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## A knight in the trenches: Owen Francis Dudley and the Catholic battle against modernity

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# **A Knight in the Trenches:**

**Owen Francis Dudley and the Catholic Battle Against Modernity**

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in Theology

by

Sir Owen D. Kubik, KCHS

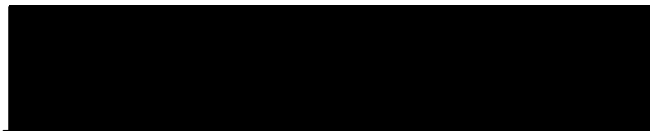
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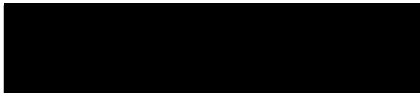
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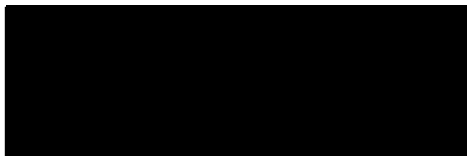
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## ABSTRACT

### A KNIGHT IN THE TRENCHES: OWEN FRANCIS DUDLEY AND THE CATHOLIC BATTLE AGAINST MODERNITY

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Rev. Owen Francis Dudley was one of the most prominent Catholic novelists of the 1920s through 1940s yet is largely forgotten today. Dudley wrote numerous novels and articles of Catholic apologetics in response to the challenges facing the Church in the aftermath of the First World War. He combined the virtues of Victorian chivalry and the English Catholic imagination with his experiences in the Great War to forge a Christological theology which stresses the intimate connection between the natural and supernatural worlds. Dudley's theology of the supernatural Christological drama of existence was not only the foundation of his work as a crusading Catholic apologist but also serves to address the universal questions of modern life. We focus on three key questions Dudley addresses - the Catholic response to modern warfare, the nature of the priesthood, and the problem of suffering - in an attempt to recapture Dudley's work and examine how it bears lasting meaning.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks are due to the fine professors at the University of Dayton and the International Marian Research Institute who encouraged and educated me throughout my theological studies.

In a special way, I thank Rev. James L. Heft, S.M., former Provost and University Professor of Faith and Culture at Dayton and now President of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California. Father Heft encouraged me to continue my studies almost 25 years after receiving my undergraduate degree. Without his guidance and inspiration, I doubt I would have ever undertaken this work.

Most of all, I thank my beloved wife, Kimberly. Without her constant help and support, it would have been impossible to finish this degree. Suffice to say there are few wives who would drive 800 miles in one day to get their husband to class on time!

*Dedicated to Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom*

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## Prologue

If Owen Francis Dudley's parents had chosen a different first name for their child, then this thesis would never have been written.

The author of this thesis first came across Father Dudley's novels in 2002. The owner of a business which bought and sold rare and collectible books, he purchased the entire library of the defunct St. Charles Seminary, the former major seminary for the Society of the Precious Blood. As he worked amidst this library in the farmland of northwestern Ohio, he came across a series of novels from the 1920s and 1930s by Owen Francis Dudley. He was intrigued by both the author's first name and the titles about a Masterful Monk. He was well-versed in other literature of the era, having extensively studied such authors as John Buchan and Albert Payson Terhune, and the very physical design of the Dudley books reminded him of them. The style of the books was familiar as well and reminiscent of many other early Twentieth Century novels he enjoyed.

The Dudley books were interesting. The plots at times were sheer melodrama, but the theology was straight-forward and the character of the Masterful Monk well-drawn. He started collecting these novels and came to realize that there was still a healthy market for Dudley in the out-of-print book world. Moreover, several of Dudley's novels had been recently reprinted and the long-dead priest had become an internet favorite of conservative Catholics, especially those who followed the Tridentine Rite. Dudley, who



always wrote as a Catholic first and insisted his works be well-grounded in Catholic philosophy and theology<sup>1</sup>, has found a modern audience among those who seek a strong, self-confident voice expressing the finest in the Catholic tradition.

As his academic career continued, the author decided to examine Owen Francis Dudley and seek to understand his legacy. In his thesis, he relied primarily on Dudley's nine major books, supplemented by various pamphlets and magazine articles the priest wrote. These works showcase Dudley's theological thought and well-express his major themes. Unfortunately, there is no extant archive on Father Dudley and the official archives of the Diocese of Westminster contain almost nothing on him. The background information on Dudley's era and context was derived from secondary sources the author judged to be both germane and historically accurate, regardless of their age. There is very little secondary material on Dudley himself other than a few articles and a pair of unpublished M.A. theses almost a half-century old. The author also had occasion to use various theological works which provide insight into Dudley's thought.

This paper is an attempt to understand who Owen Francis Dudley was and how he fits into the history of his times. But more than simply being a study of an historical figure, it is a study of those aspects of his work which still speak to us today. Dudley's theology represents the best Catholic thought of his era, a way of faith and theology which has been too oft forgotten since the Second Vatican Council. Father Dudley is not a mere archaic period piece; he is a vibrant author whose theology bears both relevance to us

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Romig, *The Book of Catholic Authors: Second Series* (Grosse Pointe MI: Walter Romig & Co., 1943), p. 85.

today and answers to our contemporary issues. By understanding the context of his times and the background of his thought, we will better understand his theology and its universal, timeless appeal.

Besides, anyone with a name like Owen Francis Dudley deserves to be remembered.

# Chapter I

*"Write out of your own heart, out of your own imagination, out of your own knowledge; out of a full heart, a vivid imagination, and a deep knowledge."*

*- Owen Francis Dudley*

From the crucible of the First World War poured forth the writings of Owen Francis Dudley. World War One, or The Great War as it was known at the time, was the seminal point of the Twentieth Century. In the horrific melding of modern technology and outdated military tactics came not only the deaths of millions but also the death of much of what Western Culture took for granted. The Great War was a crucible which created a new world populated by the survivors of the older culture who had emerged only to face new challenges.<sup>2</sup> In 1914, Father Dudley was simply another young Anglican priest in London, toying with the idea of joining the Roman Catholic Church. By war's end five years later, he had made the leap to Rome and, as a newly ordained Roman Catholic priest, had served three years on the front. When he returned, it was to a world that was rapidly changing. For Father Dudley, this was nothing more than another clarion call to

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<sup>2</sup>Numerous works have studied the effect of the First World War on modern society. Among many, we acknowledge Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 3-35.

action, this time in battle against the forces of modern secularism. As a young man, he had learned the importance of the chivalric virtues required of an English gentleman. During the Great War and its aftermath, these lessons in virtue were tested in suffering. Owen Francis Dudley combined the virtues of Victorian chivalry and the English Catholic imagination in the crucible of the Great War to forge a Christological theology which stresses the intimate connection between the natural and supernatural worlds. Dudley's theology of the supernatural Christological drama of existence was not only the foundation of his work as a crusading Catholic apologist but also serves to address the universal questions of modern life.

The world into which Father Dudley was born was the gentility of late Victorian England. When Owen Francis Dudley entered life in 1882, the British Empire was nearing its zenith and the newspapers were constantly filled with the bold exploits of brave Englishmen in exotic, far-off lands. The early 1880s alone saw British soldiers adding to the Empire in South Africa, Egypt, and the Ashanti Coast, culminating with the frantic attempts to rescue Charles George Gordon, the hero of Khartoum. The efforts would ultimately fail and Gordon would enter the pantheon of heroic Victorians who were always not only Christians but gentlemen as well<sup>3</sup>. The late Victorians were "vigorous, self-confident, prideful, determined, and opinionated peoples"<sup>4</sup> who "concealed behind stiff manners and rigid morals a violent, restless energy" which

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<sup>3</sup>Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 229.

<sup>4</sup>Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (NY: Harper & Row, 1972), p. xvii.

blended with their “unbending attitudes” to create the conviction that “British institutions and British customs, beliefs and doctrines were the best in the world - not only for Britons, but for all the other peoples of the earth as well.”<sup>5</sup> In practical terms, this led to a nation which was constantly finding itself embroiled in one colonial conflict after another, firmly self-justified in whatever course of action it chose.

Historian James Morris characterizes the world of Dudley’s youth as one where the predominant idea in popular culture was that of seeking after glory. To be sure, the Empire had a strong profit motive for some businessmen, but the attraction of glory was much stronger across class lines: “The means of profit were for the few, but the hope of glory was almost universal.”<sup>6</sup> Owen Francis Dudley would have been a teenage boy at the Monmouth School in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee and the height of Britain’s imperial power. As Morris puts it:

*The Empire was at its zenith, the Crown glittered as never before, magnificently in the center of the world lay England, home and glory. With such a background of national self-esteem, it was difficult not to be pugnacious. The late Victorians...had plenty of elan, and the history of the past century had inspired them with a happy contempt for all adversaries. Their society was stable. Their inventive genius was everywhere acknowledged. The superiority of their arms seemed to have been permanently established...”*<sup>7</sup>

Along with this national glory came a thirst for personal glory. For some this was found in warfare and exploration but, for others, it was found in a burning zeal to shoulder the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, pp. 2-3.

<sup>6</sup>James Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire* (NY: Harvourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 115.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 117.

famed white man's burden. One of the Victorian Era's great heroes was the missionary David Livingstone who had poured out his life in Africa helping to convert the natives to Christianity. The elimination of the African slave trade was widely considered one of Britain's greatest achievements<sup>8</sup> and it was generally felt that Britain was specially favored by God as the agent of Divine Providence.<sup>9</sup> However, this blush of pride concealed a truer picture, that of an Empire concerned mainly with power and wealth, one Morris calls "an agnostic political structure" where the Church of England stood for Authority and religion was at the service of secular power.<sup>10</sup>

Victorian England was a nation which took its Christianity for granted and which considered regular Church attendance part of the normal behavior required in civilized society. For much of society, religion was less a matter of a vibrant faith and more one of social mores in a land where "the national household god was respectability"<sup>11</sup> as one author later recalled. Other memoirs of the era confirm that the most important aspect of religion was its connection to respectable behavior. One writer recalls his family going to some lengths to attend church at London's more fashionable downtown churches where the congregation would look with disdain on newcomers as strangers, "the somewhat resentful term applied to chance-worshippers in those days", especially when they sat in

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 500.

<sup>11</sup>R.D. Symons, *Many Trails* (Toronto: Longmans Canada, 1963), p. 3.

the pew the author's family normally occupied.<sup>12</sup> Charles Darwin's granddaughter, Gwen Raverat, recalled the importance of religion in supporting the code of gentlemanly behavior which society demanded. Raverat castigates her parents' generation for not being candid enough to admit that the code of behavior required of a gentleman or lady was "quite as important as [the Christian moral code]. They believed in it profoundly, much more passionately" than in Christian morality.<sup>13</sup> Christian faith was seemingly fair and widespread on the surface; time would prove that it lacked the deep roots needed to persevere in adversity.

The code which Gwen Raverat so despised was the bedrock of the late Victorian era, a system of behavior which was widely influential, particularly among the upper echelon of society. It was nothing less than a modern-day version of chivalry, adapted to the peculiar mores and circumstances of the Nineteenth Century. The Victorian code of chivalry was the key to proper living and the basis for judging how one should behave. The question in any circumstance on how to behave had the simple answer not of "What would Jesus do?" but rather "What would a Gentleman do?". Historian Mark Girouard explains it thus:

*...how gentlemen lived and died was partly determined by the way in which they believed knights had lived and died. All gentlemen knew they must be brave, show no signs of panic or cowardice, be courteous and protective to women and children, be loyal to their comrades and meet death without flinching. They knew it because they had learnt the code of the gentleman in a multitude of different ways, through advice, through example, through what they had been taught at school or by their parents, and through endless stories of chivalry, daring,*

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<sup>12</sup>Gilbert Thomas, *Calm Weather* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1930), pp. 95-96.

<sup>13</sup>Gwen Raverat, *Period Piece* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1953), pp. 216-217.

*knights, gentlemen and gallantry which they had read or been told by way of history books, ballads, poems, plays, pictures, and novels.*<sup>14</sup>

It was this code which shaped the expectations of how one should behave and to a remarkable extent, it worked. For example, in the famed sinking of the *HMS Titanic* in 1912, many men truly did die as chivalrous gentlemen, living by the code of “women and children first” and refusing to enter lifeboats. While some might question the effectiveness of their response to the disaster or the social elitism of the first class passengers towards those in steerage, it remains that those who died as chivalrous knights were lionized as heroes and those men who escaped on the lifeboats lived the remainder of their lives in social disgrace.<sup>15</sup> As Girouard shows in his work, the code of chivalry was widespread in the late Victorian era and the young Owen Francis Dudley could no more have escaped it than a boy today could escape television.

Dudley attended Monmouth School in southeastern Wales and from there went on to study for the Anglican Ministry at Lichfield Theological College and Durham University.<sup>16</sup> Dudley was apparently following in the family tradition, as both his father and grandfather were ordained ministers.<sup>17</sup> He himself was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1911 but only four short years later would join the Roman Catholic Church. Dudley

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<sup>14</sup>Girouard, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Walter Lord, *The Night Lives On* (NY: William Morrow, 1986), pp. 211-226.

<sup>16</sup>John A. O'Brien, ed., *The Road to Damascus* (Garden City: Doubleday 1949), p. 134.

<sup>17</sup>According to information from the Dudley family posted on an internet website: <http://boards.ancestry.netscape.com/thread.aspx?o=20&m=48.50.322.324.327.332&p=surnames.dudley> (accessed 23 July 2010).



detailed the story of his conversion at length in the oft-printed essay *What I Found*.<sup>18</sup>

Dudley was raised with what one might consider the normal Protestant aversion to Roman Catholicism. One of his earliest memories was attending a magic-lantern show which included images of an old man dressed in white; when the young boy asked his mother who the man was, he learned it was the "Pope of Rome" of whom there was "something fishy".<sup>19</sup> This attitude that Catholics were somewhat suspicious was reinforced at Monmouth where Dudley was taught how the evil Catholic Church held England in its sway until the "Glorious Reformation" and "Good Queen Bess" freed mens' minds from Romish tyranny.

It would be at Litchfield, however, where Dudley first had doubts about his Anglican roots. He found his professors contradicting one another on the basic tenets of Christian doctrine while his peers were constantly arguing over the fundamentals of their faith. He described himself as feeling "like an addled egg" with the faint realization he had learned no theology.<sup>20</sup> During these years, he made his first visit to Rome while on vacation. He notes being impressed by the saintly visage of Pope Pius X who passed by quite close; indeed, the entire experience clearly moved him and he noted in his diary that he "can quite imagine a susceptible young man being carried away by all this".<sup>21</sup> The brief vacation moved Dudley more than he was aware at the time.

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<sup>18</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, "What I Found" in *The Road to Damascus*, pp. 136-149.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, p. 137.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid*.

Following his ordination, Dudley was first assigned to a small country parish for a year and then to a parish in London's East End. Here the enthusiastic young cleric discovered that "the vast mass of East Enders had no interest at all in the religion that I professed."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Dudley was strongly attracted to the sincerity of the common laborers he worked amongst - an attraction which would prove him in good stead in his later years where he was known for his touch in preaching to the working class.<sup>23</sup> It was from the working men of his parish that he learned that his religion was rejected because it lacked authority - when "Low Church" Anglicans preached one thing and "High Church" Anglicans the opposite while both claimed Divine Authority, then how could one respect the Anglican Church?

It was this question of authority which drove Dudley into the Catholic Church. He began to examine the Anglican Church and found it a mass of contradictions: one could be an extremist on both sides of a doctrinal question and no bishop would say yea or nay; indeed, if a bishop did make a statement, they were ignored by both laity and clergy. If the Holy Spirit was guiding the Church, Dudley concluded, then the Holy Spirit was the "author of contradictions".<sup>24</sup> Dudley's studies led him to consider the claims of the Catholic Church. After several months of wrestling with this issue, it was clear to him that "as far as Holy Scripture, history, and reason were concerned, the Catholic Church

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>23</sup>*The Road to Damascus*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>24</sup>"*What I Found*", p. 139.

could prove her claim to be God's infallible teacher up to the hilt."<sup>25</sup> It was characteristic of Dudley's character that his reason convinced, his will followed. Brushing objections aside, Dudley joined the Catholic Church and was ordained a Catholic priest in September 1917.

