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Preface

A Return to Rome

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, Heraclitus tells us, to step into the same river twice. But what if it's the river in the Eternal City? Though I once swam in the Mediterranean, I never actually set foot in the Tiber. But I did return to Rome this October for the canonization of John Henry Newman. The first time I was in Rome was nearly twenty-five years ago in my junior year in college. That visit followed a longer period, a semester in Oxford, the place Newman said "made us Catholics." That semester was formative for me in a number of ways, and I think that many experiences there did indeed play a role in my own conversion years ago. The philosopher Richard Cross of Oriel College led a seminar on the thought of Thomas Aquinas that convinced me Aquinas's way of thinking about many topics concerning the human person and salvation was solid and profound, even if I was not a born-again Thomist. In a bit of providential irony, Cross is now the successor of Alvin Plantinga as John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame; much of my first introduction to philosophy had come from Plantinga when he was substitute teaching Sunday

school classes at my childhood Christian Reformed Church in South Bend, Indiana. (I was one of the few of my age group, or perhaps any age group, to get excited about topics such as Anselm's ontological argument.)

That semester had other strange connections and ironies. I attended a debate between several prominent New Atheists, including Richard Dawkins and Peter Atkins, and several Christian believers on the resolution "This house believes that science has supplanted the need for religion." The assumptions behind this resolution struck me as unfair to begin with. I laughed aloud in later years when I read of Terry Eagleton's quip that the mistake of believing religion is some sort of scientific attempt to explain the world is akin to seeing a ballet as a botched attempt to run for a bus. At the time, however, I was struck by the weakness of the New Atheist debaters, who seemed to have nothing in their arguments against religious believers except scorn: "How weak-kneed you are to want to depend on God instead of facing up to the glorious reality of science!" they seemed to say. Alas, the responses of the believers were not always so impressive. Keith Ward, the Regius Professor of Divinity and a process philosopher, didn't do much except retort that Dawkins et al were being grossly unfair and mean.

One debater, however, was fascinating to me. Peter Hodgson, an elderly (or at least white-haired) nuclear physicist from Corpus Christi College, ignored secularist trash talk and calmly laid out his argument that, far from being mistaken and primitive attempts at science, the Bible and Christian theology had established many of the most important assumptions about reality that serve as a foundation for the modern scientific enterprise. The crowd, who seemed largely to thrill to the very assumptions inherent in the debate resolution, voted for the New Atheists. But Hodgson, a Catholic, had impressed me greatly. Eight years later, when I began working for this journal, I discovered that Professor Hodgson was a member of the editorial board.

The most important part of the semester, however, was probably

my regular attendance at the C. S. Lewis Society meetings, held in Pusey House, a library and academic house of formation established in the late nineteenth century to honor and continue the work of Newman's great friend and Tractarian collaborator Edward Bouverie Pusey.

The talks were always very interesting to me. Peter Bide, the Anglican priest who performed the marriage ceremony for Lewis and Joy Gresham, spoke about Lewis in personal terms, though he struck me as a stereotypical liberal Anglican. I heard Barbara Reynolds, who collaborated with Dorothy Sayers on the end of her Dante translation and wrote Sayers's biography (which I later read while flying across the Atlantic), speak personally about Sayers. Philip Ryken, an Oxford theological doctoral student who directed my term paper on Calvin and Luther's principles of biblical interpretation, was president of the society that term, but I don't recall what his address covered. But in another of those strange bits of foreshadowing, he returned to America that spring to serve as a minister at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, where he ministered to Anne Swank, a nurse at University of Pennsylvania Hospital who had broken up with my father in the 1950s but who later married him after my mother died. Today Phil is president of Wheaton College.

