

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

# Dowry

Spring 2024  
Issue N° 61



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## **For your diaries:**

Day of Vocational Discernment for ladies,  
Tyburn Convent, London, 13 April  
Info/bookings: [malleray@fssp.org](mailto:malleray@fssp.org)

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

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

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

# Editorial: FSSP Superior meets Pope



Official communiqué of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter – Fribourg, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

*Following a request from the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter, Pope Francis invited Fr Andrzej Komorowski, Superior General of the FSSP, to meet with him. He received him in private audience at the Vatican on Thursday, February 29, 2024, accompanied by Fr Benoît Paul-Joseph, Superior of the District of France, and Fr Vincent Ribeton, Rector of St Peter's Seminary in Wigratzbad.*

*The meeting was an opportunity for them to express their deep gratitude to the Holy Father for the decree of February 11, 2022, by which the Pope confirmed the liturgical specificity of the Fraternity of St Peter, but also to share with him the difficulties encountered in its application. The Pope was very understanding and invited the Fraternity of St Peter to continue to build up ecclesial communion ever more fully through its own proper charism. Fr Komorowski informed the Holy Father that the decree of February 11, 2022 had been given on the very day of the Fraternity of St Peter's consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. The Holy Father hailed this coincidence as a providential sign.*

[End of the communiqué]

Mainstream Catholic medias had announced the cancellation of Pope Francis' appointments scheduled for the Saturday following his audience

with the FSSP. In that context, it was providential that the Holy Father was well enough to see the FSSP superiors that Thursday. Even though no particular decision or directive followed, the papal audience was reassuring. Pope Francis is not known to have met with other representatives of the traditional movement so far. His willingness to meet again with the FSSP superiors just two years after the first audience expresses a benevolent disposition confirmed at the time by his subsequent decree.

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Already through his nuncio in Paris on October 18, 2013, Pope Francis had addressed his paternal wishes to the FSSP on the occasion of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary: "The Holy Father exhorts them, according to their own charism, to take an active part in the mission of the Church in the world of today, through the testimony of a holy life, a firm faith and an inventive and generous charity."

The recent papal audience is an encouragement to the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter and, further afield, to all those who seek to honour God and serve souls through the Roman traditions in hierarchical communion with Holy Church.

Here in England, as well as in Scotland and Ireland, our priests are

kept busy with their daily ministry. Part of our time is also invested in national events such as our annual Vocation Discernment Weekend attended by thirteen men in Buckden last February, the SPUC national Youth conference near Stone on 23-25 February, and the *Juventutem* London holy Mass and social, gathering seventy young adults from all over Southeast England one Friday evening every month.

Looking ahead, a Day of Vocational Discernment for ladies is planned at Tyburn Convent on 13 April, the annual summer weekend of *Juventutem* is booked for one hundred young people at Ampleforth on 2-4 August, a retreat for any clergy and religious is scheduled on 14-18 October in Stonyhurst, and we will attend or lead various pilgrimages and seasonal activities such as our annual children summer camps in the Peak District.

Finally, we are launching the **dowry.org.uk** website to provide easy access to the wealth of articles on doctrine, spirituality, education, fine arts and literature published over the past sixteen years in this our quarterly magazine *Dowry*.

With gratitude for your ongoing prayers for our priests, our seminarians, and for our apostolates across the UK & Ireland, we assure you of ours this Lent and Easter.

St Alban House, Bedford,  
21<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

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

# A Fresh Look at Courtship

*By a young Catholic layman attending Juventutem events*

There are many different opinions on courtship, and this is because it is concerned with actions and ethics, and is therefore a practical rather than a theoretical science. This means that there are some grey areas and people can rightly hold differing points of view to some extent. However, while it may be the case that there is some grey when it comes to the application of ethical principles, there are still many aspects which are black and white.

Courtship is a moral act, and in every moral act there are three components: The object, the end, and the circumstances. The object of the action is what you are actually doing. The end is the goal or purpose you intend to achieve, and the circumstances are those things which surround the action; they are the context within which you carry out the act. The principle of the integral good states that all three of these must be good or at least neutral for an act to be permissible.

For example, the object of my moral act may be driving a car, which is neutral. The end of my driving may be going to work or going to rob a bank. The good or bad end changes the moral character of the act so that an act which is objectively neutral or even good may become bad simply based on the goal in mind. The circumstances also play an important role in determining the

moral character of an action. If I am driving (object) to work (the end), but the circumstances surrounding that action are that it is a Sunday and I shouldn't be working, then this is enough to transform the action into a bad one.

How does this relate to courtship? If we want to embark on courtship successfully and rightly we must understand that it too has an end and the circumstances surrounding it can change its moral character. The object of courtship is of course getting to know someone who is a potential spouse. Taking for granted the circumstance that the man and woman concerned are free to marry, we must now acknowledge that the end of courtship is marriage.

It is common knowledge that the purpose of courtship is marriage but many act as if it were not, or seem to forget it because the object of courtship (the "courting") is something pleasant to us by nature and therefore often engaged in when the time is not right (when the end of marriage is not a realistic eventuality). The book of Proverbs says: "Prepare thy work without, and diligently till thy ground: that afterward thou mayst build thy house." (Proverbs 24:27).



Now that we know the end is marriage we can consider what the process of courtship involves. The primary goal of courtship is the discernment of virtue in the potential spouse. It is not about enjoyment, or even friendship for its own sake. It isn't dating or a relationship as the modern world understands it, but all is ordered towards a specific end within a reasonable time limit.

Why is virtue important? Virtue is a disposition in the soul lying between two extremes (i.e. Courage is the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness) and this mean is determined by right reason. It is a kind of excellence in this or that respect. Virtue is a set of good habits and when a person has a specific virtue in a

specific area it means that this person will act in a specific way in that given area. Simply speaking if someone has virtue they will act in a consistently virtuous way (at least most of the time) once you marry them, which is conducive to their and your happiness. This does not mean you must marry a saint, as you will have plenty of time to make each other saints after marriage, but the person should have some level of virtue which ultimately indicates that they have a good character.

