

MiSconstrued: ***The Papal Inquiry***

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Above: The Miracle of the Lamp Tavern Beer Mat

Mercian Canonisation

The concept of 'sainthood', that there are certain individuals who are recognised to have attained the most perfect state available to imperfect fan, over and above the state of 'BNFdom' or indeed 'Jiant', and who are therefore assured of a place with the divine, is not one unique to the High Church of Fandom. However the Mercian Diocese of the High Church of Fandom (also known as the Mercian Science Fiction Triangle or MiSFiTs) is the only sect in the world to have an informal, irregular and almost totally irrational process of 'making' saints. So, within the High Church of Fandom there exists an informal group of MiSFiTs devoted to this concept: the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (also referred to as 'the Saturday afternoon item at MiSconstrued'). To be strictly accurate the MiSFiTs do not claim to create saints but merely to recognise some of the saints that exist and to present them to the faithful for emulation. This ecclesial process is the only activity that may require the exercise of the Pope's most unique and awesome power: that of papal infallibility. It was not always so. It is only since November 1994 that the right to canonise was adopted by the MiSFiTs (the first two ideas for 'Saturday afternoon items' having been scrapped).

Canonisation is always a post-hangover process. Indeed, the process cannot commence until a person has been dead drunk at least once in a five year period. Canonisation is an unofficial declaration that a fan is the victim of a universal fannish cult. The fan's name is inscribed in the MiSFiTs' list of saints and is 'raised to the bars' ie assigned a feast day for ritual condemnation by the MiSFiTs.

The whole process is designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does the candidate have a reputation for having been dead drunk on numerous occasions and for having over-indulged in alcohol to a heroic degree?
2. As evidence of this reputation, do people blame the candidate when praying for their hangover to go away?
3. What particular message or example would canonisation of the candidate bring to the Fandom?
4. Is the candidate's reputation for over-indulgence in alcohol founded in fact?
5. Conversely is there anything in the candidate's life or writings which presents an obstacle to his or her canonisation? Specifically did the candidate hold, teach or write anything which is unorthodox or inimical to the MiSFiTs' faith or morals?
6. Are any of the divine signs attributed to the candidate's intercession inexplicable by fannish reason and potential miracles?
7. Is there any fannish reason why this candidate should not be canonised at this time?

The four procedures designed to answer these questions can be summarised as follows:

1. **PREJUDICIAL PHASE** - any individual or group recognised by the MiSFiTs can anticipate the formal process by organising financial and spiritual support. This is usually done by a bunch of very sad people.
2. **INFORMATIVE PHASE** - if the MiSFiTs decide there is merit in a candidate they institute an **ORDINARY PROCESS**. This gathers material to present to the MiSconstrued Committee in Oldbury in order that they may decide if there is enough evidence to warrant a **FORMAL PROCESS**. Witnesses are summoned to MiSconstrued to testify for and against the candidate who is now known as a 'Servant of Ghod'. All original testimony is sealed, and sent to Burnham-on-Sea by car.
3. **JUDGEMENT OF ORTHODOXY** - this is concurrent with the informative phase. Officials are appointed by the MiSconstrued Committee to collect the candidate's published writings. Eventually they give up because the Candidate has been too prolific.
4. **THE ROMAN PHASE** - as soon as the evidence has been examined by the MiSconstrued Committee in Oldbury an **ADVOCATE FOR THE DEFENCE** is assigned. He represents the petitioners (who should buy him several drinks). He is an established fan who prepares a brief aimed at proving the Candidate should be canonised. A **DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** is also appointed at this time who opposes the brief of the DEFENCE. There follows an informal trial or hearing in Burnham-on-Sea before the assembled Congregation of MiSconstrued and the Pope - it can take decades for these two to reach agreement so the decision is thrown open to the Congregation.

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[The above is presented as an introduction to Canonisation procedures as set down by the Mercian Diocese of the High Church of Fandom. Both the Defence and Devil's Advocate are interested in hearing from anyone who has either witnessed one of Gregory's miracles or who is willing to testify that Gregory is unfit for sainthood.]

[Testimony from Pete Wright]

Martin Tudor
845 Alum Rock Road
Ward End
Birmingham
B8 2AG

24 January 1995

Dear Martin,

INFORMATION FOR THE PAPAL ENQUIRY OF THE MERCIAN DIOCESE OF THE HIGH CHURCH OF FANDOM CONCERNING THE CANONIZATION OF GREG PICKERSGILL

In my opinion canonization of this most fannish of individuals should proceed without delay. In support of this I am able to provide testimony of seven miracles directly attributable to him.

