The Beda Review

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Front cover photo
Cardinal Vincent Nichols presides at mass at Basilica di San Paolo in February with John Bagnall serving as acolyte.

Rear cover photos
The two photographs show Pope Francis in his audience with seminarians in Rome on 12 May 2014.
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### Pontifical Beda College Students, 2013-2014
Soon after midnight on Sunday, 27 April, there were those who left the Beda to make their way to St Peter’s Square to be in pole position to take part later that morning in the canonization of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. As happens in the characteristic Roman way of things, they hardly got close, whereas others, leaving much later, found themselves better placed. And the morning itself was overcast with the threat of rain. Shortly before the mass began, drizzle fell, but then stopped. And the liturgy, dignified, calm, and moving, proceeded undisturbed.

There have been concerns expressed in some quarters about the wisdom of canonizing popes: until this day only three had been canonized since 1296, but these two men’s influence upon the Church in the last fifty years or so has been exceptional, John revitalizing the Church through calling the Second Vatican Council and John Paul offering a synthesis of its teaching during his long reign. Their personal holiness which, as Pope Benedict XVI has helpfully reminded us, does not mean they were perfect, is beyond dispute. It was a privilege to be in Rome and if the crowds did not quite measure up to the more extreme predictions – one rumour suggested there would be five million extra visitors – there were vast numbers here.

Among them was the Conference of Bishops from Southern Africa who celebrated their ad limina mass at San Paolo fuori le Mura the following Wednesday evening. We were delighted to be able to join them as a community, serving and singing, and then, as has been our custom whenever possible when episcopal conferences with Beda connections have come to Rome, we had invited them to cross the road and join us for an informal reception and festive meal. The occasion was a great success, confirmed for me when one of the bishops who had to return to Rome some weeks later, called to see me and asked, ‘Why did we leave so early?’

There had been a similar, but more intimate event two months before when Cardinal Vincent Nichols received the red hat. There were grand and formal celebrations over the weekend at St Peter’s and at the English College, but the cardinal was keen to include the Beda in his plans and therefore on the Monday he also came to say mass at San Paolo at which Beda men assisted, served, and sang, and then he and his party joined us for a reception and dinner. Hearts were in mouths a little as numbers were hard to calculate, but in the event, though the
refectory was packed, there was space for everyone. It was a memorably joyful occasion.

These three events have naturally stood out this year, but, of course, the ordinary life of the College has continued.

The large year that left to be ordained in June 2013, fifteen residents and two externals, was unlikely to be replaced altogether; nevertheless fourteen new men arrived at the end of September, twelve to live in-house and again two more who lived out. When the full community was assembled, resident and non-resident, there were fifty seminarians, drawn from seventeen different nations. Half the community was British or Irish. And there were also four graduates, three of whom had come to the Beda through the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and who have been with us for some time. As it happens, all three, Fr Aphrem Dawood, Fr Aji George, and the Reverend Jogy George, have completed their degrees during the course of this academic year. They have been a kindly presence among us and we congratulate them on what they have achieved.

A notable feature of this year has been the realignment of staff that was indicated as imminent in last year’s Report. Fr Dermot McCaul who spent ten valuable years here as Director of Human and Pastoral Formation, left last summer and Fr John Breen has moved into that role, all the while receiving wise guidance for himself, as Fr Dermot used also to do. This element of formation, especially the human dimension, is absolutely indispensable. Cardinal Beniamino Stella who is now prefect of the Congregation for Clergy which has taken over direct responsibility for seminaries from the Congregation for Catholic Education, has both in private conversation and by letter expressed to the College his own conviction of its importance and praised the Beda for what it is doing. And Fr John is relishing this new role.

At the same time, Sr Patricia McDonald who is the Academic Programme Director, a title favoured by our partners, St Mary’s University, Twickenham, has taken on the task of co-ordinating our relationship with St Mary’s. It is work that requires painstaking attention to detail and she carries it out with meticulous care. The Beda is lucky to have her here. Then this past year we have also been joined by Sr Mary Ann Clarahan, RSM. Sr Mary Ann will be well known to many more recent Beda men as she has taught as an external professor for a significant number of years, but more recently she had returned to the United States. Conversations and inquiries revealed, however, that it might be possible for her to return to Rome full-time and we have been the beneficiaries of that change. She not only teaches the liturgy courses she has taught in the past, but has also been teaching the courses on the sacraments for which Fr John used to be responsible.

Abbot Timothy Wright’s departure has placed extra pressure on Mgr Peter Verity as the only resident spiritual director, although there have been others who have helped most kindly with directing some individuals and Fr Samuel Pusateri, OSB, from San Paolo fuori le Mura has continued to be a major support, especially as our external confessor. All the same, it is not a situation that could continue indefinitely and various inquiries have been taking place. Then last November I heard to my surprise that Fr Kevin Alban, O.Carm., who has been in Rome
for many years, first as Secretary General to the Carmelites and after that as their Bursar General, and who has taught at the Beda since the tragic death of Fr Redemptus Valabek, was due to leave Rome as his term of office had come to an end. Upon inquiring, however, it seemed to be possible for Fr Kevin to join us as a resident member of staff and as a second spiritual director. He took up this post at the start of the second semester. A fly in the ointment is a degree of uncertainty as to whether he will be able to remain as the Carmelite Province in the UK with its newly appointed officers have yet to make a final decision. In these difficult times, when human resources are more limited, they have my sympathy, but I hope that there may yet be life in this arrangement.

All the while our relationship with St Mary’s University, Twickenham, has been developing successfully. St Mary’s has gained university status in its own right this past year and its first Vice-Chancellor is Mr Francis Campbell who for some years served in Rome as the British Ambassador to the Holy See. During that time he was a good friend to the College so it is a particular pleasure to be able to reconnect with him in this new capacity. We look forward to welcoming him back to the Beda in November when he plans to visit us for the Academic Mass. And I want also to record the College’s appreciation of the work done by Dr Peter Tyler, St Mary’s Moderator, who has visited the Beda regularly in recent times to oversee and co-ordinate our partnership. Dr Tyler is now relinquishing this post and we shall miss him. We have also been fortunate to have Fr Michael Kirwan, SJ, as our external examiner, for the past three years. And he too has earned our gratitude for the rigorous, yet supportive way, he has assisted us. I wish also to record my thanks to Fr Stephen Rehrauer, CSSR, and Dr David Dawson-Vasquez as external lecturers who serve on our Academic Board. Their contribution is greatly appreciated. And I am thankful as well to all those who take time out to come and teach at the Beda. It has become a remarkably stable group which has been joined this year by Fr Thomas Norris from the Irish College, teaching a course on spirituality, Fr Marc Lindeijer, SJ, from the Congregation for Saints, who has taken over Fr Ephrem Carr’s course on Early Church History, and Mr A.J. Boyd, teaching on ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. We are fortunate in the support we receive from them and from our other external lecturers.

Another particular feature of this past year has been the gradual renewal of furniture in men’s rooms. After more than fifty years, it seemed good to take this initiative. A company from Treviso with long experience of this work has done a fine job in supplying us with this furniture, new desks, beds, cupboards, and so forth. One surprise has been to find that, when they were measuring the rooms, no two rooms were quite the same size. You might expect a building constructed in the late fifties to be entirely regular in its proportions, but it is not so. Sometimes the difference was very slight, a matter of centimetres, but the measurements, therefore, have had to be done absolutely precisely, and they have been. As men leave, so rooms they vacate have been renovated. The large exodus in 2013 meant that many could be refurnished then; more will be done this July; and the rooms remaining will be completed next year.

Our Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, Sr Carmel Spratt, Sr Maura
Bermingham, and Sr Felicity Scanlon, continue to play an invaluable part in the Beda’s life. With their agreement and after discussions at Ladywell also, the area previously occupied entirely by the Convent has been reconfigured. That end section of the second floor was designed for a community of seven or eight, whereas now there are only those three. And in any case these days the FMDMs are even more fully integrated into the life of the rest of the College community. So the corridor to the right is now the convent, with private rooms upgraded and a chapel and common-room and other rooms besides, while the part that simply continues straight on past the Holy Cross Chapel has become the administration block, with offices for the bursar, Annalisa Bonanni, and for Orietta Mariotti, as secretary, a general office, and a seminar room. These new arrangements have been well received. I am particularly grateful to Annalisa for the energy and imagination she has shown in putting these plans into operation. She has also worked closely with the Vatican authorities in a way that has proved to be extremely beneficial. She and Larry Tongco have also attended courses run by the Vatican with regard to health and safety and the attention that the College has given to these matters has been noted and praised.

Larry continues to be a tower of strength for the Beda, turning his hand to almost anything. What can he not do? And he has been joined in caring for the maintenance of the College by Ivano Mammone. During the year the fish pond was found to be losing water. Larry and Ivano drained it, placing the fish and terrapins in a tank that was then lowered into the fountain pond, created some years ago by Mgr Brian Dazeley. Ivano then sealed the crack through which the water was escaping, resurfaced the pond, replaced stones and hiding places for the terrapins for their winter hibernation, as well as erecting ledges that emerge from the water so that they can bask in the sunshine in summer. He then refilled it with water. Finally the fish and terrapins were returned to their old home. It had been quite an exercise.

The other members of our domestic staff continue to place us in their debt. Edna keeps a watchful eye in the portineria and, besides other duties, constantly excels in the flower arrangements and displays that she prepares for the chapel. They are beautiful and works of art. And those in the kitchen continue to enhance the Beda’s reputation for hospitality by the fine, varied, and imaginative meals they prepare, not only on those special occasions when, for example, bishops visit 

In conclusion, let me thank the student body, a consistently impressive group of people who do the Beda proud. When groups visit, whether more formally or as perhaps a parish group that has called in after visiting the Basilica across the road, they comment regularly on the warmth of the way they have been received. Amid the demands of priestly formation and for many the return after years to a more formal process of learning, including lectures and examinations, with the pressures that that entails, Beda men never fail to provide a kind and friendly welcome for our visitors. That is as it ought to be, but nevertheless it is a pleasure to record it. And numbers for next year, as I write in mid-June, seem to be encouraging. We continue to look to the future with calm confidence.
Finding the Way: A Reflection on Matt 2:1-12

SR PATRICIA MCDONALD, SHCJ

How does this Epiphany story look if we put ourselves in the position of the magi? As the curtain goes up, they have arrived in Jerusalem “from the east” and, directly or indirectly, have conveyed to Herod the Great the purpose of their quest. If they are aware of the troubling effect this has on the King and “the whole of Jerusalem”, Matthew gives no hint of it. From where they stand, Herod seems to be perfectly reasonable: unless you had done your homework, you probably would not identify him as the tyrant who routinely executed close relatives who displeased him and who was about to decree the death of any babies who might turn out to be the new-born king of the Jews.

Perhaps the magi had some idea of what was going on, as Matthew specifies that Herod sees them “secretly”, but the account lacks any suggestion that they knew that the king’s actions were all directed to preserving his own position as king of the Jews, in a policy of brutal efficiency that had made him for almost forty years a trusted ally of the Roman superpower and one of the most successful political figures in Israel’s history. Surely if the magi, these wise ones, had been wise enough to seek our opinion, we would have advised them strongly against going anywhere near Herod.

Yet we would have been wrong: despite all his fear and his blood stained hands, Herod it is who sends them to Bethlehem – to the only place in which they will find the object of their star-inspired quest.

In other words, God’s power at work in the magi is not hindered by the workings of the negative and indeed sinful political and social realities of Jerusalem at the turn of the era. Rather, God works by means of those realities, provided that the magi do what is required of them at the time. Things could have turned out differently: the travellers could have concluded that coming to Jerusalem was a mistake, before heading off in a different direction of their own choosing. But they didn’t: Matthew says that they listened to Herod and set out.

As they did so, they again saw the star that had begun it all. And who is in charge of the movement of the stars? Certainly not Herod. So they knew that they were on track again, which is why the sight of the star filled them with delight. An interesting entity, that star: quite a sophisticated model of a first-century satellite navigation system. Some scholars think that the Jewish background of Matthew’s readers would have led them to think of it as an angel that guided the travellers, which would make it easier to understand how they eventually found the right house and not, for example, the one next door or one in the next street. Matthew does say, though, that it was a star.
So in this story, the evangelist shows how God works through created realities—a thoroughly incarnational idea that we might find helpful in the political, economic, social, ecological, and ecclesial turmoil of our own circumstances, a turmoil that can at times exist even in the best-run seminaries. Divine providence led the magi to see “the child with his mother Mary”, to prostrate themselves before him, and, through their choice of gifts, to acknowledge him as royal and as worthy of worship, although only and always as the one who will suffer. If we move forward trusting in God’s providence, the same will be true for us: we shall continue to find and to worship this God who became incarnate in a child.

On the other hand, in contrast to the shepherds and others in Luke’s version of the infancy narrative, Matthew does not describe the magi as dashing out to tell everyone what they had found. Quite the contrary: they simply went to sleep, which gave God another opportunity to communicate with them, this time in a dream. The result was that they rejected any possibility of using what they had experienced in Bethlehem to curry favour with Herod. They simply went home by another route. Their obedience is low key, but none the worse for that.

Some of us, however, have received a vocation that is more ardent than that of the magi: to be more overtly at the service of others, in ecclesial and religious communities and as citizens of a complex, confused, and (in much of the west) ageing civil society. That mission is “to help others to believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world and to rejoice in the divine presence”, as the Constitutions of my religious community express it. This gospel passage can remind us of the need to read the signs of the times, in the cosmos, in dreams, and in all the human institutions of our day, no matter how complicated and risky an operation that may be for us. Then we can be confident that we, too, will find the child with his mother Mary and offer our gifts to the Holy Child who is God with us.

Sr Patricia McDonald SHCJ is the Academic Programme Director at the Beda College.
Ten years ago, serious consideration was given to closing the British Embassy to the Holy See. “What is its role?”, asked some. “Can’t the Embassy to Italy cover its work?”, asked others. “What does the Ambassador do all day, anyway?” I’m glad to note that we’re still here, flourishing, and busier than ever. Yet the questions asked then remain pertinent now. Who are we, why do we exist, and what do we do?

Who?

All embassies to the Holy See are small, some staffed by a singleton ambassador. This is partly because there is a great deal of standard diplomatic work that we do not have to do. We do not issue passports, have to assist our fellow nationals in distress, nor do commercial work – all bread and butter for “classic” embassies. Our primary function is political, engaging with the many worldwide issues of mutual interest to our states and to the Holy See. So we are more like our multilateral missions and permanent delegations accredited to international organizations like the United Nations or the Council of Europe, than our bilateral embassies. This role is of particular importance to a country like the United Kingdom, with global interests and concerns.

So my Embassy is made up of an Ambassador, a deputy who is also a diplomat, a small number of local staff, and an Honorary Ecclesiastical Adviser. The latter is a unique institution across the British Diplomatic Service, reflecting the special nature of the Holy See, and the need for the ambassador to receive advice on matters ecclesiastical as well as political, economic or cultural.

We are the oldest Embassy in the British diplomatic network. The first ever permanent ambassador of the Crown – to any state – was appointed to the Papal Court by King Edward IV in 1479. There was a long hiatus after we broke off relations during the Reformation in the 16th century – Sir Edward Carne, Queen Mary’s Ambassador to the Holy See, in fact declined to return to England after the accession of Queen Elizabeth I, and is buried at the Church of San Gregorio in Celio. The excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I did not help matters, nor the later discriminatory legislation against Catholics enacted by the governments of England and Scotland, and later the United Kingdom. During the 19th century, the British government maintained a number of informal points of contact with the Holy See. The Catholic hierarchies in England and Wales, and Scotland, were reinstated in the 19th century. And yet it was not until 1914 that formal diplomatic relations were re-established, first under a “Special Mission”, later upgraded to a Legation, and finally to a full Embassy in 1982, coinciding with the visit of Pope John Paul II to Britain.
Why?

That answers who we are. But why do we exist? It is a question often asked of Ambassadors to the Holy See, by people who cannot understand why the Roman Catholic faith should have diplomats accredited to it, or why the United Kingdom has an Embassy accredited to the world’s smallest state. And the same question is sometimes asked even within the Foreign Office, and by other governments. To illustrate the confusion, my predecessor used to say that his political masters could never decide whether he was accredited to a San Marino or a China.

I think that the reasons why we re-established relations with the Holy See back in 1914 explain a lot. It is worth noting that I am accredited to the Holy See, not the Vatican City State, and our re-establishment of diplomatic relations pre-dated the creation of the Vatican City State through the 1929 Lateran Treaties by a good 15 years. In 1914, as World War I broke out, the Entente powers – France, Russia and the United Kingdom – realized that we had inadequate representation at the Holy See to set against Austria-Hungary and Bavaria. Yet Pope Benedict XV, the Pope of Peace, was active globally in seeking to bring the warring nations to the table. Politicians and diplomats in London grasped that the Holy See, with its extraordinary global network, really mattered. And we hastened to rectify the gap. My predecessor, Sir Henry Howard, presented his credentials to the Pope at the end of the year, and we have had a permanent diplomatic presence ever since.

It is the Holy See’s global presence and interests, through the Roman Catholic Church, that are in fact the key to our diplomatic relationship, and firmly answers that San Marino or China question in favour of the latter. The Holy See is the administrative arm of governance created to assist the Pope in managing the global Catholic Church. And the sheer numbers give a good idea of why any diplomatic service aspiring to a global role needs to engage with the Holy See. There are about 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide, in every corner of the world, equating to 17.5% of the world’s population. Of course not all will follow the mandate of the Pope, but the influence of the Holy See through that resource is undeniable. The Holy See has diplomatic relations with 180 countries, and manages 106 resident missions, including in London, led by an Apostolic Nuncio or Apostolic Legate. And what makes the Holy See’s diplomacy quite unparalleled is the fact that it can also tap into global Catholic networks, something Joseph Stalin perhaps forgot when he crudely asked the whereabouts of the Pope’s armed divisions. The roughly 5,000 bishops, 400,000 priests, and over a million religious men and women worldwide make a formidable network of information, influence and engagement. In this networked world, you could argue that the Catholic Church and Holy See are ahead of the diplomatic game. And I could add the extraordinary capillary of Catholic civil society organisations worldwide, some with real influence such as Sant’Egidio or Comunione e Liberazione; or NGO confederations such as Caritas Internationalis. Foreign Secretary William Hague told Dutch diplomats recently: “...countries are not settling into rival geographic blocs of states that think and act in the same way. There is a far more dynamic and complex lattice-work of connections at play between states in terms of trade and foreign policy interests; and also a rich web of
overlapping connections between business and civil societies in those countries which contribute to their choices and actions”. We deal in networks, and the Holy See presides over one of the most formidable.

The British Embassy to the Holy See is unique in the British diplomatic network in that it does not just look bilaterally to manage our relations with the state – or in this case organization – to which we are accredited, but in other directions too. As well as the classic bilateral relationship, we engage globally with the Catholic network, and inward towards the United Kingdom’s own domestic Catholic constituency. About 10% of the population of the United Kingdom – perhaps as many as 6 million people – is Catholic, with a political vote and social, cultural, political and economic concerns that impact on British government domestic as well as overseas policies. That 10% comes under the aegis of three separate Catholic hierarchies – England & Wales, Scotland, and the Northern Ireland half of the all-Ireland hierarchy – over which two Apostolic Nuncios based in London and Dublin have separate responsibilities. My embassy works with all of these stakeholders, to use a not inappropriate word from business. And this domestic angle to our work also includes the relationship between the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions, as well as other faiths. The embassy has, for example, just in my time in Rome, facilitated visits by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Chief Rabbi, other senior Catholic and Anglican Churchmen, as well as the Cambridge Muslim College. Rome is not just the home of the Roman Catholic Church, but a global centre of religious discourse and dialogue across the faiths.

**What?**

So, for me, the Why is pretty clear. But what do we do to turn the diplomatic relationship into something that functions in practical terms?

One way of illustrating the relationship is to take, more or less at random, the subject of recent diplomatic reporting by the British Embassy to the Holy See, based on insights or information we have gleaned from conversations with Holy See interlocutors, the statement of Holy See positions, or exchanges elsewhere in the world between British and Holy See diplomats. This includes the situation in Syria, the role of Christians there, and the position of the Holy See on the ongoing violence, as well as Holy See views on the broader Middle East. We keep a close eye on the views of the Holy See on political developments in Africa, especially Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The response to the situation in Ukraine, especially with the active role of different churches in the crisis, is also top of our current agenda. We engage with the Holy See in Rome, London, Geneva and New York on longer term issues like climate change, international development, human trafficking and human rights, looking to find common ground in negotiations at the UN, the OSCE in Vienna or the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Already a full agenda, and far from an exhaustive list. As an embassy, we contribute fully to the British government’s aim to strengthen the United Kingdom’s security and prosperity.
Managing this requires a lot of conversations, understanding by my Embassy of the best people to engage at the Holy See, confidence building, and a broad comprehension of what makes the Holy See work. Senior visitors – such as Her Majesty the Queen, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Home Secretary, the government’s Climate Change Envoy Sir David King, or the Minister for the Middle East, Hugh Robertson MP – who all came in the space of a few weeks earlier this year, can build on those conversations, and provide the context in which our bilateral relationship can flourish. Developing a complex and trusting relationship requires a great deal of background work, and in our case engagement across the Congregations and Pontifical Councils in Rome, different universities, congregations of religious, and other lay and Church experts. In other words, we don’t deal just with the Secretariat of State – the Holy See equivalent of Foreign Ministry and Cabinet Office – but the gamut of institutions, organizations and individuals connected with the Holy See in Rome and beyond, from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to the Congregation for Eastern Churches. There are few Pontifical thresholds here in Rome that we haven’t crossed.

We also do a lot of explaining: the British government needs to know how the Holy See works, and why it reacts as it does to particular world events; there is an insatiable appetite in the world’s media to understand better the trajectory of Pope Francis; and we need to show the British taxpayer that the Embassy offers value for money. So we place great stress on active communications, from the traditional media – press, speeches, interviews – to the new. Do look us up on Twitter @UkinHolySee, or on my blog at: http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/nigelbaker. The modern diplomat needs to be digital too!

A posting to the Holy See sets wonderful and sometimes unexpected challenges. I sometimes joke that as an Anglican I have been to mass more frequently since I arrived in August 2011 than many Roman Catholics! I have had the opportunity to observe at close quarters the transition from one Pope to another after Pope Benedict’s decision to step down, followed by the first, eventful year of Pope Francis. Rome is a listening post, a crossroads for encounter, and a place where history is made. It is a real privilege to serve the United Kingdom in the very special role of Her Majesty’s Ambassador at the Vatican.

His Excellency Nigel Baker is HM Ambassador to the Holy See.
Ed Gibney reflects on questions put to him about his art and his faith.

What is your first memory of having an artistic/creative interest?
I recall that my maternal grandfather liked to draw and had an old book on how to draw people and animals by starting with circles or ovals and then drawing into those geometric shapes. He was retired from his work by the time I was born so when I would spend my summers with him, he and I would draw together using that book. I still have that book. I do not consider myself skilled at drawing, but this was the first memory I have of art.

What was significant in developing your interest within your family and within your schooling?
I do not recall any specific interest from my family encouraging me to work as an artist. What was there was that my parents always supported whatever choice I made. When my finances were poor they helped me and later on, when they needed my help I was there for them.

My father was not the sort to say supportive things to his children but I was once told by a brother what he thought of my work in art. My father had told my brother how proud he was that I could go to work at the studio every day knowing that what I did that day probably would not bring financial gain. He had taught me that money is not important and without even thinking about it, I was living that by my daily enjoyment of my work.

