

NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin January 2020

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In 2020: may our politics be kinder, our nation more united, our concern for the vulnerable deeper, our questioning of why the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer more searching, our fear of climate-change more powerful ... and may our trust in each other, our hope to build a better future together, our love of the life which we share with all other creatures and our capacity for joy grow day by day. Happy New Year, everyone!

Fr Rob Esdaile

WHAT NOW? AFTER #GE2019

Revd Al Barrett 13/12/2019: In the wake of the UK's General Election result, what now? Today is one of those days where I am reminded how much wisdom there is among my friends. Any wisdom I share here, mostly comes from them...

- 1. Breathe.** Take some deep breaths. This is not just a metaphor - it's a serious, emotional, physical, spiritual necessity.
- 2. Reach out to friends.** For a physical, or virtual hug. Share food together. Cry together. Be silent together.
- 3. Make space** to allow shock, grief, anger, fear to express themselves. Don't make judgments about the emotions that you find yourselves with. Don't push them away, or pretend they're not there. Let them be. Don't jump too quickly into action, or analysis.
- 4. Embrace poetry, song, art,** where they resonate for you. They will enable parts of you to speak that will otherwise go unheard.
- 5. Find or re-engage in wider solidarities:** community groups, trade unions, broad-based community organising, campaign groups, wherever. 'Build coalitions of realistic hope and action', as my friend and colleague Ruth Harley puts it: "Deep breath. Be kind to one another, of course. But know that kindness is not enough. Find solidarity - in trade unions, broad based community organising, campaign groups, wherever. And act - organise, agitate, resist. Support your community. Hold your MP to account. Take time to listen to your neighbours. Especially if this result came as a surprise to you. Have cross-generational conversations. Build relationships with people not like you. Don't dismiss the fears of those who are most vulnerable. Offer what help and solidarity you can. Don't panic. Don't get caught up in recriminations. Don't bury your head in the sand. None of those will lead to change. Build coalitions of realistic hope and action. Make as much of a difference as you can, wherever you can. And do it together.
- 6. Push our new government to make clear, concrete commitments on key issues** (as the Methodist Church has done this morning in their open letter to the Prime Minister – see page 7).
- 7. If they've made promises already, hold the representatives of our new government to account on these.** Another friend and colleague Revd Claire Turner puts this powerfully: "So, they apparently promised more money, more hospitals, more nurses, more GP appointments, more public services ... so it's our job to hold them to those promises - loudly and fiercely - on behalf of the most vulnerable. Our civic responsibility does not end with an x against a particular name. That's where it begins. Our MP gave me postcards to give to the people who knock on my door asking for food. I will be emailing him every time someone calls. Every time. Tonight, at the end of the nursery nativity, two families asked me to put money on their gas and electric meter keys. At the nativity play. Hold them to account."
- 8. Remember that democracy is more than voting in elections.** The most important democratic conversations are the ones that happen every day in our neighbourhoods and other places of life, work and gathering - including our churches and faith communities. Find or create spaces for honest truth-telling and deep listening to each other - where possible, across some of our differences, and not in separate, self-reinforcing bubbles.
- 9. Listen.** In General Elections and referendums, politicians will proclaim confidently either that "the people have spoken" and that they therefore have a mandate to do what they intend to do, or that they have "heard the message from the electorate" and are therefore making various changes of direction in response. But this isn't genuine, serious listening. This is taking a set of statistics, imposing a particular interpretation on them (usually one that fits ones pre-existing agenda), and then acting accordingly. Genuine, serious listening - 'generative' listening - creates the space for something new, perhaps never-before-expressed, to be heard: in others, perhaps very different others to us; but also in ourselves.

What is going on in our country can only partly be understood at a rational level - people voting for particular policies because of the direct, practical impact of those policies on their lives, for example. So much more is going on at sub-rational levels, at the levels of deep emotions, senses of foundational identity, experiences of worth/value, security, meaning, connection/attachment, and the like - and experiences of the lack or loss of those things. Some of these will be very much an individual thing, but much will be shared more widely - in particular communities or geographical areas, among people from a particular class, religious or ethnic background, or who have lived through a shared experience, of displacement, unemployment, stigmatisation, abandonment, and so on. And it's at these levels that we need to be facing hard, collective realities about our shared histories and present day realities.

We need to be talking about widening inequality, a decade of austerity, and our de-industrialized society; we need to be talking about the tension between individualism and our attachments to communal and collective identities, about identities rooted in our ability to consume or produce, and identities rooted in other grounds for value and purpose; we need to be talking about the 'hostile environment', racism, whiteness, global North-South inequalities, and the legacies of Empire, colonialism and slavery; we need to be talking about nations and regions, cities and towns, urban and rural, how each shapes our sense of identity and relationships with our neighbours, near and far, and how our image of where and who we are has changed and is still changing (Anna Rowlands' recent piece is hugely helpful on some of this - see below); we need to be talking about our dis-connection from the earth itself, through urbanisation and capitalism, and the fearful outlook for our shared human future.

We need to talk about all of these, and more - and we need to hear how differently we experience these, depending on our own location, experience, and so on. We need to do the painstakingly hard work of trying to see the world through the eyes of someone else, and then working out how we can live together in ways that enable us to share together - share places, share resources, share neighbourhoods, share a society, share the planet.

Today, in that 'day after the night before', I'm not feeling remotely optimistic about any of this. I'm not sure I'm even clinging on to much in the way of hope right now. I'm far from convinced that our new government will lead on any of these challenges in ways that are at all positive - and it feels much more likely that the very opposite will be the case. But I am determined to continue working on this stuff, from the 'bottom, up', with my friends, neighbours, colleagues and companions on the way - both those who look and sound and think like me, and those who don't. And I pray for courage, for all of us, to pursue that work. Because it is, at the end of the day, our fundamental vocation as human beings.

- Rev Al Barrett is Rector of Hodge Hill Church, a Church of England-URC ecumenical partnership in east Birmingham. He lives on a diverse outer estate on the edge of the city, and has been involved in a journey of community-building there, with friends and neighbours, for the last 7 years. He was a key speaker at the 2018 NJPN Conference '*In the Shelter of Each Other the People Live*'.

AN UPROOTED NATION: FROM BREXIT TO A CHRISTIAN VISION OF THE COMMON GOOD

Anna Rowlands 9/12/ 2019

Over the last few years it has become commonplace for social commentators to compare our own unsettled times to the upheavals of earlier periods. Chief among these points of comparison has been the early 1930s. Others propose Brexit as another English Reformation, or point to the parliamentary chaos we experience these days as resonant with moments in eighteenth and nineteenth century parliamentary cycles.

Others — of an admittedly more rarefied academic disposition — suggest that we are living through times reminiscent of the fourth and fifth century collapse of empire and a shattering of our assumed worldviews about liberalism, individualism and democracy.

Not everyone, of course, feels that the current context needs to be seen in such apocalyptic terms. Brexit is read by some as a healthy sign of a corrective democratic resetting decades in the making, and part of the cycle of crisis and renewal that liberal democracy naturally tends towards. Such voices claim that it is without such shocks to the system that we are at risk, not because of them. The tricky thing, perhaps, is that it isn't always easy to know whether you are in a healthy or unhealthy democratic "crisis."

I'm not going to weigh into this debate here and propose my own grand historical comparison theory. I do, however, want to construct something of an historical conversation between past and present — but a conversation of a different kind: led not by events as such, but by an encounter with two Christian social thinkers who I think can help us think better about our difficult times and the fragmentation, fractures and fissures with which we live.

Theses

I live in the North East of England, and I was born and brought up in an immigrant diaspora community in the North West of England, the granddaughter of what we would now call "low skilled," very poor economic migrants from Catholic Ireland. My parents benefitted from the educational-social mobility of the 1960s and became teachers, although they remained living in and serving the community they had been born into. Both my upbringing in a large northern town, on the edge of a large city, in a mixed working class/lower middle class, largely white immigrant community, and the fact that I eventually left that town in search of education and later work, inevitably shape how I relate to current events.

The way that I understand Brexit is also shaped by many conversations I have had in the North East of England — in heartlands Labour and Leave — over the last three years, as well as conversations in which I have been involved with Christian groups seeking to make sense of populism in Italy and Hungary.

Let me begin by laying out a number of recurring themes — a short series of “theses” about Brexit — drawn largely, anecdotally, from those conversations. I offer these not as a definitive or comprehensive Brexit theory (I don't believe there is one yet, and I am not capable of offering one myself), but as something of a synthesis of what I hear, and as stimulation to add your own interpretations to the conversation.

I. This is a significant moment of national crisis — a reckoning, that is, in its most recent form, a generation and longer in the making. This is a moment of national crisis that has profoundly local, national and global dimensions to it. In this sense, while I think that Brexit is a distinct reality, there is also a profound relationship between what is happening here, in France, Italy, Poland, the United States and Hungary. So while these realities are not the same, and they exist in a non-identical relationship to each other, this relationship nonetheless needs to be thought in the round.

I want to suggest that we need a specific but a non-exceptionalist reading of Brexit. Let's think Brexit, but let's also think what's happening to democracy, to capitalism and to liberalism in the context of democratic shifts across the northern hemisphere.

II. Part of what is driving divisions and social fracture in a Brexit context is a growing, sharp intra-regional divide between towns and cities. This divide moves us beyond — but does not fully replace — traditional North versus South, Left versus Right and class divides: it augments these divisions and cleavages, makes them more complex fissures, and cuts across them. These inter-regional cleavages are starkly evident among civic near neighbours — Bolton and Manchester, Wigan and Liverpool, Hartlepool and Leeds. This is not just about distance from Westminster, but also the fracture of post-industrial geographies. It's what has happened to the towns that used to produce things.

These divides are also marked strongly by educational and generational differences. These divides are not therefore, solely economic as is often lazily assumed: they are social, economic, political, environmental and cultural, and crucially related to a sense of access to and distribution of power. This is much more than a story of the “left behind.”

What we often fail to see is that these are geographies that speak not simply of the drift of post-industrial capital towards metropolitan centres, but also of profound cultural narratives of attachment (the things we love, desire and attach to) and loss (the things we mourn and grieve, and the things that we desire that are simply absent from our lives; the things that become inaccessible for a generation).

We might be getting better at noting economic inequality and insecurity, but I think we are not yet well enough attuned to the affective dimensions of either the attachment or the loss that our current politics is haunted by.

III. Building on my second thesis: in many of the conversations I have had in the North East, globalisation is experienced in subjective terms by many of those who live outside dynamic cities, as a complex mix of loss as well as marginal gain. This is not just a matter of economic envy; it's also a question of the values to which people have committed their lives — lives that they feel have been politically denigrated for much of the last four decades. (Remember Tony Blair's famous 2005 speech about the need for workers to be socially and geographically mobile, for them to get with the globalisation programme or be left behind?)