1. Possession of an amazing amount of hair for his vast age. This cannot be possible without divine intervention. Praise be!
2. Transmogrification of two spotty little clean-living neos (to wit one Pete Wright and one Dave Hicks) into the far more fannishly acceptable drunks and lounge lizards that they are today. The process - having been subjected to it - took mere moments to accomplish and would have taken years without this miracle. Praise be!
3. Tolerance of London Guinness prices beyond human endurance. Also transformation of said holy fluid (presumably) into copious quantities of urine. In the light of this enquiry, I suggest that he can transform it into more urine than the original volume of Guinness! Praise be!
4. Retreat to the wilderness of Haverfordwest to contemplate the State of Fandom . A pattern is emerging to Greg's holy life, here. Praise be!
5. Causing the materialization of fanzines from thin air by power of will alone. Consider this. In order to produce fanzines, it is not sufficient just to think about it. One needs a means of production. It is patently obvious, even to the most ignorant of individuals, that photocopiers (and possibly paper itself) do not exist west of Swansea. I know, I've been there and I didn't see a single photocopier, duplicator, or any other means of fanzine production, but I did see some imported paper! How, then, can Greg produce fanzines without divine intervention? Praise be!
6. Spreading of the word by fire and the sword for a long time. Praise be!
7. Actually having heard of one of the scientific journals that Pete Wright publishes. I expect each of my journals to have a readership of about 1.75 including the author, so this will give you an idea of how important this miracle is! When news that someone outside our firm had heard of one of our journals was passed to Pete's

Martin Tudor
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1st February 1995

Dear Martin

Paul's testimony supporting the canonisation of Gregory Pickersgill should accompany this letter.

As for me:

* * * * *

God moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform, and you have to admit that he must move in very mysterious ways if Gregory Pickersgill is his chosen instrument. Having said that, Gregory is, of course, a Celt and the Celtic saints are a funny lot. I mean, what can you ~~make of~~^{do with} people who make a habit of sailing the Atlantic on millstones, and endowing with beards young women with overly importunate suitors?

So, what's Gregory's particular skill?

Gerald Durrell once described his brother, Lawrence, as being like a small blond firework, designed to go through life, blowing up, prompting people to undertake rash enterprises and then refusing to have anything to do with the consequences. This is not quite what Gregory does, but it's a start.

Gregory Pickersgill is catalyst, divine or demonic, I can't decide which. His ~~role in~~^{any thing} life is to give people the vision and conviction to go out there and do something, ~~about it~~. This has its advantages; people embark on projects they might never have considered, and good ~~comes~~ of it. We had Mexican. This talent has its disadvantages too; some ideas are stillborn, like the evening Greg and I spent several hours trying to convince Pete Weston that he would be just right for a fannish revival of Wilson, Keppel and Betty's Sand Dance. This foundered because Pete had never heard of Wilson, Keppel or Betty. And this talent has moments when it is really much much better to be on another planet altogether, rather than become infused with Greg's current theory or belief. We were standing far too close when the Worldcon was discussed last year. How else to explain that Paul and I suddenly became convinced, despite two years of ^{pro}refusal, that we could make something of the literary programme. We would cope with the bureaucracy, we would cut the crap, get to the heart of the matter, produce a programme that people could be proud of, and all without e-mail.

Well, you all know what happened. Six months later, divine intervention of another sort prompted us to withdraw from the Worldcon in order to concentrate on more mundane things like staving off the bailiffs. The Power of Pickersgill, remarkable though it is, couldn't help us survive these vicissitudes. Okay, so none of this is particularly miraculous, or is it? You see, I consider it utterly miraculous that during my brief stint with the Worldcon I never actually murdered anyone, though sorely tempted on many occasions. And when we left the Worldcon, lo, there was still a life outside. So, the Power of Pickersgill was with us after all. Spooky!

So, I hereby testify that Gregory Pickersgill should be canonised as soon as possible, if only to prove what we all knew already. He really does walk on water.