The best part was, however, the postlecture retirement to the Eagle and Child, the iconic pub that had been used for meetings by the Inklings—Lewis's collection of friends, including Tolkien and Owen Barfield, who read their ongoing fiction and nonfiction to each other amid clouds of pipe smoke and the tinkling of pints of ale. Though the place had been much renovated by the time I sat in it, it was still a joy to be where they had been. It was there that I met Bruce Griffin, another American doctoral student in theology. Bruce, an alumnus of several American Evangelical institutions of higher learning, was considering the Catholic Church and was very helpful in giving me reasons why even some difficult teachings made a kind of sense. It was also there that I got to know Walter Hooper, the American who had served as Lewis's secretary toward the end of

his life and had spent the rest of his career devoted to editing Lewis's work. I discovered that Hooper, whom I had thought was still an Anglican priest, had become a Catholic seven years before I met him. I have often said that Lewis himself is a kind of gateway drug to Catholicism, and he and his followers certainly played that role for me.

Newman, whom I had read in my English literature courses back in the States, was not important to me, though I tended to bump into him, so to speak, as I went around Oxford. A visit to the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin for a Sunday evening service (in Latin!) was mostly motivated by my knowledge that Lewis had preached some of his great lay sermons, including "On Learning in Wartime" there. But I couldn't help noticing that they seemed very proud of Newman himself, who had served as rector there for much of the Oxford Movement. A further visit was to Oriel College with some Americans to meet with Basil Mitchell, the retired Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford. Again I was excited by a man personally connected to Lewis, but he was also connected to Newman, pointing out that Newman was a fellow in the very college in which we were meeting. I found out later that Mitchell built on Newman's critiques of modern liberal humanism in his own work.

After the term ended I started a tour of western Europe with a Eurail pass. After some strange times in the Netherlands and Germany, I met up with fellow students in Barcelona and proceeded to Rome. I would like to say that I got to know Rome, but my friends wanted to simply see the highlights—including a tour of the Coliseum, St. Peter's Basilica, and the Vatican Museums, including the Sistine Chapel—and get on to a hike along the Italian Riviera's rugged coastline with five villages known as Cinque Terre.

While goofing around at ancient sites was something we all could do together, the St. Peter's and Sistine Chapel part was remarkable to me mostly for the reactions of Xan, my roommate for the semester in England. A Catholic pre-med student of Lebanese and Irish abstraction, he surprised me with his stern warnings about dis-

respectful behavior in these churches. While I no doubt put him off as being prudish, something in me felt he was right to be annoyed at tourists chattering loudly and treating these spaces as simply more old buildings. To him these places were churches first and foremost, even if they were open to tourists as well as pilgrims.

After our whirlwind tour of the city, we headed off to the next adventure. Two years later I was received into the Catholic Church in Michigan. Though I now was part of Xan's Catholic people and could now understand his approach to Catholic churches, I did not take any opportunities to go back either to Oxford or Rome. Apart from a few trips to Canada, I would not leave the United States for twenty-four years.

I had not flown to England for Newman's beatification in 2010, but I had vaguely thought I might go to Rome when he was canonized. By 2019 when the canonization announcement was made, I thought I might go, but my schedule was so packed and international trips were expensive enough that I decided I would just stay home. To be honest, I was probably also a bit afraid—my youthful penchant for taking off on unknown adventures has been largely replaced by the middle-aged habit of caution and love of the hobbit hole. Besides, my passport had expired long ago. I hate bother.

But when Jessica Zittlow Aleman, the associate director of the Center for Catholic Studies, proposed to me a trip to Rome to meet up with St. Thomas Catholic Studies alums, make connections, and make some international introductions to our work at St. Thomas, I decided that this was the voice of the Lord saying to me, "Get up and go."

I managed to get a new passport with no trouble. Strangely enough, though none of my official pictures of any sort have ever looked natural, the new passport picture was the best posed picture I've ever taken. It wasn't exactly the burning bush, but I thought it must be some sort of divine sign about the trip. I almost wanted to drive over to the Department of Motor Vehicles and get a new driver's license picture taken while in this blessed state.