When did others first start to notice and affirm your ability and what was your reaction?
The most memorable recognition I have received was from J. S. Porter, a Professor at the University of Hamilton, Ontario, who saw a sculpture of mine at an exhibition in Hamilton in 1994. He was so moved by it that he wrote an article about it in a magazine called Grail which can be read at: http://spiritbookword.net/spirit/meditation_on_stone_edward_gib.shtml

In it he mentions his connection with stone and how his view of the sculpture was quite opposite of my own (I saw it as man both damaging and healing nature while he only saw the damaging aspect). In it he compared the sculpture to the ideas of Heidegger saying, “Does this man know what he has done? He has summed up 40 volumes of Heidegger in a single image.” I thought that such a statement was more grandiose than I could live up to but who am I to argue?
What is the first of your creations that you can remember really being proud of?

When I was at university I came across a building being demolished and this was a very important moment for me because I ended up with permission to go into the site (at night) and remove as much of the sandstone that I could get out. Suddenly I had a massive storehouse of stone and I felt free to try anything. A great deal of my early abstract art style was developed in these experiments.

That said I have to also recognize that what have been my moments of ability has not been so much a successful sculpture but what I learned from the process. I am thinking of a simple metre-tall sculpture of two blocks of stone bolted together and textured in different ways to draw the eye, from place to place, around these cubes of stone. It was a sculpture that I believe still is a successful sculpture, but I remember the process and what I learned in doing it more than the success of the sculpture.

What famous artists/sculptors/others have been an influence on you and why?

I would have to begin with the inclusion of Michaelangelo as, in my opinion, he took the carving of stone and representation of the human form to a new level of expertise. In the same vein I would include Auguste Rodin, for his carving skill, but even more so for the fact that he dared to push the idea of sculpture beyond the representation of something, to the point of it being its own reality. I had the pleasure of experiencing the Rodin exhibition in Rome this winter and to see how he purposely left stone encasing the figures, and even left aspects of the duplicating equipment in the finished sculpture express this move from representation to being.

There is a relatively unknown sculptor from Germany who has always inspired me. A lot of his work was destroyed by the Nazis for not fitting the ideal image they had for art, but there are photos and some pieces remaining (I was pleased to see one in the Modern section of the Vatican Museum). His work uses the human figure, but with simplified drapery and facial figures, which is a part of what I have been doing in my figurative work.

Similar in their use of simplified and abstracted line in a three-dimensional space, I look to Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Constantin Brancusi. Brancusi’s Bird in Space of 1925 is still one of the most graceful and simple sculptures ever created.

When did you first think about a professional career as an artist/sculptor and how did you go about pursuing this career?

After graduating from high school I worked for my brother for four years creating cemetery memorials and putting away money for university. I did not have any idea what I would study and to be honest, this was a time where I was not doing much art at all. Maybe this was due to the drawing work I was doing in the Cemetery Memorial shop. I feel that if your “creative life” is related to your job, then you will not have energy for creativity when you go home from work.
After four years I was ready to go to University but in the end I was deciding between studying art and studying archaeology, neither being well travelled routes. I had come across two roads diverging in the woods, but it was hard to tell which one was the road less travelled (thank you Robert Frost)! In some ways my sculpture work is still about digging into a stone and finding something there so maybe I am doing both.

I have often been asked about regrets in the choices I have made in my life and it is common to say you don’t have regrets. Again referring to Frost, I prefer to say that I have a regret for every choice I have ever made, not because of the choices I have made but because I do not know what would have been down the other road.

Describe some of the encouragements and possibly pitfalls along the way.

I think the greatest pitfall the life of art involves is that you can become quite insular, a solitary being having limited contact with other people. A studio becomes a fortress of solitude because you need to be alone with your thoughts and creativity. However, the greatest asset of a life of art is the solitude! There have been times (they are rare and hard to reach) that one can go into a state of deep meditation while working, but one has to have no distractions in order to reach that state. It is a great moment to reach such a state but you pay a high price in the development of social skills.

Describe the further formal training in art/sculpture after school and possibly any other informal training.

My university Professor was a man by the name of Bill Epp who in the 1960s was gaining some notoriety as an abstract artist in Canada. However, by the early 1970s he had started to investigate figurative bronze sculpture and became the Sculpture Professor at the University of Saskatchewan. I have always said that Bill was the worst Professor I ever had, and I thank him for that. Some Art Professors try to make mini versions of themselves, basically teaching how to do art the way they do art. Bill only taught me one thing. He said that to learn how to make art you have to make art. No one can teach you how to make your art. Just go and make your art. I may never have notoriety as an artist but I know that the works I have created are mine.

In this way one’s education never ends. Every day at the studio is informal training and every mistake you make is knowledge. I have always had a difficult time throwing away unsuccessful sculpture attempts because these “mistakes” remind me of what I learned from them.

Give some details of your working life as a sculptor, outlining some of the significant works you created.

I have worked, quite consistently as an artist (until I made the decision to enter the seminary) from the end of my university studies in 1988 and even during my years at university I probably over stressed my sculpture work to my studies or my other artistic classes. With very few commissions over those years, my working life was experimental. I had the opportunity to carve two simple baptismal fonts but for the most part I worked on my own sculpture and used my skills at other stone connected jobs, to pay the bills.
In 1999 I was asked to carve a life size sculpture of Mary for a garden of a retreat house in Saskatoon and I proposed a figure of Our Lady of the Prairies, Our Lady holding a sheaf of wheat and with her gaze toward heaven, directing us from herself to where our attention should be. The drapery lines were simplified, expressing Mary with her cloak blown by a wind.

In 2013 I completed a bronze bust of a priest from Edmonton, Alberta. Fr Michael Troy was born in Ireland but lived most of his life in Canada, working in schools and actively involved in the Knights of Columbus. He left a huge impact on the young people of his school and in the community and it was decided to commemorate him. Working from photographs and with the help of people that had known him for years, I was able to capture an image of a man in his 90s who was looked upon by the young students as “a teenager.”

In the year before coming to Beda I have been carving the largest granite commission I have had the opportunity to create. It is an image of St Ann, Mary and Jesus as a child, an image of the importance of grandmothers. It was for a senior citizens’ residence called St Ann’s Home and the image of grandmother was the point the choosing committee focussed on in agreeing to my proposal. Again my sculpture is about simplified line in a three-dimensional form, with the majority of the lines converging on the child Jesus in St Ann’s lap.

Reflect on the ways in which your art and your faith inform each other.

The moments in my art where I have reached a meditative state, are to me a moment of such peace and clarity that I do believe they are gifts from God. I have had times where I have felt an idea come from nowhere and all I could say was thank you. When I was working on the bronze bust of Fr Troy a few years ago I had a moment where I had an urge to thin his face by about four centimetres and when I did so, suddenly recognized the structure of his face that I had seen in a photo taken when he was 40 years younger.

I think the biggest issue surrounding the relationship of art and faith is the fact that artists have a lot of difficulty admitting that they have had help with an artwork, and that is why many do not have faith. For an artist to accept that God is with him or her, helping or at least supporting, is to accept that they are not personally responsible for every aspect of the artwork.

In more recent years, as I have started to get some commissions of larger works for churches, there is a much more recognizable connection between my work and my faith. To propose a sculpture for a commission involves a lot of research on the saint, or situation, but it also requires allowing one’s imagination to be part of the story.
What has been the greatest challenge of your artistic life to date?

Leaving it behind, or at least limiting my creative opportunities in coming to the seminary!

Select two or three images of your sculpture and offer some insightful comments about them.

The first image I have chosen is of the sculpture of Our Lady of the Prairies, one of my first major commissions and probably the finest example of my style of simple abstracted lines in a three-dimensional space. The imagery of Mary focusing our thoughts on heaven is one of my more inspired moments, even though the staff at the Retreat House at first thought it made her look “snooty.”

The second image I have chosen is of a small sculpture (image taken from the plasticine original) of a Laughing Jesus. I have wanted to depict Jesus in this way for some time and my opportunity came here at the Beda. I feel it captures the human side of Jesus, as well as the divine joy that should come through Him. The thought I kept in my mind while working on it was, “and Peter said to Jesus, I think I understand” after which Jesus leaned back and laughed.

Comment on the decision to leave professional work and embark on training for the priesthood.

I think that the decision to come to the seminary has been the hardest decision I have ever made. I have spent 30 years as an artist, living a rather unstructured life, coming and going at times that suited my artistic whim. The seminary life and the potential life of a priest is a huge step from my previous lifestyle. I know that during my time here at the Beda and, should I be blessed to be a priest in the future, my time for creative pursuits will be limited, but I also know that creatively using my mind and hands is a gift I have been given and should continue to use.

However, in my discernment on coming to the seminary I kept coming across references to the need to trust and even, from Zechariah, the consequences of not trusting. And so I told my Bishop I would trust. I came to the College believing that I was putting my art aside for a long period of time but my trust was quickly answered in that almost instantly I was finding that the College was encouraging me to continue to make art, in whatever small way I could incorporate into the schedule.
Say if you have any ideas of how you might keep your creative interest going both as a seminarian and a priest in the future.

I am maintaining a connection to my art here in the seminary, working on smaller sculptures in plasticine. It took a while to find the materials and as I am writing this I am gaining more knowledge on casting and mould making materials so that I can preserve the ideas I am making in plasticine by casting them into other materials. I have also found a stone tool selling shop but I don’t think I would have any friends in the building if I started carving stone in my room on the fourth floor (much less putting a block of stone in the elevator).

The question of how to keep a connection with my art should I be blessed to be a priest is a difficult one. As much as I will need to have my artistic outlet, I understand that I will not always have the time to give to creativity. The most obvious way to have the opportunity to create is to make images connected to the Church or develop sculptural elements for the parishes I am in. As well, in my work with Fr Peter Verity, my spiritual director, I have been trying to make a connection between sculpture and prayer and so there are certainly possibilities. The difficulty of time will be the greatest hurdle. The challenge to incorporate my spiritual life and my creativity seems to be the opportunity.

Edward Gibney has completed one year at the Beda College.
Sermon for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Beda College 18 January 2014

REV. KENNETH HOWCROFT

1 Corinthians 1:1-17; Mark 9:33-41

May the words that I speak now, and the thoughts and the feelings that we all now experience be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you on this occasion at the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is a privilege and a pleasure to be invited to preach. It is a pleasure for me, at any rate (if also a frightening one) – whether it is a pleasure for you, only you will be able to tell!

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is above all about prayer. As we pray, we gather round and listen together for God’s Word through Scripture. So, in the light of what Paul says to those at Corinth, what would he be saying to us gathered here at the Beda, this assembly, this ecclesia, this embodiment of Christ’s Church? If someone came through the door with a long-lost additional epistle of Paul to us here, what would it say?

Would Paul start by saying that no matter what our labels are, no matter what our histories, our identities or our sub-groupings, in this place we are all the Church of God together? We are the Church of God together because we have been sanctified, made holy; and that means that we already have everything, all the grace, all the knowledge, all the spiritual gifts that we need. Have you ever thought how astonishing it is that Paul says precisely that to the Corinthians and seems to mean it? It is particularly astonishing in the light of what, later in the correspondence, we discover the Corinthians have been getting up to!

But Paul insists that they – and, by extension, we – are sanctified, made holy. Importantly, though, at the same time he also recognises that that is not the end of the matter. Even though we are made holy, we are still called to be saints, to be holy. Holiness is not static. There is a dynamic to it. Like love, if holiness stops growing, it withers and dies.

So Paul talks to the Church at Corinth and, through them, to us, saying that we are wholly Church and holy Church, but still growing in holiness. But he also goes on to say that although we are wholly Church, we are not the whole of the Church. There are others in other places, throughout space and time, who are also the Church.

Having made these strong assertions, Paul calls on the Corinthians and us to avoid going astray. We really do have to keep growing in holiness, and Paul points to some of the pitfalls.
In particular he talks of the dangers of factionalism. He is warning about the dangers of making things which are important but secondary into things of absolute importance. The Corinthians are treating matters in their experience and expressions of faith as if they were idols.

Paul was thinking here of things that marked people's identity, or their ways of behaviour. For example, the Corinthians imported into the life of the Church ways of behaving which were the norm in the society of which they were part, and they had then made absolutes out of them. They had not reflected on them in the light of the revelation of the gospel of Christ. Some of these norms were things like the existence of masters and slaves, and the dominance of men over women. Not surprisingly, these attitudes affected the way people behaved in the Church, until people began to reflect on them in the light of the gospel. So elsewhere we find Paul coming to the realisation that “In Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female…”

The thing which Paul is thinking about in the first chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians is the patron-client relationship, which ran throughout society. In a world without developed social welfare systems, everyone was the client of a patron, and the patrons were clients of more important patrons. If the clients had problems in their lives, be that over food, or employment or legal matters or whatever, they turned to the patron for help. In return the patron turned to the clients and expected them to perform services for him – and, not least, to get other people to vote for him if he stood for office.

The Corinthians had imported that relationship into their life in Christ’s body, the Church. They were treating Christian leaders as if they were patrons. It was a case of “You scratch Apollos’s back, and he will look after you”. They had not yet reflected on this sufficiently in the light of the gospel. It was a case of people finding the relationship to their patron in the Church more important than their relationship to Christ. Of course, then (as now) there were people who tried to say that they stood above all this, and that they only belonged to Christ. But somehow, they seemed to reduce Christ to being a patron on the same level as the other patrons. They ended up looking like a grouping that was the same as all the others, caught up in the same ways of behaving.

So do we still have the same tendency to make our ways of behaving within Christ’s body into absolutes, in a way which sets our groups against each other? Do we make idols out of our histories, our traditions, our identity markers, important though those things are? Do we now in effect have, say, Methodist Apollos, Catholic Cephas and Anglican Paul?

There is a wonderful but, I suspect, apocryphal story. I hope that all who are Irish will forgive me. At the height of “The Troubles” a foreign visitor was being shown around Belfast. After two or three days he was fed up with everything being “Catholic this…” and “Protestant that…” Different ways of being Christian seemed to be at the heart of every problem and all the violence. “Surely” he said “you need some good atheists round here!” As quick as a flash back came the reply. “Ah yes, but they would be either Protestant atheists or Catholic atheists!” There in a nutshell is what happens when secondary markers of identity are made into things of absolute importance.
So it should not surprise us when Paul poses the question to the Corinthians and, through them, puts it to us. Has Christ been divided between us? Has Christ been divided up by us?

When we divide Christ, we are making ourselves into the masters, and making Christ into an object of our whims and our power. But shouldn’t it be the grace and love and forgiveness of God that come to us through the Holy Spirit and sweep us up into the body of Christ?

For many years I have prayed and worked for Christian unity, and in my worst moments I find myself wondering if we are any further on. When I was an undergraduate – many, many years ago – I thought that God would probably sort it all out in my lifetime. I still believe it is the will of God, but we all seem to keep frustrating it. In my better moments, of course, I can see the incredible progress that has been made – we are all here, after all! But I sometimes wonder what it would be like if we actually prayed for unity. By that I mean not just saying prayers for unity, but allowing ourselves to be swept up so that we become one with our Lord praying for unity so that the world might believe that the Father had sent him (as we find in John 17).

To pray in that way would mean allowing ourselves to be shaped by grace, formed into the body that our Lord wants, not the one that we want. It would mean allowing ourselves to become part of the Lord’s solution rather than people who simply pray in order to hand over a problem to the Lord. It might give us some surprising fellow members within a body in which everyone has been given a particular place, and where we complement each other.

Even Paul knows that he cannot be and do everything in the body of Christ. Don’t you just love him? His mind and enthusiasm run away with him again and again. His thoughts come tumbling out. He shows us how he is working it out as he goes along. Sometimes he goes too far, or things do not come out quite right. But he never crosses it out, he just shows us himself correcting what he is saying in the light of further reflection.

It is an interesting question how many of the sayings of Jesus Paul actually knew. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel we find the resurrected Christ telling his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Arguably, Paul takes the lead in the early Church in so far as going to all nations and making disciples is concerned. But in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians he says that he did not baptise anybody. Then he goes “Uh oh” and remembers that he baptised Crispus and Gallus. A moment later he remembers that he also baptised the household of Stephanas. Then he covers himself by saying that he cannot remember if he baptised anyone else, and returns to his main point. It is not his job or calling to make a Pauline Church in which he preaches and baptises everyone, and of which he is both patron and boss. His job is to work with the others in the body. He preaches; for the most part, others baptise. The point is the complementarity of roles within the one body of Christ.
So how are we to treat each other if we really start to pray for unity? We need to turn here for a moment to the passage from Mark’s Gospel. This is one of my favourite parts of what is probably my favourite Gospel. Three times in the central section of that Gospel Jesus makes a statement about Messiahship: being Christ, being God’s anointed agent means that he must allow himself to go to the cross and to be raised to life. Each time the statement about Messiahship is followed by a complementary one about discipleship, about what it means if you are to be a disciple of the Messiah. The first says that you must take up your cross and follow him. The second (the one in tonight’s passage) says that you must be the last of all and the servant of all. The third ties together the other two and says that you must be prepared to drink the cup of suffering that the Lord drinks, and be the servant of all.

What does it mean to be the last of all and the servant of all? Tonight’s passage says that it involves being prepared to receive small children (and, presumably, people like them), and not treat them as inferiors or people who can be overlooked. It involves being prepared to receive a cup of water from someone who gives it to you because they see Christ in you, whoever or whatever they are. It involves accepting someone who works for the Kingdom in Christ’s name, even if she or he is not in your particular group or, shall we say, “gang”.

There is another story, also presumably apocryphal, about a new town that was being built in England. The planners and developers said that there could be a church in the centre of the development, but that the various traditions would have to share a site. The Roman Catholics and the Anglicans agreed to work together. But how should the church be designed? They agreed that to have duplicate pulpits, fonts, and altars would look very odd. So they would both make use of the same one wherever possible. All went well until they came to the question of the Reserved Sacrament and where it would be kept. There had to be no chance of things being mixed up. On the other hand, to have two tabernacles would look very odd. So they built one large one, and put a glass panel down the middle so that one side was Catholic and the other Anglican. When the Roman Catholic Bishop came to dedicate the building he wrote a notice and stuck it on the partition. It read “In case of unity, break glass!”

As we allow ourselves to be caught up in Christ’s prayer for unity, let us hope that God will break the glass. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For the past three years, the Rev. Kenneth Howcroft has been pastor to the Community at Ponte Sant’ Angelo Church and Methodist Representative to the Holy See. In June he took up his appointment as President of the Methodist Conference.
Sr Mairead Hynes - Early days at the Beda

In March 2014 I spoke with Sr Mairead (Louis) Hynes, now 98 years of age and in care at La Verna, Ladywell, the residential home for our sick, elderly and frail sisters. I asked her to tell me what it was like for her in the early days at the Beda. Mairead was at the Beda from 1960 -1974.

Firstly, I quote from a brief history about the “beginnings” taken from Mother Dolores’s account and deposited in the FMDM archives in Ladywell. “Our Sisters arrived in Rome by train from England on September 29 1960, at the request of Rev Monsignor Duchemin, Rector of the Beda. Those first Sisters were Mother Mary Dolores (Superior), Sr Josepha, Sr Sacré-Coeur and Sr Mary Isadore. Sr Louis (Mairead) joined the group on October 11”.

The sisters were met at Termini by Mgr Whitty, Vice-Rector. They stayed at the Holy Child Convent until their own convent was ready at the Beda. After resting, Mgr Whitty took the sisters to see the new College. Mother Dolores comments: “As the car took them along the Via Ostiense towards the Basilica of St Paul, all eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of the new building which had come into being in such a short time. There it was on the right-hand side of the road, looking very white against the blue Italian sky…As the Sisters drove through the gate it was evident that the college was far from completion, workmen were everywhere, planks, mortar, cement, bricks could be seen, and one could not help wondering how they proposed to be finished in time for the arrival of the students in a few days, and for the opening of the College on October 20th when the Holy Father, Pope John XXIII was expected to grace the occasion with his presence. Monsignor Whitty took the Sisters through the college, explaining every detail.”

Mairead commented, “The first days were very tough, frugal for all of us. There was little money, so we had to do our best with what we could get. Mgr Duchemin was a venerable elderly man and rarely came downstairs. Mgr Whitty ran the College, as well as lecturing. The Sisters worked very hard preparing the college for the students. They were down on their hands and knees scraping hard cement off the floors. There were some cleaners, but not altogether reliable, some were rogues, who transferred from the old Beda. There was no procurator so the chef took over but he had too much power and authority,
he robbed the College. He negotiated with the suppliers, they added extra cost and shared the difference between them.” Mairead, who had worked in our hospital in Syracuse, realised what was going on: “They were shocked to discover that I understood the Italian language, the cook was a ‘glorified procurator’, he took charge of everything. He was not a well man, and died within the year.”

Carlo Ottaviani came looking for a job; he took Ronaldo’s place in the dining room and later the kitchen. “I could see that he was a wholesome country boy, who had spent a year in the army. I saw the potential in him and trained him in international cooking. He was a very tidy and clean worker. He wanted to learn everything, special diets and all kinds of hints which I passed on to him. We had our own coffee machine, also a cold cabinet for the wine.”

I questioned Mairead as to how she continued to work with all the other staff. “Well,” she responded, “I told the Rector that I could not work in an atmosphere of crooks. Carlo and his wife Orlanda were given a little flat, near the kitchen area. I told Monsignor that I would train and supervise the kitchen, Orlanda and Carlo were wonderful workers.”

“There was a time when Orlanda and Carlo were very unhappy and thinking of leaving. I was asked to ascertain the reason, only to discover that they were not getting the correct wages. Eventually the authorities were contacted and they laid down the law, ‘to get a proper living wage, it was a legal matter.’ This was all rectified and the government made visits to speak to the staff. Orlanda started working in the kitchen and her little boy was in a play pen in the corner area.”

“When Mgr Curtin came, he gave us more money to run the place. He also made some needed improvements; remember at this time the sisters had all the responsibilities for the daily functioning of the College. We were there for all the students and staff. We looked after the sick, their welfare, we gave the students lovely afternoon tea, it was a lot of work but we had good staff in the kitchen, and we felt it important to care for the students. We did all the students’ laundry, ironing over a hundred shirts a week!! (Sr Maura who was in the laundry in the mid-sixties, said that she often ironed 120 white shirts and 70 coloured ones each week, when Rosa her helper was away.) Mairead continued, “All the sisters worked very hard as did the staff. In the summer we did not go home, but stayed to clean all the students and staff rooms, which included washing all the blankets and curtains, it was very, very hard work. The sisters were young, yet still it was not easy for them. It broke my heart to watch them work so hard, as our sisters are our greatest treasure. When the Rector asked me to keep the students out of the kitchen, I responded that I didn’t make the rules and would not prevent the students from coming to the kitchen. It didn’t last long!”

Mairead shared many interesting stories with me. The following is worth relating in the light of the present system where our Rector, Mgr Strange wants the sisters to be as integrated into the College life as is feasible. We now have our main meal in the dining room, join the students in their chapel for Morning Prayer and the daily liturgy and there are no restrictions in communicating with the students and staff. Mairead said: “There was
a very strict relationship with the students in the early days. As you know we could not talk
to the students, we had our own back staircase, we were in our own refectory downstairs
and we even participated in Mass from the tribune. The Vatican came to investigate the
physical set up of the convent. They ordered a brick wall to be built inside the door on the
second floor level, to ensure that we were completely separated from the students. The
authorities returned to see that all was done as suggested! Well they did not realise that
there was a way from Mother’s office to the community room, so the sisters used that as a
passage! If the wall was not built, according to the authorities, the sisters could not stay
there. Surely, to keep our own dignity, we did not need the Vatican to control us.”

