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LAUDATO SI': AND FRANCIS PREACHED TO THE BIRDS PREACHING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Robin Gibbons 13 February 2023

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we need some kind of shock to kick start ourselves into widening our horizons, for instance none of us can shy away from concerns about the environment, the fact of our own local climatic shifts. The drastic changes to our wildlife and habitat are becoming far too evident for us to ignore, yet still we often think that it is somebody else's concern. Until, of course, it happens to impinge on us – we are flooded out, the cold becomes too much, the plants in our garden become unsuitable for the climate change, emissions charges for cars in certain cities bite into our purse, the disappearance of insects, birds and small mammals becomes tragically obvious as a prelude of what might come. When faced with any event of obvious transformation, good or bad, the human person is also capable of strong action and considered response if guided in the right way.

A CALL TO ADJUST TO GREEN SERMONS

Yet for those of us engaged in the ministry of preaching, the crafting of a homily or sermon that tackles any issues focussing on aspects of 'greening' through the medium of the Lord's words, isn't always obvious or easy. Yet, I would suggest we have little choice but to try, for it is also an imperative as one of the great challenges we face. Now, and in our future homilies, we need to lead others to savour the Word of God in order to talk about, look at, and discuss in terms of practical outreach just how we are to care for our Earth, repair the damage done, right the injustices that enable greed and sin to hold so much power over us, and halting any forms of destruction we can. We do this by holding in our minds and hearts the Earth's role as a locus of the Divine One, part of salvation's story, a sacred, blessed, and holy space.

We are called to challenge any viewpoint that sees our Earth and creation in purely utilitarian terms, or as an unlimited human resource to plunder. Jesus never divided this world from the next, as some Christians have sought to do. We have never been taught to act as if we are Gnostics or Manicheans. Jesus sought always to bring those two cities St Augustine wrote and taught about, that of humanity and that of God, as something entwined, belonging together. The Kingdom of God might not be something tangible, seen or heard, but in Jesus' teaching it is real, organic, growing within and amongst us.

PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM NOW

For all of us who believe in the Lord Christ the proclamation of 'God-Amongst-Us' must be a constant thread. The place or locus of this encounter starts now, not in some halcyon future, as Mark points out in his gospel it starts with his own coming, for where He, the Christ and we are, there the Kingdom is! Mark has Jesus say this right at the beginning of His ministry: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel' (Mk 1:15).

'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17: 20-21). In terms of creating a purpose for us all as his disciples, Jesus himself gives us the task ahead of us, we '... must preach the good news of the kingdom of God' (Luke 4:43). However, we need to gather our ideas together and make some sense of just how this Kingdom is understood within the context of our Earth, human beings and living creatures, for Jesus reorients our ideas and prizes loose our hold on what we imagine is ours, when he pushes us into facing new horizons, as he does when he states, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36).

A WIDER HORIZON

How then can we preach our concerns for our earth and all that is in it and yet avoid a trap of seeing this place, this home, as simply transitory?

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* gives us an energising take on a greater vision, words that lead us, as does Jesus the Incarnate Word, to a horizon far beyond the limits of our sight and understanding. We begin with the original root of what we are as created matter, here the innate connectivity between us, our God, living creatures and our common home is made clear in *Laudato Si'*, 'The creation accounts ... suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations' (LS 66).

The wisdom of making known our friability is important, nobody else has caused the de-greening, the despoliation of our planet (and on such a scale) as the human species; yet we also have that capacity to work together in forgiveness and make restitution, amends – not just for the past but for life to come! Yes, there is hope, we can preach and proclaim in small and great matters, those environmental themes that pull or push us into greater action. This is not easy especially for the homilist for it also requires a humility from us that has to be foolish for the sake of the Good News. Everything is connected even if we find that a difficult concept, but we have to try and join the dots.

WORLD AND KINGDOM AS SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Pope Francis writes, 'As Christians, we are also called "to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet"' (LS 9). That is a deeply rooted insight at the heart, not only of the Incarnation where the Divine met the Human and took on life with us for ever, but in the Resurrection where death, ending, is defeated in a transformation to new life, connected to what has been. If we hold on to that, we begin to see our present world as something infinite, it is perhaps very much like the image of the growing pearl of great price, what starts in the star dust, the humus of Earth becomes the glory of the Kingdom in its fullness!

It is important that we grasp the task of reconciliation as one of the necessities in dealing with environment and climate, for nobody can excuse themselves from the command and challenge of Christ to work for the union of all things in Him, to bring creation to that fullness of love.

CONVERSION, ECUMENISM, HUMILITY

But in order to be effective in our preaching we ourselves must first believe that all are part of that 'Sacrament of Communion', there is a deep ecumenism here which breaks down denominational boundaries. Patriarch Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is quoted by Pope Francis as one spiritual leader who can open out these insights, calling us to the heart of what we are, what God is, what life becomes, what the hard work of the task before us consists of. Bartholomew understands it as a 'conversion of heart and life', a vocation, a real calling: 'It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God's world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion' (LS 6).