Dudley's conversion story reveals a number of traits which influenced his writings and theology. These include a willingness to sacrifice all in following what he believed to be God's Will; an emphasis on the importance of reason in determining behavior; and the need for man to submit himself to Divine Authority. These concepts are found throughout his theological work where they blend with his late Victorian background to develop the core theology he offers to the Church today. As such, they deserve a closer examination in how they play out in his conversion.

Once Dudley was convinced of the church's claim to infallibility, he did not hesitate to act upon it. Dudley notes he took his concerns over the authority of the Anglican Church to a respected fellow clergyman who he knew to be both "sincere beyond question...and a man of deep spiritual piety."<sup>26</sup> However, he found the man's arguments did not answer his theological doubts but rather addressed the practical aspects of converting: the loss of family and friends, the financial cost, even the chance that he might not be ordained as a Catholic priest. It would be, he was made to understand, an action which would hurt his parents deeply. Dudley admitted his entire being revolted against these outcomes: how could he be a traitor to his Church and his family? For one raised in late Victorian

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 143.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

England, this would have been a struggle indeed. The code of chivalry demanded loyalty of its adherents and to be considered a traitor to Church and family was tantamount to betraying one's nation. It would have made Dudley a blackguard of the foulest type, a Mordred to King Arthur. Dudley was no doubt familiar with the boy's adventure books of the prolific author, G.A. Henty who stressed loyalty as one of the fundamental English chivalric virtues in his works.<sup>27</sup> To be an Englishman was to be loyal to one's kin and country and to appeal to a higher loyalty was a difficult task indeed.

To become Catholic, then, was no easy matter for Dudley. It demanded sacrifice, a willingness to lose friends, family, prestige, honour...in short, to lose all that was dearest to an English gentleman. Yet Dudley no doubt would have taken to heart Christ's command to leave all one has to follow Him. A Victorian gentleman would also have learned to put his all into everything he did and Dudley, not one to settle for half-measures, took this attitude to heart. He resolved that the issue of determining the authority of the Catholic Church vis-a-vis the Anglican would be a "fight to the finish" in which no worldly concerns would hold sway.<sup>28</sup> With the bravado of a knight sallying into battle, Dudley entered into an intensive study of the Catholic Church's claim to infallibility. Once convinced, he put aside all concerns of a worldly nature and acted. Dudley was not one to tear himself apart on the horns of a dilemma; once convinced of the right, he acted upon it. With the same simplicity which marked the heroes of Henty's

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<sup>27</sup>Guy Arnold, *Held Fast for England: G.A. Henty, Imperialist Boys' Writer* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980).

<sup>28</sup>"*What I Found*", p. 142.

novels, Dudley knew the right and followed it.

Dudley did not write any further autobiographical material and it is unknown to what extent his decision to leave the Anglican Church affected his relationships with friends and family. Certainly, the hero of his major novels, Fr. Anselm Thornton, is semi-autobiographical and at least some of the incidents in the novels are taken from Dudley's life. It is worth noting that Fr. Thornton is pictured as a man apart - while he interacts with childhood acquaintances who re-enter his adult life, Thornton has no family to speak of and his parents are mentioned only in a few passages wherein he recalls his childhood. It is probably fair to assume that just like his literary protagonist, Father Dudley also was a man whose family was the Church. In fact, he notes in *What I Found* that in becoming Catholic, he "found a loving Mother who supplies my every human need."<sup>29</sup> The spiritual compensations of Catholicism apparently in some way made up for his human losses. In any case, just as one would expect from a chivalrous knight, Dudley would have kept the proverbial stiff upper lip. Human nature, however, would dictate that he must have felt the loss of his parents deeply. There is no doubt that leaving the Anglican Church was a true sacrifice for the young curate. This experience would combine with his experiences in the First World War to develop the theology of sacrifice which so permeates his writings.

Yet if joining the Church entailed loss, it brought great consolation as well. Dudley is clear of the benefits and notes them in his conversion story: a personal relationship with Christ, a knowledge of truth and life, a deep compassion for sinners, and, in short, "the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid, p. 149.

kingdom of Heaven on earth. The city of God.”<sup>30</sup> These gifts which Dudley received in joining the Church would be those which would dictate his life’s work. The continual goal of his novels, speeches, and essays was to convert men to following Christ. To follow Christ is all that is important for Christ truly is the pearl of great price. One learns to follow Christ through the Church He founded, the Church which thereby carries His authority and which alone can reveal the fullness of truth and life. It is the Church which taught Dudley compassion for those outside and a burning zeal to bring these lost sheep back into the fold. This zeal for sharing the gift he received in his conversion would shape Dudley’s future work and dictate the direction of his theology.

For Dudley, however, conversion was not simply an emotional decision, and his zeal is more than the simple flame of a religious zealot. It is important to note that his decision to convert was one firmly based in reason. Throughout his life, Dudley would stress the reasonableness of his positions and the function of human reason in determining moral behavior. One such example can be found in his 1928 attack on spiritualism, *The Abomination in Our Midst: An Expose of Spiritualism*.<sup>31</sup> In this pamphlet, Dudley argues that the rise of spiritualism is perfectly understandable in that it reflects both the decay of Protestantism in England and the slaughter of World War One: those who lost loved ones in the Great War seek to know their eternal fate but a weak Protestant faith is of no help to them. Using the evidence of scientific researchers into spiritualism such as Sir William

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, *The Abomination in Our Midst: An Expose of Spiritualism* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1928).

Barrett and Hereward Carrington, Dudley concludes that ninety-eight percent of spiritualism is clearly mere fakery. However, this leaves the remaining two percent for which there is "abundant and well-grounded evidence" of legitimate spiritual phenomena.<sup>32</sup> The question for Dudley was not whether spiritualist phenomena could occur but, rather, where did such occurrences originate? It is here that he applies reason to the issue of communicating with the dead. When one examines the nature of the conversations held at seances, one is struck by their trivialness. It is unreasonable, Dudley asserts, to believe that the "holy souls in the hands of God" would be sent to earth to communicate in such a banal manner.<sup>33</sup> In fact, it is an insult both to the souls of the dead and to the Lord Himself to think they would communicate through mediums at seances.<sup>34</sup> As the Church teaches that a soul can only animate its own body, reason shows that the seer must be animated by an outside source which could animate a third party's body. Such a being must therefore be one of pure spirit such as an angel. As it is again unreasonable that an angel under God's command would communicate banalities at a seance, it follows that the seer must be communicating with a fallen angel. Therefore, one logically concludes that spiritualism is the work of the Devil. Indeed, as Dudley points

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p. 11. To the modern reader, Dudley's claim may seem absurd and even childish. However, it should be noted that the truth of seances and spiritualism was widely debated in his era and the focus of legitimate scientific enquiry. Both Carrington and Barrett were respected scientists of their day.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup>Interestingly enough, Dudley's argument that the banality of both the communications and the purported seers proves they are false is the same as is often used against the alleged visions of Our Lady in Medjugorje.

out, this can also be inferred from Catholic theology as well. Like the Devil, spiritualism is opposed to God, as it teaches one to rely on pagan belief and practices rather than faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, spiritualism is a malicious insult against God and, Dudley concludes, "The wise will shun the seance-room...as they would shun a den of adders."<sup>35</sup> For Dudley, this entire argument is a simple exercise in the use of one's God-given human reason.

This same emphasis on reason is found in Dudley's conversion. There was no great Divine Illumination in one blinding moment nor a groundswell of emotional rapture. Instead, Dudley emphasizes the intellectual nature of his conversion. From the beginning, his doubts were based on the illogicalness of competing factions within a church both claiming to have divine authority. Reason tells one that if a church is filled with internal contradictions, then this church is either deliberately confused by God or it is not divinely inspired and led. Since the former possibility is illogical, then the latter must be true. When faced with questions such as this, Dudley turned to study and conversation to find answers. He would read widely, particularly among the Church Fathers. He would share his doubts and concerns with other Anglican clergy whom he respected. Nevertheless, his continued study led him to the logical conclusion that the Catholic Church's doctrine of infallibility was the key to the Church's claim to be the true, authentic Christian Church. If the Catholic Church was not infallible, Dudley reasoned, then it has no guarantee to be true. Therefore, if Christianity is "a mere matter of human opinion, then there is no obligation upon any living soul to believe it. Why should I stake my immortal soul upon

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<sup>35</sup>*The Abomination in Our Midst*, p. 27.



human opinion?"<sup>36</sup> The doctrine of infallibility, he learned, gave the Catholic Church divine protection against teaching falsehood. Protestant churches, he reasoned, "claiming the Holy Ghost and presenting a jumble of contradictions" in effect declare that "God *does* speak untruth."<sup>37</sup>

Dudley notes that the clergymen whose advice he sought counseled him by arguing that a reasonable man could not be expected to submit to the medieval superstitions taught by the Church, or in effect, to the idea that any religion can claim infallibility. However, Dudley considered how men routinely submit to infallible truths, such as the laws of physics. It is supremely rational to do so and would be most irrational to argue these laws are not true. If such laws can apply to nature, then is it not reasonable that they apply in the spiritual realm as well?

For Dudley, in fact, the issue is not so much one of reason as of the will. Anyone who investigates the Church's claims without "bias, prejudice, and preconceptions" will see their reasonableness clearly.<sup>38</sup> The catch is for the will to follow the dictates of reason by surrendering itself to the Will of God. This step is the one which keeps many Anglicans from joining the Catholic Church as it is:

*no easy task for the Protestant whose whole outlook in the spiritual direction has been determined by likes and dislikes, who has been accustomed to a religion that costs him little and claims the right of private judgment, who has detested being told what to believe and what to do; in a word, who has been habitually indisposed, mentally and spiritually, for anything approaching unconditional*

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<sup>36</sup>"*What I Found*", p. 143.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

*submission of the will.*<sup>39</sup>

For Dudley, however, the power of reason was a strong enough force to compel him to overcome his fears and prejudices and, with the aid of Divine Grace, to go forward and submit to the authority of Rome. Reason shows the truth of God's teaching and demands that the will be honest enough to follow her dictates.

After joining the Catholic Church in 1915, the thirty-three year old Dudley went to Rome to study for the priesthood at the Collegio Beda. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1917. By this time, World War One was in its third bloody year and the new priest was assigned as a chaplain to the British Army. Amidst the horrors of the trenches, Dudley would learn even more about the importance of submission to the Divine Will and the meaning of sacrifice. Dudley himself was wounded in action during the war and apparently underwent a number of horrific events, based on the experiences described in his novels. It was the combination of his late Victorian upbringing, his war experiences, and his firm belief in the Catholic Church's gift of infallibility which would shape the remainder of his life and work.

And what of this work? In the years following the Great War, Dudley became a best-selling author, an internationally-known lecturer, and one of the most influential voices in the Catholic Church. The gist of his fame came from his hugely popular "Problems of Human Happiness" series, a set of six novels and one theological treatise which dealt with the issues facing modern man in the early Twentieth Century...or at least those as seen through the eyes of one forceful, dynamic Catholic priest. This core of work would

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid, p. 147.

be joined by several books of essays, a posthumous novel, a study of the modern world, and numerous magazine articles and essays. He was editor of *The Catholic Gazette*, author of a popular newspaper column in London's *Daily Mirror*, and superior of the Catholic Missionary Society as well! These alone would have created a formidable body of work but Dudley became an accomplished public speaker as well, traveling as far away as Australia and the United States on the lecture tour circuit. As part of the Catholic Missionary Society, Dudley's life was a whirlwind of preaching and lecturing on "platforms, pulpits, public halls, and the out-of-doors" throughout the English-speaking world.<sup>40</sup> In the era between the wars, he was without question one of the best-known Catholic voices in the English-speaking world.. He was praised for his "natural capacity for mingling sincerely and honestly with all classes of people" and for writing books which appealed to people unlikely to ever read pure theology.<sup>41</sup> His books were widely reviewed in the Catholic press where he was described as a "genuine artist" who "pierces to the core of life and most deftly points its true meaning."<sup>42</sup>

It is not known what led Father Dudley to chose a literary career, but we find his first book published in 1924 with *Will Men Be Like Gods?*<sup>43</sup> The book no doubt benefitted from its introduction by G. K. Chesterton, who by this time was already a popular and

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<sup>40</sup>"Father Dudley," *The Catholic Bookman*, (October 1938), p. 36.

<sup>41</sup>Alice Louise Le Fevre, "Owen Francis Dudley and the Philosophical Novel", *Catholic Library World* Vol. 14, No. 7 (April 1943), p. 196.

<sup>42</sup>Review of *The Shadow on the Earth* in *Catholic World* Vol. CXXV, No. 745 (April 1927), p. 130.

<sup>43</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, *Will Men Be Like Gods?* (NY: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924).

influential author as well as a recent high-profile convert to Catholicism. The Chesterton-Dudley connection did not last, however, and there were no further collaborative efforts between the two, despite their status as two of Britain's leading Catholic figures in the inter-war period.

While it may be unclear why Dudley chose to write books, there is no doubt as to his motivation. *Will Men Be Like Gods?* is a direct response to H.G. Wells' popular utopian romance novel *Men Like Gods*. Wells, best known today for his earlier science fiction classics such as *War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Time Machine*, was better known in the 1920s as one of the leaders of the Progressive Socialist anti-religious movement, akin to Richard Dawkins in our own era. Wells wrote numerous Utopian works which expressed a humanistic philosophy which he called the Open Conspiracy movement.<sup>44</sup> As expressed in his book of the same name, Wells argued that organized religion had collapsed in the Modern World and needed to be replaced by a new religion, an "unorganized, uninstitutionalized religion of commitment to the collective being of humanity".<sup>45</sup> In a Wellsian utopia, an educated elite oligarchy rules humanity. Through education, humanity is freed from its attachments to the superstitions and religious prejudices which have hindered human progress. Wells believed such human evolution would come via the dedication of a small elite which would selflessly work for the betterment of all humanity. This elite would continually grow by teaching its ideals to

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<sup>44</sup>W. Warren Wagar, *H.G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 164-165.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid*, p. 117.

future generations until it reached that critical mass where it would first rule society, then dominate it, and eventually be the entirety of society. Until this Utopia is realized, however, the common man cannot be trusted: rather, he must be told what he wants and then given it.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, a dictatorship is the preferable form of government until such time as government is no longer needed. As Wells stated of the ideal society in *Men Like Gods*, "Decisions in regard to any particular matter were made by the people who knew most about that matter."<sup>47</sup> In other words, the world must bow to the demands of its intellectual elite who are the ones who really know what is best for the common man.

Some modern scholars argue that this proto-fascism was not really Wells' belief; the British scholar John Hammond in particular argues that *Men Like Gods* is actually a satire which is not meant to be taken as a serious Utopia.<sup>48</sup> Be that as it may, the fact remains that in the 1920s Wells' works were treated with deadly seriousness. One of his most popular books, *The Outline of History*, provoked a storm of controversy including a paper war between Wells and Hilaire Belloc in a series of essays.<sup>49</sup> Father Dudley was one of those caught up in this Catholic reaction to Wells' humanism and clearly and forcefully spoke out against Wells. In *Will Men Be Like Gods?*, Dudley presents Wells' basic

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<sup>46</sup>H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (NY: Macmillan, 1933), p. 254.

<sup>47</sup>Wells, *Men Like Gods* (NY: Macmillan, 1923), p. 62.

<sup>48</sup>John Hammond, *A Preface to H.G. Wells* (NY: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 169.

<sup>49</sup>Belloc wrote a series of essays to counter Wells which were published as *A Companion to Mr. Wells' "Outline of History"*. Wells responded with *Mr. Belloc Objects to "The Outline of History"* to which Belloc retorted with *Mr. Belloc Still Objects to Mr. Wells' "Outline of History"*. See Footnote 41 to Chapter III of Wagar.

arguments and then proceeds to refute them based on Catholic doctrine and neo-Thomistic philosophy.

*Will Men Be Like Gods?* is a traditional theological treatise. It met with popular reviews in the press; *America* called it "complete and thorough going"<sup>50</sup> while *The Month* said the book "should be widely disseminated...its style is as bright and lively as its logic is deadly."<sup>51</sup> Dudley's writing was quite straitforward, the words of a confident man who was sure of that of which he spoke. It was in many ways reflective of his late Victorian upbringing, both direct and self-assured with the easy swagger of an Englishman who knew he was superior to his foes. In a scant eighty-three pages, Dudley dismisses humanism, positivist philosophy, and modernism while re-iterating how human happiness is only found in God and the Roman Catholic Church. What may be the most amazing thing about this book is how adroitly Dudley does so, using a minimum of words and some choice examples drawn from everyday life to provide a convincing argument for the average man on the street that submission to God is the only way to find meaning in life.

