



Edmund Campion: A Life

Evelyn Waugh

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Evelyn Waugh presented his biography of St. Edmund Campion, the Elizabethan poet, scholar and gentleman who became the haunted, trapped and murdered priest as a simple, perfectly true story of heroism and holiness. But it is written with a novelist's eye for the telling incident and with all the elegance and feeling of a master of English prose. From the years of success as an Oxford scholar, to entry into the newly founded Society of Jesus and a professorship in Prague, Campion's life was an inexorable progress towards the doomed mission to England. There followed pursuit, betrayal, a spirited defense of loyalty to the Queen, and a horrifying martyr's death at Tyburn.

Edmund Campion: A Life Details

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From Reader Review Edmund Campion: A Life for online ebook

Robert Corzine says

When I first read this book in the early 90's I was still a Protestant struggling with the questions of conversion. At the end of it, I still had questions to resolve about becoming Catholic but I felt a real desire to become a Jesuit like Campion, ready to sacrifice all and defy anyone for the sake of the Gospel. Whatever your background, if you can read this story without being moved and challenged, beware the state of your soul!

It is a powerful story, thoroughly researched and skillfully told. I've often wondered why Waugh didn't write more like it; a life of More or Fisher from his pen, or even of an ambiguous and frustrated figure like Gardiner, would have been a great treasure. His life of St. Helena is excellent in its own way, but a very different sort of book.

The reason, it turns out, is very simple. The Campion book was not Waugh's idea in the first place. He wrote it primarily out of gratitude to the priest, Fr. Martin D'Arcy SJ, who had instructed him in the faith and received him into the Church five years before. One of D'Arcy's fellow Jesuits had done a great deal of research for a new biography of Campion but had died before he could actually write it. Not only is the book dedicated to Fr. Martin, but Waugh declined to profit personally from the book. He quietly signed over all royalties from the biography to Campion Hall, the Jesuit house at Oxford University that was just then beginning to be built.

Kris McGregor says

I love the writing of Evelyn Waugh...his prose are some of the best of our time, if not of all time. And when that talent is used to pen a biography of the heroic English martyr, Edmund Campion, a tremendous blessing has been given to all who glisten its pages. What a story...what a life.

Frank Kelly says

One of the finest, most inspiring biographies I have ever read. It is a tale of faith and hope in the face of ferocious injustices and intensely bloody persecutions - truly the darkest days of English history. Evelyn Waugh's graceful prose and command of history and the spirit of this great saint makes this book hard to put down. Second time I've read it and it has only gotten finer with age

Sylvia Johnson says

An excellent account of a truly noble priest. It has inspired me to pick up a book on my shelves to read more about the reformation and the vast martyrology of the Elizabethan era.

Robert Federline says

This is an exciting tale of a life lived, and willingly sacrificed, for belief and ideals.

Edmund Campion was not a sure thing as a saint, because he did not follow an easy and assured route. Edmund Campion is an excellent example of a Jesuit. The Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier, is known throughout history for its commitment to learning, and the sharing of knowledge, as a path leading to Christ.

Knowledge and true scholarship, when honestly pursued and vigorously investigated, lead to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Campion followed his investigations into a personal relationship with God, and which inevitably led to the surrender of his life. He lived in an age in which it was dangerous to believe, and more especially to voice your belief, in anything other than the preferences of the ruling authorities.

A commitment to truth can give one courage and purpose. Campion found such courage in quantity sufficient that he was not only willing, but felt compelled, to lay down his life in service of truth. Not many men are granted his eloquence, nor possess his scholarship. His example, however, is inspiring for any who are interested in Truth. Tyranny comes in many forms. Today it is common to find the suppression of ideas and prejudice against certain beliefs. We live in an age where tolerance is preached, but not practiced. In Campion's time they were at least more honest in that tolerance was not preached.

Evelyn Waugh is an excellent author who wrote many good novels, but few can compare with the truth of a life lived in service to Truth.

Craig says

Waugh had already made, or very nearly made, the transition from young bad boy satirist to mature novelist with "A Handful of Dust" but this fine little book presages his later work. A beautiful piece of writing.

Stephen says

A beautifully written, almost poetic overview of the life of the English martyr and saint. It helped me to understand just how difficult it was to be Catholic in Elizabethan England, and of the courage it took for Campion and his contemporaries to serve in their native land. I'll have a much harder time enjoying movies and documentaries that portray Elizabeth as a hero.

Rachel says

Pretty hard to read, especially the second half. Maybe I'm just out of touch with what's good, interesting writing, since this book is so highly rated. It just seemed so full of random names that would *only* be of interest to a highly academic historian.

Campion did come across as a pretty interesting character, though.

will says

Considering my non-existent interest in the history of Catholicism in England, this book was still relatively interesting.