How do we share this in our preaching? We begin with the obvious necessity of realising we do not have all the answers, that to help others we must increase our own faith by engaging with others. The charism of humility takes us back to a fundamental requirement of the preacher, to be as one who is obedient to the voice of the Holy One, by which we understand obedience in its root meaning as both passive – by listening deeply, encountering – and then active, engaging in discussion, and only then discerning together the way ahead.

It might mean a real individual reappraisal of the way we each preach, and of the significance of that vocation as part of being not so much clergy, minister, ordained but as a Christian. It does us good to listen to others and to critique ourselves and our methodology, we need renewal from time to time. To preach well is to make that connection between the Holy One and others, but it is also to be the voice of the Spirit, to do that we must know not only the 'smell of the sheep' as Pope Francis put it, but the various smells of our mother the Earth itself.

THE CHALLENGE OF FRANCIS AND THE BIRDS

I shall finish with one of my favourite illustrations of great preaching. It is significant that the harmony, which Saint Francis of Assisi (c1181-1226) experienced with all creatures, was seen as a healing of that first rupture which came through sin.

'Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence' (LS 66). This is not fanciful nor far-fetched. As we progress in biological science and anthropology, we find ourselves discovering that the creatures we have for too long just dominated and used, also have capacities to grieve loss, show affection, even love, to be hurt and reach out to those in pain, and respond to learning. They are not mute dumb beasts.

When Francis was discerning whether he should continue on in his ministry of preaching, or go into solitude, he asked the advice of Saint Clare and was told to continue. The first thing he did after that advice was to preach his famous sermon to the birds! Is it madness, sheer eccentricity? Maybe, but I am not of that opinion, as with Jesus, Francis' sermon is a parable of another reality, one in which we are forced to consider things in a different manner. To preach in such a way about such creatures may shock, but isn't that what homilies also do, shake the hearer, turn our values upside down?

Thomas of Celano tells us what Francis did and the result it had: 'He went right up to them and solicitously urged them to listen to the word of God, saying, "Oh birds, my brothers and sisters, you have a great obligation to praise your Creator, who clothed you in feathers and gave you wings to fly with, provided you with pure air and cares for you without any worry on your part." ... The birds showed their joy in a remarkable fashion: They began to stretch their necks, extend their wings, open their beaks and gaze at him attentively. When he had finished Francis was deeply moved and sorry for his previous negligence in not preaching to them, and as Thomas wrote, "From that day on, [Francis] carefully exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures, to praise and love the creator ..."' (see I Celano XXI).

He is not the only saint to do such things, Anthony preached to the fishes, Seraphim of Sarov had his bear and wild animals, Cuthbert the seals. They are only doing what William Blake shows us in his poem 'Auguries of Innocence', revealing more than is obvious, making us truly obedient to the Lord's voice in all things, opening up to us the deepest mercy and compassion of the Creator for each one of us here on Earth:

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour
A Robin Red breast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage'.

CONCLUSION

Jesus tells us to image nature and use it: 'Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?' (Matthew 6: 26,28-20).

This is the widest ecumenism of all, to preach about all that matters on our planet and to understand that the least are as important as the greatest, that all creation and life belong to us, that it is what we do to the least that shows the way of love. It is the answer to the question we yearn to ask of Christ, 'when did we see you?' 'And the King will say, "I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"' (Matthew 25 :40).

<https://www.collegeofpreachers.co.uk/articles/2023/1-april/features/laudato-si-and-francis-preached-to-the-birds-preaching-and-environmental-issues/>

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"We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion."
– **Hildegard of Bingen**

AS CLIMATE CRISIS DEEPENS, THE 'GROANING OF CREATION' IS NO LONGER JUST A SCRIPTURAL CONCEPT

Joseph Kelly 9 June 9, 2023

"With an amber heat warning blanketing much of the UK today, America's east coast disappearing under an eerie orange fog, and numerous floods and droughts happening elsewhere in the world, humanity is finally having to confront a disturbing new climate reality.

In just the two and a half centuries since Britain kick-started the Industrial Revolution, our planet has shifted from a balanced agricultural ecosystem to a vast, destructive biosphere where human life is becoming in very real danger of self-extinction. Fuelled by the relentless power of consumerism, the once cherished chattles of the West are now being demanded by all, and there's no rational or moral argument for depriving developing countries of the luxuries that we've been enjoying for decades.

The core problem of our post-industrial age lies in the lack of physical materials and resources to supply such demand, and the increasingly obvious consequences for the planet in trying to do so.

Here in the West even the most indisputable evidence of eco-collapse is failing to move those in power to meaningful action, as a now wearisome list of annual United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP) and Group of Twenty (G20) summits demonstrate. Cop 1 took place 28 years ago, the first G20 meeting was 15 years ago and since then a lot of money has been spent and a lot of paperwork produced, but next to nothing has been achieved in reducing an accelerating planetary decline. Greenhouse-gas emissions continue to increase, plastics continue to pollute our waters and food chain, and industrialisation and urban expansion despoil the landscape and strip the planet of its irreplaceable resources.

Such is the crisis, that scientists are now no longer able to predict and anticipate the negative impacts of climate change, moving us into a realm of unimaginable uncertainty. What we do know is that climate change is now upon us, and represents the single biggest threat facing humanity.

