

# SERVING LITURGICAL RENEWAL

Pastoral and  
Theological Questions

Essays in Honour of  
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VERITAS, Dublin  
(2015)

'A MISSIONARY  
IN HIS WAY AND PLACE'  
THE FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS OF  
FR ALGERNON BROWN CSP (1848-78)

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It is perhaps fitting that this chapter recalls an individual for whom the preached word became a priority.<sup>1</sup> This was Fr Algernon Brown (1848-78), a young Paulist priest who spent most of his short priestly ministry (a mere four years) at St Paul the Apostle Church on West 59th Street in New York City. He was one of the early pioneers of the Paulist 'five-minute sermons' which began to be preached at Low Masses in 1876 at the Paulist mother Church where he was based. The unidentified author of the Preface to a volume of these sermons, published in 1879, explains the rationale behind the five-minute sermons:

... that the great number of persons who generally attend only a Low Mass on Sundays might enjoy the advantage of hearing the word of God preached without being delayed too long for their convenience. For this reason they were limited in time to five minutes, while the effort was made to condense within this brief compass a sufficient amount of matter at once instructive and hortatory, in plain and simple language, to answer the practical purpose of a popular discourse.<sup>2</sup>

The Society of St Paul had been founded as recently as 1858 by a former Redemptorist, Fr Isaac Thomas Hecker (1819-88),

and its earliest members were all former members of the congregation, many of them converts and adherents of the Oxford Movement.<sup>3</sup> They were welcomed to the New York diocese by Archbishop John Hughes in the same year.

For those interested in reading something of Fr Algernon Brown's life and his short period of ministry, sources are difficult to come by. A simple internet search (as of December 2013) under the term 'Fr Algernon Brown CSP' simply turns up a website entitled findagrave.com. It sketches a short biography of Brown along with two photographs of him dressed as a Paulist priest, in which he seems much younger and more boyish in appearance than the age he must have been when these were taken – just a year or two beyond his mid-twenties. This biography is supplemented by the details found in the preface to the *Five-Minute Sermons* publication. We are told that he was born in Cobham in Surrey, England, the son of a prominent British physician in 1848. He converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism at the Brompton Oratory at the age of eighteen and went on to study at St Edmund's College and Prior Park where he took minor orders. He and his younger brother, Louis (who would also become a Paulist priest), immigrated to the United States in 1871 and settled in Cincinnati. Algernon would be ordained a priest by Archbishop Francis Purcell on 25 May 1872. The following year a mission in the diocese, delivered by one of the Paulist Society's priests, Walter Elliott (1842-1928), who later wrote the first biography of Hecker, impressed both brothers so deeply that they resolved to enter the society. Archbishop Purcell released Algernon to the society, but wondered whether his weak health might fail him while undertaking a hectic schedule of mission activity. In the event, it did, and he was soon assigned to the society's New York City parish of St Paul the Apostle, where he seems to have assumed the duties of sacristan. Here, according to the anonymous author of the preface to the volume of sermons, he displayed an 'accurate knowledge of the rubrics, ceremonial, and sacred chant', coupled with 'zeal for the order and decorum of the divine service and ... untiring assiduity in the work

assigned him'.<sup>4</sup> By 1877 his health was in steep decline, and having made one last visit home to England, he collapsed as he commenced the Introit on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December. He lingered for some months before passing away on the Monday of Holy Week, 8 April 1878. He was just twenty-nine years old. Incredibly, his younger brother, Louis, would die at the very same age two years later.

The volume of *Five-Minute Sermons* which was published in 1879 contained sermons that had already been preached by members of the Paulist society. The preface to the volume explains that these were designed to contain 'a sufficient amount of matter at once instructive and hortatory, in plain and simple language, to answer the practical purposes of a popular discourse'.<sup>5</sup> In addition, they were intended to be 'so solid and pungent that they would furnish a real nutriment and stimulus to the hearts and minds of the audience'.<sup>6</sup> Yet these sermons had not only already been preached; they had also appeared on a weekly basis in *The Catholic Review*, a newspaper founded by Mr Patrick Valentine Hickey, formerly of the *New York World*, and published in Brooklyn and New York from 1872-98. This was later described by the Catholic literary critic, novelist and diplomat, Maurice Francis Egan, as 'a paper intended for Catholic gentlemen written by Catholic gentlemen'.<sup>7</sup> The aim of the volume was to present these sermons in a 'more convenient and permanent form'.<sup>8</sup>

