**Study Guide-Key**

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

**By Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman**

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.

Answers will vary. Tutor may want to direct the student to appropriate resources.

1. Describe the characters of Pancratius and Corvinus. How do they serve as foils for one another?

Based on the altercation in the schoolyard, the reader sees that Pancratius always strives do to his best for the sake of doing well. Corvinus thinks that it is because Pancratius wants to show off and out do him. In other words, Pancratius success has a been a personal vendetta against Corvinus. The two boys foil each other in the sense that Corvinus is constantly concerned with image and Pancratius is concerned with internal image and eternal improvement.

1. In the initial exchange between Pancratius and his mother, how does his mother symbolize the Blessed Mother?

Like Mary, his mother realizes that she must be willing to allow her son to be sacrificed for the cause of Christianity. Like Mary, she takes this on willingly and with pride even if she feels sorrow.

1. 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?

The wealth in the home of Pancratius means little to them. The true riches are those of spirit and the most prized possession is the relic of blood from the martyrdom of Pancratius’s father. In Fabiola’s home, the emphasis is on possessions and looks and the show of both. While Pancratius and his mother have a close relationship that allows for an intimate conversation and a genuine show of love, Fabiola and her father Fabius seem to occupy the same space but have little time or inclination for a genuine relationship.

1. Describe the characters of Syra and Agnes. How do they serve as a contrast to Fabiola?

Syra, although injured by Fabiloa, holds her no ill will. In fact, Syra looks at the incident as a teachable moment for Fabiola. Agnes, who like Fabiola comes from a rich home, is also more concerned about simple things and demonstrating to Fabiola a better way to live. Syra and Agnes are joined in their common faith of Christianity.

1. At the banquet, how does Calpurnius describe the Christians? How does this compare to modern misinterpretations of Catholicism?

Calpurnius says that Christians are a foreign secret sect from Chaldea. He also confuses Peter and Paul with Moses and Aaron. The followers made a symbol of the cross and they consider it an honor to suffer. They believe they will go to their teachers someplace among the clouds. Answers will vary in discussion.

1. Why does Syra not become a member of Agnes’s house?

She hopes to help Fabiola see that Christianity is the true path and thus save her soul.

1. 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?

One group is meeting in secret to discuss helping the poor, while Corvnius and Afra are discussing using magic and certain poisons in order to steal wealth from another. Having these conversations side by side illustrates that true Christians share so that all have some. If someone is in need they simply have to ask and they shall be taken care of. Corvinus is in a difficult position because he will have no money. Instead of looking for honest help, he uses manipulation. These conversations show how ludicrous it was for pagan Romans to be charging Christians with crimes when they themselves were committing terrible acts as a matter of common exchange.

1. 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?

Not only are they interesting to the reader, they allow Newman to quickly develop the character of Sebastian as larger than life. The reader will understand that this is St. Sebastian, and he is significant in the shaping of the early Church. It also helps to establish the zeal with which these early martyrs approached the oppression of the Church and the passion they felt about their faith.

1. Describe the character of Torquatus. What kind of convert do you think he represents?

In the early Church, the converts were not allowed immediately into the fold. It was feared that they would see others, out them as Christians, and then the whole congregation could be thrown in prison and tortured. Torquatus shows himself to be rash and impetuous. Part of this can be attributed to his youth. He feels he knows better and knows everything. He is the kind of convert that has great passion but little understanding of the faith. This can be a dangerous thing since passion can be swayed but depth of faith and knowledge can offer protection. Therefore, Torquatus is dangerous to the movement of the early Church. It is also because of this that the Modern Church has converts study for a year. It is their passion for the faith that brings them to the Mass. It is their understanding of their faith that is learned over time that keeps them constant and urges them to defend their faith against worldly obstacles and desires.