All of this seems a very long way from the days of Victorian biblical certainties, when we were told that mankind had a solemn duty to go out and subdue the earth, and make the most of the bountiful resources that God had apparently placed there purely for our benefit and personal enrichment. Such Capitalist theology was well-suited to patronise and embolden the industrial entrepreneurs of the Industrial Revolution, but it was little grounded in the broader Christian message of the gospels, and certainly didn't square with the sentiments and theology of the tract that defines and categorises humankind's relationship with our planet – the book of Genesis.

In my younger days Genesis was more than any other the disputed text of the bible. After all, here wasn't just a memorised narrative of miracles and prophetic quotations, but an apparently dogmatic calendar of physical events from the moment of Creation to Toledoth of Jacob. At Sunday school classes we were obliged to acknowledge that the world was created in seven exact and actual days, and that all human suffering was the result of the nefarious Eve and that irresistible apple. These days most biblical scholars and theologians favour allegory, though the strength and mysticism of the Genesis narrative remains as strong as ever.

Indeed, it's a text 'whose time has come'.

The centrality of Genesis is a relatively simple message that I hear echoing in shouts around our streets every day – live in unison with and respect for God's creation and all will be well with the world; do otherwise and life will be reduced to a desperate scratching in the dust of our miserable achievements. It's the very stuff of environmental protest, but it's been the hardest of all truths to get through to those with the hard power to save the planet.

Back in 2015 in Paris, 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) signed a legally binding international treaty on climate change. Described as "a landmark in the multilateral climate change process" the overarching goal of the Paris Agreement is to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels."

However, in recent years, world leaders have stressed the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C by the end of this century. That's because the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicates that crossing the 1.5°C threshold risks "unleashing far more severe climate change impacts, including more frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves and rainfall".

As we're already experiencing, it looks like we're moving into another summer of record high temperatures, extreme weather fluctuations, damaging environmental events and the dreaded El Niño weather phenomenon which has just started firing up in the Pacific Ocean.

It's said there are no atheists before a shipwreck, and even the most sceptical of observers are starting to recognise that we are now moving into a new stage in the earth's history, far distant from the guarded gates of Eden.

Speaking on World Environment Day on Monday, Pope Francis said that the humanity of the post-industrial period: "may be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history," and he hoped that "the humanity of the early 21st Century may be remembered for generously assuming its grave responsibilities."

In his yearly message for World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which occurs on 1st September and was presented at the Vatican on Thursday 25th May, Francis was even more specific, saying that modern societies, more interested in profit than in future generations, are responsible for the disharmony between humanity and the environment.

“Consumerist greed, fuelled by selfish hearts, is disrupting the planet’s water cycle. The unrestrained burning of fossil fuels and the destruction of forests are pushing temperatures higher and leading to massive droughts. Alarming water shortages increasingly affect both small rural communities and large metropolises,” he said.

“Predatory industries are depleting and polluting our freshwater sources through extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming,” he added.

“Economic policies that promote scandalous wealth for a privileged few and degrading conditions for many others, spell the end of peace and justice.”

In his great 2015 encyclical *Laudato si’* (on care for our common home), Francis counterpoints these modern challenges very directly with the tarnishing of the “original Blessing” described in the book of Genesis.

“Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.” (*Laudato si’* 66)

For Francis, the reversal of the Fall, both practically and philosophically, is the need to avoid the “dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures ... Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full.” (*Laudato si’* 222–3)

Unfortunately repenting for our ecological sins isn’t going to be easy, especially when we have a small elite of incredibly powerful material wealth creators driving a world where so many with nothing are being offered the promise of prosperity at the expense of our environmental stability.

Traditionally our Church has not focussed its attention greatly on the environmental debate, as its challenges and solutions are intertwined inextricably with the crude politics of power and free market capitalism. In particular the loss of many local Justice and Peace groups over recent decades, which were perceived to be too ‘left of centre’ orientated, has left something of a void in the debate at the very time when the voice of lay Catholics on the politics of environmentalism is needed most urgently.

Laudato Si’ has given us the mandate to speak, and this we must if we are to avert a looming environmental catastrophe and – rather than seeing the world ‘through a mirror dimly’ – find ourselves once again face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).

<https://www.thecatholicnetwork.co.uk/as-climate-crisis-deepens-the-groaning-of-creation-is-no-longer-just-a-scriptural-concept-says-joseph-kelly/>

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POPE FRANCIS MEETS WITH PRESIDENT ZELENSKY IN THE VATICAN FOR FIRST TIME SINCE THE WAR IN UKRAINE BEGAN

Gerard O’Connell 13 May 2023

“Thank you for this visit,” a smiling Pope Francis said as he warmly shook hands and welcomed Ukraine’s President Zelensky at the door when he arrived at the Vatican on the afternoon of May 13 for his first face-to-face meeting with the pope since Russia invaded and started the war against his country. “It is a great honour,” the president responded in French.

Francis, walking with the aid of a walking stick, then led him into the private audience room near the Vatican Paul VI audience hall, not far from Santa Marta, the guesthouse where Pope Francis lives. The two sat down and spoke together in private for some 40 minutes, with the assistance of a translator. Mr. Zelensky said he asked the pope “to condemn Russian crimes in Ukraine, because there can be no equality between the victim and aggressor.” He asked the pope to support his 10-point plan for peace.

