

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

# Dowry

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*In this issue:*

**Editorial: The Youth of Roman Traditions**

***Juventutem* Summer Weekend at Ampleforth**

**Good News: Truth Can Be Known**

**Priest Novelists: Evangelising through Fiction**

**First FSSP House in Ireland**

**Novel *The Island without Seasons***

**Support our Apostolate**

Picture: Seventy young adults from all over the UK and overseas attended the *Juventutem* summer weekend in Ampleforth last July.



An international network for the sanctification of the youths through the Roman traditions of the Church, *Juventutem* will celebrate its twentieth anniversary next May on **24.V.24.**

# Editorial: The Youth of Roman Traditions



Over one and a half million young Catholics gathered in Lisbon last 1-6 August for World Youth Day, with the Holy Father and a great number of bishops and priests. Half a dozen FSSP clerics took part as well, accompanying young people from our various apostolates and meeting with visitors. Thank God for many confessions heard, numerous homilies delivered, many hours spent in Eucharistic adoration and thousands of pilgrims venerating the relics of saints such as Sts Jacinta and Francisco Marto, St Thomas Aquinas, Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, St Therese of Lisieux, and even the very ring of St Joan of Arc.

As at previous WYDs, ecclesial movements and diocesan delegations were allocated churches and assigned prelates to lead their catecheses and liturgies. Sadly this time the many young adults seeking sanctification from the Roman traditions of the Church were left homeless and without dedicated pastors, or nearly. Pope John-Paul II had been the first pope to welcome the official celebration of the traditional Roman liturgy at WYD, as requested in 2004 by the traditional youth movement *Juventutem* (cf. [juventutem.org](http://juventutem.org)). After the success of our traditional delegation in Cologne in 2005 Pope Benedict XVI had continued his predecessor's fatherly policy in Sydney and Madrid. So did Pope Francis in Rio, Krakow and Panama.

It came as a disappointment therefore, if not entirely as a surprise, when *Juventutem* was told in anticipation of the Lisbon WYD that

the traditional Roman liturgy could not be officially included this time. And yet last May, progressive newspaper *La Croix* had surveyed 30,000 prospective WYD pilgrims from France and found that “38% appreciated the Latin Mass,” while “40% had nothing against it.” Our happy experience is that most young people (and older ones alike) come to love the traditional Mass when suitably introduced to it. This was confirmed by the Vatican who invited WYD pilgrims to express

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*The bones of the old duke  
must have quivered  
with joy*

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their wishes for the forthcoming Synod on Synodality: a number of their handwritten petitions on the Synod's Twitter account ask for a return to orthodoxy and for access to the traditional Mass.

Providentially, a private venue was offered in the centre of Lisbon for *Juventutem*. It was the vast and decrepit palace of a late duke. Little had changed there since it had been built after the Lisbon great earthquake in 1755. The baroque chapel seated only thirty, but when adding the choir gallery and side spaces, we managed to fit up to sixty at Holy Mass. We set a statue of Our Lady of Fatima on the top of the altar superstructure. Among other treasures, the abandoned sacristy yielded a set of white vestments which probably had not been worn

since the 1960s. Ancient altar cards were also exhumed. We dusted the place and filled the entrance stoup with freshly blessed holy water. The bones of the old duke must have quivered with joy when, in his own chapel long deserted but now overcrowded with young souls, suddenly the bell rang and anew the holy sacrifice begun: *Introibo ad altare Dei...*

Unlike at previous WYD's when up to a thousand pilgrims had registered with us, barely a couple of hundreds visited us during the Lisbon week, since out of docility to the Vatican decisions we had kept things low-key. In a larger church in town many traditional Masses were offered by diocesan priests during WYD. For us at *Juventutem*, a very friendly atmosphere prevailed all along. Various small groups from Korea, France, Croatia, Switzerland, or America pushed our doors and were thrilled to discover our little baroque chapel set up for the traditional Mass, and to hear catecheses by our priests, as well as powerful witnesses given by our young adults. We even offered a solemn high Mass at Fatima after praying the Holy Rosary there with Pope Francis. Our young pilgrims and clerics gave thanks for the patrimony of the Roman traditions, a vehicle of sanctification in centuries past—and future: so help us God and Our Lady.

Warrington,  
8 September 2023.

*Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP  
Superior of the FSSP England  
Apostolate,  
and Juventutem Chaplain* □



***Juventutem* pictures of World Youth Day in Portugal, August 2023:**

Fr Evans, FSSP gives a talk on music in Lisbon; Fr de Malleray, FSSP gives a talk on Our Lady in Fatima; Welcoming the Holy Father in Fatima; Fr Leclair, FSSP addresses French pilgrims in Lisbon.



# Juventutem Summer Weekend at Ampleforth

By Seminarian Tom Clovis, FSSP

On Friday July 21, 2023, seventy young adults from the United Kingdom and overseas began to gather at the Benedictine Abbey of Ampleforth in York for the *Juventutem* Weekend. Some opted to drive themselves through the beautiful York countryside while others took trains to York where the *Juventutem* bus was waiting to bring them to the abbey. Despite a delay caused by a broken-down van on the steep hills surrounding the abbey, everyone arrived in great spirits, eager to meet one another and enjoy a few days closer to God and his Church. It all began appropriately with Holy Mass

celebrated by Fr de Malleray, followed by supper at which the guests, the clergy and a visiting nun were introduced to one another. Fr de Malleray from St Mary's in Warrington presided and was assisted by Deacon Miklós Homolya from Hungary, who studies in St Peter's Seminary in Wigratzbad, Germany. Additional consecrated "staff" included Sister Mari Caritas of the *Filiae Laboris Mariae*, and seminarians Conán McGonagle and Thomas Clovis from the United Kingdom, who study in Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Denton, Nebraska. The participants then descended to the crypt to pray

compline and then returned to the lounge to enjoy some refreshments while conversing or playing card games until late.

