

*“O Blessed  
Virgin Mary,  
Mother of God  
and our most  
gentle Queen  
and Mother,  
look down in  
mercy upon  
England thy  
Dowry.”*

# Dowry

Summer 2024  
Issue N°62



*Picture: Some of the First Year FSSP seminarians.  
Pray for the 568 members of the FSSP, including our  
200 seminarians and 368 priests ministering in 249  
Mass centres (of which 7 in the UK & Ireland) across  
146 dioceses on 5 continents, and for the 9546 members  
of the Confraternity of St Peter. (© Alban Crass)*

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**Support our Apostolate**

## **For your diaries:**

Annual *Juventutem* summer weekend for young  
adults 18-35 at Ampleforth Abbey,  
2-4 August. Info/bookings:  
[juventutemldn@gmail.com](mailto:juventutemldn@gmail.com)

Summer Camps in the Peak District:  
Boys 5-10 August; Girls 12-17 August.

Clergy & Religious Retreat 14-18 October  
in Stonyhurst. Bookings:  
[christianheritagecentre.com/events/in-the-footsteps-of-the-great-saintly-priests/](http://christianheritagecentre.com/events/in-the-footsteps-of-the-great-saintly-priests/)

# Editorial: A Stir Is Being Felt



No *dead* bones are those relics displayed across the walls, in the crypt of Tyburn Convent. Unlike the feet of busy Londoners running on the pavement right outside, the martyrs' limbs lie still in their caskets. Immobile as they seem, though, yet they live, for motion is not the measure of true life. Light vibrations travel across the floor of the same Tyburn crypt, every time beneath its tiles trainloads of commuters speed toward Marble Arch underground station. One would to God that every passenger be in the state of grace. Otherwise they hasten not to success but to perdition. Divine grace is the true life of souls, and because the martyrs died with ardent charity, their mortal remains still convey life supernatural to those who seek God.

So did twenty-three young ladies experience last April on a day of vocational discernment spent in that hallowed crypt. When they knelt down as a circle around the plaque of the Tyburn Tree, our fathers' gibbet, they knew that the martyrs' blood had not dried up. No, absorbed in the very Blood of Christ, King of Martyrs, that blood still runs through his mystical Body, Holy Church, carrying supernatural impulses to comfort weary souls, enthuse heavy ones, and muster legions of meek and brave disciples. So did thirteen young men experience last February when spending a full weekend of vocational discernment at Buckden Towers, the last-but-one prison of heroic and most-loved Queen Catherine of Aragon. When walking up the stairs she had used daily on her way to chapel to pray for her

adulterous husband, our young men felt inspired by Queen Catherine's courage and enheartened by her fidelity.

What will those young men and women do with their lives in 2024 England? How will they respond to the gentle call of the Shepherd of souls? Hark! Listen... A stir is being felt. For all the lethargy affecting numerous souls, despite paralysis in many minds and hearts, now is a time of grace, now are they answering 'Yes'. Some are getting married, founding large families, our domestic churches. Others fall their

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Now is a time of grace, now  
are they answering 'Yes'.

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faces flat on sanctuary slabs, for religious profession or priestly ordination. One, a young man once part of our London youth group, has now stood up a priest and is soon to be sent to minister in England. Another is a young woman, once part of the same London group, who had taken the veil in a convent across the ocean. Divine Providence now sends her back to English shores with several of her sisters to revive Colwich Abbey, once founded by descendants of St Thomas More and now about to become the first traditional Benedictine foundation in this land in decades. In addition, every year several young adults from these Isles enter traditional seminaries, noviciates and convents; while families started two, five or ten years ago seek holy baptism for their

many young children after the parents often born outside the Church have entered Christ' blessed ark of salvation.

Seeking graces from God while offering blisters and sweat, hundreds of our young Brits walked last Pentecost on pilgrimage to Chartres among eighteen thousand pilgrims their age; while others support smaller but growing UK pilgrimages, such as the Scottish 'Two Shrines' one from Edinburgh to St Andrews, the Kentish one from Ramsgate to Aylesford, or the East Anglian one from Ely to Walsingham. Last 24<sup>th</sup> May one hundred and twenty young adults attended the twentieth anniversary of the *Juventutem* movement, whose monthly groups attract one hundred and ten participants across the country, while about a hundred will meet on a summer weekend at Ampleforth Abbey (2-4 August).

Yes, the bones of our fathers in the Faith still live. They died for love of God Almighty and for Holy Church, in brotherly witness to their countrymen, while interceding for us their spiritual offspring. If our times are evil, or challenging at least, theirs were not easier, but how glorious! Let us trust in the Lord while doing our little best: *The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest* (Mt 9:37-38).

29 June 2024.

Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP  
Superior of the FSSP England  
Apostolate □

# Traffic Island Becomes Treasure Island

*A participant reflects on her day of vocational discernment spent in London among twenty-three young ladies*

A lunchtime passer-by near

Marble Arch on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> April might well have been surprised at the sight – a priest, black cassock fluttering slightly in the breeze, leading some



twenty young women towards an insignificant concrete island on the corner of Bayswater and Edgware Road. On closer inspection, the onlooker might have asked, what are those beads they're holding? What are they all muttering? And then – wonder of wonders – they form a circle and kneel, on the pavement, and just... pray?

Yes, and with very good reason. Myself and the other young women had come to Tyburn Convent from near and far, seizing the rare opportunity to spend an entire day discovering God's plan for our lives.

The day began with informal conversation over refreshments, and proceeded with an introduction to vocation in general and holy Matrimony. A beautiful Low Mass followed in the stillness of the crypt – for some of us this was the first experience of the Traditional Mass, and for all it was a welcome moment of silence in which to hear the Lord speaking to our hearts. After a picnic lunch in Hyde Park, we prayed the Rosary and the Litany of the Saints

at the Tyburn Tree, that is, the site where the triangular gallows stood where many English martyrs died. We invoked those who gave their life that we might discern God's call for us in modern-day Britain.

In the afternoon, Fr de Malleray spoke on the three vows of Religion and on the distinction between contemplative and apostolic religious life, after which a Sister of Tyburn Convent gave us a glimpse into her daily life as a Benedictine. We were surprised to learn that her vocation had taken her from Australia to London and South America – enough to give London's worldly globetrotters a run for their money!