The Paulist publication, *Catholic World* (founded in 1865) carried a review of the volume in its issue of December 1879.<sup>9</sup> This review provides further information on how the volume came about. It explains that these sermons had been delivered by the Paulists over the previous three years and were almost simultaneously printed in *The Catholic Review*; but not quite. The printed copy was received in advance from the newspaper and was pasted on a tablet, which was left on the desk for the priest who was about to celebrate the Low Mass. He would then read the text to the people after the Gospel. The reviewer explains that 'there is only one way of preaching very short sermons which are really useful and interesting, and this is to

write them out carefully and deliver them exactly as they are written'. He also points to the danger of ad-libbing a shorter sermon, which is 'likely to be a mere random declamation without pith or marrow, and the preacher will often be tempted to overrun his time'. However, even Algernon Brown's confrère, the Paulist, Rev. Alfred Young (1831-1900), writing on the topic of street-preaching in the *Catholic World*, was far from convinced that the five-minute sermon was the perfect panacea for a preacher's predicament: 'five-minute sermons are better than no sermon at all, but such a short time, snatched between the announcement of a lot of parish notices and proclamations of all sorts of regulations ... is not sufficient to present with any force the proofs for doctrine which any indiscriminate audience are capable of appreciating'. He continues:

I believe it to be a very great mistake to suppose that one must adapt the presentation of the great truths of faith and of private or social duty to an imaginary intellectual weakness or infirmity of mind among the common people. More than once I have heard unfavourably from some such attempt, made by an ill-prepared preacher, to palm off a lot of platitudes upon those whom he thought were worthy of nothing better.<sup>10</sup>

The provision of a volume of carefully prepared short sermons by the Paulists can be conceived then as an effort to address some of the poorer examples of preaching that they no doubt heard much of.

The volume of sermons proved to be largely successful. Some years later, *The Sacred Heart Review*, in an issue dated 16 September 1893, referred to the sermons as follows:

All Catholics in this country and many abroad know the five-minute sermons, those brief little addresses delivered by the Paulist Fathers to their early morning congregations in New York. They have been printed in our papers all over the land and have had innumerable readers.<sup>11</sup>

By 1893, the Catholic Book Exchange advertised the volume in the *Catholic World* with the claim that there was 'no better manual for altar use' and promised that 'on receipt of One Dollar we will mail you a copy'.<sup>12</sup>

With some exceptions, the 1879 volume contains three five-minute sermons for each Sunday of the year. In each case, at least one of these was marked with a 'B'; this indicated that the sermon could be attributed with certainty to Brown. The authorship of those lacking this marker was deemed to be less certain. Having said that, the review of the volume that appeared in the Paulist *Catholic World* in the same year as its publication claimed (most likely with some authority) that 'Brown wrote nearly all the sermons until his fatal illness put a stop to his priestly labours'.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this introduction to the Paulist five-minute sermons, this distinction will not be strictly adhered to. Rather, the aim here is to provide a flavour of the material which was preached by Brown and his confrères in the mid-to late 1870s.<sup>14</sup>

Inspired by the thought of its founder, Isaac Hecker, one of the priorities of the Paulist mission was to address the issue of how lay Catholics might accommodate themselves to the prevailing American culture and yet, at the same time, transform that culture from within. This would lead to charges of 'Americanism' in the late 1890s after a French translation of Walter Elliott's biography of Hecker appeared in 1897.<sup>15</sup> In 1866 Hecker had addressed the Second Plenary Council in Baltimore and had urged the bishops to take seriously the task of converting America.<sup>16</sup> For him, the soil was already rich and perfect for the sowing of the seed of faith. He remarked, 'Nowhere is there a promise of a brighter future for the Church than in our own country ... here Christianity is promised a reception from an intelligent and free people that will bring forth a development of unprecedented glory'.<sup>17</sup> Not everyone would remain as convinced of this as Hecker, however. Nevertheless, the Paulist emphasis would remain fixed on the idea that the lives of ordinary Catholics, if lived in an exemplary manner, could act as the leaven that would 'raise' the wider