In many of the conversations I have had, globalism and cosmopolitanism become associated in people's minds less with growing freedom and more with a package of: individualism; relatively unrestrained free markets; increasingly free movement of capital and (some) people; degrading and meaningless-seeming work in which it is difficult to feel pride; precarity in work and housing; and a lack of intergenerational benefit. In the face of these social realities, there is an attempt to assert a legitimate attachment to place (and a right to remain in a community in which you have roots, even when the work leaves), family, decent, meaningful and productive employment, public services and the aspiration to have enough wealth to own property, travel and take leisure.

And what interests me is that asserting these values comes to take on the character of resistance to something — something that feels difficult to get hold of and define. If you feel unsettled by the dominant story of liberal individualism and free markets, then resistance to these things ends up coming to seem like a package too, and this resistance has, I think, been gathering momentum just beneath the surface. An attempt to assert a seemingly denigrated attachment to place, family, work, geographical stability comes to take on the character not of a simple political demand, but as resistance.

It is telling, is it not, that we have moved from an era where popular politicians used positive messages (“Yes, we can!”) as their campaign mantras (just think Tony Blair and Barack Obama), to a time of populist politicians and political movements whose primary declaration takes the form of a strident “No!” (just think of Italy's Five Star Movement, Brexit, Trump, perhaps the *gilets jaunes* in France).

Rightly or wrongly, the pushback is against all the things that seem beyond the realm of the everyday, but which seem to block people's everyday aspirations: supra-national concern; the centralisation of everything from government and services to business and money; the free movement of capital and people; rentier capitalism.

But this account on its own is too simplistic. For alongside a memory — doubtless often romanticised — of a lost sense of stability and community is another storyline we have been fed from outside our immediate small communities by the philosophers and policy-makers of modernity. That is the story of the sovereign self. We are told that we, as individuals, are crafters of our own destinies, saviours of our own fortunes, builders of our own worlds, and that we are primarily responsible for ourselves. This takes the form, on the one hand, of the euphoric claim: Now, you can be anything you want to be! The sky is the limit. But this claim has a shadowy underside: You are responsible for both your own fortune and your misfortune.

The problem is that, for most people, the euphoric promise of limitless freedom reveals itself quickly as a cruel fiction. Those caught in the politics of everyday survival from which they cannot escape feel both a sense of anger at promises denied and a sense of internalised, lonely guilt and shame that they haven't been successful sovereign selves.

This storyline is proved fictional in a further way: it contradicts the bare facts of what we come to know about ourselves, how we thrive and how we survive difficulties — illness, mental collapse, addiction, divorce, displacement. What happens when the pressures on the sovereign self, in increasingly fragile and overstretched communities, are just too much? This is when we find that we are something other than sovereign selves: we are relational, vulnerable selves who depend on social relationships to live and live well. We know this, but we also still seem unable to free ourselves from the mindset — which we impose on ourselves and others — that we really ought to be more self-reliant, and better sovereign selves. This is a mentality that fosters isolation and produces a politics of chronic pressure. And its net sum is a solidarity deficit that compounds the structural problems latent in late modern market economies.

I have come to believe that we are currently playing out a political psychology marked by both the reassertion of our desire for rootedness and community, and a continued — but perhaps more doubtful — assertion of a narrative of self-reliance.

IV. This third thesis now bleeds into a fourth: the post-financial crash austerity drive did not cause Brexit, but I do think it remains a significant factor at play in the political psychology of Brexit and its aftermath.

I do not think that austerity is over. Why? Because austerity was never merely a pragmatic policy initiative; it was always also a kind of value system or worldview. I see austerity still at work in conversations where my friends and family explain that they voted to leave the EU so that there would be enough money for the NHS or schools, that they felt this was a single, clear vote for a new social contract for public services and the welfare state: the money had run out and it had to come from somewhere for a new generation of public services.

This has its corollary in debates about immigration: who do you stand with, fellow citizens or migrants? We evidently couldn't afford both the EU and public services fit for a new generation, and we cannot afford very much solidarity with migrant others. A politics of either/or was part of our public debate and it bears the imprint of a philosophy of austerity: the wrong kind of politics of limit.

We think within worldviews that we are often barely aware hold us in their sway. Under chronic pressure, we haven't in the last decade felt very abundant. When people explain that they voted "Leave" to bring a halt to escalating house prices, to boost social mobility for their kids, to release the chronic pressure of everyday life, we should do something other than suggest that those reasons make no sense: of course they make sense! The vote may or may not be a direct solution to those problems — to many it is not, but people were naming a solidarity deficit hitting their communities and expressing a desire to turn that around. They were naming a series of problems that they believed this vote would register. And they couldn't see any other way to indicate that something was wrong, and that they wanted it to change. The problem now is, leaving the EU alone won't fix the problem, and mainstream politics still seems not to hold out any solutions.

Illuminations: Simone Weil and Josef Pieper

Having laid out a set of critical or diagnostic theses, now I want to engage in something a bit more constructive. Not long after the end of the Second World War, the philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote in a short book titled *Men in Dark Times*. In it, she reminded us that, in dark or difficult times, we have "a right to expect some illumination."

It is to this mid-century world into which Arendt wrote those words that I want to turn. In doing this, I am not suggesting that our moment repeats the 1930s, nor am I imagining that the voices I want us to heed have all the answers.

What I do claim is that, at least for me, it is instructive to return to a series of essays written between 1943 and 1947 by Christian social thinkers in Europe, and to note the vision of political life and the common good that they propose. Both of the thinkers on whom I want to draw allowed themselves to be deeply disturbed and perplexed by their times, and both offered to the world, not simply a diagnosis of what was wrong, but also the grounds for a renegotiation of social contracts.

Both thinkers are what I would call "severe" or "difficult" thinkers — not because they are hard to read, but because they resist offering false or easy comfort, and because they are thinkers of something that might seem a bit counterintuitive: they both express the uselessness of Christian thought. By this I do not mean the irrelevance of Christianity or Christian thought, but rather that its relevance is tied to the fact that it cannot be turned into something useful, marketable or immediately politically salvific; but rather, that it is a training in a particular way of paying attention to the world and loving it.

The first of my figures is the Jewish-Christian philosopher Simone Weil. Weil died at the age of 34 in London in 1944. She had been living in London as a French Jewish refugee who had been drawn for some time — since a retreat to Assisi in 1930s — to Christianity. She died shortly after completing a manifesto for the rebuilding of France after the war, which she titled *The Need for Roots*. The book was ridiculed by de Gaulle and the Free French who had commissioned it, partly because it contained too much religious thinking.

For my purposes here, I want to draw out a couple of elements of Weil's writing from this text: her reflections on uprootedness and her vision of human obligations and needs. As the title of the book suggests, Weil's concern was to propose a basic human need for rootedness: To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular expectations for the future. This participation is a natural one, in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession and social surroundings. Every human being needs to have multiple roots. It is necessary for him to draw well nigh the whole of his moral, intellectual and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a natural part.

Weil is clear that reciprocal exchanges — the everyday relationships that fill the natural environs in which we live — are as important in shaping rootedness as any narrow physical sense of place. The problem, Weil thinks, is that most of our current modes of social organisation pull away from this deep need. Western politics and economic life in the twentieth century, she believes, have pursued policies that uproot people: our fundamental economic and political model uproots; the distribution of power uproots. And so she contrasts rootedness — as that for which we long — with uprootedness, which she thinks is our universal modern experience:

Uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, because it is a self propagating one. For people who are really uprooted there remain only two possible sorts of behaviour: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death ... or to hurl themselves into some form of activity, necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted or only partly so.

Just to be clear, Weil is not referring to people who live in exile or who are migrants; she is talking about a spiritual-political condition of uprootedness that is deep in the modern psyche and exists in visible structural forms through work, governance, markets and the flow of capital. Weil believes that uprooted cultures are prone to spiritual crises and that uprootedness does not produce the conditions for thinking well in order to get us out of such crises: uprootedness deadens thought.

Weil comes to view the moments when we manage to think well under such chronic pressure as near miraculous — as coming to us, like miracles. These are the rare moments when we can break the cycle, even for a moment: what she refers to as an "interval" of time. These irruptions of love, hospitality to the enemy, and true attention given to the other are possible, but not inevitable. They come about when the soul is willing to be truly attentive, to allow itself to apprehend reality and be moved by it, to take it on as its own. Such moments, often fleeting and difficult to sustain, stand as proxy moments for a wider justice that is still denied or notable for its continued absence. These breakthrough moments beg the question — or rather, hold open and hold up the question — of justice that remains absent.

Weil views the human being as the only truly eternal thing in the social order. Collectivities, therefore, serve the person like food does the body: societies either poison or nourish human beings in their relations with each other, and in the pursuit of their eternal destiny. She proposes, therefore, a theory of human obligations rather than human rights (she isn't against rights; she just thinks they are fragile and conditional and need to be seen as grounded in prior obligations).

She proposes that, regardless of context or condition, we bear obligations towards the human person as such, and these obligations relate to concrete needs. She names these human needs as both material and moral — and, interestingly, she thinks we have a tendency to focus more on material needs to the detriment of moral needs. Responding well to both of these needs is part of what roots and re-roots us, and keeps the tendency towards uprootedness at bay.

Weil's list of these needs is challenging. The obvious material needs for food, shelter and decent work make the list. But the moral needs she enumerates are less self-evident, and no less important: the need for truth, to have access to it, to pursue it, to find our relation to it, which she sees as the most sacred need of the person; the need for order; the need for both risk and security; the need for responsibility; the need for liberty and equality; the need for private property and also for collective property; the need for healthy relations of obedience. A society that plays fast and loose with political truth, according to Weil, is an uprooting society.

Five years after Weil had finished *The Need for Roots*, and died unbearably young in a severe act of solidarity with the suffering French community resisting Nazism, a young German academic named Josef Pieper was articulating a Christian vision of the common good. Writing in 1947, Pieper laid out the following claims for a vision of the common good fit for a post-war world: If we want to be good at diagnosing our political times, we have to attend to the deep patterns of love and desire manifest in public speech. To begin thinking about the common good is to think about our worthy and meaningful common loves.

When we think about the common good, we need to look at the sum total of a society's production: the whole of its output. The common good is as good as the sum total of the social whole. Fairness implies equal access to that total good. The crucial question, then, is: is the good of the social whole available equally to all, or are there vast inequalities in the access to what is produced by common efforts?

Pieper thinks that we have a tendency to think of the total good in merely material terms: we think the good is GDP, or “the national economic interest,” or “the usable goods of production,” as Pieper puts it. Pieper says that a theological account of the good forces us to look at the goods that are material and part of the life of necessity — the basic material needs of food, shelter, work, education, leisure that Weil also lists. Yet, he says, we must also look at the goods that are neither usable nor marketable, but which are entirely real and indispensable to a good life together: the relations of care and love and contemplation and beauty that make our lives together and sustain life. These goods represent the life of freedom and gift-exchange beyond mere supply and demand — all the things that exist for us beyond what Pieper calls “the total world of work.” It is vital to the common good that we protect the forms of social relation that cannot simply be “put to use.”