In one of the most moving moments of the day, Father invited us to consider what the world would look like with more religious, bringing the light of Christ into classrooms, hospitals and care homes. What a great joy to be a sign of God's love to the world! Or perhaps – as he suggested of the thousands who passed beneath us on the tube, unknowingly sustained by the

Sisters' prayers – to be invisible intercessors for the invisible masses, intimately united with them in longing for the invisible God.

When asked what she had seen women struggle with when pursuing a religious vocation, the Sister

responded that it was often obedience and an attachment to their phones. Nods all round. And yet, I thought, there is freedom in undivided openness to the will of God, and in detachment from the world so as to be, paradoxically, closer to its heart. And as the Sister spoke about the Divine Office, I thought, what greater gift than to be able to pray for all those who wish they could be praying, or do not yet know that that is what their heart desires? Perhaps it takes an age like ours to see that a life focused on one thing is better than one of constant, unfulfilling stimuli that leave us 'worried and distracted by many things.'

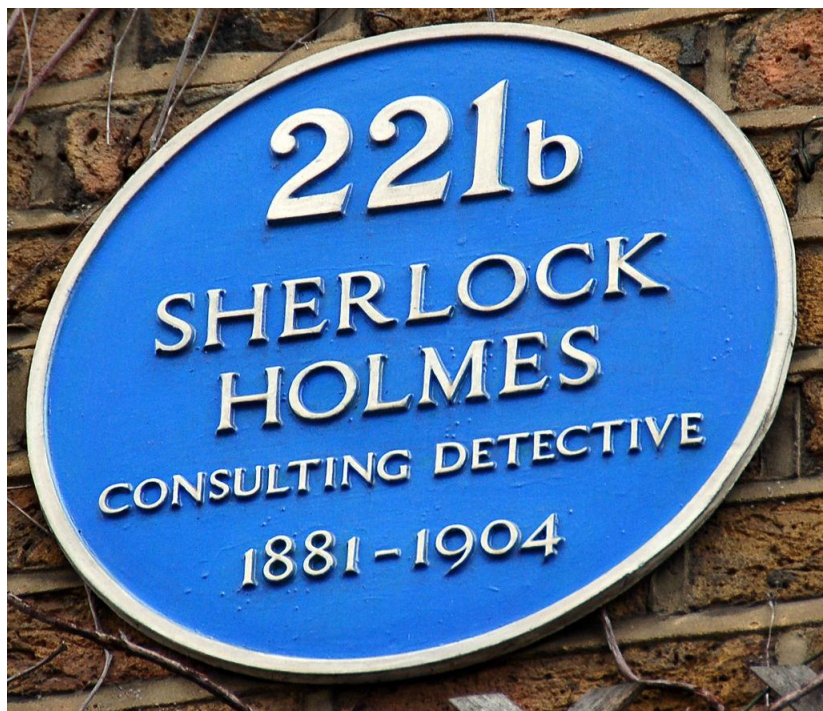
The passer-by is still confused. What would induce a young person, endowed with time, energy and seemingly endless opportunities, to spend a Saturday afternoon shut up in a convent, or praying on the street? The answer, as perhaps many of us will learn, is best said by the psalmist: *Hæc est generatio quærentium eum, quærentium faciem Dei Jacob.* □

# Chaste Sleuths Win By Popular Acclaim

*Seldom promiscuous, some popular fiction detectives are sedately married rather, but more often single, when not in sacred vows: an unwitting homage paid by secular culture to the Christian religion.*

Why did the most successful authors of detective stories opt for chaste sleuths? In the analogous literary genre of espionage after all, (to say nothing of political thrillers) spies rely on promiscuity to extract information, don't they? Would one ever imagine James Bond altogether chaste, successful and popular?<sup>1</sup> And yet, such are precisely the recurrent features of the best-loved fiction detectives. Let us find out what may explain an anomaly so blatantly at odds with the dictates of hypersexualised modernity.

Wise historians and sociologists<sup>2</sup> observe that promiscuity undermines civilisation, whereas chastity fosters moral health, social harmony, and cultural creativeness. But what is a crime story if not the restoration of social order on a small scale, overcoming crime and deceit? As such, fiction investigators are micro-civilisers. Within the limited scope of a novel set in such a town and covering barely a few weeks, the detective brings relief to the local community, rebuilding trust among citizens, avenging truth once twisted by lies, and reviving hope through defeating fear. Most fittingly then are the best detectives portrayed as chaste characters. Free from the blindness and selfishness of lust, they embody the beneficence of the human mind striving for the common good.



By Ralf Roletschek (talk) - Fahrradtechnik auf fahrradmoteur.de - Own work, FAL, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11807002>

Most fiction detectives are single and, as befits their status according to Christian morality, sexually abstinent. Is it because the inventor of the genre, Edgar Allan Poe<sup>3</sup> (1809-1849) granted no wife to his detective character Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin (depicted in three stories between 1841 and 1844)? Émile Gaboriau (1832–1873), Poe's imitator in France, also implies that his investigator hero Monsieur Lecoq is a bachelor. Victor Hugo's relentless Inspector Javert from *Les Misérables* (1862) is also single. Thankfully Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), brought up a Catholic by the Jesuits at Stonyhurst and in Austria, spared any wife an expected matrimonial catastrophe if ever

joined together with egotistic bachelor Sherlock Holmes (four novels and five collections of short-stories published between 1887 and 1927). Even the "updated" Sherlock Holmes series aired from 2010 to 2017 with Benedict Cumberbatch as main character humorously had Dr Watson (played by Martin Freeman) protest time and again that "he is not gay!" That line was consistent with the assumption that Holmes and Watson are united in chaste friendship.<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly, across the Channel, Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret is married and faithful (as well as childless, having lost his young daughter). He remains so across seventy-five novels and

twenty-eight short stories from 1931 to 1972. His relationship with Madame Maigret is devoid of any turbulences or romanticism. She is a good cook. One could argue that his marital status does not affect his detective work any more than the Baker Street housekeeper Mrs. Hudson influences Sherlock Holmes' enquiries. Across the Atlantic, Lieutenant Columbo is also allegedly a husband, but his wife and children never appear in the sixty-nine episodes acted by Peter Falk between 1968 and 2003. In Germany, world-famous Detective Derrick seems to have no private life. Across the two hundred and eighty-one episodes of sixty minutes aired between 1974 and 1998, he refers only once to a former wife, and twice is seen with a girlfriend. Back in the UK, P. D. James' detective character Commander Adam Dalgliesh of New Scotland Yard is a very private man, a published poet, and a widower who marries again only in the fourteenth and last novel of the famous series. Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse is not married, even though he admits to girlfriends in some of the thirteen novels of the series and thirty-three television episodes aired between 1987 and 2000.

