

Christianity and Western Literature

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Western Literature
A Story of Sin and Salvation

Ambrose Mong



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In Memory of Father Bonifacio Solís OP
(1945 to 2021)

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The Church as a body has never made up her mind about the Arts

Dorothy L. Sayers

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Preface and Acknowledgements

As a child, I often read the lives of the saints, which captured my imagination. They were like superheroes, fighting evil forces and rescuing people from darkness and ignorance through their learning, prayer and good works. These lives are collectively known as hagiography and saints are people the Catholic Church has canonised. But in literature, saints could also include those who, through their sacrifice and struggle, lived an exemplary life of holiness. These stories are the best form of literature to inculcate faith, especially in young children. Saints inspire us and serve as role models. Saints are not marble statues, but writings about these selected few can inspire believers and lead others to the faith. Many people I know have been converted to Christianity through reading just one book which resonates with their spiritual aspirations.

This book emerged from the Christianity and Western Literature course I taught at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2021. Most undergraduates in that class majored in Religious Studies, but only some had adequate knowledge of Christianity. Nonetheless, by reading some of the texts discussed here, the students gained deeper comprehension of Christian belief and gospel values conveyed in different contexts and historical periods. Conceivably, fiction, poems and plays can be powerful tools in portraying the Christian faith in action. Perhaps the decline in Christianity in the West is due to the lack of reading good literature.

Many people have assisted me in this project. Special thanks to Denis Chang SC for collaborating to write the chapter on Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. Kenzie Lau has been a great source of support in her editorial assistance and suggestions. I am also grateful to Br Patrick Tierney FSC, Sr Mary Gillis CND, Dr Doris Kin-Mee Au for proofreading the text, and Jane Robson for her excellent copy-editing. Thanks to the Parish Priest of St Joseph's Church, Revd Joseph Tan SVD, and my fellow colleague, Revd Paul Chan SVD, for their care and