On Saturday, the group took a late breakfast at 9 a.m., followed by a half-hour discussion about how best to participate in Holy Mass. Afterwards, Fr de Malleray celebrated the feast of St Mary Magdalene and reminded the group of the apostolic nature of our faith and our duty to bring the Good News to those around us. In the afternoon some free time was allotted to enjoy the stunning abbey grounds. Despite the quasi-constant





drizzle that day (and throughout the weekend), many chose to brave the wet, some to play football with the seminarians, others to lose themselves in the meandering trails of the abbey (in some cases literally lose themselves). Others perhaps more sensibly chose to stay inside either to buy a book from a selection handpicked by Fr de Malleray, or to pray before the Holy Eucharist inside the abbey walls. Later at 3 p.m., attendees were given the option of selecting from a variety of presentations on subjects such as truth, prayer, evangelisation, courtship, and purity. Following dinner, Fr de Malleray exposed the Blessed Sacrament for everyone to observe a holy hour before Our Lord while confessions were heard in a side chapel. Later, drinks were served and many of the guests stayed until late again in the lounge to socialise and play games, others however, chose to retire early after a busy day.

On the final day of the weekend, visitors were again offered a late breakfast followed by a talk by Deacon Miklós Homolya who spoke on the infallibility and indefectibility of the Catholic Church despite the many difficulties which afflict her in these times. Sunday Mass followed, which was attended by additional guests who had come for the day only. After this the travellers and the *Juventutem* group enjoyed lunch together. Throughout the weekend members were invited to anonymously place any questions they might have had for Fr de Malleray into a questions' box, and finally on Sunday after lunch Fr de Malleray ventured to answer as many as possible. He took this opportunity to remind everyone of the key importance of faith in each Christian's life and once again exhorted all present to remember their apostolic duty as Catholics, who have been sent out by Christ to

evangelise the world by words and actions.

Bags packed and photo taken, everyone boarded the bus bound for York in time for Vespers. This *Juventutem* weekend was a fantastic opportunity for young Catholics spread thin over the whole country to come together and be reinforced by the mutual support of other Catholics. Our religion is intrinsically social, and each Christian requires support from others who are likeminded. *Juventutem* was founded with this goal in mind: to foster the sanctification of the young through the Roman traditions of the Church lived among friends. The weekend was enjoyed by all, and gratitude should be shown not only to the organisers and the Abbey staff, but also to the participants for their positive, charitable, and social attitude throughout the weekend. □

# Good News: Truth Can Be Known

By Seminarian Conan McGonagle, FSSP — a talk delivered to young people at the July 2023 Juventutem weekend

As dusk was arising on an unusually gloomy spring morning in Palestine, the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate proposed the question, “What is truth?” to the badly beaten and scorned individual Whom he was in the process of interrogating. It is a profound question to ask, one which touches at the very character of life, of man’s purpose, of Who God is and Who He is not. The Latin “quid est veritas” lends itself to two translations: The first abstract ‘what is truth’ and the second concrete ‘what is *the* truth?’ Is there one truth rather than many and, if so, what must we do about it? What are the consequences of a world where everyone has their own truth? And how do we defend the truth in a world which does not recognise it?

Our Lord said to the Jews who believed in Him, “if you continue in

my Word, you will be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Truth, according to St Thomas of Aquinas, is a virtue in man insofar as man in knowing things outside of himself, such as certain words or actions or certain external things, speaks in conformity with the essence of those things. If I say that there is a table in front of me, I am speaking in accordance with the virtue of truth or truthfulness. If I say Ireland won the Six Nations in 2023 I am speaking in accordance with a reality external to myself. If, however, I were to say that there wasn’t a table in front of me I would not be acting in accordance with truth, nor would this do me any good since I would bump into that table (it’s not like I could bee-line out of this room without thumping my waistline or giving myself a dead leg). And so

truth is the conformity of our minds to external reality. St Thomas calls truth a transcendental, something applicable to all things insofar as they relate to the intellect.

According to scholastic philosophy, everything which exists has a certain essence, being, or nature. This is what a thing is in itself, that by which we define a thing. A definition is nothing more than saying precisely what a thing is, not according to simply how it looks or the sounds it makes or by how it relates to other things but what it is on an essential level. For example, when you say, “Man is a rational animal,” you take a higher overarching identity, animal, and you give the specific difference, that by which man is different from all other animals, that is, rationality. Birds are feathered bi-peds; a shuttlecock is the feathered projectile used in the sport of badminton – is there anything which can be done about this? No, this is what they are essentially, by nature. If you take the feathers off of a shuttlecock, it becomes a defective shuttlecock, a piece of cork that cannot even be used to close a wine bottle. Another example. To say that a woman is someone who chooses to be a woman does nothing to tell me or you what a woman actually is inherently. And so the Thomistic or realist view defines truth as describing a being, this table, insofar as it is known by the intellect (‘ah! That is a table’). And so, truth is the intellect relating to everything which actually exists outside the mind: this



table, that chair, this paper in front of you. Man has not only a natural capacity to know the truth but he also has a moral duty to live in accordance with the truth, to discern it, to call it what it is when he sees it.

This indeed was a cultural given until the seventeenth century and the *Meditations* of René Descartes. Perhaps without meaning to, Descartes undertook a series of rather flawed mental experiments whereby he began to deny the reliability of the senses in order to come to a purely intellectual proof for the existence of God. He started to posit that maybe the table in front of him wasn't there after all: for how did he know his eyes weren't deceiving him? Of course he didn't think of knocking his head on it, but this sort of distrust of the eyes and ears became very prevalent in modern philosophy, a sort of popular fad.