1. Explain the symbolism of The Wolf and the Fox. Who is the Wolf and who is the Fox?

The Wolf is Corvinus and the Fox is Fulvius. Fulvius is sly and plotting like a fox and Corvinus is hungry and aggressive like the Wolf. The two plot together to rob Agnes’s house while Pancratius is distributing his wealth.

1. 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?

Instead of being grateful, Corvinus again is angry and jealous of Pancratius. He thinks again that Pancratius is trying to embarrass him when, like before, Pancratius is merely showing the Christian doctrine of turning the other cheek.

1. Why does Syra not want to read the book that Fabiola suggests? What lesson can we all learn here?

This exchange is an important one about the power thought. Sinning in thought is the same as sinning in action. This is a good extended discussion question about the importance of reading good things and watching shows that are not sinful.

1. What other lessons about Christianity does Syra take the opportunity to share with Fabiola?

God exists everywhere and has no beginning or end. His judgement is perfect. He alone creates and destroys. He teaches us forgiveness. He listens to all of us no matter how rich or poor.

1. Why did Chromatius destroy all his statues?

He tells Fabiola that he realizes that the gods of Jupiter and Juno are not gods so he destroyed the statues. He didn’t keep them as works of art because they weren’t created for that purpose. Had they been created as art, he would have kept them.

1. Why does Chromatius chide Fabiola for criticizing Christian doctrine without reading it? What is Fabiola’s response? How is this like those who judge Catholicism today?

He criticizes her because he wants to know how can she judge something that she doesn’t understand. If she read their works and then argued against specifics it would make more sense. Fabiola responds saying that she wouldn’t waste her time reading such things and that they are enemies of all intellectual process. Answers will vary.

1. Describe Torquatus’s fall. Was it expected?

Because Torquatus doesn’t fully understand his faith or God’s Grace, he is easily tempted and then complacent in his fall because he fears confession and redemption. It is expected because he has shown himself as impulsive.

**Part II: Conflict**

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

1. Describe the character Diogenes.

He is an old man who is still very large and strong. He is the carver of epitaphs and spends most of his time among the dead in the cemetery. He is also a Christian and possibly a an early lector or reader. He is proud that in centuries in the future people will read his inscriptions of Christian with reverence and ignore the ones of rulers.

1. What things about the Catacombs does Diogenes share with Pancratius and also the reader?

Phials of blood were put outside the tombs of martyrs and fallen soldiers. Often it may appear that only one body is in the tomb when actually there are two. One may have had a rich family and the other may have died a pauper.

1. Describe the Catacombs from the chapter “The Cemeteries” and “What Diogenes Could Not Tell about the Catacombs.”

Catacombs are divided into three parts: passages or streets, chambers or squares, and churches. The passages are the catacombs or cemetery. Holes were made into the graves so martyrs relics could be touched. Oil burned outside their tombs and that oil also became a relic of sorts.

1. 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?

He doesn’t understand that no sin is too great to confess and be pardoned. Even after he hears that the “Church is a mother, with her arms ever open to re-embrace her erring children” the words fail to come out. Answers will vary. Severus sees this moment of lost grace.

1. Why does the paper that Fabiola has from Chromatius’s home disturb her? How does Syra help her?

The paper says to love your enemies, do good to those that hate you and pray for those that persecute you. Syra explains to her that real monsters aren’t hydras or minotaurs but hatred, revenge, avarice, and ambition. We can all be heroes by rising above these and find peace.

1. 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?

They are accused of murdering infants and eating them, foul crimes, worship of martyrs bodies, adoring an ass’s head, and serving no God. Another member of the group says they overthrow every government and they are under the domination of the priesthood. In a sense the Christians do overthrow kings by showing them the truth and allowing for conversion. The way Calpurnius states it, it sounds like armed insurrection.

1. Why does Newman juxtapose the conversation of Sebastian about welcoming death with the arrival of the news of the death of Fabiola’s father?

