

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

# Dowry

Winter 2024-  
2025

Issue N°64



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of age 18-30 on  
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malleray@fssp.org.

*Our wall calendar UK & Ireland  
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support!*

# Editorial: Three Sainly Anniversaries



Three forthcoming anniversaries of great significance for Catholics are spiritual opportunities to seize. They commemorate God's Incarnation, the Lord's revelation of his Sacred Heart, and Our Lady's mediation.

Thus, the 2025 Jubilee Year focuses on the Incarnation of the Lord. Also known as the "Pilgrims of Hope" Jubilee, it is a global Catholic celebration that begins this Advent (2024) and will end on the Feast of the Epiphany in 2026.

As explained on the official website,<sup>1</sup> the term "Jubilee" comes from the Hebrew term "yobel," which means "ram's horn." In Jewish tradition, the sound of the horn marked the beginning of a particular year of remission and forgiveness. The Catholic Church adopted this tradition and made it a year of pilgrimage, prayer, and reconciliation.

Pilgrims are invited to travel to Rome, for instance next October for the *Summorum Pontificum* pilgrimage,<sup>2</sup> walk through the Holy Doors of the great basilicas, and attend the traditional Latin Mass in the parish church entrusted by the Holy Father to our Fraternity.<sup>3</sup> In Great Britain and Ireland, local cathedrals and other churches will be designated for pilgrims to gain the plenary indulgence.

The bull of indiction of the Jubilee hints at the second celebration, namely, the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions of the Sacred Heart to St Margaret Mary Alacoque in Paray-le-Monial<sup>4</sup> in Burgundy, France:

"Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (*Rom 5:19*)."

A Visitation nun, St Margaret-Mary Alacoque witnessed some thirty apparitions of the Sacred Heart. In his dialogue with the contemplative nun, Christ asked for a feast in honor of his Sacred Heart to be established throughout the Church. The devotion spread all over the world, with the

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*countless households enthroned  
the image of the Sacred Heart*

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emblem of the Sacred Heart being worn as a badge of heroic fidelity by the martyrs of the Vendée in France and of the Cristeros in Mexico. Meanwhile countless households enthroned the image of the Sacred Heart as the spiritual hearth of so many domestic churches, a devotion promoted by Father Mateo Crawley-Boevey among others.

The dates of the year-and-a-half-long jubilee (Dec. 27, 2023, through June 27, 2025) recall the three main dates of Sister Alacoque's revelations of Christ: the first on Dec. 27, 1673; the second the first Friday of one of the months of 1674 (Alacoque's memoirs do not specify which month); and the third during the octave of Corpus Christi (June 13–20) in 1675.

Finally, the Mother of God will be honoured in her earliest shrine worldwide, the crypt of the cathedral of Chartres in France, whose first millenium will be celebrated from 8<sup>th</sup> September 2024, feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, to her Assumption on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025. Many of our readers will be familiar with the successful Pilgrimage of Christendom,<sup>5</sup> drawing thousand from Paris to Chartres every year on the weekend of Pentecost. All are invited to book for the cathedral jubilee pilgrimage from Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> to Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2025. On arrival with up to twenty thousand young Catholics, they will give thanks to the Blessed Virgin Mary, kneeling before her ancient relic, her veil, displayed in the cathedral. The following day they can attend Holy Mass at our medieval church of St Aignan,<sup>6</sup> a few steps away from the cathedral.

Thank God for those opportunities to strengthen, celebrate, and spread our Catholic faith, the only proximate and proportionate means of union with God until we see Him face to face.

On 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024,  
Presentation of Our Lady

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

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<sup>1</sup> iubilaum2025.va

<sup>2</sup> summorum-pontificum.org

<sup>3</sup> roma.fssp.it

<sup>4</sup> fssp-saone-et-loire.com

<sup>5</sup> nd-chretiente.com

<sup>6</sup> fssp-chartres.org

(Picture: Veil of Our Lady in  
Chartres Cathedral - © Malleray)



# Hope Does Not Disappoint

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*Extracts from Pope Francis' bull of indiction for the 2025 Jubilee of the Incarnation of the Lord*

“‘Hope does not disappoint’ (Rom 5:5). In the spirit of hope, the Apostle Paul addressed these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome.

“Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness. For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God’s word helps us find reasons for that hope...

“9. Looking to the future with hope also entails having enthusiasm for life and a readiness to share it. Sadly, in many situations this is lacking. A first effect of this is the *loss of the desire to transmit life*. A number of countries are experiencing an alarming *decline in the birthrate* as a result of today’s frenetic pace, fears about the future, the lack of job security and adequate social policies, and social models whose agenda is dictated by the quest for profit rather than concern for relationships. In certain quarters, the tendency “to blame population growth, instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the [real] issues”.