The detective characters we have referred to up to now evince no explicit connection with Christianity, the latter being merely assumed as part of their Western upbringing in the twentieth century. The bestselling author of all time with sixty-six detective novels and fourteen short story collections, Dame Agatha Christie (1890-1976) made Christianity more explicit in 1930 with her first Miss Marple novel, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, narrated by the Reverend Leonard Clement, vicar of St Mary Mead. If crime fiction connects celibacy and

detection skills, Christian celibates offer a particularly successful and popular subcategory. Indeed, both Agatha Christie's investigators Hercule Poirot (a Belgian single Catholic) and Jane Marple (an Anglican spinster) are believers, even though not proselytizers. In *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), Poirot comments: 'An interesting man, that Father Lavigny.' 'A monk being an archaeologist seems odd to me,' I said. 'Ah, yes, you are a Protestant. Me, I am a good Catholic. I know something of priests and monks.' Poirot prays the rosary and intercedes for the dead, whereas Miss Marple's last words could be

"More tea, vicar?"

As if to prove the point, a 2018 version by the BBC of Agatha Christie's *ABC Murders* turned Belgian layman Hercule Poirot (played by John Malkovitch attempting to speak French like a native) into a former Catholic priest who hoped to benefit people better if working as a lay detective. Such clericalization of Hercule Poirot is untrue to the letter of Agatha Christie's novels, but it reveals a subliminal affinity between the Catholic faith and elucidation. Seeking the truth behind and through deceptive appearances is more than a

Dame Agatha Christie, 17 September 1964  
copyright free picture by Joop van Bilsen / Anefo -  
<http://proxy.handle.net/10648/aa799426-d0b4-102d-bcf8-003048976d84>



job, it is a metaphysical quest and a supernatural fulfilment. This evocation of a subconscious “Father Hercule Poirot” leads us to fiction detectives who are not only single and Catholic but, furthermore, consecrated persons in sacred vows.

Following on that most-loved creation by G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), the congenial *Father Brown* (featuring in fifty-three short stories published between 1910 and 1936), Ellis Peters (1913–1995) offered a pleasant medieval variation with her *Cadfael Chronicles* (twenty-one novels written between 1977 and 1994, and thirteen television episodes) where a Benedictine monk from Shrewsbury Abbey solves murder mysteries. Peter Tremayne (pen-name of Peter Berresford Ellis, born 1943) carried on with *Sister Fidelma*, an internationally acclaimed series of historical mysteries comprising of thirty-three novels published from 1994 to 2023 plus forty short-stories published between 1993 and 2017. Set in seventh-century Ireland, the series revolves around Sister Fidelma and Brother Eadulf her detective partner, who features in nearly all episodes. Acute and gentle, Brother Eadulf actively contributes to solving cases. He is more to Sister Fidelma than Dr Watson is to Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, though. Halfway through the series, Brother Eadulf marries Sister Fidelma, a step not problematic in early Celtic Christianity by the author’s account. That awkward marital development may be the exception in our paradigm, unless one considers that the matrimonial element here is peripheral to their real bond, namely, that of partners in detection still perceived as religious and wearing the habits of their consecration.

In Russia, *Sister Pelagia* is another religious (Orthodox) nun detective invented by Boris Akunin, with three novels published since 2006, one of which, *Pelagia and the White Bulldog*, was made into a television mini-series in 2009. In 2022, BBC Studios launched *Sister Boniface*, a television series set in 1950s England with a nun as the sympathetic detective. This follows on the *Sister Joan Murder Mysteries*, a series of eleven novels located in Cornwall convents, published between 1990 and 1998 by Veronica Black. In America, Thomistic philosophy professor Ralph McInerney (1929–2010) wrote twenty-nine novels featuring detective priest *Father Dowling*. Published between 1977 and 2011, it was successfully adapted for television in 1989–91 as the *Father Dowling Mysteries*. In Italy, Umberto Eco (1932–2016) hinted at Sherlock Holmes in his 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose*, a historical murder mystery set in an Italian monastery during the Middle Ages with the Franciscan sleuth William of Baskerville as the lead character. Lately, Fiorella De Maria revived the Catholic genre through her *Father Gabriel Mysteries* series (four novels published since 2017), set in 1950s rural England with a Benedictine monk investigator. *The Grantchester Mysteries* by British author James Runcie<sup>5</sup> (born 1959) features clergyman-detective Canon Sidney Chambers, a single<sup>6</sup> Anglican vicar in post-WWII Cambridgeshire (seven novels published so far between 2012 and 2019, also adapted for television).

Exorcist fictions arguably offer a variation on the theme of the detective priest, only dealing with supernatural evil instead of merely human thieves and murderers, like in

the horror novel *The Exorcist* (1971) by William Peter Blatty, with two Jesuit priests Fr Lankester Merrin and Fr Damien Karras leading the action. In 2011 Mikael Håfström directed the supernatural horror film *The Rite*, with Sir Anthony Hopkins as senior exorcist priest Father Lucas Trevant. In *The Priests* (literally, *Black Priests*) directed in 2015 by Jang Jae-hyun from South Korea, Catholic priest Father Kim tries to exorcise a young parishioner wounded in a car accident. *The Pope’s Exorcist*, by Julius Avery,

*Father Brown on a case, illustrated by Sydney Seymour Lucas; public domain/Wikipedia*



was released in 2023 with actor Russell Crowe playing a priest somehow inspired by real-life Fr Gabriele Amorth (1925-2016).