culture.<sup>18</sup> Well-lived Catholicism would be its own attraction and a major tool of evangelisation. This approach is clearly in evidence in the texts of the Paulist five-minute sermons. The themes of the sermons themselves, and the language employed in their delivery, afford the reader a fascinating window into what were considered by the Paulist preachers to be some of the most pressing issues for the spiritual lives of ordinary Catholics living in the city of New York in the late nineteenth century.

The Paulist sermons might be identified as, first and foremost, rallying cries to the lay Catholic faithful to engage with the modern world while, at the same time, avoiding becoming enslaved by it. They called their hearers to be witnesses of faith to their families and friends. In the simplest of acts could the piecemeal work of converting America begin. In a sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent, based on the line from Matthew 9:10 ('Behold, I send my angel before thy face'), Fr Algernon Brown, explaining that the word 'angel' meant messenger, stated that 'all of us ought to be messengers of God to our neighbour and to the world'.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, he claimed that 'we Catholics ought to be the *angels of God on earth* to those who are not Catholics ... By our lives we ought to show the world that the Catholic religion makes us better citizens, better and more honest men of business, and truer lovers of our neighbours and mankind'.<sup>20</sup> This had a particular resonance in late-nineteenth-century America when to be Catholic routinely involved being part of a little trusted minority.<sup>21</sup> But what did this mean in practical terms? Brown was addressing a congregation in which many of his hearers were employed in the service of non-Catholic families (the language is very much of its time, speaking of non-Christians as 'infidel families'). Here was an opportunity, Brown continued, to:

show by your fidelity to work, by your strict honesty, by your modest behaviour, that you belong to a religion that comes from God. By a seasonable word, by the loan of a book, by showing your horror of cursing and swearing

and of bad talk, you would be doing God's work, and showing to those outside the Church that there is *something* in your belief which makes you good.<sup>22</sup>

Not only should such action show Catholics to be good, according to Brown, but even that they are better than others and that it is their religion that makes them so.<sup>23</sup> Even the very youngest of Catholics could be evangelisers in their own home. Brown offers the example of the young child who abstained from meat on a Friday after hearing a sermon to this end, even though his less Gospel-greedy parents beat him as a result. Ultimately, his perseverance was to bring about his parents' conversion. This example becomes the *pièce de résistance* of Brown's sermon, appearing just before its close.

The exhortation to congregations to be missionaries in their daily lives was common in the Paulist five-minute sermons. An alternative sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent, based on the verse from Matthew 12:30 ('He who is not with me is against me'), also took up the question of how to conduct oneself when associating with persons 'whose mouths are full of impious and impure talk'; these were identified as 'either infidels, Protestants or bad Catholics'.<sup>24</sup> In this instance, in a concession to practicality (and perhaps also as a health and safety measure!) the sermon states that one is not bound on each and every occasion to reprove these particular sins; nevertheless, the author continues, 'I do say that you are sometimes'.<sup>25</sup> The crucial point of this sermon is perhaps best captured in the line, 'Do not, then, keep your faith and piety shut up in your prayer-books, only to be brought out when you are on your knees before God'.<sup>26</sup> The Paulists were quick to hold to account those who exhibited a devotion that was devoid of an evangelising mentality; in the third sermon offered for the same Sunday in Advent, the preacher was to remind his congregation that 'there is a great deal of piety nowadays, but it seems often to be of a very superficial kind'.<sup>27</sup> If the Paulists never construed themselves as so-called 'sacristy priests', neither did they wish for their congregations to keep their faith for the

church pews. Rather, as a sermon for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany (based on Matthew 13:33, 'The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven') puts it:

there are many Catholics who do not seem to understand the world has got to be converted, and that they themselves have got to do their share towards it; that they are part of that leaven with which our Lord meant that the world should be leavened ... every Catholic ought to be a missionary in his way and place ...<sup>28</sup>