Afterwards, the Vatican issued a statement that indicated that in their talk they spoke about “the humanitarian and political situation of the Ukraine caused by the ongoing war.” It said, “the pope assured him of his constant prayer, as witnessed by his many public appeals and invocation to the Lord for peace since February of last year [when the war started].”

The Vatican statement said, “both [leaders] agreed on the necessity to continue the humanitarian efforts in support of the [Ukrainian] population.” Pope Francis emphasized in particular “the urgent need for ‘gestures of humanity’ towards the most fragile persons, the innocent victims of the conflict.” The latter comment was read by observers here in Rome as referring especially to the children that are the most innocent victims of the war. Earlier in the day, meeting the Italian prime minister, Mr. Zelensky had called for the return of over 19,000 children “whose names we have” who have been forcibly taken to Russia.

Mr. Zelensky, for his part, issued the following tweet after he had left the Vatican that provided a deeper insight into what was said. He said: “I met with Pope Francis. I’m grateful for his personal attention to the tragedy of millions of Ukrainians. I spoke about thousands of deported Ukrainian children. We must make every effort to return them home. In addition, I asked to condemn Russian crimes in Ukraine. Because there can be no equality between the victim and aggressor. I also talked about our Peace Formula as the only effective algorithm for achieving a just peace. I proposed joining its implementation.”

Pope Francis emphasized in particular “the urgent need for ‘gestures of humanity’ towards the most fragile persons, the innocent victims of the conflict.”

After their private meeting, Mr. Zelensky presented his delegation to the pope, including Ukraine’s ambassador to the Holy See, Andrii Yurash. Then both leaders exchanged gifts.

Pope Francis gave a bronze work of art representing an olive branch, the symbol of peace, according to the Vatican statement. He also gave the president a number of publications: the pope’s own message for this year’s World Day of Peace, the *Document for Human Fraternity*, written with the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, and the book of *Statio Orbis* that documented the pope’s talk and prayer in St. Peter’s Square on March 27, 2020, for the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the book *An Encyclical on Peace in Ukraine*, which is a collection of the pope’s talks and homilies on the war.

Mr. Zelensky gave the pope: a work of art of the Madonna (Our Lady) wearing a flak jacket, and a work of art made from anti-projectile pieces from sites of conflict, a Byzantine icon of the Madonna like the one that many soldiers wear invoking her protection in the war and a painting marked “Lost” (*Perdita*) on the killing of Ukrainian children during the war.

After his private meeting with Pope Francis, Mr. Zelensky and his delegation also met Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican’s secretary for relations with states (that is, foreign minister).

This was their second private meeting of the Ukrainian president with the pope, and it came on the 444th day of the war in Ukraine. They first met on Feb. 8, 2020, when they talked about peace in the Ukraine, and Pope Francis called him “a president of peace,” according to what the president told the Kyiv Post. Later, Mr. Zelensky wrote on Twitter, “@Pontifex does everything possible to achieve peace and harmony throughout the world.”

The war has forced the displacement or exile of almost a quarter of the 44 million Ukrainians who lived in the country before the Russian invasion. It has also caused widespread destruction in the country, and greatly disrupted the food and energy supply chains across the world.

Since the war started, Francis has sought to reach out to both Russian President Vladimir Putin who started the war on Feb. 24, 2022, and Mr. Zelensky, whom the Russians wanted to assassinate, in the hope of trying to stop the war that has led to the death or injury of hundreds of thousands of people (both Ukrainian and Russian). But only Mr. Zelensky has responded.

His visit has been interpreted as a gesture that reflected the importance that the president of Ukraine gives to the pope and to thank him for the role he plays in the humanitarian field (for the exchange of prisoners, the provision of humanitarian aid and assistance to facilitate the return of Ukrainian children that have been taken to Russia) and for his effort to bring an end to the Russian aggression against his country and the return of a just peace.

After his visit with the pope, Mr. Zelensky was interviewed for more than one hour on Italian state television by the editors of the main Italian dailies. Asked whether he saw a role for the pope as mediator between Russia and Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky replied, “With all respect for His Holiness, we do not need mediators. We need a just peace. We invite the pope, as [we do] other leaders, to work for a just peace, but first we have to do all the rest,” he said, meaning “it’s important to end the war in Ukraine” and by winning to put a stop to Mr. Putin’s aggression.

He said he saw no sense in trying to involve Russia in a dialogue at this stage, because in Minsk in 2015, Mr. Putin did not keep his word. “One cannot make a mediation with Putin. He just knows how to kill. It is not a question of the Vatican, Latin America or China.”

Mr. Zelensky said he felt the Vatican can help in some areas, including for example, with the return of almost 20,000 Ukrainian children who were taken to Russia during the occupation. He said he asked the pope to “put pressure on Russia” to achieve this goal.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2023/05/13/pope-francis-zelensky-vatican-war-ukraine-245285>

ERDOGAN'S VICTORY: THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY

Ian Linden writes: 29 May 2023

Turkey provides a unique example of the interaction between religion and politics. Recep Tayyeb Erdoğan, with his strong-man appeal to Islamic piety, won the Turkish Presidential election run-off at the weekend by 4% of the vote taking 52.1%. Kemal Kiliçdarğöglü with his promise of modern social democracy, had won only 44.9% of the vote in the first round, so stood little chance of overtaking Erdoğan with 49.5%. Fateful figures.