It may be that Dudley discovered his breezy style worked better with fiction but *Will Men Be Like Gods?* would be his only purely theological book for many years. With his next work, *The Shadow on the Earth*, Dudley began to develop the style which would make him famous. *The Shadow on the Earth*<sup>52</sup> is his first attempt at fiction. This

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<sup>50</sup>Review in *America* (Feb. 21, 1925), p. 450.

<sup>51</sup>"Short Notices", *The Month* Vol. CXLIV, No. 726 (December 1924), p. 568.

<sup>52</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, *The Shadow on the Earth* (NY: Longmans, Green & Co., 1926).

allegorical novel is somewhat clumsy, being written as a parable with characters named after the traits they personify, i.e., The Optimist, The Pessimist, The Atheist, and The Cripple. The book however is noteworthy in two respects. The only named character is Brother Anselm, the Masterful Monk. Brother Anselm would be the hero of all future Dudley novels as well as the mouthpiece for Dudley's theology. Secondly, the book is the first time Dudley posits the concept that the work is part of a series of books entitled The Problems of Human Happiness. In fact, it is the second book in the series and we learn that *Will Men Be Like Gods?* was actually the first. In the introduction, Dudley explains that *The Shadow on the Earth* deals with "only one aspect of a very big matter" and that it is written as a solution to the problem of pain and suffering.<sup>53</sup> The book was reviewed favorably and Dudley was praised in *America* for a forcible book which was "beautifully and inspiringly written."<sup>54</sup>

Dudley truly hit his stride in 1929 with his first modern novel, *The Masterful Monk*.<sup>55</sup> The third book in the Problems of Human Happiness series deals with morality, specifically "the modern attack upon Man and his moral nature by those who would degrade him to the level of an animal".<sup>56</sup> This work is actually a direct sequel to *The Shadow on the Earth* - only this time, the characters are given actual names and

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid, p. v. Quotations are from the 1930 edition. The type was reset for this edition and page numbers vary from the 1926 edition.

<sup>54</sup>Review in *America*, (Dec. 18, 1926), p. 244.

<sup>55</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, *The Masterful Monk* (NY: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929).

<sup>56</sup>Ibid, p. v.

personalities instead of serving as abstract representations of ideas. Thus we find The Cripple is Eric Esterton, The Atheist is Julian Verrers, and so forth. Of greater importance, we discover Brother Anselm is actually Father Anselm Thornton aka "The Masterful Monk". One early researcher lauded the book as displaying Dudley's skill as a modern novelist:

*By limiting the place to London, for the greater part, and by naming precise spots: Curzon Street, the Queen's Hall, Kensington Gardens, the author has given a very realistic note. The action carries through a limited time, and the events are narrated without the artifices of flashbacks and introspection. A real "slice of life" is thus presented.<sup>57</sup>*

This note may give some insight into Dudley's popularity with the public. *The Masterful Monk* is certainly direct and realistic - at least, in terms of locale and timing. The dramatic events are somewhat contrived: the villainous Julian Verrers is not only a prominent atheist but also the member of a secret society attempting to dominate the world. After Father Thornton not only completely refutes him in public debate but also convinces the female leading character to leave Verrers and return to the Church, Verrers goes so far as attempting to kill her new fiancé who just happens to be a devout Catholic. Nevertheless, Father Thornton thwarts this plot as well and the book ends with Verrers dead and the two lovers united with one another and with God. To the modern reader, the plot is "completely outrageous"<sup>58</sup> and Dudley's characters over-the-top as well. In an earlier age, however, they clearly spoke strongly to the reader and the plots, while perhaps

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<sup>57</sup>Mother Saint Irene, *Owen Francis Dudley as a Novelist of the Modern World* (M.A. dissertation, Laval University, 1951), p. 55.

<sup>58</sup>From the blog *Disputations*, posted January 16, 2009, on-line at [http://disputations.blogspot.com/2009\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://disputations.blogspot.com/2009_01_01_archive.html). Accessed 15 August 2010.



unsophisticated, were certainly fast-moving and adventurous.<sup>59</sup> Reviews were uniformly favorable and the book cemented Dudley's reputation as a rising star in Catholic apologetics. *The Tablet* called it "some of the most powerful pages known to us on the subject of contemporary irreligion" while *Blackfriars* called it a "magnificent and entirely palatable piece of apologetic."<sup>60</sup>

Dudley was now entering the most productive era of his career. He was editor of *The Catholic Gazette* and in 1933 became Superior of the Catholic Missionary Society. In 1932, he published the fourth book in the Problems of Human Happiness series and the novel which is probably his best, *Pageant of Life*. Dudley was learning his craft as a novelist and beginning to develop more fully rounded characters while also dealing with more complex social issues. This resulted in a more sophisticated novel which the author counted as his personal favorite.<sup>61</sup> The works started coming out faster even as Dudley began touring the world on extensive speaking tours. Nineteen Thirty-Six saw the release of the next novel in the Human Happiness set, *The Coming of the Monster*, as well as another direct attack on his old antagonist H.G. Wells in *Human Happiness and H.G.*

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<sup>59</sup>One might note that one of the best-selling American authors of the 1920s and 1930s was Albert Payson Terhune, the acclaimed writer of dog stories such as *Lad: A Dog* and dozens more. While those Terhune novels in print today are marketed as children's books, they were considered adult literature at the time and published in such magazines as *Colliers*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, and *Reader's Digest*. Autre temps, autre mores. See Kathleen Rais, *Albert Payson Terhune: A Bibliography of Primary Works* (Phoenixville PA: The Author, 1997).

<sup>60</sup>Reviews quoted by publisher on the dustjacket of the 24<sup>th</sup> printing of *The Masterful Monk*.

<sup>61</sup>Romig, p. 84.

*Wells: An Antidote to "The Shape of Things to Come"*. The following year brought a book of essays on contemporary morality culled from his articles in the *Daily Mirror* with the aggressive title of *A Punch at Everybody*. Following a brief pause at the start of the Second World War, Dudley published *The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk* in 1940. By now his English publishers were advertising that over 200,000 of his works had been sold.<sup>62</sup> Reviews, however, were becoming less favorable. As early as 1932, we find hints of criticism with Dudley appearing with *Catholic World* noting that while *Pageant of Life* was "original and interesting" and a "fine piece of apologetic", Dudley stressed the occult "too much and too often" by "weaving his story around a series of fantastic occurrences...so far removed from common experience as to tax even the *pius affectus credulitatis*."<sup>63</sup> By 1941, *The Sign* was making snide comments about the Masterful Monk being "entirely too competent" and spending "a disproportionate amount of time outside his monastery."<sup>64</sup> Dudley's literary style was under attack as well: the reviewer in *America* came right out and criticized Dudley's "staccato style" while adding "much more could be done by the author in realizing his characters and deepening them."<sup>65</sup>

Dudley's speeches continued during the Second World War where he regularly gave mission talks to soldiers stationed in England. After one such engagement, he praised the

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<sup>62</sup>Advertisement on the dustjacket of the first printing of *The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1940).

<sup>63</sup>Review of *Pageant of Life* in *Catholic World* Vol. 136 (November 1932), p. 250.

<sup>64</sup>"The Masterful Rumps," *The Sign*, Vol. 20, (March 1941), p. 23.

<sup>65</sup>J.G.E. Hopkins, review of *The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk* in *America* ( Jan. 4, 1941), p. 360.

soldiers who attended for "the high quality of their questions and the keenness with which they followed the answers."<sup>66</sup> After the war, the novels resumed. The seventh and final book in the Problems of Human Happiness series was published in 1948 with *Michael*. The next year brought his readers a bit of a surprise with *You and Thousands Like You*, an expansion of a lecture series he had delivered. He retired this year from the Catholic Missionary Society and became chaplain to a monastery of Carmelite Nuns in Berkhamsted until his sudden death at age seventy in 1952 on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. One more work followed with the publication of *Last Crescendo* in 1954. By now, Dudley was no longer popular, his work failing to meet the concerns of the post-WWII era. *America* called his final book only "a fair story"<sup>67</sup> whereas *Catholic World* said that while God writes straight with crooked lines, Dudley "writes straight with very straight lines indeed."<sup>68</sup> Dudley was even outdated among his peers; in his official obituary, the current Superior of the Catholic Missionary Society seemed slightly embarrassed by Dudley and took pains to note that his writing style made his apologetic "sound sometimes harsher than it was" and instead noted his kindness in personal conversations.<sup>69</sup> Those who had once praised his work now considered him as old-fashioned as the Victorian romances which had formed him.

To understand why Dudley faded in popularity, one must first consider those things

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<sup>66</sup>"Unique Mission for Airmen in England," *The Canadian Register*, August 19, 1944.

<sup>67</sup>Barbara L. Samson, review of *Last Crescendo* in *America* (July 24, 1954), p. 424.

<sup>68</sup>Review of *Last Crescendo* in *Catholic World* Vol. 179 (August 1954), p. 394.

<sup>69</sup>Obituary in *The Tablet* Vol. 200, No. 5873 (Dec. 13, 1952), p. 497.

which brought him his fame. Certainly as we have noted, his style was more suited to the innocence of the pre-Second World War than to the society which emerged from the war's aftermath. It would be shortsighted, however, to attribute Dudley's decline solely to a public which became more mature in its literary tastes. Of equal - if not greater - importance is how Dudley met the needs of English-speaking Catholics in the inter-war period.

In both England and the United States, the Catholics of this period were generally excluded from the country's intellectual ranks. Historian Arnold Sparr in his work *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism 1920-1960* attributes the popularity of Catholic authors to a concerted effort to raise Catholic literary culture above minority status.<sup>70</sup> While Sparr's work focuses on the United States, he argues the American experience had its genesis in a similar revival in England. Unlike great Catholic nations such as France and Spain, English Catholics did not have a strong intellectual heritage in the early Twentieth Century and lacked both prestige and influence. The English Catholic minority "had been systematically excluded from their nation's intellectual, cultural, and political life since Reformation times."<sup>71</sup> It was only a little more than a half-century since John Henry Newman's conversion and not even a century since the Emancipation Act of 1829. Even the 1829 Act had failed to give Catholics what they considered full civil rights and

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<sup>70</sup>Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism 1920-1960* (NY: Greenwood Press, 1990), pp. xi-xvi.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid, p. 4.

on the eve of Dudley's conversion, the authoritative *Catholic Encyclopedia* noted how "Catholics in England are still subject to various legal difficulties."<sup>72</sup>

Adding to the insecurity over civil and political life was the fact that the Catholic Faith itself was under attack. H.G. Wells was only one of the Church's many critics; such prominent literary lights as George Bernard Shaw, Alfred North Whitehead, and Bertrand Russell were all highly critical of the Church as well. Catholics in the 1920s were continually being told by leading authors that "traditional religion inhibited self-expression and stifled progress, or that those who believed in the supernatural were living in a world of illusion and superstition."<sup>73</sup> In other words, to put it in less polite terms, Catholics were ignorant fools who were a burden on society. Such anti-religionism was evident not only in academic works but in the world of nations as well where Communism would transform from a political philosophy to an actual nation-state in Lenin's Russia. In the United States, Catholics faced civil challenges of their own ranging from the explicitly anti-Catholic rallies of the Ku Klux Klan to the effective banning of Catholic education by the Oregon School Law. This uncertainty on both their intellectual and civil status combined to cause a strong Catholic reaction which surfaced in aggressively pro-Catholic literature.

In Sparr's schema, Dudley fits in with the British school of "controversialists", men such as Chesterton, Belloc, and Robert Hugh Benson who carried the Catholic banner in

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<sup>72</sup>W.S. Lilly, "England Since the Reformation" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (NY: Encyclopedia Press, 1913), p. 456.

<sup>73</sup>Sparr, p. 9.

the controversies of their day. Among the novelists, he considers Dudley to be both one of the most sectarian and a master at setting forth Catholic positions. In Dudley's novels:

*the Catholic philosophical novel reached the state of the art, where the Catholic position (stated through the imposing figure of Brother Anselm Thornton) on important philosophical and moral issues of the day was constantly contrasted with, and shown superior to, that of an assortment of sinister amorlists, materialists, and 'pseudo-philosophers'.*<sup>74</sup>

Dudley's work touched a nerve with both British and American Catholics, contributing to his wide-spread popularity. Catholics were seeking champions to defend their cherished beliefs and against such a backdrop, Dudley was naturally hailed as a vocal proponent of the Church. However, Dudley's work was needed for a limited time only and his literary efforts were as fleeting as the morning dew; Sparr argues the controversialists were already dated by the 1930s and would be completely out of place by the 1950s.<sup>75</sup> In the classic 1935 study *The Catholic Literary Revival*, Calvert Alexander notes Dudley was the leading light in the school of apologetic novelists but admitted it would be "stupid to hold [Dudley's style] up as the highest type of Catholic fiction."<sup>76</sup> During the Second World War, John S. Kennedy had argued in *The Sign* that Catholic literature had a new challenge because in a world torn apart by war, "the torments of conscience have little place in contemporary fiction"<sup>77</sup> By 1947, Erik v. Kuehnelt-Leddihn was arguing Catholic

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid, p. 169.

<sup>76</sup>Calvert Alexander, *The Catholic Literary Revival* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1935), p. 344.

<sup>77</sup>John S. Kennedy, "The Novelist and Life," *The Sign* (June 1942), pp. 679.

literature was far too simplistic and needed to address contemporary problems rather than being a mere showcase for theology.<sup>78</sup> In the years following the Second World War, Western society began undergoing tremendous changes. In the midst of these changes, the fears Catholics faced would fade and likewise so would their need for literary champions to defend them. By 1960, a Catholic would be elected President of the United States and England's anti-Catholic laws would be only a distant memory. In this milieu, there was no longer a feeling of crisis and no longer a need for a zealous Catholic revival. The authors who had spearheaded such a revival faded from the public eye and the Church marched onwards to its destiny at the Second Vatican Council. As with his peers, Father Owen Francis Dudley drifted into obscurity to become simply an archaic figure of a faded era.

Is such a view of Father Dudley accurate, however? While granted that Dudley, as with any author, will be representative of his era, we argue that his works are not simply historical footnotes. To be sure, his direct attacks on specific figures of his time date him to his historical context - it is doubtful that many people are leaving the Faith today after reading utopian romances by H.G. Wells. Nor is there a current struggle against indecent Hollywood films wherein young ladies show bare limbs or a drive to eliminate at-will divorce. The moral battles Dudley fought have largely been lost and replaced by what to him were only the sinister outcomes which would befall if society continued on its immoral course. Nevertheless, the struggle to define Catholic identity continues, the moral

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<sup>78</sup>Erik v. Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "The Failure of Catholic Literature," *Catholic World*, (May 1947), pp. 116-122.

questions remain, and the universal questions of life are still pondered. To one who carefully reads Owen Francis Dudley, his works contain a deeper thinking and a more nuanced theology which today still speaks to the human condition. Dudley's critics seem to lose themselves in his admittedly hackneyed plots and seem all too willing to categorize and forget him. For example, Sparr refers to the seven novels which feature Father Thornton as the *Masterful Monk* trilogy which can only lead one to assume he did not read the books very carefully.<sup>79</sup> For the most part, however, Dudley is simply ignored by the critics; one is hard-pressed to find any mention of him in a published work written in the last half century. The one notable exception is Father John A. Hardon who included Dudley as one of the 104 authors chosen for his Catholic Lifetime Reading Plan, defined as the books which are "the most outstanding in the twenty centuries of the Roman Catholic Church's history" as well as those which are relevant and accessible to the contemporary reader.<sup>80</sup> Dudley's work, Hardon states, tells in plain language how "the true faith provides light and strength" to those suffering in the midst of life's afflictions.<sup>81</sup>

While Dudley touches on many themes in his work, we have chosen three concepts which represent his deepest and most lasting theology. These include the Catholic reaction to war, the theology of the Priesthood, and the mystery of human suffering. Dudley examined all of these through the prism of his own life and experiences but touched on all of them in ways which still have meaning and importance for Catholics of

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>80</sup>John A. Hardon, *The Catholic Lifetime Reading Plan* (NY: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 1-4.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, p. 177.



the Twenty-First Century.