“Openness to life and responsible parenthood is the design that the Creator has implanted in the hearts and bodies of men and women, a mission that the Lord has entrusted to spouses and to their love. It is urgent that responsible legislation on the part of states be accompanied by the firm support of communities of believers and the entire civil community in all its components. For *the desire of young people to give birth to new sons and daughters* as a sign of the fruitfulness of their love ensures a future for every society. This is a matter of hope: it is born of hope and it generates hope.

“Consequently, the Christian community should be at the forefront in pointing out the need for a *social covenant to support and foster hope*, one that is inclusive and not ideological, working for a future filled with the laughter of babies and children, in order to fill the empty cradles in so many parts of our world. All of us, however, need to recover the joy of living, since men and women, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen 1:26*), cannot rest content with getting along one day at a time, settling for the here and now and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone. This leads to a narrow individualism and the loss of hope; it gives rise to a sadness that lodges in the heart and brings forth fruits of discontent and intolerance.

“12. Signs of hope are also needed by those who are the very embodiment of hope, namely, *the*

*young*. Sadly, they often see their dreams and aspirations frustrated. We must not disappoint them, for the future depends on their enthusiasm. It is gratifying to see the energy they demonstrate, for example, by rolling up their sleeves and volunteering to help when disasters strike and people are in need. Yet it is sad to see young people who are without hope, who face an uncertain and unpromising future, who lack employment or job security, or realistic prospects after finishing school. Without the hope that their dreams can come true, they will inevitably grow discouraged and listless. Escaping into drugs, risk-taking and the pursuit of momentary pleasure does greater harm to them in particular, since it closes them to life’s beauty and richness, and can lead to depression and even self-destructive actions. For this reason, the Jubilee should inspire the Church to make greater efforts to reach out to them. With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young couples, the rising generation. Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!

“14. The *elderly*, who frequently feel lonely and abandoned, also deserve signs of hope. Esteem for the treasure that they are, their life experiences, their accumulated wisdom and the contribution that they can still make, is incumbent on the Christian community and civil society, which are called to cooperate in strengthening the covenant between generations...” □

*(Picture: Marble depiction of the Nativity above the tabernacle harbouring Christ's true Eucharistic Presence, below the shining triangle of the Most Holy Trinity, at St Roch Church in Paris - © Malleray)*



# He Smuggled The Sacred Heart Into England

*Dominica Roberts tells how French priest Father Claude la Colombière S.J. providentially brought the devotion from Paray-le-Monial into the heart of London at the cost of his life.*

It is three hundred and fifty years since the visions of a French Visitandine nun, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, encouraged worldwide devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Amongst the many saints who have helped to spread this devotion is one of particular interest to English Catholics, the French Jesuit St Claude la Colombière. In 1675 he was sent to be the Rector of the Jesuit parish in Paray-le-Monial, and consequently the Spiritual Director of the Convent of the Visitation next door to the church.

One of the nuns was a young woman, Margaret Mary Alacoque, who for the past two years had been having visions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Most of the convent was unbelieving, and she had been told by the previous chaplain that they were the work of the devil. Naturally enough she was worried and confused.

St Claude came to believe in the validity of the visions. The Feast Day of the Sacred Heart, the devotion of the First Fridays, the veneration of statues and pictures of the Sacred Heart in homes, all were popularised and spread through his understanding that the devotion was based on the Gospel.

After eighteen months he was sent to England, to be a chaplain and preacher to Mary of Modena, the Catholic second wife of King Charles II's brother James, Duke of



York. He wrote often to St Margaret Mary, continuing the good work he had begun.

There was still prejudice against Catholics in England at that time. St Claude, living at the Court of St James, was active in preaching and brought back many who had lapsed, though he had always been delicate and the damp climate was already harming his health.

In 1678 Titus Oates started stirring up hysterical hatred in England against Catholics, and in particular against Jesuits, whom he claimed were plotting to kill the King and put the Catholic James on the throne.

St Claude was accused in 1679 of being a part of this eventually

discredited plot, and was imprisoned in the King's Bench Prison. He was interrogated several times. Conditions in the prison were so bad that his health was permanently impaired. After some weeks, since he was a French subject, he was sent back to France, though many Jesuits and other Catholics were executed or died in prison.

St Claude spent the last two years of his life in France, and died in Paray-le-Monial in 1682, aged only forty-one.