Poor René kicked a veritable hornets' nest by his work. For whatever reason, man's inability to know the outside world became a given. David Hume would go on to explicitly deny the relationship between cause and effect (I can let go of this pencil, but I can never know with certainty that it will fall to the ground, I can walk into this table but I do not know that my leg swelling is directly related to it). Soon Immanuel Kant would make the distinction between phenomena and numina (what we see and what things are in themselves). Hegel would reject the idea that things have permanent natures altogether. Finally, Marx and Engels would posit that a thing can and cannot be at the same time, in the same respect. That 'a thing can and cannot be, but *not* at the same time and in



(René Descartes, by Frans Hals, Louvre, Public Domain ;  
Left : Crow, © Malleray)

the same respect' is the first thing man knows by reason. It is how we distinguish things from one another, how a baby knows that he wants the biscuit now and not the green plastic rattle. The contrary view has been the cultural philosophy of the last 400 years: the philosophy of the so-called Enlightenment, of the French revolution, of Darwinian macro-evolution, of the Communist Manifesto, of the general secularisation of society.

When we deny the world outside of us, we cut ourselves off from our ability to know the truth. Indeed knowing the world around us from our senses to our intellect is our God-given capacity. It enables us to make the true statement, "that is a table in front of me, that is a man in front of me, that is a woman in front of me." How do we know? Not because of some bad make-up job. Rather, we need to ask, 'what does it do?' Can a man give birth? No. Can a woman impregnate? No. They have different bone structure,

different neurological wiring, different DNA. We use the definition and we apply it to the thing in front of us. This is how we come to God's existence through reason. By looking at the line of cause and effect, we know that there must be a first cause. When we look at the order of the nature of things, how the world moves and interacts, we see that there must be an intelligent design. Man, by denying the world around him and making himself into the arbiter of reality turns himself into an idol, a little-false god. René Descartes famously stated, "I think, therefore I am." God in the burning bush told Moses "I am Who I am." He is being itself. The modern world acts like a collection of little gods. We declare that morality changes, and so it is changed. We say that we are what we are not, and so we become.

The modern world of relativism is not only becoming more and more absurd—it must necessarily become so. Irish poet W. B. Yeats in his famous poem *The Second Coming* wrote, "the centre cannot hold." This is true of our world today: a society which is not grounded in external truth is doomed to float and meander between one extreme and another, oscillating between whims and fads. That which was taboo ten years ago has become normal; the next macabre practice or belief will soon become a human right. Why is this? Because if truth doesn't exist, there are not real consequences to human actions, physically, morally, socially. If we do not use our God-given capacity to raise our minds to discern the truth (and the good, which is nothing other than the will beholding the truth) by recognising what things are in themselves, then someone or something else will decide what is the pseudo-truth and



(*St Francis of Assisi preaching Christ to the Sultan*,  
by Fra Angelico, 1429 – © Malleray;  
Right: Jordan McDonald /*Unsplash*;) )

the pseudo-good to be upheld and respected. If Christ is the Logos, the Divine Word, the Orderer of all things, then we cannot but expect that a society which rejects the truth of His message will descend into chaos and madness. This is why Christ said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Either you will believe the truth, or you will become the slave of anything and everything.

On that gloomy spring morning Pilate asked, "What is truth?" What was ironic in all of this was that he proposed this question to Truth itself. The truth has a face and a name, it is Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." It is in and through Christ that we learn the truth about God, the truth about man, the truth about our nature, the truth about why we were created and what we are called to

become. God is the arbitrator of truth. It is He Who created all things and knows all things as they are. He has ascribed to each thing a particular purpose and end. This is true whether or not we accept it. This is the beauty of objective truth—it is unchanging, it is eternally true because it comes from God and reflects God. Rejecting truth does not make man free but throws him into greater slavery, unhappiness, and nihilism. We are not little gods, but by embracing the plan of God for our life, namely, to know, love and serve Him, we become truly free and like God, being configured more and more after His image. We must thank God every day that He has given us the Catholic faith; that we are members of His Church; that we can know the truth and enjoy its goodness by conforming our lives to it. It is not always easy. There are many truths



passed onto us by the Church which we can know by reason, but there are other truths which go beyond our human reason and must be embraced through supernatural faith. But we have the witness of God to what He says, for He cannot deceive nor be deceived. St Thomas, in his beautiful hymn *Adoro te devote*, writes, “that which truth doth holdeth, that for truth I hold.” We are Catholics: we embrace the truth. We must never be ashamed of it. We have a treasure in our hands. We cannot let it slip away. There’s enough of the truth for everyone, but we must be willing to share it.

But how do we do this in a post-Christian, secular society? How can we give the truth to a generation and a people who consider truth to mean a completely different thing than we do? I suppose all I can do is make a couple of practical suggestions.

First: Perhaps skip the long philosophy lesson, but find some way to get them to recognise that there are objective truths which apply to everyone indiscriminately. Do they believe that the whole custard cream is greater than half a custard cream? Do they believe that fire burns your hand if you touch it?

Do they believe that the wooden table in front of them exists? If they do (I certainly think they do), well, then ask them to perceive other things in this same way, as being external to their mind, and objectively what they are regardless of what me or you think of them. If this can apply to fire and wood and custard creams, why can it not apply to God, man, good and evil?

Second: Remember that a relativistic society leans on cheap emotionalism. Don’t allow your friends to brush something off as a choice, as love, as spirituality—what do these terms mean? Can they apply to the things they say they apply to? Don’t allow people off with cheap cop outs. Remember, just because they may be sincere doesn’t mean that they are right.