## Chapter II

*"In the enormous tragic silence of the night, Francis, the monk of Assisi, with sunken eyes of immense tenderness, caressed the white body, the snow-white body, of a poor dog that died in the war....Francis has wept, while afar nations made war." -*

*from the poem "Brother Dog", Luis Anibal Sanchez*

The horrors of the First World War are seared into the collective memory of Western European civilization. This is especially true in Great Britain where the recollection of the Great War still resonates in public life and culture today. Almost a century after the war began, its mythos lives on, ranging from the memorial statues which still stand proud in virtually every village to London's theatre district where one of the most popular plays is *War Horse*, a children's play about a horse in World War One. The Great War, as it is normally called, still has a hold on Englishmen and its sacrifices are still remembered.<sup>82</sup> When one recalls the war, one normally remembers the horrors of trench warfare, the bloody carnage of combat, and the sense of anger and waste which war represents. The

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<sup>82</sup>The author himself remembers how moving it was being in London a few years ago on Armistice Day and seeing people pause at 11am for a moment of silence as the church bells tolled.

literary image is that of Siegfried Sassoon's passion at the close of *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*:

*And here I was, with my knobkerrie in my hand, staring across at the enemy I'd never seen. Somewhere out of sight beyond the splintered tree-tops of Hidden Wood a bird had begun to sing. Without knowing why, I remembered that it was Easter Sunday. Standing in that dismal ditch, I could find no consolation in the thought that Christ was risen. I splashed back to the dug-out to call the others up for 'stand-to'.*<sup>83</sup>

As with so many authors, Sassoon's passion was reserved for hatred of the war and all for which it stood.

It may surprise the modern reader, however, to learn that not everyone who went through the war was emotionally wrecked by it and not every author wrote anti-war novels. Indeed, one finds that the most famous anti-war books were not written until a decade or more after the end of the conflict. These include such classics as Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Robert Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929), and the afore-mentioned *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928). To be sure, anti-war novels appeared earlier; for example, John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* came out in 1921. For the most part, however, Great War fiction in the 1920s and 1930s does not deal with "revulsion and outrage" but instead uses the war as a backdrop and "fall into the category of popular literature whose purpose is mainly to tell a

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<sup>83</sup>Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1942), p. 255.

story, to entertain, to divert the reader briefly from life".<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the perception that war literature changed from jingoism to anti-militarism as the war's reality became known is simply not true. Hager and Taylor's study shows the percentage of novels which treat the war in a positive or neutral light remained consistent from 1914 to 1950. To the respect that popular literature reflects culture, one can argue that for the majority of Englishmen and Americans the war was not seen as the huge tragedy which so many see it as today.

In discussing the nature of World War One poetry, the British poet Jon Silkin notes four stages of developmental consciousness. The earliest stage is a simple passive reflection on the war; the second level is that of the angry prophet who denounces the war; the third stage is compassion for the war's victims; the final stage is one where anger and compassion merge into a desire to change society.<sup>85</sup> This schema seems to work well with Great War fiction also.

In examining how Owen Francis Dudley wrote of World War One, we find his writings reflect the third stage of development. A study of his use of the war shows a great compassion for those soldiers who suffered in it, particularly those injured in the war. Dudley himself was wounded in action and this may have been the source of his special compassion for maimed veterans. Dudley's writings do not reflect Silkin's first two stages of passive observer and angry prophet and if the poet went through those stages, it must have been prior to writing his first novel.

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<sup>84</sup>Philip E. Hager and Desmond Taylor, *The Novels of World War I: An Annotated Bibliography* (NY: Garland Publishing, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>85</sup>Jon Silkin, ed. *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 30-34.

Dudley's war service no doubt influenced him greatly. While he did not directly discuss his war experiences in any printed works, he would have shared the common experiences of his fellow chaplains. When Dudley was ordained a Catholic priest in 1917, there was an acute shortage of Roman Catholic chaplains and a vigorous recruitment program was under way.<sup>86</sup> Being a chivalrous English gentleman, Dudley responded to the call and went immediately into the service. As a Catholic chaplain, he would have served on the front lines amidst the fighting, unlike the Anglican chaplains who predominantly lived and worked behind the lines.<sup>87</sup>

On the front lines, Dudley would have seen the immense suffering of British soldiers up close and personal. He would have also learned that only ten to twenty percent of soldiers had any strong faith while most soldiers had an extremely limited understanding of Christianity:

*Many soldiers had no sustained exposure to religion, and, of those who did, the exposure was generally formal rather than spiritual, with teaching failing to address the fundamentals of the faith in a way the majority could understand....the war had shown the majority of the male population was alienated from the life and practices of the Christian churches in Britain. The social pressures to attend church were lifting, and recreational or work activities were supplanting religious worship.<sup>88</sup>*

Such experience with the British "Tommy" would drive Dudley in his life's work. As Iremonger points out, many chaplains returned from the war with an understanding of the

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<sup>86</sup>Jonathan Iremonger, "British Army Chaplains of World War I: Reactions to Service at the Front" in *Seaford House Papers 2000*, (London: HMSO, 2000), p. 5-26.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid, pp. 9-11.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid, pp. 6-7.

vital need to address religious issues in ways which the average man could understand.<sup>89</sup>

One can easily see this in Dudley's works which express Catholic theology in a clear, direct manner which no one would find overly obtuse or complex.

The war affected not only the soldiers at the front but the whole of society as well. The culture of chivalry which had so defined late Victorian and Edwardian England was destroyed amidst the mud and blood of the trenches. One special horror for the English was the destruction of virtually an entire generation of the country's best and brightest young men. As movingly detailed by historian Reginald Pound, the casualties in the war - particularly in its first two years - were disproportionately high among the members of Britain's upper class.<sup>90</sup> The roster of the dead included many of those slated to become the leaders of the future, a future in which others would lead instead. Many of these were bright young men who volunteered for service upon the declaration of war in August 1914, men imbued with the spirit of chivalry. They were men with an "exhilarating assurance of receiving the title deeds to a fabulous future, of being favourites of destiny rather than puppets of fate...The ironic gods never had more wicked sport with any generation."<sup>91</sup>

We have seen the major role which chivalry held in the popular English imagination prior to the war and in fact, the chivalric ideal was consistently used to justify the war and build national pride. Victorian chivalry had already conditioned society to believe that "a

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup>Reginald Pound, *The Lost Generation of 1914* (NY: Coward-McCann, 1965).

<sup>91</sup>Ibid, p. 14.

fight in a just cause was one of the most desirable and honourable activities open to man, and that there was no more glorious fate than to die fighting for one's country."<sup>92</sup>

Chivalric references filled the popular literature about the war and were widely used in recruiting posters. As casualties mounted, it became customary for memorial tributes to use the language of chivalry, describing the dead as gallant, faithful knights.<sup>93</sup> As the war continued and stretched into the bloody stalemate of trench warfare, the chivalric imagination died a hard death. For those who were living the reality of war, chivalry quickly ceased to inspire them. Different men would find different ways to understand what was happening to them but there were few who could identify themselves as gallant knights while enduring bombardments, gas attacks, rats, mud, the sight of their comrades literally blown to pieces. Over time, the suffering spread across the Home Front also as more and more families suffered the loss of loved ones. In the years following the war, English society would seek ways to understand and remember the war and those who died in it. Many churches responded with Remembrance Sundays at which the dead were memorialized but few ministers addressed the underlying issue of the meaning and purpose of war.<sup>94</sup>

The biggest challenge which any chaplain would find was "the issue of how the Christian belief in a just and loving God could be reconciled with the extent of suffering -

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<sup>92</sup>Girouard, p. 276.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid, pp. 284-288.

<sup>94</sup>Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations: A Social History of the Town of Bury in the Aftermath of the Gallipoli Campaign* (NY: Henry Holt, 1992), pp. 145-159.

suffering which seemed to be both pointless and indiscriminate.”<sup>95</sup> In point of fact, the problem of suffering is the most consistent theme in Dudley’s theology, one which we address directly in a later chapter. For Dudley, the response to war was to try to determine how it fit into God’s Providence. As with many other chaplains, he would have dealt with those whose faith was shaken by the deaths of good men.<sup>96</sup> Iremonger notes how:

*Increasingly, as good men were seen to die no less than bad, chaplains recognised that they needed to get soldiers to see events less in terms of men’s individual merits than against God’s wider purpose for the world...*<sup>97</sup>

Dudley’s view of war was shaped by this need, a need to explain how war fits into God’s eternal plan. He clearly felt compassion for his fellow soldiers and a desire to help them understand God’s loving plans for them. In his writings on the war, he demonstrates a desire to show how God is always present, suffering alongside the soldier.

In his first novel, *The Shadow on the Earth*, Dudley has Father Thornton confront The Atheist in a struggle for the soul of a young man crippled in a mountain-climbing accident. The Atheist is trying to convince The Cripple that his life is effectively over and that, since God does not exist, he may as well commit suicide. Thornton (the “Masterful Monk”) effectively refutes The Atheist’s claims. In the book’s climax, we learn that Father Thornton knew The Atheist during the war - in fact, the two served in the same regiment. Moreover, Thornton actually risked his life to save The Atheist from certain

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<sup>95</sup>Iremonger, p. 13.

<sup>96</sup>For example, see Robert Graves’ experiences in *Good-Bye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929).

<sup>97</sup>Iremonger, pp. 12-13.



death on the battlefield. By revealing this secret to The Atheist, Thornton refutes his claims that religion is merely a self-interest, a panacea for the emotionally weak.

Dudley describes the rescue of The Atheist in a full chapter of the book titled "A Thing That Had to Be Done". The chapter title reveals much about Dudley's attitude towards war: while unpleasant, it is something which sometimes must be done. The writing in this chapter is the most vivid in the book and is no doubt drawn from his own experiences in the war. Dudley was a chaplain in the Royal Field Artillery following his ordination in September 1917 until the November 1919 armistice. The Father Thornton character likewise was in the Royal Field Artillery, although as a field doctor rather than a chaplain. Dudley's experiences serve him well in drawing a vivid picture of warfare.

The story begins with an artillery attack on his unit which quickly turns into a massacre. Thornton grimly tries to save the many wounded. As evening falls, the air itself "was thick with the smell of smoke and blood" and Thornton's work is rendered futile as the recovering wounded are killed by the ongoing barrage.<sup>98</sup> The order finally comes to withdraw and the remnants of the battery hitch the guns to their horses and retreat to safety.

It is now however that Thornton realizes a fellow officer with a broken leg has inadvertently been left behind. It is a critical moment of conscience for the doctor:

*He knew quite well that the Captain had not been taken to the dressing-station; that he must have been overlooked, and left up there amongst the horrors of that death-trap....The Captain was there - somewhere...*

*He paced about in an agony of indecision...*

*There was no obligation upon him to do it. Why should he? Why should he try*

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<sup>98</sup>*The Shadow on the Earth*, p. 75.

*to save a man against whose vile, lying ways his whole being revolted - merely to give him further opportunities?...all the Captain's spare time was spent in trying to instill unbelief and even malice against God into others...*

*But left there to die with all that infamy upon him?...He couldn't leave him like that. Suddenly he knew he would do it.<sup>99</sup>*

His mind made up, Thornton rides off into the night to retrieve the wounded officer. An artillery shell lands very close, knocking the doctor into the mud. He proceeds through the dark illumined by bursting shells to search for the Captain amongst the dead. He finds the man and, hoisting him on his back, heads back for the lines.

It is not an easy task. Thornton is wounded and the task seems almost unbearable. He is tempted to abandon the Captain and must force himself to continue:

*He was too weak now to carry the Captain a yard further. He could only watch the road for any help that might appear. The feeling of isolation increased. Not a living being about. Nothing but death here. Dead stumps, dead bodies, dead - Something arrested his eyes.*

*Curious he hadn't seen it before! Close behind the shell-hole stood a great, gaunt crucifix - the Christ hanging pale and vivid in the moonlight. With an effort he stood up, and saluted...Something struck him about the Figure. The half-closed eyes of the Crucified seemed to be looking down into the shell-hole at the man who was lying there - at the man who was His enemy. He stood, spell-bound by what he saw in that moonlit Christ stretched there amidst the terrors of the ridge. For it had come to him that Someone had suffered immeasurably more than himself - yes, infinitely more - for that mocking unbeliever below.<sup>100</sup>*

Moments later, the two are rescued.

The imagery of the roadside shrine is a strong one for Dudley and one which he uses

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid, pp. 76-77.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid, pp. 81-82.

again in the prologue to *The Coming of the Monster*.<sup>101</sup> Here Dudley describes dawn rising over a battlefield. In the midst of carnage and corpses, a wayside crucifix stands undamaged. Over the crucifix argue an angel and Lucifer. The devil plays with a row of corpses “until a row of faces, distorted in the death-agony, are turned upwards hideously” at which point he proclaims how these Christians truly love one another!<sup>102</sup> Lucifer proceeds to mock the soldiers, praying identical petitions for victory in the languages of different combatants, and repeating the Lord’s Prayer as he re-enacts the deaths of different soldiers. The angel says nothing, only spreading his wings to protect the Wayside Shrine from shell bursts. Beneath the shrine lie two dead soldiers, one of whom is holding a water-bottle to his comrade’s mouth.

This imaginative prologue is unique among Dudley’s writings, being the only time he explicitly turned to fantasy in one of his works. Indeed, these few pages stand in stark contrast to the rest of the book, the remainder of which is a straightforward tale of love and redemption. Dudley’s works do, however, contain strong mystical elements including several cases where individuals have mystical visions. These visions are clearly meant to be part of the normal plot, as realistic as the character’s conversations or the newspapers they read. In *The Shadow on the Earth*, the Cripple learns to accept his suffering after a midnight vision in the chapel of Christ Crucified; in *The Coming of the Monster*, the heroine has a mystical experience at Lourdes; and in *Michael*, the title character has a

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<sup>101</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, *The Coming of the Monster* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936).

<sup>102</sup>*The Coming of the Monster*, p. 2.

series of revelations of God starting as a young child. In all of these works, Dudley presents the mystical as something which is constantly around us although something mortals are seldom able to appreciate.

For Dudley, one's earthly life is simply part of a much greater picture, a cosmic drama of which we are unaware. The drama itself is simply the age-old struggle waged between God and Satan for the souls of men. It is against this backdrop that all of life's twists and turns must be measured. This schema applies not only to individuals but to world events as well. Wars, therefore, are not significant per se, but rather gain significance from the effect they have on human souls.

War, in other words, is viewed through the prism of the Catholic Imagination. We use this term in the broad sense of how Catholics view the world as a place where God is immanent in all things, revealing Himself to man through all creation, a place where as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."<sup>103</sup> Dudley's imaginative use of the wayside shrine in *No Man's Land* is a striking example of how the religious imagination uses symbolic images to "disclose the ultimate horizon of God in human experience."<sup>104</sup> For Dudley, the war and all its suffering makes sense only when one can understand that God is present in the world completely, that he is present not only in the beauty of nature but in its squalid ugliness as well.

In his later novel *Michael* (1948), Dudley deals with God's presence in His creation at

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<sup>103</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur" in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, (London: H. Milford, 1918), p. 30.

<sup>104</sup> Stephen Happel, "Religious Imagination" in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph A. Komonchak, et al, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 502.

length. The premise of this novel, set in the late 1930s, is that Father Thornton becomes involved with Michael St. Helier, a young British aristocrat he meets on a long ocean voyage. St. Helier has a morbid fear of violent death, and becomes completely unglued when several crew members are killed attempting the rescue of others from a sinking cargo ship. As Thornton meets St. Helier the first time, the discussion quickly turns to the horrors of war. The young nobleman asks the older priest if he had served in the Great War, and Thornton explains that he had been a medical officer prior to entering the priesthood and had seen much of the war.