St Margaret Mary died in 1690 and was canonised in 1920. St Claude la Colombière was canonised by Pope John Paul II in 1992. There is a shrine to both of them in Paray-le-Monial. □



(Picture: private collection - © Malleray  
Left: St Claude gives holy Communion to St  
Margaret-Mary © Shrine of Paray-le-Monial )

# Statistics, Intercession, and Sanctification

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The annual statistics of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter worldwide have been updated last 1<sup>st</sup> November ([fssp.org/en/statistics-update/](https://fssp.org/en/statistics-update/)). Our clerical society of apostolic life of pontifical right is the largest traditional priestly society in hierarchical communion with the Church. Founded in 1988 by twelve clerics through direct intervention of Pope John Paul II and then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, it now numbers 583 members of fourteen nationalities (386 priests, 15 deacons, and 182 seminarians). The priests minister in 151 dioceses across four continents, serving 255 Mass centres, including two mission apostolates in Nigeria and Colombia. The seminarians are being trained in our two international seminaries in Europe (St Peter's International bilingual Seminary in Wigratzbad, Germany) and in America (Our Lady of Guadalupe's International Seminary in Denton, Nebraska), plus in our First Year Seminary in Sydney, Australia. We ordain fourteen new priests per year on average, and our members are 39 years of age in average. We are supported through prayer by the 10,515 members of the Confraternity of Saint Peter, our international prayer network, and more generally by the broader number of those who pray for us, seek and fund our ministry. Most of our priests minister in parishes and chaplaincies, some in schools run by us or requesting our pastoral input. Our priests also organise retreats, pilgrimages, missions, youth groups,

and pursue further academic studies in Rome, Jerusalem, Toulouse, Fribourg, Paris, and Washington.

Due to our young age we have only fifteen deceased members, most of whom were ordained before joining us. Such is the case of Fr Claude Michel, FSSP who died of sickness last 24<sup>th</sup> October. All our 386 priests were informed immediately by email and within about 24hrs offered 386 holy Masses of Requiem for the repose of his soul. R.I.P. Such a grace-filled response tripled on All Souls Day, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, when holy Mother Church unleashes her full intercessory power to hasten entrance into blessed eternity for the souls of her children suffering in Purgatory. The Priestly Fraternity of St Peter worldwide was one hundred percent committed to that undertaking of supernatural charity, offering within one day 1,158 holy Masses of Requiem. That amounts to 48.25 Masses per hour, or 1 traditional holy Mass starting every 74 seconds over 24hrs. Furthermore, since all Masses were offered with permission from the local bishops they were also fully lawful, thus deriving maximum fruit. *Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis!*

Communiqué of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter on September 26, 2024, Fribourg:

“The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter (FSSP) has recently been informed by the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of the

opening of an apostolic visitation of the Fraternity. As the Prefect of this Dicastery himself made clear to the Superior General and his assistants during a meeting in Rome, this visit does not originate in any problems of the Fraternity, but is intended to enable the Dicastery to know who we are, how we are doing and how we live, so as to provide us with any help we may need. The last ordinary apostolic visit of the Fraternity was undertaken in 2014 by the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission. As the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has been in charge of the FSSP and other former *Ecclesia Dei* institutes for the past three years, it now the competency of this Dicastery to look after the FSSP.”

Entrusting anew our Fraternity, our ministry, and all the souls we serve to the motherly intercession of our special Protectress the Blessed Virgin Mary and of our glorious Patron the Apostle Saint Peter, we also request your prayers and we assure you of ours, that we may bear always more abundant and lasting fruit, please God, to his greater glory and for the conversion of the world.

□

Book for our annual Vocation Discernment Weekend for single Catholic men 18-30 on **28 Feb-2 March 2025** at Buckden Towers near Bedford: [malleray@fssp.org](mailto:malleray@fssp.org).

(Pictures: Masses of Requiem by FSSP priests for the celebrant's mother (top, Wigratzbad seminary) and for the fallen in the two world wars of the last century (bottom, Bedford, England.)





# Garments of Sanctity: Opus Anglicanum

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*The glorious English tradition of sowing and embroidering liturgical vestments is valued anew, Ola Smalley finds.*

**T**he English must be proud when it comes to embroidery of the sacred vestments. Opus Anglicanum or “English Works” hold a special place in the tradition of the Catholic Church, weaving together threads of faith, devotion and artistry. As our Church celebrates the Holy Mass, the sacred vestments worn by priests play a vital role in the divine encounter. The unique craftsmanship mainly survives on ecclesiastical vestments enriching the liturgy and it is a testament to the importance of preserving tradition within our Church.

## **The origins of Opus Anglicanum**

Between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries the English were renowned and esteemed across the continent for their unique embroidery including intricate gold and silver threads, fine silk work and delicate pearls. Such was the appreciation for Opus Anglicanum that many English vestments were gifted to popes and bishops and are still preserved to this day, including in the Archbasilica of St John Lateran in Rome.

The English style can be particularly noted by rich colours, particular stitches and adorned imagery of saints, angels, and Biblical scenes.