It points out the difference in the way the martyr views death and the pagan. Sebastian was speaking about death being welcome and that he had no fear of it. Fabiola has no sense of the afterlife. She has no comfort in the fact that her father is somewhere. She worries that he his merely gone or in darkness. This juxtaposition illustrates the abyss for those with lack of faith.

1. 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?

Answers will vary.

1. What were some of the tortures that awaited the Christians if found out? Why do you suppose that Fulvinus showed these to Torquatus?

The rack, a large gridiron, an iron chair that would be made hot, hot oil, hot lead, and various tools for inflicting pain. Fulvinius shows these to Torquatus to make him scared of confessing or returning to his Christian philosophy.

1. What two interesting things about the early church do we learn from the Ordination in December?

To this time there was only one church with an altar in Rome and that the one altar that was existing was not of stone.

1. How does Fulvinus gain admission to actually see the Pope?

He gave the correct password and was good at copying what the others were doing.

1. 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?

Answers will vary but should contain some of the following: One could become consecrated to God at 12, which was considered the nubile age by Roman law. However, during times of oppression, the Church allowed girls younger than this age to take the vow. They would come forward and make their vow to the bishop. Then the holy Pontiff blessed them. A wreath of flowers was laid on their heads.

1. Who is the brave Christian soldier in Nicodemia who tore down the imperial decree? By what name do we know this man?

George. This man is St. George.

1. 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?

He puts up savage guards and makes a password that no Christian would utter “Divinity of Emperors.” Sebastian is strong and Pancratius is quick. Corvinus is outraged but he finds a knife and he remembers that it belongs to Pancratius.

1. In “Explanations,” how do the pagans misunderstand the rituals of the Church and mistake them for witchcraft?

They again mistake the miracles for witchcraft. They think that they must have been using some sort of a charm rather than faith in God.

1. 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?

Answers will vary.

1. How does Severus keep Torquatus from exposing the congregation? What happens to Torquatus?

He makes sure that the path can be blocked quickly with sand. He and and his brothers are stationed above and they quickly dump the sand in the path. Torquatus is abandoned and trapped.

1. Does Caecilia sacrifice herself? Why?

Some students may say that she knows the danger and is on guard, yet is willing to be taken in order to save the others. Other students might say No she didn’t sacrifice herself. She didn’t want to be taken but would go willingly if she has to.

1. Of what does Caecilia die?

Modesty

1. What item gives Pancratius away as the one who tore down the edict? Who has that item?

The pocketknife. Corvinus has it.

1. What is Torquatus’s ultimate fate? Whose death is his redemption? What can be learned about God’s grace and redemption?

He is found during the funeral for Caecilia. He makes a full confession and he his put in a Christian home where he will out of danger of temptation or of vengeance.

1. What happens after Pancratius is sent from Rome by Sebastian?

Corvinus, looking for Pancratius, enters the schoolhouse of Cassianus and encourages the schoolboys to kill their teacher. Corvinus then feels worse because of his revenge.

1. How is Corvinus treated by Pancratius? How is he treated by his own servants?

Pancratius helps him even though he knows if the tables were turned, Corvinus would turn him over to be tortured. Corvinus’ servants steal from him.

1. How is Pancratius finally captured?

He is visiting the prisoners and Corvinus hears and recognizes his voice.

1. 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?

Answers will vary. This is another good question for discussion. Students should use their books to prove their points.

1. Why did Sebastian send Pancratius away?

Sebastian says if he had stayed he would have been seized for pulling down the edict. He would have been taken and suffered for Christ but for a civil offence, not for the belief in Christ alone. Sebastian feels it is better to die for Christ alone.

1. How does Pancratius deliver the ultimate final blow to Corvinus?

He tells him how he spared him in the river and how mistreated he was by his own servants.

1. What role does Sebastian take on after the martyrdom of Pancratius?

A general among his troops.

1. 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?

Answers will vary but should contain something about how he was slain by arrows and then restored to some strength by Irene. It should also contain details of how Fabiola witnesses his speech to the Emperor and subsequent death by bludgeoning.

