

Indeed, the whole body of the literature of satire and complaint reflects directly what Owst (*Literature and Pulpit*, 213) calls “. . . at once the profoundest and most abiding influence of the English pulpit.” To cite but one of many available examples, the great collection of homiletic tales, the *GESTA ROMANORUM*, is a storehouse drawn on by Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and Hoccleve; it supplied Elizabethan dramatists with the plots of some of their best-known plays. Wherever one turns in examining the growth of secular literature in England, from the most sedate to the most ribald, one finds it firmly rooted in popular pulpit oratory and in homiletic writings.

*See Also:* PREACHING, I (HISTORY OF).

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## PREAMBLES OF FAITH

Classically, those conclusions taken from the natural and philosophic sciences that are of use in demonstrating the validity of the Catholic faith or of the apologetic that is designed to defend it. In the pyramidal structure of the 19th-century scientificohistorical apologetic, the *praeambula fidei* were presumed to have been previously demonstrated from first principles in the study of the several sciences that are related to apologetics, so that only relevant conclusions needed to be considered in the defense of faith. Thus, the objective validity of the human power to know, the existence and absolute nature of objective truth, the existence and spirituality of the soul, the freedom of the will, the existence of a personal God and His principal attributes, the ethical necessity for man to worship God, etc., were all included among the preambles of faith without which, it was felt, a scientific apologetic

could not be constructed. These propositions were presumed to have been conclusions validly drawn in the sciences of epistemology, theodicy, psychology, and ethics. Any philosophic or scientific theory that impugned one or more of these fundamental propositions was to be rejected, while any theory that supported them was to be favored.

In more recent apologetic thought there is a departure, to some degree, from the closely reasoned and what many consider to be the almost rationalistic method of the 19th-century defense of the reasonableness of faith. The pioneer work of J. H. NEWMAN (*A Grammar of Assent*) raised the question regarding the reasonableness of the faith of the multitude of Catholic believers who are unable to grasp the reasoning involved in the apologetic employed to demonstrate its reasonableness. His conclusion was that it is by the convergence of evidence and the congeniality of orthodox beliefs among themselves that one comes to a reasonable basis for belief, rather than by the syllogistic method employed in scientific apologetics. Within the structure of his thought, the metaphysical question raised is how could there be such a convergence of evidence if the point toward which all the evidences gravitated were not the truth. This approach widens considerably the traditional definition of *praeambula fidei* to include not only the propositions previously noted, but a number of evidences that are personalistic in character and may be recognized only vaguely by the ordinary Christian. Newman’s approach left room for the investigations of depth psychology and a consideration of the influential but not fully conscious convictions of the individual that form the context of his entire reasoning capacity.

In the 1960s the a priori conditions of faith were sought in the historical dimension of human existence experienced as transcendental openness to the absolute mystery of being and thus predisposing man to accept the revelation of God-man as the concrete historical and social realization as well as the historical, objective expression of his existential openness (*see* Bouillard, RAHNER, Darlap). As a consequence Rahner takes for a starting point of the way to faith man as the potential believer who, thanks to the abiding presence of the eschatological Christ-event in the world, is already in possession of what he is to believe, e.g., God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ. Preambles of faith are therefore an implicit faith as an abiding feature of man’s existence oriented to explicit faith as to its objective and conscious self-expression in the society of believers.

Since man discovers more and more the unlimited varieties of his own historical tradition, and thus a common philosophical ground for all believers and unbeliev-

ers is found extremely difficult, in the 1970s the preambles of faith were sought rather in the empirical fact of the already existing believing community. This conception of the preamble of faith does not assume any philosophical notion of human existence or religion in general by determining a priori which philosophy or religion should be the most adequate for man. It takes the community of believers as God-given, Christ-sign-event as puzzling datum strong enough to raise in man questions concerning God's personal presence in Jesus Christ.

Preambles of faith will be defined according to the concept of the apologetics they are designed to support. In an apologetic designed to arrive at the necessity of belief (credendity), they appear in strictly demonstrable, propositional form, whereas in the more recent Biblical and personalistic approaches to apologetics that strive to show no more than the reasonableness (credibility) and desirability of belief, they assume a less rigid and wider aspect that is more a way of life than the foundation for a syllogistic analysis.

*See Also:* APOLOGETICS; FAITH.

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[J. P. WHALEN/T. HORVATH]

## PRECA, GEORGE, BL.

Dun Ġorġ (in English, Father George) Preca; founder of a religious order, b. Feb. 12, 1880 in Valletta, the capital of Malta; d. July 26, 1962, in Santa Verera. The seventh of nine children born Vincenzo Preca, a businessman, and Natalina Ceravolo, a teacher, he was baptized Ġorġ on February 17. After completing his studies at the Lyceum, Dun Ġorġ studied philosophy and theology at the University of Malta. He attend the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Malta in Floriana, and was ordained to the priesthood Dec. 22, 1906.

Even before his priestly ordination Dun Ġorġ was inspired to devote his life to the catechetical ministry. He

gathered a group of young men and instructed them in the teachings of the Church. His goal was that these educated and formed men devote their lives to the ministry of catechesis. In 1910 he founded a female branch. All members dedicate themselves to catechize the young for an hour every day and thereafter meet among themselves for personal continuing formation. They embrace a simple evangelical lifestyle and lead prayerful lives by saying short prayers at regular intervals during the day. He called the group *Societas Papidum et Papidissarum* ("Society of the Sons and Daughters of the Pope"). The locals nicknamed his association the Museum because of the run-down building where the members held their meetings. The members in turn adopted the epithet and created out of it an acronym in Latin: *Magister Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus* ("Divine Teacher, may the whole world would follow the Gospel").

The innovative idea of the laity catechizing raised suspicions among the Church authorities. In 1909 the bishop ordered Dun Ġorġ to close down all the centers he had so far opened, but the parish priests rallied behind Dun Ġorġ and the ban was soon lifted. A few years later destructive articles about the Society appeared in the local press. As a response Dun Ġorġ required that the members take a vow of meekness. After further investigations by the Church, the bishop canonically established Dun Ġorġ's group as the Society of Christian Doctrine on Apr. 12, 1932, and in time the Society established branches in Australia, England, Albania, Sudan, Kenya, and Peru. Dun Ġorġ wanted his members to study, pray and proclaim God's word in their own native tongues. He translated parts of the Bible into Maltese and wrote a good number of books on systematic and moral theology as well as on spirituality, mainly for the continuing formation of the members of his society. He had a great devotion to the mystery of the incarnation and instructed his members to wear a badge with the words *Verbum Dei caro factum est* ("The Word of God became flesh"). Dun Ġorġ was a zealous apostle of the word of God, a faithful minister of catechesis. He was a priest of great humility, goodness, meekness and generosity. Dun Ġorġ died July 26, 1962 and was buried in the Church of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal adjacent to the Society's motherhouse at Blata l-Bajda. He was one of three Maltese beatified by Pope John Paul II on his visit to Malta May 9, 2001.

Feast: May 9.

[E. MAGRO]

## PRECEPT

A precept is a command by a legitimate authority that binds in conscience. Since this is also true of law, ca-