But at this point, Pieper adds a note of caution: while we can certainly list the basic material goods to which we all need fair access, and the problems that ensue when we don’t have that access, what we cannot do so easily is define with any certainty or finality what the total common good should look like. In fact, Pieper goes further and argues that we should be very suspicious of any form of government that thinks it can define, beyond doubt, that total common good — the ultimate horizon of the good. Any form of political messianism that tells us there is a final vision, an end to the open-ended conversation of what the good might be, revisable at every turn, is to be suspected as the imposition of a total market or totalitarian view of society. There is a necessary not-knowing about the final form of the good for which we strive; that not knowing for sure is why the social conversation and the contexts within which it can happen, must remain open, revisable, repentable.

So, for Pieper, we need to work out a version of justice based on what we do know and are obligated towards, and what we cannot fully know. There are certain material and moral conditions that must be met for a health society — basic needs for access to basic goods. Critical to his account of these basic goods is the necessity to ensure the maximum conditions for social participation to all, and forms of power and agency that enable people to make their fullest contribution to the social whole. The question for him is not just whether have access to the benefits of the whole society (its wealth, leisure, natural environment), but also have I had a chance to contribute to it. To block contribution and the full extension of talents is to offend against the justice of power distribution. In the UK, I would insist, we have a contributory deficit and it is structural. For Pieper, the question of where and how power is distributed — not to mention a felt sense of distance from power — is a key part of the question of distributive justice and injustice, the question of the distribution of goods. And this is the facet of justice and the common good that we most often overlook. Thus, Pieper writes: The good of a common wealth includes the inborn human talents, qualities and potentials, and part of the ‘*iustitia distributiva*’ is the obligation to protect, preserve and further those capacities.

When I read Weil and Pieper and hear the level of social attention to which they call us, I am left feeling that part of what has fractured in our current context is our capacity to hold the whole in common, to imagine some sense of moral unity and to seek to speak of the whole from our own social locations, our places and histories. Love makes a poor abstraction: loves are particular, rooted, placed; they are about bodies — they are our fragile but unavoidable way into the whole. This is true of our political loves, too.

Theologian Oliver O’Donovan expresses this sentiment particularly well in an article on the common good. He says there are two poles of the common good for a Christian: there is the given-ness of community in its finite form — we live where we live, with the people that are there in all their diversity, and there is a requirement that we live well with that given-ness; but there is also the reality of a universal community without boundaries, never completely fixed, open to all, into which we have been called — this is a community of eternity, which is also a real community now. This is the divine economy of the political with which we have to wrestle, claimed by both realities.

O’Donovan also says that, from a Christian point of view, the good — like love itself — is always trying to communicate itself. It is word made flesh, a good that seeks to be known as truth manifesting itself among us. What is truly good is the opposite of all that seeks to obscure, to isolate, to make us unable to think and speak, to fragment. It is like Pentecost: it drives us to risk speaking, communicating, beyond boundaries about our deepest desires.

I think that attending to this communicating good among us will involve attention to the longings that find their way easily into words: for roots, for community, for an ability to use talents and to shape the world. But it will also involve attention to all that manifestly seeks to frustrate the good — the realities that tell us about the lack of the good, and which can be heard in silence and shame as much as in clear speech. These are the trickier things, from which our minds often seek to flee. This second category is, spiritually speaking, harder to keep our attention on.

I am drawn to the work of Weil and Pieper partly because both call us to this double task of attention, as individuals and as communities. And I feel fairly certain that if we do not listen for these things, then others will feign doing so and manipulate what they hear, because these loves seek recognition, even if in distorted form. Hannah Arendt expressed this rather nicely when she wrote: By desiring what is not, love establishes a relationship with what is not present in order to bring this relationship into the open, [to] make it appear ...

The task of truth is to allow love to speak, to enable the good to communicate itself, and to bring relationships into the open, as part of breaking the cycle of injustice and learning again to negotiate a truly common life — even if only for an interval. But maybe, in dark times like ours, that is enough.

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METHODISTS ISSUE OPEN LETTER TO NEW PRIME MINISTER

13/12/2019 The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference have written to new Prime Minister Boris Johnson, assuring him of their prayers and asking for clarification on key issues including climate change, poverty and social cohesion.

They write: We wish to congratulate you on being given the responsibility by the British electorate to form a government, and assure you of our prayers and the prayers of the Methodist people as you take on that responsibility.

Churches are rooted in communities around Britain. It is our task to emphasize, from our ground level experience of British society, issues which we believe must be seen as key priorities. Creation does not belong to us. Our task is to nurture and recognise our place within it. Many of our members see climate change and environmental degradation as the most pressing issues of our day. Can you tell us what steps you will be taking internationally and domestically to help the UK to reach its climate change targets? What kind of lead will you be taking at the 2020 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow?

Many of our churches and church members are involved in running foodbanks and offering support for people caught up in poverty. Foodbanks should not have to exist. Can you clarify for us what steps your new government will take to address the scandalous levels of poverty, and particularly child poverty?

The church is an inter-generational, multi-ethnic, socially diverse collection of communities. It is far from perfect. But we have seen in our communities growing forms of hostility, divisiveness and hatred, and have sought to support people who have experienced such discord. What active steps will your government now take to work towards healing and greater concord in society?

We wrote to you, Prime Minister, in July to express our concern that a No Deal Brexit was likely to impact the poorest communities very hard indeed. We wish to reaffirm our concern that the poorest in society face huge risks as our trading relations with EU are rewritten. We seek your reassurance that needs of families facing poverty will be central to the proposed trade deal and that should it not be in place before the transition period expires that comprehensive measures are put in place to protect them from the ensuing upheaval.

Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

Professor Clive Marsh, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/an-open-letter-to-the-prime-minister/>

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38516>

UNTOLD STORIES – READING SCRIPTURE FROM THE MARGINS

The Bible shows us again and again that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. People on the margins. But too often, when we read scripture in our churches, we focus on other aspects of the story, or we are so familiar with the text that we don't notice the challenging things it has to say to us. The five Bible studies in *Untold Stories* focus on the Gospel of Matthew, and highlight different perspectives. We look at Jesus' teachings and miracles through the eyes of characters in the margins of the story. We remind ourselves that the original audiences for Jesus' teaching, and for the Gospels, were primarily people who were themselves marginalised by poverty, living under military occupation. Produced by Church Action on Poverty, *Untold Stories* is a great resource for personal reflection and study - or for use as a Lent course in your church. It's designed to encourage personal commitment by congregation members following a service on 23 February, Church Action on Poverty Sunday.

Download here: <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Untold-Stories-Bible-studies.pdf>

PM'S WORDS OF SUPPORT FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS 'NEED TO BE MATCHED WITH ACTION'

26/12/2019: Prime Minister Johnson has expressed solidarity with Christians around the world who face persecution, in his first Christmas message to the UK. He said that his government will defend those Christians' right to practise their faith and that he wants to bring change to the reality of Christmas being celebrated in secret, "perhaps even in a prison cell." Boris Johnson's mention of persecuted Christians in his Christmas message is to be welcomed, says Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, a charity standing up for persecuted Christians worldwide. However, she says: "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" and that the newly re-elected government needs to remember the issue when they are negotiating new trade agreements post-Brexit. "It's really positive he is saying something on this publicly, but the proof of the pudding is always in the eating. One of the challenges is Brexit and how trade agreements will be negotiated with countries, where Christians and Muslims are having an increasingly difficult time. We would like to see the government raise religious freedom in its trade discussions."

This comes on the eve of the launch of the 2020 World Watch List early next year in Parliament. The list is a ranking of 50 countries where it is most difficult to practise the Christian faith. It is produced using detailed information provided by Open Doors co-workers in more than 60 countries, as well as independent experts. "If the Government wants to defend freedom of religion or belief, it is all the more important that MPs educate themselves about these issues," said Henrietta Blyth. "We hope that as many as possible from all parties will attend the launch of our World Watch List in January." According to the 2019 World Watch List that was launched last January, Open Doors estimated that 245 million Christians experience high levels of persecution in 73 countries from China to sub-Saharan Africa.

www.opendoorsuk.org/ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38599>

THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES STATEMENT FOR THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

Fr Rob Esdaile responds to the Bishops' statement: When the history of the 2019 General Election comes to be written, I wonder whether the contribution of the Catholic community will merit a footnote. Clearly the fault-lines concerning Brexit ran through our congregations just as strongly as through every other section of society. So it is odd that the belated and meagre 'Message From the Bishops of England & Wales' about the election had nothing substantive to say about the principal issue facing the electorate or the basis on which a just resolution might be arrived at.

However, there was hardly any meat on the bones in any of its various bullet-points. To group together "people with disabilities, Travellers, older people, those who are homeless, those in prison and those trapped in modern slavery" under the general heading of "those who are frequently neglected or discarded by society" scarcely qualifies as social analysis. There was no mention of the unacceptable level of dependence on Food Banks, the fear created by the brutal implementation of Universal Credit (with its 'two child' limit - What could be more anti-family or less Catholic?) or the crisis in the social care system. Nor was the essential positive contribution of migrants in healthcare and elsewhere mentioned in the welcome rejection of xenophobia and racism - although the Catholic community in these islands is a shining example of how the presence of people from many cultures can bring blessing to all. There was nothing about the Arms Trade, in which Britain is a dominant player (to such deadly effect in places such as the Yemen), and you would never guess that Pope Francis had so roundly condemned the possession of nuclear weapons just days before the statement was issued.

It may just be that this December poll will be remembered in Church circles for the fact that the official voice of the Catholic community was so caught up in its own agendas (about life in utero and euthanasia and Catholic schools and the like) and so concerned not to say anything controversial about individual party programmes that it failed to get a word in edge-ways in the debates that ordinary people were actually engaged in. That would be the saddest footnote of all."

• **Fr. Rob Esdaile** is parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Thames Ditton in Surrey.