Maureen



'Four Winds' 2 Halloughton Road
Sutton Coldfield B74 2QG
Tel: 0121 354 6059

5th February 1995

Dear Martin,

Thank you for your letter of 20th January regarding the Inquiry into the possible canonisation of Gregory Pickersgill, to which I am delighted to respond.

Although I have known Mr Pickersgill for 10! these many years, I regret that I have little direct evidence to offer to support his elevation to a higher plane. Naturally I support the canonisation, but the only two incidents of which I have direct knowledge are as follows:-

- 1) At an early Novacon, held in the Imperial Hotel (since demolished) I witnessed a mass levitation performed by Mr Pickersgill. Said incident occurred on a Saturday night, in one of the corridors of the hotel, where 20-30 fans were holding an impromptu party. After a little while, Mr Pickersgill suggested we should move to a quieter spot, a dozen yards away, where we sat down for a discussion of how he bought my collection of U.S. Galaxy for only £15.00 (and complained about it being too much). To my amazement, the entire body of the party mysteriously lifted off the floor and levitated along to our corner. The only visible evidence of effort exerted by Mr Pickersgill was a raised eyebrow as he uttered his ritual blessing of 'Piss off you lot'. This has always stuck in my mind as an exceptional feat of supernatural power.
- 2) The other incident merely supports your existing evidence of the miraculous ability to induce other people to volunteer for onerous and difficult tasks. This happened in 1974, when fandom was faced with the evil prospect of Peter Presdorf winning an unopposed bid for the next Eastercon, to be held in a hall of residence in Manchester. Fearing the worst, Mr Pickersgill induced other fans, including Malcolm Edwards, Graham Charnock, and other otherwise-sensible individuals to put together an impromptu bid for the successful 1975 Seacon. I recall that Andrew Stevenson was so smitten by the visions of Mr P that he subsequently spent the entire weekend in a telephone box, trying to locate suitable hotels along the entire length of the South Coast. (Seacon '75 took place in Coventry). Mr P. remained personally uninvolved in the event but miraculously induced great enthusiasm and stupidity in the ad-hoc con committee which he created in less than 15 minutes while the Presdorf presentation was taking place in the con hall.

This is my evidence as Ghod is my witness and I will so give testimony if called upon.

Best Regards,

PS: Don't Saints have to die, first?

3) And of course he has been nice to Brian Burgess at D.M. Sheswood, which must be evidence of his nature - then nature!

Paul Kincaid

60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone Kent CT19 5AZ

Phone & Fax: (01 303) 252 939

30 January 1995

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to testify that Gregory Pickersgill changed my life.

This was all a long, long time ago, before there were such things as Worldcons. In fact it was at Skycon in 1978. I was, as you can imagine, an innocent young fan taking part on a panel in the dark, underground box that passed as a fan room in the Heathrow Hotel.

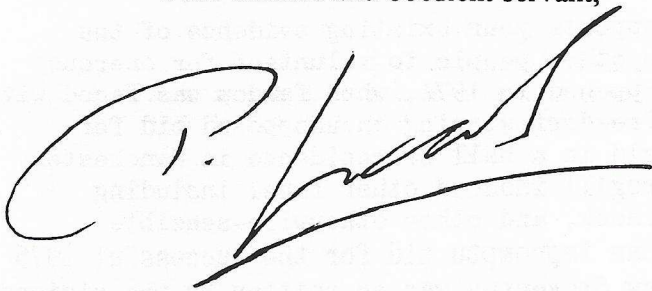
It was there that Greg imparted his words of wisdom to me. Concentrate on the sercon writing, he told me.

Now this, I know, may not seem like much. Just the usual fannish exchange, you might think. Except that, no sooner were these words out of his mouth than heavenly bells started to ring. Of course, being materialist so-and-sos, we immediately interpreted this as a fire alarm and emptied the building. But I knew better. I knew the bells signified a message from on high.

So I followed Greg's advice dutifully, and lo, the fame and fortune of the BSFA followed as day follows night. So you see, he was right after all.

Besides, Greg has to be a saint. He's put the fear of god into more fans than anyone else. And I imagine everyone else will tell you that, too, so it must be true, mustn't it?

Your humble and obedient servant,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Kincaid', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

*Martin Tudor,
845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End,
Birmingham, B8 2AG.*

To: Pope Chris,
The Papal Inquiry,
Royal Clarence Hotel,
The Esplanade,
Burnham-on-Sea,
Somerset,
TA8 1BQ.