Third: Nevertheless, be kind and patient. Rome wasn’t built in a day. Remember that most people are victims and not perpetrators of the culture of relativism, even if they claim to be very sophisticated and independent. This relativism has been their bread and butter from childhood. For many it’s all they have ever known. We are to preach the truth in love and through love.

This requires sacrifice, the laying down of our lives for our neighbours.

Four: If you want a full-proof way of bringing people out of the culture of relativistic nihilism, let them see Jesus in you. Let the hope and the joy that is in you touch their hearts. Let them ask, “Why are they so happy? How can they be content in the midst of so many troubles and anxieties?” It is because we know and possess the truth, we trust in Him Whom we believe. We know our end; we know where we are called, and where hopefully we are going. There is nothing more attractive than this in a world of cheap consumerism and endless, vain pleasure-seeking: that one can bear witness to faith, hope and love in the midst of everything. That one can hold himself with certainty, showing oneself to be grounded in reality, in true and authentic happiness. A relativistic society seeks for a happiness it can never find. For it can only come through the truth. Let us show the truth to our neighbour, and let us treasure it within ourselves. Through this our witness God wishes to change the world. □



# Priest Novelists: Evangelising through Fiction

By Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP

## Introduction

Do priesthood and fiction writing ever intersect? Can they? Should they? Countless clerical and religious authors have met with deserved fame through their books on theology, philosophy, Church history, exegesis, archaeology, or even psychology and sociology. The likes of St Francis de Sales (declared “heavenly patron of all writers”) dedicated time and energy to nonfiction publications explicitly or closely connected with the Catholic faith, benefitting large audiences among Catholic faithful, attracting

converts, and inspiring the research of less numerous but scholarly readers. In comparison, where does fiction writing by priests stand, if at all? Sacerdotal ministry and fiction writing seem mutually exclusive.

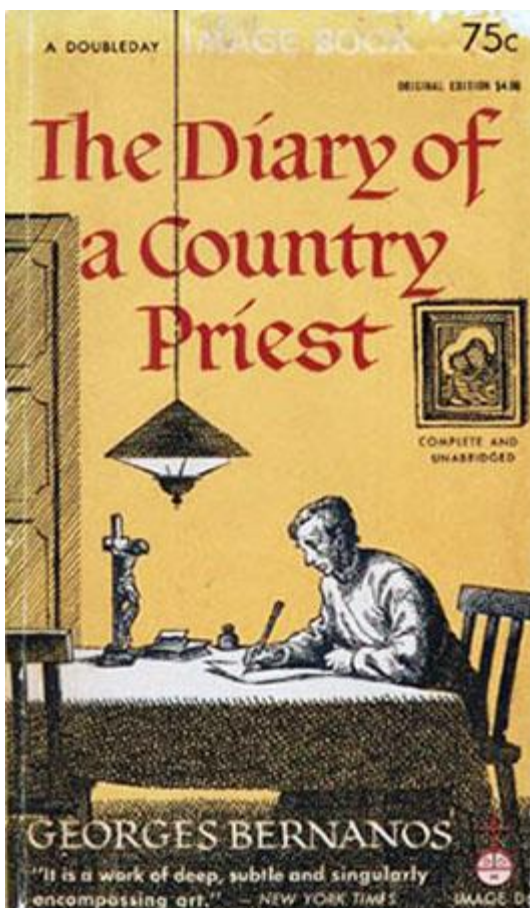
For how can men entrusted with divine powers dabble into mere human artistry? Can he whose hands were anointed to hold the Body of Christ use them to depict figments of his imagination, typing: “Once upon a time”? Worse: the supernatural energies handled by priests and the truths they teach are invisible, being accessible only through faith. Thus, belief is a prerequisite to priestly ministry. But literature itself is printed make-believe. Should not priests, therefore, keep fiction at bay lest religion itself be held, God forbid, as a pious tale? Finally, truthful literature entails the depiction of evil, a perilous involvement for priests called to fight sin rather than illustrate it.

And yet, priesthood and fiction writing do overlap, sometimes felicitously. Let us examine their occasional encounters and offer a rationale. For most readers the connection between the sacerdotal and literary

spheres conjures famous priestly characters such as the anonymous pastor in Georges Bernanos’ *Diary of a Country Priest* (1936) or Graham Greene’s ‘whisky priest’ in *The Power and the Glory* (1940). But Bernanos and Greene were laymen. What of real-life priests who wrote novels? How did they combine an activity that may seem frivolous or perilous with the awesome duties of their sacerdotal calling? Are they remembered as novelists or as men of God and saints? We will seek an answer from the example of the Lord Jesus teaching in parables. As short fictions, Christ’s parables make use of imagination to enlighten the minds and lead souls back to God: a most genuinely priestly purpose and activity.

## Five English priest novelists

The varied firmament of modern English literature encompasses a little-explored constellation of five Catholic priest novelists. John Henry Newman (1801–1890), Nicholas Wiseman (1802–1865), Robert Hugh Benson (1871–1914), Ronald Knox (1888–1957) and Bryan Houghton (1911–1992) all published Catholic fiction between 1848 and 1990. Newman’s two novels are *Loss and Gain* (1848) and *Callista* (1855), following Wiseman’s *Fabiola or, the Church of the Catacombs* (1854). Benson authored nineteen novels, plus children’s books, hagiographies, plays and devotional books. His best-known novels are *Lord of the World* (1908); *Come Rack! Come Rope!* (1913);



and his Reformation Trilogy: *By What Authority* (1905), *The King's Achievement* (1905), and *The Queen's Tragedy* (1907). Like Newman's, Knox's novels—six detective stories written for leisure—are mere byproducts of his literary work, whose monumental achievement is his translation of the Holy Bible. Houghton wrote fiction as a personal witness to the importance of safeguarding Roman traditions: *Mitre and Crook* (1979) and *The Marriage of Judith* (1984).