Here is the statement on the General Election issued by The Catholic Bishops' of England and Wales in November 2019:

"The statement concentrates on the key issues – not parties or manifestos – offering a series of points that can be put to candidates prior to voting. The Bishops highlight the duty of all citizens – not just Catholics – to help shape politics that are "rooted in the service of human rights and peace". The innate human dignity of all – particularly the vulnerable and those on the margins – lies at the heart of the statement as the Bishops encourage everyone to "engage with the election and vote." In making judgments about how to vote, the Bishops ask that the following are carefully considered and, indeed candidates can be asked how they will uphold:

- The innate dignity of every human being; defending both the child in the womb, the good of the mother and an understanding of the immeasurable good of a child not yet born?
- The dignified care for those who are terminally ill and dying while resisting the false compassion of assisted suicide or euthanasia?
- The needs of those who are frequently neglected or discarded by society such as people with disabilities, Travellers, older people, those who are homeless, those in prison and those trapped in modern slavery?
- The process of integration of migrants and refugees who have made their homes here[1], challenging the global rise of xenophobia and racism that is so radically incompatible with our faith[2]?
- The rights of those in our own communities and overseas who "can see no end to the tunnel of extreme poverty,"[3] providing them with assistance and confronting the structural injustices that compound their suffering?
- Care for our common home and tackle the climate emergency which threatens the future of our entire human family and is already having a profound impact upon the world's poorest people[4]?
- Freedom of religion and belief, ensuring that everyone has the right to exercise their conscience and practise their creed freely without fear?
- The cherishing of marriage, recognising the essential place of the family in the service of life and of society?
- The right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their faith and support the work of Catholic schools in their contribution to society and their promotion of the common good?"

[1] Pope Francis: *Message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (14/1/18)

[2] World Council of Churches and Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development: *Message from the conference on Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration* (20/9/18)

[3] Pope Francis: *Message for the 3rd World Day of the Poor* (17/11/19)

[4] Pope Francis: *Address to meeting on the energy transition and care of our common home* (14/6/19)

REFLECTION ON POPE FRANCIS' 53rd WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE

1/1/2020: Pope Francis' 52nd World Day of Peace message in the year 2019, invited us to reflect on the theme *"Good politics is at the service of peace"*. The Pope's message was that politics, though essential to building human communities and institutions, can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole. This year, 2020 Pope Francis's 53rd World Day of Peace theme is *"Peace as a journey of hope: dialogue, reconciliation and ecological conversion"*. The reflection on this theme is captured in the following sections of his message (1) Peace, a journey of hope in the face of obstacles and trial; (2) Peace, a journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity; (3) Peace, a journey of reconciliation in fraternal communion; and (4) Peace, a journey of ecological conversion.

In a world devastated by war and conflicts which often affect the marginalized and the vulnerable of our society, we are being invited to reflect on peace as the object of our hope and the aspiration of the entire human family. The virtue of hope inspires us and keeps us moving forward, even when obstacles seem overwhelming. The Pope discusses the different forms of violence that are tearing humanity apart and their true significance. He points out: "Every war is a form of fratricide that destroys the human family's innate vocation to brotherhood and [sisterhood]".

The message of Pope Francis is a very strong message, a vocational message. This vocation is that of children of God, brothers and sisters. But the Pope underlines "our inability to accept the diversity of others, which then fosters attitudes of ... domination born of selfishness and pride, hatred and the desire to caricature, exclude and even destroy the other". He emphasizes the fact that "war is fuelled by a perversion of relationship, by hegemonic ambitions, by abuse of power, by fear of others and seeing diversity as an obstacle". On the contrary, in respecting, trusting others, seeing them as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters, we can 'break the spirit of vengeance and set out on the journey of hope'.

Reflecting on this message, we have the opportunity to act against stereotypes and prejudices of others, cultural domination and cultural blindness and various forms of exclusion experienced in our communities, country, and the global world due to their race, gender, creed, ethnicity, status, orientation and age. More importantly, the Pope poses some critical questions to assist us to reflect on our lack of acceptance, mistrust and fear of others as individuals and/or community. "How do we undertake a journey of peace and mutual respect? How do we break the unhealthy mentality of threats and fears? How do we break the current dynamic of distrust?" How do we deal with the divisions within a society, the increase of social inequalities and the refusal to employ the means of ensuring integral human development which endangers the pursuit of the common good? This calls for deep reflection and the prompting of the Holy Spirit who will enlighten us so that we respond positively by becoming artisans of justice and peace.

According to the Pope, the world develops a strange paradox, while seeking to guarantee peace "through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust, one that ends up poisoning relationships between peoples and obstructing any form of dialogue". The climate of fear reinforces the fragility of relationships and increases the risk of violence, creating vicious circles which never lead to a peaceful relationship. The Pope focuses in particular on the danger of nuclear deterrence "that can only produce an illusion of security". Reflecting on this, Pope Francis cautions against the illusion of thinking that we can "maintain stability in the world through the fear of annihilation" as opposed to protecting and preserving life and developing a "global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family of today and tomorrow." Violence in all its forms has never led to peace, including especially the use of weapons of mass destruction. Peace will never be attained through nuclear deterrence or any act of violence, on the contrary, "peace emerges from the depths of the human heart".

We are called to live free from fear as we have a God who loves us despite our weakness and our needs as illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24). Therefore in our search for peace may we "find inspiration in the love that God has for each of us: a love that is liberating, limitless, gratuitous and tireless". In order to break this dynamic of mistrust, we must therefore "pursue a genuine fraternity based on our common origin from God and exercised in dialogue and mutual trust. The desire for peace lies deep within the human heart, and we should not resign ourselves to seeking anything less than this".

The Holy Father speaks about peace as a "journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity". Reflecting on the horror of the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and the memories of the *Hibakusha* (the survivors of the atomic bomb), he exalts the importance of keeping and preserving the memory of past events. Such memories should not only be a reminder in order to prevent similar events happening but also to "enable memory as the fruit of experience, to serve as a basis and inspiration for present and future decisions to promote peace". Keeping memories of victims alive kindles new hope in individuals and communities as opposed to seeking vengeance which tends to create more violence. In view of this, we invite each one of us to study our context and where applicable honour memories of victims so that their and our hope can be kindled in order to harness peace.

In the darkness of war and violence, a simple outstretched hand can sometimes spark new energies and rekindle new hope in individuals and communities. Opening and tracing the path of peace is a 'complex' challenge because the interests at stake in relationships are multiple and contradictory. We can only truly reach peace if we seek truth together "beyond ideologies and differing opinions". Through dialogue and listening to one another, this "can lead to mutual understanding and esteem, and even to seeing in an enemy the face of a brother or sister". The peace process is a long term commitment.

The Pope insists that “the world does not need empty words but convinced witnesses, peacemakers, who are open to a dialogue that rejects exclusion and manipulation”. The Holy Father then develops the role of democracy which can be “a significant paradigm of this process.” He also warns against fractured societies where “the increase of social inequalities and the refusal to employ the means of integral human development endanger the pursuit of the common good”. It is up to the Church and its organisations to participate in the service of this common good through transmission of Christian values, moral teaching and social education works.

In the third part of his message, the Pope refers to the Bible where many passages show that the other must never be locked in what they have to say or do, but they must be considered according to the promise that they carry within them. Pope Francis invites us to respect, forgive, reconcile. He calls us to reflect on the power of forgiveness as taught by Jesus Christ (Mt 18, 21-22) – to forgive “seventy times seven”. We learn to live in forgiveness so that we can “grow in our capacity to become men and women of peace” and offer that peace to the men and women of our time.

The Holy Father invokes a fraternal communion in each area of existence, social, economic and political. In so doing we emulate Christ who was the first reconciler through his death on a cross “making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). In this World Day of Peace message, we are reminded that for those who follow Christ, the journey to peace is sustained by the sacrament of reconciliation which renews individuals and communities. This is a journey that calls for patience and trust, listening to one another and contemplating on the world that God has given to be our common home and that of generations to come.

In this message of peace, the Pope also invites us to reflect on ‘ecological conversion’ as a way to build peace. Thus, each one of us is challenged to examine our exploitative, domineering, abusive and selfish attitude towards the environment and the resources that our Creator has entrusted to us as the custodians. This is also a reflection on the way we treat others especially the marginalized and vulnerable. We are therefore invited to walk the journey of “ecological conversion” so that we respect and nurture the earth and all that lives in it, inclusive of the human life. Through ecological conversion we challenge ourselves and others to a new way of looking at life while appreciating God’s generosity to us for giving and sharing the earth with us. This calls for a change in attitude and transformation in the way we relate with the Creator, who is the origin and source of all life, with others and with God’s creation in all its rich variety. Thus, as the Pope points out, “We need to change the way we think and see things, and become more open to encountering others and accepting the gift of creation, which reflects the beauty and wisdom of its Creator”. Moreover, reflecting on the recent Pope’s visit to the Pan-Amazon Region and his reflection on this visit, the call to us is to endeavour to work towards peaceful relationship between communities and the land, between present and past, between experience and hope. Pope Francis also invites us to find new ways of living together, celebrating and sharing life with others as well as respecting and appreciating the earth as our common home.

Finally, the Pope returns to the theme that opened the text, that of ‘hope’. “Peace will not be obtained unless it is hoped for” emphasizes Pope Francis who designates patience and confidence as supports. He continues to expound on this. In the first place this means believing in the possibility of peace, believing that others need peace just as much as we do. Here we can find inspiration in the love that God has for each of us; love that is liberating, limitless, gratuitous and tireless.

May all of us across the five continents - old and young, women and men, all created in God’s image and likeness “experience a life of peace and develop fully the promise of life and love dwelling in their heart”. As we continue to serve in our different contexts and capacities; as we advance our Pax Christi International four focus areas: (1) Nonviolence as style for politics of peace; (2) The nuclear weapons ban treaty ; (3) Extractives in Latin America; (4) Renewed Israel-Palestine peace process; and as we look forward to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Pax Christi International in May 2020 in Hiroshima, may the inspiration of this 2020 World Day of Peace message continue to be the impetus that drives us. May we continue to work for a world where all will experience equality and social justice; where ‘the other’ no longer is treated as an enemy but a friend, where swords will be turned into ploughshares, where God’s creation will be nurtured and respected and all will come together in gratitude to the Creator of us all.

May the Creator of new beginnings walk gently with each one of you and bring peace to you and your family this New year 2020. As you create cultures of peace in your day to day living, may you experience peace, joy and hope.