7th February 1995

Your Holiness

There is, as I am sure you are aware, much evidence in support of the canonisation of Gregory Pickersgill. For example the fact that numerous fans have been in the habit of referring to the Candidate as "that Blessed Greg" (or words to that effect) for so many years proves that in the mind of fandom he has long since passed the traditional first stage of canonisation. Added to this is the fact that even his enemies customarily refer to his immaculate birth ("that bastard Pickersgill" can mean nothing else in the face of the irrefutable proof of his parents marriage). But in the unlikely event that your Holiness requires further proof I feel compelled to present the following testimony.

Obviously the Blessed Gregory has met the primary criteria of fannish sainthood times beyond number - that of being dead drunk but vocal. But more than that on at least one occasion, to which I can testify, the Blessed Gregory was not only dead drunk but was also the recipient of a divine vision of staggering import.

The incident to which I refer occurred at the Blessed Gregory's residence at Lawrence Road shortly after his miraculous works at Conspiracy - where, as the Congregation are aware, he not only ran the Fan Room successfully in the face of Satanic opposition from both the Steering Committee and the Management of the Brighton Metropole Hotel, but did so at a profit.

The Blessed Gregory had, as had everyone else present, been imbibing vast quantities of the sacred nectar alcohol. But, being the divinely inspired fan that he is, he had been consuming *his* alcohol through the medium of home made Brandy Alexandra. The first, minor, miraculous event of the evening took place when the Blessed Gregory ran out of cream and instead turned yoghurt into Brandy Alexandra! Whereupon he went on to drink a further pint or two of this miraculous concoction.

After consuming several pints of this potent mixture the Blessed Gregory was more than a little "dead drunk" and it was at this time that the divine spirit (which, I hasten to add, bore no resemblance to brandy) descended upon him.

The divine spirit revealed to the Blessed Gregory that the insane Scientologists were not, as had previously been thought, merely deluded misguided fools. The vision revealed the awful truth that they were, in fact, malicious tools of Satan - set to destroy the fannish way of life! Fortunately the Blessed Gregory revealed his divine insight to me in time to prevent me accepting a full page advert from the British tentacle of the vile Scientologists, New Era, HALLELUJAH!

Martin Tudor

A List of Members of MiSconstrued, a relaxacon organised by the MiSFiTs at the Royal Clarence Hotel, from 10-12 February 1995.

1. Tony Berry
2. Helena Bowles
3. Martin Tudor
4. Richard Standage
5. Pam Wells
6. Paul Vincent
7. Janet Harries
8. John Dallman
9. Chris Murphy
10. Steve Lawson
11. Alice Lawson
12. Julian Headlong
13. Sam Bennett
14. Maureen Kincaid Speller
15. Paul Kincaid
16. Steve Green
17. Ann Green
18. Tony Whysall-Hammond
19. Kim Whysall-Hammond
20. Peter Weston
21. Eileen Weston
22. Dave Cox
23. Michael Abbott
24. Alison Weston
25. John Harvey
26. Eve Harvey
27. Jo McCahy
28. Nick Mills
29. Bridget Hardcastle
30. Julia Daly
31. Greg Pickersgill
32. Catherine McAulay
33. Mick Evans
34. Bernie Evans
35. Pat Brown
36. Vernon Brown
37. Dave Hicks
38. Cat Coast
39. Mike D Siddall
40. Pete Wright
41. Anne-Marie Wright
42. Claire Brialey
43. Mark Plummer
44. Gary Starr
45. Phil Greenaway
46. Lilian Edwards
47. Christina Lake
48. Peter-Fred Thompson
49. Dave Langford
50. Simon Dearn
51. Tommy Ferguson
52. Anne Wilson

Membership as of 7.2.95. MiSconstrued is brought to you by Tony Berry, Helena Bowles, Richard Standage and Martin Tudor. All of whom wish to thank everyone who has supplied testimony, quiz questions and/or moral support. Special thanks to the Blessed Gregory Pickersgill who agreed to be the subject of our Papal Inquiry (against his better judgement) and to everyone who has agreed to participate in the programme. It's all up to you now - enjoy!

MiSconstrued

10th to 12th February 1995, Royal Clarence Hotel, Burnham-on-Sea

It was then fandom
realised it had
Misconstrued
Pickersgill all
these years...



• DPH 11/94 •