Wiseman was the only cradle Catholic. The four others converted from Anglicanism. Newman, Benson and Knox had received Anglican “orders”, whereas Houghton converted as a layman. Benson is the only one owing his fame principally to his novels. Newman is known mainly as a theologian, Wiseman as the first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Knox as a scripture scholar and Houghton as a liturgical exile. Their literary production spans one hundred and forty-two years of English history, from Queen Victoria to Queen Elizabeth II. Admittedly, fiction writings by Catholic priests in other countries, languages and cultures can be found, but isolated. By contrast, those five belonged in modern England and identified as Englishmen. They were not part of a literary school or circle, however. No further connection between them as novelists is known. One wonders what factors explain their grouped appearance when comparatively few of their fellow-priests abroad are known as fiction writers.

### **In Europe, America and Australia**

Rather sporadic indeed are the precedents. Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681) was a Spanish dramatist and poet who was



(Left: American front cover of Bernanos' novel, public domain; Massive sculpted head of Giant Gargantua after Rabelais' character, at Maillezais Abbey, France – © Malleray)

ordained a priest in 1651 once his literary career was nearly completed. Before him in France, François Rabelais (ca. 1483-1553) is known for his tales of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel. A former Franciscan and Benedictine, Rabelais was never ordained a priest though. Another exception is the author of the hugely successful novel *Manon Lescaut* (1731), Fr Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles, known as Abbé Prévost. If for a moment we broaden the scope of our investigation to include Anglican clergymen, we encounter major literary celebrities such as Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, but better known as the author of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). One century later, we find the inventor of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) Lewis

Carroll, pen-name of the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832–1898), an Anglican “deacon”.

A more recent author now rather forgotten even in his native France is Fr Jean Montaurier (1906-1992), who published novels under the pen-name Edmond Fleury and received the *Grand prix catholique de littérature* (1962). In Ireland, Canon Patrick Augustine Sheehan (1852–1913) is best remembered as a novelist. A Jesuit priest also a fiction writer was Austrian-born Fr Francis X. Weiser (1901-1986). Famous in America mostly for his popular books on the liturgy, he also published sixteen novels, biographies, and plays. A former Jesuit, Fr Malachi Martin (1921-1999) reached global fame through his conspiracy novels. Fr Raymond

Flanagan (1903-1990) was also a Jesuit before joining Fr Thomas Merton at the Trappist monastery of Gethsemane, where he published in 1941 a successful novel *The man who got even with God: the life of an American Trappist*. In addition, in 1944 the same Fr Flanagan (hereafter known as *Fr Mary Raymond*) published *Three Religious Rebels: Forefathers of the Trappists*, a historical narrative on the founders of the Order of Citeaux that reads like entertaining fiction and successfully familiarised the wider public with medieval saints such as St Bernard of Clairvaux. Another successful author in America is Fr Charles T. Murr (born 1950), whose literary production was surpassed, though, by his fellow-American Fr Andrew M. Greeley (1928–2013), a hugely popular novelist.

The case of best-selling novelist Morris West is interesting since, although not ordained a priest, he trained and served as a Catholic religious for a dozen years before returning to the world and publishing among many books, *The Devil's Advocate* (1959) and *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (1963). Fr Raymond Bruckberger OP wrote the scenario of *The Dialogue of the Carmelites* which he made into a film in 1960, based on Poulenc's opera (1957) adapted from Gertrud von Le Fort's novel (*The last one at the scaffold*, 1931). Of late, German theologian Fr Andreas Wollbold (born 1960) has published detective stories. May the priest author of this article be permitted to mention his modest attempts at fiction-writing for the sake of evangelisation: to document humorously priestly struggles met when offering Holy Mass in *Near Missed Masses* (2021), and to reflect on priestly



identity in *Vermeer's Angel* (2023). Finally, two further novels have just been released, *The Chemist of Catania*, by Fr Alexander Lucie-Smith; and *Renegade Priest*, by Fr Dwight Longenecker.

### Christ invented stories

As we have seen, more priests than one might imagine did write novels. As ministers of the Gospel and teachers to their flocks, priests are meant to write as well as to preach. At Holy Mass priests utter the following petition right before proclaiming the Gospel, “Cleanse my heart and my lips, O Almighty God, Who cleansed the lips of the Prophet Isaiah with a burning coal; in Thy gracious mercy deign so to

purify me that I may worthily proclaim Thy holy Gospel. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.” As a pastoral extension of the Gospel, proclaiming the Good News of salvation encompasses non-liturgical vehicles such as parish bulletins, periodicals, and more recently, social media outlets—but rarely fiction. And yet, the Sovereign High Priest Jesus Christ frequently used fiction to teach the truths of salvation.

St John tells us that Jesus did write at least on one occasion, albeit not on paper but on the ground, before the women taken in adultery (Jn 8:6). He did not commit to paper any writing but his spoken words

impressed the memory of his audience no less durably. Verbally at least, then, the Lord Jesus created short narratives probably based on actual events or derived from his observation of life among country folk. He imparted essential doctrines through the medium of parables such as *The Prodigal Son*, *The Good Samaritan*, *The Sower*, *The Lost Sheep* and more. As a storyteller though, Jesus occupies a unique position. He is the only author whose fiction can become reality at will. As Word eternal, he invented the world, since at his bidding all things came to be, “according to their kind” as we read in Genesis. It is the same divine Person who, once incarnate, shaped narratives depicting fictional characters such as the *ten virgins* or the *unrighteous steward*. How fascinating to glimpse respectfully into the authorial consciousness of Christ where will, not capability, distinguishes fiction from reality.

