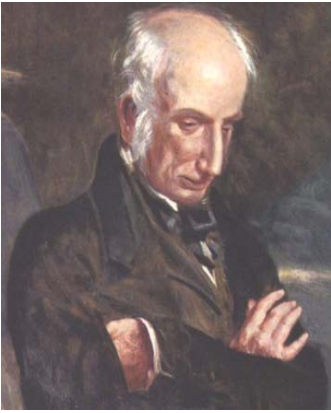


William Wordsworth



Frederick W. Faber



***THE VIRGIN and
THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS;***
An essay regarding lines about Mary:
the spotlighted and the erased.

By Thomas C. McCarthy 3/30/2022

What began as an intended quick look-see into William Wordsworth's writing that nowadays oft-quoted line about Immaculate Mary – (“*Our tainted nature's solitary boast*”) – soon morphed into extended research concerning removals of Marian references from popular hymns written by his friend Frederick William Faber, one of the Oxford Movement's literary leading lights.

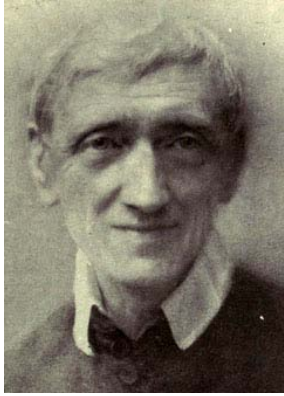
THE VIRGIN

*Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncroft
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
Woman! above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast;
Purer than foam on central ocean tost;
Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak strewn
With fancied roses, than the unblemished moon
Before her wane begins on heaven's blue coast;
Thy Image falls to earth. Yet some, I ween,
Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might bend,
As to a visible Power, in which did blend
All that was mixed and reconciled in Thee
Of mother's love with maiden purity,
Of high with low, celestial with terrene!*

Those Wordsworth's words were beautifully arranged and theologically sensitive. If he ever wrote any more such Marian verses, I have not yet found them online. If the reader knows of any, please share.

Consider how this apparently “solitary” Marian expression from Wordsworth's poetic nature -- so frequently cited in our seemingly more ecumenically enlightened era -- contrasts with the continued near virtual blackout on Marian references originally in various of Faber's 150+ hymn/poems. The prime example is his classic, “*The Faith of Our Fathers.*”

This stirring hymn-intended poem, first appeared in Faber's “*Jesus and Mary or Catholic Hymns*” book, published in 1849. It was written as a tribute to Catholics martyred under Henry VIII, the first Queen Elizabeth, and James I.



**John Henry
Newman**

Its author four years earlier had resigned as an Anglican Church vicar. With his mentor, John Henry Newman and others from the Oxford Movement, Faber joined the Roman Catholic Church. In 1847, Faber was ordained a Catholic priest.

His original poetic tribute to the victims of those monarchs' religious persecution included these lyrics:

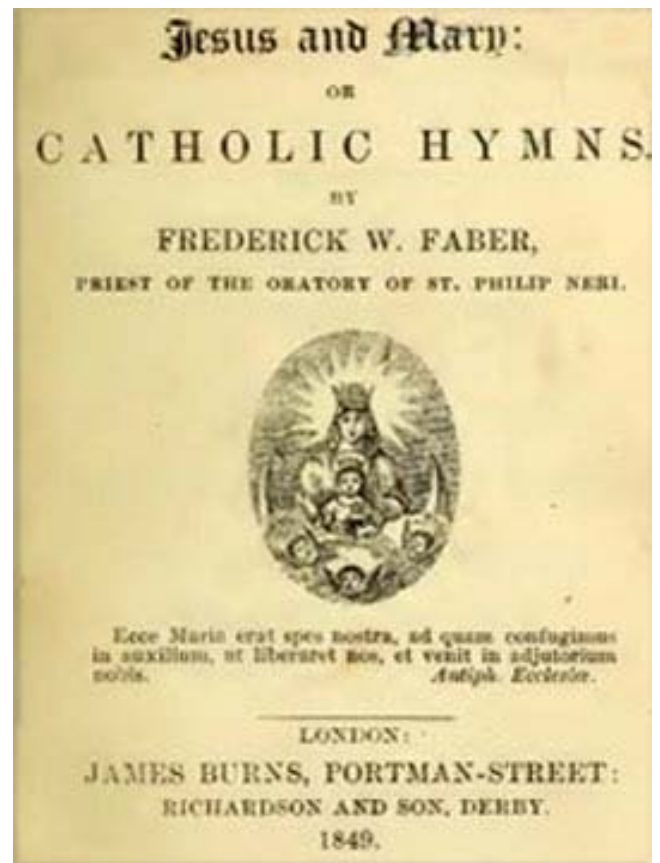
*Faith of our Fathers! Mary's prayers
Shall win our country back to thee:
And through the truth that comes from God
England shall then indeed be free.*