We are all the sum of our moral choices. Moral acts lead to habits (virtues or vices), and habits form our character, and our character is who we are. Therefore, the discerning of virtue before marriage is the key to understanding who the other person truly is (and therefore what you are both getting yourselves into)! If the potential spouse doesn't have many virtues but on the contrary have formed the habits of vices they will act in an evil or harmful way and it will be difficult to live in common with them. While grace can and does work miracles in this regard, it is not our place to suppose that God will work such a transformation. For the sake of discernment it is best (as well as fairer towards the other person) to assume that they will remain more or less the same after marriage as the way you found them, at least in their fundamental character and temperament.

Saint Thomas says that honour is the recognition of virtue, which is a kind of excellence in this or that respect. Honour then is a kind of intellectual appreciation of

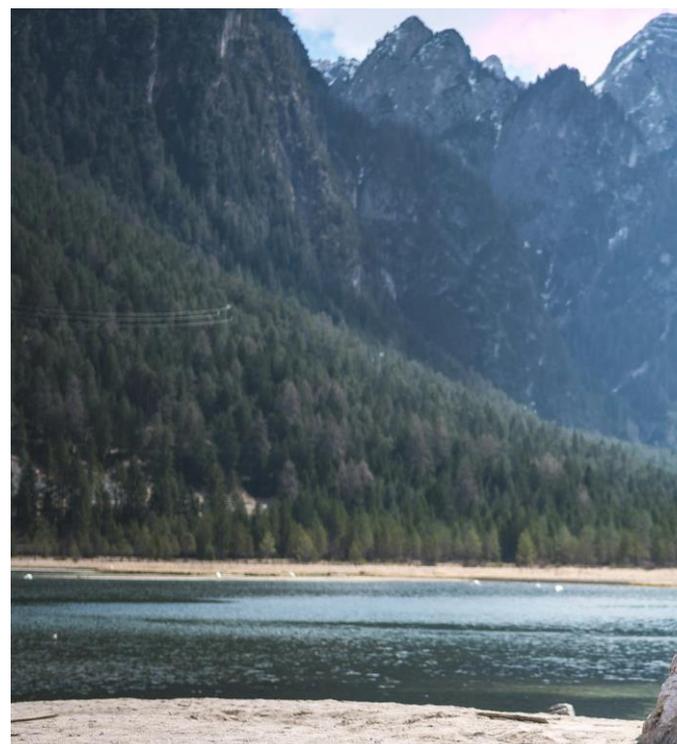
excellence. This is the reason that those who seek honour while lacking virtue rub us up the wrong way. Courtship then is not only about discerning virtue but protecting the virtue, and the honour, of one's counterpart.

In summary the end of courtship is marriage, courtship itself is a process of discovering if the potential spouse has sufficient virtue, and primacy must be given (especially for a man) to protecting the honour of the other. Now we move on to briefly consider the ideal stages of courtship as they are traditionally presented.

The first step of courtship is called friendship, and friendship is willing the true good of the other. There must be some attraction, but this kind of friendship should be non-romantic and not yet physical (just like any other friendship). Detachment is very much needed in order to maintain clarity of judgement, and this is a point the modern world does not understand. When discerning marriage, the modern opinion is that closeness is key to discern properly. "Live together first", they may say. At first glance this seems to make sense. But we may question whether this is sound advice considering that at least half of marriages end in divorce these days. Cohabitation

invariably puts the couple in a situation where they cannot discern marriage at all, because the passions inevitable in such close proximity have a blinding effect on the intellect, and proper discernment is never made. It is not a stretch to see that cohabitation contributes to, if not causes, divorce and adultery in many cases.

This stage is confined to friendship in the true sense, which is based again on virtue as the true good of the other. There must be compatibility but no signs of physical affection, detachment of emotions, and moderation. The pair shouldn't meet alone but should try to see each other in group settings, and exclusivity should not yet play any part in this friendship. If the two decide they will probably remain just friends, nothing has been lost! The two are unscathed and probably better off for their discretion and discipline.



If things do work out then the courtship can progress to the second stage: courtship proper. This is the beginning of exclusivity and a closer and more focussed discernment. Even in the modern world it is appreciated if the man gets the permission of the father or at least introduces himself to him and the family. Getting to know the family is a vital part of courtship, as opposed to modern dating where you may never even meet their family until an advanced stage. You do not just marry a person, but you also marry into a family, therefore it is a great thing to begin this integration now and involve the family in the relationship from its foundations. This period should not take years as this runs the risk of wasting each other's time and even damaging the other person when things do not result in marriage many years later. Ideally, there shouldn't be many signs of physical affection, though some disagree. The

problem is almost always too much physicality rather than too little, so it can't hurt to lean a little in the other direction, knowing the goal is to remain detached and able to think rationally. The man in this stage should look for a woman who is capable of trusting his leadership, and the woman should look primarily for a man who will love her truly, that being understood as sacrificial love.

True love always involves sacrifice, and therefore both the man and the woman (but especially the man) should sacrifice themselves and their own desires by practising chastity throughout their courtship. The woman wants to know that her potential husband is in control of his emotions and can deny himself for her sake, and ultimately for the sake of future children. In order for this to be possible distance and moderation must be maintained to some

extent. Meeting in public and visiting the respective family home serves as fitting boundaries. If you follow these guidelines and the courtship does not progress further, you have left the other the same or better than you found them, and this really should be the golden rule of courtship.