Two highly charged contending mindsets define Turkey's national identity. Kemal Atatürk, a revolutionary nationalist who, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, founded the modern Turkish secular State in 1923. He was influenced by French laïcité, an ideological commitment to keep religion out of the public domain, and achieve its complete separation from the State. For many, this is expressed as a passionate rejection of Islam in favour of Turkey's 1928 secular constitution traditionally supported by the military. For others there is a no less passionate religious commitment but to a moderate, pious Islamic conservatism.

The US Brookings Institution wrote glowingly in 2002 that the AKP, Erdoğan's Justice & Development Party which had just swept to power, “heralds democracy”. It seemed like a “new model” for the Islamic world. A year later, Erdoğan became Prime Minister. His development of a modern transport system, political flair and skilful negotiation of the deep nationalist tensions, while maintaining his espousal of Islamic values in the AKP, have enabled him to increase his power ever since.

Erdoğan's religious appeal owed much to the phenomenal success of the Gulen Islamic revival movement that provided him with the cultural and religious credentials of Turkish Islamic piety and helped to attract pious voters. Inspired by Fetullah Gulen, a scholar and preacher, the movement prioritized modern education, understanding of science and a commitment to interfaith dialogue as well as traditional Islamic practice.

During the 1980s, starting with popular dersane, crammer schools, the Gulenists – calling themselves Hizmet (meaning service) – gained ground in the medium-sized towns of Anatolia. Those with money, the ‘Anatolian tigers’, invested in media and business forming the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists. Nationwide, Gulenist-led universities and schools became a ladder into the civil service, judiciary, police and army.

With a flat structure and a reputation for being secretive, Hizmet was accused both of ‘infiltration’ of the state structures and of becoming too close to Erdoğan, collaborating in his dismissals of secular opponents of the AKP.

At trials, beginning in 2008, Gülenist prosecutors brought charges, some falsified, against some 275 key secularists, high ranking military, government critics and opposition politicians. By 1999, Fetullah Gulen had withdrawn from the fray to a ranch in Pennsylvania after a new Turkish government which aimed to restore the constitution's secular principles put him in danger of arrest for ‘anti-secular activity’.

By 2012 Erdoğan was powerful enough to dispense with Hizmet's blessing. Influential in the judiciary, the media, universities and schools and with supporters in some 160 countries, Hizmet was now a potential rival needing to be curbed. That October Erdoğan obliged Hizmet to hand over its cash-cow, the dersane schools, to the State. In February 2014 Hizmet members hit back by releasing tapes which provided concrete evidence of major corruption involving the President and his son. Erdoğan brazened it out and was elected President that August.

The key to survival as an autocrat is ruthlessness, luck and courage. A military coup got underway on the night of 15 July 2016 while Erdoğan was on holiday in Marmaris, south-west Turkey. He narrowly escaped capture, broadcast to the nation via a mobile phone held to camera in a TV studio, flew back to Istanbul, called his supporters out onto the streets and regained control. Over 250 people were killed and 2,200 injured. Here was his opportunity finally to take control of the army and destroy his old allies, the Gulenists, some of whom had joined the coup.

A disturbing feature of the coup's aftermath, demonstrating the efficiency and depth of surveillance by the National Intelligence Agency was the immediate arrest of thousands of Gulenists alongside the coup's secular military participants. A massive purge of civil service, police, armed forces, judiciary, media, universities and schools followed. Many were guilty of nothing more than a vague connection with Hizmet. 'restoring democracy', Erdoğan had seized the last pieces completing the puzzle of autocratic power.

A sorry story of not much import? No. Now that we perceive geo-politics as a struggle between democracy and autocracy the Turkish experience is a neon sign flashing confirmation that democracy is losing the global struggle.

Look at the post-Cold War record: Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya three tragic failures of intervention; Iran still in the hands of the mullahs; Russia triumphant in a devastated Syria and destroying Ukraine; Putin contemptuous of European democracies, the USA and international law; China with its terrifying surveillance society watching Ukraine as a dry-run for taking Taiwan; Narendra Modi's discriminating against religious minorities; the army in Pakistan unwilling to accept Imran Khan's attempt to reduce its power over the State. Sudan wrecked by two military factions. South Africa by government corruption. Just one hopeful sign in Brazil with its peaceful democratic transfer of power from Jair Bolsonaro.

There are two main possible reactions to Erdoğan's adding five more years to his twenty in power.

Firstly, realpolitik requires continuing efforts to keep Turkey, a NATO member, out of the expanding band of brother autocratic regimes around the world, notably Russia. Another imperative is continuing huge payments to Erdoğan, following a 2016 migration deal which is keeping nearly four million refugees (3.6 million of them Syrians) out of the EU.