Yes, there was irony in that the poem saluting those who were martyred for not joining the Crown's church had been written by a British cleric who left it to join the Catholic Church which those monarchs outlawed and violently attacked.

But 25 years after the hymn/poem was first published and nine years after its author's death a second irony emerged as hymnal publishers began making or accepting edits to it by others. Major among the changes was elimination of the Mary reference. In time what had been her stanza became

*Faith of our fathers, we will strive
To win all nations unto thee,
And thru the truth that comes from God,
Mankind shall then be truly free.*

The revisions had the effect of obscuring precisely which Christians had remained faithful to which church "in spite of dungeon, fire and sword" employed against them by which persecutors, when or where. Removal of those inconvenient identifying details made Faber's poem, expressly written for Catholics, more palatable to a wider English-speaking (and hymn singing) public; that is, more palatable to non-Catholics.



Over time, the non-author alterations accomplished their apparent intended purpose. The recast hymn-poem became widely and warmly embraced by Protestant congregations, most if not all, totally unaware the original had first appeared in convert Father Faber's book.

Eventually, significant numbers of Catholics, also unaware of its actual origin, came to it regard as a Protestant hymn as well.

Then came the third irony. Post-Vatican II saw Catholic mass hymnals this side of the North Atlantic “Pond” include hymns by well-known English Protestant hymnists; e.g., Wesley, Cowper, Newton, et al. Faber’s hymn/poem also appeared, but in the Protestant-ized version, sans the Mary verse or other Catholic identifiers.

Faber’s 220 + pages volume, “*Jesus and Mary or Catholic Hymns*,” listed “*Faith of Our Fathers*” in the table-of-contents as the 29th entry among 43 poems waiting to be put to music. They had been deliberately written by the convert in a style suitable both for (1) congregational singing (if coupled with an appropriate musical composition) and (2) for individual reading in pursuit of personal inspiration, instruction and devotion.

Faber stated so in the Preface of his 1849 book of lyric poems published by James Burns of Portman Street, London. Burns’ father, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, wanted him to follow the same career path. Instead, the son chose a publishing vocation, becoming printer for the Oxford Movement Tractarians largely led by John Henry Newman. Young Burns became a Catholic in 1847.



Henri Frederick Hemy

In 1874, a hymnist named James G. Walton (1821-1905) took music from a hymn which honored a 4th Century martyr (St. Catherine) and which had been written by a Catholic church organist /Catholic college music professor named **Henri Frederick Hemy (1818-1888)**. It had been published in *Crown of Jesus Music* (1864). Walton matched that music with the *Faith of Our Fathers* poem by Catholic convert priest Faber (1814 –1863) after removing the Marian prayers reference, along with other Catholic identity markers. Faber had died nine years earlier.

A well-respected web resource on the etymology of hymns gives the *Faith of Our Fathers* rewrite the following explanation:

“This hymn was originally written in a manner that only suited the Catholic faith, but through a few different changes in text, this hymn is considered wholly universal to any church that would like to use it. This hymn was written to honor those who have suffered Martyrdom in the name of Christ through many centuries Throughout history, it is estimated that over 50 million people have suffered the death by being a Martyr in the name of Christ, following

Hebrews 11 and having faith that the land they are in is not nearly as good as the land that they are seeking. . . .”