The third and final stage of courtship is the betrothal or engagement. The

entry into this stage really should start with the man asking the father of his bride-to-be if he can propose to his daughter. This is not a token, but an acknowledgement that the father has the right under natural law to say no. He must consent and this is why he will ultimately present the hand of his daughter to her groom on the wedding day. Betrothal itself is a ceremony where the couple promise before God to marry the other. They must marry unless a grave reason presents itself. This stage should not be never ending (as often is the case in our times), but should again have a reasonable timeframe for the wedding. There is again limited physicality, but of course there is more freedom, because a promise and obligation to marry is in effect. It is however worth taking note of not just our human weakness but also other people's perceptions during this transitory phase. Helping each other grow in virtue must remain at the heart of this relationship as it should throughout marriage. The next stage is of course marriage, where the real work begins! But if the pair have at least attempted to follow these steps and moderated their own desires for the sake of God and each other, they will be able to happily recall this magical period of time throughout their married life. □

(Pictures: *The Betrothal of the Bl. Virgin Mary*, Raphael, Milan, Public domain Wikipedia; Couple sitting, by Timo Stern, Unsplash license)



# Two Young Women Love Sacred Art

*Young convert artist Rachel Moberly explains why she paints, and homeschooled Catholic Francesca Stevens (one of twelve children) shares her dream of learning a classical artistic trade in Florence*

Sacred art is a medium through which the abstract truths of the Faith become visible realities that we can conceptualise and fall in love with. This may sound obvious, but it is the precise reason

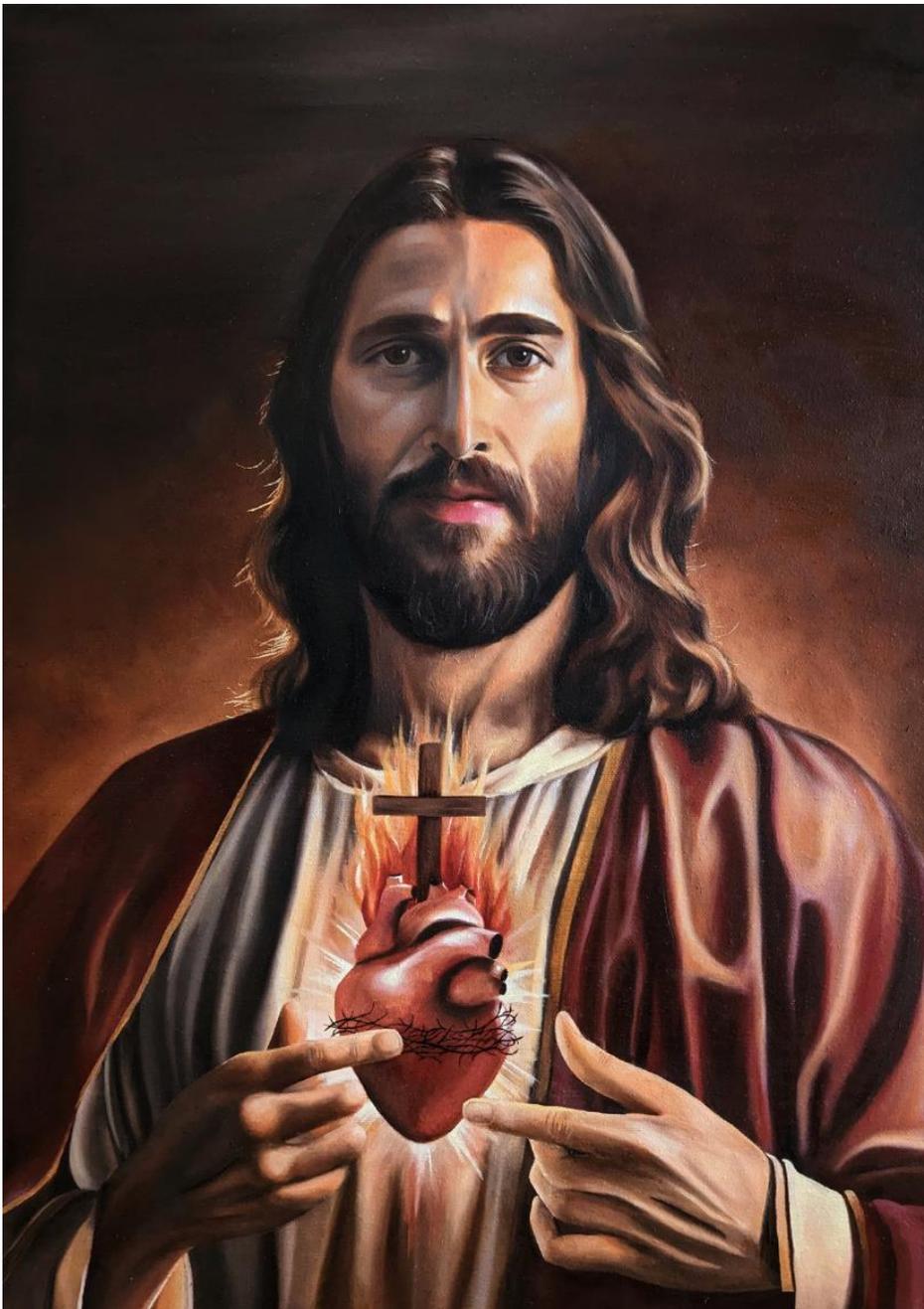
that I believe this country needs religious art more than ever—we need a wake-up call.

Having converted to the Catholic Church from secular Anglicanism, I

felt all too painfully how common it is to see a crucifix without *seeing* it. To hear the passion narrative without *hearing* it. How can we proclaim Christ crucified to a country where the horror of the Cross is reduced to a banal, half-forgotten wall decoration?

It was in answer to this question that I made it my mission to make sacred art specifically for a ‘post-Christian’ England, which would reimagine typical religious art and emphasise the dynamism and radicality of a *living* Faith. I try to present Biblical figures in a contemporary and vividly realistic style whilst maintaining a traditional form and technique to create something both new and old, exciting and familiar.