Finally, let us mention detective stories written by clerics. In *The Three Taps*, novelist Mgr Ronald Knox (1888-1957) writes of his lay detective Miles Bredon “I know—I know it is quite wrong to have your detective married until the last chapter.” Mgr Knox theorised on detective fiction, a genre which he further illustrated through seven



novels and two short stories. Fr William Xavier Kienzle (1928-2000) sadly left the Catholic priesthood after decades of ministry in the Archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan. He wrote twenty-four crime novels all set in Catholic parishes and institutions, with fictional Father Robert Koesler as the sleuth priest. Kienzle’s first and best-known novel, *The Rosary Murders* (1978) was made into a film in 1987. Three Anglican clergymen authored detective stories portraying clerical sleuths. Under his pseudonym Stephen Chance, the Rev. Philip Turner (1925–2006) created the Reverend Septimus Treloar. A retired Chief Inspector turned country parson, Reverend Septimus uses his police experience to solve mysteries encountered in his clerical ministry. The series comprises four novels published between 1971 and 1979, the first of whom and best-known, *Septimus and the Danedyke Mystery*, was put to the screen in 1979. Another Anglican clergyman author of detective novels was Rev. Victor Lorenzo Whitechurch (1868-1933). In *The Canon in Residence*, Reverend John Smith learns during his holidays in Europe that he has been promoted to (fictional) Frattenbury Cathedral, only to have his identity stolen by a fellow traveller, with enlightening consequences. Finally, Rev. Richard Coles (formerly part of the musical pop band duo The Communards) authored the *Canon Clement Mysteries*, comprising of *Murder Before Evensong* (2022), *A Death in the Parish* (2023), and *Murder at the Monastery* (due June 2025). Canon Clement lives with his widowed mother.

In conclusion we observe that if detective stories are so popular, it is because the audience loves to

identify with a daring character seeking the truth so as to restore the goodness of order once disturbed by crime. This aspiration to seek the truth and enjoy the good is universal because God endowed the human mind with intellect to know the truth, and with free will to desire the good. Chastely married detectives can apply the faculties of their minds to such a worthy purpose, as our survey of crime fiction shows. But celibate and even consecrated sleuths display a particular affinity with the quest for truth and the restoring of goodness. What makes them eminently credible is that they have renounced the comforts of the world and the joys of the family for the sake of an exclusive service to God and to their brethren here below, in anticipation of heaven. They risk everything to dispel lies and overcome evil. No wonder that even popular culture recognises how fit interpreters they are of every soul’s aspiration to know the One who is truth and love. □

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<sup>1</sup> Actually yes, an Elizabethan “James Bond” called Father John Gerard, SJ had precisely those traits, as his *Memoirs of Hunted Priest* demonstrate.)

<sup>2</sup> *The Global Sexual Revolution—Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, by Gabriele Kuby, Angelico Press, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> An American of Anglo-Irish descent, Poe spent five years of his childhood in England.

<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the 2008 film *Brideshead Revisited* decided that Sebastian Flyte was homosexual—but that is not a detective story.

<sup>5</sup> Like Robert Hugh Benson, he is the son of an “Archbishop” of Canterbury.

<sup>6</sup> The novels have him become married after several episodes, but the *Grantchester* television adaptation keeps him single.

# Challenges to Married Life in Secular Society

*We offer this spontaneous contribution by a Catholic married septuagenarian who looks back, and forward*

I wish first of all to express my deep appreciation of *A Fresh Look at Courtship* which appeared in *Dowry* Issue No. 61. For some of us now long-established married folk, the advice contained therein would have been most useful had it been available earlier.

So, may we turn for a moment to the aforementioned article? The one end of courtship is marriage. So-called ‘dating’, seeking a relationship with a person of the opposite sex in order to enjoy the ‘fun’ for the sake of it, must therefore be seen as gravely contrary to God’s law.

What now might the ends of marriage be? The primary end is the procreation of children and the secondary end is mutual help and the allaying of concupiscence. What does this mean? Animals reproduce but Man procreates, thus echoing the supreme dignity of his Creator. Procreation therefore includes not only the acceptance of a number of children according to God’s will. It also entails their education in the knowledge and love of God and of their neighbour as themselves. In Catholic circles we may hear of ‘Natural Family Planning’ (NFP) which, while using nothing ‘artificial’, can predispose a couple to a contraceptive mentality. In his book, *Credo—Compendium of the Catholic Faith*, H.E. Bishop Athanasius Schneider on page 306 asks, “Is it advisable to use the expression ‘Natural Family

Planning’? No. This sounds overly technical and bureaucratic, like an economic plan for grain production or cattle breeding. It is unworthy to apply the word *planning* to human persons, potential children of God and new citizens of Heaven”. Holy wedlock is not something to be entered into without due discernment. Indeed, writing as then-Archbishop of Krakow, St John Paul II stated in one of his books that unless a couple intending marriage has attained a certain degree of maturity the wedding should not go ahead. This is not a nod of approval to cohabitation but rather a salutary reminder of the dangers of entering into marriage without due thought. Alas, since the Great Fall, not only has death entered into the world but the whole of God’s creation has been damaged; and so has everything that is human. Are we marrying for the

right reason? Here we might stop and think about Tobias and Sarah in the Old Testament, the latter being widowed seven times, each of her husbands dying on their wedding night because they had undergone marriage for the wrong reason. Finally, Tobias enters into her life and after the wedding he proposes three days and nights of prayer before consummating their marriage. Especially in our younger days, all too many of us are inclined to rush into things and only in our later years may we come to understand that in our momentary flush of youth we can easily become slaves to our instincts! St Paul somewhere tells us that it is better to marry than to ‘burn’; but while one aspect of marriage is indeed a remedy for concupiscence, if this is our only reason to wed we may expect big trouble ahead! Before the Fall, we can suppose that when