Of course a poorly lived Catholicism could render one what might be termed an 'anti-missionary' to one's non-Catholic associates, thus causing them to stumble, or at the very least to dismiss from their minds any thoughts of enquiring further about the Catholic faith. The same sermon identifies the practice of swearing as one instance in which this might come about, sternly warning its hearers that 'if you are the cause, by this abominable habit of yours, of his [the interested Protestant, in this case] turning away in despair from the Church, most assuredly you will have to give an account for it when your soul shall come to be judged'.<sup>29</sup>

The perennial challenge for any preacher is to draw some connection between the world of the liturgy and the world of daily living. At many points, the Paulist sermons clearly identify a yawning disconnect between the two. For instance, in a sermon for the First Sunday of Lent (based on Matthew 4:4, 'Man liveth not by bread alone'), Brown addresses in particular all working men who spend their time earning a living while neglecting their souls. He warns them, 'Don't leave piety to priests, religious women and children, but let the men also be seen in the church and at the altar-rail'.<sup>30</sup> The reluctance of some men to receive Holy Communion is also highlighted in a sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost (based on Luke 14:18, 'And they began all at once to make excuse'), which treats of the objection 'Piety is very good for priests and religious; but I am living in the world and can't be good enough to go to Communion' with a

dismissive 'Humbug! ... are you more in the world than St Henry, Emperor of Germany; St Louis, King of France; the two Saints Elizabeth, of Hungary and Portugal? ... Don't make any more foolish excuses, then'.<sup>31</sup> The idea of the lay apostolate, which emerged in the later nineteenth century, was strongly supported by the Paulists. In a sermon for Septuagesima Sunday (the ninth Sunday before Easter), reflecting upon the verse 'Why stand ye here all day idle?' (Matthew 20:6), the following categories of persons are addressed:

... such among you as have means, or who are able to help your pastor by active service in the charge of the sick and the poor, who can teach the uninstructed, help along in sewing-schools and in forming sodalities and pious organizations of various kinds – to you also the cry comes 'why stand ye all the day idle?' Why, when called upon to bear a little part of the priest's burden, are so many people like an old gun that hangs fire? Why is it often so difficult for the priest to get the active co-operation of the lay people? ... How often they say 'I have no time'; 'What are the priests for anyhow?'; 'Let *them* look after these things ...'<sup>32</sup>

Here we have a call for active participation of the laity in the apostolate; yet, in the late nineteenth century (and, indeed, for much of the twentieth century) it would remain a sharing in the mission of the hierarchy.<sup>33</sup>

There were other ways to ensure that one's Catholicism was reflected in the manner in which one lived – and, in the main, these involved avoiding certain practices, situations and entertainments. Among the areas highlighted in a sermon for Gaudete Sunday (which Brown terms 'a little *let-up* ... on the solemn season of Advent') is that of fashion: 'when you deck yourselves out in clothing, in fashions which are beyond your means, unsuited to your calling as a Christian'; he calls such individuals 'nothing but jackdaws in peacock's feathers'.<sup>34</sup> This problem also extended to what was worn in church and Brown

comments in a sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (on Luke 19:46, 'My house is the house of prayer'), that 'the church is not the place to see what kind of clothes people have on, or to show off one's good clothes ... it is the place to dress neatly but not showily'.<sup>35</sup> A sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (based on Galatians 5:19, 'The works of the flesh are manifest') raised the issue of the 'dances which have become fashionable in the last few years', concluding that even the most scrupulous of Catholics seem to see no harm in them; and yet,

the harm is in the improper positions assumed in what are called round dances and which have lately been brought into almost all others. These mutual positions of the parties, these embraces – for that they simply are – are in themselves evidently contrary to modesty and decency ... every person pretending to be respectable would blush to be detected in such positions on any other occasion, unless united to the other party by very near relationship or marriage. And let no one say that fashion justifies them.<sup>36</sup>