Sacred art must ignite a spark of curiosity to stir the soul. It should be a presentation of the truth in such a way as to engross its viewer, to elevate their mind, to perhaps unsettle them, and draw them into the beauty of God. Far beyond mere aesthetics, it must overtly oppose the viewer’s indifference, and offer a drop of honey with which they may search for more.



As a young woman, I am humbled to have a small part in this timeless tradition and would be very grateful for your prayers.

Website: [rachelmoberly.com](http://rachelmoberly.com)

Pictures left *Burning Furnace of Charity* and right *Mater Purissima* © Rachel Moberly; picture bottom right: Francesca Stevens standing by Michelangelo's *Pietà* in Rome.

*Young Francesca Stevens attempted twice to study classical art in England, but on both occasions she had to leave. Why? She found that the sacred works of Christian art on her university curriculum were presented with a painful lack of respect for the faith they illustrate and toward the believers who seek inspiration from them. She is now hoping to learn an artistic trade in Italy.*

**B**eauty is that which lifts our soul to higher things. It is what arouses our senses. Beauty is found all around us, as Van Gogh says, 'If you truly love nature then you will find beauty everywhere.' I see beauty in history, especially the development and impact of art.

I am attracted to classical art because I see history, talent, beauty, and a story. Sadly, art today has fallen far from tradition and real artistic talent has been overlooked. Nowadays, artists are seeking to move away from artistic tradition. They wish to be free and express themselves through their works. In my eyes, this is the cause as to why art is losing the beauty that it once had. When contemplating a contemporary art piece, one is not inspired, there is no story, and it does not reflect true talent. Art without tradition is like "the foolish man who built his house



on sand" (Lk 6:46-49), without a solid base it crumbles and fails to achieve its purpose. Pope John Paul II's *Letter to artists* in 1999 encapsulates many reasons that the History of art should be studied and appreciated. Pope John Paul explains that art is rooted in religious experience and artistic creativity, established over thousands of years in Churches and through Sacred Scripture.

I wish to be trained to become an artist following a traditional format. Thus, I have applied to study Sacred Art at the Sacred Art School in Florence. I have a place on the Goldsmithing course, which I can accept if I can raise enough money.

Please read my *GoFundMe* page for more information:

<https://gofund.me/539d4b79> □



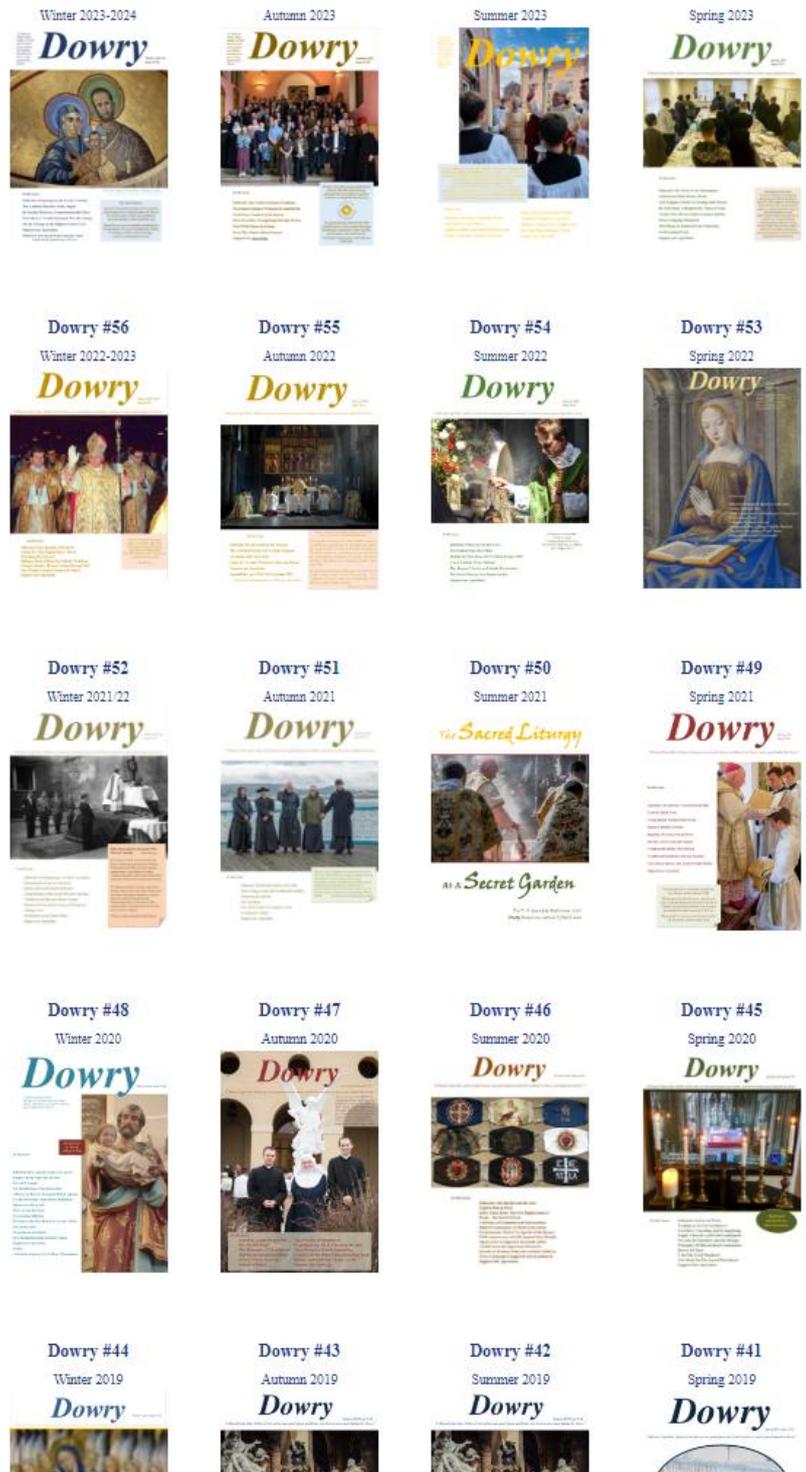
# Evangelising Britain in the Digital Age

Since the first edition of our quarterly magazine Dowry in Advent 2008, hundreds of articles about faith, spirituality, family matters and education, liturgy, vocations, history, sacred art and literature were released. Like the truth they illustrate or expound, most

of those articles are still relevant and are accessible online as pdf documents. To facilitate browsing and selecting by a wider readership, we are pleased to offer a dedicated website named [dowry.org.uk](http://dowry.org.uk). Webmaster Robert Slawik presents this new tool for evangelisation.