Bishop Marc Stenger, Bishop of Troyes, France

Sr Teresia Wamuyu Wachira (IBVM) Kenya, Co-Presidents Pax Christi International

<https://paxchristi.net/2019/12/30/reflection-by-the-co-presidents-of-pax-christi-international-on-pope-francis-53rd-world-day-of-peace-message-1-january-2020/>

<https://pcintlorg.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/reflection-co-presidents-pci-1-jan-2020.pdf>

Theresa Alessandro, Director Pax Christi writes: Peace Sunday falls on 19 January 2020 and is an opportunity to spread widely Pope Francis' World Peace Day message. We will be mailing a Peace Sunday liturgy booklet to all parishes, and Pax Christi members, at the beginning of December. We are also sending to parish priests a letter from Archbishop Malcolm McMahon our National President. Electronic copies of the booklet and resources are here:

<http://paxchristi.org.uk/product-category/peace-sunday-2020/> We would appreciate your support in circulating the Pope's peace message later through your networks. As always, we deeply appreciate parish efforts to take a collection, or make a donation, around Peace Sunday for the continuing peace work of Pax Christi in the year ahead. We are writing to all bishops asking them to consider supporting this, while noting our awareness that there are many demands and constraints on parishes. Pax Christi, St Joseph's, Watford Way, London, NW4 4TY 0208 203 4884 Work Mobile: 07882788124 www.paxchristi.org.uk [www.twitter.com/paxchristiuk](https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk) www.facebook.com/PaxChristiUK

ST ALBAN'S JUSTICE & PEACE PRAYER VIGIL FOR PEACE, SATURDAY 18 JANUARY 8-9 PM

Although World Day of Peace is celebrated in most Catholic countries on 1 January, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales invite us to keep the Sunday that falls within the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25 January) as a day of prayer not just for Christian Unity, but also for World Peace. It is further suggested that in preparation for, and on Peace Sunday we reflect on the theme chosen by Pope Francis for the annual World Peace Day, which this year, the 53rd World Day of Peace, is: PEACE as a JOURNEY OF HOPE: DIALOGUE, RECONCILIATION and ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION.

In 2020 Peace Sunday will have a particular 'flavour', because we pass so many significant anniversaries in the coming months: the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, marked by Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January; the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe - marked by a special Bank Holiday on 8 May; then again in August, the 75th anniversaries of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of Japan's surrender; it marks also the 75th anniversary of PAX CHRISTI, which was started by two people who obeyed the gospel challenge to love their enemies even in the bitter context of the same World War. All a long time ago, and yet all events continue to mark our history; events which show the human capacity for inflicting evil, as well as the human capacity to resist evil. All these events invite us all to examine the roots of violence in our culture today, and especially, in our own hearts. They call us to conversion, to a rejection of the logic of responding to violence with violence often leading to a spiral of death, and destruction with enduring effects on the body and soul of humanity as well as on their physical habitats.

A commitment to rebuild what has been broken in ways which will lead to lasting reconciliation and lasting peace is urgent in our world today, and to respond to this need St Albans Justice & Peace will be organising a PRAYER VIGIL for PEACE on Saturday 18 January from 8-9 pm. Please join us!

THE ARMS TRADE

Bethany Hughes: With the recent escalation of conflict in Syria near the Turkish border, and the UK government's decision to stop new arms licences being given to Turkey, it is quite appropriate to consider how other countries can so greatly affect the outcome of a so called 'civil war'. The official definition of civil war is 'a war between citizens of the same country'. However, currently, we are seeing cases of the course of 'civil wars' being affected more by other countries than those in the country at war.

This is the case in Syria, where Turkey recently launched an offensive on the Kurdish forces near the border, apparently to create a 'safe zone' to house refugees that Turkey doesn't want in its country, resulting in two opposition forces from the original war, the Kurds and the Syrian government, agreeing to join forces in a united fight against Turkey. Suddenly this is no longer about resolving the original conflict but is about multiple individual tensions, deeply engrained in the area. In effect, the war has given Turkey the opportunity to attack the Kurds, a minority ethnic group which has fought against Turkey for an independent state for decades. The US withdrawing their support for the Kurds exposed a level of vulnerability that Turkey has taken advantage of. Yet the original conflict was to do with the Syrian leader and government being fought against by rebels demanding a fairer system. This is just one of many 'civil wars' where other countries abuse the situation to express long standing opposition views to certain people even if it does not actually link to the reasons behind the war.

So how is the UK involved? - Through extensive arms trade to countries involved in wars. Since the beginning of the Yemeni war in March 2015, the UK has sold around £4.7 billion of arms to Saudi Arabia, including military aircraft and bombs, making us the second largest arms supplier to Saudi Arabia, under the US. Of the estimated 11,700 civilians who have been killed during the war, it is estimated that ⅔ have been caused by the Saudi led coalition, and the UK is contributing to this. UK weaponry has and is being used by a nation which, according to the UN, breaches international humanitarian law by deliberately targeting civilians in a war. Of course, Saudi Arabia is not the only country that this applies to; in 2018, British arms exports rose to £14 bn from £9 bn in 2017, with 80% of these going to the Middle East, including countries such as the UAE and Qatar.

As well as the usage of British weaponry breaking laws, our sales of them to Saudi Arabia were also ruled unlawful by the Court of Appeal in June 2019. However, this does not mean that all existing licenses have to be stopped immediately, only that no new ones can be granted. In September 2019, trade secretary Liz Truss admitted to the government breaching court orders banning these sales 3 times. They admit their malpractices, but plan to appeal the ruling so that arms sales can continue freely. It is clearly evident that the government acknowledges that what it does is wrong, but for them, the economic benefits of the arms trade outweigh the lives lost because of it.

It can be seen as positive that on October 15th, the government pledged to make no new arms deals with Turkey over the situation in Syria. This is exactly what the government wants. They want us to believe that positive steps are being taken with regards to the arms trade, when in reality they have only sold Turkey £1.1 billion worth of arms since 2014 compared to £4.7 billion since 2015 to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has a much greater economic benefit for us in terms of trade, so it is easier to break off trade with Turkey. If the UK did not have such a role in the arms industry, we could no longer be known as a global military power, which is regarded by the government as much more important than advocating peace and justice. Thus, it is evident that the government's greatest concern is money and that their sanctions on Turkey are merely to please the public.

It is difficult for us to change our government's arms trade policies, but what we can do is raise awareness of it and bring it to our conversations so that more people understand what the government is doing behind the scenes. For those of you interested in finding out more about the war in Yemen and the effect it has had on its people, I would recommend the **Yemen: Inside a Crisis** exhibition which is at the Imperial War Museum North until 26 January 2020.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/seasons/yemen-inside-a-crisis>

• *Bethany is a 16 year-old student who writes a monthly article on current affairs for St Alban's, Macclesfield.*

WILL WE SEE THROUGH THE 'FOG OF WAR' THIS TIME?

Rose Marie Berger 3/1/2020: The Trump administration's assassination of Iran's Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani on Thursday is a massive foreign policy blunder — one that takes away the power of the American people who supported in a bipartisan majority in June to prevent an unconstitutional war with Iran. The attack by a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone that fired missiles into a convoy carrying Soleimani was neither impulsive nor a retaliatory response. It was not undertaken to protect Americans. It was not an act of patriotism. It was not done to defend the U.S. embassy in Baghdad after the “dramatic but bloodless” siege. If anything, it was in response to Trump's increasingly untenable situation at home. Complex operations like this one aren't planned and executed in a few hours. They take weeks and months: ample time for congressional approval.

This was not a response to a deadly provocation —not even to the attack on the Iraqi military base in Kirkuk last month that killed an American contractor. Trump's clearly disproportionate response to that attack was five airstrikes in Iraq and Syria that killed at least 24 people and injured dozens more. (All of which enflamed the passions of protesters in the streets of Baghdad.) Soleimani's assassination was designed to confuse, distract, and create a “fog of war” around Trump's increasing loss of support at home through an impeachment trial and the fracturing of his evangelical base.

Of course, Soleimani, father of three adult children, was no innocent victim of war. As a charismatic military leader and recognized religious hero of the nation, he has led Iranian regular and paramilitary forces that have killed thousands of Syrians, Iraqis, and even other Iranians, as well as U.S. and international forces in Iraq. He has been a driving force behind Iran's military and political expansion for decades and is responsible for stabilizing or destabilizing the region to serve that Iranian agenda.

“As destabilizing as general Soleimani's activities have been, the consequences for the people of the region of more intensive conflict are incalculable,” observed Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches. “But [Trump's] attack and anticipated reactions to it threaten even wider and more disastrous conflict in the region,” said Tveit.

The U.S. maintains more than 5,000 troops in Iraq with a mission to contain ISIS and train Iraqi armed forces. Since Trump reneged on the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, attacks on U.S. and Iraqi troops have increased. “The rise in rocket attacks comes amid escalating tensions over hard-hitting sanctions imposed by the Trump administration after it backed out of a nuclear deal with Iran negotiated under President Barack Obama's tenure,” reported Stars and Stripes news service. Over the past several months, Iraqis have been caught in the crossfire between Iran-backed government crackdown and the military pressure from the U.S., leading to hundreds of civilian deaths. Iraqis have taken to the streets to demand independence from foreign control forcing the prime minister to resign in November.

Instead of making non military investments to support the diverse base of the protesters demanding a stable and independent Iraq and pushing back on Iranian expansion, Trump's military actions have played directly into the hands of the Iranian loyalists, including those in the current caretaker government in Baghdad. He's shoved Iraqis into Iranian arms. “This war-mongering should be as toxic politically as it is morally,” wrote Peter Certo, editor of Foreign Policy In Focus. “Trump rode into office promising to end America's wars, winning him crucial votes in swing states with large military and veteran populations. Huge bipartisan majorities, including 58 percent of Republicans, say they want U.S. troops out of the Middle East. Trump is betraying them spectacularly.”

Trump's calculation is that deadly chaos in the Middle East (with a concurrent national security crisis here at home) will maintain Republican lock-step in the Senate and unite his evangelical base with Manichean heresies about fighting evil and reheated apocalyptic fantasies for Christian Zionists on the restoration of Israel and the ushering in of the End Times. Trump's “bombing and Bible-thumping” evangelical tour begins tonight at King Jesus International ministry in Miami. There is still an opportunity to put Iraq back on a path to political and economic recovery, to buttress infrastructure for elections and reinvigorate a working economy. But it will require a savvy American public to see through the “fog of war,” demand accuracy, transparency, and accountability, suspend belief in administration tweets about plots and threats, and recognize that military escalation by the U.S., the world's leading superpower, can only lead to asymmetrical annihilation. Civilians are always in the crossfire. World Council of Churches' Tveit appealed for all sides to “exercise maximum restraint, to refrain from further escalation, and to give priority to the welfare of all people of the region, and their right to peace and stability after so many years of violence and bloodshed.”

De-escalation may also require the removal from office of this capricious commander in chief surrounded by inexperienced appointees before the U.S. can re-establish diplomatic communication with Iran through third parties to stabilize the region. A week before Trump ordered Soleimani's assassination, Iraq's leading Christian cleric, Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, a supporter of the nonviolent civilian protests throughout the country, preached against killing. “A person is a project for life, not for killing,” said Sako in his Sunday sermon. “God wants to tell each of us: You are responsible for your brother.”

Reacting to the New Year's Eve siege at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, Trump blamed Iran and tweeted, “They will be held fully responsible.” But who will take responsibility for Trump? As Americans, that's our job.

<https://sojo.net/articles/will-we-see-through-fog-war-time>

• Rose Marie Berger is senior associate editor of Sojourners magazine.