*"I loathe war," the monk replied, qualifying however with, "though there's something amazingly thrilling about it. To compensate, I suppose....Have you ever heard the war called the Great Adventure?...We called it that at the time. It was the Great Adventure for most of us. There was a strange sort of splendour-"....*

*[Thornton] described an incident still vivid in his mind - his own battery caught in a V-shaped sector near Soissons and ordered to the gallop under fire; the thrill of the wild thundering race shelled the whole way; they had done it just in time, though at heavy cost in life... "You can call it hideous, but the splendour's there."*

*Michael St. Helier's composure suddenly left him:*

*"The splendour of bloodiness! What damned nonsense! That's merely shutting your eyes to it."*

Thornton pauses in the face of the younger man's tirade and proceeds to calmly respond with a verbal riposte which leaves the young man speechless:

*"I'm not talking about stopping war. I'm telling a young man of twenty who's never been in a war, about a certain side of it, because he asked me if I'm fond of war. I loathe war, but I'm not going to pretend that there are no 'splendid' stuff and heroics....[You refuse to accept] there's nothing splendid about war? Men going over the top - to death? A gun-crew sticking it out to the last? Possibly because you've never seen that kind of thing."*<sup>105</sup>

The discussion ends with St. Helier stalking off, fuming about how the only thing he

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<sup>105</sup>Owen Francis Dudley, *Michael* (NY: Longmans, Green & Co., 1948), pp. 6-8.

loathes more than war is war-mongering.

As the cruise continues, St. Helier becomes romantically interested in a young Catholic woman. The budding relationship allows Thornton to intervene in bridging the gaps between the two lovers' different faiths; in the process, Thornton and St. Helier become quite close. It is now that Thornton learns that St. Helier's hatred of war is not based on physical fear nor a mental pathology but rather on his aesthetic philosophy. The crux of St. Helier's problem was an inability to reconcile the horrors of life - whether the violence of war or the tragedy of unexpected sudden death - with the beauty of the world. His confusion had begun as a young man when he had a mystical vision while being overwhelmed with the beauty of nature in a pleasant wood one spring day:

*[The experience] was accompanied by an almost unbearable happiness. The colours, the scents of the wood seemed to be intensified...How it came to him he wasn't sure, but it was not by reasoning - that [the flowers] were living by a life that was more than their own natural life; the miracle of spring...was not a thing that just happened. He saw why it happened - the Life behind natural life and within it, 'urging it on' and without which there could be no spring at all...*

*[There was] the gradual awareness of a tremendous Presence filling the woods; it was too definite, as of a Personal Presence, Someone wanting him to understand....he had felt utterly small and humbled before an Immensity infinitely beyond everything visible and tangible; the beauty around him was gathered up into this tremendous Presence, the source of its ineffable loveliness.<sup>106</sup>*

It was only on later reflection that St. Helier identified the Presence with his God and Creator.

The problem which then arises is how the Creator of such beauty permits it to be hideously destroyed by accident, sickness, and war? Thornton then faces the challenge of helping St. Helier understand why a Good God can permit such evil. In doing so, he

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid, pp. 93-94.

brings Michael into the Church, thereby setting the stage for his eventual marriage to his beloved. The argument which Dudley puts forth via his literary alter ego is that war is not something which God created for His own perverse enjoyment. St. Helier's problem is that he is "attributing to a finite creation the infinite perfection of the Creator"<sup>107</sup>.

Furthermore, he is subjectively imposing his own reactions to reality onto God and making himself the central fact of the universe; in other words, St. Helier is saying that since he finds bloodshed abhorrent because it contradicts natural beauty, then God is at fault. Father Thornton's tells him he must focus on dogma, i.e. on the actual facts which God has revealed of Himself. These are not mere facts which one must take on blind faith but rather revealed assertions which human reason can understand and, through grace, believe as articles of faith.

For Michael St. Helier, the key to his conversion is found in understanding that the God who created nature is the same Christ who was crucified. This happens when he watches a passion play which shows how the crucifixion was part of the ongoing struggle between God and Satan; what is more, the play shows how the continued replay of Christ's sacrifice via the long procession of martyrs through the centuries leads to the building of glorious churches where the Eternal Sacrifice of the Mass is continually offered. Michael sees that while the crucifixion was "blood and agony and death - a hideous thing", <sup>108</sup> it has an element of glory to it as well. He struggles with the idea of "Eternal Beauty, hanging on a Cross, nailed, twisted, disfigured, at the mercy of all that

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

was loathsome”<sup>109</sup> but Thornton points out that the important fact is that it *is* a fact: “It’s not what you feel about it; it’s what God *did* - *your* God of Eternal Beauty...The crucifixion is the one hideous thing in the world, Michael, that is sublimely beautiful as well.”<sup>110</sup> Michael then understands that Beauty is more than just his subjective interpretation of it; Beauty is the reflection of God and His Eternal Love for creation.

Dudley’s use of the Catholic Imagination in his novels reflects not only his late Victorian upbringing but the English character as well. As Hans Urs von Balthasar has noted, the English spiritual tradition is “completely bathed in the ancient and mediaeval tradition” and has preserved the use of imagery in its theology.<sup>111</sup> The English tradition eschews the universal and focuses on the uniqueness of the encounter of the personal God with His individual creations. Christ is the key to this event, the Divine Word which is the first creative form expressed by God and from which the entire created universe follows. All creation expresses a Christological form and it follows “that through all the raging of the elements, all the wilderness of matter, all shipwrecks and ruins, Christ can be coming and truly is”.<sup>112</sup> Dudley takes this tradition and uses it to explain the suffering of war by relating all to the sacred imagery of Christ Crucified.

The climax of the novel *Michael* is set in London during the Blitz of 1940-1941 when

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid, p.142.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid, p. 143-144.

<sup>111</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. III* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 353-354.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid, p. 383.



a hospital is set on fire by incendiary bombs. St. Helier, who is serving as a volunteer fireman, is gravely injured, losing an arm while rescuing the sick. Father Thornton, although he has not seen medical service since World War One, is pressed into service to perform emergency surgery. He also is wounded but manages to save several lives, including his friend Michael. The novel ends on a cautionary note as Father Thornton delivers a speech on war. The speech - likely based on an actual speech by Dudley<sup>113</sup> - is titled "The War That Will Not End War" and shows a further development in Dudley's thinking on the nature of war.

Although the speech is set in 1942, *Michael* was published in 1948 - after the development of nuclear weapons. For Dudley, war has now entered into a new phase. War has never ended war and never will, unless humanity destroys itself. Peace cannot be kept by power, he emphasizes. Rather, peace is a matter of "valuing humanity above power" by renouncing the use of power which divides our common humanity.<sup>114</sup> Modern war is essentially insane. Father Thornton now recalls his adventures in the bombed-out hospital:

*"There was a heavy roll of casualties. Some were killed instantly by the explosion, others trapped and burned to death, some died later, many were maimed for life. They were all of them patients in the ward...That is what modern war means - the slaughter of the innocent. And that is only one of thousands of similar massacres..."*<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Dudley uses Father Thornton to deliver public speeches in many of his novels and these speeches are actual speeches which Dudley himself delivered. It is supposition that he is following this track again here.

<sup>114</sup>*Michael*, p. 273.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid*, p. 276.

The solution is quite simple. Man must turn to the One Power which will hold the world together instead of rending it apart, the God who is Eternal Love. We must kneel down before the One who "accepted a cup containing all the anguish of this war...enduring unto death the hideousness He never made; but who did make dawn and sunset, stars and sunlight, and songs of birds, and flowers."<sup>116</sup> Only by turning to Christ can the world be saved from destruction.

As the novel ends, we find Dudley's thinking on war seems to have gone beyond the third literary stage set forth by Silkin, from compassion for war's victims to a blend of anger with compassion that desires to save society from future conflicts. The Second World War apparently affected Dudley deeply and the conclusion of *Michael* with a German air raid just beginning on St. Helier's ancestral estate strikes one of the most pessimistic notes found in Dudley's writing. Just prior to this raid, Thornton is speaking with St. Helier and his wife who ask him whether he thinks humanity can avert future wars. The priest thinks not:

*"There's nothing in the present ordering of things to hold the world together. It's almost as if human sanity were in abeyance...I can conceive a hideous vicious circle - governments piling up weapons for mass-destruction in the name of security...I've tried to form a conception of the world like that, the sense of helplessness, God forgotten and ignored, all pretence of international morality laid aside...I can imagine a spontaneous unloosing of everything that's evil - massacre on an incredible scale, cities wiped out mercilessly, no humane considerations. A frantic struggle for survival amidst universal chaos..."*<sup>117</sup>

Thornton concludes, however, with a hopeful note. He notes the message of Our Lady of

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid, p. 277.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid, p. 298.

Fatima and points out that God will not end the world even if the world tries to destroy itself. There is a note of triumph, a Resurrection for a shattered world.

Dudley is clear that war, even the ultimate destruction of nuclear warfare, is something which man does to himself. In his apologetic work *A Punch at Everybody*, Dudley answers the question of why an Almighty God does not prevent war:

*You are asking God to protect us from ourselves. God does not violently intervene to prevent men from using their free-will, even for their own destruction. He has not made us automatons, but free agents. To stop war the Almighty would have to override us, and deprive human nature of its supreme prerogative - free-will. Every war is due to the abuse, somewhere, of that prerogative. It is statesmen who make war, and declare war. War will stop when we stop statesmen making it.*<sup>118</sup>

As early as the late 1930s, then, Dudley admitted there was a human responsibility to end war. It was after World War Two, however, that this became more prominent in his writings. *Michael* was clearly written to examine the problem of war in novel form whereas his 1949 treatise *You and Thousands Like You* deals with it in the form of an exhortatory essay.

*You and Thousands Like You* was the last work Dudley published in his lifetime and is essentially an enlargement of the final pages of *Michael*. Seemingly written with urgency, it comes to its point quickly and concisely. The world has turned away from God and is being driven to destruction "under the impetus of the weight of its own evil."<sup>119</sup> The world had a partial recovery from the First World War but there is none from the Second and the rising tide of Communism can only lead to a Third and Final World War. It is up

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<sup>118</sup>Dudley, *A Punch at Everybody* (London: Alexander Ouseley Ltd, 1937), p. 61.

<sup>119</sup>Dudley, *You and Thousands Like You* (NY: Longmans Green & Co, 1949), p. 2.

to all who read this essay to turn their lives back to Christ. The world is in the midst of a great spiritual battle, Dudley argues, which goes beyond mere statesmanship - rather, it is the struggle of Christianity against its many enemies who would destroy it. In the late 1930s, Dudley had been profoundly moved by the martyrdom of so many Catholics in the Spanish Civil War and had come to view the struggle between democracy and communism as a shadow war, hiding the true conflict between God and Satan.<sup>120</sup> The ultimate end and Christianity's final triumph is coming, he now asserts, basing his arguments on the revelations of Our Lady at Fatima. The darkness over the world is not permanent, he says:

*Though the hordes of evil extend their havoc malice throughout the world; though the greater part of mankind perish, yet the triumph of Satan will be short and followed by the triumph of good...If, during the satanic violence, many are martyred for the Faith and nations destroyed, yet, with the extermination of the impenitent, there will be the purification and renovation of the world...*<sup>121</sup>

Grace will be abundantly available for all who ask. The coming persecution will unite Christians of all denominations in the one river of blood which pours forth across the ages from Christ's side. He concludes by exhorting his readers to prepare for martyrdom by making an intention of martyrdom. Offer yourself as a victim, and you will have nothing to lose, and all to gain.

Dudley's final novel was published in 1954, two years after his death. *Last Crescendo: The Story of Paul Gray* returns to the theme of a coming apocalypse.<sup>122</sup> Taking place

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<sup>120</sup>Dudley, "This is Communism," *The Sign* Vol. 18. No. 3 (October 1938), pp. 171-172.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>122</sup>Dudley, *Last Crescendo: The Story of Paul Gray* (NY: Longmans Green & Co., 1954).

amidst Cold War Berlin, it sets the struggle between Democracy and Communism in the greater arena of the battle between light and darkness. Father Thornton again delivers a speech warning that science has given man the ability to destroy himself and such will occur if the world does not quickly return to God. In this novel, the grim warning that it is unlikely that such will occur is given by Thornton's friend, the saintly Father Preuss who had survived the Nazi concentration camps. The novel ends on a more upbeat note than *Michael*, however, and ending is perhaps a fitting conclusion to Dudley's career. No matter how much hatred is in the world, it will always be vanquished by the greater power of love as Father Thornton states in explaining why the pianist Paul Gray risked his life to give a free concert in war-torn Berlin:

*"There were some thousands present, all sharing the common dread...Paul Gray was presenting something above and beyond the reach of hate, that once conquered and can conquer again; pleading passionately for a world that could be - not the world we know, the world of hate, the world of war; but a world of God, a world of love, a world no longer hating, a world of men in love with their Creator..."*<sup>123</sup>

As with nature, the music which Paul Gray plays shows forth the beauty of God, the Eternal Beauty of He who is Eternal Love. The arts also serve Dudley's theological aesthetic. Gray begins the novel as a suicidal drug addict; Father Thornton leads him to renewal and redemption by encouraging him to find God in his music. Gray's love for music and his compositions on the beauties of the seasons lead him to find the God who creates such beauty. As with Michael St. Helier's love of beauty in nature, Paul Gray finds God through the music of the changing seasons, the ceaseless rhythm of life, death,

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid, p. 311.

and rebirth.

Dudley's writings reflect a Catholic approach towards the question of war which sees human war in the greater context of the supernatural. Both as a quintessential late Victorian and as an English Catholic, Dudley is not the prophet decrying the evils of war. Rather, he reaches out to those injured by the war in body or spirit by focusing on the relationship between suffering in war with the suffering of the Crucified Christ. Ultimately, he argues for an imaginative vision of the future, a future where evil is vanquished and man redeemed. The answer to the problem of war is not found in demonstrations nor in politics. Rather, it is found in turning one's heart to Christ. Unlike the Utopia of H.G. Wells, man cannot create a perfect society. Society can only be perfected by the Blood of Christ, washing it clean of its wounds and sinfulness. If you seek peace, work not for human justice but rather for the "peace that surpasses all understanding", the peace of heart found only in submission to Christ. Peace comes upon one's knees before the Crucified One who bears all our suffering and redeems us in the Eternal Beauty of His Love.

## Chapter III

*“Galahad drew near and looked into [the Holy Grail]...then lifting up his hands to heaven, he said: “Lord, I worship Thee and give Thee thanks...Here is the source of valour undismayed, the spring-head of endeavour” -*

*From the 13<sup>th</sup> century epic, “The Quest of the Holy Grail”*

In our current age, the Catholic priesthood is suffering an identity crisis. The changing nature of theology since the Second Vatican Council has included a change in the privileges and expectations of the priest. Combined with a significant drop in vocations and the overall graying of the priesthood, the past half-century has created a world where the nature of priestly identity is in flux. Among progressives, we have those who argue that Vatican II document *Presbyterorum Ordinis* calls for “presbyters” who are leaders of a “people-centered community”, men who are called to be servants, facilitators, and enablers.<sup>124</sup> On the other extreme, we find those who strictly adhere to a model of the priesthood which by emphasizing the priest’s ecclesiastical power and prestige alienates

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<sup>124</sup>Donald B. Cozzens, ed., *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 50-52.

many Catholics.<sup>125</sup> When combined with the scandals caused by sexually active homosexuals in the priesthood, it is no wonder that the meaning of priestly identity is unclear to many. In the writings of Owen Francis Dudley, however, we find a clear, strong model of the priesthood, one which can still speak to us today.

As with his approach towards war, Dudley's Victorian and English Catholic imagination combine in his theology, as here they produce the ideal priest in the character of Father Thornton. The Masterful Monk is many things, but above all he is both a chivalrous gentleman and a devout priest. He is a contemporary Bayard, *un chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, but he is also a modern-day Sir Galahad. The priest is called to be a leader among men, displaying his active leadership with bravery and physical prowess. The priest, however, is more than a worldly leader - he is also called to be pure and brave so that he might be a worthy intermediary between God and man.

As we noted, the Victorian ideal stressed chivalry and the system of gallantry, honor, and courage which it represented. In the popular imagination, these virtues were often transferred to the athletic field where sports were seen as a necessary part of any gentleman's education; regardless of whether or not he actually said it, it was certainly common parlance that the Duke of Wellington had proclaimed that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. Sports were a major method by which chivalric ideals were enshrined in the upper classes. As taught by Thomas Hughes in one of the Victorian era's most popular children's books, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, there was a

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<sup>125</sup>For example, see the article "Sauk City-area Priests Inspiring Some, Alienating Others" in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, on-line at [http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/article\\_56b0b7d7-c2d5-5962-a105-72d464d9flea.html](http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/article_56b0b7d7-c2d5-5962-a105-72d464d9flea.html). Accessed Sept. 2, 2010.



strong connection between moral strength and physical strength. Everyone has enemies who must be beaten back, be they moral evils or common ruffians.<sup>126</sup> Sinful habits and inclinations are the personal enemies of a young Englishman and must be defeated in the same manner as the Zulu warriors needed to be crushed.

