

perfectly sound; for this was an enemy operating the *index librorum prohibitorum*, the Holy Office and its fires, a burner of books and men. Of course we were against it! By 200 years we anticipated Pombal, Voltaire, Joseph II and all the forces which in the Catholic world in the 18th and 19th centuries were to express themselves as anticlericalism.

For long after it relinquished, or was relieved of, its direct powers to misgovern, the fingers of the Church still itched for raw temporal power. There are few stories more melancholy than that of Mastai-Ferretti (Pius IX) in the long sulk and self-immuration which followed the destruction of his temporal powers begun by that hero of the English and notable anticlerical, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Pius IX was reduced by the loss of most of the Papal states to proclaim his infallibility, calling in, as it were, the next world to redress the balance of this. The effect of Vatican 2, whatever eccentricities it may have prompted, was to break forever the resentful antiquarian hold of what might be called the Counter-Risorgimento, the taste of the Church for chic reaction and for all-round submissiveness among its faithful.

Perhaps one is too optimistic but the post-posterous world of Evelyn Waugh's Mr Crouchback, still in distress over the usurpation of the House of Savoy, is lost and Catholics seem to think it well lost. Imperfectly and with many stumbles, the Catholic church seems to be a late convert to English liberalism. There were thus no significant protests against the Pope's visit to this country, for the substance of what had made Catholicism politically objectionable to us has gone into irreversible decline.

So the crowds turned out: at Wembley (newly recovered from the replay of the FA Soccer Cup), at Coventry, York, Manchester, tumbledown Liverpool, and most notably at Belahouston Park in Scotland, where the crowd of the faithful gave every indication of cheering the Pope without bothering to listen to him. Indeed the phenomenon did have affinities with a Pop concert. Where religious devotion began and coming to see the great star left off who shall say? But it was all very fitting that the Roman Catholics of this country registered their affection. Even though it appears that expectations of the size of crowds were much too high, the delight was real enough.

IRONICALLY, although the Pope dropped a great many hints about the iniquity of war, and by implication the wrongness of our dusting-over of the Argentinians, it had exactly no effect, either on the crowds or on Mrs Thatcher, who tactfully avoided a meeting and went on dusting.

Even more ironically Major Keble, who following the death in action of Colonel "H" Jones, was in temporary command of the Second Parachute regiment and who accepted Argentinian surrender at Goose Green, is a devout Roman Catholic. While the Pope was deploring (eloquently), the army was fighting (superlatively), and the Major countersigned. It is an Erastian world after all. English Roman Catholics tend, on balance, to be every last little bit as nationalistic and English as the rest of us. As a source of direct political authority the heir of Innocent III has about as much direct authority as Señor Perez de Cuellar, which suits us admirably.

### A Chip off the Block

A spelk's half-lost under the skin  
like the vague support  
in an unlit paper lantern.

I jab with the needle, tattooing nothing  
until my nail, as broad as a shovel,  
forces out the jagged wedge—

no light, no image, wooden;  
every writer's nightmare.  
Enough to make my finger cry.

*David Sweetman*

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## BOOKS & WRITERS

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### A Magical Mish-Mash

*Esoteric & Conspiratorial Myths—By PETER PARTNER*

I USED TO ADMIRE my Uncle Walter because his job with the Great Western Railway led him to walk up and down the platform of Paddington Station in a beautiful tall silk hat—and because he used to tell me that the stones of the Great Pyramid of Egypt prove that the British are the Lost Tribe of Israel. How could the measurements of an ancient monument give the man with a tape measure insight into the deepest processes of human history? History not only of the Bible (which at least mentions the Ancient Egyptians) but of the Anglo-Saxons (who belonged to quite different times and places). . . . And, indeed, how could the Pyramids affect my destiny, for I belonged to the Anglo-Saxon tribe just as surely as Uncle Walter? His possession of all this hidden knowledge—the word “esoteric” was then unknown to me—worried and disturbed me.

Today, 50 years later, Uncle Walter and his silk hat are no more. For many years I gave no more thought to his visions. But the voices of the Pyramidologists are still to be heard in the land, and by a roundabout route which has led me through the East, though not past the Pyramids, I have again come to ask questions about their mysteries.

I have just completed a book on the Templars and their myth. The medieval Knights Templar were an Order of soldier-monks, bound by religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and engaged in religious war in Palestine. After the Muslims had finally driven the Crusaders from the Holy Land the Templars became, on their return to the West, the apparently innocent victims of a campaign of slander and persecution. The French King charged them with “heresy” and with “apostasy from the Christian faith.” After this long lapse of time the records are hard to interpret, and it is not definitely established

whether the accusations were true or not. But after a short period of crisis (1307–1312) in which many Templars were cruelly tortured under examination, and some burned to death, the Templar Order was dissolved for ever.

Modern scholars have hesitated to come to a definite conclusion about the Templar trials. Fanaticism and greed (for the Templars were thought by contemporaries to have been immensely rich) played a part in stimulating their accusers. Some historians think that the French monarchy simply trumped up the charges in order to fill its empty coffers; others have allowed the possibility of serious irregularities having occurred in the Order.<sup>1</sup> If we take the worst case, and assume the charges against them to have been well-founded, we can still conclude very little about the Templar heresy. The Templars were a military *corps d'élite* which perhaps lost its faith and its nerve in the Palestinian defeats. Some or (less likely) all its members may have fallen into some sort of superstitious devil-worship. The nature of that devil-worship, if it ever existed, is profoundly obscure.

THE TEMPLAR HERESY is unlikely to have been intellectual or learned in origin, as modern study of their organisation has shown that most Templars were illiterate. The way in which the accusations were framed implies that the Templars acquired their wicked ways in the Holy Land, but this is questionable. Like other Crusaders, the Templars were likely to have been entirely ignorant about Muslim customs and religion. They were taxed with the adoration of a heathen image called a “Baphomet” or “Muhammad”, but the term itself indicates the ignorance of the people who brought the charges. It is very unlikely that the Templars picked up in the East the custom of worshipping such an image, because of all religions Islam is the most uncompromising in its prohibition of the worship of any but the one

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<sup>1</sup> The Templar case has been recently examined in Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) and in *The Knights Templar*. By STEPHEN HOWARTH. Collins, £9.95.