Smartphones and other computing technologies have become a staple of our time. On one hand, such devices give us unparalleled access to a collective of human knowledge that ancient philosophers could have only dreamt of possessing. On the other, a brief look at the news or Twitter feed reveals the prevalence of sin across this digital domain—from the promotion of radical ideologies often rooted in the heresies of old, to industries profiteering off emotional and sexual exploitation of the most vulnerable. This dichotomy, alongside the sheer number of potential distractions, forces us to be vigilant and prudent about the things we decide to click on. However, when used in accordance with our conscience, these tools present an opportunity to deepen our spiritual lives.

The United States is home to some of the biggest evangelisation institutions—Word on Fire, Ascension Press, the Thomistic Institute and others. Each produce digital content in a variety of formats that is engaging, beautiful and willing to tackle the challenges of being a Christian in today's society. Whilst their reach is international, it is primarily targeted at an American audience. There appears to be a distinct lack of quality digital materials that could



resonate more strongly with people in Great Britain—this is why *Dowry* is going beyond the print medium and is now accessible online ([www.dowry.org.uk](http://www.dowry.org.uk)).

Increasing our reach in this way naturally brings various practical benefits—if you cannot get your hands on a physical copy of the magazine, the same articles will be displayed on the site in a view that adjusts to your device. Direct links to reviewed literature, and a way to filter content by categories and tags ensure that our readers can easily find whatever interests them to facilitate their growth in faith. This is only the start however—the extensibility of the platform opens the doors for more experimental formats, such as embedding videos from various conferences and opportunities for contributions from guest writers—we encourage our readers to provide suggestions and feedback by emailing [contact@dowry.org.uk](mailto:contact@dowry.org.uk).

St John Paul II warned that "whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering

a viable and working community of faith, are now put to a hard test, and in some cases, are even undergoing a radical transformation, as a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism"<sup>1</sup>. As seen in the latest census data<sup>2</sup>, this radical transformation has taken root in Britain. It is no secret that mainstream catechesis has failed<sup>3</sup>—but perhaps this is precisely the opportunity for us to present the faith in an authentic light: faith that is grounded in objective truth, real devotion, intellectual rigour, promotion of beauty and genuine friendship.

It was extremely encouraging to see the fruits of such efforts at the *Sharing the Church's Story* conference in February of last year, organised by Word on Fire and Catholic Voices. With over a thousand in attendance, many of whom were young adults, the passion for evangelisation and the thirst for authenticity were on full display. This trend is further corroborated by overflowing attendance at traditional pilgrimages, particularly to

Chartres<sup>4</sup> and Walsingham<sup>5</sup>. It is unmistakably clear that young people want the Truth, and are willing to speak out about it.

I hope that the expansion of *Dowry* can become one of the vehicles aiding in this evangelisation effort, and I am grateful for your prayers and support as we embark on this new digital journey. May Our Lady intercede for the continuing expansion of Her Son's Kingdom on these isles. □

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles Laici."

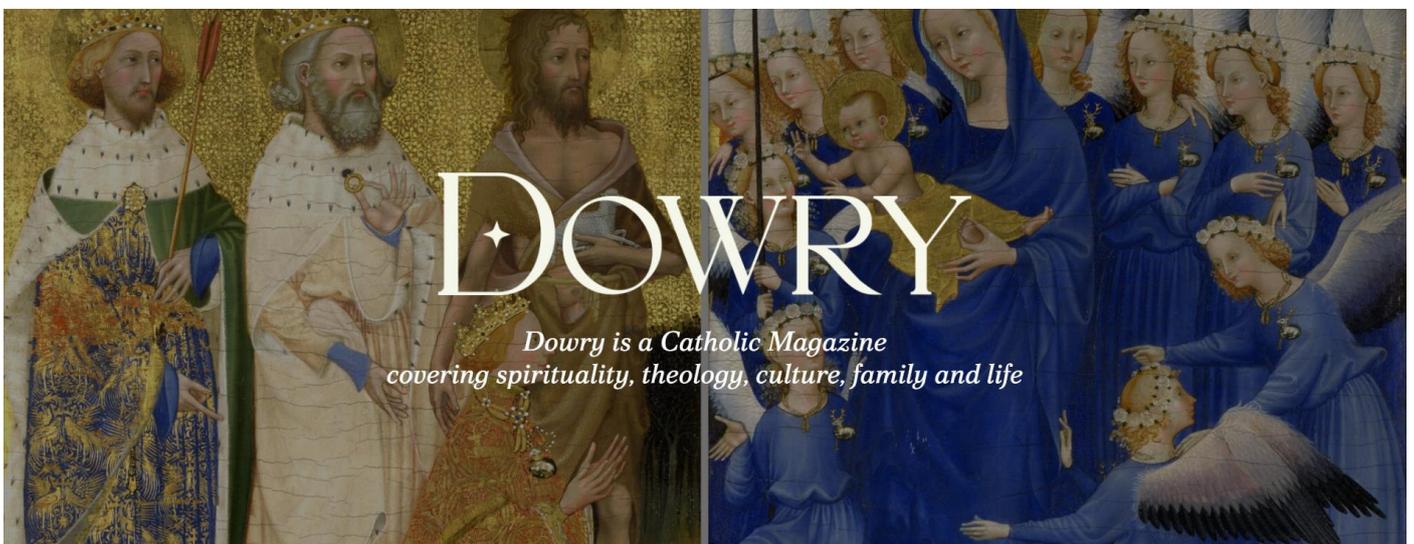
<sup>2</sup> ONS, "Census 2021: Religion, England and Wales"

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, "One-Third of U.S. Catholics Believe in Transubstantiation"

<sup>4</sup> National Catholic Register, "Traditional Chartres Pilgrimage in France Is a Victim of Its Own Success."

