***Fabiola: The Church of the Catacombs***

**By Nicholas Wiseman**

**Student Study Guide**

A note the to the student: *Fabiola*, although written about the lives of Saints with which we are very familiar, is at its core a work of fiction. Cardinal Newman wrote this work at a time when Catholicism was just recently made legal once again in England. He wrote it as a response to the widespread discrimination his fellow Catholics were enduring even though they were free to practice their religion. For more accurate and historical depictions of the Saints that the reader encounters, Wiseman himself suggests the reading of various hagiographies (biographies of the Saints).

**Part I: Peace**

The reading for this section should be completed prior to class and the questions should be answered in preparation for discussion.

1. The whole of this novel takes place in and around important places in Rome. In order to get a better understanding of the movement of the characters, find a map of Ancient Rome (you will no doubt have one from your studies of Ancient history or Latin). Take the time to mark the important spots on the map as they occur.
2. Describe the characters of Pancratius and Corvinus. How do they serve as foils for one another?
3. In the initial exchange between Pancratius and his mother, how does his mother symbolize the Blessed Mother?
4. The houses of Pancratius and Fabiola are both rich. How do they differ? How is the relationship between Pancratius and his mother different from the relationship between Fabiloa and her father?
5. Describe the characters of Syra and Agnes. How do they serve as a contrast to Fabiola?
6. At the banquet, how does Calpurnius describe the Christians? How does this compare to modern misinterpretations of Catholicism?
7. Why does Syra not become a member of Agnes’s house?
8. In “The Meeting,” Wiseman contrasts the plotting of Sebastian and Pancratius to disperse his wealth to the poor to the plotting of the Corvinus and Afra. What purpose does this serve? What elements of these characters do these two separate conversations demonstrate?
9. The chapter “Other Meetings,” includes scenes found in Acts of Saint Sebastian. Why does Newman include these scenes that are somewhat outside of the narrative at hand? What purpose do they serve for the characterization of Sebastian and the overall theme of the story?
10. Describe the character of Torquatus. What kind of convert do you think he represents?
11. Explain the symbolism of The Wolf and the Fox. Who is the Wolf and who is the Fox?
12. In “Extremes Meet,” the audience once again sees an altercation between Corvinus and Pancratius. Pancratius once again gets the upperhand on Corvinus. How does this effect Corvinus? How do you think this makes Corvinus feel towards Pancratius?
13. Why does Syra not want to read the book that Fabiola suggests? What lesson can we all learn here?
14. What other lessons about Christianity does Syra take the opportunity to share with Fabiola?
15. Why did Chromatius destroy all his statues?
16. Why does Chromatius chide Fabiola for criticizing Christian doctrine without reading it? What is Fabiola’s response?
17. Describe Torquatus’s fall. Was it expected?