These textiles reflected the grandeur and sanctity of the Mass, presenting the faithful with visual theology and an opportunity to contemplate the divine mysteries embodied within the Eucharistic sacrifice.

### **Telling the story of faith**

Symbolism is an important aspect of our faith, aiding and shaping our prayer. The English vestments are the embodiment of this symbolism: gold and silver threads represent the light of Christ, while deep reds and blues invoke Christ's Passion and the Virgin Mary, respectively. Intricate floral motifs, such as lilies, roses, and vines, recall purity, martyrdom, and the vine of Christ. These symbols invite reflection on the divine mysteries and connect the faithful to the narratives of our faith.

For the traditional Roman Catholic Church, these details are more than ornamental. They transform the vestments into a visual sermon, silently instructing the faithful and turning the priest into a living icon of Christ. The embroidery turns fabric into a spiritual bridge between the earthly and the divine realms.

### **Continuing the Legacy**

The Catholic Church has kept Opus Anglicanum alive and in the nineteenth century we experienced somewhat of a revival of the techniques used, with artisans again



*(Picture left by Ola Smalley at the V&A: The Butlet-Bowdon Cope, about 1330-50. The silk velvet originates from Italy or Spain and the embroidery is from England. The cope shows the life of the Virgin Mary surrounded by apostles and saints. Current page: Member of the Guild of Saint Clare mending a chasuble - © guildofstclare.org)*

turning to medieval patterns and techniques. This was led not only by an interest in craftsmanship but also by the desire to restore the Church to Her former glory.

Today, although only a handful of medieval vestments have survived, we are blessed to have the opportunity to admire the work of our ancestors. There are many exhibitions where these works can be examined and the processes used in their creation studied, the most prominent being the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

Most importantly, we ourselves can be embodying the continuity of tradition in the Church's sacred celebrations. The exquisite detail and spiritual resonance of English embroidery remind us of the

enduring importance of beauty in worship. Through the centuries, English embroidery has been a gift to our Church, a testament to the love and devotion of artisans who saw their work as an offering to God. These vestments, often laboured over for years, serve as a reminder that the Mass is more than a

ritual; it is a divine encounter, and through these sacred textiles, the Church ensures that beauty and reverence continue to glorify God.

As we witness a renewed appreciation for traditional arts, may English embroidery inspire us all to seek beauty in the everyday and, above all, to honour the Mass with the same dedication and reverence as those who thread the garments of sanctity.

If you, like many others, have an interest in learning to beautify sacred vestments, the Guild of St Clare holds vestment mending workshops, embroidery classes and sewing retreats where you can acquire these skills in a Catholic setting. Visit their website, [guildofstclare.org](http://guildofstclare.org). □

# Interior of the Carpenter's Shop at Forty Hill

Using a non-religious painting by John Hill (c.1780–1841) from the Tate Britain Gallery in London, Fr Armand de Malleray walks a few easy steps with beginners in the art of interpretation that can further apply to religious art.

**W**hat do you see? What do you see, my friend? A painting hangs before you, widely displayed. At first glance, you easily identify a room inhabited by men busy with tools and timber. Is that all? What if there were more to this picture than meets your eyes? You behold the image, but do you read the message? Is there not something hidden, some secret or cypher? That sounds interesting, perplexing. Let's take a

look, shall we?

First, where are we? In a workshop. You may add, *It is a carpenter's workshop*. Perhaps if you check the full title of this painting, you will specify, *It is located in a village named Forty Hill, near Enfield, in England*. The date of the picture, circa 1800, will yield further information. It was painted in the early nineteenth century when Great Britain was at war with Revolutionary France. Now you survey the main action taking place within the frame. You see men at

work. They are carpenters, as their tools indicate. They process wood. How does it feel to you in this vast room? Noisy? Busy? Smelly? Hot? I don't know about you, but to me it feels very peaceful and quiet. It is strange, in a way, because these three men are very active, aren't they? They have no time for us beholders, it seems; nor for one another, since they don't even look at each other's bench. They are so focused on their respective tasks, aren't they? Why is it then, that their busyness feels so relaxing? One detects no hurry, no impatience, no





(Picture left: Tate Gallery, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence (CC BY-NC-ND).  
Above: By Sailko - Own work, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=68240900>.)

anger, nor any worry. It is as if the material those three work so skilfully were not only wood, but something bigger, some cosmic element even, like time and space. They know exactly what they are about, although *we* can only guess what it is. They have no doubt that the work will be completed on time. By when must it be ready? We notice no tiresome clients waiting for their order to be handed them. There is only ourselves, watching the three, contemplating their hands on the tools as they fashion the wood. Wait a minute, what if *we* were the customers? And perhaps, if I may disclose in advance, better than *clients*, may we be the *patients*?