TO EXIST IS TO RESIST

Bethany Hughes: Report of a talk in Leek last August organised by the Leek Palestinian Solidarity Group

In his UK tour, Palestinian scientist and director of the Palestine Museum of Natural history, Mazin Qumsiyeh, spoke about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from a different perspective. He treats it like a medical patient, through the stages of symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. This allows us to better understand the situation with its causes and the possible outcomes. Physical symptoms of the issues in Palestine include the demolitions of rural villages, the building of illegal settlements on occupied land, and the tearing up of olive groves and other valuable agriculture. Although the media coverage on the Israeli state is usually dominated by accusations of racism, it seems that many of these symptoms are actually linked to a greed for land. This led Qumsiyeh to his diagnosis of the conflict as colonialism.

In order to fully grasp our role in resolving the conflict in Palestine, we have to consider possible outcomes of it, therefore creating a prognosis. If we look back at other examples of colonialism, the three common outcomes are; genocide, as seen in America with the indigenous communities; war leading to the colonialists leaving, seen in Algeria when the locals fought against the French for 8 years before regaining independence; and the most common outcome, of eventual peaceful co-existence. Countries that colonise others don't usually do so with the intentions of cooperating with the native people, therefore for Palestinians, a two state solution is an extremely unlikely outcome. This leaves the best option for the future as a state of peaceful co-existence.

In his talk, Qumsiyeh highlighted the fact that there will be varied opinions in every population, even Israel, but we are all still fellow humans. Therefore the victim should not become the oppressor, but should state their beliefs in a peaceful manner which still represents resistance. For the Palestinian people, existing is a form of resistance because it contradicts the reasons for the presence of Israeli settlers in their land. Society needs to recognise that showing a lack of support for the state of Israel is not anti-semitic, otherwise people in the international community who believe in the rights of Palestinians, will continue to not speak out. No matter how much you can offer towards a cause such as this, the beliefs associated with any small actions of resistance are what really matters. Every person in society is called to take the risks they can tolerate, therefore if you don't feel prepared to risk your life, it is still worth doing what you can, to show support for the oppressed.

The phrase I took away from Qumsiyeh's talk was "The only thing preventing hope is the mind". It is not Israel's violence that destroys hope. It is not the fact that this conflict has been going on since 1948 that destroys hope. It is the way in which our minds become convinced that a solution is impossible. Nothing will change if you don't believe it can.

• *Bethany is a 16 year-old student who writes a monthly article on current affairs for St Alban's, Macclesfield.*



BIT BY BIT ISRAEL AIMS TO SQUEEZE OUT PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

23/12/2019 **Jonathan Cook writes from Nazareth:** Bit by bit Israel aims to squeeze out Palestinian Christians. It's decision to trap the minority group in Gaza this Christmas is a prelude to a seemingly contradictory plan to sap the people of the will to stay and struggle for what is theirs. Gaza's minuscule community of Christians will spend this Christmas feeling even more under siege than normal. The Israeli military authorities have denied the vast majority of the enclave's 1,100 Christians a permit to exit the Palestinian territory for the holiday season. Unlike previous years, none will be allowed to join relatives in Bethlehem, Jerusalem or Nazareth, or visit their holy places in the West Bank and Israeli cities. Alongside the enclave's nearly two million Muslims, they will be forced to celebrate Christmas in what is dubbed by locals as "the world's largest open-air prison".

To read on go to: www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/bit-by-bit-israel-aims-to-squeeze-out-the-palestinian-christians-1.954910
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38582>

TACKLING OUR THROWAWAY CULTURE – THE 2020 COLUMBAN SCHOOLS COMPETITION

Columban missionaries are urging young people to challenge 'throwaway culture' through its third Schools Journalism Competition. The title is: *Tackling our Throwaway Culture*. Young people aged 15-18 inclusive are invited to write an article or produce a short video report that informs, challenges and raises important issues on the topic.

The competition encourages students to use their journalistic writing and mobile skills to look at a topical issue which is relevant to society today and resonates with Catholic Social Teaching.

The closing date for entries is 14 February 2020. Winning articles and videos will be announced in Columban media on 16 March 2020. For more information about the 2020 Schools Journalism Competition and to enter see:

www.columbancompetition.com
<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12102/tackling-our-throwaway-culture-the-2020-columban-schools-competition>

TRIBUTE TO DR EDWARD P ECHLIN, A FRIEND OF THE EARTH

Ellen Teague 2/1/2020: Dr Edward P Echlin, eco-theologian and organic gardener, died just before Christmas at the age of 89 years. We in the UK churches have lost a great advocate of "ecological conversion". The natural world has lost a dedicated friend.

I have known Edward and his wife Barbara since Christian Ecology Link (or CEL, now Green Christian) was founded in the early 1980s. He spoke at conferences of the National Justice and Peace Network in the 1990s, and his firm promise that despite getting invitations to speak from around the world he would never fly was the first time I realised how serious the response to environmental crises needed to be.

In 2012, he ran a workshop at CEL's 30th anniversary conference in Bristol, arguing that small scale, biodiverse, organic food production not only preserves soil and stabilises climate but is also the most productive form of agriculture. That same year he helped Sisters of St Joseph of Peace and associates - gathered in London from the United States, Haiti, El Salvador and Britain - to explore their mission of Peace and Care for Creation.

He urged a move away from an oil-based lifestyle, undertaking gardening, and supporting local environmental initiatives such as farmers' markets. He presented a Hubbard squash plant from the Echlin's organic garden to the sisters. He was always generous in drawing attention to the unsung heroes who have put climate change on the agenda of the Christian churches in Britain, and paid warm tribute to Barbara, a great networker in building up the Green Christian movement.

Edward was critical of the obsession so many Christians have with 'inner journey' spiritualities and debates about church structures. He suggested that the Churches should focus much more on, and indeed have "a priceless contribution" to offer to, the Earth community in its struggle to mitigate climate change. We sometimes forget that we are the "prophetic presence of the living and risen Jesus Christ". He was a 'hands-on' kind of theologian. He wandered around allotments to discover the "precious wisdom" of allotment holders, and, indeed, to learn from the wisdom inherent in the whole soil community of plants and animals. He had enormous respect for the world's small growers and farmers, highlighting that their efforts feed millions throughout the world. It was rare to turn up to a meeting with Edward and Barbara and not be treated to tasty tomatoes or pears from their garden.

He was born on 15 January 1930 in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1948 and remained a Jesuit for 25 years. In the early 1970s he lectured in England - at Ushaw College, Durham, and as Catholic Lecturer at the Anglican theological college at Lincoln. He was laicised and married Barbara in December 1974. Always interested in the environment, from the eighties onwards he focused all his efforts on relating Jesus Christ and the Earth. He saw rebuilding a mutually supportive relationship of humans with the Earth community, as the defining issue of the twenty-first century. He wrote three books: *Earth Spirituality*, *Jesus at the Centre* (1999/2002), *The Cosmic Circle*, *Jesus and Ecology* (2004), and *Climate and Christ, A Prophetic Alternative* (2010). He also wrote numerous articles in both academic and popular journals and magazines, and had a chapter in the 2017 book *Reclaiming the Common Good* - How Christians can help rebuild our broken world.

Earth Spirituality: Jesus at the Centre traced Edward's own life journey - from the starting point of his childhood experiences in the Great Lakes of North America, through years with the Jesuits, to his life in Southern England as an ecological theologian and organic gardener. He presented wonderful images of a childhood in Michigan which greatly influenced his concern for the natural world. As a boy, he remembered seeing the stumps of trees everywhere. Some were as tall as a boy because lumberjacks, working on snowshoes and wielding two-man saws, worked despite the thick snow which carpeted the State between November and March. "As I grew up, homes for car workers were replacing the cleared farms which had replaced the woods," he said, and he was alerted to other environmental issues too. The passenger pigeon was extinct by 1914 but there were elderly people around during his boyhood who "remembered them whistling through the sky in their millions." He says that, "we wondered as boys if it could happen to other birds, to animals, to us too".

His "Jesuit years" reinforced the embracing of a spirituality which encompassed God's Earth. "Ignatius tells us to thank other creatures, the angels, saints, heavenly bodies, and all soil creatures, including those that move in the waters, that, despite our sin, they support us, remain in relationships with us, and do not destroy us." He was a great admirer of theologian Teilhard de Chardin and took the view that good is in all things and all things in God. Edward lived in England with Barbara from the 1970s, first in Ripon and then in East Sussex. In East Sussex he insulated the walls and the roof to save energy, installing solar tubes which heat water about half the year, and purchased bicycles.

He talked of the desirability of liberating theology from academic confinement and condemned the failure of Church leaders and theologians "to provide a theologically compelling Earth spirituality or to bite the sharp bullet of sustainable living". He drew attention to the cosmological dimensions in the birth and death of Jesus - the star, the earthquake and the descent of unusual darkness on the earth. Echlin painted a picture of the environment that Jesus lived in and linked references to the natural world in the everyday life and parables of Jesus. He felt Jesus offers a reconciliation which encompasses a wounded planet, saying, "Reconciliation in Jesus of Nazareth, risen and glorified, includes all families and all creatures, the entire earth community, past, present and future".

Edward felt the sensitivity of Jesus to nature is particularly vivid in his parables, which are "derived from living close to the natural world and from familiarity with the Jewish scriptures and their metaphors of cosmic order, drawn from predictably changing seasons, reliable skies and winds, seas which did not transgress the limits of the strand, birds which migrated seasonally in Autumn and on the Spring thermals".

He felt keenly the loss of Sunday - the Sabbath - as a special day of prayer and community in a society where people are more likely to spend the day working and shopping. As for sacraments, he felt Baptism reminds us of the sacredness of water and we must respect and heal seas, beaches and all local aquifers with their teeming life. Preparation for Confirmation could include a commitment to consume sustainably and locally, to share transport, to restore ruined local habitats. We should use local organic bread and wine at our Eucharists - "bread which Earth has given and human hands have made" and "fruit of the vine and work of human hands." Penitential prayers should include personal and structural ecological sin. Liturgies should be Earth-inclusive. He had a passion for fruit trees and in the past year inspired the planting of 24 apple and pear trees, in church grounds, schools and individual gardens. In his view, "this beautiful practice symbolises that Christians are water and tree people, an Earth-renewing presence wherever they live and worship".

I picture Edward in the Holy Land's Garden of Gethsemane, which he visited several times before giving up air travel, where he "was moved by the biodiversity and the sheep grazing peacefully there with birds resting on their back."