This question of what was considered 'fashionable' exercised many of the early Paulists in their preaching. A sermon for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost declares that 'we hear a great deal nowadays, my dear brethren, about toleration. It is a thing which the nineteenth century takes a special pride in ... but if we examine this pretended toleration and charity we shall have to confess that it is simply a sham, having nothing whatever in it to make it deserve the name it takes'.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, elsewhere, in a sermon by Brown for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, which warned of the dangers of false prophets, he critiques a number of 'false' principles which he finds to be particularly prevalent in his own time: that religion is a matter of choice; that it doesn't matter what a man believes as long as he is good; that education is the business of the state; that religion has nothing to do with science; that a man cannot help his nature; that a young man is expected to sow his wild oats; that 'we are in the world and must go with it'. For Brown,

these were the principles of the 'false newspaper prophet' who offers for sale 'his filthy, licentious, and lying sheet'.<sup>38</sup> In a sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Brown complained of Catholics who never thought of reading 'a good religious book or a Catholic newspaper', but instead turned to 'the trashy, beastly stuff that is served up daily and weekly to pander to depraved appetites'.<sup>39</sup>

The five-minute sermons also comprise an important commentary on aspects of the social condition of American Catholics at the time. One of the great concerns of the Paulists was the problem of alcoholism within families. In a sermon on the verse 'No man can serve two masters' (Matthew 6:24) for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Brown calls alcohol the 'master of the poor', a 'devil' which takes a poor man's wages on a Saturday night

and from the bar-room he sends him home to be a scandal to his little children, and maybe to beat his wretched wife. Others this master sends from that liquor-store to steal, and so to prison and hopeless ruin; others he sends to brothels; many a one he afflicts with frightful diseases and sudden accidents, and so brings them to hell.<sup>40</sup>

The effects of such behaviour on families comprises the subject matter of a sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent on the verse, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to desolation' (Luke 11:17). Here, Brown depicts the drunken husband arriving home 'in a dull, heavy stupor, or else in a perfect fury of rage; he worries his wife, scares his children, disgraces himself; all his family shrink from him' and, in a passionate plea, urges his hearers 'For God's sake, *stop this evil war*. Stop these things which make the family miserable'.<sup>41</sup> However, alcoholism was just one aspect of a wider social problem which the Paulists identified in their sermons: the phenomenon of parental neglect of their children. This is clearly expressed in a sermon by Brown for the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas:

There are some who let their children eat just as they please, who pamper their appetites, who give them all kinds of unwholesome food. Such children will never be healthy. There are others who spend all their money on drink – who leave their poor little ones at home, moaning and starving with hunger ... no wonder that our city children are unhealthy; no wonder death sweeps them away as it does.<sup>42</sup>

Addressing parents directly, he states, 'you make your home uncomfortable by your crossness, by your curses, by your slovenly, untidy habits. Your children, from their earliest infancy, take to the streets'.<sup>43</sup> There they learn impurity, blasphemy and cursing and smoke, chew tobacco and flirt 'like little men and women'.<sup>44</sup> And, in a story which anticipates Dorothy Law Nolte's 1954 poem, 'Children Learn What They Live', Brown continues, 'You know the story of the old crab who said to her little ones "Why do you walk sideways?". "Suppose, mother", they said, "*you show us how to walk straight*".'<sup>45</sup>

But there were others, too, within the family household, to whom a duty of care was owed. Brown makes this clear in a sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, which took its cue from the account of the good centurion in Matthew 8:8 ('Only say the word and my servant shall be healed'). Here he takes the opportunity to ask how Catholics treat their hired help, especially in cases where they fall ill: 'You grumble at the inconvenience to which you are put, but what do you do to help them? ... Often a servant is made to work when bed would be a more fitting place to be than in the kitchen'.<sup>46</sup> However, the duty of care was expected to stretch beyond the temporal to the spiritual needs of their employees, seeing that they get to Mass, that they are afforded time to confess their sins, and that they receive Holy Communion when ill. The message was clear: 'God will require all these souls at your hands'; the corollary, of course, was that 'No Catholic man or woman ought to keep in their houses a servant who is negligent of his or her religious duties'.<sup>47</sup>