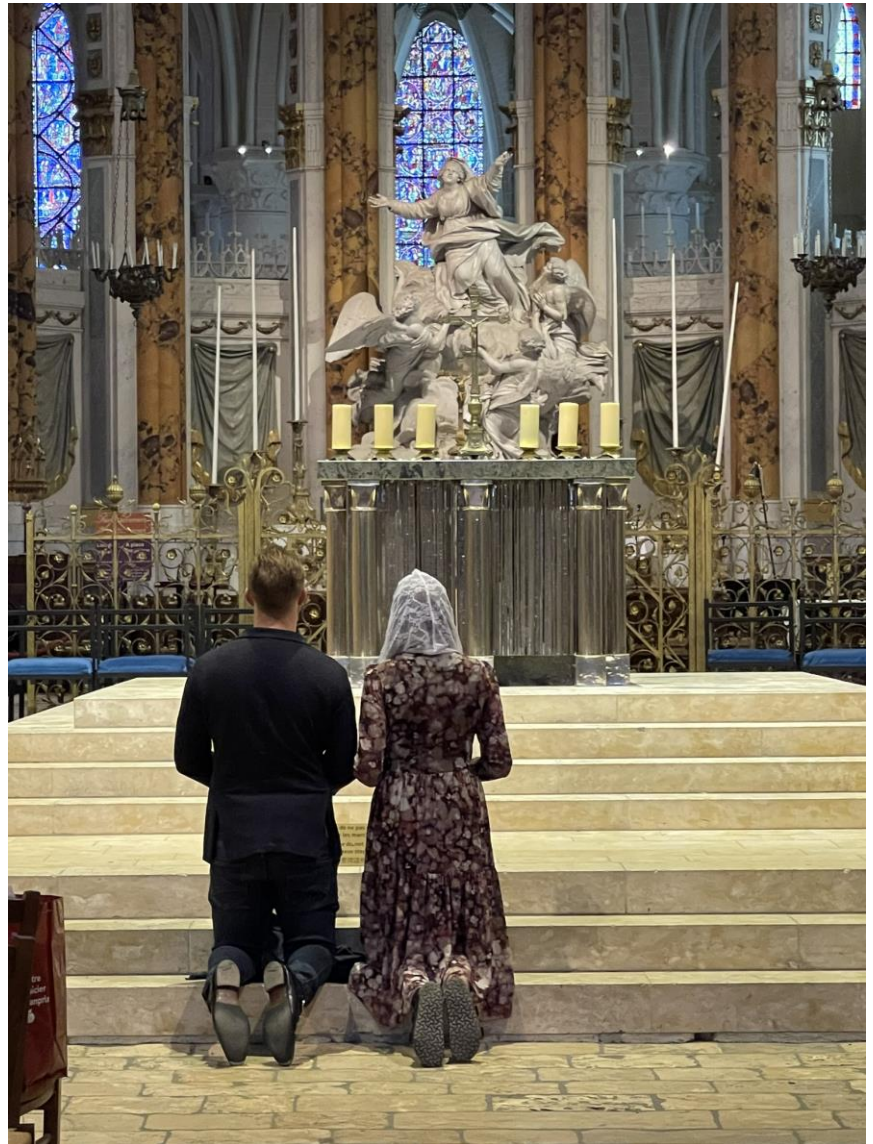




Adam looked at Eve, he first of all saw a beautiful person. Only later did the realisation come “that they were naked,” and it is indeed men who are very much driven visually towards women. Sexual attraction is created by God, hence an inherent good, but like everything else, Man in his inclination towards sin can mar it!

Having decided that we are partnered-up with the right person, we approach our parish priest and make preparations for the big day. There will of course be the caterers to consider; making sure the wedding cake arrives not too fresh; the best man to be entrusted with the rings; and so on. But man and woman have a body and a soul. As part of our preparation we should make a good Confession beforehand and it would not seem out of place to invite our Catholic wedding guests to do likewise. Then, following the wedding, we are man and wife, joined in Holy wedlock for as long as both spouses live.

Moving together under one roof feels something of a novelty, but after a year or so we settle into our life together seeing it as ‘ordinary’, now that the heat has died down, so to speak. It is then that our first difficulties may manifest. Perhaps there is a child on the way and indeed, while we have entered into a unique bond with our spouse, in a sense we are also “married” to one another’s family. How supportive are our in-laws or our parents? In time, when our family begins to increase, they may criticise us for “not knowing what we are doing” and suggest that we, like they did in their day, use a contraceptive of some kind. We strive to live as good Catholics but we feel that the ‘rug’ has truly been pulled from beneath



Left: Jeremy Wong Weddings Unsplash License  
Top: couple in Chartres Cathedral © Malleray

us. From a husband’s point of view, perhaps we are not showing enough our manly responsibility, so our mother tells us, “Don’t forget that you married so-and-so, and not her mother”! Then, there may be those who complain that there is too much religion in Catholic schools. In reality, if we are speaking of the State-aided sector, there is not nearly enough and what there is, is of the wrong kind as we will learn in time. So, we have our children baptised, we go to Mass on Sunday, we send our children to what we take to be Catholic schools, but now grown up they no longer practise or,

if so, according to their own ideas. There is marriage outside the Church, cohabitation, divorce and the rest! Sacramental marriage is at best an option. From our children, now themselves somewhat middle-aged, arrives a number of grandchildren the greater part of whom remain unbaptised. Some of our children may show no belief in God, saying that “Mum and Dad made me and that is that!” For most of our family, Confession is a ‘no-go’ area. God help me! What have I done? In time it may turn out that our spouse now practises according to his or her modern ideas while we ourselves try

our utmost to live according to the authentic Catholic faith. Our family may tell us that there is no obligation to attend Mass on Sundays or Holydays anymore, quoting that “Vatican II has changed all that” (no it hasn’t). Moreover, when seeking guidance from a supposed Catholic marriage counsellor we bring up the issue of Obligation, he promptly jumps to attention proclaiming, “well, I suppose some people still think that way”! Will the real Church stand up, please?

Loaded as we are with ongoing sorrow, we can be tempted into thinking that what we have chosen in life was perhaps not God’s calling. Our Lady of Fatima has been quoted as saying that more souls go to Hell for sins of the flesh than for any other reason. If we build our marriage on “sand” rather than on God’s “rock”, what are we to expect? St Paul somewhere reminds us that if we sow in the seed-bed of the flesh we will reap corruption but if we sow in the seed-bed of the Spirit we will reap everlasting life. It may indeed be the case that God had a different vocation in mind for us, but we should not dwell on this too long. Better accept the situation in which we live and, with God’s help, strive to improve it. It may be that a priest-friend knowing us for a number of years and having some idea of how we function interiorly, suggests that perhaps we may have been suited to the contemplative life. We may spend a lot of time thinking, but are we really looking at the deeper meaning of Life, or are we too lazy to stand up and actually do something? We may find ourselves in a church far from home and notice before Mass a layman leading the Rosary, the Litanies and so on.