• Dr Edward P Echlin was Chair Emeritus of Catholic Concern for Animals, Honorary Research Fellow in Theology, University College of Trinity & All Saints, Leeds and Visiting Scholar at Sarum College, Salisbury. He was a member of Green Christian, Garden Organic, Soil Association and other environmental NGOs. His funeral is at 12.30pm on Wednesday 15 January - which would have been his 90th birthday - at his local church, St Martha's RC Church, Cooden Sea Road, Bexhill. He will be buried in Bexhill Cemetery. His grave will be located in a beautiful part of the cemetery with countryside around, and the South Downs and Beachy Head visible in the distance.
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38631>

DR MICHAEL STRODE, FOUNDER OF HCPT HAS DIED

27/12/2019: The founder of HCPT, Brother Michael Strode died today, Friday 27th December at the age of 96. Doctor Michael Strode, or Brother Michael as he was called after he became a Cistercian monk in later life, was born in Woking, Surrey, on 5th June 1923. He trained to be a doctor at St Thomas's Medical School, London, qualifying in 1946. In September 1945 he was received into the Catholic Church. Michael began his National Service in 1947 serving as a Surgeon Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Towards the end of his service he contracted tuberculosis and was hospitalised until 1950. After his recovery Dr Strode served in several hospitals before he joined the Chailey Heritage foundation for children with disabilities in 1953. He worked at Chailey until his retirement in December 1988.

Michael made his first pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1951, travelling with the Birmingham diocesan pilgrimage. In 1954 he and his friend Peter Keevney took a group of disabled children from Chailey to Lourdes as part of the Birmingham pilgrimage. This was a great success and two groups visited Lourdes from Chailey in 1955, one with the National Schools' pilgrimage at Easter and one in July, again with Birmingham. In 1956 HCPT was founded and the first Trust pilgrimage took place in 1957. Michael was unable to take part because he suffered a recurrence of TB that year. This was soon overcome, and he was able to accompany the HCPT pilgrimage in the Lourdes centenary year of 1958.

Michael suffered a few health problems, notably an operation for a slipped disc in 1972 (when he attended the pilgrimage in a wheelchair) and a coronary thrombosis in 1986, which prevented him from coming on the pilgrimage. Happily he made a full recovery. During all these years Michael played a full part in the HCPT as Chief Medical Officer (until 1990) and as a Governor of the Trust. In 1975 he was awarded the KSG at the opening of Hosanna House. The last year in which he participated as a doctor with HCPT was in 1990. In October 1991 Michael entered a Cistercian community as an Oblate. He took simple vows on 4th June 1995 and made his final commitment as an Oblate on 7th June 1998. Since 2016 he has lived in a care home in Cardiff. Until the end of his life Michael played a very active role in the running of HCPT. He last travelled to Lourdes to join the 2013 Easter pilgrimage, during which he was awarded the prestigious Médaille Notre-Dame de Lourdes in recognition of his long dedication to pilgrims and pilgrimages to the Shrine.

For more information visit: www.hcpt.org.uk/passing <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38605>

CARDINAL BACKS NEW TOOLKIT TO PROMOTE CARE FOR ELDERLY

Ellen Teague 16/12/2019 *The Tablet*

Catholics are urged to nurture and support elderly people in their communities as part of new guidance published by the Church's Social Action Network (CSAN). Two resources, a report on care and ageing and a toolkit for parishes, were launched this month in London at an event organised by CSAN and addressed by CSAN's Patron, Cardinal Vincent Nichols. "Our society is ageing, and ageing Catholics form an increasing share of practising Catholics in many parts of England and Wales", Dr Philip McCarthy, CSAN's Chief Executive, told *The Tablet*. "It is a wonderful sign of progress that people are living longer, and often healthier lives, but it poses challenges for society and for the Church," he added, describing elderly care as "one of the pressing social issues of our time". At the launch Cardinal Nichols described the elderly as "a treasure to be nurtured" and paid particular tribute to carers and religious sisters who provide support structures. Practitioners from religious orders and charities in the Caritas network attended the launch. The **Care in Time** report provides evidence from religious orders, directors and diocesan representatives in the Caritas network on care and ageing, drawing on Catholic Social Teaching. Dr McCarthy hopes it will "encourage parishes and Catholic care providers to deepen mutual support" and "garner support for national dialogue between Christian and public agencies in England and Wales". Download at <http://www.csan.org.uk/about-csan/publications>

Reaching Out is a new toolkit for parishes to organise social activities for older people. It is the fruit of a three-year collaboration between Caritas Salford, Catholic Care in Leeds, Father Hudson's Care and the national CSAN team.

Download at <http://www.csan.org.uk/embrace/>

More than 20 new group activities were established by Catholic parishes, involving more than 1,000 people within and beyond the Catholic community. CSAN will be represented at the first international Catholic congress on the pastoral care of the elderly in January 2020, organised by the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12294/cardinal-backs-new-toolkit-to-promote-care-for-elderly>

YEAR OF THE WORD: THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

Scripture is at the centre of everything the Church does. The word of God shapes our prayer and worship. The Bible shows us how to understand the world, how we are called to live and relate to each other. 2020 is the 10th anniversary of *Verbum Domini* – Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation on 'The Word of the Lord' and the 1,600 anniversary of St Jerome's death. These dates have inspired the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to dedicate 2020 as a year of focus on the Bible and 'The God Who Speaks'. During the year, we will be celebrating, living and sharing God's word with an exciting new Scripture initiative. It's an opportunity to enrich current practice and to develop and explore new ways of responding to 'The God who Speaks'.

Throughout 2020 there will be a range of events, activities and resources to participate in all around the country. To help achieve transformation in our hearts and in our communities there will be three themes of celebrating, living and sharing God's word. MORE INFO: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/the-god-who-speaks/>

Pax Christi is involved in the Scripture Tour at Westminster Cathedral from 30 January to 1 February. Come and meet us there if you can! If your Diocese is planning to hold a Tour too, contact the office for advice on resources and ways to ensure Pax Christi plays a part where you are.

Link to brochure <https://rcdow.org.uk/att/files/proclaim/yotw/the-god-who-speaks-brochure-final.pdf>

*"A church that doesn't provoke any crises,
a gospel that doesn't unsettle,
a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin,
a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed
– what gospel is that?"*

St Oscar Romero

CATHOLIC PEOPLE'S WEEKS 2020

Catholic People's Weeks (CPW) have been offering faith-filled, fun, and reflective, holidays for Catholics and their families for nearly 75 years. The UK-based holidays range from two to seven nights and are fully inclusive of all meals and accommodation. The adult activities include talks, discussions and workshops, while a trained team of youth helpers provide engaging and creative activities for young people and children. For many, CPW has provided a genuine experience of community life and the opportunity to make life-long friendships.

The 2020 programme kicks off with a Winter Weekend 15-16 February on 'Prophetic Imagination' at Hinsley Hall in Leeds. In the year of CPW's 75th Anniversary the stories of inspirational people who have been part of CPW's history will be recalled to inspire responses to today's challenges.

The speaker for the Dora Turbin Lecture on the Saturday will be David McLoughlin, Emeritus Fellow of Christian Theology at Newman University, Birmingham. In his research he explores the relationship between theology and everyday life. On the challenge of prophetic imagination in 2020, David says, "in every age we need men and women who open up for us the prophetic imagination of a Moses at the burning bush, or Hosea and Amos in a time of national crisis and of Jesus in his time". The chaplain is Columban Father Jim Fleming who worked in Pakistan for 20 years and now raises awareness about missionary outreach and supports asylum seekers in Birmingham. Chair Ellen Teague is part of the Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Team, and works as a Catholic journalist on justice, peace and ecology issues.

Among ten other CPW events organised in 2020 there is a walking week in North Wales in June and a cycling week in the Cotswolds in August. A CPW 75th anniversary event will be held at St Cassian's Centre in Kintbury on Saturday 15 August. The 2020 programme is the second of a three-year cycle of study into Priesthood, Prophecy and Kingdom.

Full events programme at: <https://catholicpeoplesweeks.org/events/>

Read more about CPW: www.catholicpeoplesweeks.org
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38628>

A FRANCISCAN BLESSING

*May God bless you with a restless discomfort
about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with holy anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.*

*May God bless you with the gift of tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.*

*May God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you really can make a difference in this world,
so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.*

TATE LIVERPOOL: FIRST MAJOR UK EXHIBITION OF AMERICAN ARTIST THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates (b. 1973) is one of the world's most influential living artists. In *Theaster Gates: Amalgam*, the artist explores the complex and interweaving issues of race, territory, and inequality in the United States. The exhibition takes the history of Malaga as its point of departure. During the 19th century, this small island off the coast of Maine, USA, was home to an ethnically-mixed community. In 1912, on the orders of the state governor, Malaga's inhabitants were forcibly removed to the mainland. They were offered no housing, jobs or support. *Amalgam* presents sculpture, installation, film and dance that respond to this history. Highlights include a new film, *Dance of Malaga 2019*, which features the choreography of acclaimed American dancer, Kyle Abraham. Gates's musical collective, *The Black Monks* provide the film's score. Their blues and gospel-inspired sound can be heard throughout the exhibition, continuing into an immersive 'forest' installation.

Theaster Gates is a socially engaged artist living and working in Chicago, Illinois. He began his career studying urban planning, which continues to influence his work. He is best known for his projects in South Side, Chicago, where he has redeveloped abandoned buildings for community use. Reminiscent of the ongoing work in the Granby area of Liverpool, Gates shows how art can transform places and improve the lives of the people who live there.

Tate Liverpool, Royal Albert Dock Liverpool. Liverpool L3 4BB 13 December 2019 – 3 May 2020

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/theaster-gates-amalgam>

VIVIAN SUTER – EXHIBITION AT TATE LIVERPOOL

Explore the tropical landscape of Guatemala through Vivian Suter's immersive installation of hanging paintings. Navigate your way through the maze of colourful hanging paintings, which form Vivian Suter's (b.1949) large-scale installation *Nisyros (Vivian's Bed) 2016-17*. Suter's work is inspired by the tropical landscape of Panajachel in Guatemala, where she lives and works. The environment plays an important role in the making and development of her work. She leaves her artwork outdoors to be exposed to the elements so that natural substances, such as volcanic and botanical matter, are incorporated into the work. Look closely at the hanging canvases and see whether you can spot the leaves or twigs congealed in the thick paint or the random imprints of her dog's paws.

Tate Liverpool, Royal Albert Dock Liverpool. Liverpool L3 4BB 13 December 2019 – 15 March 2020

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/vivian-suter>

TURNER PRIZE SPLIT FOUR WAYS AS NOMINEES DECIDE AGAINST A SINGLE WINNER

4/12/2019: The four artists nominated for the 2019 Turner Prize will share this year's award after urging the judges not to choose any of them as a single winner. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Helen Cammock, Tai Shani and Oscar Murillo got together to write to the prestigious prize's panel. They said they wanted to make a "collective statement" at a time when there was "already so much that divides and isolates people and communities". The judges agreed and revealed the move at Tuesday's ceremony in Margate, Kent.