I said to Mairead that I heard that she nearly missed seeing Pope John XXIII when
he visited the College. “Yes,” she retorted, “we were imprisoned.” I take the account from
Mother Dolores’ history:

“There was quite a bit of excitement going on behind the scenes. Mgr Whitty had
arranged that when the Holy Father reached the entrance hall, he would be presented to
Mother Francis (Superior General) and the Sisters. During the ceremony, Mother and the
Sisters had been in the tribune, and naturally decided to leave the tribune before the end of
the ceremony in order to be in the entrance hall to be presented to the Holy Father.
However, their progress was impeded by one of the Vatican Officials, though he could not
prevent us from going into our convent and so through the convent, down the back stairs
to the entrance hall. We went as fast as we could. But imagine our dismay to find another
official in the front entrance hall, who very rudely pushed Mother and the Sisters (also Mrs
Whitty and her daughter) into the porter’s lodge, closing the door behind him. We
instructed him to find out from Monsignor Whitty his orders regarding ourselves, as it
looked as if we were going to miss His Holiness; instead of being presented we would only
get a glimpse of him as he passed by our prison! Eventually another official came and gave
the magic word – and we were released. There in the entrance hall, each one of us waited
with expectancy to the arrival of His Holiness. When he did come he looked more
embarrassed than we did. However, we each kissed his ring and received his blessing. We
could hear him saying, ‘Coraggio, coraggio sorelle.’ He blessed us and all those near and
dear to us.”

Mairead continued: “There were occasions when we did mix with the students, like
our ‘gita’ to Orvieto for the Eucharistic procession and festival. That was a wonderful
experience to see the people from the various regions dressed in their traditional costumes.
Despite the hard work and other inconveniences, I loved the Beda, and you are fortunate
to be there today”. I responded: “I realise that, and I love the people and place which is my
home at present; also our new and refurbished convent is very comfortable and compact.”

Sr Carmel Spratt is one of the three FMDM sisters resident in College.
From Rome to Normandy 1944:
Fr Gerard Nesbitt and Fr Peter Firth

FERGUS MULLIGAN

So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,
And tired men sigh, with mud for couch and floor,
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,
Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,
But for a dream, born in a herdsman’s shed,
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.

Lt Thomas Kettle, Royal Dublin Fusiliers,
killed at Ginchy, the Somme, 9 September 1916

This is a year of anniversaries, the start of World War I in 1914 and the 70th anniversary of the D Day landings in Normandy, 6 June 1944. Two of the participants in that Day of Days, Fr Gerard Nesbitt and Fr Peter Firth, studied in Rome at the Venerable English College. They became army chaplains and both were killed in Normandy aged 33. This is their story.

Fr Gerard Nesbitt, 1911-44

From Ushaw to Rome

Gerard Nesbitt was born in Felling-on-Tyne, Co. Durham on 22 January 1911, the son of Stephen and Jane Nesbitt. He attended St Cuthbert’s Catholic Grammar School in Newcastle and at 16 moved to Ushaw College on 17 September 1927. He did well there, excelling in Latin, Greek, French and English. The regime at Ushaw was very harsh but Gerard seems to have enjoyed his years there, taking part in a number of plays including Puss in Boots and Robin Hood. Gerard arrived at the Venerable English College, Rome on 19 October 1929 as a Hexham

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1 Tom Kettle (1880-1916) was a gifted individual: orator, poet, barrister, MP, professor, soldier, husband and father. He attended Clongowes College SJ and University College Dublin and was elected Nationalist MP for East Tyrone in 1906. When war broke out in 1914 he was in Belgium buying arms for the Irish Volunteers, witnessing firsthand the brutality of the German invasion. Heeding John Redmond’s call to join the British army he was commissioned in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. In France he turned down a safe staff job to stay with his beloved Dubliners and was shot while leading an infantry charge at Ginchy on the Somme, aged 36; his body was never recovered. See Thomas Kettle, The Day’s Burden, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1968.

2 Information supplied by Matthew Watson, Ushaw College Librarian

3 John Heenan arrived at Ushaw five years before and recorded less favourable impressions: “academically boring and wasteful.” He was even more critical of the food: “dangerously inadequate”, a diet free of vegetables and vitamins was “as unbalanced as culinary incompetence could contrive”. Two years later Heenan left for the English College, Rome and was in his fifth year when Nesbitt followed him from Ushaw. John C. Heenan, Not the Whole Truth, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971, pp.34, 36-7, 39.
Peter Firth, just 5 months younger, was then in his final year at Stonyhurst.

Two years after arriving at the Venerabile Gerard was Secretary of the Grant Debating Society and captained the football team. He was Secretary of The Venerabile magazine for five years, then published twice a year and once in the College Diary he referred to “the little angel... blowing a whistle all day long in the cortile”. In 1932 after three years Gerard received his doctorate in philosophy from the Gregorian University. Cardinal Marchetti bestowed tonsure on him at the Lateran Seminary on 17 December 1932, first minors in the College church on 1 November 1933 and second minors on 31 March 1934. Gerard became Head Sacristan in May that year and received the Sub-diaconate from the same cardinal in the Lateran Seminary on 15 June 1935. He was ordained deacon on 14 July 1935 and ordained priest in Sant’ Ignazio, the Gregorian University church, on 28 July.

The pity of war
On completing his Theology Licence at the Gregorian Fr Nesbitt left the College in 1936, a few months before Peter Firth began his studies in Rome. He served as a curate at St Robert’s, Morpeth, from September 1936 to September 1939 and then returned to teach at his old school, St Cuthbert’s Grammar School until 30 December 1940 when he received his commission as Chaplain to the Forces (CF) no.163330. Fr Nesbitt was assigned to the 8th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry and followed his men as they fought through Cyprus, Palestine, Iraq and El Alamein. He found himself on Italian soil again during the hard fought allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 though he did not see the liberation of Rome two days before D Day on 4 June 1944.

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4 The Venerabile, January 1933, Vol.VII, No.1, pp.53-74
5 Extracts from the VEC Liber Ruber p.148, reproduced by kind permission of the Rector, Mgr Philip Whitmore with thanks also to Kasper Baadsgaard, Student Archivist and Sr Mary Joseph, College Librarian.
6 Information supplied by Tony Durkin, Hexham & Newcastle Diocesan Archivist
7 The German commander tasked with repelling the allies in Sicily, Field Marshal Kesselring, later operated from Frascati and stationed an artillery detachment at Palazzola.
Fr Nesbitt’s experience of three and a half years of war had a marked effect on him. Like many others he rarely talked about what he saw and heard: the horror was unspeakable.8

The Catholic Herald described the effects of war on Gerard:

Fr Nesbitt was brought face to face continually with the tragedies of battle, in the burial grounds, among the minefields, at the casualty clearing stations and at the base hospitals. The experience made him older, more serious, and it was only with difficulty that one could get him to talk about Egypt, Africa or Sicily. He was endowed with great personal courage....

Once when things were quiet in North Africa, Fr Nesbitt took the opportunity of going to a base hospital to have an injury to his knee attended to. He was there only a day or two when he heard that his regiment was to take part in an invasion of Sicily. He got up from bed and went straight back to his beloved Durham Light Infantry. He had many narrow escapes from German shells and small arms fire in the Middle East and Sicily.9

VEC Vice-Rector Fr Godfrey Malone described Gerard Nesbitt thus:

there was so much in his personality that was loveable and praiseworthy. Most outstanding, perhaps, was the zeal and enthusiasm he always showed in whatever he was doing. . . . His naturally placid and generous disposition gave him a certain charm of manner which made companionship easy. . . . Whatever he did, he put his whole heart and soul into it. . . . He would travel any distance to attend a meeting of Romans – and how he enjoyed those meetings! When Gerry enjoyed a thing he showed it in no uncertain manner; his eyes would light up and his whole expression be transformed, so that none could mistake his delight.10

In this photo taken in May 1944, two months before his death, Fr Nesbitt wears ordinary fatigues. He has the eyes of a man who’s been drained by years of warfare, soldiers referred to it as the thousand yard stare.

8 US army psychiatrists reported 10-20% of combat troops in Normandy suffered a psychiatric disorder, producing terror, panic, anger, grief and helplessness. Soldiers reached their peak at 90 days of combat after which efficiency declined steadily; within 5 months they were quite ineffective. Stephen Ambrose, Band of Brothers, London: Simon & Schuster, 2001, pp.202-3

9 The Catholic Herald, 28 July 1944, p.5

10 The Venerabile, Vol.XII, No.1, November 1944, pp.188-9
On the front line
Before embarking for Normandy Fr Nesbitt visited a friend in hospital, Reggie McCurdy, telling him he did not expect to return home alive. When the allies landed in Normandy on D Day the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) took the vanguard.11 They succeeded in establishing a bridgehead but the fighting was vicious and prolonged. The area around the village of Tilly-sur-Seulles south of Bayeux saw fierce tank battles between the 50th Infantry Division and the Panzer Lehr Division. The small town changed hands many times, with heavy military and civilian casualties; like Caen and St Lô it was totally destroyed. On 5 July 1944 Fr Nesbitt was conducting a series of funerals close to the front line when he was killed by a shell, possibly fired during a tank engagement.

Major Lewis and Major English of the DLI described the death of their much loved chaplain:

Padre Nesbitt was killed today by a stray shell while burying the dead behind the 9th DLI positions. [He] . . . was well loved by all ranks whether of Roman Catholic faith or not, his quiet manner yet very strong personality impressed all those who came into contact with him. Always cheerful and willing to help others in trouble, he was regarded as a personal friend by many. He was a great example of courage and fortitude and his death deeply affected all members of the Battalion. All the old officers of the 8th DLI headed by the CO went back to attend the funeral at 149 Field Ambulance.12

An Anglican friend, Rev. Cecil Hawksworth, was returning from Fr Nesbitt’s funeral when killed in a traffic accident. The two lie alongside each other in the same graveyard, beautifully maintained by the CWGC.

Jerusalem War Cemetery at Tilly-sur-Seulles, a small village west of Caen, contains just 48 graves and is the last resting place of Fr Nesbitt. His grave is the first on the left in the middle row. He may have ministered in the farm buildings in the background, used as an advanced dressing station. A month earlier Fr Firth landed at Hermanville-sur-Mer on the Normandy coast. Photo: CWGC13

11 The DLI believed it had done more than its share of the fighting in Europe and North Africa. When Montgomery, a difficult man, told DLI troops they had the honour of being in the first wave of invasion troops they responded with a loud groan: “It’s always the bloody Durhams”, the soldiers complained and refused to line the road to cheer off Monty: Anthony Beevor, D-Day: The Battle for Normandy, London: Penguin, 2012, 6
13 For more on the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission see www.cwgc.org.
Fr Peter Francis Firth, 1911-44

Peter Firth was born five months after Gerard Nesbitt on 30 June 1911 in Scorton, Applegarth, Lancashire, the son of Ernest Cecil Firth and Agnes St John Abdy. His father, a distinguished cricketer, attended Marlborough College and became a barrister.\textsuperscript{14} Peter had three older siblings: Henry born in 1899, Mary Margaret in 1907 and John in 1910. In 1920 Peter went to Hodder preparatory school before moving to Stonyhurst College where he won prizes for Latin and Classics and also a joint prize in Upper Rhetoric for an essay on “The influence of the Church on public life”.\textsuperscript{15} He contributed to the Debating Society, theatricals, the Altar Staff, the Sodality and became Under Officer of the Officer Training Corps.\textsuperscript{16} Although large in frame and not very sporty, in his final year he became Golf Club Secretary.

Stonyhurst College SJ, Lancashire, where Peter Firth received his secondary education

In the summer of 1930 Peter left Stonyhurst for Lincoln College Oxford,\textsuperscript{17} socialising in his Wellington Square rooms with other former Stonyhurst pupils. He graduated with 3rd class honours in Modern History and was conferred with a BA on 18 November 1933, followed by an MA on 31 July 1937.\textsuperscript{18} While at Oxford Peter pondered two careers: the British army like his oldest brother, Henry, who became a brigadier, or the Jesuits, the choice of another older brother, John. Peter finally opted for the Society and spent two years at the Manresa novitiate before deciding it was not for him. The diocese of Lancaster accepted him as a student and aged 25 he arrived at the Venerable English College, Rome on 16 October 1935, overlapping for a year with Gerard Nesbitt, then in his final year.

\textsuperscript{14} http://cricketarchive.com/Archive/Players/256/256502/256502.html
\textsuperscript{15} Information on Fr Firth’s early life from David Knight, Stonyhurst Librarian.
\textsuperscript{16} Information on his school years is from an obituary written by his brother, Fr John Firth SJ, written for The Stonyhurst Magazine, No.234, October 1944, p.195.
\textsuperscript{17} Lincoln was founded in 1427 by Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln as “the College of the Blessed Mary and All Saints, Lincoln, in the University of Oxford” to train priests to combat Lollard heretics or, as its charter put it, to defend “the mysteries of the sacred page against ignorant laics, who profane its most holy pearls with their swinish snouts”; quoted in Jan Morris, \textit{Oxford}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.167. Firth’s home address was 63 West Cliff, Preston and his name appears on the Stonyhurst and Lincoln war memorials; information from Andrew Mussell, Lincoln College Archivist.
\textsuperscript{18} Information from Oxford University Archives, courtesy of Emma Harrold.
A rare bird in the ecclesiastical aviary

Peter settled in well and over the next four years became Secretary of the Literary Society and President of the Grant Debating Society. As Editor of *The Venerabile* magazine he was methodical and “unruffled and efficient without being fussy”. He also answered letters making him “a rare bird indeed in the ecclesiastical aviary”. He played golf at Palazzula wearing “an old Panama hat and sun specs”, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. Although of “Falstaffian bulk” he was “a constant bather in the lake and in spite of his size and weight would go down more than once in the day – no mean feat even for the more athletic”.19

Although Peter found aspects of seminary life “trying”, Vice-Rector Mgr Richard Smith described him as “supremely happy... his laugh would ring across Refectory or Common Room, as if he were still a boy. His was the gift of enthusiasm. He would throw himself into the activities of the House, not only through public spirit, but also because he thoroughly enjoyed doing so.”20 As Peter’s brother notes: “From then on the Venerabile came second only to Stonyhurst in his loyalty, affection and generosity.”21

A reactionary but never dull

Four years later Italy joined the war on the side of the Axis and the English College had to leave Rome; the Beda College had departed in the summer of 1939, finding a temporary home at Upholland. On the morning of 16 May 1940, Peter and his fellow students headed for Stazione Termini dressed in lay clothes for the hurried journey through Italy and France to the Channel. They were waved off by the Rector and two students from the German College, repaying the compliment from 1915 when the English waved off the Germans.22 Events were moving fast and the students escaped on a boat out of Le Havre, just weeks before the Dunkirk evacuation; by 14 June the Germans had occupied Paris. The English College settled first at Croft Lodge, Ambleside where the students went rowing on the River Brathray. The Senior Student’s diary contains an enigmatic entry about rowing boats: “Mr Firth hired another;”23 thereby surely hangs a tale. He was also noted for rejecting “spud-peeling with scorn”.

By a quirk of fate, Peter found himself back in his beloved Stonyhurst when the College moved to St Mary’s Hall later that year. The staff made great efforts to replicate the Roman regime, even organising a *gita* to Blackpool. Peter received the Subdiaconate from Bishop Flynn in Lancaster cathedral on 8 June 1940 and the Diaconate from Archbishop Godfrey in St Mary’s Hall on 1 December 1940. Bishop Flynn ordained Fr Firth on 30 March 1941 at St Augustine’s church, Preston.

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19 Anonymous “Personal” section, *The Venerabile*, Vol.XII, No.1, November 1944, pp.85-6
20 *The Venerabile*, op.cit., pp.95-8, obituary by Mgr Richard L. Smith
21 *The Stonyhurst Magazine* obituary, op.cit., p.195
23 Ibid., p.224
Later Mgr Smith wrote an insightful description of Peter as a student.

His age and experience told in many directions. After breakfast he could not be parted from his smoke and the latest available copy of *The Times*. In debates he never hid his conservative opinions, which came as a stimulating challenge to the views of the younger men, brought up on the social encyclicals without experience of actual conditions. If he was a reactionary – and it all depends what you mean by that word – it was from conviction, not from laziness or selfishness. He distrusted the new-fangled, and not least in the spiritual life . . . he had a deep veneration for the memory of our forefathers . . . and all who had preserved the Faith through generations of oppression. Their grit had been tried; these new enthusiasms were untried.

And if he was a reactionary, he was never a dull one. He could marshal his ideas and express them with a clarity that gave them force. Particularly English in a hundred ways, he was more at home with the concrete than with the abstract. . . . This made his sermons very practical: he never left the congregation in any doubt what he was talking about, and what he taught was always near the bone.24

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24 *The Venerable*, op.cit., p.96
The rest could be left to God

Mgr Smith believed Peter could have become a successful barrister or an army officer, noting a number of students had left to join the armed forces: “the pressure was too strong for them”. Surmising Peter was similarly tempted he concluded: “He was sure of his vocation to the priesthood – that was his first concern . . . . His business was to prepare for ordination, and the rest, including the fate of his country, might safely be left to God.”

Peter was assigned to Barrow Island and Carlisle though he made it clear his ambition was to become a military chaplain. He received his commission in February 1943 and considered joining the Paratroop Regiment but as his brother John comments, somewhat bluntly, “his increasing weight – a fact which caused him no concern – forbade this”. He was posted to the Royal Artillery and then to the Royal Army Medical Corps as Chaplain 4th class, no.257744.

Before embarking for Normandy Fr Firth gave a number of retreats for his men who nicknamed him “Friar Tuck”. He was wading ashore at Hermanville-sur-Mer on 7 June 1944, waving to one of his men when he was shot and killed. Mgr Smith relates: “they found his body floating by the water’s edge, he had been badly hit and must have died instantly”. Fr Michael Elcock, another VEC contemporary, conducted the funeral and Fr Firth now lies with 1,000 other casualties in Hermanville War Cemetery.
We remember him from the little things

The *Liber Ruber* of the English College has this poignant final entry for Fr Firth: “1944 June 6: Killed in action on the Normandy Beaches during the invasion of France by the Allies. 1946: Awarded posthumously the Croix de Guerre.”29 An anonymous writer in *The Venerable* adds: “And so we remember him – from the little things. We are sorry to lose him but proud and glad of the manner of his death.”30

An un-named Anglican padre wrote to Ernest and Agnes Firth offering his condolences on the death of their youngest son.

> Your son Peter was my friend, and he used to come frequently to say Mass for our RCs. He was a good and holy man, and a zealous padre, whose only wish was to serve the men under his charge. All chaplains in the division deeply regret his death. Last night I found myself in the cemetery where he is buried.

> He is buried in No.8 grave, I J Plot, in the English soldiers’ cemetery at Hermanville-sur-Mer... in an orchard immediately behind the Parish Church of Hermanville. It is beautifully kept, and full of flowers laid there by the French who, with the Graves’ Commission, are devotedly caring for the place. On Peter’s grave is a simple white cross which says:

> “R.I.P. 257744 Rev. P.K. Firth, R.C., Ch.D.;
No.8 British Field Ambulance, Killed in Action
6 June 1944”

Earlier this year I visited the graves of both men in Normandy. The two cemeteries are indeed beautifully kept and though you might not expect it, far from gloomy. Sad, obviously but with a palapable air of peace and hope. It was a bright, late summer’s day as standing before their graves I offered a prayer for Gerard Nesbitt and Peter Firth, to thank them for what they did and to tell them they were not forgotten. Requiescant in pace.

> “Are we heroes? No, the real heroes are still over there in Normandy.”

*D Day survivor, Private Ray Lord, East Yorks Regiment, 6 June 2014*

Fergus Mulligan is a publisher and author; he publishes *The Beda Review* on behalf of the Beda College.

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29 *Liber Ruber*, op.cit. The date was 7 June 1944. Information also from Linda Forster and Michael Dolan, the Talbot Library, Lancaster.
30 *The Venerable*, November 1944, op.cit., pp.85-6
The practice of nightly Eucharistic adoration is part of the daily rhythm here at the Beda College. While on Sunday evenings this occurs within a holy hour including Benediction and Vespers prior to supper, the other five nights (excluding Thursday) this prayer takes the form of exposition, adoration and Night Prayer, led by one of our acolytes. Attendance on these evenings is voluntary. I have come to enjoy participating in this simple, reverent, yet at times powerful prayer at day’s end. The Church teaches that this prolonged adoration of Christ made present at Mass leads us back to participation in the Eucharist. And so goes the daily flow of encountering, adoring and celebrating Christ in the midst of our lives.

A resurgent interest and participation in Eucharistic adoration has also been noted among Catholic youth over the past fifteen years. World Youth Day (WYD) gatherings initiated by John Paul II and continued by Benedict XVI and Francis have witnessed occasions where thousands of young people pass a night in vigil prayer before the exposed Sacrament. Many observers are stupefied by both the profound silence and sustained engagement of these young people in adoration. Some might rightfully question – is this a passing fad or one-off emotionally charged event of many youth together? What happens when they leave WYD? Is Eucharistic adoration just another expression of individualism disconnected from the communal celebration of Eucharist and Eucharistic living?

A Secular Age

The Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, may provide some insight. In his well known text, *A Secular Age*, Taylor explores the marginalization of religion in the public spaces of our secular age. He interprets the current crisis of religion not as the substitution of faith by science, technology and rationalism but the result of a radical shift in religious sensibility which forms one’s unconscious assumptions and life practices. Taylor views “secularity” in terms of a “whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place”.¹

Tracing this progressive shift of religious sensibility, Taylor notes that within the pre-modern world horizon in the West, religion was “everywhere”; belief was so interwoven with social life that one was inconceivable without the other.² A religious sensibility of transcendent mystery formed the social imaginary³ of human flourishing, or the ideal of fullness of life.

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² Ibid., p.530
³ Taylor uses the phrase “social imaginary” to connote a broad understanding of the way a given people imagine their collective social life, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlay these expectations.
Emerging cultural influences of modernity, however, gradually changed the landscape of our social and religious imaginary. As an example, Taylor notes that in contemporary secular society, one can “fully engage in politics without ever encountering God”.\(^4\) What would have been unimaginable in the naivety of the Middle Ages is now common to the Western imagination: belief in a transcendent God is not axiomatic, but one among many possible cultural options offered for human flourishing.\(^5\) In this framework, Taylor concludes, secularization is more a gradual disappearance of faith on the level of the imagination.

Taylor is a believing Catholic. He firmly believes in the universal action of the Holy Spirit at work in the journey of human transcendence. He claims that religious longing, a longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation perspective, can survive any form of secularization.\(^6\) Taylor identifies a counter-movement today which he calls God’s pedagogy: “God is slowly educating mankind, slowly turning it, transforming it from within.”\(^7\)

Hence, Taylor shifts a contemporary discussion of “religion” from the level of beliefs and practices to conditions of belief, experience and search in which the construal of the moral/spiritual is lived. So we might ask, in today’s secular context, what might be the conditions of belief, experience and search for young people known as “seekers” that can transform their social imaginations? Specifically, what conditions might gradually allow them to situate the place of human flourishing within a Christian sensibility that holds loving and worshiping God as the ultimate end?

As an entry point to this exploration, Taylor asks: where will the access lie to practice of and deeper engagement with religion? His answer is to look to the various forms of spiritual practice to which each is drawn in his/her own spiritual life in a broad sense. These may involve meditation, study group, pilgrimage, work of charity, special form of prayer, as well as other possibilities.