*Top: Holy Family © Malleray ; Right: Tomb of married couple Sir John Mordaunt and Edith Latimer, Turvey Village All Saints Church © Malleray*

Our curiosity is aroused and after Mass we enquire of one of the parishioners as to what this man is all about, to which we are told, “that’s so-and-so, a bachelor living by himself... and, he knows more than the priest”! Be that as it may, out of humility none of us can assume a greater knowledge of any kind. Then again, perhaps a then-girl-friend of ours once told us that “she could not imagine us ever playing with children.” We brushed off her remark, our passion having blinded us to reality. The trouble is

that maybe she was right, God knows.

Looking for a way out of our predicament, we might even wonder whether our marriage is valid? A priest tells us that a marriage contracted while in a state of mortal sin remains valid but is devoid of God’s grace, which seems to us logical. The possibility of annulment comes to mind but we learn that there is an atmosphere pervading the Church for some decades that makes annulment all too easy, with cases not being

properly discerned. Sure enough, some of our churches display leaflets explaining annulment. But do we question the validity of the priest's ordination or that of our baptism? Why then after many years should we be thinking that our marriage may be invalid? We go to a retreat, perhaps, to be told that sometimes it can feel as if you are married to your 'persecution'! Pray for your little 'persecution', hold your 'cross' high and kiss it! You need your 'persecution' to purify you and make you fit for Heaven. So, our marriage has become our 'cross'. "Unless you take up your daily 'cross' and follow Me, you are not worthy of Me"! This is serious stuff! We come to realise that our efforts from now on must be directed not only to our own salvation but to that of our spouse, our family and those around us. Laypeople that we are, we enter into some kind of reparative lifestyle based on the Fatima Message. And if nothing seems to change, we plough on, no matter what anyone may tell us to the contrary. We remind ourselves that there were those who tempted Jesus to come off the Cross but He remained steadfast and prayed instead for His enemies to be forgiven.

It is noticeable that the number of married people raised to the ranks of sainthood is quite low. We pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and so we should. Yet, there is a story, true apparently, of a newly ordained bishop trying to impress his elderly mother with his ring of office, to which she told him, "Son, without my ring, you would not have yours"! When is the last time some of us saw a Catholic wedding? Like priestly ordinations in some parts of the Church, weddings seem to have become something of a rarity. But without Catholic families well-grounded in the Faith, from where are our priests and religious supposed to come? Not only this, but we live in a world of unprecedented apostasy; in a world leaning towards a religion somewhere on the axis of naturalism and the truly demonic. Even when not overtly anti-life and anti-family, too often our secular laws do little or nothing to promote and sustain the institution of marriage. Here in Britain there was once a Married Man's Allowance, but no longer so. Our economics are so arranged that for many families it is impossible to provide basic necessities without both parents earning an income. Furthermore the Inheritance Tax

forces every next generation to start from a financial 'ground zero'. God will put an end to all this at some stage. In the meantime, following St Padre Pio's advice, we pray, hope, and don't worry. We may also consider St Therese of Lisieux's reminder that this world is our 'ship' and not our home! Oremus! Deo gratias! □

A reader's feedback:

"*Dowry* No. 61 (Spring 2024) features an article on courtship. The author, a young layman, is of the opinion that a father's consent is required for the marriage of his daughter. In fact, canon law, reflecting the natural law, requires parental consent in the strict sense only in the case of minors (under 18) of either sex, although the Church might in some circumstances override parental opposition if it is unreasonable (Code of Canon Law, can. 1071 §1.6). Of course, regard will be had for the minimum age for marriage in civil law. The author of the article also says that betrothal entails an obligation to marry unless a serious cause intervenes. If an engaged person no longer has the will to marry the other, that is indeed reason enough to break the engagement rather than risk an invalid marriage. Fr Brendan Gerard, FSSP, Edinburgh"



# How Abbot Suger Invented the Gothic Style

Art historian Leslie Anne Hamel tells about the royal Basilica of St-Denis in Paris

The magnificent basilica of St-Denis, dedicated to the first Bishop of Paris, is located in a busy suburb just north of the capital. It is sometimes compared to Westminster Abbey in England, for it is similarly the final resting place of kings, and established in a monastic setting. The French church, however, has significantly earlier origins, dating to the first Frankish kings, and to Dagobert himself (c.605-639), who is its legendary founder. Today it is most recognisable for its royal associations, and for its place within the history of architecture, as the birthplace of the Gothic style. Its patron and proponent was Abbot Suger (c.1081-1151), who took advantage of new techniques to build a monument to glorify God, to strengthen ties between his abbey and the King, and to reflect his own spiritual message.

The style, today so recognisable in ecclesiastical architectural vocabulary, for its graceful, pointed arches, vertical emphasis drawing the eye upward, and for its use of vast expanses of stained glass, found its first expression in the eastern end of the basilica. Suger drew on the philosophical writings of the Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite, in considering the ascent of the soul from the earthly to the heavenly realm. The new style was to draw



the heart and mind to a spiritual union apart from the everyday and the ordinary, in an ascent from that which is material to that which is not.

The use of ribbed vaulting in the apse of the church allowed Suger's builders to cover irregularly shaped spaces, and thus creating a free flow of traffic for pilgrims visiting the important relics housed at St-Denis. The ribbing also made possible the opening of wall space for stained glass, which could be used to tell stories from scripture, and would also create a dazzling new kind of atmosphere, of coloured and uninterrupted light. In his book written on the consecration of the church, *De Consecratione Ecclesiae Sancti Dionysii* (1144), Suger tells of miracles occurring throughout the building campaign, indicating that God had his hand in the entire project, to create a space worthy of

its central purpose, as the setting for the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Suger delights in telling of the abundance of items of gold and of precious gems donated for the adornment of the space, and clarifies that the best things of this earth point to the splendour of heaven. While his contemporary and friend, St Bernard of Clairvaux had very different ideas on church decoration, desiring few distractions and displays of luxury, the two

came to understand each other and the different roles of their respective churches. The new monument at St-Denis was intended to dazzle and disorient the pilgrim faithful, creating a sensory experience evoking awe and wonder.