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Herald, "The Latin Mass Society's Annual Pilgrimage to Walsingham Gets Bigger Every Year."

Visit [dowry.org.uk](http://dowry.org.uk)



# The Spiritual Meaning of Making Altar Bread

*A nun in formation at the Cistercian monastery of Valley of Our Lady reflects on her hidden life with Christ*

Cistercian monastic contemplative life is hidden with Christ in God<sup>1</sup>, a life finding its source and summit in the liturgy<sup>2</sup> with all things ordered to union with Jesus Christ, the Divine Bridegroom in praise of the Blessed Trinity. Inheriting the balance of *ora et labora* from our Holy Father St. Benedict and following our Cistercian Fathers in manual labour, we find expression of our union with the Eucharistic Christ in uniting our offering to His by making our own the work of human hands<sup>3</sup> that is the bread, the matter for the Eucharistic species. The mystery of His Presence in the Eucharist is a

paradox of proximity and hiddenness. Each stage of the production process becomes a possibility for union for the nuns; each work opens to its own prayer, particular to the heart of each nun wrapped in the silence of a heart immersed in the Word.

## **Weighing and Mixing**

*All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.* Proverbs 16:2

Our flour comes to us from outside sources, yet adjacent fields remind us of the many images in scripture drawn from the grain of wheat which exemplify asceticism and

purification of the heart. Heavier manual labour is conducive to working out the healing of memory necessary for interior silence. This first step of the altar bread process—weighing out hundreds of pounds of flour in preparation for baking—is an opportunity to dig deeply into the heart and lay bare areas in need of healing and conversion. Intercession comes to surface too as the flour sifts into containers.

The next step—mixing the water, wheat germ oil, and flour—requires a vigilance to ensure even mixing and correct viscosity that the batter,



which is not unlike a runny pancake batter, may bake evenly without spot or wrinkle. The roar and gurgle of nearly twenty gallons mixing allow us to experience solidarity with the noise of world. The violence with which these three simple ingredients are blended in the mixer is not unlike the intensity sometimes experienced in the spiritual life.<sup>4</sup> The end result of a few minutes mixing is a smooth libation of fine flour poured out ready for baking.

### **Baking**

*Love's flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame.* See Song of Songs 8:6

The wafer bakers are equipped with iron griddles similar to a waffle iron which imprint crosses or other designs reflecting what the bread will become. These rotate on a carousel before the nun baking who removes the rectangular sheets of wafer and prepares the plate for its next measure of batter which includes scraping any crumbs or residue and flooding it with water spray to produce an even bake. The warmth of the oven is a comforting heat in the Wisconsin winter and an added asceticism in the summer months. Each baked sheet of bread is checked for its worthiness to be used during the Holy Sacrifice. The rhythm of the work produces an interior silence with an openness to the Word allowing the Holy Spirit to bring His fire of transforming love.

### **Resting**

*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.* Ps 37:7

Beginning with the seventh day of creation until the Parousia, the Lord calls us continually to find our rest in Him. The bread too has its rest. It is stored away awaiting the next stage, hidden very much like ourselves. It is an important part of

the process and continues through our own resting and rising.

### **Humidifying**

*Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew.*

Song of Songs 5:2

After resting, the bread is must be softened by humidifying to allow it to cut without breaking. When one walks into the room where this takes place it is like walking into a warm cloud. A nun monitors the process to ensure the even quality. The Holy Spirit works in a similar way, first softening the heart to be docile and open to the voice of the Bridegroom.

### **Cutting and Sorting**

*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.* 1 Corinthians 10:17

This stage of the process is quite communal. While one sister cuts stacks of fifty sheets into the familiar round discs, the others sort out any bread with imperfections. Each side is checked for flaws. A steady rhythm can keep pace with decades of the rosary. It is work not unlike the basket-weaving tasks of the desert monks of old. Prayer, whether of direct intercession or focused on the Lord alone in adoration, contributes to the building up of the whole Body of Christ, which is the Church, as our lives become increasingly united to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

### **Packing and Shipping**

*No speech, no word, no voice is heard yet their span extends through all the earth, their words to the utmost bounds of the world.* Psalm 19:3-4



Though we live a life of hiddenness and silence our packing and shipping office is a small reflection of the reach of our life. Most often, our life and its influence on the Church is hidden from ourselves. We live in the faith that our own prayer and self-offering united to that of Jesus' is bearing fruit in ways that we will only know in eternity. It is enough to be given to Him, to offer our own *fiat* in Our Lady's. The altar bread we bake is shipped both near and far. We serve parishes urban and rural, monasteries and missions. The universality of the reach, though limited, reflects in some way the reach of our prayers, when united to the infinite One is beyond our own understanding. □

Monastery website:

<https://www.valleyoffourlady.org/>

Link to full article:

<https://realpresence.info/communion-bread-making-a-labor-of-love/Pictures> © author

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:3

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ordinary of the Roman Missal

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 11:12

# Picasso's *Guernica* or, *This Is Not A Corrida*

By Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP, author of the novel *Vermeer's Angel*, quoted in this article

Pablo Picasso died fifty years ago last year but Holy Saturday eclipsed his anniversary. On April 8, 2023 Catholics were preparing for the Resurrection. They were still celebrating the rising of Christ later that month when another anniversary occurred: the bombing of Guernica in northern Spain, on April 26, 1937. Picasso painted a picture after the same name: *Guernica* was a turning point in his career. Let us look at it again.