A striking example of Dudley's ideal of sportsmanship is found in his third novel, *Pageant of Life*.<sup>127</sup> This novel contains the best character development in any of Dudley's works and was the most popular of his books;<sup>128</sup> in fact, the lead character of Capt. Cyril Rodney was so well-done that Dudley recalled he was often asked whether Cyril was a real person rather than a fictional character.<sup>129</sup> *Pageant of Life* is also noteworthy for being the only work in the Masterful Monk series which deals with Father Thornton's youth. The opening section of the book deals with a dramatic rugby battle between the two top teams in the area and their captains, Cyril Rodney and Anselm Thornton. Cyril is the acknowledged top rugby player in the area but finds himself stymied by Thornton, who once collars him from behind only yards from the goal line. The game is scoreless until late in the second half when the ball is kicked to Thornton who makes an unexpected move:

*Instead of punting for touch, [Thornton] coolly tucked the ball under his arm, gathered himself together, dodged an attempted collar, and shot off. He was*

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<sup>126</sup>Girouard, p. 166.

<sup>127</sup>Dudley, *Pageant of Life* (NY: Longmans Green & Co., 1932).

<sup>128</sup>Sister Mary of Saint Louise-Ida, *Literary Profile of Father Dudley* (M.A. Thesis, University of Montreal, 1958), p. 14.

<sup>129</sup>Romig, p. 84.

*coming well up the near line before Morton grasped the situation; there were only three or four between him and a clear run. His pace carried him easily past the first, two more made a furious effort for his legs, but were sent sprawling. He recovered his speed and came on like wind. Cyril had dropped back quickly, seeing his intention. He was waiting, ready, a few feet from touch, as Thornton neared...*

*[Thornton] feigned a swerve; then went straight for Cyril's crouching figure....[he] jumped the tackle, stumbled for an instant, recovered himself, was missed by the Moreton back and -*

*Instead of going on and scoring an easy try, he slowed up and stopped, looked behind him, dropped the ball, and, next moment, was on his knee beside Cyril, who was lying huddled together on the grass...<sup>130</sup>*

Once the doctor helps Cyril off the field, the referee gives Thornton the option of resuming the game by stepping over the goal-line for the score. Thornton, however, declines as it would be unsportsmanlike to win because a player was injured. The game ends in a scoreless draw.

The rugby game is the centerpiece of the first of the four sections of *Pageant of Life* and is meant to draw a clear moral lesson. We learn later that Thornton is two things besides a star athlete: he is both a perfect gentleman and a Roman Catholic. His impeccable manners and good breeding combined with his astute knowledge of his faith win over Cyril's anti-Catholic family and the two boys become best friends. The friendship will later lead Thornton to join the Army to fulfill a promise to Cyril's mother to keep an eye on her son; the ramifications of that decision are followed throughout the book and explain how Thornton is eventually led to the priesthood.

Sport is also shown as an important way to bridge the social gap between society's upper and lower classes. Later on in *Pageant of Life* when Thornton is a young medical

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<sup>130</sup> *Pageant of Life*, p. 19.

student, we find he takes time from his studies to organize wholesome entertainment for local day laborers in order to divert them from more sordid recreation. Thornton turns out to be a champion boxer as well as a first-rate pianist who performs popular dance music for the crowd. He has the unique ability to best all comers in the ring and then spend the remainder of the evening leading the crowd in festive dance. Truly, Thornton is a man for all seasons!

For Dudley, sport not only teaches individual virtue but also the virtues of community spirit. In fact, the lessons he learned on the public-school playing fields were strong enough that he would later suggest applying it to one's professional life. In a work written in response to Wells' utopian romance *The Shape of Things to Come*, Dudley argues that Wells' Sovereign World Council which imposes social justice on humanity will never work and that we need a social order based on the Divine Law. Neither communism nor rampant capitalism is the answer but rather a social system based on co-operation instead of competition. To this end, Dudley turns to his sporting background in explaining how different professions should work together:

*...why shouldn't each trade and profession be given its badge or colours? Why not? Why on earth should only a group like a football team have its colours, merely for kicking a bladder about? Why shouldn't Butchers and Doctors? Colours are half the battle with a football team. Why not something similar to colours in the trades and professions?*<sup>131</sup>

In this case, Dudley might be taking the value of sport a bit too far - one imagines a modern London populated by millions of people in different uniforms - but nonetheless,

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<sup>131</sup>Dudley, *Human Happiness and H. G. Wells: An Antidote to 'The Shape of Things to Come'* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1936), pp. 31-32.

his thinking reveals the value he placed on sport as a method of building community pride. His main point is not that professionals need uniforms as much as that people need to band together as one under God to serve Him and one another. Just as young Thornton refused to score when Cyril was injured, so people must not take advantage of one another in their business lives either.

If the ideal of chivalry includes fair play and honour among rivals, it most certainly includes respect for the weak and oppressed as well. The code of "women and children first" rings as true in Dudley's writings as it did on the *Titanic*. The priest is called to be a friend to women and children, yet all the while conscious of his own unique ontological identity. Throughout the novels, Father Thornton meets one attractive woman after another (in fact, in *The Masterful Monk*, the ravishing female protagonist is even named Beauty) and, rather than be tempted to break his vows, is instead a moral guiding force for them. In fact, some of the harshest criticism Dudley directs in his novels is against those who attempt to dishonor young women. The plots of both *The Masterful Monk* and *The Coming of the Monster* revolve around mysterious groups of communists seeking to destroy both the Church and Western Civilization. Significantly, the Bolsheviks are shown as not only anti-Catholics but as leering lechers as well. It is not enough for Julian Verrers in *The Masterful Monk* to be a communist; he is also a cad seeking to lure Beauty into being his mistress. Father Thornton intervenes, showing Beauty how Verrers' talk of throwing off the chains of conventional morality and entering the brave new world of scientific morality is nothing more than an attempt to gratify his own lust.

The priest is also the friend of children. This is particularly evident in *The Tremaynes*

and the *Masterful Monk* where Father Thornton is involved in protecting some young children from their sociopathic uncle. The book contains some of Dudley's most moving writing as he describes Father Thornton playing with the young Tremayne children. To the youngsters, Father Thornton is "Uncle Rumps", their best playmate and the finest friend for which a child could hope. Dudley stresses the importance of being a friend to children elsewhere noting that if one talks down to children, one only succeeds in boring them.<sup>132</sup>

The importance of women and children is also found in the emphasis that Dudley places on the family. He sees the family as the foundation of the Church, a foundation under grave threat from the attacks of the rationalist humanitarians. Dudley minces no word when it comes to the assault on marriage; if marriage is undermined, then you will witness "the whole structure of Christian civilization collapse".<sup>133</sup> The evil Julian Verrers preaches against marriage, which he calls "one of the most heinous inventions ever foisted on mankind" by the tyrannical Catholic Church.<sup>134</sup> Father Thornton refutes Verrers in public debate with a passionate defence of marriage against free love:

*"Love endures. It is rooted in something far deeper than mere bodily desire - in mutual esteem, in spiritual affection, in home life, in the child. Mr. Julian Verrers is not talking of love. He is talking of licentious concubinage. He would have men and women like the animals he tells them they are. No, lower. There is more*

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<sup>132</sup>Dudley, foreword to *As Little Children* by Annetta Howarth Lord (London: Washbourne & Bogan [1934] ), p. iii.

<sup>133</sup>Dudley, *A Punch at Everybody*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>134</sup>Dudley, *The Masterful Monk*, p. 85.

*fidelity in animal life than there would be in his temporary agreements.*"<sup>135</sup>

The marriage bond is sacred, commanded by Christ Himself. Men and women are called to make a true commitment to one another and to "play the game" with one another - the husband must not give his wife cause for jealousy, while the wife must not nag her husband.<sup>136</sup> The priest's role is to support marriage which Father Thornton does consistently in his adventures, from healing broken marriages to bringing young couples together in holy matrimony.

As we noted earlier, Thomas Hughes stressed the connection between physical and moral courage; Dudley is no different in his ideal of the priest. The priest must be a man of moral courage, one who is unafraid to stand for that which is right. Father Thornton displays this quality as a young man prior to ordination; confronted with the anti-Catholic slurs of the Rodney family, he responds by calmly listening to their views, all the while being "perfectly polite" and showing "amazing" self-assurance - he then quietly refutes the views of adults more than twice his age.<sup>137</sup> When Beauty Dethier attempts to persuade a young man to go riding with her rather than attend Sunday Mass, Father Thornton adroitly interferes and confronts Beauty as being nothing more than a "silly little girl" despite her feminine charms.<sup>138</sup> Thornton is willing to confront scoundrels such as Verrers in debate or even combat, dropping Verrers with a single punch when he pulls a gun on

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>136</sup>*A Punch at Everybody*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>137</sup>*Pageant of Life*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>138</sup>*The Masterful Monk*, pp. 68-69.

an innocent man. Thornton's moral rage comes out strongly in *The Coming of the Monster*, a direct attack on communism as being of satanic origins. In this, the most combative of his novels, Father Thornton confronts a street vendor selling pornography:

*In the white light from an arc-lamp the monk was standing with his arms akimbo facing an infuriated man, who was shouting and gesticulating. The pavement round was littered with torn magazines. There were wide gaps in the disordered lines of illustrated papers adorning the shopfront behind...*

*The monk reached up, pulled down another magazine, and held it up before the proprietor...It was open at the picture of a naked woman. There was a tearing sound as he ripped the pages across, before flinging it down to join its companions on the pavement.*

*"Now, send for the police." "139*

Throughout Dudley's novels, Father Thornton is shown to be a priest who is both Catholic and a gentleman, a true knight in the best English tradition.

Dudley's vision of Father Thornton is a classic example of "muscular Christianity" at its finest. This style of strong, self-assertive Christianity was formed in mid-nineteenth century England and was at its heyday in the period from 1880-1914 - in other words, during Dudley's formative years. The ideal of muscular Christianity came from the works of two authors who were both Christians and sportsmen: Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Kingsley, an Anglican minister, was a highly influential figure in Victorian culture, both as the author of best-selling novels such as *Westward Ho!* and in his role as Queen Victoria's favorite preacher.<sup>140</sup> He gloried in physical toughness and was described in an 1857 article in the *Saturday Review* as someone whose "ideal is a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours...[who] breathes God's free air on

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<sup>139</sup>*The Coming of the Monster*, p.178.

<sup>140</sup>Girouard, p. 130.

God's rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker round his finger."<sup>141</sup> Kingsley's historical adventure novels featured brave knights who were the epitome of chivalry yet who always remembered they were first Knights of God in the battle against Satan. Kingsley's close friend Thomas Hughes was the author of the aforementioned *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and a fellow proponent of Christianity and sportsmanship. Hughes emphasized the virtues a boy could learn through sports, virtues which would equip one to fight the moral battle against sin. The influence of these two authors and the Muscular Christianity ethic on Dudley is unmistakable.

Even at its zenith, the ideal of Muscular Christianity was an easy subject for both ridicule and criticism and Hughes was pained to make the distinction between a muscular Christian and a simple muscleman: the muscleman is one who enjoys the powers of his body for their own sake whereas the muscular Christian is one who forms his body so as to be able to work for Christ. Dudley would also be criticized as a mere muscleman; in a 1941 *Irish Monthly* review of *The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk*, the critic describes the plot:

*[Father Thornton] dashes into the fray, off to the rescue in a fast car, boxes this one, horsewhips the other - all for the higher motives, of course - and last leaves the spineless Tremayne family with its feet back upon the right path.*<sup>142</sup>

Recent scholarship on Muscular Christianity tends to studying it as a form of sexual repression and much has been made of Kingsley's struggles with maintaining a chaste relationship with his future wife. In this view, Muscular Christianity is a means by which

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<sup>141</sup>Quoted in Girouard, p. 142.

<sup>142</sup>Quoted in Saint Louise-Ida, p. 45.



sexual tension is sublimated by emphasizing purity and then released through physical exertion.<sup>143</sup> Whereas it might be easy to dismiss Dudley's Masterful Monk as a repressed celibate who takes out his frustrations by bullying booksellers, such an approach is too facile. Kingsley answered the criticisms of his own era with words with which Dudley himself would no doubt agree; Muscular Christianity, Kingsley said, is "a healthy and manful Christianity, one which does not exalt the feminine virtues to the exclusion of the masculine."<sup>144</sup> For Kingsley, true manliness lay in the *thumos*, the hot passions (or "pluck" as he called it) which are the primal source of virtue. This drive is expressed symbolically by the volcano, the deep core of which provides strength and energy yet which also has the power to be destructive. Blocking the flow of *thumos* however makes a man effeminate; a man's drives must flow freely.<sup>145</sup> The whole man consecrates his entire being, including the *thumos*, to God and uses his body and pluck in the Lord's service.

Whereas Kingsley and Hughes were notable Protestants, Father Dudley was of course a Catholic priest. In Kingsley's view of *thumos*, Dudley's celibacy would effeminize him. However, both in his own life and in his novels, one finds the opposite: Dudley was a "man's man" as well as a devout Christian. Dudley's view of the priesthood was one in which the priest is both a man and an agent for spiritual power. The priest is fully a "Man

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<sup>143</sup>David Rosen, "The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness" in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, edited by Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 22-26.

<sup>144</sup>Quoted in Girouard, p. 143.

<sup>145</sup>Rosen, pp. 30-32.

of God” and the two sides of his character are manliness and godliness.

For Kingsley, a man’s fiery spirit must be allowed to burst forth, then directed towards God’s service. For Dudley, this same pluckishness is molded and enriched through the Sacraments. The Sacraments bring life and it is the priest’s role to bring them to his flock. In his books, Dudley shines his English Catholic imagination squarely on the Eucharist as the source of life. Consistently, the Eucharist is shown to have not merely spiritual power but also an actual power over physical events. For example, in *The Shadow on the Earth*, the climax of the novel occurs when the Cripple spends the night in the chapel adoring the Blessed Sacrament:

*It was to the Cripple as if a door were being closed upon the world of sense...He was aware of sinking away from outer things into an ineffable peace within - into a Presence that surged all round...A vast sphere appeared. So vast as to seem more than his vision could take in. He perceived it as being immeasurably greater than space and time...*

*Beneath the immensity of this sphere...there was a small dark object on which the sphere seemed to rest...*

*The understanding of it came to him.*

*The sphere was the Catholic Church. The dark object was the world. Its darkness was that of a heavy shadow...the shadow of pain and suffering and sin.*<sup>146</sup>

As the vision continues, the Cripple realizes that the escape from the darkness is by entering through it into the heart of the sphere which is ablaze with the glory of the Crucified Christ.

*It was Christ conquering, Christ reigning from the Cross, Christ radiating life. For from the Cross streamed seven mighty rivers, seven rivers of life, seven rivers of grace - their waters filling the spaces of the sphere, flowing to the uttermost ends.*

*He saw them as the seven Sacraments of God.*

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<sup>146</sup>*The Shadow on the Earth*, pp. 134-136.

*And he saw the sphere in another manner now - as, in a mystical way, the Body of Christ. The vastness of it was full with living beings, members of His Body. They drank of those rivers of life. For them the Crucified had agonized; offered Himself in death - to release those seven floods, that they might drink and live.... For the rivers gave release from the darkness of sin; transformed the suffering and pain for the purifying of the sufferers, drawing to the Cross all who drank, so that He Who hung there suffered with them and they with Him, He in them and they in Him....*

*So did he perceive that no suffering was lost, that pain was not in vain. So also did he perceive the reason of the sphere's magnitude, and of the world's littleness. It was the sphere that mattered; the world mattered not.<sup>147</sup>*

The mystical experience shows Dudley's essential vision of the world. The world of sense perception is of little permanent consequence; what matters is the spiritual world which supports it. The spiritual world permeates the material one, occasionally breaking into it in a way that makes the spiritual background visible. Nowhere is that spiritual support more pronounced than in the Sacraments, those graces from God which are the underpinning of creation. The priest, therefore, is of great importance in his role as the one who serves as the conduit between these two worlds, especially in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In this role, the priest brings down the fire of the Holy Spirit, that, as St. John Chrysostom explains, "grace may descend upon the victim, and through it inflame the souls of all and render them brighter than silver fire-ried."<sup>148</sup>

The physical power of the sacraments is shown in many ways. We find Beauty Dethier realizing the goodness of God while attending the Last Rites as a "terrific reality was borne upon her", a reality which causes the apostate Catholic to immediately renounce

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid, pp. 137-138.