1. What happened to Sebastian’s body? How was it recovered?

It was thrown in the sewer and then he appeared to St. Lucina in a dream and directed her to where his body was.

1. Why does Fulvinus ultimately desire Agnes? What plan do Fabiloa and Agnes hatch to outwit him?

He desires her wealth. They have all of her wealth transferred to Fabiola on her death.

1. 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?

Agnes asks Fabiola to master the doctrines of Christian faith. Fabiloa feels dark in front of Agnes. We all feel at times that we are not worthy of the goodness of God and certainly we are not capable of being Saints. But we are all worthy and have the potential of Sainthood. Answers will vary.

1. How does Agnes meet her martyrdom? How does the crowd receive her body?

Agnes meets it joyfully. Crowds of Christians pressed themselves forward to gather up her blood.

1. What happens to Fulivinus? What is his uncle’s plan?

He doesn’t get the money and needs to leave because his debtors will be after him. Also the emperor has thrown him out. His tells him that he plans to leave and try to make a new start and saving that they will commit suicide.

1. What realization does Fabiola make about all the people who she respected? How does that relate to her conversion to Christianity?

She realizes that everyone she respected was a Christian. It begins to change her understanding of the faith and deepen her desire to keep her promise to Agnes.

1. What happens during the last conversation between Fabiloa and Fulvinus?

Fulvinus tries to stab her and stabs Syra instead.

1. What relation is Fulvinus to Syra? Who is she really? What is her real name?

Fulvinus is Syra’s brother. Her real name is Miriam.

1. What greater restorative does Dionysus bring to Miriam?

The Holy Eucharist.

1. Describe Fabiola’s conversion.

Answers will vary but should include details from Miriam’s recovery.

1. How does Miriam end up being Syra? What part did Fulvinus and his uncle play in that story?

She is forced to turn over her fortune to her brother and uncle. She leaves on a ship she believes is bound to take her to place for Christian women. Instead it wrecks and she is sold into slavery.

1. Of what does Miriam die?

Consumption (Tubercuolosis)

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?

Fulvius

1. What year did the Church gain full liberty? Under whose reign?

313 under Constantine

1. When does Section III take place? How has the mood of Rome changed towards Christians?

15 years after the death of Miriam. Laws are in place to secure the safety of the Church.

1. How does Corvinus feel about this change towards the group he so despised?

He is bitter. He is also not above lying about being a Christian rather than be persecuted for his lack of faith.

1. What deals Corvinus his death blow?

A Panther

1. How is Corvinus’s aversion to water symbolic?

Water is the means of baptism and redemption, both of which Corvinus has avoided his whole life.

1. Who does Corvinus think he sees as he is dying? Why?

Pancratius. Answers will vary.

1. What was Eurotas’s plan? How did it fail and why?

He planned to kill Fulvinus, but he didn’t listen to Afra. The larger vial held the sleeping potion and the smaller vial held the poison. Because he misjudged, he instead died.

1. How is Fulvinus saved?

He drinks the wrong vial and then he realizes the wrongs he has done to people. He returns to Fabiola and attempts to make amends. He spends the rest of his days in a penitential fervor.

1. What is the overall theme of Fabiola?

Answers will vary. Students should be able to support their answers. Some could include: Conversion, Redemption, Martyrdom, Forgiveness

1. How does Fabiola follow the same plot outline as any other great heroic quest?

Students should use the Joseph Campbell model of the Heroic Journey to answer this question (Call to Action, Separation, Trials, Divine Help, Return and Reintegration)

1. What Catholic virtues does Newman hope to impart to his Catholic readers?
2. Answers will vary. This is a great question for group discussion. Students should use the text to prove their point and not merely just give their opinions.
3. What explanations of Catholicism does Newman hope his non-Catholic readers to understand?

Answers will vary. This is a great question for group discussion. Students should use the text to prove their point and not merely just give their opinions.

**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.