*Guernica* is a masterpiece, not of art, but of propaganda. I use this word here not derogatorily. Propaganda is a subtle form of communication that entails the use of fine arts, of intelligence and politics in general. Artistic propaganda reminds us that no depiction is ever neutral. Any artistic representation implies selecting a vantage point, illustrating a worldview and colouring it with one's ideological preferences. Allow me to be forthright. Visually I consider *Guernica* a pompous and unimaginative grey collage. From a propaganda perspective, I admire its efficient conflating of the injustice of war with General Franco's Government; and reciprocally its equating the innocent victims with Communists in general.

Let me quote a few public figures to give us perspective. Indeed, if between three hundred and one thousand people died in Guernica's bombing, just one year earlier the Communists had assassinated

between thirty-eight thousand and seventy-two thousand three hundred and forty-four Catholics priests, monks and nuns during the Spanish Red Terror. Three years after Guernica, in Katyn only, the Soviets assassinated twenty-two thousand Polish army officers. Adolf Hitler, a failed painter, killed about six million Romani, Jews, Western Christians, Poles and Ukrainians in concentration camps. In Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, Joseph Stalin orchestrated the Terror-famine causing three and a half to five million victims. Mao Zedong starved thirty-five million innocents to death in 1959-61, not counting political torture and assassinations.

But let us limit ourselves to city bombing, more relevant to *Guernica*. During the Blitz in London, from September 1940 to May 1941, the Nazi Luftwaffe killed some forty-three thousand British civilians. In Dresden on February 13, 1945, American and British bombs killed thirty-five thousand German civilians. In Japan, when bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 respectively, the Americans killed between one-hundred and

thirty thousand and two hundred and twenty-five thousand people, most of whom were civilians. In comparison, neither the number of victims nor the degree of injustice explains why Guernica, one of the smallest of modern war episodes, seems to have risen to archetypal status, outshining carnages atrociously more lethal and unwarranted. Certainly, the artistic quality of its eponymous painting fails to justify this.

Does some secret meaning, then, some hidden code account for Guernica's fame? Do any *pentimenti*, these hidden depictions lying under the surface of famous paintings, explain the success of the picture, as was found in some other works by Picasso such as his *Crouching Beggar*? The answer is yes. *Guernica* is a giant *pentimento*. Beneath the alleged war scene, there



truly lies ...a *corrida*. Let me clarify this.

The painting was first about bulls, not bombs. Later, the picture was given a new meaning despite no significant changes affecting its composition. This lack of conceptual integrity was concealed through the masterly opportunism of the painter. Pablo Picasso admitted that his painting had nothing to do, originally, with the bombing of Guernica, for the very simple reason that the town had not yet been bombed and no major artist, not even the Catalonian painter, had ever heard of the little Basque locality. It would make news only in late April 1937. But three full months earlier, in January 1937, Picasso had received the commission from the Republican Government to paint a mural for the Universal Exhibition to be held in Paris that July. He banally selected bullfighting, a Spanish cliché recycled from *Minotauremomy*, his last significant engraving on bulls less than two years earlier. The composition of that picture resembles that of *Guernica* as if

reflected in a mirror. No mystery here if one recalls that etchings are inverted in the printing process, swapping left and right.

Inspiration was wanting though. He did not know how to make his painting strikingly original. Winter was gone, spring had arrived, and still no creative spark. How was he to present his completed work by July that summer? After three months of fruitless labour, Picasso heard of a small Basque town which had just been bombed on April 26, 1937. That was his chance, he realised. Creatively, he decided to twist and bend his *corrida* into a war scene. His close collaborator and model Miss Dóra Maar took photographs of the painting process. A member of the French Communist Party, Miss Maar inspired Picasso's shift from art to propaganda. Until then, he had not been political. He cautiously waited until the Nazis had left Paris in 1944, though, to join the Communist Party, giving in to Miss Maar. Salvador Dalí commented: "Picasso is a Communist. Neither am I."

How did Picasso manage to reframe his *corrida* as a war scene, you may wonder? Here is the trick, or the genius, if one prefers. Picasso showed himself an adroit *torero*. He performed a dazzling pirouette. To avoid the horns of his original bulls, that is, to hide his want of inspiration about *corridas*, he

stuck a new label all across the canvas, calling it 'war painting' instead. Picasso's friend Juan Larrea recalls how the Communist poet Paul Éluard was the one who had found the new name for Picasso's painting in progress. At that time Éluard was writing his poem *La Victoire de Guernica*. On seeing Picasso's bullfighting scene he exclaimed "Guernica!" Picasso immediately realised the benefit of connecting his image with the Basque town recently bombed. No matter that his composition included no bombs, no planes, no swastikas, no guns or any modern weaponry, nor any crumbling roofs or walls. Their absence would enhance the evocative power of the work. *Guernica* would be its name, then. I suggest that *Guernica* should be more aptly titled *Muleta*. The 'muleta' is the matador's red cape hanging from a stick. Waved before the bull, the muleta conceals the sword about to be plunged into the neck of the exhausted beast. I say, shake off the muleta! Remove the upper layer of *Guernica*, that is, the alleged war description, and you will find the hackneyed *corrida* scene.

Look, it is all before you, hidden in plain sight. Picture yourself in Las Ventas, the large bullring in Madrid. It is 9pm and still sunny and hot. You are sitting among twenty-three thousand fellow-spectators. Suddenly they start yelling. You all rise together like a swelling wave. Why? A *picador* has just fallen from his horse as he tried to pierce the bull with his lance. All look in horror, as the beast paws the sand. The man attempts to crawl away, his leg broken. But the angry bull is now coming back, about to charge and trample upon the unfortunate horseman. To distract the beast (and



win a scoop), a journalist flashes his camera. The wife and child of the fallen man scream with fear! ‘Daddy!’ In the middle of the painting, up here, you can see the *picador*’s horse. Right above it is the flashing camera. The bull is obviously on the far left. The wife and child are below it and the fallen *picador* lies at the bottom. He grabs the sword thrown at him by the *torero* (it is not regular, of course, but a human life is at stake). To the right, the audience is held in suspense, mesmerised by the imminent tragedy. To the far right, a helpless spectator turns his face away from the action, looking at the last sunrays shining over the edge of the vast circular arena. Unless he is praying for a miracle from heaven.