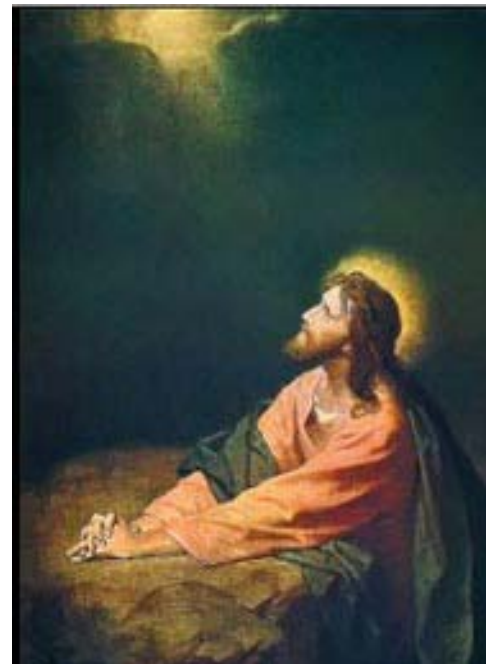
In less euphemistic words, the hymn/poem written by a Catholic convert for Catholic congregations was considered not catholic enough and needed removal of the Marian verse and other traces of Catholic identity in order to become properly catholic (universal) for the national state Church of England and its offshoots.

I am NOT proposing Catholics and other Christians stop singing the revised version of *Faith of Our Fathers* with its focus on all Christians ever martyred. Certainly, paying homage in prayerful song to all the brave men and women martyrs in Christ is worthwhile. Each time I have sung it at mass in my parish church, including as a choir member in the pre-Covid era, I was moved by this tribute to the millions of martyrs in the Communion of the Saints.

My main problem with the etymological rationale quoted is two-fold: First, the explanation shields the hymnal reader from being informed what rendered the original wording “unsuitable” for other Christians; namely, its honoring English Catholic martyrdoms and its expressing faith that their sacrifices and Mary’s continuing prayers would one day make England “truly free.” Faber’s poetic prophesy did come true, at least in terms of “freer” for non-state church worshippers; i.e. Catholic and other Christians.

A corollary problem flows from the failure to inform hymnal readers about the pertinent background details of this particular hymn, one of the select few included in probably most, if not virtually all major English language hymnals. A too-easy, overly-optimistic, simplified sense of Christian hymn unity is conveyed and perpetuated when diverse denominations singing it are denied relevant details which would put the words sung (and those not sung) in a more multi-layered light.

This critique does NOT advocate returning to the sectarian struggles of the past which have left Christendom in its current sorry state of still scandalous lack of the unity for which Our Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane:



“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they [believers in Him] all may be one, as Thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.” [John 17:18]

Our “*Hail Ecumenical Mary, Mother of Christians!*” Facebook group was founded in February 2020 “to continue and expand the endeavor begun by the [now defunct] *Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary USA* to advance the study and appreciation of her role in Ecumenism as Mother of All Christians and as new Eve in spiritual relation to all humanity.” It believes that the best and surest way to the sanctified unity sought is not to stray or stay away from her, but to go through Mary to her and the Father’s Son, for that is the way Jesus came to us, through her by the Holy Spirit.

Rather than boycotting the revised *Faith of Our Fathers* version or perpetuating ignorance of the hymn’s original Catholic martyrs focus , I respectfully suggest a far more positive, affirmative and ecumenically-sound (no pun intended) approach:



John Mason Neale
So closely identified with the Oxford Movement, he was barred from performing his full Anglican priest role.

Why couldn’t the movers and shakers in the Catholic English-singing hymnal and choir world collaborate in organizing and promoting annual concerts in the parishes spotlighting the original hymns of Faber, Newman, John Mason Neale and other hymn writers and translators involved in, closely associated with or strongly influenced by the Oxford Movement?

Any hymn ecumenism needing to be buttressed by ignorance – whether imposed or self inflicted -- of Christianity’s musical past would be ill-structured to survive the adversities of changing times. Ecumenism founded on clear-eyed acceptance and knowledge of the admittedly blemished historical record, wherein there’s sufficient blame to go around, would be better positioned for solidifying our common commitment to seek the union/communion for which Jesus prayed.

Less the reader think the removal of Mary from Faber’s “*Faith of Our Fathers*” was a rarity, a one-off, an odd instance of her being edited out of his 150 hymns, consider his beautiful and moving poems about Mary at the Crucifixion and at the Pentecost. The pieta-akin poem reads:

O Come and Mourn With Me Awhile

O come and mourn with me awhile;
See, Mary calls us to her side;
O come and let us mourn with her;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

Have we no tears to shed for Him,
While soldiers scoff and Jews deride?