### Christian echoes

Actually, have we not been there before? Although we have no need

of either plough or yoke if this proves to be a carpenter's workshop; and despite not feeling sick if, as you suggest, some healing is offered here—why this slight impression of *déjà vu*? Now that you say so, this scene does look a little familiar. A carpenter's workshop; three persons at work; a wide-open, Edenic countryside framed by the window at the back, like a picture within the picture. And this triangular shape of the wood beams meeting (outside the frame) at the roof pitch... And the three identical windows on the left... And, well, that is merely a hint, is it not—this unsheathed axe by the block in the foreground as if ominously awaiting a victim. We don't quite dare to suggest it, because there is no evidence of anything religious or Christian in this depiction that we can see.<sup>1</sup> And yet, even non-believers have heard

of St. Joseph the carpenter, the foster-father of Jesus Christ. In the same art gallery where our painting by John Hill is displayed—the Tate Britain, in London—we can glance in the next room at St. Joseph's workshop as imagined by John Everett Millais in *Christ in the House of His Parents*, painted not long after in 1849. That later painting includes the cousin of Jesus, St. John the Baptist, among the trainee carpenters. Could the three men in our picture be St. Joseph (back), Jesus (front) and St. John the Baptist (middle)? Nothing precludes it. By association with the biblical theme, it is difficult to ignore that in Western painting the number *three* is loaded with religious meaning in reference to the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of one God in three Persons: the divine Father, Son and holy Ghost. There is

no need to have attended catechism classes to recall that God created heaven and earth, and later came to redeem mankind from sin. Finally, such salvation was wrought by Jesus Christ when dying upon a cross. As an apprentice and carpenter in Nazareth for thirty years in the workshop of his foster-father St. Joseph, no doubt Jesus would have assembled pieces of timber at a right angle. When condemned to die on a cross after his three years of public ministry, even before carrying it on his shoulder along the streets of Jerusalem, Jesus would have gauged accurately the weight and solidity of his gibbet.

### Holy Trinity

Very well, now I have said it. What? That this painting allows for a Christian interpretation. I know, I know, nothing supports it explicitly. But ask yourself, between us, don't you feel something quite enticing and uplifting when you start looking afresh at this image as a depiction of Jesus, St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist in the workshop at Nazareth? And even more so if the trio typifies instead the Most Holy Trinity creating and redeeming the world? Does the master at the back represent God the Father, then? His clothes are darker in colour, his hat black. He stands furthest away from us (by the open window), as on high the heavenly Father sits yonder clouds and stars. Nearest to us, to the front, an apprentice clothed in lighter shades is the only one facing us. On his bowed head though, his squarish hat conceals his features. His leg is bent to keep steady the plank he is sawing. He could have just sprung out of the chest on the far left, whose dimensions and conspicuously opened lid evoke, as in some Renaissance paintings, the



gaping tomb of Christ rising on Easter morning. Whilst all three carpenters stand close to three green chests, only the Son's is open. His back turned on us, the third man must be the Holy Ghost, third Person of the divine Trinity. His position between Father (at the rear) and Son (to the front) fits well his role as intermediary between those two other Persons whose mutual love he personifies. He obligingly bends his back forward, leaving unobstructed, for us to enjoy, the landscape through the window. Out of the three, the middle man is the only one with both feet visible on the floor. Of Father and Son, only the left foot shows. If those were boys, one could expect them soon to run a *four-legged* race, each with a limb strapped to their partner's. They are adults though, but no less

closely connected through nature and purpose.

### Mystical chessboard

Did you notice the wide flagstones on the floor? They project far-reaching lines across the composition of the painting, like *coordinates*. Those coming down from the Father (vertical *ordinates*) meet those leading sideways to the Son (horizontal *abscissas*). Notably, their intersection is the very spot where John Hill set his block and axe. I described earlier as *sacrificial* the conjunction of these two items typically used for capital punishment (inflicted upon St. Paul the Apostle, or closer to us, upon St. Thomas More or St. John Fisher). I see in them a discreet allusion to the Sacrifice of the Cross, in which the Son offered up his human life to

glorify the Father and redeem sinful men. You are fully entitled to object, preferring to define as *fortuitous* the painter's choice of such tools and their positioning in the current location. A carpentry expert disagrees with you though. He was commissioned by the Tate Gallery to provide a thorough description of this painting as a genuine master carpenter would see it. Well, after identifying dozens of carpentry tools, after commending John Hill on the professional accuracy of his painted depiction, that commentator singles out the axe and the cross-cut log lying on the flagstone, as *the only slightly unrealistic note in the picture, for no carpenter would leave an axe on the floor like that*. Why? It is simply too dangerous, lest someone walked or fell on it and got hurt.<sup>2</sup> Fictional sleuths such as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot know that a single unaccounted-for detail is sufficient to warrant alternative explanations when seeking the truth in a crime case. The anomaly of the exposed axe and block allows us to unfold our *Trinitarian* hypothesis further, noting that the Father's posture is triangular, and that he stands beneath the smaller triangle