Taylor notes that in the past, these practices existed more as optional extras for those already embedded in ordinary church practice. But in today’s “Age of Authenticity” he observes the reverse pattern: first people are attracted to participate in a pilgrimage, WYD, prayer circle or meditation. Then later on, if they continue in this same direction, they may find themselves committed to ordinary church belonging. Among seekers, there will be much movement among spiritual practices, and between associated faiths.\(^8\)

Taylor highlights the experience of pilgrimage. It has built into it a quest motif and holds an attraction for young people (though not only youth) searching for faith and meaning in their lives. Taylor points to Taizé as a striking example of this dynamic. Taizé has drawing power for thousands of youth “because they are received as searchers”, can meet their counterparts from other countries, and “explore Christianity without any preconditions as to the outcome”.\(^9\)

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\(^4\) Ibid., p.1
\(^5\) Ibid., p.3
\(^6\) Ibid., p.515, p.530
\(^7\) Ibid., p.668
\(^8\) Ibid., pp.515-516
\(^9\) Ibid., p.517
Taizé is clearly based in Christianity as well as the international values of reconciliation; these roots are explored particularly in bible study and ritual prayer, especially chant. It is the whole package that attracts many youth. WYD is modelled on the Taizé experience but with a stronger catechetical and sacramental emphasis including Eucharistic adoration. Such departures from the everyday, contact with something/Someone greater, within a context of universal fraternity and ritual embodiment provide an experience of fusion which cannot be ultimately explained away in rationalistic discourse. For Taylor, this form of spiritual experience remains a niche in our contemporary world where the “transcendent can erupt in our lives” and slowly transform our social imaginary within a setting that is more Christocentric and relational.

Taylor anticipates those who may object to this seemingly individualistic itinerary and, to a degree, he shares their concern. However, he argues that although the “framework” of spiritual practices may be individualistic it does not necessarily mean the “content” is individuating. In other words, such a pathway doesn’t necessarily lead to an utterly privatized spirituality. Taylor reminds us that one develops a religious life; it is not a singular event. Practices lead to insights. Taylor pursues this pathway with a further question: how does one’s relation to the sacred lead to collective connections? Many people are not satisfied with momentary experiences of “wow” alone. After a while, they desire more and search for a way to take this further. The initial framework of practices, Taylor contends, is their main access to traditional forms of faith. Yes, some may follow a spiritual life centred in personal experience alone. Many others, Taylor argues, will find themselves joining faith communities such as the Catholic Church because this is where their sense of the spiritual will lead them. He contends that strong collective options, through sacramental or common practice, are still powerful in our modern world despite many attempts over the centuries to render our religious and moral sensibilities more personal and inward, thereby downplaying the collective. Therefore, Taylor supports a relational or communitarian anthropology as a necessary foundation for human selfhood as against isolated, disengaged individualism.10

In light of this, Taylor views religion as a source of “graced conversion” in which one’s perspective of what constitutes human flourishing is gradually transformed beyond that which is commonly held. For Christians, the starting point is not human agency, but God’s initiative of transformative action in and among human lives. The end-goal is not a feel-good naivety that eschews self-sacrifice and the realities of suffering and death. Authentic faith, Taylor claims, involves gradual conversion by God’s love and towards a new way of loving as evidenced in the Gospels. It implies participating in God’s total self-giving love for humanity that goes beyond mutuality, not bounded by some measure of fairness.11

Taylor captures a central paradox of Christian faith: the free self-giving of Christ to suffering. “God’s initiative is to enter, in full vulnerability, the heart of the resistance, to be among humans, offering participation in the divine life.”12 Genuine fullness of life, Taylor

10 Ibid., p.516, p.517.
11 Ibid., p.430.
12 Ibid., p.654.
asserts, “means eternal life, and death is taken into stride.”

This is the power of God’s transforming love that Christianity needs to reclaim for the twenty-first century.

Testimony of Eucharistic adoration

Let us return to the witness of contemporary “seekers”. Testimony from various young people point to the practice of Eucharistic adoration and its impact on their life choices. Three years ago I had the opportunity to interview several Dominican women in initial formation from Australia, Ireland and the USA regarding their experience of Eucharistic adoration before coming to religious life.

Those who had participated in WYD in Sydney (2008) noted that they began searching for other opportunities of Eucharistic adoration and found “fellow seekers” along the way with whom they forged a bond. They also acknowledged that catechesis enhanced their understanding of and attraction to this practice. Two sisters, from Sydney and Dublin, reflected of their peers that young people want to be with the Lord in a more informal setting – God who knows the deepest part of them, loved them and allowed them to love him. One described her experience as: “Christ gazing upon me…He knows me… still loves me…to him I bring my heart, love… listen in silence.”

The American sister recalled that in her time of discerning religious life she had a busy schedule. She had to consciously make time (one hour weekly) for Eucharistic adoration, often when not convenient. Once there, she was glad for the space, silence, being with the Lord. For each of these women, participating in Eucharistic adoration was an influential part in their discernment.

Another testimony comes from a 2011 college graduate from an American state university where Eucharistic adoration was offered daily at the campus Newman Center. Courtney reflected what a difference it made to her day and how she views others.

My experience – and I know many others – was very positive. To take 30 minutes out of your day to sit quietly and really reflect with the body of Christ in front of you and be submerged in his light was truly an inspirational time. Sometimes we all just need a little quiet time throughout the day to really just relax and collect your thoughts. To be able to do that while in such a holy presence was divine. If someone for whatever reason was having a bad day, I can imagine that taking the time to reflect and build on your rapport with God would immediately put you in a better mood. I know for myself coming out of adoration each day was like having a weight lifted off of my shoulders. Whether you prayed, reflected, sang or just sat quietly, in that moment you became one with Christ and there was a glow about people after coming out. I know it always made my day better so I hope it had the same effect on others!

13 Charles Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity” a 1999 lecture given at the University of Dayton
14 “Courtney”, a written interview conducted on June 13, 2002. Courtney is now a professional event planner.
The interview with Courtney also revealed that volunteering at a homeless shelter one night a week was a routine part of life for her and her university friends as well.

A final example from the Catholic University of America illustrates the collective experience of Eucharistic adoration. Over the past few years, one hour of adoration has been offered every Wednesday evening, beginning at 9pm, at the request of the students. Caldwell Chapel is filled; the majority of the participants are male undergrads often accompanied by a few professors who live on campus.

Although Eucharistic adoration does not attract all young people, their own words and silent presence give credence to the potential of spiritual practices to connect human longing and the universal action of the Holy Spirit at work in the journey of human transcendence.

**Tom**

What about more “mature” men at the Beda? How has this practice been formative of their discernment toward priesthood and “graced conversion”? One experience of night adoration will be etched in my mind. I happened to check the rota of acolytes assigned to lead that evening’s adoration and found Tom’s name. Now Tom had returned to us two months earlier, after having suffered a stroke the previous year. He has made a marvellous recovery but still in progress is the automatic recall of speech. Sometimes the words that he wants to say take a little longer to retrieve and articulate. I must admit, I was a bit worried about how he would do in leading Night Prayer. After some discreet investigation, I discovered that Tom had looked ahead and enlisted the service of another class mate to begin the singing. Obviously, he felt ready to take his turn. Upon entering chapel that night, I noticed more students there than usual, especially those in Tom’s year as well as men from other classes. Adoration began, Tom reverently exposed the Blessed Sacrament, and thus ensued 30 minutes of silent prayer. When Tom approached the sanctuary to begin Night Prayer one could feel the sense of anticipation in the chapel. “O God, come to our aid” timidly ushered forth from Tom’s mouth, followed by an invitation to an examen of conscience. We began the hymn; the song took on a greater energy. And Tom’s voice grew in confidence, clarity and courage as he led us through Night Prayer. As Tom knelt one last time before reposing the Blessed Sacrament, I couldn’t help thinking that the Body of Christ exposed on the altar was also kneeling before the altar and surrounding Tom in the pews. This was the Beda at its finest.

One final greeting remained for Tom to conclude Night Prayer. Facing the assembly and relying solely on his memory, he exclaimed serenely, “The Lord grant us a restful night and a perfect end.” Although it was Lent, everything inside me shouted: Alleluia!

And so goes the daily flow of encountering, adoring and celebrating Christ in the midst of our lives, seekers of all ages.

Sr Mary Ann Clarahan RSM joined the staff on a full-time basis this academic year (2013-2014).
A Bird’s Eye View of God’s Love

MGR JOHN CHALONER

A man sits at a desk by a window in a large building in Rome. It is in the late 1960s and he is in his late twenties. He gazes out of the window on to the road below and watches the young men with their scooters at full throttle as they speed up and down, now swerving precariously around a corner, now screeching to an abrupt halt. The mid-day sun blazes down from a cloudless Roman sky. The gold leaf in the façade of the old basilica across the way glistens in its rays. He pours himself another cup from his recently acquired coffee maker and, sipping from it, turns once more to his book on metaphysics. Still in the Introduction, he seems destined to remain there interminably. In desperation he leafs through the book until he alights upon a part about “questioning the question.” Adjusting his spectacles, he reads that in metaphysics the starting point is the question and that therefore the question about the starting point is the question about the question. He blinks and reads on. Even though a question may not be well framed, the passage continues, or impossible to answer, it would be a contradiction in terms to question the possibility of questioning.1

He removes his spectacles, puts them on the desk, sips his coffee, and looks out of the window again. “That’s it,” he says to himself. “That is it. Nobody can question the possibility of questioning. At least I can understand that much if I can’t understand anything else.” He walks the length of his room, a small bed-sit with a desk, a wash basin, mirror and cabinet, book shelves, a wardrobe, and a built-in chest of drawers. He does this three or four times before he sits down again and mutters, “The question is, or rather, the questions are: can I do this? Can I change my life in this way? Even more to the point – do I want to? I thought I did. I prayed and prepared for it, but now? Oh, I don’t know. I really do not know.”

He has been in the seminary and preparing to become a priest for nearly three weeks, one among 75 other seminarians; some are in their late 40s, most in their 50s, a few in their 60s and a couple even in their 70s. All have had “other lives” – a rich variety including: teachers, medical doctors, a stockbroker, a financier, a policeman, a couple of engineers, a captain, a major, a colonel, the owner of a chain of supermarkets, former members of religious congregations – and, of course, all are men. There is a religious congregation of sisters who have their convent within the building but you never see them as they are enclosed and indeed, you seldom see any women anywhere in the seminary unless you go into the kitchen or meet them when they are cleaning the rooms, corridors or stairs. They are all Italian and are more than happy to engage you in long and animated conversation – which is delightful if you are fluent in Italian but less so if you speak it but falteringly, as he does. There is, however, one notable exception: Fausta, a beautiful Italian girl who works temporarily in the kitchen, in transit awaiting her appointment as an air hostess, but who is known to speak only one word,

twice, to the seminarians. One of Fausta’s jobs is to stand at the far end of the refectory and
pour out coffee at breakfast time. Her standard question to every coffee cup carrier is
“Cinquanta, cinquanta?” (meaning: fifty-fifty? half coffee; half milk?), a question delivered in
so sultry a voice that it fills one’s being with pure rapture, evoking either a glazed smile or a
weak, “Si. Grazie tante.”

He takes a deep breath, replaces his spectacles, has another sip of coffee and, returning
to the book, he attempts to move from the second to the third page. But his mind wanders
again, this time to the Millstone pub where, less than a month ago, he said his farewells to his
colleagues from the office and to Rachel from Accounts.

At the thought of Rachel, all other thoughts vanish in an instant. Now gone completely
from his mind is the book on metaphysics, the questioning of the question, even Fausta of the
sultry voice. Now he does not even bother to sip his coffee but instead he stares out of the
window, oblivious even to the roaring motor cycles below.

“What have I done?” The words are not spoken aloud; they are simply mouthed, and
then mouthed again. “What have I done?”

It was not as if he had known Rachel for months or years. He had been out with her but
once and that had been two or even three years ago. By no standards could the occasion have
been deemed a success. They had been to a performance of Aida at the city opera house but
left before the final Act to catch the last bus. That hadn’t gone down too well with Rachel. A
somewhat frosty “Goodnight and thanks for the opera. Pity we had to leave before the end”,
with a cool peck on the cheek had brought the evening to a rather chilly end. Even so, she had
come to his farewell do, she had wished him well, she had seemed quite sad that he was leaving,
and he had felt an awful wrench inside – and he still felt that wrench now…

His musings – and his futile attempts to study – are brought to an abrupt halt by the bell
summoning him to chapel for prayers and from there to lunch in the refectory. Lunch has a
monastic feel to it. Dressed uniformly in cassocks, all are seated in silence at long tables during
which one of the seminarians reads either from the scriptures or from the Documents of
Vatican II. But when the reading is done they talk. Seated next to him today is Paul, a man in
his late 60s with a weather-beaten happy face. They have never had an opportunity to get into
a good conversation before but now they do and Paul begins.

“I’m in my second year; they all say it’s the worst of the four years that you’re here.”

“Oh? Well, that’s something to look forward to, I suppose,” he replies, dismally.

“It will come and go. The first year went quickly enough. Nothing compared to the
years I was away at sea.”

“You were in the Royal Navy then?”

“Don’t ever say that to a merchant seaman! No, Merchant Navy for most of my life,
nearly fifty years at sea. Was in the Royal Navy during the War though – torpedoed twice, we
were. Then, after the War back in the Merchant Navy and finished up Master of a schooner.
Was married but my dear wife died some years ago. Got a son a priest, two married daughters. I wasn’t always a Catholic – I became one when I got married – you know how it is. On my last trip as Master of the schooner we sailed into Genoa harbour, I put my ticket in, finished – caught the train to Rome and came here. Just like that. Mind you, I’d seen the Vocations Director and done all you have to do, that sort of thing. Before I left England I went to see my old Mum in London. She’s in a home now, 92, she is not a Catholic. I said to her ‘Mum’, I said, I’ve decided after all these years, now that the wife’s died and all the children have settled, I’ve decided I’m going to study to become a priest and, guess what, Mum, I’m being sent to Rome for my studies. How about that?’

‘You’re going to do what, son?’ she said. (The old hearing’s not so good now.)

‘I’m going to try and become a priest, Mum, and I’m going to Rome.’

‘You’ve been roaming all your life, luv,’ she said. ‘But you’re going to be a priest you say? Dear God! Well, all I can say is, you’ve been a bad ‘un, most of the time, son, but at long last you’ll have a proper roof over your head.’”

The meal over, they file out of the refectory in silence and return to the chapel to pray for the Pope and the benefactors of the seminary. Then it is free time for a couple of hours and he decides to go into the library, choose a book, and recline in a shaded spot in the garden.


In the cool shade of the garden he takes up his book, lights his pipe, and begins to read: “The life so brief, the art so long in the learning, the attempt so hard, the conquest so sharp, the fearful joy that ever slips away so quickly – by all this I mean love, which so sorely astounds my feeling with its wondrous operation, that when I think upon it I scarce know whether I wake or sleep.”

“Heavens above,” he exclaims to himself. “I didn’t know love was that complicated,” but curiosity beckons and takes him to Cicero’s Dream of Scipio, the book with which Chaucer’s narrator opens his work. It tells of how Scipio’s ancestor Africanus appears to Scipio as he sleeps and shows him the smallness of earth compared with the Milky Way and the immeasurable vastness of the heavens; then he shows him the nine spheres from where flows a melody “which is the fount of music and melody in this world, and the cause of harmony”. Africanus speaks of heaven itself, “a blessed place where there is joy without end” and when Scipio asks Africanus the way to that heavenly happiness he is told, “First know yourself to be immortal; and always see that you labour diligently and teach for the common good.”

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2 Margaret Drabble (Ed.), The Oxford Companion to English Literature, (Oxford University Press, 2000), p.765
3 Gerard NeCastro; http://www.um.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/Chaucer, p.14
4 Ibid., p.36-84
Chaucer’s narrator is obviously enraptured by this book for he says that he reads it until the light fails but that on retiring to his bed he is anxious and disturbed and this is because “he has not what he wants, and has what he does not want.”

At this, our reader in the Roman seminary garden is jolted into the reality of his own life. “Could this apply to me?” he asks himself. “I’m trying to love God and do what I believe God wants me to do but I don’t know for sure, and God doesn’t seem to give any answer. I believe I am being called to become a priest. But can I go through life without the love of a wife and children? I thought I could but now I find that I’m still thinking about Rachel and that I have feelings for her. Oh, pull yourself together, you stupid boy! You should have settled all this business long before you came here and, in any case, she will have forgotten all about you by now. Best read on.”

Which he does, and soon comes to the part where Chaucer’s narrator himself falls asleep and is visited in his dream by the same Africanus who takes him by a river in a green meadow to a garden “full of blossomy boughs, with white, blue, yellow and red flowers; and cold fountain streams […] full of small shining fish with red fins and silver-bright scales. On every bough I heard the birds sing with the voice of angels in their melody […] Further on, I noticed all about, the timid roe, the buck, harts and hinds and squirrels and small beasts of gentle nature.”

It is into this garden that every bird imaginable, making “an exceedingly great noise” soon gathers to choose his mate for it is St Valentine’s Day. Presiding over them all is Nature who summons every bird to take their place with the birds of prey in the higher positions and the water fowl and smaller birds in the lower ones.

They include the royal eagle, “that pierces the sun with his sharp glance”; the noble falcon “that with his feet grasps the king’s hand” and the less majestic ones such as the dove “with her meek eyes”; the starling “that can betray secrets”; the “tame redbreast”; the sparrow, “son of Venus”; the nightingale, “which calls forth the fresh new leaves”; “the ancient thrush and the wintry fieldfare.”

Nature then calls on the tercel eagles to present themselves as suitors and to convince the formel eagle that she will find none worthier. The first eagle presents a good case for himself, as does the second eagle, and the third. But the other birds get irritated because the pleadings of these eagles go on, and on – and on. “When shall your cursed pleading come to an end?” they cry, followed by “Kek, kek!”, “Cuckoo!”, “Quack, quack!” from the goose, the cuckoo, and the duck.

Then follows a parliamentary debate which no human parliament could excel; speeches peppered with point scoring, witticisms and insults abound as one bird after another attempts to speak on behalf of his kind on love and the art of wooing. But Nature intervenes and decrees that the formel eagle shall have the one on whom her heart is set “since it cannot be debated here who loves her best”, and in the end none of the tercels wins the consent of the formel

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5 Drabble, op. cit.
6 NeCastro, p.210
7 Ibid., p.364
8 NeCastro, p.497-504
9 Ibid., p.637
eagle for Nature readily agrees to her request to wait a year before she makes her decision. The pre-nuptial formalities of the royal birds now resolved, if only temporarily, the birds of the “lowere kynde” are free to choose their mates and the dream-poem comes to an end with the birds singing a joyful song of welcome to the coming spring:

“Saint Valentine, throned aloft, 
Thus little birds sing for your sake: 
Welcome, summer, with sunshine soft, 
The Winter’s tempest you will shake!”10

Our reader in the Roman garden closes the book, lights his pipe again, and ponders. As he does so, he is aware of a presence standing behind him.

“Hi. Was that interesting?”

The visitor speaks in a broad American accent. It is Sandro who has a room near his own and who is also in his first year. He is American-Italian, a former major who having fought in various combats overseas later held highly responsible posts in the Pentagon.

“Oh yes. Most interesting. Fortunately, it was translated from the Middle English in which it was originally written but even so, I’m not at all sure that I fully understood it. I picked it up as a change from metaphysics which I can hardly understand at all. But it wasn’t a particularly ‘light read’ after all and it seemed to leave some things hanging in mid-air.”

“Is that so? But I reckon good books always leave the reader asking questions, right?”

“Um. Yes. Right.”

“Say, will you have coffee with me in my room before we go to the next lecture?”


Sandro wears military style boots that make no attempt to disguise their presence anywhere and in particular upon the tiled corridors of the seminary along which they now walk. Entering his room is comparable to opening a door and immediately setting foot in a jungle. One has to steer around or duck under the various exotic plants therein festooned and soak in their aroma, mingling and lingering as it does with that of the Galloise cigarettes smoked in profusion.

“Come in and take a pew – as you guys say. Black or white?”

“Oh black, thank you.”

“So – how are you doing? Are you doing good?”

“Well, alright I suppose, but …may I confide in you?”

“Sure you may.”

“I’m having doubts about whether I want to be a priest because … well, because I don’t know if I’ll be able to live a celibate life.”

10 Ibid., p.686
“Hold it right there,” says Sandro, “these are early days and it’s not what you want to do, is it? All of us who have come here are trying to find out what God wants us to do. Right? I go through these times of doubt too, you know. We all do. You said you were reading *The Parliament of Fowls*? Well, I don’t what that’s about but I do know that Jesus told us to look at the birds in the sky, that they don’t sow seeds, or gather into barns and such like and yet God looks after them, so I reckon that God will certainly look after you and me and all of us here. And as for celibacy – well, that ain’t easy, but it kind of goes with the job, y’know? You’ve got to unload your worries on to the Lord since he is looking after you – I think St Peter said that. Just give God time to show you the way. Have another cup of coffee.”

Early next morning he enters the chapel and prays. Sandro’s words of encouragement have helped him and for the first time since arriving at the seminary he experiences an inner peace. Soon the chapel fills and all meditate together in quietness before mass. The Gospel has the words of Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper: “You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another.” (*Jn. 15:16*).

After mass he remains in the chapel after everyone else has left and opens his heart to God. “It’s there in *The Parliament of Fowls*, Lord, isn’t it? The protestations of love, the birds’ parliamentary debate over who is worthy of love and who is not, what love is and what it is not – in the end all comes to nothing. But then, no one can know, can they? Love is indefinable; it is your mystery and your gift to us.

The birds did not know which of them would be chosen by the formel eagle; they had to wait. We too have to wait for you to show us your choice. This too is your gift. Even if our lives are full of failures you can change us and turn everything into your gift if only we trust in you.

In that garden the birds sang to welcome Spring, their discord at an end. If we let you walk with us in this world you will take us into other gardens: from the Garden of Gethsemane into the Garden of the Resurrection until finally we arrive in the new and everlasting Garden of Eden. But on our journey most of our questioning will not be resolved, there is so much that is unknown for there are “things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him” (*2 Cor.: 9*) The song of the birds, like the music from the planets that Scipio heard at the beginning of the poem echoes the harmony of heaven. Even in our unknowing we can join in that harmony until, as St Paul says, “I shall know as fully as I am known.” (*1 Cor. 13:12*)

His prayer of thanksgiving ended, he leaves the chapel and walks into the garden to greet the Roman sun shining on another day.

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The earliest mention of Lent in the history of the Church comes from the council of Nicea in 325 AD. The council of Nicea is best known for the profession of faith – the “Nicene Creed” – which is still recited in most parishes every Sunday immediately after the sermon. However, the council also issued twenty canons of a practical nature, dealing with various aspects of church life, and the fifth of these canons speaks of Lent.

The word used for Lent in this fifth canon is *tessarakonta* (in the original Greek), which means “forty”. For the first time in recorded history, we have mention of this period of preparation for Easter as lasting forty days. Much earlier Christians had introduced Easter Sunday to celebrate Christ’s resurrection. Soon a period of two or three days preparation, specially commemorating Christ’s passion and death – the “Holy Week” part of Lent today - was adopted by various Christian communities. But the first mention of a preparatory period lasting the forty days comes from this fifth canon of Nicaea.

The length of time was adopted in imitation of the forty days which Jesus spent in the desert at the beginning of his public ministry:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.  
And he fasted forty days and forty nights. (Matthew 4.1-2)

In many languages the word for Lent implies “forty” – “Quaresima” deriving from “quaranta” (forty) in Italian, “Cuaresma” coming from “cuarenta” in Spanish, “Carême” deriving from “quarante” in French. The English word “Lent” has another, very beautiful derivation. It comes from the Anglo-Saxon (early English) word meaning to “lengthen”. Lent comes as a time when the hours or daytime are lengthening, as spring approaches, and so it is a time when we too can “lengthen” spiritually, when we can stretch out and grow in the Spirit.

We should not, therefore, place too much emphasis upon our own efforts. Just as the sun was thought to do the work of lengthening the days during early Springtime, so it is the sun – in the sense of God’s warmth and light – that does this work in our lengthening and growing in Christ. In the English language, indeed, we have a beautiful play on the words “sun” and “son” which are pronounced identically. Just as the sun was seen to do the work of lengthening the days in spring, so it is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who does the work of lengthening in our spiritual growth. This image provides a comfort for us in our busy modern world, where hyperactivity can become the norm. Our role during Lent is to cooperate with God’s grace and initiatives, in a sense to relax in the presence of God, rather than to force the pace with our own efforts.