We flew on the afternoon of October 8 from Minneapolis. Dr. Ron Snyder, an orthodontist who graduated from the Catholic Studies Master's program and started a Newman reading group in the Twin Cities, flew with us, as did Fr. Spencer Howe, an alumnus of our undergraduate program and one of the priests who are in the process of forming, like Newman did in England, an Oratory of St. Philip Neri here in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The other aspiring Oratorians flew in on different flights (we flew to Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and thence to Rome) and so too did John Kelly, father of an alumna and an alumnus himself of the Master's program and advisory board member for the Center for Catholic Studies.

The flight to Amsterdam was long enough to have gotten in a good nap, a smart move given that with the seven-hour difference between Minnesota and Rome we were due to get in around 9 AM in the latter. But since we were flying in midafternoon I was not tired and decided to get some work done. I ended up working nearly the entire time, finishing an academic book review (a volume on Christians in higher education inspired by Newman), a weekly column for *The Imaginative Conservative* (on Newman's sacramental vision and economics), and a third short essay on Newman and conscience for a newspaper (alas, unpublished) during the nearly nine hours of flight time. Given that productivity, I felt good about sleeping on the short flight to Rome.

Though very tired and with a body out of whack with the actual time there, I was pleased to be whizzing in a car from Rome's airport into the city. Airplane travel is always a miracle to me, but there is nothing like ground travel, even at sixty or seventy miles per hour, to give one the feeling of movement as hills and foreign-looking trees whiz by. Our Airbnb site in the Piazza del Risorgimento was perfectly situated for the canonization, merely a five-minute walk from St. Peter's and a stone's throw from the Vatican Museum. We were able to drop our bags off and join John Paul Sonnen, one of the first St. Thomas Catholic Studies students who had lived in Rome for about nine years and now runs a Catholic pilgrimage tour company from his home base back in St. Paul.

A genial man, John Paul spent the afternoon with us, serving as a translator and helping us shop for a reception that we were to hold at the University of St. Thomas's Bernardi Campus for various Minnesotans either living or visiting in Rome. Given that hundreds of St. Thomas students have told me about their life-changing experiences in Rome while living at this building, it was a delight to visit.

Later that afternoon we went over to San Gioacchino for a Mass said by Fr. Paul Haverstock, a Minnesota priest who had stopped over in Rome after a retreat in Ireland. The Church, opened in 1898 and finished in 1911, was built to celebrate the priestly jubilee of Pope Leo XIII and has a great deal of marble and metal decoration, with three naves and fourteen chapels dedicated to various nations that contributed to its construction. It's a remarkable structure and, interestingly, tucked away on a secondary road—part of a strategy on the part of the anticlerical nineteenth-century Italian government to downplay the importance of the Church by not allowing churches to be located over the main neighborhood square. The irony may be that the effect on the tourist is that even out of the way places in Rome are the sites of glorious ecclesiastical architecture. Dr. Snyder leaned over to me after Mass and said, "Just another Roman church."

And that is a bit how I felt. Though I was to be in the Eternal City for almost a week, just taking in the neighborhood establishments of Rome was going to be an experience that I wished to savor and not to overwhelm me. Dr. Snyder did quite a bit of touring with the Oratorians, who are all in their thirties and forties, and chose to spend many of their days in Rome tramp-, tramp-, tramping all over the city. For me, just taking in the feel of the city, spending meals in a leisurely fashion sipping wine and eating pasta (sauces from which inevitably found their way to my clothing), and seeing a few sites per day was enough. While many pilgrim-tourists attempt to see all of the Seven Churches of Rome and visit every shrine imaginable, I was happy to amble along at a human pace and sit in wonder at the strangeness of the place in general and the wonders of individual places.

