



THE BLACK BOX TREASURES (#36)

There is an interesting term called the “black box theory”. It speaks about an object which can be analyzed in terms of its input and output, but there is no knowledge of its internal workings...

(The letters of John Henry Cardinal Newman #36)

Cardinal John Henry Newman was canonized by Pope Francis during a solemn ceremony in Rome last Sunday. In light of this occasion, in the last newsletter I showed you a book from our library signed and given by the now Saint, to Fr. Jerome Kajsiewicz, C.R. in 1847. However it is not the only item of interest that we have in our Roman Archives about Cardinal Newman. In the black box titled “Episcopi Orbis” among letters from different cardinals and bishops from England, we keep two letters from Cardinal Newman.

In the last newsletter I mentioned that Newman spent two years in Rome studying at the College of *Propaganda Fide* located very close to the church of St. Claude - the central headquarters of the Resurrectionists in the Eternal City. He wrote two letters to Fr. Jerome Kajsiewicz asking him to arrange a meeting with Mother Macrina Mieczyslawska (1846). Many of us know the story of Mother Macrina...

The convent of the Basilian Sisters in which Mother Macrina was a superior in Minsk (White Russia) was brutally closed by the Orthodox Bishop Joseph. Macrina claimed that the sisters were subjected to much torture because they refused to join the Orthodox Church. “They were beaten to death, their eyes were pulled out, and they were buried alive”. Mother Macrina escaped. After wandering for three months in the forests of Lithuania she arrived in Poznan (Poland). “She had suffered from cold, hunger and thirst. She was constantly pursued by soldiers and tracked by dogs”. To make a long story short... Because of her interesting stories about persecution at the hands of the Tsar’s forces, many hailed her as a martyr and a saint. Some Resurrectionists were under Macrina’s spell.

In 1845 Mother Macrina came to Rome where was asked to prepare a report for the pope. At that time she lived in the convent on *Trinità dei Monti* at the Spanish Steps, so very close to our church and to the Propaganda. Probably Henry Newman had heard her story and wanted to meet with her to introduce himself.

In the history of our Congregation, Mother Macrina is known for her part in the “drama involving Fr. Semenenko and the great suffering and humiliation Fr. Peter endured. It began quite innocently when, on his way to Paris to attend the special general chapter, Semenenko had written a letter to Alfred Bentkowski on November 30, 1845, and included a note for Sister Julia Bartoszewicz, asking him to deliver it to her personally. When Bentkowski received the letter, he was not sure whether he should deliver it and asked Father Jelowicki's advice. Jelowicki suggested that he show the note to Mother Macrina and ask for her holy counsel. Mother Macrina prayed over the note and announced the following procedure: she would read the note. If it was an innocent letter, she would

not return it because there were to be no contacts between Father Semenenko and Sister Julia. If the letter was evil, she would return it to his brothers in religion so that they could deal with the situation. If the letter was extremely evil, she would burn it. This would eliminate a great source of worry for his confreres and avoid the possibility of Semenenko committing suicide. Mother Macrina invoked the Holy Spirit in the presence of Jelowicki and Bentkowski. She opened and read the letter. After a great emotional scene, she burned the letter, lamenting Father Semenenko's pharisaic behaviour. In the eyes of most Community members and those outside the Community too, the authority of Mother Macrina was such that no further proof of Father Semenenko's wrong-doing was needed. He was condemned and Julia Bartoszewicz ostracized". Thank God, a few years later, it came about that "many of Mother Macrina's visions and prophecies were shown to be merely daydreams or figments of her imagination which she described as divinely inspired". Fr. Smolikowski in his history of the Congregation "pointed to the simplicity and naïveté of Mother Macrina who misunderstood Father Semenenko's flowery style of writing which scandalized her and prompted her to condemn him unjustly".



* All the citations are from J. Iwicki, *Resurrectionist Charism*, Rome 1986, 135-142.

* The image of Mother Macrina was taken from the book from our library: *Märterthum der Oberin Irena Macrina Mieczyslawska und ihrer Leidensgefährtingen*, Augsburg 1846.

Il sig. Newman facendo i suoi
complimenti al Sign. Curato di S. Claudio,
prende la libertà di avvisare la sua
Reverenza, che, posto che non sia in-
modo, questa sera verso le tre e mezzo
farà venire da lei il suo amico
per avere l'onore di esser condotto
alla presenza della Madre Mariana

Frattanto le prego di gradire
le sue scuse per tanta importunità.

Spaga-da.

Giugno. 18.

M. Riviera. Sigi.

M. Signor Curat. di S. Claudio.

1846

Propaganda

II

AR	VUM	C. R.
No.	38915	

April. 27.

Padre mio umilissimo,

Se piacerebbe alla vostra
 benignità, vorrei molto presentarmi un'al-
 tra volta alla Madre Makrena. Forse
 lei avrebbe la bontà, di romerian il
 giorno e l'ora quando lei sarà conve-
 -vole di introdurmi.

C'è un giovane Protestante in Roma
 che mi ha domandato il prestito del mio
 libro. Forse il di lei amico eccellentissimo,
 nelle di cui mani si trova il presente, po-
 -trebbe favorirmelo.

Servitore suo umilissimo

Giov. E. Newman

P. Hieronimowicz

Al Rev.:

Padre Altom

di San Claudio