




REVIEW

Walking with Father Vincent by Andrew McNabb, with an Introduction by Dale Ahlquist, Gracewing, Leominster, 2023, pp. vii+185, £12.99, pbk

This is a welcome book, but a hard book to pigeonhole for review. It is, in part or in passing, an engaging introduction to much of the life and thought of Fr Vincent McNabb (b. 1868, d. 1943), the Northern Irishman who became perhaps the most famous Dominican friar of the English Dominican Province in the first half of the 20th century, and whom the author, Andrew McNabb, is proud to name his ‘great-granduncle’. It would be nearer the mark, though, to describe it as a series of reflections, mostly on family life, inspired by the plain-dealing life and plain-speaking writings of Fr Vincent from the pen of a contemporary American Catholic author on one side of the current culture wars.

We are presented in large part with the deep and lively faith Fr Vincent shared with his mother, Ann, as this has suffused and reverberated in Andrew McNabb’s life; though, in addition to family recollections, the great-grandnephew relies heavily on the biography by Fr Ferdinand Valentine OP and on E. A. Siderman’s *A Saint in Hyde Park*. Readers may be moved in particular by the faith with which mother and son faced family illnesses and death, and their practical charity towards the others outside the family who were poor, sick, or dying. However, Andrew also rightly highlights the importance of the papal encyclical *Rerum novarum* as an inspiration to his older relative, and a guide to a preacher’s priorities, with its description of the plight of the working poor as the ‘pressing question’ of the hour. The author briefly sets out Fr Vincent’s friendship and collaboration as a commentator on social issues with Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton. He also explores how their economic ideas influenced one of Andrew’s own short stories, which is reproduced for the reader, and how it impacted on his career more generally.

If there is a price to pay for this highly personal approach, it is perhaps first in flattening out Fr Vincent’s development as a thinker (there’s no straight forward account of his career as a Dominican teacher, writer, or religious superior) and, second, in thinning down the historical context of his writings. In a few places, the author also misreports his sources. However, the book’s great value is that the author’s own struggles may voice difficulties or objections to Fr Vincent’s often forthright views, difficulties which may be shared by the reader, who may in this way be helped to work through them.

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