The Turner Prize is Britain's most high-profile contemporary art award. The quartet will share the £40,000 prize money. The art world had gathered at the town's Dreamland amusement park to find out who had won, but even for an award once known for its shock value, the four-way split was unexpected. Attendees stood and cheered as Vogue magazine editor Edward Enninful opened the envelope and was surprised to find a statement about all four artists rather than the name of just one. "Here's something quite extraordinary," he said. "At a time of political division in Britain and conflict in much of the world, the artists wanted to use the occasion of the Turner Prize to make a strong statement of community and solidarity and have formed themselves into a collective."

This year's nominated works included Murillo's congregation of human effigies staring at a black curtain covering a window overlooking the sea; and "audio investigator" Abu Hamdan's sound effects, recreating the noise inside a notorious Syrian prison. They were the pre-ceremony favourites. Shani presented a brightly-coloured feminist fantasy world "beyond patriarchal limits"; while Cammock made a film commemorating the role of women at the start of the Northern Irish Troubles in the late 1960s.

In their letter to the judges, the quartet said they all made art "about social and political issues and contexts we believe are of great importance and urgency". They continued: "The politics we deal with differ greatly, and for us it would feel problematic if they were pitted against each other, with the implication that one was more important, significant or more worthy of attention than the others." After the announcement, Cammock read a joint statement saying their work was "incompatible with the competition format, whose tendency is to divide and to individualise". They said they wanted to speak out in "an era marked by the rise of the right and the renewal of fascism in an era of the Conservatives' hostile environment that has paradoxically made each of us and many of our friends and family again increasingly unwelcome in Britain". They added: "Isolation and exclusion are the weapons of this hostile environment. It is this we seek to stand against by making this symbolic gesture of cohesion."

The jury unanimously agreed to allow them to share the prize. "We are honoured to be supporting this bold statement of solidarity and collaboration in these divided times," they said. "Their symbolic act reflects the political and social poetics that we admire and value in their work." Tate Britain director Alex Farquharson, who chaired the judges, said: "In coming together and presenting themselves as a group, this year's nominated artists certainly gave the jury a lot to think about. "But it is very much in the spirit of these artists' work to challenge convention, to resist polarised world views, and to champion other voices. The jury all felt that this made the collective a worthy winner of the Turner Prize."

REVIEW: 'THE TWO POPES' IS A TOUR-DE-FORCE THAT TAKES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SERIOUSLY

John Anderson *America Magazine* 26/11/2019

'The Two Popes,' a fly-on-the-tapestried-wall account of a one-on-one conclave between Pope Benedict XVI (Anthony Hopkins) and pontiff-to-be Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Jonathan Pryce), is a tour de force of acting, of actors interacting, of actors duelling and dancing — literally, at one point, as Pryce's earthy Argentinian tries to teach the tango to Hopkins's less-than-flexible German.

But in addition to its sly humour, Vatican locations and visually lush production design (inspired by Michelangelo, among others), the film addresses, however fleetingly, the weightiest questions confronting the church — not just about financial crimes and sexual abuse but dogma, ritual and the Christian mission. The movie does not really know how to end, it must be said. But as a character study it is an exhilaratingly intellectual, deftly directed drama that in the end suggests very strongly not just that desire is destiny, but that temperament dictates theology.

"The most important qualification for a leader," says Cardinal Peter Turkson (Sidney Cole), during the 2005 conclave that opens the film, "is not wanting to be leader." The cardinal adds, somewhat gratuitously given his audience, "Plato." What he says without saying it is "Bergoglio."

'The Two Popes' does not dwell on the 2005 election, but the event is necessary to establish both the political climate and the characters involved. With the death of Pope John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and dean of the College of Cardinals, is a leading contender for the Chair of St. Peter. And he very much wants the job — something that the director Fernando Meirelles ('City of God,' 'The Constant Gardener') implies mostly through gestures and reaction shots. Among the outliers in the balloting is Bergoglio, who to his own embarrassment gets 10 votes. It is not a close election, but everyone recognizes the cosmic significance of a Jesuit "from the end of the earth," as Pope Francis would later describe it, having so solid a bloc of support.

The years skip by until 2012, and a summons from Benedict to Bergoglio, who has tendered his resignation as archbishop of Buenos Aires. He wants Benedict's permission to quit his post and become a "simple parish priest" once again, and the pope isn't inclined to give it: The pope has something quite different in mind, which is part of the brilliant evolution of Benedict as a character.

He is something of a stiff, who lives in a pontifical bubble and doesn't know who the Beatles are. There is a snippet of the jazz musician Thelonious Monk playing on the holy TV set, which Benedict switches to his favourite show, about a dog detective. The little windows into Benedict's inner life are almost mocking, especially as compared with his visitor's open-hearted humanity, devotion to spirituality (and soccer). But Benedict's intellect is fierce and his self-awareness not entirely absent, as evidenced in the scene in which he tells his visitor about his plan to abdicate. Bergoglio is shocked and dismayed. There can't be two popes, he moans. "There were three popes in 1978," Benedict replies. "That's not the same thing," says Bergoglio. "It was a joke." "It wasn't funny." "It's a German joke," the pope concludes. "It doesn't have to be funny."

The archbishop's own plan to resign is tied up with his guilt over his experiences during the military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 to 1983. As portrayed in the film, Bergoglio made the preservation of life a priority over resistance to the junta, and for this he suffered recriminations from others as well as his own regrets. The Argentina chapters are the less engaging parts of the film, frankly (the sequences involving the two principals in contentious discussion in Rome were the highlights for this viewer), but they help the audience to understand more deeply why Bergoglio does not see Rome moving in a satisfactory direction, and to appreciate his opposition to the more rigidly dogmatic side of the church — something Benedict personifies. Or so Bergoglio thinks.

While Meirelles and his cinematographer, César Charlone, were able to use some locations in and around Rome, including the summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, they had to substitute for Vatican locations and even recreated some — notably their Sistine Chapel, fabricated at the famed Cinecittà Studios. Part of Bergoglio's tour when he visits Pope Benedict is a two-man visit to the chapel which, as the pope no doubt intends, is awe-inspiring. So is Charlone's lighting — the characters seem to become part of the frescoes surrounding them, and in turn part of church and papal history. At the same time, the contrast between such Vatican magnificence and the humble Bergoglio could not be starker. "You imply that the rest of us aren't living simply enough," says the pope. He isn't really kidding.

Both Pryce and Hopkins deliver astounding performances, and their presentation of their complex, multifaceted characters is enhanced by Anthony McCarten's nuanced script (adapted from his stage play) and the director Meirelles's appreciation for how much his two main characters' body language, facial reactions and even clothing reveal their very divergent personalities. Pryce is the ostensible star of the film, of course, and his Francis-to-be is its hero, but there is a reason Anthony Hopkins is Anthony Hopkins. He makes the less charismatic Benedict a heroic figure in his way, someone deserving not just of admiration, but also of sympathy. "This popularity of yours," he asks Bergoglio. "Is there a trick to it?" It's enough to break your heart.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2019/11/26/review-two-popes-tour-de-force-takes-catholic-church-seriously>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/12/movies/a-hidden-life-review.html>

DIARY DATES

JANUARY

Yemen: Inside a Crisis exhibition Imperial War Museum North, Salford Quays until 26 January 2020.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/seasons/yemen-inside-a-crisis>

10-12 Christians Aware Conference: Swanwick christiansaware.co.uk/calendar 0116 254 0770

14 Time Out Quiet Day 10am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

14 CWDF Forum 6.45-9pm The Unity Centre, Cuppin St, Chester CH1 2BN. Speaker Colin Watson, bringing us up-to-date on the work of the CWAC Climate Emergency Task Team.

17 CAFOD Quiz Night Our Lady's Parish Centre Ellesmere Port Town Centre 7.30 pm. Admission: adults £3 children £1 which includes Fairtrade refreshments at the interval. All money raised will go to the CAFOD's new *Hands on Peace* building project in Magdalena Medio, Colombia. Contact Tony Walsh on 0151 355 6419

18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity ctbi.org.uk 0203 794 228819

18 St Albans, Macclesfield Justice & Peace PRAYER VIGIL for PEACE 8-9 pm.

19 Peace Sunday *Peace as a journey of hope: dialogue, reconciliation and ecological conversion* paxchristi.org.uk 0208 203 4884

19 Liverpool 2020 Memorial Lecture 2pm to 4pm, LACE Conference Centre, Croxteth Drive, Liverpool, L17 1AA.

Guest speaker Kevin Hyland OBE, the UK's first Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, now Ireland's representative to the Council of Europe's Independent Group of Experts for Trafficking Info: s.atherton@rcaol.org.uk 0151 522 1080/81

19 Wallasey, The Wirral, CH45 6UE Claremount Methodist Church 12-3pm Details: 07910960316 ***Message in A Bottle: Rubbish Campaign.*** Plastic Free soup and bread lunch with stalls, activities and speakers. Help persuade the world's biggest plastic polluter to change their ways. <https://www.facebook.com/events/503422500291250/>
<http://www.claremountmethodist.org.uk/>

23 Clun, Shropshire: 'Energy from the Sea' 7.30pm at Clun Methodist Church. Jim Halcro Johnson: - developing sustainable wave and tidal energy converters, Refreshments, Donations welcome. 01588 640789

25 Time Out Quiet Day 10.30am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

27 Holocaust Memorial Day hmd.org.uk

29 Lecture "Towards a Geography of Industrial Decarbonisation?" 7.30-9.00pm, Best Building, University of Chester off Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ. Visitors are welcome to attend this lecture by Prof Joseph Howe. Executive Director of the University's Thornton Energy Research Institute. In December 2018 the UK Government announced the Industrial Grand Challenge to enable the deployment large scale industrial decarbonisation infrastructure. This presentation provides an overview of this initiatives, detailing some of the initial proposals emerging from the UK, and examining how different localities are responding. Further information 01244 512190.

FEBRUARY

8 NJPN Open Networking Day Bristol 0117 9243011 justiceandpeace@Cliftondiocese.com 10.30am – 4pm, St Nicholas of Tolentino Parish Hall, Lawford's Gate, Bristol BS5 0RE. There will be an opportunity to hear about justice and peace activities from groups around the country. Representatives of national agencies will report on their work and suggest practical ways of becoming involved in campaigning for social justice. Geoff Thompson – NJPN Administrator, Tel: 020 7901 4864 admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk

8 Day of Prayer for Victims of Human Trafficking catholicchurch.org.uk

9 Racial Justice Sunday: catholicchurch.org.uk carj.org.uk

11 Time Out Quiet Day 10am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

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23 Church Action Poverty Sunday: *Speaking Truth to Power* church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/

24 -8 March Fairtrade Fortnight fairtrade.org.uk 020 7405 5942 Focus on cocoa, the special role women farmers play in the journey to living incomes, and sharing new fairness!

NJPN continues to have a weekly column in *The Universe*, and some of these are uploaded onto our website.

- 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 (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues) and resources at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk 020 7901 4864

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