Scripture and the early Church suggested a variety of ways in which this lengthening might come about, a variety of ways in which we can cooperate with God’s grace. The passage from chapter 4 in Matthew’s gospel, just mentioned, emphasized the role of fasting. Canon 5
of the council of Nicea emphasized rather the importance of forgiveness and harmony within the Christian community. Thus a synod (local church council) was to be held “before Lent so that, all pettiness being set aside, the gift offered to God may be unblemished”. Various other features of Lent came to be drawn in, as we shall see.

Lent is very ecumenical. At the time of the council of Nicaea, the Church was still united, East and West. We are long before the sad division of the Church into Catholics and Orthodox, which came about in the eleventh century. Indeed the council of Nicea belongs principally to the eastern Church: the city lies in modern Turkey. Most Protestant churches recognize the authority of the early councils and therefore, at least tacitly, the canons of Nicea. Article 21 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, in the form first promulgated in 1563, states explicitly that respect should be given to the council of Nicaea. In keeping Lent, therefore, Christians can celebrate the eastern roots of their faith. They can rejoice, too, that despite the sad divisions which still remain, unity among them is fundamental. Christians are much more united than divided.

It is important to remember that Lent is a joyful season. The first Preface for the Mass in Lent makes the point very elegantly:

Each year you (God) give us this joyful season
when we prepare to celebrate the paschal (Easter) mystery
with mind and heart renewed.
You give us a spirit of loving reverence for you, our Father,
and of willing service to our neighbor.
As we recall the great events that gave us a new life in Christ,
you bring to perfection within us the image of your Son.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to emphasise this joyful aspect of Lent, but the older among us may remember a more negative emphasis. As boys at school we were urged to give up sweets during Lent, and the months of February and March were quite a bleak time anyway. Various pleasures, such as watching films, were cancelled. Some asceticism is important, of course, but it is essential to place the discipline within its proper and positive context: purification so that we can receive God’s gifts more fully.

This twofold dimension of Lent – joy and preparation – is elaborated in the Second Vatican Council’s decree on the Liturgy (Sacrosanctum concilium, nos. 109-10). The passage is worth quoting in full:

The twofold character of the season of Lent – for Lent, through reminding believers of baptism or preparing them for it, and through penance, make them ready to celebrate the Easter mystery, as they listen more attentively to the word of God and set aside time for prayer – should be brought out more clearly both in the liturgy and in teaching based on the liturgy.

Accordingly, the baptismal features particular to the liturgy of Lent are to be brought into it more fully; indeed, insofar as circumstances allow, certain
elements from earlier tradition are to be restored. The same goes for the penitential elements. Moreover, in teaching, the distinctive character of penance as a repudiation of sin, inasmuch as it constitutes an offence against God, is to be impressed on the minds and hearts of believers. This should go together with a sense of the consequences of sin in society. Also, the roles of the Church in penitential activity should not be omitted, and the need to pray for sinners should be emphasized.

Penance during the Lenten season should not only be inward and individual, but also public and collective. Moreover, penitential activity, in ways suited to our time, to different parts of the world, and to the situations in which believers find themselves, must really be encouraged and recommended by the relevant church authorities.

However, the paschal fast must be kept sacrosanct. It is to be observed everywhere on Good Friday, and, if circumstances allow, it should be carried over to Holy Saturday. This is so that people can thus come through to the joys of Easter Sunday with minds and hearts concentrated and receptive.

The Council of Nicea in 325 and the Second Vatican Council may be seen as the two poles in the history of Lent: Nicea acknowledged its existence while Vatican II confirmed its importance. The sixteen centuries between the two Councils saw a variety of developments in the way Christians observed this season.

At an early date the last week of Lent – “Holy Week” – became distinct and focused on the last days of Christ’s life on earth, followed by his resurrection. This was an obvious development inasmuch as the week tied in with the overall chronology suggested by the gospel writers (the precise chronology is debated by scholars). The “week” begins with Palm Sunday, commemorating Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21.1-9; Mark 11.1-10; Luke 19.21-38; John 12-12-18). It moves to the Last Supper with his disciples on Maundy Thursday – “Maundy” deriving from the Latin *mandatum* meaning commandment, following Christ’s invitation: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you” (John 13,34) – and his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, followed by his arrest and the beginning of his trial. Good Friday – “good” in the sense that it is the day on which our redemption is realized – commemorates the bitter details of Christ’s passion: his scourging and crowning with thorns, his condemnation by Pontius Pilate, his journey to Calvary, his death on the cross, and his burial. Holy Saturday quietly remembers Christ’s time in the tomb, and Easter Sunday rejoices in his resurrection “on the third day” - “third” in the sense of counting Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

The long earlier, part of Lent sought to relive more directly Christ’s forty days in the desert, giving Christians appropriate time for quiet, prayer and purification. The psalms and the scripture readings which make up the Divine Office – the seven “hours” of Matins (morning prayer), Lauds (Praise), Terce (third hour after sunrise), Sext (sixth hour), None (ninth hour), Vespers (evening prayer) and Compline (final prayer) – were selected to harmonise with this
“Lenten” spirit. The readings during Holy Week followed closely the story presented in the gospels together with suitable readings from the old Testament and other parts of the New Testament – specially notable are the four “Songs of the Suffering Servant” from the book of Isaiah (42.1-9, 49.1-7, 50.4-9 and 52.13-53.12) which provide the first readings on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday of this week.

Appropriate colours also came to be chosen for the vestments worn by the priests and other celebrants at the liturgical services. Purple is prevalent during Lent, the colour signifying both penance and hope; red is chosen for Good Friday, signifying Christ’s shedding of blood and his martyrdom; while the colour for Maundy Thursday as well as for the Easter vigil and Easter itself is white, celebrating Christ’s triumph. In these colours we find proper attention paid to the visible and sensitive dimensions of the liturgy and of human life.

Many of the details of the liturgy of Lent today – including the use of English and other vernacular languages rather than Latin – came about through the reforms inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council, for which we can be truly grateful. The reform of the liturgy of Holy Week, however, was largely the work of Pope Pius XII in the decade before the summoning of Vatican II. Another recent recovery of the early Church is the reception of catechumens into the Church on Maundy Thursday, which, as the celebration of the Last Supper, is a particularly appropriate day for catechumens to receive Communion (the Eucharist) for the first time. A wonderful occasion for me occurred when, during a period of teaching in Malaysia, I was privileged to witness the reception of some hundred adult catechumens, and their first Communion, during the Maundy Thursday liturgy in the parish church of St Francis Xavier in Petaling Jaya.

Vatican II explicitly linked the catechumenate and Lent. So we may appropriately conclude this short History of Lent by quoting from the Council’s decree on missionary activity:

It is desirable that the Lenten and Easter liturgies should be renewed in a way that will prepare the minds and hearts of the catechumens for the celebration of the paschal mystery, at whose solemn ceremonies they are reborn in Christ through baptism.

This Christian initiation during the catechumenate should be the work not only of catechists and priests but of the entire community of the faithful, especially the sponsors, so that the catechumens are aware right from the beginning that they belong to the people of God. Since the life of the church is apostolic, the catechumens should, in their turn, learn to cooperate actively, by the witness of their lives and the profession of their faith, in the spreading of the gospel and the building up of the church (Ad gentes, no. 15).

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This article first appeared in www.thinkingfaith.org for 15 March 2011 and is published here by kind permission of Frances Murphy, Editor of Thinking Faith.
Dr Anthony Towey, of St Mary’s University in Twickenham, has met his brief to create an accessible and stimulating introduction to Christian theology. It is a work of impressive ambition: an academic sojourn beginning deep in ancient Judaism and ending with contemporary debates – all conducted in the spirit of “thoughtful conversation about God” (p.3). In adopting a witty, simply written and “basically historical” approach, he offers a text especially appealing to what I suspect is his main constituency – the younger student new to tertiary level theology. It could also work as a useful primer for teachers, catechists, religious, or simply those with a general interest in theology.

For all the lightness of a style not to every taste, there is throughout the text the deeper signature of a serious pedagogical intent: the thoroughgoing concern for narrative; the taming of technical vocabulary by etymological recourse; the explanation of subtle schools of thought in simple, but not simplistic, ways; the provision of a useful glossary and an extensive study guide replete with various scholarly sources. Less in evidence, though, is editorial diligence. There are too many little errors of various kinds in the work, even running to anomalies in the maps.

With 25 chapters arranged in five parts (complemented by a sixth part devoted to references and reading), Towey’s work begins with a development of his “thoughtful conversation” leitmotif and offers for argument a defining thesis for theology – “reality is best understood as God-based” (p.4). Appealing to history, anthropology and philosophy, he invites the reader to make an imaginative visit to the “world in front of the text” of scripture. A God-based reality has been an awkward thesis for an intellectual mind-set still heir to the Enlightenment, which is why some theological writing in the last two centuries has tended to bracket out this thesis. Towey aims at a theology between belief and bracketing out.

In Parts Two and Three, readers embark with him on a theological-historical journey through the Hebrew Scriptures into the Jesus Event, the Gospels, and the story of the early Church. His lively style prompts them to an imaginative openness to what these narratives contain. A Creator? A Revealer? A God of miracles? One who took flesh? In chapters exploring the Hebrew Canon, the Gospels and the early Church, the author disposes the reader to understand these questions in their hermeneutical settings. In Parts Four and Five, he proceeds through the Patristic era into the medieval, Reformation, modern and contemporary eras, with each age signposted by significant theological preoccupations. Relying on a mix of established and newer scholarship, the author works to draw in the reader personally with his fresh presentation of material.
In the four chapters comprising Part Two, the author surveys the Hebrew Canon under its traditional divisions of Law, Prophets and Writings, presenting critical scholarship in all its breadth but limiting his own analysis principally to hermeneutics. Acknowledging academic friction at various points, Towey shields aspiring theologians from its intensity whilst giving them a sense of the heat beneath their feet. His chapter on Genesis is a great example of his gift for lively, insightful interaction with scripture. By emphasising how the ancient Hebrew mind-set was accommodated to aetiology (stories providing a vivid “why” to the “way things are”) as an orienting device in a theological space, he neatly sidesteps those knottier questions of fact and history that the beginner may have. Perhaps in quickly setting aside such questions there is also something of the contemporary theological and philosophical distaste for ontology at play.

Part Three, comprising six chapters, deals with the “Theology of the Jesus Event”. As with the Hebrew canon, there is nothing particularly novel in the kinds of headers under which the author pursues this theological exploration. Nonetheless, delicately adjusted to be an engaging but not apologetic account, his part exegetical unpacking, part historical commentary reads more like a transcript from a seasoned educator’s lecture than a draft for a theological text. This all helps in negotiating the trickier hermeneutical terrain of the “Jesus Event”, layered as it is by centuries-old quests for the historical Jesus and shaped by new schools of thought, often drawing on fairly abstruse literary criticism. Whilst giving a sense of the breadth of views, Towey steers from extremes without yielding to a bland rehearsing of scholarly opinions. He is studiedly partisan in some longer-running debates about Qumran, the Jesus Movement and messianic expectation. What kind of messiah was awaited? The author proceeds with caution, aware that the history of answers to this question is in part the history of hermeneutics dressing in the intellectual fashions of the age only to be dated by the passing of time or new findings. He is fairly cool on the “Messiah-Revolutionary” thesis, creating a subtler picture from priestly, prophetic and kingly archetypes and a strong colouring of late-Isaiah servant imagery.

In Chapter Seven, Towey discusses the “Theology of the Kingdom”, including Jesus’ parables and miracles. Regarding miracles, the author, while acknowledging different strands of scholarship, sympathetically unpacks them within a tradition proximately “in front of” the world of the text. He quickly dismisses the notion that Jesus’ miracles can be bracketed out of an assessment of his ministry – they are “at the heart of the synoptic tradition” (p.105). Similarly, the resurrection accounts are of a piece with the early Church’s faith: that Jesus had died and been raised. Perhaps on this question there was space in the study guide for contrasting thoughts from such as Wright and Crossan. Discussing Hume later on, the author ventures his own view that miracles are not “irrefutable proof of God’s action” (p.305). Their semantic weight must rely on a grammar of faith they do not establish. Still, the reader might wonder whether there is something artificial in the controversy over things such as miracles and resurrection once we countenance the God-grounded thesis. There is sufficient astonishment in the idea of such a God, still more in an incarnate God, to disallow a different or more excessive astonishment at attendant wonders.
All told, Towey’s variegated picture of Jesus and Kingdom theology has the merit of being resistant to the grand reductive theory beloved of the cheap documentary makers of today. The aspiring theologian needs some critical armour against the one-track “Was Jesus … [an apocalyptic prophet? a charismatic healer? …]” approach. His full and rich treatment of the Gospels must be bought at the price of abridging elsewhere. Though Acts is extensively referenced in developing a picture of the Jesus Movement, the author reserves Paul’s undisputed letters to characterise that apostle’s theology, John’s Gospel to characterise his. Other books, for example, Hebrews, are given a more limited billing in a chapter on the developing Canon. Later within the same chapter, we find a discussion about the Book of Apocalypse, with a detailed hermeneutical excursus preceding a discussion about its canonical reception. To debate the emergence of “high Christology” in the New Testament, the author makes use of graphics, an all too rare recourse in a work that has to explain so much. In this case it is to guard against drawing simplistic lines in tracing the development of the earliest Christian doctrine.

After these chapters, we move to Part Four – Theology in the Classical Period. Here, the theological journey picks up the pace to sweep through the Patristic era into the early medieval then on to the high scholastic age. Though covering well-trodden ground, Towey makes use of significant persons, events and debates emergent in apologetics, councils and Christian disputation to mark these centuries and effectively convey the importance of paradox as a germ for doctrinal development. He deftly handles the assimilation of Greek thought into Christianity, though with the accent on Platonism rather than on the Neo-Platonism influential later on. Further ahead, he melds theology, history and analysis beautifully in his chapter on sacraments. There was comparatively little discussion about the office of the papacy and whether its prerogatives were always present, even if only embryonically, from the first. Or did need and office and person opportune meet in Leo to do what the great councils had done hitherto and what other agencies would in time effect? Since the latter view is a staple in much Protestant and Orthodox thought against the iure divino claim about the Papacy, this would have served as preparatory for his discussion on Christian unity later on.

The last chapter of Part Four focuses on later ecclesiological development, including the tragedy of the Great Schism and the trauma in Western Christianity in the 16th century. The Reformation era, though it gathers under it events as a sequence, in some measure names a chaos. A historical-theological work must plot through this a path to the present and in doing so necessarily reveal to the reader something of its author’s own intellectual and confessional biography. Similar texts to hand move to the present via a detailed discussion of Reform theologies or by reference to the standard historical designations or by drawing eclectically from events, moods, figures and schools. Towey’s signposts could also be thought an eclectic mix, though they answer to an educator’s instinct. He discusses the modern era under tentative, exploratory headings that set theology against philosophy, science and anthropology. In similar fashion, he marks contemporary theological developments by means of other headings that begin with “Dialogues…”. This gives him scope to survey post-modern and feminist contributions to Christian theology as well as broach significant ethical and ecumenical questions.
Confronting the modern era in Part Five, the writer seems increasingly hostage to the ambition that produced such a scintillating sweep through the scriptures and early Church onwards. His own great gift for interacting with the texts and worlds in which there is a shared story is not so naturally employed when this story fractures into multiple, divergent accounts. He takes on too much and risks imposing a narrative in which felicitous writing may not hide forced joins. There is something to be said here for a hybrid thematic-historical approach, in which a few central philosophical, ecclesiological and ethical themes could be deeply wired into the earlier parts of the work to prepare for natural connections later on. Acknowledging that a great deal would have to be untold, the author would have given himself space for the profounder telling of what remained. Nonetheless, he does excellent work in corralling philosophical, sociological, anthropological and ethical discussions into something that has the narrative feel of his earlier chapters. However, to represent in accessible précis some fairly intricate thinkers, complex events and abstruse schools is a difficult undertaking, in which shortcomings are scarcely avoidable. To take just a sample of these, the noetic, ineffable, transient and passive characteristics he cites from William James’ work are more properly associated with mystical experience than with religious experience in general; likewise Anthony Flew’s religious critique belongs with falsification theory rather than with logical positivism. Newman on conscience is sketched to put him at a distance from Aquinas and Butler, when each thinker’s moral psychology and starting points seem to me in some measure inter-translatable. And hazarding a link between free will and quantum theory is problematic since it would still leave unanswered the question of how one’s free choices could be properly one’s own.

In summary, the book’s very ambition in thesis and scope presents a challenge which at best can only be magnificently unmet. That Towey carries through such ambition even with shortcomings testifies to a certain courage and generosity of spirit in trying to take on so much and make it intelligible. In doing so he has produced a text which any newcomer to academic theology will find engaging and intellectually stimulating. The author’s purpose was never to usher readers to a Sinai encounter but to help them put off an imaginative straitjacket and go out to meet those ages of faith when “thoughtful conversation” was once actually communication.

Paul McHugh has completed two years at the Beda College.

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First Year Students

**Back Row (L/R)**  Ron Seery, Rick Fernandez, Shaun Addinall, David Savoury, Michael Barratt, John Warnaby
**Front Row (L/R)**  Brillis Mathew, Patrick Aboagye, Mgr Roderick Strange (Rector), Edward Gibney, Andrew Senay

Second Year Students

**Back Row (L/R)**  Declan Brett, Geoffrey McIlroy, Albert Smith, Anthony Lappin, Darien Sticklen, Mark Rucci
**Front Row (L/R)**  Warren Collier, Humphrey Nwajoko, Mgr Roderick Strange (Rector), Darren Jones, Paul McHugh
Third Year Students

**Back Row (L/R)** Herman Schaepman, Cosmas Epifano, Kevin Murphy, David Burke, Lambert Bakourebe, Patrick Toohey, Nathan McKay, Tom Corry, Jonathan Rose

**Front Row (L/R)** Oliver Tham, John Bagnall, Mgr Roderick Strange (Rector), Tom Stevens, Tom Montgomery

Fourth Year Students

**Back Row (L/R)** Keith Evans, Sean Hyland, Paul Mizzi, Patrick Daly, Barry Larkin

**Front Row (L/R)** Laurence Gambella, Martin Wheaton, David Casey, Mgr Roderick Strange (Rector), Ralph Candy, Carmelo Spiteri
The College domestic staff *(personale)*

**Back Row (L/R)**  Anna, Pina, Gabriella, Edna, Larry  
**Front Row (L/R)**  Ida, Ivano, Angelo, Maria Grazia, Lucia, Orietta

**Resident Staff**

**Back Row (L/R)**  Fr Kevin Alban, Fr John Breen, Mgr Peter Verity  
**Front Row (L/R)**  Sr Patricia McDonald, Mgr Roderick Strange (Rector), Sr Mary Ann Clarahan
Beda 2013-14 Sisters

Standing  Mgr Roderick Strange (Rector)
Front Row (L/R)  Sr Felicity Scanlon, Sr Carmel Spratt, Sr Maura Bermingham

Beda College staff and students, 2013-2014
New men arrived bright eyed and bushy tailed by 27th September from far and wide. In residence were to be five men from England and Wales and others from Ghana, South Africa, Australia, Canada, Dubai, Scotland and USA. They were to be joined by two external students from the Missionaries of Charity and the Rosminians (American and Tanzanian respectively). The ages ranged from 28 to 66. A further *strictly external* student took up residence in the top secret Pontifical Cappa Nove College in the orchard. (Answers on a postcard please). They were welcomed by a small group of men in upper years led by David Casey, Student Dean. The thoughtfulness that was to characterise the efforts of all the welcoming team (Hospitality/Refectory/Sacristy and MC/Bar) was evident from the word go when the Dean made off immediately to give one new arrival’s friends a quick tour of St Paul’s, sensitively leaving him to unpack and settle in in the meantime. The welcoming team remained on hand to assist with anything from the process of applying for residence permits for non EU men, to setting up laptops/printers. Fresh talents were soon apparent with Alex Chow bargaining in Cantonese to get discounts on printers in the local shop. He had by now got used to the fact that an extraordinary number of Italians seemed to be shouting out his name in the street, getting off buses etc. The formation staff were in residence to add their welcome, valiantly ferrying men from the airport on arrival. Srs Carmel and Maura, resident in the FMDM Convent added their unique warmth to the reception.

The new men’s first mass was held in St Paul’s Basilica followed by a meeting with the Spiritual Director and a walking tour of Rome. The best English language bookshops were pointed out and the important 10% Beda discount at the Pauline bookshop solemnly intoned *in situ*. Careful note was taken of recommendations as to the best gelateria and the Rector in his infinite bounty had provided the means for testing the claims. The next day in his formal welcome talk he warned that seminary was sure to expose any serious areas of weakness in the students and stressed the importance above all of the integrity and equal weight of the four “pillars” of formation – spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and human. He asked for all to be open to change whilst appreciating that to a degree God had already formed the student in important ways in life before the Beda. To commence the students’ first full week, mass was held in the beautifully renovated San Columbano Chapel of St Peter’s.

The centre of the induction process was the building up of the group under the astute moderation of the Pastoral Director. Thanks be to God, an atmosphere of trust, openness and sharing was very quickly established and was to endure throughout the year. A splendid meal was enjoyed by all at Pizzeria Al Peperoncino close to the College.
The Rector ushered his ducklings onto a coach for a tour of the Castelli Romani, the hill towns to the south-east of Rome around lakes Albano and Nemi. After mass in Frascati, a thoroughly satisfactory lunch was taken at a restaurant overlooking Lake Albano with visits to Nemi and Castel Gandolfo. The next day afforded the privilege of mass in the catacombs of San Calisto. Sunday Mass was attended at Santa Maria in Trastevere.

The new men met Tish Nicholl for sessions on proclaiming the Word of God and public speaking. The induction week was rounded off by attending the Wednesday Papal Audience which due to rain provided a good opportunity to observe at close hand if not the Holy Father, the faithful’s multifarious choice of umbrella.

Immersion in the multitude was helpful, for with shouts of greeting and many an embrace, the remainder of the House was that day gathering for the new academic year. The new kids on the block jockeyed for position in the chapel with the old lags and the new year began with a period of recollection led by Mgr Peter Verity. He spoke about the fact that God should work with us the way God wants not the way we want. This leads to a big question: Are we weak enough to be priests? The kitchen staff (as usual) excelled in a festive meal to celebrate the beginning of term. Their great skills were again in evidence at a dinner held to honour the FMDM sisters and in part to welcome Sr Felicity Scanlon who joined the community in the convent at the end of September. Sr Felicity had spent some time in Australia and the US as well as no less than 32 years in Africa, most recently in Zambia: proof positive of the saying “join the FMDMs and see the world”. In his speech the Rector spoke movingly of the vital presence of the sisters in the College and the very special gift they represent. He noted that when they are absent (on retreat for example), there is a palpable sense of something missing. The Refectory resounded with a spirited rendition of Ad Multos Annos!

The FMDMs were very much present when Sr Maura topped up the library coffers with one of her book sales, strategically positioning her stall between the refectory and the stairs (the only means of escape) and employing her abundant gifts of the Blarney to waylay any seminarian with cash in his pocket.

November

While the fourth year deacons celebrated the feast of All Saints at the English College’s Palazzola during their period of recollection, those remaining at the Beda were told in Mgr Peter’s homily of the school kid who having seen a saint depicted in a stained glass window remarked that a saint must therefore be “someone who lets the light shine through”. The Rector presided at the Academic Mass at which we were particularly pleased to have present Dr Anthony Towey, Academic Director of Theology and Religious Studies, representing St Mary’s University. The first years were treated to a gita to Subiaco where they were able to have mass in the Sacro Speco Monastery of St Benedict. There the young Benedict retired from the world and began to develop the principles of the Order which bears his name. The remarkable allegorical frescoes were admired and the visit was a special joy for Br Andrew, a Benedictine in the first year, and Sr Gertrude, a Benedictine sister living at the Beda whilst studying for her doctorate.
The College welcomed to tea priests from England and Wales celebrating their 40th and 50th anniversaries of ordination. The combined years of service were in excess of 2000 and as is the way of things in the Church, old friendships were renewed and new connections established. Hard on the heels of the Jubilarians, there arrived en masse the Vocations Directors of England and Wales. Bravely resisting the seminarian’s natural instinct to run to cover in the face of such a pack, the Beda foxes kept the glasses charged to throw them off the scent and a merry time was had by all. Abbot Christopher Jamison, Director of the National Office of Vocation, was in the visiting party.