Secondly, there is the utopian hope that one last push in the next elections in 2028 will remove Erdoğan, ending the imprisonment of opposition politicians, journalists and dissident voices, as well as removing government control of 98% of press, radio and television. But how realistic is this? Over half the electorate, not only in Erdoğan's Anatolian heartland, feel he represents their values and hopes, and sustains their version of national identity. He represents strength amidst the fragility of their lives and their fear of repeating the chaos across Turkey's southern and eastern borders.

Must foreign policy choose between these two visions of Turkey's future? Between realpolitik and utopian? In a recent slim volume, *The Tragic Mind: Fear, Fate, and the Burden of Power* by Robert D. Kaplan, a US journalist who has served on the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, implies we need to embrace both. The tragic mind, he argues, experiences failure not as fatalism or despair but as a goad to greater understanding and as a prompt for the heroism of 'acting bravely in the face of no great result'.

The tragedy of Kemal Kiliçdarğoglu and his defeated Republican People's Party (CHP) is that however much he may understand the nationalism, culture and thinking of Turkey's rural poor and of the working class in its medium sized towns – his talk of expelling the refugees - he does not speak to them and their condition convincingly. Erdoğan, more street-wise, plays on their heart-strings. No-one can doubt Kiliçdarğoglu's heroism and bravery in facing a ruthless autocrat. There are lessons to be learned about navigating today's multiple threats to democracy from the failure of Turkey's Opposition.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/erdogans-victory-the-decline-of-democracy>

• Professor Ian Linden is Visiting Professor at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill, London. A past director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, he was awarded a CMG for his work for human rights in 2000. He has also been an adviser on Europe and Justice and Peace issues to the Department of International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Ian chairs a new charity for After-school schooling in Beirut for Syrian refugees and Lebanese kids in danger of dropping out partnering with CARITAS Lebanon and work on board of Las Casas Institute in Oxford with Richard Finn OP. His latest book was *Global Catholicism* published by Hurst in 2009.

"When our eyes are graced with wonder, the world reveals its wonders to us. There are people who see only dullness in the world and that is because their eyes have already been dulled. So much depends on how we look at things. The quality of our looking determines what we come to see. Too often we squander the invitations extended to us because our looking has become repetitive and blind. The mystery and beauty is all around us but we never manage to see it. When the imagination awakens, the inner world illuminates. We begin to glimpse things that no-one speaks about, that the outer world seems to ignore."
– John O'Donohue, excerpt from *Divine Beauty*

FORCES WATCH REPORT

Artificial Concerns

Towards the end of May, British Army personnel took part in the "first joint AUKUS AI and autonomy trial" on Salsbury Plain alongside the US and Australia. See: <https://twitter.com/dstlmod/status/1662010547640971264>

The trial was using artificial intelligence to detect and track targets, and while participants were no doubt told they were taking part in the first trials of "exciting" new weapons they probably didn't expect the barrage of AI scare stories that came in the following ten days.

On 30th May a group of leading figures in the AI industry - including Google DeepMind CEO Demis Hassabis and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman - issued a joint statement about the potential dangers of the technology. According to tech magazine *The Verge* many more experts than those who signed the letter are also fearful about the roll out of AI:

"...even without improvements in their capabilities, AI systems present a number of threats in the present day — from their use enabling mass-surveillance, to powering faulty “predictive policing” algorithms, and easing the creation of misinformation and disinformation."

Of course, we should be cautious of statements from CEOs that seek to profit from the development of AI - especially those in companies with huge military contracts or funding from Peter Theil - and sceptics have accused many corporate signatories of trying to benefit from regulatory capture. But within the context of the AI news deluge it has got to be mentioned. Especially because of what came next.....

Autonomous Killers

At the start of June stories broke across the mainstream press of a US Air Force simulation in which an autonomous drone allegedly killed its operator to prevent them from interfering with its mission. According to Colonel Tucker Hamilton:

The system started realising that while they did identify the threat, at times the human operator would tell it not to kill that threat, but it got its points by killing that threat.

Hamilton, who is head of AI test and operations with the US Air Force was speaking at the Future Combat Air and Space Capabilities Summit in London in May. He added that after the AI was told not to kill the operator, it simply destroyed the control tower the operator used to control the AI.

However, within a day Hamilton backpedalled, claiming he had misspoken about the alarming results of the simulation - which had only been a “thought experiment”, and not an actual simulation. Confusing to say the least, but the US Air Force itself also released a statement denying the exercise had ever happened.

Meanwhile the UK’s terror watchdog (See: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/04/ai-poses-national-security-threat-warns-terror-watchdog>) warned that AI might also influence vulnerable people to take up terrorist causes and even cause injury or harm to the public. Jonathan Hall KC, whose job it is to review terror legislation, said people could be influenced by AI bots:

“What worries me is the suggestibility of humans when immersed in this world and the computer is off the hook. Use of language, in the context of national security, matters because ultimately language persuades people to do things.”

While there might be examples in which this is true, it certainly lets British foreign policy off the hook to just blame the computers.

Our soldiers aren’t satisfied

Last week the Ministry of Defence released the annual Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey and it seems military personnel are deeply unhappy. The results paint a grim picture of service life and one that flies in the face of the advertising rhetoric. Not that we need to tell you that! But the numbers are a useful tool in challenging military recruitment because they can be held up as concrete examples of why a service career is not what the expensive marketing makes it out to be. And it is those serving who have said it.