Ah! look how patiently He hangs;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

How fast His Hands and Feet are nailed;
His blessed Tongue with thirst is tied,
His failing Eyes are blind with blood;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

His Mother cannot reach his Face;
She stands in helplessness beside;
Her heart is martyred with her Son's;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

Seven times He spoke, seven words of love,
And all three hours His silence cried
For mercy on the souls of men;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

What was Thy crime, my dearest Lord?
By earth, by heaven, Thou hast been tried,
And guilty found of too much love;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

Found guilty of excess of love,
It was thine own sweet will that tied
Thee tighter far than helpless nails;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

Death came, and Jesus meekly bowed;
His falling Eyes he strove to guide
With mindful love to Mary's face;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

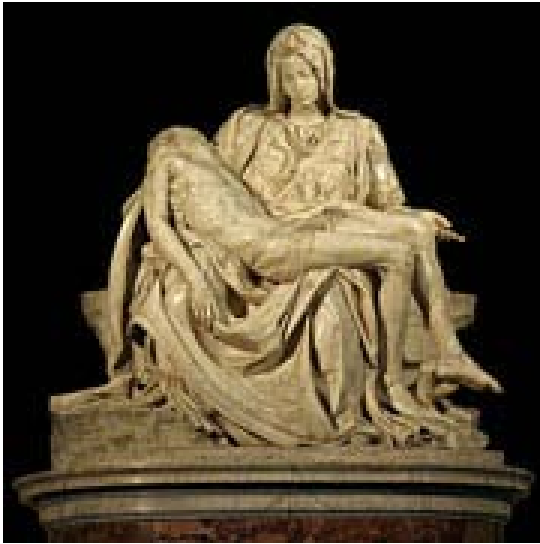
O break, O break, hard heart of mine!
Thy weak self-love and guilty pride
His Pilate and His Judas were;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

Come, take thy stand beneath the Cross,
And let the Blood from out that Side
Fall gently on thee drop by drop;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

A broken heart, a fount of tears,

Ask, and they will not be denied;
A broken heart love's cradle is;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

O Love of God! O Sin of man!
In this dread act your strength is tried;
And victory remains with love,
For He, our Love, is crucified!



The typical revised version takes the original opening verse lines

*See, Mary calls us to her side;
O come and let us mourn with her;*

and changes them to

*O come ye to the Savior's side;
O come, together let us mourn:*

Deleted are the other Marian verses

*His Mother cannot reach his Face;
She stands in helplessness beside;
Her heart is martyred with her Son's;*

and

*Death came, and Jesus meekly bowed;
His falling Eyes he strove to guide
With mindful love to Mary's face;*

An even more egregious example of Mary being edited out of a Faber hymn involves his poem about her praying with her Son's disciples in the Upper Room at Pentecost. The original reads:

The Descent of the Holy Spirit

O mighty Mother! why that light
In thine uplifted eye?
Why that resplendent look of more
Than queenlike majesty?

O waitest thou in this thy joy
For Gabriel once again?
Is heaven about to part, and make
The Blessed Vision plain?

She sat; beneath her shadow were
The Chosen of her Son;

Within each heart and on each face
Her power and spirit shone.

Hers was the courage they had won
From her prevailing prayers;
They gazed on her, until her heart
Began to beat in theirs.

Her Son had left that heart to them:
For ten long nights and days,
The Saviour gone, no Spirit come,
She ruled their infant ways.

Queen of the Church! around thee shines
The purest light of heaven,
And all created things to thee
For thy domain are given!

Why waitest thou then so abashed,
Rapt in ecstatic fear,
Speechless with adoration, hushed,—
Hushed as though God were near?

She is a creature! See! she bows,
She trembles though so great;—
Created Majesty o'erwhelmed
Before the Increate!

He comes! He comes! That mighty Breath
From heaven's eternal shores;
His uncreated freshness fills
His Bride as she adores.

Earth quakes before that rushing blast,
Heaven echoes back the sound,
And mightily the tempest wheels
That Upper Room around.

One moment—and the silentness
Was breathless as the grave;
The fluttered earth forgot to quake,
The troubled trees to wave.

One moment—and the Spirit hung

O'er her with dread desire;
Then broke upon the' heads of all
In cloven tongues of fire.

Who knows in what a sea of love
Our Lady's heart He drowned?
Or what new gifts He gave her then?
What ancient gifts He crowned?

Grace was so multiplied on her,
So grew within her heart,
She stands alone, earth's miracle,
A being all apart.

What gifts He gave those chosen men,
Past ages can display;
Nay, more, their vigour still inspires
The weakness of to-day.