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**Part II: Conflict**

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1. Describe the character Diogenes.
2. What things about the Catacombs does Diogenes share with Pancratius and also the reader?
3. Describe the Catacombs from the chapter “The Cemeteries” and “What Diogenes Could Not Tell about the Catacombs.”
4. What keeps Torquatus from confessing while in the Catacombs? What does he not understand about sin and confession? Who alone sees this moment of lost grace?
5. Why does the paper that Fabiola has from Chromatius’s home disturb her? How does Syra help her?
6. What foul and absurd crimes are heaped at the feet of Christians? What does another member of the group say about the Christians? How is he correct in saying that they made war and destroyed every king that came in their way? How does he misunderstand how the Christians have achieved this? Of what does the emperor accuse the Christians?
7. Why does Newman juxtapose the conversation of Sebastian about welcoming death with the arrival of the news of the death of Fabiola’s father?
8. What do you suppose that Fabiola was missing in her pagan faith that made her despair so at the death of her father? Do modern Christians also sometimes show a lack of depth of their faith at the moment of death?
9. What were some of the tortures that awaited the Christians if found out? Why do you suppose that Fulvinus showed these to Torquatus?
10. What two interesting things about the early church do we learn from the Ordination in December?
11. How does Fulvinus gain admission to actually see the Pope?
12. In the chapter “The Virgins,” the reader gets a view of the important role women played in the early church. Give a description of the way these early Nuns made their vows. What does this ceremony reveal about the characters of Syra, Agnes, and Caecilia?
13. Who is the brave Christian soldier in Nicodemia who tore down the imperial decree? By what name do we know this man?
14. What measures does Corvinus take to make sure the edict says up for all to see? What do Pancratius and Sebastian do to get around the protection? What is Corvinus’s reaction?
15. In “Explanations,” how do the pagans misunderstand the rituals of the Church and mistake them for witchcraft?
16. In the same chapter, Newman again explains how the pagans mistake the act of confession and redemption. Why would this be important to point out to the English who were oppressing the Catholics of Newman’s time? Is this still misunderstood today?
17. How does Severus keep Torquatus from exposing the congregation? What happens to Torquatus?
18. Does Caecilia sacrifice herself? Why?
19. Of what does Caecilia die?
20. What item gives Pancratius away as the one who tore down the edict? Who has that item?
21. What is Torquatus’s ultimate fate? Whose death is his redemption? What can be learned about God’s grace and redemption?
22. What happens after Pancratius’s is sent from Rome by Sebastian?
23. How is Corvinus treated by Pancratius? How is he treated by his own servants?
24. How is Pancratius finally captured?
25. Describe the Prison. How do the Christians act in the prison? Why do you think they do not renounce their faith? How can we take courage from this display of faith in our modern times?
26. Why did Sebastian send Pancratius away?
27. How does Pancratius deliver the ultimate final blow to Corvinus?
28. What role does Sebastian take on after the martyrdom of Pancratius?
29. Describe Sebastian’s death and revival and the effect of those on the Emperor and on the Christian movement. How do these events effect Fabiola?
30. What happened to Sebastian’s body? How was it recovered?
31. Why does Fulvinus ultimately desire Agnes? What plan do Fabiloa and Agnes hatch to outwit him?
32. What promise does Fabiola make to Agnes? In that moment, how does the reader relate to Fabiola? Are we all Fabiolas in the face of Saints? Can we all attempt to attain Sainthood?
33. How does Agnes meet her martyrdom? How does the crowd receive her body?
34. What happens to Fulivinus? What is his uncle’s plan?
35. What realization does Fabiola make about all the people who she respected? How does that relate to her conversion to Christianity?
36. What happens during the last conversation between Fabiloa and Fulvinus?
37. What relation is Fulvinus to Syra? Who is she really? What is her real name?
38. What greater restorative does Dionysus bring to Miriam?
39. Describe Fabiola’s conversion.
40. How does Miriam end up being Syra? What part did Fulvinus and his uncle play in that story?
41. Of what does Miriam die?

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**Part III: Victory**

The reading for this section should be completed prior to class and the questions should be answered in preparation for discussion.

1. Who is the Stranger from the East?
2. What year did the Church gain full liberty? Under whose reign?
3. When does Section III take place? How has the mood of Rome changed towards Christians?
4. How does Corvinus feel about this change towards the group he so despised?
5. What deals Corvinus his death blow?
6. How is Corvinus’s aversion to water symbolic?
7. Who does Corvinus think he sees as he is dying? Why?
8. What was Eurotas’s plan? How did it fail and why?
9. How is Fulvinus saved?
10. What is the overall theme of Fabiola?
11. How does Fabiola follow the same plot outline as any other great heroic quest?
12. What Catholic virtues does Newman hope to impart to his Catholic readers?
13. What explanations of Catholicism does Newman hope his non-Catholic readers to understand?

**Final Assignment:**

Write an essay explaining the significance of this novel to the modern reader. Your essay is should be at least 3-5 pages in length.