The language and rhetoric of the Paulist five-minute sermons was designed to hold the attention of the congregation, and their home-spun style must have been very effective. A sermon for Septuagesima Sunday, based on 1 Corinthians 9:24 ('So run that you may obtain the prize') refers to the contemporary 'great rage ... for walking, running, or footing it in any way', alluding to its health benefits and the fact that it is also good for the pocket (in a time of recession, such that it was).<sup>48</sup> This segues into a discussion of the journey that one must make on foot to heaven and the preparation or training needed for this. In a line which might be regarded by some as somewhat Pelagian in tone, it continues, 'If we are to get there [heaven], it must be by our own exertions'.<sup>49</sup> One also finds references to contemporary events, which were undoubtedly fresh in the minds of the congregation. In this way, the Paulists were perhaps Barthian before Barth in their approach to the combined use of newspapers and the scriptures. One such example is in a sermon for Christmas Eve which refers to a fire which occurred at the Brooklyn Theatre just weeks before, on 5 December 1876, claiming the lives of at least two hundred and seventy-eight people:

But a little while ago we read in the papers of an awful calamity – the burning of the Brooklyn Theatre ... brethren, some of those poor creatures who perished in the Brooklyn fire were so charred, so burnt that they could not be recognised. Take care that you do not become so disfigured by sin that at the last day God will say to you 'I know ye not'.<sup>50</sup>

The sermon went on to draw a comparison between returning to a life of sin and re-entering the theatre building and exposing oneself once more to the conflagration.<sup>51</sup> Sobering words for a Christmas Eve. In a further example, a sermon for Passion Sunday warned against the escalation of the passions in verbal quarrels that quickly get out of control. The potential ramifications of a careless word uttered in the white heat of

anger were captured in the line, 'A cow kicked a lantern in a stable, and Chicago was on fire for days', referring to the Great Fire of Chicago on 10 October 1871, some five years earlier, the cause of which has traditionally been attributed to 'Mrs O'Leary's cow'.<sup>52</sup>

However, there were many lighter moments for a congregation listening to a five-minute sermon. In a sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday (the Sunday before Ash Wednesday), which set out to explain what is meant by a fast-day (namely, the consumption of only one full meal), the preacher raises the objections of his audience, 'I will get very hungry and lose a good many pounds on such a scant diet as that', to which he replies, 'It wouldn't do some of you any harm to lose a few pounds; you will recover from it, I am sure'.<sup>53</sup> A sermon for the previous Sunday, which focused on the passage, 'A sower went out to sow his seed' (Luke 8:5), contended that 'you do not get any fruit from the word of God, though you often think your neighbours ought to. You say "I hope Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Brown, or Jones heard that"'.<sup>54</sup> In the Candlemas Day sermon it was observed that there are some Catholics who are not adequately equipped to welcome a priest arriving on a sick-call, having to borrow a candle from some pious neighbour and then having no candleholder to place it in, resorting to the use of a bottle instead. At this the preacher quipped, 'It would look much better, in some houses which we have to visit, if there were fewer bottles and more blessed candles'.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, a sermon on the calming of the storm episode in Matthew 8:26 opens with the lines, 'Some people are always worrying. It would seem that they must enjoy it, for they always find something to worry about ... they are so fond of their amusement that if they cannot get their favourite matter to worry about, they will take something else rather than not have any at all'.<sup>56</sup> In another effective image used in a sermon for the Feast of Pentecost, Brown explains that it does not automatically follow that the person who likes to pray really



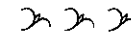
loves God very much (at least in the short term when he feels that he is rewarded for it): 'He may like it in the same way that a child would like the company of anyone who would give him candy. If the supply of candy stops his affection is gone'.<sup>57</sup>