Even at that, there is a difficulty in taking in the densely packed

history that one walks over, by, and through. Standing in Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini on the final night in Rome, I heard my name pronounced and turned around to discover an American friend. A former musician who is now an executive of a stationery company, my friend had come into the Church a few years ago in large part due to the influence of Newman and couldn't resist coming to the canonization on his way to do some other business in Malta. He remarked that Rome was almost too much. If a traveling collection of sacred art or relics had come through his hometown in Florida, he observed, he would have been ecstatic. But how to take in a city where "just another Roman Church" and some buried saint or sacred masterpiece smacked one in the face nearly every block? One needs a bit of time, a lot of thought, and a lot of prayer.

Nevertheless, despite this conundrum we continued on together for an hour or two, walking down to see Bernini's remarkable statue of St. Teresa in Ecstasy, just sitting there in the side of Santa Maria Della Vittoria. We had to wait a little bit, however, because a rosary was being prayed by the priest and people in the Church. Similarly, walking further down toward Termini, Rome's train station, we were able to look inside Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri but not see all of it, because they were in the middle of Mass with a fairly good-sized group of people.

This was indeed a surprise in a very good way, because as a follower of the Church's fate in the West I had the vague idea that nobody would be at Mass and there would be no children around. Low expectations do wonders for one's perceptions, however, and I kept turning to traveling companions and saying, "Look! A baby. Maybe there's hope." But the reality is that Italy's total fertility rate is around 1.3, a number that brings to mind the phrase "death-bed demographics." Even for young Italians who have managed the difficult feat of being born, there seems to be little hope. The young gentleman selling us gelato around the corner each night told us that he himself is headed for America to study engineering in Florida—and bringing his own gelato recipe to the United States. The factors blocking the

young from entrepreneurship and work in Italy redound to other countries' benefits, but they make one sad that the country that holds the Eternal City seems so mortal.

The beauty of the ancient pagan and Christian world was hard to deal with and take in, but so too is the decline of the Church and the family in Italy itself. True, American Catholicism is itself very quickly collapsing in many places and the American fertility rate is below replacement level, but I have been spoiled in living in the Twin Cities where, despite the problems in the Church, there is great life and a vibrancy that do not find a match in many places, not least Rome. And yet amidst the religious and cultural ruin, which one has to remember has plagued Rome many times before (remember young Benedict fleeing the city because of its violence and corruption around 500 A.D.), there is in the city and its international cohort of students, priests, and religious something of excitement.

That reception we planned for the first night in Rome turned out to be a delightful time, with the four aspiring Oratorians, Dr. Snyder, and a seminarian from our own archdiocese who studies at the North American College in attendance. These young men who are giving their lives to serve the Church as priests really do believe and are ready to act on their faith. And the many people we met in the city throughout the week who have a devotion to Newman or to one of the four other figures being canonized are serious about the power of the saints and the need for the saints here and now. Many hold no illusions about the state of the Church (the bizarre goings-on at the Amazon Synod down the street while we were there were a kind of symbol of the confusions in the Church at large) or the crumbling of the Western societies that might have at one time been more properly labeled Christian. Or for that matter of the difficulties attending those countries in Africa where the Church is certainly alive but has more direct conflict with Islam. Yet they persist and they rejoice in the history of God's faithfulness that surrounds them in this city of wonders.

One of the most potent symbols of this persistence we glimpsed

on a tour of the Vatican Museum. I was able to join one of our fellow pilgrims, a patron of the museum, for a private tour of the Sistine Chapel and the restoration labs in the basement. Seeing the art from various times and locales in the Church's life was a potent reminder that the Church is for all peoples. One lab expert explained to us that restoration does not include the removal of marks that are created by practices of prayer and devotions, for instance places where prayers have been tacked onto a painting. After all, the art is itself only important insofar as it is a tool and a window into the saints, angels, and God-made-man depicted in it. And the pieces of art that were being renovated were often sent from places where faith was itself under fire.