<sup>148</sup>St. John Chrysostom, as translated by Patrick Boyle, *On the Priesthood* (Westminster MD: The Newman Press, 1955), p. 42.

her dissolute life and return to the Church.<sup>149</sup> Beauty seeks the Sacrament of Confession, leaving the confessional “trembling with a new happiness” and after receiving Holy Communion, “cried out her joy in faithful Marie’s arms.”<sup>150</sup> In the World War Two novel *Michael*, Father Thornton explains it is not enough to demand that God unilaterally intervene in human affairs; rather, man must invite His help:

*It was men like Michael, kneeling humbly before the Crucifix and Tabernacle, who were doing the work of the world; all those thousands of the Religious Orders, whom the world knew not, unwearily interceding; priests offering ceaselessly and pleading the Sacrifice of Calvary; the faithful of all nations who served the Saviour of mankind without thought of reward in this life; the spiritual few to whom the many owed so much; who held the hand of God and kept heaven linked with earth...*<sup>151</sup>

One of the most striking examples of the power of the Mass in human affairs is found in *The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk*. In this work, Father Thornton attempts to convert the thoroughly despicable Gordon Tremayne, an abused youth who has become a sadist as an adult, seeking to destroy other lives, even driving them to suicide. His conversion comes about through the virtue of his three young nephews and nieces offering intense prayers for him at Mass during the moment of consecration.<sup>152</sup> These prayers carry a strength of grace in them which is strong enough to convert their hardened uncle’s black heart.

At their core, Dudley believed the struggles of this world to be spiritual as well. *The*

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<sup>149</sup>*The Masterful Monk*, p. 244.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid*, p. 261.

<sup>151</sup>*Michael*, pp. 232-233.

<sup>152</sup>*The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk*, p. 277.

*Coming of the Monster* deals with the threat of international communism and Father Thornton's efforts to thwart an attempted Communist Revolution in England. At the novel's conclusion, one of the Russian agents converts and explains to Thornton that he was forced to by knowledge that the monster was coming; while communists claim their work is for the Revolution, in reality it is for Satan, the monster who drives them to make men hate God.<sup>153</sup> War is caused by sin as well and its remedy can be found in faithful adherence to the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance. Dudley exhorts his readers in *You and Thousands Like You* to imagine "the mass of the human race believing in the Blessed Sacrament and Penance and availing themselves of these two Sacraments." It is only under such a scenario, Dudley argues, that peace will prevail in this world, a world transformed by the Peace of Christ.<sup>154</sup>

A priest is not a mere Sacrament-making machine, however, but also a shepherd of souls. In his preparation for the Catholic priesthood, Dudley would no doubt have encountered the works of Henry Cardinal Manning. Manning (1808-1892) was the Archbishop of Westminster and one of the most prominent figures of late Victorian Catholicism. His book *The Eternal Priesthood* lays out the meaning of the priesthood, stressing its duties and benefits and laying out the path to sanctity which a priest should follow. Based heavily on the Church Fathers and especially St. John Chrysostom, Manning's work stresses the sacramental powers that a priest receives at ordination,

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<sup>153</sup>*The Coming of the Monster*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>154</sup>*You and Thousands Like You*, pp. 116-117.

namely the ability to consecrate the Eucharist and to absolve the penitent of sin.<sup>155</sup>

Manning also notes how the priest, by virtue of the ontological change in him at ordination, stands in three relations: to Jesus Christ as the great High Priest, to Christ as Head of the Church, and to those souls which have been entrusted to him.<sup>156</sup> Father Dudley is aware of the priest's duties as shepherd of the flock. Throughout his novels, Father Thornton is always available to help those in need with the right blend of compassion and authority. He shows a knack for knowing when to speak of religion and when to leave it be, when to challenge someone for skipping Sunday Mass and when to allow one to sit in silent prayer before the Crucifix. The priest also shows a strong preference to the suffering of the poor. While we have already seen in *The Coming of the Monster* that Dudley equates communism with Satan, he takes pains to show Father Thornton as a priest speaking out in the Church's name for justice for the oppressed:

*"We condemn the domination of money-power; the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. We condemn unrestricted competition, profiteering, underselling, control of the Press, the sacrificing of the laws of Justice. We condemn the capitalists who gain the machinery of social life at the expense of the common good of the people."*<sup>157</sup>

Nor is Father Thornton a man of mere words; in the same book, he also takes a perilous trip down a mine shaft to aid an injured coal-miner and minister to his companions.

Dudley's entire career as an apologist was driven by this desire to be a good pastor of

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<sup>155</sup>Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, *The Eternal Priesthood* (Westminster MD: The Newman Press, n.d.), p. 12.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid, pp. 26-34.

<sup>157</sup>*The Coming of the Monster*, p. 116.

souls. He states that after his conversion, he “found compassion for those outside - for the sheep without a shepherd. And I would that I could show them right into the heart of him whom men call the Pope of Rome - the shepherd of the sheep...”<sup>158</sup> This desire came from the combination of his embrace of the chivalric ideal with the duties of the priesthood. In fact, Dudley’s ideal of the priesthood harkens back to the original ideals of the religious-military orders of knighthood founded during the Crusades. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre, founded by Sir Godfrey Bouillon in 1099, enjoined all its members to wear the Jerusalem Cross signifying the five wounds of Christ and to take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>159</sup> Over the centuries, the concept of Christian Knighthood has obviously changed, with swords and armor exchanged for the spiritual arms of prayer and almsgiving. Nevertheless, the Church still holds up these ideals to the members of its chivalric orders of knighthood. As Edmund Cardinal Szoka has said, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem witnesses to the ongoing significance of the chivalric virtues:

*It continues to speak of Christian virtues, self-discipline, generosity, and courage. If the past centuries located these virtues on the battlefield, we realize that knighthood today involves a courageous struggle for justice and peace in courtrooms, in corporate offices, in labor negotiation meetings and in international politics.*<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>“What I Found”, p. 149.

<sup>159</sup>William J. Doyle, *The Origins, Structure, and Present Work of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem* (San Diego: Western Lieutenancy Publications, 2000), pp. 6-7.

<sup>160</sup>Edmund Cardinal Szoka, *The Significance of Knighthood in Today’s Society* (The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, n.d.), p. 3.

The order maintains a special division for Priest-Knights who must make a special vow upon being knighted. The knights are enjoined by the Cardinal celebrating the investiture to wear a stole with the Jerusalem Cross as a symbol of their vow to deny themselves, take up their crosses, follow Christ, and "fight against our enemies to further the salvation" of all Christians.<sup>161</sup> This ceremony could just as easily have been written directly by Dudley himself, signifying his concept of the priest as knight.

For Owen Francis Dudley, the priest is called to be the embodiment of both saint and knight, a living Sir Galahad who has found and drunk from the Holy Grail. The priest is both the man of action and sportsmanship and also the servant of the Holy God, the one who offers the Divine Sacrifice which unites and supports the foundations of physical reality. While this may seem like a tall order, it is clearly the ideal by which Dudley lived and one which he believed attainable. He speaks at one point of a vocation as being the capacity to live religious vows,<sup>162</sup> a capacity which would have been developed by living a pure, sportsmanlike life according to the ideals of chivalry. From that point, the priest must merely accept God's Will for him and allow God to supply his remaining needs. By doing so, he will truly become both priest and knight, living out the Five Wounds of Christ and carrying His banner into the moral battles of modern life.

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<sup>161</sup>From the Investiture Ceremony for the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, as approved by the Holy See.

<sup>162</sup>*The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk*, p. 57.



## Chapter IV

*"Strength is born in the deep silence of long-suffering hearts; not amid joy."*

- Sir Arthur Helps (1813-1875)

If there is one theme found consistently throughout Dudley's writings, it is the problem of human suffering. Time and again, his characters struggle with deep suffering and question why they must face such a lot in life. Suffering is presented as a major and important part of life and one, which in Dudley's opinion, brings great opportunity for good. While we know not if he was familiar with the above quotation from the British historian Sir Arthur Helps, he clearly argues that there is a strength which comes from suffering freely accepted.

Following the First World War, millions of people faced a new problem, that of dealing with the scars and wounds of the war. For some, these were emotional scars caused by the loss of loved ones. For many, it was the issue of dealing with permanent severe injuries such as lost limbs or damaged lungs from poison gas. The maimed veteran was an all-too-common sight in post-Great War Britain, selling red poppies on the street corner. In his study of the effect of the war on one English town, Geoffrey Moorhouse notes the number of returning veterans who committed suicide, unable to cope physically

and mentally with the trauma they had endured.<sup>163</sup> Families suffered as well, especially those whose members were listed simply as missing:

*Newspapers in Lancashire regularly carried pathetic messages from women whose men appeared to have vanished into thin air - as they literally had sometimes if they had been hit by an artillery shell - without their comrades knowing how they'd died.*<sup>164</sup>

The village of Bury began the war with a population of about 50,000, of whom it is believed around 15,000 served in the war.<sup>165</sup> A year after the war's end, the town held 1,266 disabled veterans, a number which fails to include those suffering from undiagnosed psychological disorders.<sup>166</sup> The effects of the war could linger for years; as late as 1932, one injured veteran collapsed in the street and died from the wounds he had received at Gallipoli.<sup>167</sup> The war brought a whole new era of suffering to Britain which would last for the remainder of many people's lives.

As an army chaplain, Father Dudley no doubt saw much of this suffering first-hand. The vivid passages describing war's carnage in *Pageant of Life* bear a ring of authenticity, lacking the melodrama which often accompanies Dudley's fictional denouements. Short descriptions of men killed suddenly, a brief account of a man who has a momentary panic attack and ends up being executed for cowardice, memories of comrades changed from

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<sup>163</sup>Moorhouse, pp. 108-109.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>165</sup>The exact number is unknown as the records were destroyed in a fire during the Second World War. Moorhouse, p. xiv.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid, p. 107.

living beings to “unrecognisable, dismembered” corpses: all serve to give the reader the sense that the author truly understands that of which he writes.<sup>168</sup> Dudley himself was wounded at the front; nothing is known of the wound and while it left no obvious visible damage, it could possibly have been something which caused lingering suffering over the years.

In addition to his war service, there are other indications that Dudley may have suffered deeply. As we saw in Chapter One, there is circumstantial evidence that Dudley’s conversion from Anglicanism caused a break with his family. As an only child, his parents no doubt invested many of their hopes on their son’s future only to see him renounce the church in which they raised him and which they presumably loved. It is telling perhaps that Dudley states that one thing he found on joining the Catholic Church was the Blessed Virgin Mary, “a loving Mother who supplies my every human need.”<sup>169</sup> Is this an indication that Mary became the substitute for his human mother (and father) who rejected him? Another hint is found in the *Masterful Monk* novels. Although Father Thornton is shown to have been raised in a good Catholic family by a wise and loving father, several novels have subplots involving characters who are rejected by their parents after converting Catholicism. It is entirely conjectural, of course, but there are at least strong hints that Dudley’s conversion caused a break with his family, a break which would no doubt have caused him personal suffering.

Finally, as a priest, Father Dudley would have known his share of suffering. By virtue

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<sup>168</sup>*Pageant of Life*, pp. 180-185.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid*, p. 149.

of being an *Alter Christus*, Dudley would have been conformed to Christ in all things, including his suffering. The High Priest Christ “molds and configures every man who shares His priesthood, and this process is nothing less than a share in His suffering”.<sup>170</sup> Dudley’s entire priestly training would have prepared him to embrace suffering, rather than to run from it. Cardinal Manning devotes an entire chapter of *The Eternal Priesthood* to the sorrows of the priest, noting in particular the suffering caused by the falling away of the sheep in his flock and the lukewarmness of many souls to whom the priest ministers.<sup>171</sup> For Dudley the apologist, keenly attune to the needs of souls outside the Church, such suffering must have occurred. The theme of the need to accept suffering is found throughout his works - in fact, it is the most common theme found in his writings. If we are to give Dudley any credit at all, we must assume that he knew suffering by virtue of his priesthood and his experiences.

Suffering was a common shared experience in post-war Britain and one which drove society in diverse manners. For example, Dudley himself credited the popularity of spiritualism to the “slaughter of the Great War, followed by the perverted cravings of relatives of the dead for direct evidence of their survival.”<sup>172</sup> The war, which caused a general breakdown of trust in society’s institutions, gave strength to the various philosophers calling for social change, such as Dudley’s *bete-noire*, H.G. Wells. These

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<sup>170</sup>Rev. Charles P. Connor, *Meditations on the Catholic Priesthood* (NY: St. Pauls, 2005), p. 69.

<sup>171</sup>Manning, pp. 137-142.

<sup>172</sup>*The Abomination in Our Midst*, p. 5.

humanists thought that “only a radical reconstruction of Western society and its economic system could prevent a recurrence” of the suffering of the Great War.<sup>173</sup> To this end, existing societal structures - including the Catholic Church - should be done away with to allow for the creation of a new society, a utopia perfected on its own through education and technology. Suffering would end in a glorious new world wherein all humanity existed in blissful peace with one another, serving the common goal of their perpetual betterment.

In a practical sense, the humanitarians taught that suffering was bad. The whole point of the Wellsian Utopia is that science and reason have eliminated suffering through eugenics and medical advances. Societal structures which cause suffering, such as the demands of marriage and parenthood, will be destroyed, to be replaced by free love and birth control. Dudley himself summarizes humanitarianism as a struggle ultimately between atheism and Christianity, most notably in *Will Men Be Like Gods?* and *The Masterful Monk*. Dudley argues that humanitarianism’s view of suffering is based on a false idea of happiness, one which sees it as an absence of pain and suffering. As he points out, Utopia ends up based “on the negative conditions of happiness” rather than the positive. Happiness does not come just because “all that is not consistent with it is removed.” If Utopia makes science its god, then it is doomed to despair:

*What kind of happiness would any rational being find in working solely for a Humanity doomed to extinction? For the extinction of human life on earth is scientifically a matter of time. Of what value would be all the moral efforts of all the individuals in the world, if the fruits of those efforts were fated to fade like a*

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<sup>173</sup>John Steele Gordon, “What We Lost in the Great War” in *American Heritage* Vol. 43, No. 4 (July-August 1992), p. 87.

*shadowy pageant, leaving no trace behind?*<sup>174</sup>

Utopia ignores the Christian answer to the problem of human suffering because it does not understand the true nature of happiness. Happiness is found not in eliminating suffering but in following Christ.

The key to happiness is found in a world view which understands the supernatural character of reality. As we saw in the Cripple's vision in *The Shadow on the Earth*, the world is centered on the Church, i.e., the Mystical Body of Christ, and is permeated by the grace of God. God is found in all things, filling and supporting the world with Divine Beauty and Power. It is only when we recognize this and enter into this life of grace that we begin to understand happiness. This does not happen immediately for it is not an act of an instant but instead a journey on a path unknown. As Dudley explains:

*A journey lies before them. The King's highway passes through this vale of tears. The way of grace is, at its outset, the Way of the Cross. The sanctified are privileged to share with the Crucified. But suffering so shared is haloed with divine light and sorrow turned to joy.*<sup>175</sup>

Those on the journey to God learn that neither suffering nor its lack, neither worldly pain nor pleasures bring happiness; true happiness is only found by resting in God.

Dudley's argument is found repeatedly in his novels where almost all his characters face the problem of suffering. His first novel, *The Shadow on the Earth*, deals with the pain and suffering of the Cripple, the young Englishman permanently injured in a mountain-climbing accident. A succession of visitors attempt to help him understand his

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<sup>174</sup>*Will Men Be Like Gods?*, p. 11.