encompassing his tools hanging against the wall, within the wider compositional triangle of the horizontal beam connecting the outer walls and the roof rafters. Finally, the empty frame hanging askew above the Father conveniently hints at the landscape framed by the window. If John Hill's picture is primarily about depicting a carpenter's trade, by necessity it also involves the art of painting. I submit that this neatly framed view of the countryside, whose blue and green hues contrast elegantly with the spectrum of brown and beige shades inside the room, represents the *intention* of the Holy Trinity at work, the planned outcome of their *love labour*, surely not lost. In consubstantial harmony, the three divine persons bring into existence the orderly sequence of finite beings, visible and invisible, mineral, vegetal, animal, and rational, as per the biblical *Book of Genesis*. Reaching out to fallen humans, the divine Three decree the loving scheme of the Son's Incarnation for men's redemption. Such a complex deployment of the divine mercy is alluded to and summarized by this idyllic countryside, like a glance at the

peace of Eden, once lost and soon to be restored, and even augmented.

### He did not

You smile. Is it contentment? Does my unashamedly *subjective* explanation of this painting please you? Ah, here we come. You enjoyed it, but you also wonder whether John Hill, the painter, *meant* to represent what I suggested. What a timely question! I answer, *In my opinion he did not!* He may have been aware of the religious undertones conveyed by his composition. After all, in the early nineteenth century, England was still a deeply Christian country, even though not a Catholic one anymore. Master John Hill, an average layman, would have known his religion better than many a modern expert. More importantly, unlike most religious *experts*, John Hill would have held the Christian revelation as true, and would have sought to conform his life to the Gospel. Is there in a drawer, perhaps in some dusty archive, a letter or a diary entry in which John Hill might have written that he meant his painting to illustrate Christian catechesis? Stranger things have

(Picture left: Piero della Francesca – Public Domain <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/P/piero/resurrex.jpg.html>, Museo Civico, Sansepolcro. Below: Tate Gallery, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence (CC BY-NC-ND).





(Picture above: Execution of Queen Marie-Antoinette, Public Domain; [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/43/Ex%C3%A9cution\\_de\\_Marie\\_Antoinette\\_le\\_16\\_octobre\\_1793.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/43/Ex%C3%A9cution_de_Marie_Antoinette_le_16_octobre_1793.jpg). Right: By Gustave Doré/ Héliodore Pisan - The History of Don Quixote, by Cervantes. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6912771>).

come to light in art history, but we cannot rely on a mere possibility. It thus seems unlikely, I readily admit, that he would have intended to depict a convincing metaphor of the Holy Trinity at work. This, for the simple reason that being primarily a carpenter he loved his craftmanship, and as an amateur painter he found the accurate description of his skills, tools, and associates the best homage he could offer God. Why then? Yes, please say it. Why then did I just comment on his painting in Christian terms? Regardless of the intellectual thrill it affords, why bring theology into carpentry? Am I not being disloyal to the artist? Am I not hijacking the fruit of his exertions, appropriating it for a purpose that was not his?

### Intention

So, you agree that the intention of an artist should not be overlooked. You find it an essential consideration for a legitimate commentary on his work. You are absolutely right. However, some modern critics would object that such an ethical *a priori* might unnecessarily restrain their freedom of examination. It would deprive them and the beholder of intriguing and enriching suggestions. For instance, adopting a Marxist perspective on this painting would reveal the likely *oppression* of the apprentices by the master; it would condemn the patriarchal structure in force before the liberation of the proletariat theorised in England by Karl Marx during the

same nineteenth century. Might it not even suggest that the wooden appliance assembled by the three men in the workshop is none other than a *guillotine*, assuming that John Hill authored his painting toward the end of the French Revolution when that *rasoir national*— the *national razor*—was proudly invented across the Channel? A capitalist approach, on the other hand, would welcome the end of such village workshops, expediently absorbed into vast factories to foster mass production and to make carpentry products affordable for all (even if only as flatpacks to self-assemble at home and refrain from moving anywhere afterwards, lest the thin planks broke around the tiny screws and the whole wardrobe collapsed). A



feminist explanation would bemoan the scandalous exclusion of any women from this working scene, unless the middle apprentice (our Holy Ghost) be ascribed as female. The feminist view would praise the advent of equal job opportunities in subsequent centuries, allowing for members of the *weaker* sex to demonstrate their strength and resilience as bricklayers, steam train drivers, and grave diggers. Such commentaries would give little attention to the author's intention. His intention could be invoked against him, if anything, as a proof of his socio-religious bias, of his economical backwardness, of his male chauvinism. You smile again. You think my descriptions of purported Marxist, capitalist and feminist views of John Hill's *Interior of the Carpenter's Shop at Forty Hill, Enfield* are humorously dismissive. Fair enough, no offense meant. But you see what is at stake. Modern critics will sometimes bypass the painter's intention, taking dubious liberties with his work. I would be wary of it. Those reflections on the artist's intention lead us to the no less important matter of *interpretation*.