The five-minute sermons of Algernon Brown and his Paulist confrères, short as they may have been by nineteenth-century preaching standards, nevertheless punched well above their weight. Although communicated in an accessible style and pitched at a broad audience, the challenges that they set before their hearers were not always so easy. For the Paulists, Catholicism solely lived between the covers of a prayer-book was not Catholicism at all. Indeed, one of its Christmas sermons castigates those who 'seem to imagine that it is enough to be a Catholic to be quite sure of one's salvation', associating it with the Reformation idea 'that a man may be justified by faith without good works'.<sup>58</sup> For the Paulists, the proof of true conversion entailed a real change of heart and a demonstrable change of one's habits. And they were sufficient realists to conclude that this was not always the case. In fact, in a sermon by Algernon Brown for Low Sunday, based on the 'Doubting Thomas' passage in John 20:25 and adapted from Matthias Faber SJ (1586–1653), the preacher likewise takes a sceptical approach to the individual sinner's repentance. It seems a fitting passage in which to conclude our discussion of the evangelising five-minute sermons of the Paulists and their emphasis on the necessity of a fully-lived Catholicism in late-nineteenth-century America:

I will not believe that you have come out of the grave of mortal sin unless I see in you the signs of a former crucifixion. First I want to see the print of the nails. I want to see in your hands and feet – that is, in your inclinations and passions – the print of the nails that the priest drove in, in the confessional. I want to see that these hands strike no more, handle no more bad books, pass no more bad money, write no more evil letters, sign no more fraudulent documents, are stretched forth no more unto evil things,

raised no more to curse ... I want to see these hands smoothing the pillows of the sick, giving drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, and raiment to the naked ... These feet, too – I must see them bearing you to the confessional regularly, taking you to Mass, carrying you to Benediction, bent under you in prayer. In a word, I must see in you the signs of a true conversion, or I will not believe that you have really risen from the death of sin ... Lastly, I want to put my hand into your side to see if your heart is wounded. I want to see if there is true contrition there ...<sup>59</sup>

So much more could be said of these sermons; the short account above hardly does them justice. Neither does the fact that they have been little worked on so far. It is to be hoped that this situation will soon be remedied.



#### Notes

1. Some of the most abiding memories I have of Fr Paddy Jones' time in Maynooth College revolve around the 12.15 p.m. liturgies of the Eucharist which he celebrated most weekdays in St Mary's Oratory, and especially the homilies he delivered. These were firmly rooted in the readings of the day and, although always suitably brief, were invariably thought-provoking. Although he did not speak from a text, Paddy always carried a small slip of paper with some short guiding notes. In concluding his few words, he would fold this tiny *aide-mémoire* over a couple of times and make his way back to the presider's chair. What was important for Paddy was clearly not the length of his preaching; the critical point was that it should be undertaken daily and should flow from the Word just proclaimed.
2. *Five-Minute Sermons for Low Masses on All Sundays of the Year* by the Priests of the Congregation of St Paul (New York: The Catholic Publication Society, 1879), iii.
3. For the early history of the society, see David J. O'Brien, *Isaac Hecker: An American Catholic* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992).
4. *Five-Minute Sermons*, vi.
5. *Ibid.*, iii.
6. *Ibid.*

7. Maurice Francis Egan, *Recollections of a Happy Life* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924), 118.
8. *Five-Minute Sermons*, iv.
9. *Catholic World*, Vol. 30, Issue 177 (December 1879), 426–7. See the database ‘Making of America’, [quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/bac8387.0030.177/430:14?g=moagrp;rgn=full+text;view=image;xc=1;q1=Five-Minute+Sermons](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/bac8387.0030.177/430:14?g=moagrp;rgn=full+text;view=image;xc=1;q1=Five-Minute+Sermons) (accessed 11 December 2013).
10. Rev. Alfred Young, ‘Street Preaching’, *Catholic World*, Vol. 46, issue 274 (January 1888), 502.
11. Newspapers. Boston College: [newspapers.bc.edu/cgi-bin/bostonsh?a=d&d=BOSTONSH18931216-01.2.21#](http://newspapers.bc.edu/cgi-bin/bostonsh?a=d&d=BOSTONSH18931216-01.2.21#) (accessed 11 December 2013).
12. *Catholic World*, Vol. 58, issue 348 (March, 1894), A26.
13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, Issue 177 (December 1879), 426.
14. It should be noted that in 2010 the print-on-demand publishing company, Kessinger Publishing, re-printed this volume of sermons as part of its Legacy Reprint Series.
15. In fact, it was the preface to this French translation, written not by Elliott but by Abbé Félix Klein of the Institut Catholique, which proved to be most controversial, suggesting that Hecker was a model priest of the future and idealising the new American way of Catholicism as the way forward. After Pope Leo XIII’s Apostolic Letter, *Testem benevolentiae*, which appeared on 22 January 1899 and which condemned ‘Americanism’ and specifically mentioned the French translation of Hecker’s biography as one of its roots, Klein submitted to papal authority and withdrew the volume from circulation. See Thomas T. McAvoy, ‘Abbé Klein and Americanism’, *The Review of Politics* 11: 3 (July 1949), 379–81.
16. It should be noted that already, according to one estimate, between 1831 and 1860 the number of converts to Catholicism, stood at some 57,400. See Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 109.
17. Timothy E. Byreley, *The Great Commission: Models of Evangelization in American Catholicism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 74–5.
18. This language is actually used in a five-minute sermon for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany. See the discussion of this below.
19. *Five Minute Sermons*, 27.
20. *Ibid.*, 28.
21. For a useful discussion of anti-Catholic sentiment during this period, see especially Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