While in a hall looking at a crucifix from medieval Milan being restored, the patron noticed hanging on a screen to the side the most recent work of restoration his family had sponsored. A tenth-century depiction of the three young Hebrew men and the strange visitor in the fire recounted in the book of Daniel. It had been painted on a cave church wall in Sudan. In the 1970s when there was a danger of the cave Church being destroyed in war, it was cut out of the wall and sent to the Vatican to be kept safe and restored.

The story of the three young men in exile in pagan Babylon is a potent image of the fate of Catholics in every age, but especially our own. My own journey to Catholic faith involved a college-age time in Oxford, which was fast becoming post-Christian then but is more so now. So too even in Rome where the faith is alive, but sometimes seems on life support. And yet those works of art and those Roman Churches, with their centuries of prayer clinging to them, speak to us, reminding us of what God has done and how he has worked wonders before. An 1877 letter from St. John Henry Newman to an aristocratic convert, Lord Emly, shared the worries about the weakness of the Church and the power of her enemies, yet noted that faith and hope deal in trust in the unseen and unpredictable. God is the God of faithfulness amid trials, the one who promises to save us again in ways that are as unpredictable as the problems:

As to your question, the Church has ever seemed dying, and has been especially bad (to appearance) every 300 years. Think of it when the whole force of the Roman Empire [w]as against it. Well, they triumphed, against all human calculation. Hardly had things got into shape, when down came the barbarians and all was undone and they had to begin again. Would not the prospect of the future look as terrible to St. Augustine or St. Leo (humanly) as it does to our generation? It is impossible to forecast the future, when you have no precedents—and the history of Christianity is a succession of fresh and fresh trials—never the same twice. We can only say “The Lord that delivered me from the lion and the bear, he will deliver me from the Philistine.” But we cannot anticipate the exact shape the conflict will take.¹



In this issue we say goodbye to our long-time editorial board member Fr. Michael Buckley, SJ, who passed into eternal life at the age of 87 on July 25, 2019. With the permission of our friends at the *Church Life Journal*, we reprint here a tribute to Father Buckley written by two of his former students. **Anna Bonta Moreland** and **Grant Kaplan** write in “**A Tribute to Michael Buckley, SJ**” that their mentor’s “religious writings penetrated to the heart of the encounter with the incomprehensible mystery of God, most fully revealed in the suffering of Christ crucified.” Indeed, he was perhaps most famous for his account of the rise of modern atheism, caused not by the conquest of modern science over Christian belief, but by the uncritical embrace of science by theologians. It was as a teacher, however, that he was remembered as contributing most. He didn’t simply teach but “cultivated a circle of graduate students that constituted a modern day ‘school,’ organized around shared debate, liturgy, and desire to learn.” While we are happy to report that Carol Zaleski of Smith College, labeled by one journalist as the “mother of modern heaven studies” will be joining our editorial board, we are sad to lose this friend and advisor whose faithfulness to his calling inspired generations. *Requiescat in pace.*

Our first regular article this issue takes on a great poem of the season. **Gerald P. Boersma's "Death in Life at Christmas: T. S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi'"** examines this seminal poem, written shortly after the poet's reception into the Anglican communion, for its powerful depiction of the dark side of the truth: the reign of the child king means an end to old ways.

Baptism and Eucharist (alluded to in the second stanza) are a participation in the eternal life of Christ. However, to share in Christ's life is equally to share in his death. It is to renounce life's finite desires and aspirations as illusory; it is to confess that our ambitions and achievements have no significance except as they are ordered to eternity. The tragedy of this Christmas poem is that the Magus knows this to be true.