Nicolas Carrillo-Santarelli says

This is a fascinating book that accomplishes different things. Firstly, it portrays the life and sacrifices made by Edmund Campion, from renouncing to success in England to his very martyrdom, and his selflessness in trying to help others while abiding by a separation between Church and State. The description of his condemnation in a mock trial devoid of minimum guarantees and due process shows how, in spite of the Queen's proclamation that faith had nothing to do with the sentencing, reflect how conviction was preordained regardless of actual guilt or treason. On the other hand, the book clearly describes how religious toleration in the Elizabethan era was actually not so, and the drastic changes experienced in England over a short period. Highly recommended.

Scott George McCombe says

When one looks back to the grisly period that was Elizabethan England one is struck by the almost miraculous fact that Catholicism survived at all. Despite centuries of propaganda claiming that the Elizabethan State did not make 'windows into men's souls', the authorities were not solely concerned with perceived traitors who sought to harm Elizabeth, but were dedicated to purging England of the Old Faith and those who practiced it. That Catholicism did survive, albeit as a small remnant of the population, is a testimony to the courage, devotion and perseverance of the Faithful and the priests who served them. One group that particularly stands out for its bravery and sacrifice is the Society of Jesus, amongst whose ranks many of the English martyrs can be counted. St Edmund Campion is an example of one man who forfeited a comfortable life as an academic to minister to the Catholics of England as a Jesuit priest and ultimately sacrificed everything for this mission.

Despite the grim reality that faced Catholics of this era, it is undeniable that the lifestyle of espionage, covert defiance and struggle to stay one step ahead of priest-hunters carries with it a certain romantic adventurism which cannot fail to inspire contemporary Catholic readers. We may all be glad that the days of bloody persecution are behind us—at least for the time being in England—but the life of men such as Edmund Campion show fully the 'stuff' that Saints are made of. If it was not history it would make an excellent story on the struggle of good resisting evil and, for this reason, the gifted author Evelyn Waugh was the perfect person to write this narrative.

Waugh divides the life of Campion into four sections: Scholar, Priest, Hero and Martyr. The simplicity of this trajectory was all too common and a priest in England would usually end up dying in agony for the Faith. Campion was aware of the almost certainty of death when he arrived back as a priest in England. While his ministry was cut short by capture a little over a year after returning to his native land, the work of Campion bore a great deal. While faithfully dispensing the Sacraments to those who desired them, he also launched a polemical tract campaign critiquing the New Religion and defending the rights of Catholics to

practice the Old Faith. His tracts caused a sensation amongst both the ordinary people and the authorities. It is undoubtedly the case that people were brought back to the Faith as a result of the controversy he stirred. His mission was set out in his famous 'Campion's Brag' in which he stated that, 'So the faith was planted: so it must be restored'. Waugh emphasized the importance of recognizing that at no time did his tracts call for the overthrow of Elizabeth. At his show trial he made a point of declaring that he and his fellow accused 'have been as good subjects as ever the Queen had'. Indeed, after his arrest there was an extraordinary offer made of high office in the Church of England--potentially the Archbishopric of Canterbury--if he would only recant his Catholicism. He refused and gained a place amongst the Saints in Heaven.

In his preface, Evelyn Waugh makes the point that this is not a scholarly work about St Edmund Campion. It should be read, as he puts it, as a 'simple, perfectly true story of heroism and holiness'. Waugh succeeds admirably in this.

Ryan says

Not Waugh's finest book, it shows that even when not at his best, Waugh is among the best. This biography reads fluidly and clearly, almost like a novel. The book handles its topic sensitively with an eye both to historical fact and the sensibilities of its characters and of modern readers.

Patrick Baty says

Chastening. Beautifully written.

Shaunda Penny says

This was an excellent biography of an extraordinary man. As with all the lives of the saints, I found so much that was relevant and inspiring even now, centuries later.

Having just read *Helena* and *The Loved One*, though, I did miss the personality and story telling that is so wonderful in Waugh's fictional works.

Jerry M says

This is a fairly short and surprisingly old fashioned biography of Edmund Campion. I say surprisingly because Waugh's writing is usually more modern in tone. This is more reverent than one expects of Waugh. Campion was an English scholar who seemed destined for greatness but who realized his sympathies were with the Catholic church. He went to Douai in France was received into the Catholic church. He eventually went to Rome, joined the Jesuit order and was assigned to a mission to return to England to preach to Catholics still in England. Campion expected all along the this mission would be a death sentence, but he seems to have only worried that he didn't have the courage to do it.

Waugh does a very good job of explaining that Campion at no time was part of a plot to bring down the English government and murder Queen Elizabeth. The book is easy to read, except for the use of clerical

terms that most of us wouldn't understand. It is hardly the best of Waugh but it is well done.
