

HOMILY FOR THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF 'THE TABLET'

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

16th MAY 2015

ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

At the Monmouth Assizes on 8th January 1840, John Frost was found “guilty with mercy” of leading the march of the Chartists from the deprived valleys of South Wales to the city of Newport. The Chartists were demanding what we would call today their “human rights”. The march ended in a bloody confrontation with the military in which 22 Chartists died. One of the commanders of the soldiers was described as “...*a fine peninsular volunteer.*” His name was Captain Stack!

The years between 1840 and 1850 marked the second industrial revolution. They were years of social and political foment. The revolutions of 1848 transformed Europe. It was into that maelstrom that ‘The Tablet’ was born in 1840. Its publication was another sign that the Catholic Church in this country was emerging into the daylight, not least because of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The need of a forum to inform people of the spiritual, theological and social teachings of the Church, resulted in the publication of a journal which reflected the desire of John Henry Newman for “...*a laity, not arrogant, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well instructed laity...*” (1)

It is said “*Architecture is often as good a guide as any to the state of a civilisation and its cultural life, and the Church must not be an exception to that rule.*” (2) ‘God’s Architect’ Augustus Welby Pugin, was at the peak of his powers during those early years of The Tablet. He championed the Gothic

Revival as the norm for the revitalised Catholicism of the 19th century and beyond. Yet his radical influence on modern architecture, not least in the design of English homes, is little recognised today. A recent Tablet article reminded us that (Pugin) *"...was an enthusiastic if not uncritical Tablet reader"*. Six months after the first issue he said *"I had hoped it would be a catholic journal but it ends Like everything else in Modern Liberalism"*. Pugin continued to read 'The Tablet' despite once describing it as *"... merely a vehicle of Discord and Scandal"*. (3) He was not the only one who found it difficult to understand the concept of 'critical loyalty'. Commitment to orthodoxy is not something passive but is, in the words of G.K. Chesterton *"...that wild truth, reeling but erect"*.

"When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean. Neither more or less" said Humpty Dumpty. *"The question is"* replied Alice, *"whether you can make words mean so many different things"*.

Words and labels, even conservative and liberal ones, cannot plumb the depths of our attempts to explore the meaning of things and their purpose. Perhaps most difficult of all is how to comprehend the revelation of God, how it is to be proclaimed and mediated, how to be reported in the revolutionary world of Information Technology. Catherine Pepinster has written *"Many stories about the Church are not self explanatory. They require a wider context, a longer historical perspective and a grasp of the theology underlying them"*. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in the encounter between the Church and the World, explored so powerfully in the decree 'Gaudium et Spes' of the Second Vatican Council. *"The cross stands still whilst the world turns"* – the motto of the Carthusian Order, takes us to the heart of the theology of St. Paul. *"The language of the cross may be illogical to those who are not on the way to salvation"*. (1 Cor 1:18) In reporting the implications of international conflict, in analysing the persecution and suffering of the innocent, in supporting the healing hands of those who commit their lives to justice in the cause of peace, 'The Tablet' continues to analyse and explain *"the language of the cross"* in the conflicts of our broken world.

At the Offertory of this Mass we shall hear Roxanna Panufnik's setting of words from the Wisdom of Solomon in the Book of Proverbs. *"Write my words on the tablet of your heart"*. 'The Tablet' is an analogy for discerning wisdom and right conduct. 'The tablet of your heart' surely refers to the mind and to the heart, to that true inner self which recognises who I am in the sight of God. And if I am a person of infinite dignity and worth in God's sight, the moral imperative demands I invest others with the same human dignity, respect and rights I expect for myself. The theory of that truth may be read about in theology textbooks and learned journals, on digital tablets and the multitude of media outlets. But the motet at Communion by the Welsh composer William Matthias will remind us *"...the knowledge of the holy is understanding"*. This understanding through holiness can only be discovered when "Heart speaks to Heart" – and I always add "In the silence of the heart". Just one reason why the words of "The Living Spirit" column in this week's edition are of equal importance to those of the editorial which *"...celebrates the achievements (of migrants) and mark this gradual and subtle blending of identities"* - surely the aim and achievement of 'The Tablet' over the last 175 years.

- (1) The Present Position of Catholics in England – John Henry Newman
- (2) Newman and the Laity – Paul Chavasse
- (3) Built on Emancipation – Timothy Brittain-Catlin