Perhaps one of the most shocking takeaways is the lack of accountability when it comes to bullying, harassment and discrimination. The overwhelming majority (87%) of respondents who said they experienced some form of bullying, harassment or discrimination in the past year did not make a complaint because they felt no action would be taken or it might impact their career. That sounds like an incredibly toxic work environment.

Read more here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2023>

REFLECTION: THE FEAST OF THE VISITATION

Donna Del Santo Ssj 31 May 2023 From my Sisters in Brentwood on this Feast of the Visitation:

As we celebrate the Visitation we remember...Though Mary is poor and lowly, and a culturally insignificant woman, the powerful living holy God is doing great things to her. And God does this not only to her but to all the poor: bringing down the mighty from their thrones; exalting the lowly; filling the hungry with good things and sending the unrepentant rich away empty. And all of this is happening in fulfilment of the ancient promise — and in her very being. For she embodies the nobodies of this world, on whom God is lavishing rescue.

In this song, she sings of the future too, when finally, peaceful justice will take root in the land among all people. This is a great prayer; it is a revolutionary song of salvation. As writer Bill Cleary once commented, “It reveals that Mary was not only full of grace but full of political opinions.”

Miriam’s song has political implications — socially radical ones at that. With a mother like this, it’s no wonder that Jesus’ first words in Luke proclaim that he has come to free the captives and bring good news to the poor. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree!

So, Mary lived in solidarity with the project of the coming Reign of God, whose intent was to heal, redeem and liberate. It does no honour to reduce her faith to a privatized piety. Worse yet, which sometimes happens in traditional Mariology, is to reduce her faith to a doting mother-son relationship. She hears the word of God and keeps it. What I’m suggesting is that before Jesus was born she had her own relationship to God that wasn’t focused on Jesus. Even after his death and resurrection, when she is now part of the community proclaiming him as the Messiah, her pattern of faith is still that of Jewish hope: God’s Messiah who now has come will come again soon and bring this justice to the land as a whole.

She hears the word of God and keeps it. And in this too she is, as Paul VI called her in *Marialis Cultus*, our sister in faith. We can begin to see the potential in other Gospel scenes. As we remember her and keep foremost the idea that she is a Jewish peasant woman of faith, then we can interpret the other scenes in the Gospels where Mary shows up and where we are presented with the dangerous memory of this very inconsequential woman in her own culture and historical context. With a heart full of love for God and for her neighbour, Mary of Nazareth gives us this tremendous example of walking by faith through a difficult life.

~**Excerpt from *A Theology of Mary for the Third Millennium*, by Elizabeth Johnson**

“Whenever I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife, which may at any moment become for us all a time of terror, I think to myself, ‘What else is the world interested in?’ What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships? God is love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship to each other. We want with all our hearts to love, to be loved. And not just in the family but to look upon all as our mothers, sisters, brothers, children. It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly that we can recognize how tepid is our love for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering, of course, but joy too, because it is a foretaste of heaven.”

Dorothy Day, quoted in *The Reckless Way of Love*

CARJ WEBINARS: The Struggle for Racial Justice: Recalling the past and discerning the future.

As a preparation for CARJ’s 40th Anniversary in 2024 there will be a series of 90-minute free webinars on Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings from May to August 2023 to reflect on the history of the past 75 years and attempt to discern the best ways forward for society and for the Church in the effort to bring about a more just, more equal and more cooperative society. There will be two speakers and ample time for discussion, chaired by Yogi Sutton. To register for one or more webinars or for further information, please contact the CARJ Administrator at info@carj.org.uk A link will be sent to all who register. The Webinars will be recorded and will be available on the CARJ website until the end of August 2023.

SUSTAINABILITY? SURVIVAL OR SHUTDOWN?

The NJPN Swanwick conference this July 21st – 23rd will address issues crucial to the common good and the well-being of creation. Echoing the words of Pope Francis, all issues are interconnected, as well as environment and especially the impact of climate change, we must consider the need for just and peaceful conflict resolution, economic justice and stability. A few places left – call 020 7901 4864

More details and booking form to download: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>

DIARY

JUNE

10-18 Great Big Green Week <https://greatbiggreenweek.com/> Some local events: Cheshire West and Chester libraries will be delivering events to celebrate community action to tackle climate change and protect nature. See individual libraries for details. <https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/libraries/library-events>

13 and 15 Conservation and Ecology Landscape Walks 10:30am – 12:30pm National Trust - Quarry Bank, Styal Road, Styal, Wilmslow. Booking essential <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/cheshire-greater-manchester/quarrybank/events/829327d3-e19d-40ca-be2b-72cc16368eae>

15-17 Green Expo 2023 on the Riverside and Castle Drive, Chester. <https://greenexpo.uk/> This will follow on from the highly successful first Green Expo event in held in June 2022, but bigger and better! It aims to show what has been achieved in the region on progress to Net Zero and climate change and how it will impact how we live, work and play. Green Expo will have components for business.

15 Green Expo Conference with a special Inward Investment focus and Green Expo Awards Dinner, both with accessible pricing.