## Interpretation

Interpretation? What exactly do I mean by that? Well, I mean that every work of art, nay, every impromptu speech or trivial piece of writing involves some level of interpretation. Why so? Because whatever is reported or depicted is one Mr Jim or Miss Jane's own understanding and

perception, that is, always something subjective. If the said Jim is dull, his understanding is likely to be dull. If Jane is subtle, her depiction will be more entertaining. But *total* objectivity is impossible for the human mind to achieve. Thus, every message painted, carved, sung, danced or written down, is to some extent a subjective interpretation by its author of the object represented. This is most manifest in performing arts such as music concerts and theatre plays. Musicians and actors are not only forgiven for *interpreting* Mozart or Shakespeare, rather, they are *expected* to interpret. To an audience familiar enough with this symphony or that tragedy, interpretation is the more interesting

aspect of the performance. Applying this to pictures, we can be sure that another artist would have painted John Hill's workshop differently. The light, the characters, the postures, the perspective would have differed. John Hill interpreted what

he saw, not what his apprentice saw nor what his customer saw. John Hill gave us his own perception, his take on the sight offered, his personal outlook on the room. Therefore, any reviewer or any beholder is entitled to *interpret* Hill's painting, just like Hill *interpreted* the workshop.

You ask how far that principle extends. It depends on the purpose. For the sake of humour, satire or provocation, a commentator may seem to ignore the author's intention and even make light of the authorship of a masterpiece. This is what Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges did in his 1939 short story *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, in which he irreverently manipulates Cervantes' classical novel. In the name of *science*, modern exegetes have conditioned us to critical analyses of the holy Bible showing little regard, if any, for the divine inspiration of the sacred texts. Less subtly, what of Marcel Duchamp's iconoclastic *moustache* drawn on *Mona Lisa* in 1919? There is little doubt whether the author's intention, Leonardo in this instance, was taken into consideration in the use made of his masterpiece. Such should not be our method to interpret explicitly Catholic paintings. Because those unambiguously illustrate various episodes in the Christian history of salvation, they can and must be interpreted according to the teaching of the Church. Thankfully, Christianity—and Catholicism



in particular—offer the richest, deepest and most enthralling background. Even though one were to look at these paintings without faith, merely out of cultural interest rather, one would be delighted by the interplay between so many historical ramifications, theological parallels and compositional analogies. Because Christianity shaped and nurtured Western civilisation, depictions such as a Nativity, St. Joseph in his workshop, the Calling of an Apostle, an Apparition of Christ or the Martyrdom of a Roman Pretorian shine just like individual tiles within an immense mosaic. Attractive and beautiful as a painting may be when considered individually, it is but a sample, deriving a wealth of meaning from its insertion within the wider picture of the economy of salvation still being drawn across history by God’s Providence. A truth on which other main religions agree with Christianity is that nature is the work of God the Creator, whose Providence continuously influences even society and civilisation. Therefore, Catholic artists and commentators should be guided by the intention of God as author of the world and director of history.

## Composition

Looking carefully at the *composition* of Catholic paintings helps us draw meaning from them. Remember the *coordinates* on the floor and the *Trinitarian* roof rafters John Hill’s *Carpenter’s Shop*? Well, unsurprisingly it works even better when applied to pictures which are explicitly Catholic. By the way, what is *composition*? The *composition* is the structure of the image. For instance, is it altogether a horizontal or a vertical rectangle?

How is the space organised within the frame? Are there any obvious contrasts or symmetries in shapes and colours? Where is the light coming from? What direction do the main lines follow: diagonal, perpendicular, parallel, converging? Do any curves and circles show, are there dots to be connected? All such geometrical elements combine to convey movement, thrust, dynamism, rise—or the opposite: deceleration, lowering, stabilisation. This does not sound abstract when applied to good Catholic paintings. A bonus for you, composition thus surveyed as a geometrical structure is not vague, but objective; not remote, but immediate. It is objective because the same line cannot be painted vertical *and* askew: it is one or the other. Similarly a triangle either has three angles, or it is no triangle at all. Also, geometrical composition is immediate because any such data are displayed before your eyes all at once. You don’t need to look up this or that fact online. So, even if you don’t know Catholicism well, geometry hands you tools that you can use without preparation or consultation, as a born-carpenter let loose in the workshop! No waiting time: you can get started straight away.

