



NEW LLANTHONY ABBEY Father Ignatius's Monastery at Capel-y-ffin

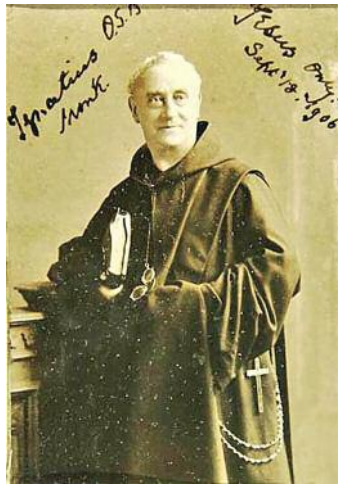
Hugh Allen

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In the gallery of Anglo-Catholic saints and sinners Joseph Leycester Lyne (Father Ignatius) occupies an ambivalent position. He was a devout young man, early drawn by a romantic medievalism to the re-establishment of the Religious Life in the Church of England, supported by Dr Pusey and Priscilla Lydia Sellon. He was made a deacon; but did not proceed to the priesthood – at least not within the Church of England. He served under the great Fr Prynne with whom he had difficulties, as he did later with Fr Lowder. He had great energy and attracted supporters and adherents. Many of these, however, were flotsam and jetsam: criminals; a confidence trickster; eccentric misfits; one with a “devious disposition and unpleasant temper”; and another who was described as a “most holy man” but who struck Fr Ignatius’s mother as “an unmitigated scamp”. Although he had the vision to launch the project, despite his limitations, he lacked insight into human nature. His energy tipped over into impatience; and his manifesto caused controversy. He was self-professed, self-appointed, eager but ignorant, and inexperienced. He was regularly and comprehensively inhibited from preaching in dioceses, and turned to touring hired halls to spread his vision. There is the whiff of an ecclesiastical huckster about him.

After various false starts and peregrinations he settled his community, in which life was often divisive, unhappy, and fractious, at New Llanthony Abbey – a set of “slightly sinister-looking Victorian Gothic buildings beside the ruins of a church.” His community at Capel-y-ffin was based on a Benedictine template and principles with Three Orders: those cloistered; those living in the world in their own homes but following a quasi-monastic life of canonical hours and



habit; and those similarly in the world observing rules of regular communion, confession, prayer, alms-giving and obedience to abbatial discipline. His behaviour could be decidedly prelatical: he “introduced a most slavish kind of homage enjoining his associates of the Order never to speak to him unless they went down on their knees, and never to pass him without making a prostration”. It is not surprising that there is some evidence of nervous collapse, a “psychosomatic element in [his] breakdown”.

The quieter life of the Abbey, although not without its own familial disquiet during the occupancy of Eric Gill and his family, after Fr Ignatius’s death and the exodus of the community, and the present work of the pilgrimage trust, is not neglected in what inevitably seems like an extended postscript.

One of the several merits of this book is the fascinating detail that it provides for those who came and went – the subsidiary cast, a motley crew, however we regard them – and not least the appearance of Joseph René Vilatte, one of the *episcopi vagantes* that almost invariably turn up in a certain strain of Anglo-Catholicism. They emerge from Fr Ignatius’s shadow and allow a more comprehensive understanding of the enterprise and its ultimate failure. It is a heady mixture of scandal, devotion and decadence, personal tensions and friendships, vision and trumpery. The *mouvementé* life is seen in the context of the buildings and the constant demands of finance. The careful and judicious sifting of evidence from personal reminiscences, contemporary press reports, previous publications (it is not the first study and that by Arthur Calder-Marshall, *The Enthusiast*, still repays attention), results

in an enjoyable, instructive, detailed, and compelling study. I hesitate to call it definitive because new and unexpected treasures can emerge from unlikely places – but it will take some dramatic revelation to supersede this account. This is a substantial and significant book, well-researched, rooted in thorough archival sources and attractively, if weightily, presented and written by Hugh Allen, comprehensive in its scope, measured and considered in its judgments.

William Davage

VATICAN II A Pastoral Council

Serafino M. Lanzetta

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In the past decade or two a huge controversy has raged within the Roman Catholic Church on the interpretation of Vatican II. Was it a continuation of past teaching, or a rupture? How do you interpret the Council Decrees? Has the Church really changed, or has it avoided the change the Council Fathers wanted? The questions are endless. Clearly Vatican II is not an event which ended in 1965, but one which continues 50 years later as people try to unpack its significance. Naturally, private agendas influence this process and it is not helped by the ambiguity of several of the Council documents. The ambiguity was, of course, often intended, in order to keep on board the majority of the voting bishops. It did, and in most votes the majorities were overwhelmingly large. In this study of the Council, and particularly its hermeneutic, Lanzetta attempts to map out some of the key debates and help us to understand something of what was going on.

There is much that is helpful in this book: it reminds us that Vatican II was quite different from all other Councils in that it did not seek to define any doctrine. It firmly resisted the pressure from the Holy Office to anathematise modern heresies. Under the direction of Pope John XXIII it breathed a new spirit of openness and love to the world. It was not, as the Holy Office would have liked, an inward looking Council, tidying up the Church and protecting Catholics