16 A Youth Conference FREE for school and college students.

15-17 Green Expo Exposition, FREE for anyone to attend running alongside the River Dee in Chester, on Castle Drive

11 Tax Justice Sunday Info from: **JustMoney Movement** <https://justmoney.org.uk/tax-justice-sunday-2/>

12-16 Job Crypt Blockchain Sustainability Week – UK 2023 an in-person celebration taking place in Liverpool of some of the great blockchain led innovation that is driving sustainability efforts around the world. This event will see 15 talks presented by numerous speakers on subjects such as Land Conservation, Regenerative Finance, Sustainable Web3 and more! Our events will take place in Liverpool, starting promptly at 17:45 each day. **For more information and tickets see:** <https://www.jobcrypt.com/blockchainsustainabilityweekuk2023>

15 CARJ webinar ‘Persistent inequality and Racism over the past 75 years’ 7-8.30 pm info@carj.org.uk

17 Pax Christi AGM 10.30 for 11 am – 4.30 pm In-person at Bloomsbury Baptist Church 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8EP and online on zoom. Register to attend in person or register apologies by emailing admin@paxchristi.org.uk To attend online register at <https://tinyurl.com/yc38znxs/> More details: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/>

18 Day for Life www.dayforlife.org

19-25 Refugee Week For Refugee Week’s 25th anniversary we invite you to celebrate what compassion looks like in action. Together we can create a shared understanding of compassion to ensure we are extending it widely to all. <https://refugeeweek.org.uk/>

During Refugee Week 2023, the Chester City of Sanctuary group will host an interactive display in the Cathedral gardens. Come and see the displays (including items from The Unity Centre Craft Group, and reflections from local students of English for Speakers of Other Languages – ESOL) – just follow the path of flags to the gazebo. info@chester.cityofsanctuary.org and www.chesterwdf.org.uk/events/

23 Fairtrade Fashion Show 7:30pm at St. David’s Church, St. David’s Lane, Mold, Flintshire CH7 1LH Organised by Chifundo, there will be a talk alongside the Fashion Show, a stall selling Chanasa Fairtrade products. Admission costs £3 for adults, half-price for under-18s and the price also covers refreshments.

26 International Day in Support of Victims of Torture www.acatuk.org.uk 01395 577 669 and <https://www.un.org/en/observances/torture-victims-day/>

29 CARJ Webinar ‘Combating racism - different approaches over the past 75 years’ 10-11.30am info@carj.org.uk

JULY

6 Social Action Network: Shape the Change Croxteth Drive Liverpool L17 1AA. This partnership event between Nugent, Justice and Peace Commission and Liverpool Archdiocese brings together policy makers, workers and volunteers involved in social action, to interlink themes, make partnerships, and advocate for change. The purpose of this event is to bring together policy makers, workers and volunteers involved in social action, to interlink themes, make partnerships, and advocate for change. There will be a high level of demand for this FREE day event, so book early, and limit 1 ticket per parish: <https://SocialActionNetworkingEvent.eventbrite.com>

6 CARJ Webinar ‘The Churches role in combatting racism over the past 75 years’ 7-8.30pm info@carj.org.uk

13 CWDF July Forum Meeting, 7pm at The Unity Centre. We are very much looking forward to meeting our new City of Chester MP Samantha (Sam) Dixon. We’ve invited her to talk to us about her impressions of Parliament, her role and goals, and aspects of the Labour policies on development issues – like the 0.7% of GDP for overseas aid. [Note the day is Thursday, not our regular Tuesday.] www.chesterwdf.org.uk/events/

21 -23 NJPN Annual Swanwick Conference

26 UN Day in Support for Victims of Torture <https://www.un.org/en/observances/torture-victims-day>

29 CARJ Webinar ‘Combating racism – An Agenda for the Future for Britain’ 10-11.30am info@carj.org.uk

AUGUST

3 CARJ Webinar 'The Church's role in the struggle for Racial Justice in the future' 7-8.30pm info@carj.org.uk

6 Hiroshima Day <https://nationaltoday.com/hiroshima-day/>

SEPTEMBER

12 The Mistake An urgent new play about Hiroshima and the first atomic bomb by Michael Mears at the Wesley Church Centre St John Street, Chester, CH1 1DA at 7.30 pm. AVAILABLE FOR PERFORMANCE in 2023 and beyond, the play is suitable for audiences of 15+ years. It will appeal to anyone interested in history, politics, science, ethics, morality and peace studies. We also want to perform to school and college students. Contact: Michael Mears thehalfitalian@aol.com 07960 981857 <https://michaelmears.org/>

19 CWDF Forum meeting, 7pm at The Unity Centre. This will take place a week later than usual to avoid clashing with the play *The Mistake*. Gill Miller will be giving us a talk on "Dealing with Disease; the role of global institutions and local players". www.chesterwdf.org.uk/events/

- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resources for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.
- **Sign up** for regular news and information from NJPN including a **new fortnightly e-bulletin with a comprehensive round-up of current events, campaigns, e-petitions and resources** (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues for NJPN North West) at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org or admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk 020 7901 4864
- **Read the SUMMER issue of MOUTHPEACE the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/app/uploads/2023/05/Summer-2023.pdf>

The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN