Jesus (as) replied, "Do you know what

land this is?" The disciples said they did not. Then Jesus (as) informed them, "This is the land on which the son of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) shall be killed."

Not only do holy family members and prophets cry about his martyrdom, Imam al-Baqir (as), the father of Imam al-Sadiq (as), has said that "humans,

jinn, birds and wild beasts all mourned and wept over the tragedy which befell Hussein, son of Ali." Even the sky had cried for forty days over the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as), he has told us. His position was such that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said that Allah appointed four thousand anguished and grief stricken angels to stand by his grave and weep over him until the Day of Judgment.

Another member of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), Imam Ridha (as) has advised, "If it makes you happy (and you desire) to be with us in the elevated ranks of paradise, then be sad in our grief and

**“You are the only
promise in anxiety
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by his friends.”**

happy at our happiness." His day of martyrdom is such that believers have been advised to leave all their worldly activities behind to mourn and cry for him (along with the 72 other martyrs, which included many members of his family, friends and supporters (as), as well as his sole surviving son, Imam al-Sajjad (as) and the widows and orphans (as) left behind. Imam Ridha (as) has said that God will grant you the desires of this world and the Hereafter if one does so. Likewise, Imam al-Sajjad (as) used to say, "Every *mu'min* (believer), whose eyes shed tears upon the killing of Hussein ibn Ali (as) and his companions, such that tears roll down his cheeks, Allah shall accommodate him in the elevated rooms of Paradise."

Whether in the elevated rooms of paradise or the lower rooms of the lower world (*dunya*), grief against injustice and oppression in the symbolic sacrifice of Imam Hussein (as) is glorification, worship and *jihad*. Imam al-Sadiq (as) has said, "The breath of one who is aggrieved upon the injustice and oppression subjected to us is *tasbeeh* (glorification of Allah) and his grief for us is *ibadah* (worship of Allah) and his concealing of our secrets is *jihad* in the path of Allah." The Imam (as) then added, "This tradition should be written in gold."

Sometimes, despite or even because of one's best efforts, there can be a spiritual death instead of a spiritual re-awakening, when the dark night of the soul becomes a secret habit, and the promise of victory or paradise, even in this very life, becomes a distant memory, no matter how much effort one exerts in their own personal *jihad*. And then, just as one loses all hope in salvation, one's entire soul and being lights up like an exuberant galaxy of illuminated stars. One might hear the name of Ali (as), the eternal companion of nobility and righteousness, mentioned on someone's tongue or beautifully stylized in one of the

daily callings of the *adhan*, or the story of Hussein (as) mentioned in history, literature or song, and faith is returned - restored and renewed like a soaring eagle, transcending pain and doubt with certainty and truth until the next turn of the heart might test even this ecstasy.

And yet.

If one is strong and sincere enough, if one fights for their faith and still desperately cries out in petition to God, quoting, say, from the line in the famous supplicatory prayer of Imam Ali (as) called *Dua Kumayl*, "O He whose Name is a medicine and whose remembrance is healing!" Or one might call out into those nights and days of the soul which can envelop an individual and cloud and clothe them in darkness and oppression, "Ya Ali Maddad!" Or one might simply cry out, "Ya Hussein!"

Why? Because to say their names is to proclaim victory. To ask for their help is to ensure success. To celebrate their existence is to honor God. And what victory can be greater than that?

As Friends of God and as part of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), their missions were the same, although their assignments were different. Some of us may not know of Ali's place in history, but that of Hussein's can oftentimes be more obscure. It is said that Hussein (as) was the sacrificial lamb that was eventually given in place of Isaac (as) - the choice of following God's will at all costs is handed to Ishmael (as) in the Quran as he was Prophet Abraham's (as) rightful firstborn son according to Islam - and that it was only a matter of historical time for the lamb of Hussein (as) to be cruelly slaughtered on the heat-scorched plains of Karbala in Iraq when the very notions and practices of Islam were at stake.

One can think and speak of many, many things in relation to these two purified guides of humanity, but honor and integrity are the hallmarks of their

clan. Imam Ali (as) and Imam Hussein (as) are indeed two great saints of Islam who are immortalized forever, both openly and in secret, in the haunting lines of the Quran, in history and politics, and the ecstatic utterances of poets and religious singers who never tire of singing their praises or recording their sorrows, in the melo-

dious versions of *adhan* summoning the faithful in the call to prayer, and in the memories, hearts and minds of all people all over the world, whether Shia, Sunni, Sufi, Christian, Jew, Hindu or beyond, who know them and their stories and who are forever transformed upon hearing them.

This essay was written to explain the following poem to a non-Muslim audience who may not be familiar with these two holy personages that deserve a place in every believer's heart, no matter their religion or creed.

When honor wants to admire itself, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor wants to define itself, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor wants to show itself, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor has been dishonored, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor has been oppressed, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor has been forgotten, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor wants to be revived, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor wants to never cease, it calls out YA ALI!
When honor wants to be immortal, it calls out YA ALI!
But when honor witnesses the death of Ali, it calls out,
YA HUSSEIN!

Citations 1. These five saintly figures are collectively known as the Holy Five, *Panjatan Pak* (Purified Five) or *Ahl al-Kisa* (People of the Cloak), depending on the cultural tradition.

ST NICHOLAS OWEN: BUILDER OF PRIEST HIDES IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Tim Guile

In Elizabethan England it was against the law to practice the Catholic faith. Priests and sympathisers were arrested and treated brutally. Many died terrible deaths for their faith. Ingenious craftsmen were required to design and construct secret spaces to hide a priest and his 'massing-stuff.' These secret places were built in fireplaces, attics and staircases and were largely constructed between the 1550s and the time of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. Sometimes other building alterations would be made at the same time as the priest's holes so as not to arouse suspicion. The priest hole or hide, was usually tiny, with no room to stand up or move around. During a raid the priest would have to stay as still and silent as possible, for days at a time if necessary. Food, drink and basic sanitation had to be provided in these hiding places. During the reign of Elizabeth I, Jesuits priests were feared as enemies of the state and hunted down by agents of the Privy Council and by magistrates and pursuivants. Catholic priests moved from Catholic household to Catholic household, often pre-

tending to be tutors, visitors or distant relations. Wealthy families built hiding places in their homes so that when the priest hunters came calling there was somewhere to hide their secret guest. Many manor houses employed mainly Catholic servants and retainers in order to protect the priests and the families. It was not unknown for disloyal servants to denounce their masters.

The authorities began to launch unannounced raids on the homes of known Catholic sympathisers. This often involved the priest-hunters known as pursuivants measuring the footprint of the house from the outside and the inside to see if they tallied; they would count the windows outside and again from the inside; they would tap on the walls to see if they were hollow and they would tear up floorboards to search underneath. Another tactic would be for the pursuivants to pretend to leave or quickly return and see if the priest would then emerge from his hiding place. Once detected and captured, priests could expect to be imprisoned, tortured, and put to death.

One of the priests who was arrest-

ed near Oxford was Fr Edmund Campion who is now a saint. At the time, one of Campion's servants, an Oxford born carpenter and joiner who abandoned his apprenticeship to follow Campion was present at his arrest according to Mattias Tanner in his book on Jesuit martyrs published in 1675. (Reynolds, T, St Nicholas Owen, Gracewing 2014, p25) Whether or not this is accurate, what we do know is that Nicholas Owen, who joined the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, as a lay brother, went on to construct the best examples of priest hides in England. It is impossible to know how many priest hides were constructed and where they were all located as, at the time, it was highly secret information. We know that some hiding places in the English midlands have been attributed to Nicholas Owen, who devoted the greater part of his life to constructing these places to protect the lives of persecuted priests.. With incomparable skill Owen knew how to conduct priests to a place of safety along secret passages, to hide them between walls and in hidden recesses. With great ingenuity, he so disguised the entrances to these as to make them most unlike what they really were. Unsurprisingly, he kept these places so close a secret that he would never disclose to another the place of concealment of any Catholic let alone an agent of the crown. He alone was both their architect and their builder, and their location was secret. One thing is certain, Owen's skilfully crafted priest holes saved many lives during this period of religious turmoil and persecution.

Owen was born in Oxford in 1562, one of four sons of Walter Owen. Their father was a carpenter and Nicholas followed him into the trade. In 1577, Nicholas Owen was apprenticed to the Oxford joiner William Conway and learned the skills that he later put to use designing and building secret hiding places. His brother John became a

priest, his brother Walter died in 1591 and third brother, Henry, was apprenticed to a printer and engaged in the secret printing of Catholic literature. By the time he was in his mid-twenties, after the arrest and death of Fr Camion, he had apparently abandoned his apprenticeship as a joiner and taken up working for Father Henry Garnet, a well-known Catholic priest. He had also been accepted as a lay brother in the Jesuit order by then. Owen was a short man who was said to have suffered from ill health including a limp from a poorly set bone and a hernia. Despite his physical disabilities, he secretly travelled from manor house to manor house constructing priest holes throughout the midlands and beyond. He used pseudonyms such as Little John and few knew his real identity. His modus operandi was to work entirely on his own by candlelight at night to create his hiding places. Many of the priest holes were so well concealed that they were only discovered much later.

Owen's favoured locations appear to have been behind fireplaces and under stairs. The pursuivants were men who could judge if an interior wall looked shorter than an exterior wall, so Owen had to be very careful as to where he located his priest holes. Sometimes he created a secret space which could be quickly found but was not the real hiding place for a priest.

By 1588, he was in the employment of the Jesuit priest, Fr Henry Garnet and Owen later himself became a Jesuit lay brother. He travelled from house to house, accepting only a bed and food as reward for his work and in a letter dated 1596, Father Garnet speaks of, "a carpenter of singular faithfulness and skill who has travelled through almost the entire kingdom and, without charge, has made for Catholic priests hiding places where they might shelter the fury of heretical searchers". (Letter dated 1596 by Fr

Henry Garnet)

The work of 'Little John' is particularly impressive when one considers that he was of diminutive size and walked with a limp after his leg was badly set following a fracture when a horse fell on him. He also had a hernia, but none of this prevented him from working alone and in secret,

usually during the night, to break down stone walls and reconstruct them in such a way as to create secret places that were almost impossible to find if you did not know where to look.

He made false entrances in fireplaces and staircases, trap doors, sliding doors and in one case at Speke Hall, near Liverpool, a crawl space above a ceiling accessed by a rope ladder in a small space at the side of a bedroom. He is said to have favoured sites away from outside walls and seems to have had the ability to think in three dimensions and in curves. Owen's favoured locations seem to have been behind fireplaces and under stairs. In order to provide cover for his principal work of constructing priest-holes, Owen would always engage himself with other obvious works by day, only conducting the real work by night. This in itself must have been exhausting, not to mention that he would generally work unaided and would be engaged in substantial physical work. Whilst the

skill, he knew how to conduct priests to a place of safety along subterranean passages, to hide them between walls and bury them in impenetrable recesses, and to entangle them in labyrinths and a thousand windings." Furthermore, Owen's hides were always different, discovering one in one house would not help a searcher to find a hide in another house.

The pursuivants employed craftsmen who could judge if an interior wall looked shorter than an exterior wall, so Owen had to be very careful as to where he located his priest holes. He used false perspectives and illusion, now more often employed by stage magicians, to hide the priest holes.

Some priests were discovered and arrested, but many more escaped detection thanks to his ingenuity and skills. The hiding places at Harvington Hall in Worcestershire are the finest surviving examples in England, and four of them, all sited round the Great Staircase, show the trade-marks of Owen, the

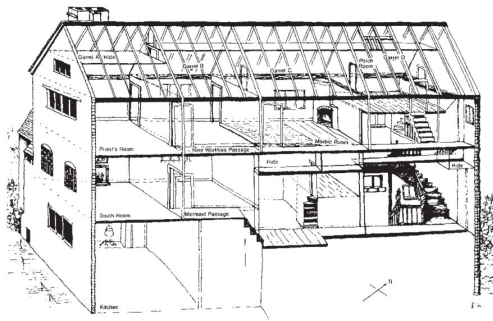


Figure 1: Cross section diagram of Harvington Hall showing location of priest holes.

Courtesy of Harvington Hall.



Figure 2: Location of a priest hole under the stairs at Harvington Hall.

Courtesy of Harvington Hall.

hides built by others were often simple trapdoors or hidden doors, covered with furnishings or other floor coverings, Owen's constructions are recognised because of the ingenuity of their construction.

Alan Fea's book *Secret Chambers and Hiding Places* quotes an authority saying of his work, "With incomparable

master builder. He was known to have stayed there around 1588. Baddesley Clinton in Warwickshire was a safe house for Catholic priests and home of the Jesuit priest Henry Garnet for almost 14 years. It too boasts several priest holes built by Nicholas Owen. One hiding place, just 3' 9" high (114cm), is in the roof space above a closet off a bedroom. Another is in the corner of the kitchen where visitors to the house today can see through to the medieval drain where Father Garnet was hidden. Access to this hiding place was through the garderobe shaft in the floor of the room above. A hiding space beneath the library floor was accessed through the fireplace in the Great Parlour. They were sometimes built as an offshoot from a chimney. Another favourite entrance was behind panelling such as at Ripley Castle in North Yorkshire. Others were adapted from garderobes for example at Chesterton Hall, near Cambridge. Other places where known examples of his priest holes were at Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk, Coughton Court and Baddesley Clinton, both in Warwickshire. At Hoghton Tower, in Lancashire, one priest hole was only discovered when an electrician fell into it, and at Astley Hall, Chorley in Lancashire a priest hole was discovered as recently as 2004. There is evidence

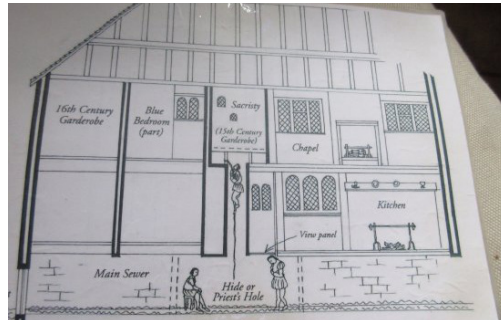


Figure 3: Cross section of Baddesley Clinton showing location of a priest hole in the sewer.

Courtesy of the National Trust.

and cunning they were able to meet up. The plan was to rescue them from the roof of the Cradle Tower by means of a rope strung across the moat from the roof of the tower. After a failed first attempt to manoeuvre a boat into position, the rescuers tried again the following night. Waiting again until they had been locked in the tower together, Gerard and Arden climbed onto the roof. Throwing down a weighted cord they raised up a rope that had been tied to it by the rescuers below. The plan had been to slide down the rope but the angle it made meant that instead the escapers had to pull themselves hand over hand along its length. Fr Gerard was later smuggled out of England and made his way to Rome where ended his days.

that Owen also stayed at Sawston Hall and Huddington Court in Worcestershire.

Nicholas Owen is also credited with planning the daring escape of Fr John Gerard and another Catholic, John Arden from the Tower of London in 1597. They were being held in one of the towers but by means of bribery

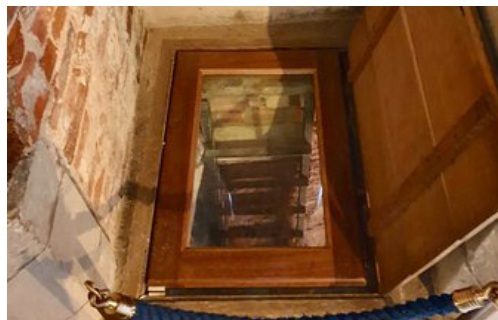


Figure 4: Entrance to priest hole at Baddesley Clinton.

Courtesy of the National Trust.

Owen once had had a very narrow escape at Stoke Poges while engaged in constructing priests' holes at the Manor House. The house, like many such houses was secluded and surrounded by woods. But this was not

the only advantage. The walls were very thick and offered lots of opportunities for Owen. Whilst he was busily burrowing into the masonry a search party arrived; but somehow or other he slipped between their fingers and got away under cover of the surrounding woods.

The authorities continued to search for Catholic priests up and down the country. These searches could go on for many days and all the time the priest in his hidden chamber had to remain still and silent faced with either discovery or starvation. Surprisingly, there is no record of Harvington Hall ever having been searched. The centre of the operation for hiding priests in Worcestershire and the Welsh Marches was Hindlip Hall, the home of Humphrey's friend Thomas Habington, where the Jesuit Edward Oldcorne arrived in 1590. Although Hindlip was demolished in 1814, descriptions of the hides there show a striking similarity to those that survive at Harvington. That is unlikely to be an accident. It was there that Garnet, Owen and Oldcorne were all captured in 1606, just after the Gunpowder Plot. According to Allan Fea (*Secret Chambers and Hiding Places*, Chapter 1) The walls of the mansion were literally riddled with secret chambers and passages. There was little fear of being run to earth with hidden exits everywhere, or so they



Figure 5: Entrance to a priest hole at Oxburgh Hall.

Courtesy of the National Trust.

must have thought. Wainscoting, solid brickwork, or stone hearth were used as possible places to hide a priest. Tensions were heightened as a result of the failed plot and the authorities were out to get as many Catholic sympathisers as they could. The house was surrounded by a hundred men

at daybreak on Monday, the twentieth November and the searchers began to rip the house apart. Owen may have been starved out of his own hide on the fourth day of a twelve-day search, during which he and a companion, Ralph Ashley, had nothing to eat except one apple between them. They seem to have been discovered, creeping along a gallery, possibly to distract attention from the two priests, Fr Garnet and Fr Oldcorne, who were also in hiding there. But after eight days, the priests were found and also arrested. There would be no escape for Nicholas Owen. Fr Oldcorne and Ralph Ashley were later executed.

When he heard the news of Owen's capture, Lord Cecil, the Secretary of State, wrote 'Great joy was caused all through the kingdom by the arrest of Owen, knowing his skill in constructing hiding-places, and the innumerable number of these dark holes which he had schemed for hiding priests throughout the kingdom.' (<https://elizabethashworth.com/2015/05/13/>)



Figure 6: Entrance to a priest hole in the tower at Coughton Court.

Courtesy of the National Trust.

nicholas-owen-builder-of-priest-holes/)

After his arrest Owen was transferred to the Tower of London and it was here he was tortured following Lord Cecil's instructions that, 'the secret is to be wrung from him'. Although it was illegal to torture disabled people, he was first manacled by the wrists and suspending in chains from a ceiling. This resulted in his hernia bulging from his body to such an extent that his intestines were protruding, so Topcliffe, the man tasked with his torture, ordered that an iron plate be strapped to him to hold them in. It was this plate that eventually killed him.. James I's agents wanted to know everything he knew about the Recusant network of safe houses. He would not tell them. He told them what they already knew and that was all. According to the Jesuits in Britain website, we have two records of Owen's confessions under torture. For example, on March 1, 1606: He confesses that he has known and sometimes attended Henry Garnett, the Provincial of the Jesuits for around four years. He confesses that he was at the house of

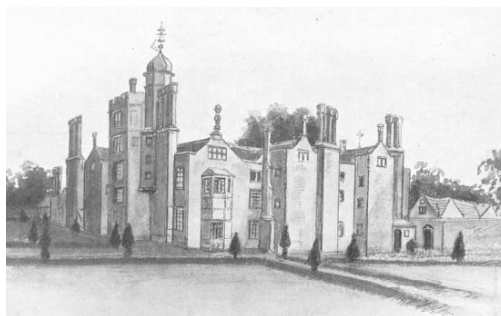


Figure 7: Hindlip Hall

Courtesy of Wikipedia.



Nicolaus Odöenus Anglus Soc:IESU, odio Religionis Catholicae tormentis enechus Londini in Anglia. A. 1606. 12 Nouembris.

Figure 8: The torture of St Nicholas Owen

Courtesy of Libby Ashworth.

Thomas Throgmorton called Coughton at the beginning of November last year, when the Lady Digby was there and by the watch that was in town they knew that Robert Catesby, Thomas Percy, and the rest of the gunpowder plotters were up in arms. That on All Saints Day last year,

Garnett said Mass at Coughton House, and that at that Mass there were around half a dozen people. That Henry Garnett was at Henlipp, the house of Thomas Abington some six weeks before he was apprehended and Hall the Jesuit was there about three days before the house of Mr Abington was

searched. (<https://www.jesuit.org.uk/search/Nicholas%20owen>)

Refusing to divulge any information he was racked and the result was that the plate cut into the hernia and ruptured it causing him to bleed to death in his cell in the early hours of second of March 1606. He took his knowledge of his priest hides to the grave, having divulged nothing to his torturers.

The official stance was that he had committed suicide by ripping himself open with the knife given him to eat his meat. It is an

unlikely story as the torture had left him unable to use his hands at all and suicide, for a Catholic, was a mortal sin that would have endangered his soul. Since they had learned nothing from Owen and had killed him, the authorities covered up what they had done by holding an inquest and issuing the verdict that Nicholas Owen had killed himself.

One can note the irony in trying to excuse the futile death of a man committed to the truth with a lie. As Father John Gerard later commented in his *Autobiography*, they added, "calumny to murder," and that they had tortured him cruelly. Gerard comments that if Owen had not injured his neighbour by revealing secrets that would harm them, he certainly would not "offend God by self-murder" concluding that the "Day of Judgment will refute this calumny as well as others." (Gerrard, J, *Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*)

He was buried in the grounds of the Tower of London. Fr Gerard said of him 'I verily think no man can be said to have done more good of all those who laboured in the English vineyard. He was the immediate occasion of saving the lives of many hundreds of persons, both ecclesiastical and secular.' It is true that many priests must have owed him their lives and many Catholic families were able to receive

the sacraments from a priest because of his work. He was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1929 and canonized by Paul VI as one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales in 1970. His Feast is celebrated on the 23rd January in the Diocese of Birmingham and 22nd March elsewhere and there is a church dedicated to him in Lancashire. In one of the odd twists of time, that many of the houses in which St. Nicholas Owen built priest holes are now tourist or pilgrimage sites such as Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk, Speke Hall near Liverpool, Baddesley Clinton and Harvington Hall in the midlands. Visitors can actually crawl into priest holes and see how it would have felt. From a place of desperate refuge, it has become a highlight on a day trip or pilgrimage. Next time you are visiting a Tudor house and you are shown a priest hole, spare a thought for Nicholas Owen for his ingenious work and for his horrific and painful death for his steadfast faith. Fr Garnet, a priest he worked for, said of him: "I verily think no man can be said to have done more good of all those who laboured in the English vineyard. He was the immediate occasion of saving the lives of many hundreds of persons, both ecclesiastical and secular." (<https://www.jesuit.org.uk/profile/nicholas-owen-sj>)

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WOLVES

Hasan Shikoh

Wolves. Everywhere, there were packs of snarling wolves...

Askari realised that his breathing was shallow, and his cheeks were wet with tears.

Why? he thought. What's happened to me?

Then the commotion in the Oculus Rift pulled him back into its realm.

"Husayn is dead. Husayn has been slain!" soldiers were shouting to their comrades across the battlefield, their swords and lances raised high.

Within moments, their cries of victory marked the air.

Then there was commotion on both sides.

Wails from Husayn's camp rose over news of his killing.

Across the killing field, Umar bin Saad's horse-mounted troops broke into a gallop towards Husayn's encampment, kicking up a pall of sand in their wake. In their blind lust for booty, they trampled on the bodies of Husayn's dead comrades lying bare on the desert floor.

Before Husayn's women and children could even begin to collect themselves, the enemy had raided their camp.

Swords flashed. Torches blazed. Tents burned.

Zaynab, dizzy but now back on her

feet, scrambled to shield the camp's remaining children. Other women hugged one another from the inroads of the zealous soldiers and their battle steeds.

A beautiful child with curly locks stumbled out of a burning tent. A horseman galloped immediately towards him. A silver blade flashed in the slowly dying afternoon light. Blood spurted against the backdrop of a blur of heatwaves spewing from another gutting tent. The head with the curly locks tumbled forth. The hurtling headless body tripped over the guy line of the tent. A woman in the background, watched, her hands on her cheeks, mouth agape, letting out a blood curdling scream.

One among many others on that dreadful afternoon.

Her legs wilted. Her knees hit the sand.

A man with a blazing torch and a whip darted towards her from behind. He struck her with his whip, and then turned his horse back towards her to pull her black chador from her head. She pleaded, implored, protested for him not to do so. But to no avail.

He kicked her face. She fell forward from her knees in slow motion,

face first onto the sand. Her dying wail got muffled under the drumming of hooves.

All around, the scene of soldiers on foot and horseback burning down tents, slapping children, slicing bodies, snatching booty continued for a while.

'Wolves. Everywhere, there were packs of snarling wolves attacking Husayn's women and children in wild

abandon,' the weathered, heartbroken voice in the Oculus Rift said.

A chill ran down Askari's spine. He could not bear to witness the scenes of the humiliation and pillage any further. He pulled the Oculus Rift off his head.

Who really was this Husayn, son of Ali? he wondered...

Author's note: You can hear an audio version of this piece via the following link:
<https://youtu.be/uUoJkactxKk>



FEASTS OF SAINTS

Amanda Pizzolatto

As the year draws to an end and the holidays loom ever larger on the horizon, starting with Thanksgiving, I would like to talk about some big holidays in Europe that take place in autumn before we leave the season behind for the year. Two of these holidays are about two saints, St. Michael and St. Martin, both saints associated with soldiers and horses.

St. Michael's feast day, better known as Michaelmas, is mostly referenced in older English novels, like the works of Jane Austen, when the celebrations of the holiday were fairly big. Full feasts and balls were given in honor of the day. Food such as goose and blackberries were the main focus of the meal, especially as blackberries were in their ripe season. An old legend states that after the feast of St. Michael, September twenty-ninth, the devil ruins the blackberries. More like they got mildewy and old, but saying the devil ruins them is more fun. And being the holiday that takes place not long after the autumn equinox, it was also the date when many people would pay their bills. Every quarter, the bills were due, so the closest holiday to the seasonal change was chosen for bill payment. But once that was done, the party commenced. Eating,

dancing, games, the typical party fare, all proceeded by a Mass to commemorate the bravery of the angel who stood up to an angel greater than him for the love of God.

St. Martin's feast day on November eleventh, or better known as Martinmas, was, at first, a strictly French holiday since St. Martin is one of the patrons of France. Then it spread to other parts of Europe and it became celebrated in a way quite similar to the way Americans celebrate Thanksgiving, as a kind of harvest festival. The typical feasting and merrymaking was involved along with Mass at the beginning of the day. And while St. Martin is associated with soldiers, since he was one, he is best remembered for cutting his cloak in half and giving it to a poor man. Later, the poor man is seen in his bed and is revealed to be Christ in disguise, thanking him for the kindness. Martin leaves the military not long after that and becomes a priest, eventually becoming bishop of Tours and later patron of all of France.

While many do not associate the first half of December with being still in autumn, it technically is since the first day of winter isn't until December twenty-first. As such, these next two holidays are still considered autumnal

holidays.

The first is the feast of St. Nicholas, celebrated on December sixth. The Turkish saint behind the legend of Santa Claus is claimed by people who celebrate his feast that the saint delivers presents on his feast day rather than on Christmas. The reason why he became such a large character in the Christmas sphere was because of a legend that he helped three young women and their father in a time of need. When he grew up he became a priest, and then a bishop, and continued his generosity. After his passing, the legend spread to other parts of the world, where they eventually got mixed up with traditional Father Christmas/Winter imagery, eventually becoming the Santa Claus we know today.

The final feast day, that takes place on December thirteenth, belongs to St. Lucy, a fan favorite of the Northerners, specifically Sweden and Norway. They celebrate her feast with one of the daughters (typically the eldest) dressing up in a white dress, a red sash, and a wreath crown with lit candles. She serves the family coffee and baked

goods such as saffron bread and ginger biscuits to commemorate the girl martyr so closely associated with eyes. This is because, according to legend, her eyes were destroyed as part of her torture, but God gave her back the use of her sight, converting several people to the faith. But eventually her persecutors did martyr her, and many celebrate her loyalty to God by observing her feast day.

These are just the four biggest feast days celebrated in the autumn, next to All Saints day, or Hallowmas or Hallowtide for the three day holiday. There are others, like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Therese of Lisieux in October, which holds some significance on the calendar, but aren't quite as big of celebrations as the four listed. Most countries have their own saints that they celebrate the feasts of that not many others, if any, do catch on and celebrate as well. As such, you will find the big celebration of certain feasts only in one country or another, while others are celebrated around the world due to immigration. Which is the beauty of cultures sharing and growing together as we walk into the future.

JOHN WESLEY'S SAVANNAH MISSION AND THE ROOTS OF METHODISM

Wesley Hutchins

John Wesley is known for his role in founding and being a leader of the Methodist movement, alongside George Whitefield and his brother Charles, which today claims approximately 80 million adherents. However, before Methodism became an independent religious force, it was a movement within the Church of England and John Wesley was an Anglican priest who had been educated at Oxford, where he also lectured and organized the Holy Club with his brother Charles. Dedicated to the pursuit of a devout Christian life, members of the club engaged in daily prayer, communion, and biblical readings, along with fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. They also visited prisoners, as well as preached, educated, and relieved debtors, and cared for the sick. The methodical way in which they carried out their practices gained them the nickname "methodist", and Wesley himself referred to the name in a letter, whilst a published pamphlet described the group as the "Oxford Methodists".

The turning point in Wesley's life, which led to Methodism taking root into what is today, was probably when

he was invited by General James Edward Oglethorpe to become rector of the new Anglican parish in the colony he had recently founded in Savannah, Georgia. He became a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and, along with his brother Charles, joined Oglethorpe on his second voyage to Savannah in 1735. During the journey, Wesley came into contact with a group of Moravian Christians, whose sense of piety and inner spiritual strength made an impression on him, especially when other passengers panicked during a storm which had broken a mast off of the ship, but they calmly sang and prayed.

Upon arriving in Georgia on February 6, 1736 – almost three years to the day of its founding by Oglethorpe – Wesley led his fellow passengers in a prayer of Thanksgiving on what is now Cockspur Island. About a month later on March 7th, he conducted his first formal church service and preached his sermon at the site now occupied by the US Customs House at the corner of Bay and Bull streets. Even though a lot was set aside for a church in Oglethorpe's planned city, Wesley con-

ducted services from his parsonage at Abercorn and St. Julian streets on Reynolds Square – now occupied by the Oliver Sturges House – and at the town hall on Wright Square at Bull and York streets, where there now stands a post office and courthouse. Each of these sites has a historical marker to commemorate their association with Wesley and his time in the city.

Wesley's ministry was supposed to be primarily about evangelizing the local Native American Indians, but a shortage of clergy necessitated that he spend most of his time ministering to European settlers in the city, and he served as the parish priest for Christ Church. In this position, communion attendance increased and Wesley was successful in establishing one of the first Sunday schools in America. He also oversaw the publication of a *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, the first Anglican hymnal published in America, and the first of many hymnals Wesley published throughout his life. However, he became increasingly unpopular with the congregation, due in part to his insistence on strict discipline.

Such discipline carried over to his relationship with Sophia Hopkey, whom he had met soon after arriving in the colony. It devolved into a strained courtship as Wesley hesitated to marry her, because he believed his

first priority was to be a missionary to the Native Americans and he desired to practice clerical celibacy. Eventually, the relationship had become completely soured between the two and Hopkey ended up marrying another man, William Williamson. This resulted in Wesley concluding that she was no longer pious in practicing the Christian faith, and using a strict interpretation of the *Book of Common Prayer*, he denied

her communion when she failed to notify him in advance of her intention to take communion. Refusal of this sacrament had the effect of tainting her character, and legal proceedings were brought against Wesley for defaming her in public. He believed the matter to be of an ecclesiastical nature, and therefore refused to recognize the authority of the secular court, but this only further eroded his standing among the population.

By now, John Wesley had been in Savannah for nearly two years; the length of time and the almost continuous struggles of this missionary journey were taking their toll. He had done better than his brother Charles, who left after only six months in his roles as General Oglethorpe's secretary and the parish priest at Fort Frederica, seventy-five miles south of the city on St. Simon's Island. Plagued by illness and difficulties with the colonists, he had



sailed back to Britain in August 1736 in a general state of discouragement. Over a year later, John was reaching the end of his own tether. On top of the struggles he too had been having with colonists, he had failed to make a missionary impact on the Native Americans, and he started to question the state of his own soul – writing in his journal journal, "I came to convert the Indians, but, oh, who will convert me?"

Finally, on December 2, 1737, Wesley departed Savannah and returned to Britain. He would later say that his twenty-two months in the city had amounted to no more than him "beating the air", but it would appear that the issues that he faced there forced him to confront spiritual and theological questions, and his interactions with the Moravians were instrumental in providing the answers he sought. Within a year of returning home, he underwent an evangelical conversion

within a Moravian religious society on Aldersgate Street in London, where he recounted that his heart had been "strangely warmed" with the reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, which described the "change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ."

In the aftermath of this "Aldersgate Experience" and armed with the belief in personal salvation through trust in Jesus Christ, Wesley, with his brother Charles and others, would go on to preach and successfully organize a network of Methodist groups and societies throughout Great Britain and Ireland. These would flourish and spread across the British Empire, until by the time of Wesley's death 1791, Methodism had become an independent force unto itself outside of Anglicanism, and this development has been a legacy of John Wesley's missionary journey to Savannah.

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NEXT ISSUE

Coming up next... a collection of medieval themed short fiction and poetry, to be published in print!

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