22. *Five Minute Sermons*, 28.
23. *Ibid.*, 29.
24. *Ibid.*, 30–1.
25. *Ibid.*, 31.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 33.
28. *Ibid.*, 119.
29. *Ibid.*, 119–20.
30. *Ibid.*, 156.
31. *Ibid.*, 293–4.
32. *Ibid.*, 123–4.
33. For the history of the development of this concept, see especially Joseph Sasaki, *The Lay Apostolate and the Hierarchy* (Ottawa: St Paul’s University/University of Ottawa Press, 1967), 73–102.
34. *Five Minute Sermons*, 38.
35. *Ibid.*, 351.
36. *Ibid.*, 398.
37. *Ibid.*, 422–3.
38. *Ibid.*, 331–2.
39. *Ibid.*, 309.
40. *Ibid.*, 395–6.
41. *Ibid.*, 171–2.
42. *Ibid.*, 56–7. For a useful study of this area, see Samuel H. Preston and Michael R. Haines, *Fatal Years: Child Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). It argues, however, that the relatively high rates of childhood mortality of the period should not be attributed solely to parental neglect or socio-economic factors, but to the widespread communicable disease in an age when germ theory had not been widely accepted.
43. *Ibid.*, 57.
44. *Ibid.*, 58.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, 92.
47. *Ibid.*, 92–3.
48. *Ibid.*, 128.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 47–8. Vivid descriptions of the awful scenes as the fire raged were gathered from eyewitnesses and were carried in local newspapers such as the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Few people within the congregation would not have been familiar with the details of the tragedy.
51. *Ibid.*

- 52. Ibid., 190.
- 53. Ibid., 149.
- 54. Ibid., 137.
- 55. Ibid., 105.
- 56. Ibid., 98.
- 57. Ibid., 272.
- 58. Ibid., 50.
- 59. Ibid., 215-16.

## WHEN THE REFORM BECOMES PRAYER: THE STRANGE CASE OF 1 JANUARY



LIAM M. TRACEY OSM

In a volume honouring the contribution of Fr Patrick Jones to the celebration and study of liturgy in Ireland, mention must be made of his editing of the annual *Liturgical Calendar for Ireland*,<sup>1</sup> a task on which he collaborated with Fr Brian Magee, CM, and for which he took responsibility after the untimely death of the latter in 2003. This contribution is a study of the first day of the civil year which appears in the liturgical calendar, now entitled 'Mary, the Holy Mother of God' with the rank of solemnity, and is also named 'World Day of Peace' and 'Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord'.

### **Liturgical Cult to the Virgin Mary**

Alongside the cult and veneration of those early Christian heroes and witnesses, the martyrs, devotion to and veneration of Mary the mother of Jesus appears to have developed quite early in the history of the Christian Church. However, precisely when this devotion and veneration took a distinctive liturgical shape remains a matter of debate and conjecture.<sup>2</sup>

As the Second Vatican Council document on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, notes in article 66, a remarkable growth in piety toward Mary followed the declaration of the divine maternity of Mary at the Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>3</sup> Recent Church teaching has also reflected on this foundation of Marian piety. In the first document of the Council we find the