It was the Beda’s turn to organise the Remembrance Day Mass at San Silvestro in Capite, bestowed in 1890 on the English church by Leo XIII. A highlight was undoubtedly the excellent playing of the Last Post and Rouse by a trumpeter from the Italian Army’s Bersaglieri Corps. The President of the Rome Section of the Corps, resplendent in Bersagliari plumed hat, despite a number of pleas to be seated, insisted on remaining standing for the entire mass as a mark of respect. Afterwards, he explained that he felt honoured to be asked to be present and it was a poignant reminder of the lives of all nations lost in war. His Excellency the British Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr Nigel Baker, was in attendance with his family.
Towards the end of the month the third year students were admitted to Candidacy. Bishop Brian Noble, a Beda Trustee, presided.

In his sermon he noted that although the candidates were required to say only one word – “Present” – it was a declaration of enormous significance. The Rector led the Advent period of recollection treating on heaven and hell, judgement and death. To say the least, there was much food for thought. Priests from the English, Irish and Scots Colleges joined Fr Samuel Pusateri OSB (a much appreciated frequent visitor from San Paolo) to pray with us in a service of Reconciliation and to hear confessions.

**December**

The first years made their maiden voyage to the English College’s Palazzola and they could not have hoped for better weather: the lake bathed in light, not a cloud in the sky. The days were unusually mild and only the smokers had to endure the sharp drop in temperature the clear sky presented at night. Some English College men were in residence and we joined them in front of the blazing fire in the Library. The core of the weekend was group discussion and sharing moderated by Fr John Breen and the Rector attended as an observer. The first years
took the opportunity in the evenings to gather around the piano and look at some possible music for the forthcoming House Concert. Palazzola echoed to the mournful strains of “Don’t Cry for me Argentina” with bursts of Andrew Lloyd Webber and offerings from the great American songbook. The Sunday lunch – meat pie and apple crumble and custard – was always going to be a winner and fortified the post lunch Christmas “sing off” with the English College men who, somewhat caught napping, were forced quickly to raise their game. Though playing away from home, the Beda team came back at least sharing the musical points.

The House Concert saw the first years’ musical talents bolstered by Sr Gertrude’s special guest appearance singing Peter, Paul and Mary’s “Lemon Tree” with her backing group (lemon in each hand) not trying terribly hard to avoid upstaging her. Sr Maura appeared frequently with her accordion (to be immediately bundled off by men in white coats) but returned (having given her minders the slip) supported by Ron (‘Riverdance’) Seery to great acclaim. Michael Barrett courageously accepted the poisoned chalice of portraying the Rector who sat in the Mastermind chair. Having scored 2,236 points in his specialist subject “the letters and diaries of John Henry Newman”, the fictional Rector had a disastrous general knowledge round, nonplussed at “sitters” such as “How is the Lateran Council Canon ‘Veritas Petrae’ better known?” (Answer, of course, “Peter Verity”. The finale was a version of the Twelve Days of Christmas with the chorus “The first day at the Beda, the Rector said to me...work in the re-fec-try”). The Common Room roof was raised.

January

The House reassembled in a mild Roman winter in time to celebrate together the Epiphany and enjoy a festive meal. The week of prayer for Christian Unity was marked by a service in chapel at which the preacher was the Rev. Kenneth Howcroft, Pastor to the community at Ponte Sant’ Angelo in Rome and Methodist Representative to the Holy See. He is also President of the Methodist 2014 Conference. Formerly responsible for British Methodism’s theological education and ministerial formation, his research interests in New Testament studies guaranteed a sermon of considerable erudition, deftly communicated. The British Ambassador to the Holy See and the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Representative to the Holy See, Archbishop David Moxon attended the service. Members of the College joined the throngs of those who attended Vespers in the Basilica on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, the Holy Father presiding.
February

Examinations loomed large over the beginning of the month. Nevertheless the College threw itself with vigour into the celebration of Chinese new year, with Sr Carmel FMDM sporting particularly fetching oriental garb and the refectory decorated for the occasion. The Philippines gave support to the celebration in the shape of Larry, Beda head of maintenance and *fons et culmen* of goodwill, who oversaw a buffet spread of Chinese favourites – spring rolls, sweet & sour pork, and spare ribs were followed by not very Chinese delicious gateaux.

A procession with candles took place from the Common Room to the Chapel to celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. With all of us praying for illumination, exams began.

The second semester saw the return to the Beda to take up his permanent position on the formation staff, of Fr Kevin Alban, O Carm, lately Bursar General of the Carmelite Order. February also saw surely the highlight of the year, with Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster being created Cardinal by Pope Francis. Students were able to watch the Consistory live on the screens in St Peter’s Square and then join the crowds to be received by His Eminence later. Students, Sisters, Bishops, Knights of St Gregory in uniform, Uncle Tom Cobley and all, and all nations, jostled in the jolly rugby scrum to get through the single security portal which afforded access to the Paul VI Audience Hall where Cardinal Vincent, along with a number of other newly created Cardinals, was receiving guests. Once through security and the Swiss Guard on the gate, we were greeted by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor who had just himself paid his respects to his successor. Once in the Hall, the peculiar serenity and order of the British queue was re-established and old chums encountered. Ambassador, Lord Patten, Mrs Cherie Blair and lowly seminarian joined the reception line and needless to say were received each and all by Cardinal Vincent with his usual grace and good humour, patiently posing for many a photograph.
The following day the new Cardinals celebrated Sunday Mass in St Peter’s with the Holy Father, however a particular treat was in store for the Beda. We were responsible for organising a mass on Monday at St Paul’s Basilica, the new Cardinal presiding and James Michael Cardinal Harvey, Archpriest of St Paul’s among the many concelebrants. The Mass was attended by Cardinal Vincent’s colleagues and friends from Westminster and throughout England and Wales and the College entertained his party at dinner afterwards. In his speech the Cardinal, an old friend of the Rector from their days together at the Venerabile, acknowledged the latter’s prowess on the rugby pitch – proposed of course as Solemn Dogma within the portals of the Beda – but was less approving of the Rector’s performance at the batting crease: “an English gentleman trying to swat flies with a rolled umbrella”. The new Cardinal visited the Common Room after supper and consented to have his photograph taken with the Bar team. The team continues to hope that this betokens some form of nihil obstat.

The second and third years left for Palazzola to study safeguarding issues, returning in somewhat sombre mood having heard of the lessons of the past and the necessarily strict requirements for the future.

**March**

Maria Grazia at lunch on Shrove Tuesday treated us to her remarkable dolci proving again that the way to the heart of most men of a certain age is pudding or cake – and trifle a racing certainty. The staff table was taken by surprise by the sudden appearance of a conga line in elaborate carnival costume, with Madam Bursar leading out the personale. Quickly realising that resistance was futile, the Rector led the staff attachment to the rear of the conga and the motley ensemble made a few laps of the refectory.

At the beginning of Lent Fr Kevin led a period of recollection which amongst other things encouraged us to reflect on how we might see God in others; the deft mediaevalist produced for our consideration the lyrics of Brian Withycombe: “What if God was one of us?/Just a slob like one of us/Just a stranger on the bus/Trying to make his way home”.

Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham, Bishop Michael Campbell of Lancaster and Bishop Terry Draney of Middlesbrough arrived to conduct a visitation. Archbishop Longley presided at a mass to admit the second years to the Ministry of Acolyte and preached about the special dignity of service at the altar of the Lord. During their stay the visitors made themselves available for individual meetings with students.
Fr Samuel Pusateri OSB from St Paul’s led the Lenten service of reconciliation. He also most kindly gave the first years a fascinating guided tour of the Basilica bringing to life with his gentle charm the extraordinary history of the place. It was of course, in the Monastery of St Paul’s that Pope St John XXIII, having presided on the occasion of the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, surprised the Abbot be asking him to summon the cardinals present to attend upon him in the monastery. (It is thought that the Pope, running behind schedule, realised that by the time he would have got back to the Vatican, the secret press embargo on the calling of an Ecumenical Council would have expired.)

There and then he made the announcement. Part of the exhibition in the Basilica has a photograph of the event: amongst the smiling cardinals is one obviously flabbergasted with mouth wide open. Fr Samuel said that he was still discovering remarkable features in the place – only for example noticing comparatively recently that one of the pillars outside was different in one important detail to all the others and is a Constantinian original. The traditional Beda Lenten Oasis festive meal was held and our guests this year were the Irish and Scots Colleges.
We bade farewell to our Orthodox students, Aphrem Dawood of the Assyrian Church of the East, Jogy George of the Greek Orthodox Church and Ali George of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. In writing to thank all members of the College for his time at the Beda, Fr Aphrem asked us to pray for him and all the Christians of Iraq: “In Rome it is easy to take our religious freedom for granted with opportunities for worship at almost every street corner, but unfortunately there are many places in the world where it is hard to practise without persecution”.

April

Cardinal Harvey presided at the St Paul’s Lenten Station Mass. An invitation was extended to everyone attending to breakfast in College afterwards. As usual the kitchen staff and refectarians Geoff McIlroy and Warren Collier pulled out all the stops with the refectory full to capacity. Large North American College students’ eyes lit up at the sight of Maria Grazia’s cakes: a mighty blow to those who had given them up for Lent.

Lenten retreats this year saw the fourth year deacons go to Centro ad Gentes for an Ignatian retreat conducted by Mgr Peter Verity and Fr Nicholas King SJ. The third years had the pre-diaconate silent retreat at Bagnoregio led by Mgr Pat Kilgarriff, sometime Spiritual Director and later Rector of the English College. The second and first years remained in house for their silent retreat which was conducted by the indefatigable Fr Ronnie McAinsh, CSsR from Perth, Scotland, Provincial of the London Province Redemptorists. Fr Ronnie, who has preached the Gospel all over the world has a staggering fund of encounters on which to draw and illustrated his talks with well chosen and often amusing examples. He discussed following the Lord’s call: “doing” and “acting” rather than “talking” and “thinking”. His talks were helped by his gentle Perthshire accent, flowing like the River Tay itself. He told the story of a religious sister who was asked if she would swap rooms for a while with another older member of her community who had broken her hip and couldn’t cope with the stairs. The sister announced that she was “going into discernment” on the request. Fr Ronnie twinkled “nae mind your discernment woman, get away up those stairs!” Also a psychotherapist, Fr Ronnie had some very interesting things to share in the areas of sexuality, personal growth and self-image. He made himself available for individual sessions with each student for the sacrament of reconciliation, spiritual direction or as he put it, just a chat.
The Wednesday of Holy Week saw the Seven Churches Walk. This tradition was established by St Philip Neri in the 16th Century, who would lead Oratorians and their followers on the walk with picnic, songs and litanies, pausing to pray and catechise in the churches. Our no less joyful band of 13 walked to Santa Maria Maggiore, San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, San Giovanni in Laterano, San Sebastiano fuori le Mura, St Paul’s and St Peter’s. The length of the walk is 22.5 km and Sr Felicity Scanlon FMDM inspired the team, completing the walk as if it were her customary stroll around the Beda orchard.

Many worked hard in preparation for the Easter triduum, particularly those involved in music and planning for the liturgies, including the printing team whose members and volunteer helpers formatted, printed, photocopied and stapled the words and music. In his homily on Good Friday the Rector suggested that it was appropriate to give each stage of the Triduum its proper place – not to see the whole as it were through the prism of Easter Sunday – this was the time deeply to engage in the fact of the Lord’s physical anguish in his passion and death on the Cross. The Vigil liturgy outside did not have to contend with the threatened rain but with strong gusts of wind which repeatedly blew out the paschal candle.

Once inside and uplifted by Ralph Candy's singing of the *Exultet*, our candle problems continued; although the Paschal candle, now out of the wind, was flickering away cheerfully, one of the large altar candles simply refused to burn at the appropriate time and despite several attempts remained in its sulk for the whole mass. “People make plans and God laughs”.

The canonisations of Popes John XXIII and John Paul II by Pope Francis, with Pope Emeritus Benedict in attendance, or as the news headline had it “Two Popes make two Popes Saints” was an extraordinary event with an estimated one million people in Rome for the occasion – some queuing for 12 hours before the police allowed entrance to St Peter’s piazza at 5.30am. The streets around the piazza and the piazza itself were awash once again with Polish flags. The Holy Father in his homily praised the saints as men of courage and mercy, who responded to the challenges of their time by modernising the Catholic Church in fidelity to its ancient traditions. Both, the Pope said “were not afraid to look upon the wounds of Jesus, to touch his torn hands and his pierced side. They were not ashamed of the flesh of Christ, they were not scandalized by him, by his cross; they did not despise the

![Mgr Strange lights the Paschal candle](image-url)
flesh of their brother because they saw Jesus in every person who suffers and struggles. These were two men of courage, filled with the parrhesia of the Holy Spirit, and they bore witness before the Church and the world to God’s goodness and mercy.”

The College welcomed 29 Bishops of Southern Africa (South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland), on their Ad Limina visit to Rome, to a festive meal after their mass at St Paul’s.

Representing an extraordinary variety of dioceses, it was fascinating for those students who did not know the region to hear of their successes and in some cases most severe challenges. A number of students attended a mass for the party later in the week in Santa Maria Maggiore and the chapel where hangs the ancient icon of Our Lady entitled Salus Populi Romani – the health, or well-being of the Roman people – rang with joyful African hymn and drum.

May

A very happy occasion at the beginning of the month was the marriage in College of Sr Carmel Spratt FMDM to Patrick Toohey in the third year. There have been a number of happy unions between the convent and the College over the years and some of the sisters have been married several times. This was of course marriage rite practice. The reception was a low key affair at the ice-cream parlour near the metro station where the happy couple were joined by a small group of well-wishers.

On the Monday after Vocations Sunday Pope Francis summoned to the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican the several thousand seminarians studying at Rome’s pontifical colleges and residences. Whilst we awaited the Holy Father there was prayer and music – the latter a sort of seminarian X Factor (groups) as choirs from different colleges entertained their expectant brethren. There was a creditable rendition of William Byrd’s Haec Dies by the English College schola but the massed ranks of the North American College’s unusual, somewhat dark harmonies combined with impeccable diction looked for a while certain to get the vote. Then entered the Pontifical Urbaniana group singing an upbeat hymn in Zulu to the accompaniment of drums. As the crowd expressed its acclaim they pressed on to a finale which added just enough choreography to the music to remain dignified yet exuberant. From then on it was a one horse race.

The Holy Father began by saying that he was very close in prayer to the 146 seminarians present from the countries of the Middle East and to those from Ukraine. He then asked for questions from seminarians, which he had seen, but said that there was no
problem if the questions were changed or more spontaneous. In his responses the Pope stressed the importance of integrated formation and the danger of academism – the students’ goal was to return to their dioceses as graduate presbyters: there was a danger of seminarians returning to their bishops not as Fathers but as Doctors. The Pope drew laughter when he noted that community life at seminary might for some be perhaps more like Purgatory than Paradise. “Never, never” he said “speak ill of others.” If you have something to say about someone, say it to his face. The Pope gave the example of a recently ordained priest who was his secretary when he was first appointed bishop in Buenos Aires and who when asked spoke candidly about mistakes Francis had made. The Pope said he thought “I will never remove him from the post of secretary: he is a real brother”, unlike those “who tell you lovely things to your face and then not so lovely behind you.” “Gossip” he noted “is the plague of the community.” He said he himself as a student of philosophy mentioned a problem he was having with another student to his spiritual father. Having laid out his anger, the young Francis was asked only one question: “Tell me, have you prayed for him?” Francis replied “No.” His spiritual father remained silent adding only, “We have finished.”

The Pope encouraged students, whilst being serious in their studies, to embrace the novelty that Rome affords, to experience its universality, to engage in dialogue with people from different countries and cultures.

The Pope said that vigilance as a Christian attitude – vigilance over one’s self was crucial: “What’s happening in my heart? Because where my heart is, there is my treasure.” The first advice, when the heart is in turmoil is the counsel of the Russian Fathers: go under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God. “It is in difficult moments when a child always goes to its mother. And we are children in the spiritual life. Never forget this!” Speaking of the tabernacle he added: “Never, never –and this is vigilance! – never end the day without going there for a while,
in front of the Lord, to look and ask “What happened in my heart?”"

When asked a question about leadership the Pope was plain speaking. There was only one form of leadership: service. “If you have many qualities – to communicate etc. – but you are not a servant, your leadership will fail.” Money, vanity and pride, he said are the three steps that lead you to all the sins. The Pope spoke of his own striving to keep time for prayer. In the morning he said he tries to pray the praises and lectio divina. He first reads the “coded” messages and then prays. After mass he works, depending on what is required each day. Lunch at noon followed by a bit of a siesta. Vespers at three followed by the Office. Then afternoon work, adoration, the rosary and dinner. The Pope said that he tries to keep to the plan. “This is the ideal, but I don’t always do it, because I am also a sinner and I’m not always that ordered.”

The Pope said the New Evangelisation involves going forth and becoming close to all the people, a closeness both physical and a closeness of love. The problem of boring homilies he said is that there is no closeness. “If during the homily you speak, let’s say, for 20-25 or 30-40 minutes – they aren’t fantasies, this happens – and you speak of abstract things, of truths of the faith, you are doing a school! It’s something different. You aren’t close to the people.” He said that after eight minutes the listeners’ attention wanders. He recommended two books from his own time both entitled *The Theology of the Homily*. The first he described as “a jewel” by Hugo Rahner (“Not Karl but Hugo. One can read Hugo easily; Karl is difficult to read”). The second by Fr Domenico Grasso.

The Holy Father said that priestly friendship is a treasure “one of the most beautiful joys of the priestly life.” Before leading us in the *Regina Caeli* the Pope’s closing words were: “I wish that you be friends with those that the Lord puts before you for friendship. I wish you this in life. Priestly friendship is a force of perseverance, of apostolic joy, of courage and also a sense of humour. It’s beautiful, most beautiful! This is what I think.”

There was a happy coincidence of timing in that the first years received the Ministry of Lector with a good number of the Beda Association in College for their AGM and consequently able to concelebrate at the mass and enjoy the festive meal afterwards. In his (eight minute!) homily, the Rector stressed that it was no accident that lector was the first formal step towards ordination as the priest’s call is above all to proclaim the Word of God. Nine men received the Ministry and were given a copy of Fr Nicholas King SJ’s translation of the New Testament to mark the occasion.

The celebrations after the mass gave a wonderful opportunity for the Beda Association priests to share their own experiences of College and subsequent ministry with current students.
With our day off the following day some of the sharing went on for quite a while but the Beda Association appeared the next morning fresh as daisies, full of plans for the day.

We did not let looming exams spoil our enjoyment of St Bede’s feast day. George Cardinal Pell, Prefect of the new Vatican Secretariat for the Economy, presided at Mass. The other Cardinal present (technically) was the Prince and Grand Master of the Order of Malta, Fra’ Matthew Festing (on whom the Church confers the rank of Cardinal). Before his election in 2008, Fra’ Matthew was Grand Prior of England and led missions of humanitarian aid to Kosovo, Serbia and Croatia.

In a moving ceremony, presided over by Fr John Breen, the eleven candidates shortly to be ordained as deacons, made a profession of faith, standing in line and facing the altar. Each candidate proceeded to the altar to sign the profession.

Exams imminent and lectures over, the house fell into an eerie silence as students carefully reviewed all the notes on all the books they had read from the various subject reading lists (shurely shome mishtake – Ed).

**June**

Sr Mary Ann Clarahan, whose musical gifts are often apparent showed another string to her bow with a simple yet very effective arrangement of small flickering candles arranged on the sanctuary and on the rear wall of the chapel for our celebration of Pentecost. The Rector’s *gita* to Sperlonga, a lovely beach town half way between Rome and Naples, provided relief from the arrival, albeit later than most years, of very hot weather in Rome. The formation staff led the way into the sea with the Rector at one point seen wading about like Canute and Fr John (“Hasselhoff”) Breen looking entirely at home. The elegant Madam Bursar brought a distinct feel of San Remo to the proceedings. Lunch was taken al fresco by the sea.

120 guests of all ages attended the student barbeque. The sudden arrival of rain on the day meant that all the tables and chairs (gleaming after Ron Seery’s ministrations) had to be moved under cover at the last minute. (Our new head of hospitality, Jonathan Rose, made the difficult and as it transpired the correct call as the rain persisted on and off for most of the evening). Both the outgoing Student Dean (David Casey) and his successor John Bagnall led by example. All guests dressed informally for the occasion. One student having had a few words with a friendly looking older man whom he assumed was a friend (indeed possibly the father) of one of the formation staff, found out the next day that he’d been chatting to Bernard Cardinal Law. With plenty to amuse the children in the garden (including the Beda rabbits) the evening was a very happy family occasion.
The new deacons with Cardinal Harvey and other clergy after the diaconate ordinations at Basilica di San Paolo

The year finished with the ordinations to the diaconate of the third year men in St Paul’s by Cardinal Harvey, with Cardinal Pell concelebrating. The College welcomed the family and friends of the men to a celebration in the garden of the College afterwards.

So concluded the year. Students departed to the four corners of the earth for the summer. Wherever they go, they know that two things will crop up in conversation. First, they will be told: “The word on the grapevine is that Rod Strange is leaving the Beda” – this comes around each year as sure as an income tax return – and then they will be asked whether the Rector has done any tap dancing during the year. We will deal with only the second question. Seminary is not always a bed of roses and a matter of deep regret to all is the absence all year of any tap display from the Rector. True, the economy of movement on the sanctuary is obvious, with a frequent ball change step and the sense of a soft shoe shuffle just dying to get out. In this he is kept up to the mark by Sr Patricia, whose ballet training guarantees graceful movement at all times around the House. We continue to hope that we may be rewarded with some form of display next academic year.
The New Men

Patrick Owusu Aboagye

I was born in 1985 in a town called Nsuta-Kyebi near Mampong, in Ashanti Region, Ghana. Both of my parents are from Ashanti Kingdom. My mother is a Catholic but my father is a pastor of the church of Brotherhood in Mampong. I have four sisters, three of whom are Catholics and one Methodist. I am the only son of my mother and also the last. I had my basic education with my parents and later moved to Kumasi, the regional capital where I continued my education.

My initial interest in the Catholic priesthood was aroused by Rev. Savino, an Italian parish priest of Mampong St Paul’s Catholic Church. I met this priest when I was about fourteen years old. He talked to me about the life of a Catholic priest and thereupon I developed an interest in the priesthood. I carried this interest with me to the day I was baptized at the age of eighteen years.

After baptism, I joined the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group and have attended a series of seminars and leadership courses leading to my appointment as a coordinator for the Charismatic Youth Group in Konongo-Mampong Diocese. I have also served as an executive member of St Peter’s Parish at Atimatim as secretary for six years and fully participated in all the church activities. Throughout my prayer life at the Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group, I prayed fervently to the Holy Spirit to nurture the seed planted by Rev. Savino and to help it to grow to become a mighty tree.

Later, I became a member of the Kumasi Provincial coordinating team member of the Charismatic Renewal youth. I am also a member of the deliverance team of Renewal in my diocese. Meanwhile the seed planted by Rev. Savino had sprouted and was growing and in 2008, I applied to enter the St Joseph Minor Seminary at Mampong. I was however rejected because at that time I did not have a secondary education.