<sup>175</sup>*Ibid*, p. 79.

suffering . The Atheist argues it is proof that God does not exist for how can one believe in “a *good* God creating men and breaking them on the wheel of life - as He has broken you?”<sup>176</sup> Man is called to strive towards a humanitarian Utopia, one in which the unfit are discarded as useless - an argument which drives the Cripple to attempt suicide. It is only through the intervention of Father Thornton that the Cripple finds reason to live. As the two gaze out at the Italian Alps, Father Thornton explains how that which seems to be bad may be something which leads to a greater good:

*“You see those dark patches of rock? They bring out the whiteness of the snow, don’t they? They add to the beauty of the mountains. Don’t you think, in the same way, that the ugly patches of the world, the dark patches of pain and suffering, might bring out the goodness of life - might add to its beauty?...Is what happened to you really an unmitigated disaster?” said the monk. “Is it really a cruel horror? Why shouldn’t it add to your life, in some way? It has cut you off from a great deal, yes, including...the silly shams of a world that dares not think, that jizzes along on its brainless round of shows and drinks and lusts...And it has left a void. Don’t you think that possibly that void may be a good thing?”*

*“How? Why?”*

*“Because voids can be filled.”<sup>177</sup>*

As the Cripple’s gradual conversion continues, Thornton will later explain how humanitarianism fails by seeking happiness in a pain-free world. Pain and suffering, the Masterful Mink teaches, are not evils *per se* but rather part and parcel of God’s Eternal Purpose. The humanitarian who decries a God who allows suffering is wallowing in “the folly of the thwarted child that sulks.” The solution is found in allowing that God may have created a world where “pain and suffering minister to man’s great end”.<sup>178</sup> This end

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<sup>176</sup>*The Shadow on the Earth*, p. 8.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>178</sup>*Ibid*, p. 24.

is found in the life and death of Christ Himself, whose suffering on the Cross is the key to man's redemption.

Emphasizing that human pain and suffering may be the means God uses to bring people to salvation strikes many today as cruel and unreasonable. Such thinking however has long been part of the Christian tradition. St. John Chrysostom, for example, wrote a series of sermons on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus from the Gospel of Luke. Chrysostom compares the Rich Man to those who follow the broad path to destruction, the easy life of *luxuria* and wealth. Lazarus signifies those who follow the narrow way, a life marked by asceticism and suffering. All people, even the best of men, will commit some sin for which punishment is due. Far better to endure this punishment patiently in this life rather than in the next!<sup>179</sup> Suffering is not evil in itself; Chrysostom compares it to visiting a physician where "the treatment is painful. But its purpose is beneficial."<sup>180</sup> Lazarus is held up as a model for Christians because he accepted his poverty and resigned himself to God's will. By doing so, he identified himself with the Suffering Christ. Rather than seeking the life of *luxuria* which only seems to be the way to happiness, Lazarus sought lasting happiness by the humble acceptance of God's will in his life. Such apparent human goods as wealth, power, and material goods are meaningless when viewed in supernatural terms; although not intrinsically evil, they are good only in as much as they serve to bring one closer to union with God. Pain and suffering are likewise

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<sup>179</sup>St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, translated by Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid*, p. 102.



often confused as evils when they are moral neutrals whose value lies in whether they serve to bring one to God. Life in this world is but preparation for Eternal Life and it is this end to which all our thoughts must be directed.

For Dudley, suffering has an expiatory value as well. In several novels, the voluntary acceptance of suffering is shown to cause good ends via the grace released by such submission to God's will. Verna Wray's decision to end her engagement and enter the convent is the means by which the villainous Bolshevik assassin Karenov is converted<sup>181</sup> while elsewhere Father Thornton attributes his own vocation to the martyrdom of his close friend Cyril Rodney.<sup>182</sup> The Cripple comes to understand that his role in life is to silently suffer for the sins of those who denounce God<sup>183</sup> while in the book's sequel, he voluntarily takes a bullet meant for his brother - and by doing so, his death leads to the conversion of Beauty Dethier.<sup>184</sup> Michael St. Helier is consecrated in his vocation through the actions of an Elizabethan priest martyred in the family chapel; through the martyr's prayers, Michael is given the grace to risk his life twice to save others during the war.<sup>185</sup>

We have seen the influence of the English Catholic imagination on Dudley and it is the imagery of the Crucifix which best signifies the paradox of suffering to him. For Dudley, the Cross is all that matters in this world. Compared to Christ on the Cross, the

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<sup>181</sup>*The Coming of the Monster*, p. 269.

<sup>182</sup>*The Tremaynes and the Masterful Monk*, p. 14.

<sup>183</sup>*The Shadow on the Earth*, p. 143.

<sup>184</sup>*The Masterful Monk*, pp. 238-245.

<sup>185</sup>*Michael*, pp. 192-193.

Great War meant nothing, politics, scientific progress, newspapers, cinema - all meaningless when set against the Cross where "the eternal destiny of every living soul hangs on that pale, bloodstained Figure!"<sup>186</sup> The Cross is what holds the world together and what gives meaning to suffering. Dudley explains the importance of the Cross in whose light "no pain is in vain, but of immense value, all suffering invested with merit, offered up with the sacrifice of Calvary."<sup>187</sup> In the Mystical Body, all of humanity is joined with Christ on the Crucifix, joined through the Sacraments so that "He Who hung there suffered with them and they with Him, He in them and they in Him. They were suffering to be made like Himself." The sufferings of Christ Crucified are combined with those of His members into one intense prayer of love to the Heavenly Father which releases the floods of Divine Mercy upon the earth. It is in being apart from the world and one with the Crucifix that Light and Truth are found.<sup>188</sup>

The imagery and meaning of the Cross are central to the plot of *Pageant of Life*. This novel details the friendship between Thornton and Cyril Rodney. Set mainly during the Great War, Thornton has not yet become a priest and serves in the Army with Captain Rodney. Despite being a brave, first-rate athlete and sportsman, Cyril is shown to have an abnormal abhorrence of crucifixes, to the point of being physically unable to stand being in a room with one. Despite heroic bravery during the war, Cyril attempts to convince Thornton to detour cross country to avoid passing a roadside shrine for no other reason

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<sup>186</sup> *Human Happiness and H.G. Wells*, p. 25.

<sup>187</sup> *You and Thousands Like You*, p. 49.

<sup>188</sup> *The Shadow on the Earth*, pp. 138-139.

than the pain he experiences passing a crucifix.<sup>189</sup> Eventually, his fiancée convinces him to tell the story of why he abhors crucifixes and we learn that Cyril had a strange dream as a child, half-nightmare and half-vision, of being himself crucified:

*It had been as if he were watching an excruciating torture being inflicted on his body...one part of himself seemed not to mind; another part was resisting violently. The impression had remained afterwards that the more he had struggled against it, the more torturing it had become; when he "gave in" it was not so terrible.<sup>190</sup>*

As the war progresses, Cyril's mood becomes ever blacker and his friendship with Thornton strained as he resists God's call. Finally, Cyril gives in to God and becomes a Catholic, learning to Thornton's marvel, that he must actively court the Crucifix.<sup>191</sup> Cyril becomes a devout Catholic, spending lengthy time in prayer kneeling, arms outstretched, before a crucifix. The book concludes in 1919 during the Allied Expedition to Siberia<sup>192</sup> with Thornton and Cyril volunteering to battle against the atheistic communists. The two are captured by communist spies and dragged off into the wintry forest. The Bolshevik leader seizes the crucifix Rodney wears, spits on it, and tries to force Cyril at knifepoint to do likewise:

*The leader was holding the crucifix once more before his mouth, giving him a last chance to spit.*

*Cyril looked down at his right arm, and signified that he wanted it released.*

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<sup>189</sup>*Pageant of Life*, p. 203.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid*, p. 237.

<sup>191</sup>*Ibid*, p. 272.

<sup>192</sup>The expedition was an abortive attempt to support the White Russians against the Red Communist forces during the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. Little was accomplished and the expedition today is largely forgotten.

*The leader regarded him questioningly....The man spoke to his guards, and his right arm was released.*

*Thornton saw Cyril stand erect and motionless.*

*Then raise his hand to the salute...<sup>193</sup>*

The Bolshevik thugs are outraged and, seizing Cyril, they bind him to a large tree. Seizing their knives, they crucify him to the tree with them, saving the last knife to bury into his side as he writhes in agony. The novel ends as Cyril dies with one final glance at his beloved friend Thornton.

This powerful scene sums up Dudley's view of the power of the Cross. Cyril Rodney spent his life running from God, only finding happiness when he stopped running and embraced the Crucifix. Cyril pays the ultimate price, becoming another Christ in his suffering, joining in his crucifixion with the Crucified One. The ultimate act of human virtue is shown to be accepting God's will with courage. Cyril's gallant act of bravery in saluting the Crucifix is no mere bravado; it is the courage of the true knight putting his loyalty to God before all considerations of personal well-being. Cyril is a true knight, unafraid and true to his liege, placing honor and service above all else.

Dudley's theology of suffering is related not only to his ideal of chivalry but also to his view of the importance of the Eucharist. We find this in his treatment of the Virgin Mary. While the Blessed Mother does not figure large in his works, she is often there, silently in the background, occasionally shining forth. Dudley's work shows particular devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes and particular compassion for the suffering pilgrims found at her shrine. In *The Coming of the Monster*, the novel's climax occurs at Lourdes.

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<sup>193</sup> *Pageant of Life*, p. 339.

In this novel, the struggle of the Church against Communism is clearly shown to be but the current historical manifestation of the battle between God and Satan. Dudley uses militaristic imagery to describe Lourdes, calling the prayers during Eucharistic Adoration a "bombardment" coming forth from "that army of living souls crashing its artillery upon What was poised there..."<sup>194</sup> It is at Lourdes that the novel's heroine, Verna Wray, first realizes she is called to the religious life. Almost desperately, she tries to convince herself she is called to marry her beloved fiancée, fiercely fighting against the call she feels in her heart. Her close friend June Champion advises her to pour forth everything to Our Lady at the Grotto shrine, explaining, "You'll understand yourself, my dear, when you understand Lourdes."<sup>195</sup>

The key to understanding Lourdes, as it turns out, is not found in miracles. Rather, the key is found in suffering *and the free acceptance of it in humble submission to God's will*. The key to Lourdes is understanding that freely accepted suffering is the War of the Cross, a War of expiation, of "chosen victims waging war against vice, immorality, revolt."<sup>196</sup> Suffering is not something which anyone chooses, but it is something which God, in the infinite depths of His Divine Knowledge, chooses for some of us. Kneeling before a statue of Our Lady, Verna comes to understand suffering and the necessity for all people to submit to God's Will in their lives.

Father Thornton was leading the pilgrimage at Lourdes and reflects on those suffering

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<sup>194</sup>*The Coming of the Monster*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>195</sup>*Ibid*, p. 237.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid*, P. 241.

pilgrims who had come to Lourdes seeking healing, if not physical then spiritual. As he watches the parade of the crippled and maimed, he is stirred by the sight of "that vast pageant for the love of Mary." These pilgrims are the "Deathless Army of the Cross" going forth "to conquer by their Faith a Faithless world."<sup>197</sup> At Lourdes, they have been healed by learning how to accept their suffering and how to offer it back to the Lord, joining it with Christ's Passion.

In one of his essays, Father Dudley expounds on this topic, reflecting on his personal experiences at Lourdes. The priest, serving as a volunteer to help the sick, is amazed by the work of his fellow *brancardiers*, "whose boots I am always conscious of not being fit to lick",<sup>198</sup> and understands what immense love of God drives men to help others even when the work becomes loathsome and repugnant. He begins to understand what Our Lady asks:

*You leave the Piscines in shame, knowing how miserably you have shirked the Cross and shrunk from what it involves.... Our Lady asks for heroes and martyrs to be crucified with her Son. She asks for the big thing. She asks you, by the power of the Cross, to live at the service of others for the love of God, of the helpless, the suffering, the unattractive, the despised...*<sup>199</sup>

But even more, Dudley realized that Lourdes is not about a few miracles, but about the many for whom there is no miraculous cure. Those who come with an open heart receive a new grace, "the grace to offer themselves. If they are healed - *Deo gratias*; if not - *Fiat*

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid, pp. 259-260.

<sup>198</sup>*Human Happiness and H.G. Wells*, p. 42.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid, p. 43.

*voluntas tua.*<sup>200</sup>

For Dudley, it is when the soul echoes the Divine Fiat of the Virgin Mary that there then comes:

*the joy of a great understanding: They are the chosen ones of God for a vast, mysterious work of expiation, a mighty volume of pain and prayer sweeping up before the Throne in Heaven. Chosen to remind men of the folly and futility of the flesh. Chosen to tell the world that there is something immeasurably greater than the mere physical courage of long-distance flights - supernatural fortitude.*<sup>201</sup>

It is by following the Blessed Virgin that the suffering come to Christ. By imitating the example of Mary in accepting God's will for one's life, the suffering are allowed to be joined with Christ Crucified, sharing their suffering with His. Our human suffering is thereby united with His in expiation for the sins of the world.

We have seen the importance in Dudley's canon of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The power of the Mass in the world is one of Dudley's key concepts and the most important theme which his work carries for us today. The focal point of our world is Christ and all of us are called to follow Him by freely accepting God's Plan for us. All of us will suffer but none of us need suffer alone. We are all called to join with Christ on the Crucifix. In all humble love, we are called to join in His work of expiation for the sins of our brethren. This occurs both when we consciously accept God's Will in our suffering and in the Divine Sacrifice of the Mass. It is again by considering the Blessed Virgin that we can understand the nature of Divine Will and human suffering.

Since the Council of Trent, the Church has taught that the Holy Mass is the same as

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<sup>200</sup>Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid.

the Sacrifice on the Cross, differing only in the way in which it is offered. The Mass is not merely a memorial of something which happened in the past or an attempt to recreate theatrically an historical event. Rather, it is the liturgical presentation of the actual event itself. The event is understood to occur not only in its historical time and place but again and again over the ages. The event - the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross - occurs outside time and space while simultaneously being presented in time and space. The Church comes to the Mass "not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*".<sup>202</sup> It is important to realize that at *each individual* Mass, a specific event *is* occurring. Cardinal Ratzinger notes that "What is going on in the Eucharist is an event happening to the thing itself and not just something agreed among ourselves."<sup>203</sup> The Eucharist is not play-acting nor is it a symbolic act. It *is indeed* the event it presents sacramentally, occurring across eternity, infusing our world with God's love.

When we consider what the Church teaches of this historical event, we find first Jesus offering Himself to the Father through the Cross. Yet we also find Mary at the foot of the Cross. It is there that Mary offers her son to the Father, fully co-operating with God in the salvation of man. Just as Christ is eternally offering Himself on the Cross here and now at every Eucharist throughout eternity, so too is Mary constantly at the foot of the Cross offering her Son to the Father. The two are linked in an eternal kenosis of faith and love,

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<sup>202</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Washington: USCCB Publishing, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>203</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), p. 87.



in one moment in which history ceases and eternity is opened.

It is this moment to which Dudley calls his readers. All of us are meant to join with Christ and Mary, either suffering with Christ on the Cross or with Mary beside it. By accepting God's will and whatever it entails in love and submission, we become one with Christ, entering into Divine Union with the Trinity. It is this submission which makes us part of His Mystical Body, one with Him in the eternal Heavenly Banquet. There is nothing greater to which any of us can aspire, nothing more that holds greater meaning. The Eternal Sacrifice of Our Lord is our feast and our delight, resonating through time and space, charging the world with that glory and grandeur of Our Lord. It is the depths of an eternal love to which all are called, the love into which we may plunge in an eternal journey into mystical union with the Holy Trinity.

This supernatural end - eternal union with God in heaven - is the key to understanding the meaning of suffering. Pain and suffering reminds us that:

*man's final aim and happiness lie beyond this world, that he must suffer and endure, that he may not snatch the victory unearned. We see them as rungs in the ladder of life for the scaling of heroic heights. We see this world as a vast crucible into which men are plunged for their testing - for Eternal Life. For those who shirk the test the world becomes a cauldron; for those who face it - a crucible of Love.*<sup>204</sup>

All of us must pass through this cauldron as did Father Dudley. By faith, however, we know that we will not pass through it alone. By following the example of Mary, we will come to find Her Son, the Love for whom and by whom we are forged in the crucible.

Owen Francis Dudley was in many ways a man of his era, shaped by Victorian

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<sup>204</sup>*The Shadow on the Earth*, p. 28.

chivalry, the English Catholic imagination, and the suffering of the First World War. Yet the way he combined these experiences with his faith produced a theology which speaks directly to some of the timeless questions of the human experience. The world is far more than what one can find by one's own senses, being rather intimately connected with its Creator in a fusion of the natural and supernatural. All of us must be forged in the crucible of life, the crucible of suffering, a crucible which is nothing more nor less than the Mystery of Christ Himself.

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