We can hardly appreciate just how daring Suger was, to build such an important church in a radically new style. His writings make it clear that this decision was very much a spiritual matter. The Gothic, with its upward ascent and its radiant atmosphere, indicated that God is light; a phrase which Suger inscribed upon the church building itself. His message still resonates with us today, when we visit St-Denis, and other churches inspired by Suger's model. We find ourselves removed from the mundane and drawn toward the glory of heaven. □



# Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*

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*Fr Armand de Malleray comments on Johannes Vermeer's picture painted c. 1664, on display at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Find out more about Vermeer's paintings from a Catholic perspective in Fr de Malleray's novel Vermeer's Angel (Arouca Press, Amazon).*

## **H**ow much? What is this worth?

This image<sup>1</sup> does not illustrate a biblical event. It is not a Gospel scene. Nor does it depict any later achievements by popes and saints in general. Plainly, it shows a housewife at home. Unlike the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Mary Magdalene or St. Irene, she bears no famous name. She performs no momentous action. In fact, she could be any woman in any domestic setting. Admittedly though, not every woman weighs jewels in a little balance on her dining-room table! Fair enough: she may be the wife of a jeweller, then; or a well-off lady assessing the value of gifts recently received, or soon to be given. Possibly, a gala dinner is scheduled that weekend at the townhall in Delft—will *you* go? —and she ponders how best to adorn herself.

Looking at her face though, we detect no vanity. Instead, she looks composed, meek and serene. She is self-absorbed but not self-centred. Her wealth makes her neither worried nor boastful. In fact, her bodily posture reflects her inner poise: evenness defines her inside out. We wish we were always like her. Instead, we seem continually to lean toward this or that direction, allured by greed and repelled by want; committing the evil we loathe while omitting the good we seek; unable to keep our balance in life. Why is she different? The painter

suggested the answer through the framed depiction on the wall behind her. It shows Christ coming at the end of time as Judge of the living and the dead. Right above the woman, the Lord Jesus sits upon a gilded cloud, both arms raised in judgment, to bless the just and punish the wicked. The former rise to heaven: at the bottom of the painting below the right arm of Christ, to the left of the woman's face. Symmetrically, the latter fall down to hell: at the back of the woman's head, below the sceptre or sword brandished in Christ's left hand. Apostles and saints surround the Lord, at His level upon the clouds.

## **Balance**

The balance held by the woman illustrate Christ's judgment. Wherever we travel across this image, we revolve around the balance held in the lady's right hand. We should pay more attention to it. Vermeer wished it so. In proof of which, let us explain how cleverly he superimposed two essential points or junctions. The first junction is the crossing of the two invisible lines connecting the opposite corners of the painting: from top-left to bottom-right, and from bottom-left to top-right. The second junction is the pivot of the balance uniting its handle and horizontal beam. Can you see that the geometrical junction coincides with the mechanical one? Both invisible lines cross exactly

where the scale handle is hinged on the beam holding the two pans. Thus, the exact point of symmetry of the entire image is also the centre of the balance. This composition loads the scale with a power of visual attraction in opposite proportion with its diminutive size and its sparsity of colour nearing invisibility. The smallest and dullest item depicted in this painting happens to be the focus commanding the intelligibility of the entire depiction.

## **Conversion**

On Low Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> April (thus, one week after Easter, that fell on 13<sup>th</sup> April that year), Vermeer married his beloved Catharina Bolnes. The ceremony took place in secret at Hoyden, a village outside Delft, in a barn used as a clandestine church. Won over to Catholicism, then repressed in Holland, Vermeer had courageously converted prior to his marriage. Thoroughly instructed by the zealous Jesuit priests in Delft, he would have been well acquainted with dogmatic truths. From the Catholic perspective, no better preparation for a happy judgement is afforded men than daily Mass. The Jesuit mentors of the Vermeer family would have offered the so-called *Tridentine* Latin Mass, that begins precisely with a petition to God for an anticipated judgement, directing the penitent soul to reform itself with the help of Christ while there is time: *Judge me, O God, and discern my cause from the unholy nation... Send*



All pictures public domain, courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1236.html>

*forth Thy light and Thy truth: for they have led me and brought me to Thy holy mount, and into Thy tabernacles... And I will go into the altar of God: to God, Who gives joy to my youth... (Psalm 42 Judica Me.)* These first words of the Traditional Holy Mass—*Judge me, O God*—fit our painting so well as to qualify as its alternative title, one may suggest.

### **Secret Mass**

We could almost imagine that, like in England during anti-Catholic persecution, holy Mass has just taken place in secret, on the very table which the lady of the house now covers with gems less precious than the fragments of the Sacred Host gathered minutes earlier from the

altar cloth now folded away. Close by, but concealed, a Jesuit priest has divested his sacred vestments and now, wearing inconspicuous lay dress as if a customer or an acquaintance, he kneels down toward the *Last Judgment* painting, leading the household in thanksgiving for the Eucharistic sacrifice just offered behind the veiled window. If Calvinist magistrates walked into this house of the *Papists Corner* of Delft, they would detect no *hocus pocus*. Even the religious painting on the wall would look tolerably compatible with their Protestant creed. There are serious hypotheses interpreting Vermeer's later work, the *Allegory of Faith*, as just such a preparation for a Catholic Holy Mass

to take place in secret. We make no such claim for the *Woman Holding a Balance*. But we wish to inform the artistic perception of the onlooker with this aspect of the life in Vermeer's family. Catholicism was as central to the Vermeer household as it was concealed to elude persecution. If therefore the lady looks so supernaturally serene despite being seemingly busy with the riches of this world of iniquity, it may well be that she pretends to weigh pearls while in her heart she worships the Eucharistic Christ still present in her following holy Mass. In other words, she may be giving thanks to God for His True Presence just received in Holy Communion. Then, on her knees a few minutes







ago, she had welcomed in her mouth the sacred wafer that the priest had turned into Christ's Body. Aware that the Divine Presence remains in the communicant a quarter of an hour after ingestion, she would unite spiritually with her Saviour, begging of him every necessary graces for her, for her dear husband Johannes, for their several daughters, and for the return of their country to the Catholic fold.