The desire to enter the seminary was so strong that I applied again to the same Minor Seminary during 2009/2010 academic year. I was again refused admission for the same reason. I continued my deliverance work in the charismatic renewal group and in 2003, I entered the Kumasi Technical Institute and studied Industrial Mechanics. In 2007, I gained admission to the Kumasi Polytechnic, a tertiary institution and graduated with Mechanical Engineering Part I, II and III certificates in 2012. After that, I taught in a Presbyterian Junior School for a year.

At the beginning of the year 2013, I discussed my interest in the priesthood with my new parish priest (Rev. Leonard Antwi) who completed his training at the Beda College
in 1993 and he contacted the Bishop on the issue. The Bishop advised me to apply to the Beda College in Rome through him and here I am today with great men of God. “If the Lord is pleased with us, He will take us there and give us rich and fertile land as promised by Him” (Numbers 14:8). Thanks be to the Holy Trinity, Amen!

Shaun Addinall

Attending a Holy Cross convent school in my primary school years, provided me with a good introduction to learning the Catholic way of life by regular prayer and mass attendance. The sisters were wonderful teachers. While still in the convent school, my father, being in the Air Force, was transferred to the north of the country, to a predominantly Afrikaans town in the then Transvaal province, called Potchefstroom, where I did the majority of my schooling. The idea of possibly wanting to become a priest popped its head up when I was nearing the end of my high school. However, at the same time, I had also started playing and doing well at bowls and my father had been transferred back to Cape Town. There was just too much going on for me to give this proper thought.

After high school, I was conscripted to do two years of national service in the South African Medical Services. Towards the end of my national service, during the latter part of 1989, I applied for a position at Old Mutual and ended up working sixteen years for them, in the Financial Asset Management division. During my time at Old Mutual, I was fortunate enough to be given a bursary to study Business Administration and Industrial Psychology. I also worked for J.P. Morgan as a Training and Development manager and enjoyed the international travel that was part of the job. But I was still searching as to what God wanted me to do. There was still a sense of uneasiness in my life.

In 1996, I received my South African colours for bowls and represented South Africa at various international championships and tournaments until 2010, where I was blessed and fortunate to have won a gold medal for South Africa at the Commonwealth Games, held in Delhi, India.

Having ticked that goal off, I did some more introspection as to “where to now?” Although I enjoyed many parts of the corporate life, it just never seemed totally right for me. I always believed I was called to do something else, something more.

During this time, I found myself getting more and more involved in all aspects in the life of the parish. I was part of many of the ministries, groups and associations in the parish and also served a three-year period as Parish Pastoral Chairperson.

In 2011, I participated in the Archdiocesan discernment programme, which also incorporated spending 40 hours of community service in St Joseph’s Home for sick and disabled children in Cape Town. What a humbling experience that proved to be!
I was accepted to enter the national orientation seminary in February 2012 in Cape Town. It provided a good basis for further formation. Although painfully challenging at times, the seminary was important for me in discovering more about myself, about the Church and about my relationship with God. It also allowed me to experience different cultures and, thereby, to enjoy the vitality of the Church in South Africa. My formators proved to be great people of faith, understanding and wisdom.

In January 2013, I was assigned to do my six-months pastoral assignment in the remote town of Atlantis on the West Coast of Cape Town, approximately 50km out of the city. It was an excellent learning opportunity for which I was extremely grateful. I arrived at the Beda College in Rome towards the end of September 2013.

Michael Barrett

I was born in London into a Catholic family whose roots were very firmly based on the west coast of Ireland in Mayo. I spent my formative years in north London and was educated in a Dominican run primary and secondary school. Following this I embarked on a primary school teaching career lasting 37 years after training at St Mary’s College of Education, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham.

It was while I was teaching in London that I met my wife Jacqueline, also a primary school teacher, and we were married at St. Anne’s Catholic Church, Ormskirk, Lancashire in 1980. Our children, Angela and Christina, became the centre of our lives along with very busy teaching careers. We moved to Lancashire and the Liverpool Diocese in 1986. Tragically Jacqueline died after a very short illness in 2005. It is at a time like this that one draws upon one’s faith, family and friends. As a close family we continue to support each other to gain strength and confidence.

“Never underestimate the work you do.” These were the quietly spoken words of Cardinal George Basil Hume to a very young but enthusiastic head teacher on the 25th anniversary of the opening of the school. That small sentence sustained me over 23 years through the joys and challenges of working as a head teacher in a Catholic primary school in the Benedictine parish of St Mary’s, Leyland.

Following retirement and having worked alongside the monks and priests in Leyland as well as my own parish priest at Our Lady Help of Christians, Tarleton, I came to feel that I had a call to priesthood. Being involved in primary education, working alongside families as well as other professionals I felt that God was calling me to a new vocation. After discussions with those close to me and the diocese a decision was made that the most appropriate place to continue my discernment was the Beda in Rome.

I hope that in some small way I can continue to pass on our faith that has enriched me over so many years.
My full name is Hector Enrique Fernandez, but I go by “Rick”. My parents were originally from Santander in Spain, but my family relocated when I was four to Los Angeles, CA, USA.

I started my secondary education with the Salesians of St John Bosco and their educational system impressed in me the spirit of St Francis De Sales, to be of service to the less fortunate, with the Salesian approach of love expressed in kindness. During those school years, extra-curricular activities led me to a vocational path that influenced me to decide on becoming a religious missionary with the Salesians in Central America. I was then sponsored by a community from Costa Rica.

I chose the Central American missions after being inspired by Archbishop Oscar Romero’s life, from a film, that moved me deeply when I saw real spiritual and physical suffering of the people in El Salvador, and the need for pastoral support. It was then that I felt a calling to do something about it, to somehow help alleviate their suffering. In Central America I finished a one-year pre-noviciate and a one-year noviciate, then took three years of temporary religious vows and finished university studies.

During the years of vocational and religious studies, I was blessed with a university education, and completed a BA in Philosophy, a BA in Pedagogy and an MA in Salesian Pastoral Theology, at an institution affiliated to the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome.

Towards the end of my three-year temporary vows, when it was time to decide whether to commit further to the Salesian Congregation or not, it became clear to me that religious life was not my calling in life. With great sadness but a clear conscience and the aid of my superiors, after deep discernment, I left the religious missions, choosing a new life path by becoming a teacher. Back in California, I started my new ministry as teacher, chaplain, retreat leader, music minister etc., for different Catholic schools and colleges in the Los Angeles area. This work lasted approximately eleven years.

But five years ago, because of some sudden changes in my family circumstances and personal life, such as the sudden death of my mother, followed a week later by the near drowning of my eleven-year old nephew that left him in a vegetative state, and the beginning of the economic recession in the USA that affected my job for the upcoming school year, after deep reflection on my motivations, with the aid of my spiritual director, I decided to make a bold change of life direction and moved to England, for a fresh adventure, a new life full of possibilities for travelling, learning and experiencing European culture and history.

So then I lived in London, working as a secondary and college teacher, as my university degrees were compatible with UK government regulations by European affiliation with the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome, granting me QTS status. In 2010 I started working at All Saints Catholic College in Dagenham, then at Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School.
becoming involved again in different Catholic ministries, so that I rediscovered a deeper calling to prayer and service, and the need to once again become fully committed to the service, education, ministry and pastoral care of others within the Catholic Church.

Although my vocational path started during my youth and after years being silenced by worldly distractions, it has resurfaced stronger than before, and has led me to seek the guidance and care of the Brentwood diocese, finally receiving acceptance to the Beda College for holy orders.

**Edward Gibney**

I was born in the small town of Canora, Saskatchewan, living there until I was sixteen years of age. My father’s family (Gibney and Healy) are of Irish ancestry and they have lived in Canada and the United States for many generations. My mother’s family (Duncan and Browell) are of Scottish and Welsh roots, and they came to Canada from Falkirk and Newcastle respectively in the early 20th century. My mother is a convert from the Anglican faith.

After finishing my high school education in the City of Saskatoon I worked for a family business for four years, creating cemetery memorials, before entering the University of Saskatchewan with the aim of being a sculptor. It was at this time, some 30 years ago, that my uncle, Fr Charles Gibney, first suggested discernment saying, “It is about time that someone in this family showed some aesthetic talent, but keep in mind that you are still single and you could still be called to the seminary.” I thought I had completed my university education with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1989.

I have spent almost 30 years as a professional artist (professional in name, not in finances). My father once told one of my brothers how proud he was of me for going to work every day knowing that I was probably not going to make any money from it. He taught me the importance of things other than money and stature. It has been through my sculpture that my eyes have been opened to the little moments when God has been active in my life, particularly in the moments of inspiration and guidance.

For the past fifteen years I have been very active on the Provincial Board of a Catholic, family, fraternal organization called the Knights of Columbus. From 2010-2012, I was the Head of the Knights in Saskatchewan, making speeches and writing articles which I hoped would inspire the local Councils of Knights to continue their good works. Little did I know that these articles were being sent to the Hierarchy of the Province as well and in 2011 my Bishop came to me and suggested that, knowing I had another year leading the Knights, I should consider discernment to the seminary when I was done. A year later he asked me again and this brings me to the Beda.
Brillis Mathew

I come from a small village called Kainakary in the beautiful district of Alleppey in South India. My grandfather was a deeply spiritual man. I feel his love for personal prayer and the Eucharist was passed on to me at a very early age. When I was fourteen, I felt that the Lord was calling me to be a priest.

Unfortunately, during the next few years, I lost my faith. At the age of eighteen, God gave me a great conversion whilst praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Soon after this, I met Br O. J. Victor, who led an intense apostolic life in leading many people back to the Sacraments with a particular charism of quoting the Scriptures. Through him I was led to a strong and living faith and love for Sacred Scripture.

I left my family-run contracting business at the age of 21 to devote my life completely to the Lord. With a few friends, I moved to Dubai where we started to form ourselves as the Community of Grace, a Public Association of the Vicariate of Southern Arabia with a mission to preach the Word and lead people to the Sacraments. I could see God was starting to use me and I travelled to many different places to share my experiences with people from all walks of life.

In 2013, however, I felt again a special call from the Lord to the priesthood and this brought me to the Beda. A special gift from Jesus that has sustained me till the present moment is the presence of the Blessed Mother in my life and I attribute all the graces in my life to her maternal intercession.

Br Petrus-Lucas

I, Br Petrus-Lucas was given with the name Bruce Edward Packel at birth. I was born in Milwaukee Wisconsin in the United States. Within that first year my family was forced to move to the west coast due to my poor health (which was affected by the severe cold weather there).

We moved to Anaheim California which was where the very first Disneyland had begun. We attended the Lutheran Church, and it was there I was baptised. The street on which we grew up was a small rather intimate cul-de-sac of nine family homes. It was to be a cluster of neighbours who would remain friends for life. Through the influence of one of those friends, Deborah (Debi) Lewis, I became acquainted with and then a part of the Jesus movement, and later became involved in the Catholic Church.

In high school, we attended weekly Catholic catechism classes in the home of one of the parishioners of St Boniface Catholic Church in Anaheim. The classes were taught by a woman by the name of Dorothy Clay, the wife of Andrew Clay, who was a school principal,
as my father was. The couple had four young children. Their home became the second
home for a rather large number of youth who were obliged to attend catechism classes for
St Boniface parish. This family gave us a sense of welcome in their home. Dorothy in
particular had an open heart and ear for each of us kids. Eventually Dorothy and members
of our “catechism class” began attending daily holy mass 6:30 each morning before going
to school. Since I was the one with the “car” I was the group’s official chauffer in my old 56
Chevy, which we would pack with kids each morning.

Eventually, I converted to Roman Catholic and later was officially confirmed in the
Catholic faith. After graduation from High School, I attended Fullerton College in
California. I took classes in many different subjects as I had no idea what I was to do with
my life. Fortunately, through a priest friend, Michael Manning SVD, who was involved in
our youth group, I discovered a call to the priestly vocation. I joined the Divine Word
Seminary and attained a degree in Philosophy and a minor in Theology. The three years
spent in the seminary provided the solid Catholic foundation that I so needed.

It was during the final year, while in our school library, my best friend, Marty
Buckley, handed me a tiny book titled *A Gift of Love* which was a collection of Mother
Teresa’s thoughts. The words of this “dead saint”, as I thought she was, set my soul on fire.
I kept that little book in my back pocket for many a day and reflected upon her words daily.
I sensed that somewhere “in” God’s infinite compassion and mercy, was my call. Upon
finishing my Philosophy degree I did join the Missionaries of Charity. After the initial years
of formation, I was made superior of a community in the poorest part of Los Angeles and
also given charge of caring and educating homeless youth who had immigrated from South
and Central America. Most of these youth had fled critical situations from their homelands.

Over the years I entered into formation work with the brothers and eventually became
the Provincial. After some years a very big hurdle came. In my mid-forties, I had what I
believe to have been an earth shaking midlife crisis. I sensed that I could not separate myself
from the “positions” that I had acquired over the years and ended up feeling the need to
take time out from the context of religious life. The following years I worked as a social
worker, finished my degree in Psychology, but once again a profound longing for a more
intense inner life overwhelmed me.

In 2008 I joined the Contemplative branch of the Missionaries of Charity (whereas
previously I had been with the active branch). During the following years, as the “inner
life” did deepen, I again awoke to the summons to the priesthood. I believe it is God’s
gracious providence that has brought me to the doors of the Beda Seminary.
**David Savoury**

I was brought up as a Roman Catholic and educated by the de la Salle Brothers. As a teenager I felt sure that I had a vocation to be a teacher and so joined the order as a novice. By the time I had finished reading for my degree at Oxford, I felt certain that I was not called to be a de la Salle Brother (though I certainly loved the Brothers, who taught me so much that remains with me today) but was still attracted by teaching. Most of my career was spent as a Specialist Teacher for the Deaf.

My twenty-three years working with profoundly-deaf children at the Mary Hare School for the Deaf were a great blessing. For me, thorough immersion in the work of the school (which eventually involved joining the Board of Governors and training Teachers for The Deaf with Oxford Brookes) provided me with a happy and satisfying life. It was not just a professional engagement for me but, as for so many others at the school, a way of life. The idea of becoming a priest would often visit my thoughts, but I would set it aside, reflecting that teaching was a valid vocation and one in which I had proved useful.

In 2010 a hereditary neuropathy struck and by April 2011 I was officially retired. I had the shock of my life. The world to which I had belonged for nearly a quarter of a century was no longer mine. So, I moved to North Dorset and settled down to read. It seems the Lord was waiting for me in the person of my parish priest, who came to visit me one afternoon, when he asked the question, “Why aren’t you a priest?” He himself had studied at the Beda, after the death of his wife, and so could reassure me that being already middle-aged did not mean there was no hope of my becoming a priest. I am glad to have come to the Beda and look forward to the rest of my studies.

**Br Andrew Senay, OSB**

I was born in 1960 in St Louis Missouri, USA and consider it home. My father is a retired professor of Physiology and my late mother was a surgical nurse. I have five older brothers and a younger sister. In 1970 due to my father’s scientific research we lived for a year in South Africa. A remarkable experience in which the greatest trauma I suffered other than the school system was that South Africa did not have TV at the time.

Life went on and I graduated from college. In 1986-1987 I spent a year teaching in China. Upon my return life went on as I went to work, mowed the grass on Saturdays and shoveled snow off the walkways. God played a part in my life and that part kept getting larger and larger to the point where I had to do something about the relationship. You know, like when you fall in love with someone. Vocation? Something I now recognize I ignored over the years with the usual litany of excuses.
So there I was at 45 with a vocation on my hands. An old and much valued friend of mine who had a personal connection with St Louis Abbey suggested I try my vocation there as he thought I would make a “great monk.” I don’t know about this “great monk” business but I find this way of living my vocation to God keeps my soul at rest in Christ just as my friend lives out his vocation by being married and having thirteen kids.

Wilhad Shayo

My name is Wilhad Casmir Shayo. I was born on 6th August 1980. I am the first born in a family of seven (four brothers and three sisters). I come from the Sacred Heart parish-Uru in the Catholic diocese of Moshi-Kilimanjaro Tanzania. I was baptized in September 1980 and given the names Wilhad Bahati. I received first communion in 1991 and confirmation in 1993 in the same parish.

I completed my primary education in 1995 and joined secondary school in 1996 for form one to four, then form five to six from 2000 to 2002. Coming from a Catholic family I had a great foundation in prayer life which was as a result of my parents and grandparents. I joined the Institute of Charity (Rosminians) on 15 September 2003 for Postulancy (one year) and then Noviate from 5 August 2004 to 17 May 2006 when I professed my first vows.

On 30 September 2006 I was sent to Ngong International House of Formation in Nairobi, Kenya for further studies. I joined the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in 2007-2010 where I pursued a Bachelor of Education (Science) specializing in Physics and Chemistry, after which I joined Tangaza College in August 2010 to May 2011 pursuing a Certificate in Youth Ministry.

On 25 May 2011, I was sent to Rosmini High School in Tanga-Tanzania to teach and to be responsible for school administration as a Second Master for two years. I had time to come to Rome from June-September 2012 to prepare for my final vows. This was marked by a wonderful and the most remarkable event in my life on 12 January 2013 when with undivided heart I decided to bind myself totally to the Lord through profession of final vows. I was sent to Rome to pursue priestly studies on 10 September 2013 at the Beda.

My hobbies include playing and watching football, volleyball, singing, travelling, watching movies, listening to music and making friends.
John Warnaby

Born in Birmingham UK of a Co. Cork mother and Yorkshire father, I have three younger sisters. After school in Birmingham (St Teresa’s, Handsworth Wood, and St Philip’s, Edgbaston), I read Theology at Oriel College Oxford.

At College, I decided to become an actor. Needing to earn a living/pay off my student overdraft I did some painting and decorating, taught English to foreign students and enjoyed some freelance human development type work with young people with the Industrial Society (now the Work Foundation). As well as acting and singing as much as possible, I took what was intended to be a temporary job with the regulatory arm of Lloyds of London (the insurance market) as well as joining the army reserves and doing a bit of jumping out of airplanes.

Lloyds asked me to open an office in the USA to work with its investors and for a couple of years I was based in Atlanta, Georgia. Returning to London in order to concentrate on my acting career, my supportive employers allowed me to continue to work for them on a part-time, consultancy basis. I got my Equity card through a West End production of a Tom Stoppard play and went on to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre and various other companies as well as extensive film and television engagements.

As I got older, my faith, always an important part of my life, started to become the most important part. I had thought about priesthood all my life at various times and had come to the conclusion that I had “missed the boat.” However, conversations with close friends who were priests (including a couple of ex-Beda men) encouraged me to reflect, pray and hope to be called.

And here I jolly well am, by the grace of God: from time to time looking over the Beda garden thinking it might all be some sort of dream. Please keep us in your prayers.
## Ordinations 2014

### Priesthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shaun Richards</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>25 January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Daly</td>
<td>Brentwood</td>
<td>28 June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Mizzi</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>1 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Evans</td>
<td>Menevia</td>
<td>5 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Wheaton</td>
<td>Hexham &amp; Newcastle</td>
<td>5 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ralph Candy</td>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>7 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Hyland</td>
<td>Kildare &amp; Leighlin</td>
<td>13 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernard Larkin</td>
<td>Ferns</td>
<td>13 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laurence Gambella</td>
<td>Salford</td>
<td>18 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Casey</td>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>19 July</td>
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### Diaconate

On 18 June 2014 Cardinal James Harvey, Archpriest of San Paolo fuori Le Mura, ordained the following Beda students to the diaconate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Bagnell</td>
<td>Hexham &amp; Newcastle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lambert Bakourebe</td>
<td>Tamale</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Burke</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
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<td>Paul Gillham</td>
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<td>Nathan McKay</td>
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<td>Oliver Tham</td>
<td>OFM, Singapore</td>
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<td>Patrick Toohey</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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</table>
Cardinal Harvey prays before the altar at the prostration.

The candidates prostrate themselves.
Friends, family and clergy assist with the vesting of the newly ordained deacons.

Cardinal Harvey with newly ordained deacons Lambert Bakourebe and John Bagnall.
### The Beda Association

**President**
Mgr Roderick Strange  
Pontificio Collegio Beda  
Viale di San Paolo 18  
00146 Roma  
Italy

**Hon. Secretary**
Rev. Michael McLaughlin  
Carmel House  
7 Wesley Place  
Silsden  
West Yorkshire BD20 0PH  
email: MIKEML2K@YAHOO.COM

**Hon. Treasurer**
Rev. Louis Beasley-Suffolk  
St Luke and St Theresa’s Presbytery  
South Street  
Wincanton  
Somerset BA9 9DH

**Members of the Council & Diocesan Representatives**

### Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
To be appointed

### Archdiocese of Birmingham
Rev. John Cross  
St Peter’s Presbytery  
Dormer Place, Leamington Spa  
Warwickshire CV32 5AA

Rev. Gerard Kelly  
St Francis Presbytery  
101 Hunters Road, Handsworth  
Birmingham B19 1EB

Rev. Vincent Royles  
The Presbytery, St Thomas a Becket  
Hall Road, Marchington  
Staffordshire ST14 8LG

### Diocese of Brentwood
To be appointed

### Archdiocese of Cardiff
Rev. William J. Isaac  
St Mary’s Presbytery  
37 Ewenny Road  
Bridgend CF31 3HS

### Diocese of Clifton
Rev. Michael Thomas  
Sacred Heart Presbytery  
8 Townsend Road  
Minehead TA24 5RG

### Diocese of East Anglia
To be appointed

### Diocese of Hallam
To be appointed

### Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle
Mgr Andrew Faley  
St Edward, Coquet Avenue, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear  
NE26 1EE

### Diocese of Lancaster
Rev. Andrew Broster  
Our Lady & St Patrick  
The Priory  
Eaglesfield Street  
Maryport, Cumbria CA15 6EU

### Diocese of Leeds
Rev. Michael McLaughlin  
Carmel House  
7 Wesley Place  
Silsden, West Yorkshire BD20 0PH
Archdiocese of Liverpool
Rev. Andrew Jolly
c/o Centre For Evangelisation
Croxeth Drive
Liverpool L17 1AA

Rev. Ron McGivern
St Patrick’s Presbytery
67 Hardybutts
Wigan WNI 3RZ

Diocese of Menevia
To be appointed

Diocese of Middlesbrough
Rev. Canon Gerard Robinson
St Mary’s Cathedral
Darby Way
Coulby Newham
Middlesbrough TS8 0TW

Diocese of Northampton
To be appointed

Diocese of Nottingham
Rev. John Kyne
St Hugh of Lincoln Presbytery
34 Broadgate
Lincoln LN2 5AQ

Diocese of Plymouth
To be appointed

Diocese of Portsmouth
Rev. David Sillince
St Boniface House
413 Shirley Road
Shirley
Southampton, Hampshire SO15 3JD

Diocese of Shrewsbury
Rev. Robin Sutton
9 Sherborne Road
Wallasey
Wirral, Cheshire CH44 2EY

Rev. David Craig
42 Cromwell Court
Beam Street
Nantwich CW5 5NZ

Archdiocese of Southwark
Rev. Stephen Wymer
St Simon Stock Presbytery
5 Bleakwood Road
Walderslade
Chatham, Kent ME5 0NF

Rev. Philip Seed
Our Lady Star of the Sea Presbytery
23 St Peter’s Road
Broadstairs CT10 2AP

Diocese of Wrexham
To be appointed

Scotland
Rev. Jeremy Milne [Edinburgh]
St Mary’s Cathedral
Cathedral House
61 York Place, Edinburgh EH1 3JD

Rev. Roderick Johnston [Argyle & Isles]
Holy Redeemer Presbytery
71 Kenneth Street
Stornoway HS1 2DS

Australia
Rev. Kevin Kiem
Catholic Presbytery
PO Box 10
Raymond Terrace
New South Wales 2324
Australia
krkiem@yahoo.co.uk
Report

This year our Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday, 14 May at the Pontifical Beda College in Rome. As usual when our meetings are at the College we were welcomed with open arms with the opportunity of meeting up with old friends on the staff at the College (including the personale) and those attending the AGM.