Those Tongues still speak within the Church,
That Fire is undecayed;
Its well-spring was that Upper Room,
Where Mary sat and prayed.

The Spirit came into the Church
With His unfailing power;
He is the Living Heart that beats
Within her at this hour.

Speak gently then of Church and Saints,
Lest you His ways reprove;
The Heat, the Pulses of the Church
Are God's Eternal Love.

O let us fall and worship Him,
The Love of Sire and Son,
The Consubstantial Breath of God,
The Coeternal One!

Ah! see, how like the Incarnate Word,
His Blessed Self He lowers,
To dwell with us invisibly,
And make His riches ours.

Most humble Spirit! Mighty God!
Sweet must Thy Presence be,
If loss of Jesus can be gain,
So long as we have Thee!



This powerful Faber poem about *The Descent of the Holy Spirit* at Pentecost, written with a profoundly Marian perspective, originally appeared in the convert priest/poet's 1849 hymn book. Seventy years later a hymnal was published carrying a much altered version, one disregarding Mary entirely. In

response, the music writer for the Catholic *Ecclesiastical Review* found the "prettily-bound" volume "guilty" of displaying "vulgar editorial ignorance."

Monsignor Hugh Thomas Henry, Litt. D., a Catholic University of America professor and himself author/translator of dozens of hymns, wrote:

[The revised rendition] "*omits the first nine stanzas in order to eliminate the figure of Mary. The [original] 12th stanza pictures the Holy Spirit as hanging a moment 'o'er her' and then breaking 'in cloven tongue of fire' upon the heads of all.' But [the revised] edition must confuse the picture hopelessly in order to get rid of Mary.*"

Prof. Henry notes the altered edition replaced the singular pronoun "**her**" with the plural pronoun "them."

"It's a graceless tautology to speak of the Spirit hanging over 'them' and breaking in tongues of fire upon the heads of all. The original is elegant, forceful, picturesque. The alteration is almost meaningless. Certainly it is exceedingly weak and wordy.

"Again, where Faber wrote

*'Those Tongues still speak within the Church,
'That Fire is undecayed;
'Its well-spring was that Upper Room,
'Where **Mary sat and prayed.**'*

"[The revised rendition], determined to eliminate Our Lady, exposed the vulgar ignorance of its editor concerning the elements of versification by adding two syllables to the last line –

'Where the disciples met and prayed'

"Who could have been guilty of such editorial ignorance?"



Msgr H. T. Henry

Clearly the hymns columnist for the Catholic *Ecclesiastical Review* was upset about the revised rendition's alterations removing the whole Marian perspective from Faber's original hymn/poem: 14 of 21 stanzas were hers. But Msgr. Henry chose instead to point out that, in focusing so much on removing Mary, the revised rendition's editor failed to have the alterations adhere to basic hymn writing rules.

Prior to diving into these alteration details, H.T. Henry's critique opened by noting Faber himself was "*only too glad his compositions should be of any service' and he never refused permission to even to Protestant editors of hymnals to include his own verses, although he stipulated while omissions might be made, no direct alterations should be attempted.*"

All three Faber hymn/poems cited in this essay had not undergone wording omissions and alternations simply to shorten their lengths. They underwent wording omissions and alterations to erase Mary, Jesus' Mother and ours. These were edits of exclusion: hers.

It behooves those earnestly endeavoring to foster ecumenical Mariology and Marian ecumenism to take the revised *Faith of Our Father's* substitute stanza as our cue to promote awareness of the hymn's original intent and its subsequent history. In sentence form, that revised verse wording proclaims *we will strive to win all nations unto thee, and thru the truth that comes from God, mankind shall then be truly free.*

Q & A

Is not Jesus "*the truth that comes from God?*"

As He declared (John 14:6): "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*"

How did the Father's Son come to mankind?

By the Holy Spirit through Mary, Jesus came to us, God Incarnate.

And the way to Jesus many saints of various eras have considered best?

Through Mary!

Does the phrase *To Jesus, Through Mary* sound familiar?

Although the concept dates back to the Early Fathers of the 600s, the modern mind generally attributes the term *To Jesus, Through Mary* to the 17th/18th Century French priest, Louis Grignon de Montfort's "*True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin.*"

And who introduced the English reading world to that Mariology milestone by writing and publishing the first English translation?

Frederick William Faber, priest and poet!

And now -- to borrow a Paul Harvey phrase -- you know the rest of the story. ###