Thus, war depiction is about as intrinsic to the initial intent of the work, a *corrida*, as would be in England, where I live, a painting of a thoroughbred racehorse subsequently acclaimed as the Trojan horse outside the walls of Ilium. This could be a practical joke by the curator of the London National Gallery, swapping the signs for George Stubbs’ *Whistlejacket* racehorse and Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo’s *Building of the Trojan Horse*. Perhaps the most important lesson that *Guernica* teaches us, then, is the power of naming. That power can be used for good when the name expresses the essence and original purpose of the thing. But it can be misused if arbitrarily assigning a name to a thing that bears no essential relation with it. As a little diversion, you may find relevant this quote from another skilled artist, Lewis Carroll, creator of *Alice in Wonderland*:

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful



tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master—that’s all.’

(Through the Looking-Glass, Chapter 6)

I do not claim to have exhausted the semiotic riches of *Guernica*, far from it. To broaden our perspective, allow me to conclude with a couple of new interpretative suggestions.

To start with, you may recall that on February 28, 1974, in New York, artist Tony Shafrazi spread red spray paint on *Guernica*, writing the words “Kill lies all,” as a protest statement. One could argue that he was merely imitating what Picasso himself had done: adding a further layer. First, there was a *corrida*. Second, there was a war scene. Third, there were red letters sprayed, red like the *torero*’s muleta spread in front of the bull. Perhaps, I don’t know, perhaps Shafrazi was only bringing the painting to its original stage—a *corrida*. I suppose it was

no defacing then, but dutiful restoration.

My second conclusive hypothesis is that Miss Dóra Maar’s influence might not have been solely political, but multi-layered. As a surrealist photographer, she would have been acquainted with René Magritte’s 1929 seminal surrealist painting, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*. Magritte’s picture is titled *This is not a pipe* despite depicting what objectively is a pipe. Just like Salvador Dalí surrealistically said of Picasso “This is a Communist,” *Guernica* could be interpreted as Pablo Picasso’s surrealist try, if a more explicit title had been chosen, such as *This is not a corrida*.

In this fiftieth anniversary year of the death of Picasso, we may pray for his soul. To Dominican Fr Severino Alvarez in 1963, Picasso had expressed his desire for reconciliation with the Church, as Dóra Maar had done earlier. Please God, this time her influence might have been salutary. R.I.P. □

Pictures: *Guernica* © Fine Art Images/age footstock ; reversed view of *Minotauremarchy*

# PRIORY CAMPAIGN – APPEAL UPDATE



By Fr Matthew Goddard, FSSP, Rector of St Mary's Shrine, Warrington



the region of £30,000 to £35,000 mainly due to price rises, essential design variations and other regulatory requirements. **The resulting cost overrun from our original phase 1 budget therefore is now approaching £165k to £170k.**

Whilst this is a substantial amount, we remain mindful that the project got off the ground based

**M**any of our readers have generously contributed to our Priory Campaign, for the purchase and refurbishment of Priory Court, Warrington, to provide much needed space.

The buildings were purchased and plans for their conversion drawn up shortly before Covid hit. After finally beginning work In February 2023, **we are pleased to report that we are now in the final stages of Phase 1, namely the creation of a large hall spanning the length of the first floor, with a double height middle section plus balcony, creating an impressive, flexible space.**

The major construction work is now complete, decorators have started painting, the lift will be installed within 2 to 3 weeks, while the plans for the kitchen have been finalised and the new

flooring ordered. Our contractors anticipate that these last elements will be completed by the end of April. Our Shrine community is waiting eagerly!

The project has not been without its trials however. The conversion work has, sadly, been beset by numerous problems, in the aftermath of Covid. High inflation, a rise in building costs, necessary changes to certain structural elements and work required to other areas of Priory Court, all meant a phased approach to the works was the only way forward.

In order to complete the current stage of works, last autumn saw us commit a *further £100,000 (the majority) of St Mary's Shrine general funds – plus we have £30,000 of committed contract costs yet to cover.*

Within the past few weeks we have been hit with further costs in

on 2022 prices and has taken far longer than anticipated, so a significant rise was unavoidable after a certain point. The pay back will be long term but the many benefits to be gained from having this valuable space should not be lost in these figures.

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**We very much need to plug that £170,000 overrun. Are you able to help in any way? All donations would be very gratefully accepted. Many thanks in advance. May God reward your kindness and generosity!**

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Please see insert flyer for details of how to donate, or use our Warrington bank account:  
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□

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All other donations sent to us in England will finance our development and apostolate in England & Wales.

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Many people in and outside the UK benefit from our Warrington-based daily broadcast of Holy Mass with daily homily, especially under lockdown. We request your financial support for this worldwide apostolate. You can easily donate online via our Warrington/LiveMass 'Donate' button on <https://fssp.org.uk/donate/>. Thank you.

## Homilies & Conferences:

St Mary's Warrington YouTube channel, with homilies for Sundays and feasts uploaded permanently: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_NVY7jpDIhANiwjng1gN0w](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_NVY7jpDIhANiwjng1gN0w)  
Also, conferences & homilies on <https://vimeo.com/livemass>.

More of them on the Juventutem London Video page: <https://www.facebook.com/londonjuventutem/videos>

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## DOWRY Magazine

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(FSSP seminarian Benjamin, from England, received First Tonsure and donned the cassock and surplice last autumn. Pray for more vocations: [fssp.org.uk/about-the-confraternity](https://fssp.org.uk/about-the-confraternity))

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