Normally around 25 members join us for the AGM. However, this year the number was well down with only 12 attending. The main reason for the lack of numbers was the lateness of Easter with the associated holidays, meaning that for many it was more difficult to get away again. Some 21 members offered their apologies.

Mgr Strange opened the meeting as always with a prayer and we then remembered those who had died over the last year who had been brought to our attention:

Remembrances

• Rev. Eric Newbound 25 May 2011 - Hallam
• Mgr Gerard Moorcraft 29 May 2011 - Northampton
• Rev. Thomas Quirke 20 July 2013 - Lancaster
• Rev. Patrick Auger 31 October 2013 - Clifton
• Rev. Fred McDonnell 1 November 2013 - Limerick
• Rev. John Redford 6 November 2013 - Southwark
• Mgr Ralph Brown 6 January 2014 - Westminster
• Rev. Patrick Nolan 9 January 2014 - Westminster
• Sr de Luce Cashman, FMDM 7 February 2014
• Canon Michael Howard 14 April 2014 – Plymouth
• Richard Joy 14 April 2014 - Student for Leeds 2007-2010
• Rev. Mark Elvins 1 May 2014 – Arundel & Brighton

Previous Minutes

The minutes of the AGM were accepted and signed by Mgr Strange.

Rector’s Report

The Rector’s statement was given, much of which is covered in his report in this Review.

Financial Report

Last month Rev. Canon John Carlyle offered his resignation as treasurer of the Beda Association, a position which he has held for some 20 years. John has been a zealous guardian of the little monies that the Association has raised over the last 20 years. For this, on your behalf I offer him our thanks. Unfortunately John was not able to attend the AGM this year.
I’m sure that there will be an opportunity for personal thanks to John at a later date. This announcement was published on the 1 May allowing time to consider those who might be elected as his successor. He informs me: “The job is not onerous, by any means, and takes up only about ten or fifteen minutes a month in checking the bank statement.” This is followed up by the producing of a statement of account for the AGM every year. John sent me a copy of the accounts for this year which I presented.

After the presentation of the accounts it was decided that some £1500 should be sent to the College.

Secretary’s Report

I spent a week here at the Beda in October 2013 researching the obituaries of past students through past issues of The Beda Review in order to make the Necrology booklet as accurate as possible. I had hoped to present it here at the AGM. However, my printer decided to leave out four pages in its printing. Hopefully I will present it soon. If you receive notification of the death of any of the Beda priests, I would be obliged for notification.

The resignation of Rev. John Carlyle after 20 years of service given to the Beda Association as treasurer was highlighted. He was assured of our thanks and prayers.

A written invitation will be sent out in May/June to all top year students at the Beda College to join the Beda Association.

Again a request was made for up-to-date membership details from each Diocesan Representative.

At this time we are trying to form a sub-group of the Beda Association in Australia with Fr Kevin Kiem taking the lead in promoting this idea. There are some 20 Beda trained priests in Australia at this time.

A request was made that Mgr Strange pass on our thanks to the students and staff for the generous welcome and hospitality shown to the members during our stay here.

Election of Officers

- President: Mgr Roderick Strange
- Secretary: Rev. Michael McLaughlin
- Treasurer: Rev. Louis Beasley-Suffolk
- Vice-president: Rev. M. Thomas
Venue for the AGM in 2015

Originally we had hoped that we would be able to hold our AGM on the 5-6 May 2015 at the Oblate Retreat and Conference Centre at Wistaston Hall. However, on contacting them it has been discovered that the only possible date is Wednesday 15 April 2015, with the possibility of overnight accommodation being available for anyone who wishes to stay over. Please place this date in your diaries for 2015. Details will be sent out after the New Year.

Any other business

Prayers requested for our sick, retired and housebound members. The Rector requested that we especially remember Sr Assumpta in our prayers.

Later that evening we celebrated nine students being commissioned as Lectors by Mgr Strange during Mass. This was followed by a reception and a sumptuous dinner.
Obituaries

Fr Mark Elvins OFM Cap.

By John Whitehead

I was very saddened, although not surprised, to hear this morning of the death of Fr Mark Elvins, OFM Cap. He has been ill for the last year and more, but, even though one knows that a person’s death is fairly imminent there is always a sense of surprise when one hears the news.

Brought up in Canterbury and Lincoln he studied at St Stephen’s House in Oxford and became an Anglican deacon, only to develop what he described as “Roman fever”; sent by his Bishop on a sabbatical to be talked out of it he read in the works of Newman arguments he found unanswerable and was received on Christmas Eve 1968 into the Catholic Church.

After study at the Beda he was ordained for the diocese of Arundel and Brighton, serving at Arundel itself, including being Chantry Priest to the Duke of Norfolk. He was subsequently at St Mary Magdalene Brighton (Fr Blake’s post about his death can be seen here) where he established the parish’s 365 days a year soup run to the homeless. After being priest at Henfield he entered the Capuchins, being professed in 1999. He served the Order in Preston before returning to Oxford as head of Greyfriars. His Franciscan habit topped by a matching brown beret was a distinctive feature on the Oxford Catholic scene.

I first met him at a Lent Quiet Day he conducted at the Oxford Oratory, and then when he initiated the revival of the Oxford University Heraldry Society. I also got to know him further in the attempt to establish St Bede’s Hall as a successor to Greyfriras Hall - an institution he had sought to maintain against the plans of others - and through the Franciscan Studies Centre’s lectures here in Oxford.

A man of great charm and good humour, erudite and entertaining, someone with whom I occasionally met up and spent an afternoon with in the Oxford pub the Bird and Baby (the Eagle and Child to give it its proper name). It was there that I saw him last, in the summer last year. He was philosophical and calm about his cancer, which at that time was in remission. It was a convivial occasion for what turns out was our farewell.

I said the Rosary for him this afternoon and invite others to pray for the repose of his soul. May he rest in peace.

This obituary first appeared on the blog Once I Was A Clever Boy and is reprinted here by kind permission of the author, John Whitehead, who is a historian working in Oxford.
OBITUARIES


By Mgr Martin Hayes, 15 January 2014

A man who loved people and enjoyed their company, Mgr Ralph Brown put his sharp mind and warm heart at the service of family, friends, colleagues and the Church. He was truly “a son of the Church”. Kind, generous and hospitable, his company was always enjoyable, and his infectious laugh fondly remembered. He embraced life and gave and received much love. His family will remember gatherings at Christmas over the years, when Ralph would bring his roulette wheel and act as banker once lunch was over and a period of rest observed. Winnings were donated at his request to the charity Crisis at Christmas. He is also remembered for his ability to make a good cocktail, favouring margaritas. He was also gifted at photography, capturing people and events then carefully cataloguing pictures in albums, of which there are several. Another interest was history, latterly focused on the Plantagenets, while maintaining an interest in all things military.

The third child of John and Josephine Brown, Ralph was born on 30 June 1931 in Warsenaar in The Netherlands. Schooling took place at St Aidan’s, Grahamstown in South Africa and from 1946-49 at Highgate School. In December 1949 he was called to national service and joined the Middlesex Regiment. In 1950 he was sent to Korea, where he was wounded and hospitalised.

He entered Allen Hall, the seminary of the Diocese of Westminster in Ware, Hertfordshire, in 1953 to study for the priesthood. His gregariousness, good humour and sheer energy became evident. He was ordained to the priesthood on 23 May 1959 in Westminster Cathedral by Cardinal Godfrey. After ordination he was sent to Rome to study for a doctorate in Canon Law. In 1963 he returned to the Diocese to take up his appointment as curate in Bushey. After a relatively short period of pastoral ministry he was to spend the rest of his ministry in administration and teaching, mostly in the Westminster Metropolitan Tribunal where he began a very fruitful partnership with his great friend the late Mgr Edward Dunderdale. From 1964-1971 Mgr Ralph served as Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Officialis of the Diocese of Westminster, then as Officialis 1971-77. On his appointment as Archbishop of Westminster, Basil Hume appointed Mgr Ralph Vicar General. He served in this post until 2001, bringing his intelligence, common sense and knowledge of the Diocese to bear in its inner councils. He continued to serve as Judicial Vicar until his retirement on 30 June 2006.

The 1960s and 70s had seen important developments in the field of matrimonial jurisprudence which opened up the possibility of people in broken or irregular marriages bringing petitions for annulment before diocesan tribunals, thus enabling many to enter into new unions. He found this work, though of its nature legal and exacting, immensely pastoral. He was very much at the cutting edge of these advances and the Westminster Tribunal helped to train canonists from abroad. His book *Marriage Annulments in the Catholic Church* was to be an important reference work for many canonists. He contributed to many learned journals and he served with distinction for two terms as Judicial Vicar of the Tribunal. During this period he gave some time as lecturer in Canon Law at Allen Hall.
He was prominent in the work of the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland which was to play an important role in the revision of the Code of Canon Law when it advised the Bishops’ Conference then considering their responses to the various schemata sent from Rome. He took a major part in the translation into English of the new Code in 1983 and was pivotal in the preparation and publication by the Society of a *Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*. He became Secretary then President of the Society, in which capacity he travelled the world in company with Edward Dunderdale, attending the various canon law society conferences of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, countries where he was an honorary member of their Canon Law Societies. Since 2006 he served as the Judicial Vicar of the Oslo Tribunal. He served as the canonical consultant to the Polish Catholic Mission to England and Wales. For outstanding service Mgr Ralph was awarded the honour of Commander of the Order of Merit of Poland in 2008. Until shortly before his death he was still editing the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland Newsletter.

He was appointed national coordinator for the Papal Visit of Pope John Paul II to our countries in 1982. Mgr Ralph worked with numerous people, mainly volunteers, inspiring them with his energy, enthusiasm and attention to detail. In 1984 Mgr Ralph celebrated the Silver Jubilee of his ordination with four generations of the Brown family, including his mother (then nearly 90), his father (88) and his brother Norman and sister Lydia (now deceased) and their children and grandchildren. His Golden Jubilee was celebrated in 2009.

In the course of all his appointments Mgr Ralph proceeded through the three ranks of Monsignor (Chaplain to His Holiness, Prelate of Honour, then in 1999 Protonotary Apostolic) and he was also honoured with election to the Old Brotherhood of the Secular Clergy in 1987 and went on to become Secretary then President. Other honours and distinctions came his way from international and learned bodies in recognition of his work.

Mgr Ralph was an active member of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, having joined in 1984 and becoming a Commander in 1991. He was also a member of the Friends of the Holy Father. He generously gave of his time to individuals and organisations seeking his advice, and at heart he remained a faithful and devoted priest. He was an indefatigable worker and he did not rest until he had accomplished work in hand. He did not allow problems leading to, and following, major surgery to dampen his spirit, and did not want the spirits of friends affected either. He remained cheerful and busy, especially with work for the Oslo Tribunal. He will be mourned by his many lay and clerical friends, and his focus, energy, enthusiasm and compassion will be missed too.

*With thanks to Mgr Martin Hayes, Vicar General, Diocese of Westminster.*
Fr Patrick Nolan


Last evening, our Archbishop and Cardinal-designate Vincent Nichols, received the mortal remains of Fr Patrick into this church. The symbols of his priestly office, a stole, book of gospels and chalice were placed upon the coffin. Mass was offered for the repose of his soul. This morning we gather again with Bishop John Arnold, together with close family and friends and brother priests to celebrate his Requiem Liturgy. In this liturgy we remember him with love and gratitude, we bid our last farewells and commend him trustingly to Almighty God.

The Liturgy, especially the liturgy of the Mass is a teacher and it is a healer. May I begin my adding my own words of consolation and prayer for Fr Patrick’s family and close friends here today as I draw their attention and ours to its words:

“He has sought to please God, so God has loved him.” “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want...He is true to his name. If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear...You are there with your crook and your staff...You have prepared a banquet for me.” “Yes, it is my Father’s will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.”

How often I wonder would Father Patrick have preached on those texts and others like them? How often would he have reflected on their meaning when his beloved parents went to God, and close friends and parishioners too? May they be for him now and for us what he so frequently prayed for in others, with hope and trust in Christ’s promises for those who are faithful.

I have an image in my mind’s eye of Fr Patrick whom we remember with affection and prayer. It was in 1971 when I first met him. He had just arrived in Rome to commence his studies for the priesthood at the Beda College. He was a comparatively young man, in the prime of his life we might say. He was looking fresh and vigorous, with an easy smile and ready wit, eager to begin the four years of training. He was 42 years of age with happy memories of family and friends, and work experience, oh and horse riding, behind him. The latter was a life-long passion. At the Beda College he joined a house full of interesting men from many different backgrounds and work experience who all had a story to tell of God’s grace. I wonder what it was that first set Fr Patrick thinking of the priesthood when you think that he was by then well established in London, with a home and secure employment. The faith of his family certainly, but also, I suspect, as an interested layman, the experience he had in Catholic Action and seeing a parish close up in organisations such as the Legion of Mary with its often unseen work, as well as youth clubs and a spell doing voluntary work with the Alexian Brothers at Twyford Abbey, whose particular vocation it is to care for the sick.
God’s grace had placed him first of all in the bosom of a loving Irish Catholic family with his parents John and Helen, whose hallmarks were hospitality, kindness and generosity, and his brother Sean and three sisters, Maureen, Eithne and Germaine. As well as being a large family unit, it welcomed many people to its home and table. Sunday lunches sometimes numbered upwards of fifteen people. His father died when Fr Patrick was a youth but Mrs Nolan’s home, or simply “Mrs Nolan’s”, continued to act as a kind of magnet both in Ireland and in London where she eventually came to live with Patrick. Friendships were forged there that lasted a life time. Some are here today; many have gone to God.

Equestrianism can be hard and competitive; it can also be a gentle and indeed a musical activity. Horses were in Patrick’s blood, indeed he rode out on a horse from Knightsbridge Barracks in Hyde Park very frequently. Music was also in Patrick’s veins and he delighted in dressage, Irish dancing and a sing-song round the piano, with him as accompanist. He loved classical music too. This eclectic mix he brought to the community of the Beda College and to the various parishes where he was called to serve after ordination at St Paul’s Outside the Walls in Rome in 1975.

His appointments after ordination were always to the parishes of the diocese. His uncomplicated character, warm personality and charm were employed with great success throughout his 38 years as a priest of the Westminster diocese. Hendon and then South Harrow-with-Northolt were to be his first appointments as assistant priest. He founded clubs for senior citizens and the youth. Camden Town was to be his first appointment as parish priest. This was especially challenging since the parish had previously been administered and recently vacated by a community of missionary priests called the Scheut Fathers, a Belgian Congregation. As a young man Patrick had studied accountancy in London and in this capacity he had been employed both by what we then called the Gas Board, and subsequently by the City of Westminster. With this experience he must have been the only priest of my acquaintance positively to have relished the prospect of completing the annual parish financial return personally, and ahead of time! He would later deploy these skills helping other parish priests as the diocese worked to bring a more professional approach to parish finances and accounting.

It was whilst he was at Camden Town that a heart problem surfaced and it became necessary for him to undergo radical surgery, from which he made a remarkable recovery. He asked Cardinal Hume for another assignment. In 1989 that he was appointed to the Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer and St Thomas More in Chelsea – sometimes and most regretfully referred to as “Chelsea 2”! But never mind! There he spent eight of the happiest years of his priestly life. He resigned the parish after eight years or so suffering from exhaustion, but on his recovery, and to his great surprise he was sent here, to St James’, Spanish Place, a parish quite unlike any other he had previously encountered. He came to love this glorious church, its history, its fine choral tradition and its people. Many happy hours were spent in the company of young people and friends around the very large table in the Rectory dining room. They brought the food; he provided the liquid refreshment. It was a sad moment when the time came for him to leave St James’, when retirement age
came round. Nevertheless he lived nearby for some time and often did supply work here.

Patrick was also a Chaplain of Magistral Grace of the Knights of Malta and he was very proud of this connection. For many years he accompanied the Order’s annual pilgrimage to Lourdes and he delighted in baptising the children of Knights he’d come to know. He was too, a Trustee of the Beda College in Rome and a loyal alumnus.

His later years were dogged by ill health. The heart still had to be watched and he suffered from advancing diabetes and osteoarthritis. This did not keep him from the company of his family and friends both in this country and in Ireland where he was a frequent visitor. The enjoyment of his lot was a feature of his retirement. Another image in my mind’s eye was of seeing him in the Kings Road a few years ago strolling along wearing his hair to the shoulders and cutting something of a Bardic figure! A parishioner seeing him in the porch of the Holy Redeemer church one day exclaimed, “Ah, the Abbé Liszt I presume”! Happy memories and grateful ones. But we must remember that we’re here to pray for his soul and to commend him to Almighty God.

The psalmist in today’s liturgy has given us the image of the Lord as a shepherd. May the Good Shepherd lead Fr Patrick through his valley of darkness and purification into the banquet of life, and into the presence of that God in whose service Fr Patrick so delighted to be.

Canon Michael Brockie is Parish Priest of Our Most Holy Redeemer & St Thomas More, Chelsea.

Sister Mary de Luce Cashman, FMDM
6 May 1931 – 7 February 2014
Mgr Roderick Strange

Sr de Luce died in February in Ballinasloe, where she went when she left the Beda in 2007. She had been guest mistress and a member of our community for twenty years. And the most important statement to make about her immediately is that we loved her. Sr Catherine Purvis used to say, “Everyone remembers de Luce.” And it was true. She welcomed guests and cared for them so attentively. Nothing ever seemed to be too much trouble for her. And they never forgot her.

And the kind of care she took of guests was even more evident in the care she took of students. She had her finger on the pulse of events. There is a regularity to seminary life, but there are all sorts of occasions during the year when the routine shifts slightly, perhaps because of an early mass or a group outing, so in particular the kitchen needs to be warned. In the course of other events, it is so easy for a warning about these altered arrangements to slip the mind. And when I’ve forgotten or mentioned it only at the last minute – and find Gabriella coping wonderfully nonetheless – and apologize to her for not letting her know sooner, we smile and agree that what we really need, as the personale always called her, is “Suor Lucia”.
After a while her health deteriorated, her asthma worsened, but for a significant period of time the Roman climate suited her as well as any other was likely to do. So she stayed on. Sr Catherine would want her not to overdo things, but she found it nearly impossible not to keep up her old ways. This was when, if she was helping in the kitchen, she would say to the domestic staff, “Don’t tell Sr Catherine.” If Catherine found her doing too much, she would try to call her to order. She and Catherine were in fact close friends and de Luce could be funny about Catherine. On one occasion she remarked, “There’s Sr Catherine going into her office with the Kit-Kat, and we won’t even see the silver paper.”

The principal care she took of us was, of course, in prayer. She loved the rosary and would sit outside the refectory under the portico or in the garden, praying quietly and mentioning students by name. She buoyed us up by her prayers and has no doubt continued to do so in more recent years in Ballinasloe, and, we may confidently hope, she is doing so still.

When de Luce was young, she loved the outdoors, walking and cycling, and she was keen on drama and step dancing. She worked as a secretary for seven years before joining the FMDMs in 1956, receiving the name Sr Mary de Luce. After her novitiate, she trained as a psychiatric nurse and worked in Zambia for a while, but then returned first to Bramshott, Surrey, nursing the elderly, before working in Kerry for twelve years with children who have disabilities. Here she became the local Superior so her secretarial skills and her psychiatric training came to be combined. She has been described as “dynamic and active as well as being welcoming and hospitable”. There too everyone loved her. Then from 1980 to 1986 she was part of the Mount Alvernia community in Gibraltar at the Old Person’s Home and after that had a year’s study leave at the Franciscan Centre in Canterbury. And so in 1987 she came to Rome and to the Beda.

She died on 7 February. It was, according to an account sent here, a day like any other. She had her lunch in the refectory, rested in the afternoon, and ate her supper in her room. When she finished, she rang the bell for the tray to be collected and it was. The account continues: “After collecting the other trays, the carer thought she would check on de Luce and much to her surprise she had died sitting in her chair. Just as de Luce would have wanted it – no fuss!”

De Luce loved God and had a great devotion to Our Lady. She loved and was loved by many people. She brought great blessings on the Beda. May she rest in peace.
Beda Review Photographs
2013-2014

At the end of the Seven Churches Walk, the group assembles in front of St Peter’s

Patrick, Shaun and Albert rest a moment on the Seven Churches Walk

A terrapin posing with Oliver Tham
David Dawson, Susan Dawson-Vasquez and Jonathan Rose relax after the Academic Mass

Sr Maura, Fr John and Richard Peel avidly enjoy the launch of The Beda Review

Tish Nicholl and Sr Gertrude enjoy a festive occasion
The Rector speaks to guests and students on St Bede’s Day.

Fourth year students relax and almost look happy to be leaving the college imminently!
Sr Carmel Spratt, Sr Felicity Scanlon and Sr Maura Bermingham (our three FMDM sisters) pray in their newly refurbished chapel.

A group of St Lucia clergy, Beda students and visitors enjoy a trip into town.
Pontifical Beda College Students
2013-2014

First Year
1. Aboagye, Patrick (Konongo-Mampong)
2. Addinall, Shaun (Cape Town)
3. Barrett, Michael (Liverpool)
4. Chow, Alexander (Melbourne)
5. Fernandez, Rick (Brentwood)
6. Gibney, Edward (Saskatoon)
7. MacDonald, Peter (Aberdeen)
8. Mathew, Brillis (Vic. Southern Arabia)
9. Savoury, David (Clifton)
10. Seery, Ron (Westminster)
11. Senay, Andrew (St. Louis Abbey)
12. Warnaby, John (Westminster)

First Year External
1. Packel, Petrus-Lucas (MC)
2. Shayo, Wilhad (IC)

Second Year
1. Brett, Declan (Hallam)
2. Collier, Warren (Meath)
3. Jones, Darren (Leeds)
4. Lappin, Anthony (Edinburgh)
5. McHugh, Paul (Birmingham)
6. McIlroy, Geoffrey (Melbourne)
7. Nwajoko, Humphrey (Nnewi)
8. Peel, Richard (Westminster)
9. Rucci, Mark (Perth)
10. Smith, Albert (Castries)
11. Sticklen, Darien (Melbourne)

Second Year External
1. Agak, Simon (IC)
2. Lobo, Patrick (OSB)
Third Year

1. Bagnall, John (Hexham & NewCastle)
2. Bakourebe, Lambert (Tamale)
3. Burke, David (Westminster)
4. Corry, Tom (Stockholm)
5. Epifano, Cosmas (OSB)
6. McKay, Nathan (Cairns)
7. Montgomery, Tom (Westminster)
8. Murphy, Kevin (Salford)
9. Rose, Jonathan (Nottingham)
10. Schaepman, Herman (’s Hertogenbosch)
11. Stevens, Tom (Sydney)
12. Tham, Oliver (OFM, Singapore)
13. Toohey, Patrick (Perth)

Third Year External

1. Gillham, Paul (IC)

Fourth Year

1. Candy, Ralph (Plymouth)
2. Casey, David (Limerick)
3. Daly, Patrick (Brentwood)
4. Evans, Keith (Menevia)
5. Gambella, Laurence (Salford)
6. Hyland, John (Kildare & Leighlin)
7. Larkin, Barry (Ferns)
8. Mizzi, Paul (Malta)
9. Wheaton, Martin (Hexham & Newcastle)

Fourth Year External

1. Spiteri, Carmelo (OCD - Malta)

Resident Studying out

1. Vimalraj, Chris (Bangalore)

Orthodox

1. Dawood, Aphrem (Assyrian Church of the East)
2. George, Jogy (Greek Orthodox Church)
3. George, Aji (Malankara Orth. Syrian Church)