If Jesus can bestow existence upon whatever he fancies, reciprocally though, he imagines nothing that is not holy and useful. The apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* depicts young Jesus bringing clay birds to life. That never happened. On the contrary, infinitely remote from whim and ostentation, the divine will always entails wisdom and purpose. After creating man, and after man had sinned, the divine Word imagined nothing dearer than healing fallen souls. If we may couch this in authorial terms, Jesus was passionate about one highly complex and all-encompassing scenario titled “Redemption.” He saw the woes afflicting actual sinners and imagined the remedies of grace to set them free. The divine “fancies” were written in time, with red “ink” flowing from the Sacred

Heart, calligraphing on the parchment of his torn flesh the most sublime illuminations ever displayed before the Father of Mercies. For Jesus, what we call “fiction” is grace as offered to sinners; what we call “reality” is grace once welcomed by penitents who, henceforth enlivened, bear fruit.

### Symbol, devil and parable

For Christ, as we have just seen, fiction is to reality what a prophecy is to its fulfilment. That explains his constant recourse to fiction in his preaching: “All these things Jesus spoke in parables to the multitudes: and without parables he did not speak to them” (Matt 13:14), thus

fulfilling the prophecy, “I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter propositions from the beginning” (Ps 78:2). Etymology can help us reach deeper into the meaning of the word “parable.” “Parable” comes from the Greek *parabolē* ‘placing side by side, application’, from *para-* ‘beside’ and *bolē* ‘a throw’ (from the verb *ballein*). Thus, a parable produces meaning by bringing something known close to something unknown. For instance, Jesus offers us the story of a wayward son embraced by his father to illustrate invisible truths such as divine mercy and filial repentance. Biblical vocabulary includes another

(Left: Front cover of Wiseman’s novel, public domain; Carved depiction of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Arley Hall – © Malleray; next page Landscape, North Wales © Malleray; St J. H. Newman, Public Domain)



famous word also based on the verb *ballein* - to throw. It is the word “devil,” from *diaballein* ‘to slander’, from *dia* ‘across’ and *ballein* ‘to throw’ (hence *diabolical*). Thus, both Christ and the devil “throw” something in the direction of men. But their aims are opposite. The devil attempts to interfere between divine mercy and sinners, whereas Christ unfolds his parables as promises of redemption. Satan erects a fence; Christ throws a bridge. Parables are divine instruments gently reaching out to men’s hearts through imagination, so as to heal souls from sin.

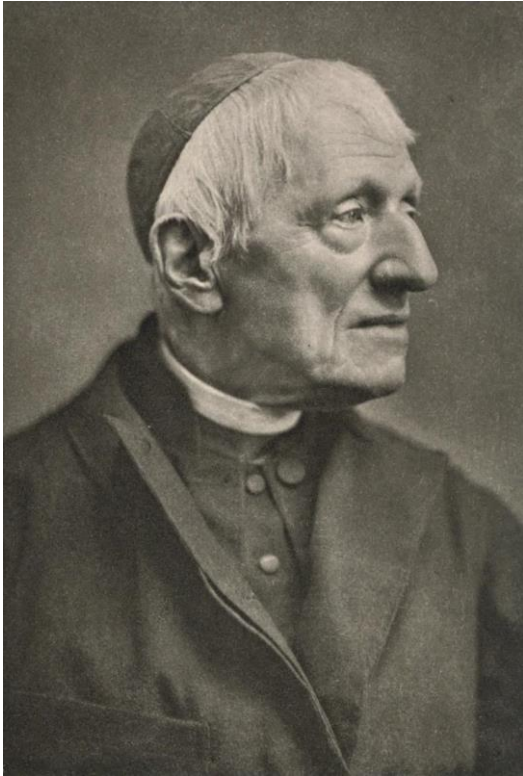
Let us go back to the beginning. Satan set up fiction against reality when he lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden: “No, you shall not die the death. For God doth know that in

what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3: 4-5). The divine commandment not to eat of the fruit under penalty of death was reality. Its twisted interpretation, presented by the devil to the first woman, was the first piece of fiction uttered. The fallen angel meant his fiction as a screen separating men from God. He succeeded. The New Adam, our Lord, corrected that sinful use of fiction. In his parables, Jesus incorporated facts and imaginations, obviously not to mislead his human audience, but on the contrary to guide them back into the saving truth. Parables are verbal instruments to gently tend the wounded minds of fallen men. They are like the crook used by the Good

Shepherd to gather his sheep out of the dispersion of deceit and error. Like “sheep that were scattered, so will I visit my sheep, and will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day” (Ezek 34:12). Our Lord uses facts of nature (the observation of birds, plants and seasons), quotes from Scripture, and even news items (the collapse of the Tower of Siloe, killing eighteen men in Lk 13:4). He draws moral meaning out of such data, not arbitrarily, but *intelligently*, that is, literally *reading inside* facts their deeper meaning.

Since the entire material world was created by God to teach men about the sanctity, bounty and power of their invisible Maker, all things are meant as signs addressed to us.





Adam knew this when he assigned names to things, before sin had twisted his will and obscured his intellect: “Adam called all the beasts by their names, and all the fowls of the air, and all the cattle of the field” (Gen 2:20). In the deepest sense, whatever falls within the range of our five senses is *symbolic*, telling us about One greater and dearer than anything created. Pointing at the etymology again, we see that both the words *symbol* and *parable* include the verb *ballein* - to throw, as does the word *diabolical*. Christ’s parables help us learn anew the symbolic nature and purpose of God’s creation. His invented narratives lead us from the devilish fiction of sin to the liberating truth of divine law and love. Jesus uses imagination not to distort the truth or distract from it, like the devil did and still does. On the contrary, Christ as author of fiction reveals to the sons of Adam the divine design once obscured by sin.