### **Coded piety**

The Catholic religion was still persecuted in Holland and, like in other such situations, Catholics had become used to concealing the depictions of their faith under some artistic codes or hints. At the same epoch in Japan, when Christianity had become actively persecuted and the Catholic missionaries were expelled, the *Kakure Kirishitans* or *hidden Christians* devised such pious stratagems, carving the Cross of

Salvation on the back of a Buddha statue, or venerating the Blessed Virgin Mary disguised as a statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of compassion. Jesuit priests permitted it, based on similar camouflages resorted to under persecution, such as were found in Roman catacombs where an innocuous anchor conceals a holy Cross, or a fish stands for the acronym of *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*. To delude Calvinists, some European painters resorted to similar expedients, such as still-lives displaying an empty niche surrounded with exuberant flowers, wittingly referring to the Mother of God invisible to eyes but not to hearts. Some years ago in England, radiography revealed a painting of a Madonna and Child purposely hidden as underlay beneath a portrait of Sir Francis Walsingham, the chief priest-hunter of Protestant Queen Elizabeth I of England. When

searching a mansion suspected of Catholic leanings, Protestant officials were bound to assume loyalty to the Crown when seeing the household reverently bow as they walked by the image of the Queen's henchman.

### **A Marian depiction?**

This *Woman Holding a Balance* could be meant as a veiled *Annunciation*, the wondrous event when God became man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Nazareth. The suffused light (symbolising the Archangel Gabriel) filtered through the drawn curtain and the veiling of her head for deeper recollection fit well with this most intimate occasion. Then, the immaculate maiden of Nazareth became the Mother of God as she answered the divine proposal, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.*<sup>2</sup> At that moment, in her virginal womb, the Son of God

became her Child. No less relevant then is the representation of Christ as Judge above the woman just become his Mother. She knows already that her *child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.*<sup>3</sup> The scales of judgment in her hand show that she meditates in awe on the salvation of souls to be wrought by Christ, with her motherly cooperation. Her jacket is partly open, revealing a coral bodice, as a hint at the hidden treasure she carries henceforth, *All the glory of the king's daughter is within.*<sup>4</sup> In strong contrast with the dark hues all across the painting, this bright coral opening purposely points to the marvel of the divine conception of the Messiah who will *crush the head of the devil.*<sup>5</sup>



### Crushing its head

Speaking of whom: Vermeer pushed away to the left the blue drapery spread upon the table, revealing the lion-shape finial beneath the furniture. That carved beast could figure the evil one, as Saint Peter warned us, *Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.*<sup>6</sup> The dramatic effect is all the more potent as one does not, at first sight, take notice of that detail hidden in nether darkness. And yet, the wide-open mouth of the beast reminds every cautious observer of the need to watch, and to pray. Notably the

sculpted lion roars, below, at the same distance from the Lady's wrist holding the scale as the Seated Christ above. Beast, wrist, and Christ show on the same line. Mankind in the middle; evil and good at either end, depicting the choice to be made by the soul: either Belial or Christ. In the same perspective, as the reader recalls, the Lady's head stands in between the just and the wicked on the painting behind her. May we

heed to her motherly admonitions and cling to her Son our Saviour while we have time. □

<sup>1</sup> Best online reproduction: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/woman-holding-a-balance/-wHFDKu7-mhjtQ?hl=en-GB>

<sup>2</sup> Lk 1:38

<sup>3</sup> Lk 2:34

<sup>4</sup> Ps 45:13

<sup>5</sup> Gn 3:15

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pet 5:8

# Tolkien and the Green Knight

Robert Lazu Kmita explains how the Arthurian legend honouring chastity influenced Tolkien's writings

Among the main sources of the imaginary world created by Professor J.R.R. Tolkien, a place of honour is held by an old medieval story that is not focused on the hero's confrontation with the dragon, but on the trials to which the brave knight is subjected to prove his virtues: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The author of the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* made an important contribution to the knowledge and popularization of this medieval legend, which he edited together with E.V. Gordon in 1925, at the prestigious Oxford University Press. Originating from the universe of the Knights of the Round Table and King Arthur, the legend fundamentally influenced our author in highlighting a chivalric code of honour based on the Christian virtue of chastity.

A renowned warrior of the Round Table, Sir Gawain is subjected to an unexpected challenge during a feast at the king's court. Another knight, completely clad in green, proposes that he expose himself to a blow

from a weapon – sword or axe – after first exposing himself to a blow from Sir Gawain. The interval between the two blows was to be exactly one year. Astonished, the hero accepts the challenge, striking the mysterious green warrior fiercely. To the amazement of those present, the visitor from who-knows-where picks up his head from the ground and leaves, unfazed. When the year is up, Sir Gawain sets off in search of the adversary who had vaguely indicated the area where he could be found. On his journey, he is hosted at the court of a noble and brave prince whose wife, bitten by the demon of infidelity, ardently seeks Gawain's love.

Resisting without hesitation the beautiful woman's advances, our hero accepts, with elegance, a sash. It is the only sign of respect he shows to the rejected lady. After leaving the company of the prince and his wife, Gawain arrives in the kingdom of the Green Knight. Here he finds himself in the position of receiving a blow from an enormous axe, which would surely end his life. Closing his eyes, Sir Gawain entrusts himself to God's mercy and protection, acknowledging that only Providence could save him from disaster. Instead of receiving

a fierce blow, he is merely touched lightly on the arm. Following this first surprise comes the second: the Green Knight is actually the husband of the lady who had tempted him with her seductive favours. By proving his fidelity to the cardinal virtue of chastity, Sir Gawain has demonstrated both his courage and chastity, being recognized as a true knight, fit to sit at the table alongside King Arthur.

Inspired by the essential virtue of chivalry, the story provided Tolkien with the most fitting model of a Christianized legend, similar in spirit to the ancient tale of *Beowulf*. It contrasts sharply with the frivolity of courtiers and courtesans in the romances of the Round Table. Emphasizing the necessity of purity of heart, the message encoded in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is fully reflected in Tolkien's world, devoid of the passion of those struck by the malady of the "earthly eros" (Plato), always ready to sell their purity for an inflamed and inflaming carnal love. Tolkien's heroes and heroines value chastity. Like Gawain, all of Tolkien's knights, especially King Aragorn, honour their beloved with a decency increasingly rare in our modern world. Purified of frivolity, flirtation, and eroticism, Tolkien's heroes are true exponents of the Christian institution of chivalry, defenders of the weak and humble, and fierce enemies of those who wish to subjugate the free world to their reckless desire for power. □



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(Rev. Miklos Homolya, FSSP, being ordained a priest last 15<sup>th</sup> June in Bavaria. The new priest will be assigned back in England as of August. Hungarian by birth, he heard God's call in England while studying for his doctorate in IT and attending the *Juventutem* London group.

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