Wise men of later vintages often took dark views, though not all of them were as accurate. **Philip Booth** and **Matías Petersen** lay out one such wise man's views of the nature of things in "**Catholic Social Teaching and Hayek's Critique of Social Justice.**" The kind of social justice Friedrich Hayek condemned as Catholic was not actually what the Catholic Church understands by the term (though to be fair, many Catholics don't understand it either). Booth and Peterson give a history of the concept along with Hayek's own critique. They speculate on what might have happened had Hayek actually understood the Catholic meaning:

We would argue that Hayek could have developed more fully a theory of justice outside the political order that would then have provided an interesting juxtaposition with Catholic ideas of social justice and that would have opened up rather than closed down intellectual exploration of the operation of justice in society outside the political order. A Hayekian critique of social justice, as it developed in the Catholic Church from 1850–1939, could have engaged constructively with the idea of justice in society and within nonstate organizations in

society while challenging the proposed role of the state that has developed in some strands of Catholic social thinking and teaching.

Joseph A. Carola, SJ, treats of many wise men in the Church in **“The Academics, the Artist and the Architect: Retrieving the Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Catholicism.”** St. John Henry Newman, Johann Adam Möhler, Augustus Pugin, Friedrich Overbeck, and Giovanni Perrone, all in their different ways, struck out to revitalize the Church in an age of discontinuity. They “came to employ the tradition in a notably dynamic manner in order to respond to contemporary challenges. They aimed to reboot the system, as it were, but not to leave it stranded in some falsely conceived, idyllic past. Rather, they retrieved Christianity’s ancient, perennially valid sources in order to revitalize the present for the sake of the future.” They all rediscovered the need for community in an age celebrating the individual, and their work is just as much needed today as ever.

Part 2 of **Rev. Walter F. Kedjierski’s** survey of the **“Papal Contributions to the Development of the Church’s Missionary Spirit: From *Ad Gentes* to *Evangelii Gaudium*”** covers the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Father Kedjierski defends Benedict against the criticisms of theologians such as Massimo Faggioli who contend that the German was involved in a Eurocentric endeavor that showed a lack of a global vision. Instead, Benedict’s language actually fits well with other documents such as the Latin American Aparecida vision for evangelization. With Francis, Kedjierski must defend the pontiff from his admirers who seem to think he is bringing back a “Spirit of Vatican II” mentality. Kedjierski acknowledges the Argentinian’s lack of clarity in some documents, but focuses on his continuity with his predecessors: “There is no new gospel, but rather the same gospel that has been proclaimed for two thousand years. While the times have changed, and at times some, even in the leadership of the Church, have lost their focus, the kerygma Catholics are called to ‘shout from the rooftops’ by their words, and

more compellingly by their lives, has always been the same: Jesus is Risen! Jesus is Lord!”

As with T. S. Eliot’s very Catholic sensibility, so too another Anglican whose vision was very interestingly in tune with the Catholic tradition. **Daniel Frampton** in “**The Haunting of M. R. James: An ‘English Catholic Sensibility’?**” looks at the academic and writer of ghost stories as nostalgic in the true sense of experiencing the loss of home. “James was returning home—not to the cozy English idyll of ‘old maids hiking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning,’ however, but something altogether more symbolic, spiritual, and terrifyingly alive.” His recovery of the medieval sense of embodied spirits found echoes in another great writer of tales, Tolkien. James’s treatment of the Catholic past and his recovery of a fuller sacramental understanding of reality was “unconsciously Catholic,” but it was useful all the same.

Our final article, **Michael J. Naughton’s “A Tale of Two Adams: Insights for the Integrity of a Catholic University,”** takes up the famed twentieth-century Orthodox rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik’s interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 as depicting two different aspects of the human person. Adam One’s contemplative nature is essential for the life of universities, while Adam Two’s active, even “hyperactive” desire to do and make, should be secondary. Yet modern higher education usually leans the other way. Naughton’s challenge is thus: “Catholic universities should resist the temptation to describe their purpose simply in Adam One terms of utility and self-creation. First things first. The deepest purpose of university studies entails receiving a vision of the world that brings wisdom, founded in the principles of the unity of knowledge and complementarity of faith and reason.”

Notes

1. *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain and Thomas Gornall, SJ, vol. 28 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 196.