## Conclusion

Let us apply these considerations to priest novelists. Some may write for mere recreation. Indeed, to one gifted with imagination, putting together invented stories can be a refreshing and innocuous hobby. However, the theological reflections offered above call for a deeper purpose. Ontologically configured to Christ through sacramental ordination, priests must use their time on earth to serve and preach Christ even more continuously than lay people. After the

example of Christ as a story-teller using the literary form of parables, priests may have recourse to literature to evangelise, “speak[ing] in [men’s] own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). Needless to say, literary skills, if not genius, are required for such an apostolate. Flannery O’Connor’s witty reminder applies also to priests, “The Catholic novelist doesn’t have to be a saint; he doesn’t even have to be a Catholic; he does, unfortunately, have to be a novelist.”

Here lies the challenge for priest novelists. They must become saints before they become novelists. They can never define themselves as novelists, not even as Catholic novelists. In their case, “priestly character” does not primarily refer to a role played by some cleric in a novel, but to the sacramental mark indelibly imprinted in their souls through priestly ordination. That

priestly character made them other Christs, embedding in their soul divine powers for the greater glory of God and the salvation of men. Those powers are, chiefly, to make God present upon the altar, and to restore divine grace to penitents. Diligently enacting those powers conditions the sanctification of priests. They are “other Christs”: such is their truest definition. For them creative writing can only be accessory (which means neither amateurish nor indulgent). It is a means to an end: to preach Christ. St Paul, who wrote no novels but many epistles, warned priests, “for a necessity lieth upon me: for woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel” (1 Co 9:16).

No artistic skills and fame approach the greatness of offering the sacred Host and reconciling a penitent. This applies to the fine arts in general, including music and painting. Hopefully Fr Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) knew it, having been ordained a priest when only twenty-five years of age, with almost forty years ahead of him to spend as a virtuoso musician and a prolific composer. Certainly Fr Guido di Pietro was aware of it, better known as Blessed Fra Angelico (ca. 1390–1444) whom God inspired to depict the history of salvation in exquisite frescoes. If alive today, St Paul would not write on his business card, or type in his LinkedIn profile as his profession, “epistolarian” (nor “tentmaker”). Neither did St John Henry Newman, author of two novels, consider himself a “novelist.” St Paul defined himself as an “Apostle,” and so should priests (apostles with a small “a”), even though they may include storytelling among their pastoral tools, like ink nets thrown into the deep to gather God’s fishes. □

# First FSSP House in Ireland

By Fr Patrick O'Donohue, FSSP

**S**t Oliver Plunkett House has become our Fraternity's first permanent home in Ireland.

At the beginning of 2023, the FSSP began a fundraising campaign for the purchase of a community house in the South-East of Ireland. Thanks to the generosity of our faithful and benefactors we were able to purchase St Oliver Plunkett House in Waterford City. Between January and June 2023, an incredible €263,000.00 was received in donations for the purchase of the property. The property cost €500,000.00, which meant that we had to borrow almost half of the funds required.

Please consider making a one-off or recurring tax-deductible donation on our website ([www.fssp.ie](http://www.fssp.ie)) to help us buy out our house in Waterford. Alternatively, cheques can be made payable to 'The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter', St Oliver Plunkett House, Ballinaneeshagh, Cork Road, Waterford City, X91 N677, Ireland.

The weekend that we received the



keys of the new house coincided with a visit from Fr McCambridge, FSSP and some seminarians from the North American Province of the Fraternity which, providentially, allowed us to have Solemn High Mass (the first of its kind in St John's church in many decades) and sing the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for this milestone development.

In 1647 St Oliver Plunkett sailed to Rome from Waterford City. His martyrdom for his loyalty to the See of Rome and his fidelity to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass make him a fitting patron for our community house. He remains an important intercessor for the Church in Ireland, particularly for priests and bishops. □

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(Farewell Mass of Irish FSSP priest Fr Gerard Quirke in Warrington, UK, on 10 September 2023 before his departure to America for further formation : © Joachim Kahn)

# Novel *The Island without Seasons*

Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP reviews Robert Lazu Kmita's novel published in 2023 by Os Justi Press

The strange story of Alexander Wills begins breathtakingly with the oneiric description of a storm shaking the captain's cabin on board some pre-steam vessel. The entire book is presented as the account that Wills started writing on 15 August 2003. Thus, the reader knows that the main character survived the tempest or awoke from his dream. A bachelor in contemporary London, and a classical scholar by formation, Wills became an IT engineer to make ends meet. Mystery enters his life one morning at the office when he finds himself incapable of hearing what his colleagues utter, while Gregorian chant plays in his memory instead. Wills is led to realise that his professional routine

and the urban horizon have distracted him from his original calling, namely, to seek the truth about existence as propounded in the writings of Greek philosophers and early Christian thinkers.

Providentially, a mysterious duke summons him to a meeting at his Oxfordshire mansion. The imposing but affable Duke of Kirkwell is to Wills a little what Gandalf is to Frodo in *Lord of the Rings*, sending him onto a dangerous but rewarding quest. His Grace of Kirkwell had once hired Wills' late grandfather as his librarian. The two men had identified a philosophical path laid out by the wisdom of Plato, whose partly lost dialogue *Critias* has become their "holy grail". The lost

manuscript supposedly describes the demise of Atlantis, an ancient civilization sunk under the waves through some cosmic catastrophe. Finding Plato's warning could teach modern men how to avoid a similar fate. Consequently, the duke sends Wills to his family island in the middle of the Atlantic, where his extensive library should furnish him with the clues needed to find the *Critias* or Atlantis.