Wait a minute: geometry is not the end, just a means. The composition is only the bones, the skeleton, so to speak; while the things and people depicted are the flesh. Why? Because this is not about modern non-figurative art, as you realise. This is about illustrating the Christian faith in a non-visible God, Creator of all things invisible and



visible, later making himself present under visible forms. Therefore, geometry only matters here as a supporting actor. The real stars of the show are the people, and after them, the animals, plants and stones.

John Hill’s *Carpenter’s Shop* gently suggests that an everyday setting, seemingly devoid of anything supernatural, allows for a spiritual interpretation. It makes commentaries of explicitly Christian paintings more convincing. If Christian dogmas provide unsuspected depth to John Hill’s *Carpenter’s Shop*, they are even more relevant when applied to Catholic depictions such as a Nativity, a Last Supper, or a Crucifixion. Finally, and between us, I quite like John Hill’s workshop. One feels comfortable in his room. Warm breeze blowing through the open window, and a nice smell of sawdust. □

<sup>1</sup> I failed to locate an elusive “small eagle” meant as a model for the full-size wooden appliance supporting liturgical books in church services, which a commentator identified against the back wall.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jack Warans: <https://blog.lostartpress.com/2019/08/21/a-tour-of-john-hills-workshop/>. Accessed 5 October 2022.

# Craft Resources For Catholic Homes

*Catherine Witkowski and John Grimer introduce the online shop run by them and their siblings to equip families with home-made visual illustrations of the Catholic faith through the depictions of saints, calendars, and books.*

Today's culture challenges the core values of family and faith, promoting distorted views on beauty and truth. It replaces God by putting the self at the centre of life. Authentic beauty is redefined, and there is immense pressure not only to accept these distortions, but to embrace them. These twisted ideas can be difficult for even adults to resist. This is why it is more vital than ever to protect ourselves and our children, guiding and grounding them in the Catholic faith and curating our home to reflect the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

While navigating through our fast paced, media driven age, where our very attention has become commoditised, it becomes crucial to provide a space that redirects our focus to God. St Gregory teaches us the power of images in guiding young minds to holiness, *'For what writing presents to readers, that a picture presents to the unlearned*

*who look at it, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow. In a picture, even those who do not know letters can see an example to imitate.'*<sup>1</sup> The importance of visual reminders of our faith in the home cannot be understated. By surrounding our children with sacred art, we cultivate in them a natural appreciation for beauty, and it is in this light that anything lesser or distorted can be recognised for what it is.

Our parents filled our home walls with religious artwork painted by our dad, our ears with the sound of Gregorian chant and our noses with a stream of fragrant incense. Our 'sensus fidelium' was cultivated through experiences that appealed to all of our senses. Our mother managed the household and worked tirelessly to help our father to create these enriching experiences for us. Most importantly we would, without fail, attend Mass every Sunday and pray the Rosary every night. It was expected and natural to kneel together at the home-made altar that our dad built and he would allow the best behaved of us to move the rosary cards at the end of each decade or blow out the candles at the end. In fact, our dad painted these rosary cards himself and we were all given a set of our own once we started our own families.

It is our duty as parents to nurture the next

generation's faith, especially as the devil works hard to pull them away from it. St. Teresa of Ávila tells us, *'Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.'*<sup>2</sup>

This is the reason we started *Faithful Labours*; our mission is inspired by the desire to help bring our wonderful experience into other Catholic homes. We strongly believe in the importance of integrating the faith into every aspect of family life. We are called to live in the world but not be of it. We choose a life and home that mirrors the Church.

That's why we've crafted resources to help Catholic families cultivate an environment that keeps Christ at the forefront. From books to read with your children, family games, and sacred art for your walls, we want to help enrich homes with daily reminders of our faith.

If you would like to support our mission or simply learn more about us, please visit our website at [www.faithfullabours.co.uk](http://www.faithfullabours.co.uk) or our Instagram @faithfullabours. □



<sup>1</sup> Gregory the Great. (c. 600) Epistle to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles. In: Letters (Books XI–XIV). Available at: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/letters-books-xixiv-11549> (Accessed: Nov, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Teresa of Ávila. The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, ICS Publications, 1976.

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Photo: First Tonsures at OLGs, including of Rafal, one of our five UK & Ireland seminarians. Pray for them!

## Contact FSSP ENGLAND:

**Priestly Fraternity of St Peter,  
St Mary's Priory, Smith Street,  
Warrington WA1 2NS  
Cheshire, England**

**01925 635 664**

**warrington@fssp.org**

**fssp.org.uk**