Most of the novel takes place on the small, and desert, island. Wills successively visits a mansion, his grandfather's cabin, a shipyard, an observatory, some ruins, a chapel and a subterranean passage to the inside of the island's volcano. A useful map is drawn halfway through the book (page 112 out of 213) for the reader's orientation. The solitary wanderings of Wills across his small island and his attempt to visit a nearby islet make him look like some Robinson Crusoe stranded upon a giant chessboard. For every step on the beach hints at a strategy, every building erected has a philosophical meaning, the reader increasingly suspects. This "island of the Nameless One" is loaded with references to the works of Greek philosophers, and Wills' exploratory strolls echo the odysseys of antiquity as if, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom wandered across



some totally deserted Dublin.

Readers untrained in classics may miss many hints, but they will still perceive that the lost wisdom of Greek antiquity is the key to Will's presence and success on the island. In fact, the novel entails very few scholarly quotes, if any. Conquistadores and Christian rulers are referred to more often than Aristotle. Nor is the average reader to fear lengthy philosophical considerations. Instead, one simply follows the hero in his physical exploration of the territory. It is enjoyable enough and not without excitement, as when Wills is caught in a typhoon! Unlike on Crusoe's island, no fellow human, "Friday" or other, is to be found until the duke himself re-appears and Wills' quest ends, or expands.

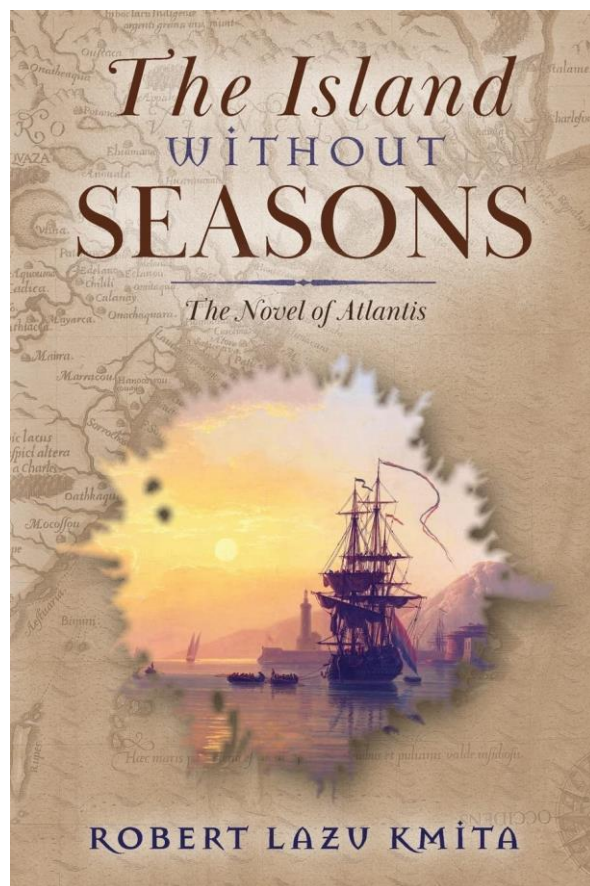
The scarcity of characters enhances the impression of busy solitude, stressing the importance of the hero's quest, as if the entire world had been blocked out. Thus, the duke is the only one who interacts with Wills in the beginning, and towards the end; Wills' work colleagues are nameless and soon vanished; his old host couple from the visit in Oxfordshire never reappears; and late Grandfather Paolo Paltini is given no direct speech but is only reminisced at times.

This novel is meant as a dream or a parable, perhaps a philosophical myth after those of Plato himself. The story does not claim to describe a real-life situation. With friendly respect for the imaginative work of my fellow-novelist Robert Lazú Kmita, I venture that such an oneiric convention is needed to exonerate his plot from a succession of occurrences otherwise implausible

in a novel. Such are: ready-made and eatable food at hand in cupboards despite no Tesco supermarket in sight; a motorboat already fuelled with petrol; power from a handy generator bringing instantaneous light into bulbs that never burn out; no snakes or ferocious beasts to dread other than placid iguanas and indifferent seagulls; fresh water running at will through rust-free pipes despite no caretaker or plumber waiting in that part of the ocean; old-style deep-sea diving suit and helmet safely put on and used as if Wills had trained under James Bond; and various letters planted by the duke conveniently found by our hero in his random exploration. A third-millennium Indiana Jones, classical scholar Alexander Wills goes unaccompanied through jungle, typhoon, shipwreck, archaeological exploration, and deep-sea diving with barely a scratch.

Let me conclude favourably. The novel is short enough for untrained readers to sustain its parabolic logic. The level of English is high and the translator must be commended on his elegant rendition. Lovers of the environment will find poetically refreshing the descriptions of the wild nature on the desert island with

its changeable sea and sky. Non-Christian readers will encounter relatively few allusions to Catholic liturgy and dogma. Such discretion may attract a modern audience and dispose our agnostic, atheistic and politically-correct brethren to consider seriously what seems the main purpose of the tale. And what is that, you may wonder? Couched in pagan Greek concepts, the fate of Atlantis is the warning of almighty Zeus to our times of technological hybris and moral arrogance. To quote the novel's crucial revelation: "Let those be punished who have betrayed the religion of their ancestors, by which was preserved the delicate bond between things seen and unseen." □



(Left: Mikhail Preobrazhenskiy/Unsplash License; Front cover of novel © Os Justi Press: [osjustipress.com/products/the-island-without-seasons](https://osjustipress.com/products/the-island-without-seasons))

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(Picture: Annual gathering of FSSP priests from England, Scotland & Ireland in Stonyhurst, 11-13 September 2023)



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