

The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly within the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send diary dates to [anneoc980@hotmail.com](mailto:anneoc980@hotmail.com)

## 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PARTITION OF IRELAND -3 MAY 2021

**Heather Kiernan** writes: At its heart, the 'Cure at Troy' addresses the conflict between personal integrity and political expediency, and the ways in which the victims of injustice can become as devoted to the contemplation of their wounds as the perpetrators are to the justification of their system. In this, Heaney saw parallels with the violence then still raging in Northern Ireland. The Chorus speech from the play's closing scene was to become one of his most famous and oft-quoted passages.

from "The Cure at Troy" ~Seamus Heaney

Human beings suffer,  
they torture one another,  
they get hurt and get hard.  
No poem or play or song  
can fully right a wrong  
inflicted or endured.

The innocent in gaols  
beat on their bars together.  
A hunger-striker's father  
stands in the graveyard dumb.  
The police widow in veils  
faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don't hope  
on this side of the grave.  
But then, once in a lifetime  
the longed for tidal wave  
of justice can rise up,  
and hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change  
on the far side of revenge.  
Believe that a further shore  
is reachable from here.  
Believe in miracles  
and cures and healing wells.

Call the miracle self-healing:  
The utter self-revealing  
double-take of feeling.  
If there's fire on the mountain  
Or lightning and storm  
And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing  
the outcry and the birth-cry  
of new life at its term.  
It means once in a lifetime  
That justice can rise up  
And hope and history rhyme.

## THE PARTITION OF IRELAND: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

In order to mark the centenary of the partitioning of Ireland, Queen's University Belfast is organising and hosting a major series of public talks. The series is supported by the UK Government and the Irish Government, and by the British Academy and the Royal Irish Academy. The talks are being recorded and produced by the BBC. The series addresses a diverse range of major themes, including the complex origins and legacies of partition, the Irish border in literature, the experience of minorities, and class-based and gender-based perspectives. Talks released weekly, Monday 12pm. <https://www.qub.ac.uk/talks-100/>

**See also: *Partition of Ireland is a 100-year-plus failure from tomorrow on***

<https://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/niallodowd/partition-ireland-100-year-plus-failure>

***A century on, what was Ireland's partition & why does it still matter?* | Euronews**

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/03/a-century-on-what-was-ireland-s-partition-why-does-it-still-matter>

## PILGRIMAGE FOR PEACE

4 May 2021 Explaining Pax Christi's latest fundraiser, Matt Jeziorski, from Warrington, Executive Committee member writes: 'Rarely has the imperative to be creative in our fundraising been as urgent as it is in 2021 and we can all find imaginative ways to raise funds for the ongoing work for Pax Christi. On International Conscientious Objectors' Day (15 May) I will be making my Pilgrimage for Peace, cycling from my home in Warrington to the graves of Tom and Peter Allen in Barrowford, Lancashire – Catholic Conscientious Objector brothers of the First World War. My route is a little over 50 miles and takes in various other sites of CO interest. I will be inviting sponsorship to encourage me on the road.

Others taking to their bikes are Sean Finlay from Wisbech, East Anglia, cycling a loop that takes in Walsingham and RAF Sculthorpe, carrying with him a poster of Pope Francis with a dove. Rachel Sweetman, staff member, will cycle 75 miles on one day, commemorating 75 years of Pax Christi's work. Tim Devereux, from Leeds plans a five-day route covering 250 miles. It is especially poignant as it partly replicates a ride taken with his brother on the Camino some years ago. Sadly, his brother died with Covid this year.

Some political demands will be made during the week as Bruce Kent knocks on the door of Downing Street and the London Embassies of nuclear weapon states on 19 May. Just so they know why he is there, he will read out part of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (which they have not signed!) and hand in a letter urging them to do so. An eight mile walk through London on 18 May, led by Pat Gaffney, former Pax Christi Coordinator, will take in monuments and sites that highlight women and peace, starting with the moving suffragette scroll in Christchurch Gardens, the 20 Century Martyrs at Westminster Abbey finishing at the Peace Pagoda in Battersea Park. Rev G Nagase, a Japanese Buddhist monk who helped to build the Pagoda in 1985, will join the walk.

While the whole project begins on 15 May it will continue into 2022 as former Pax Christi chair, Holly Ball, plans to visit every Catholic Cathedral in England during the year ahead.

Sponsorship has started to mount up, at the time of writing it has reached £4,500 but we need much more. As well as the financial support Pax Christi is receiving there is great solidarity and encouragement being shown by those who want to join in with some of the activities, those sending messages of support and those donating. As the country 'opens up' so too is the community of peacemakers 'opening up', finding words, gestures and activities that shine a light on the work that is still to be done in creating a culture of peace.

Another northern Pax Christi Exec member, Joan Sharples from Cheshire will join Pax Christi's chair Ann Farr in *knitting4peace* <https://www.knitting4peace.org/> for the Pax Christi *#pilgrimage4peace* fundraising project. The Beanie Hats and Scarves will go to *Care4Calais* <https://care4calais.org/> for refugees.

You can support these efforts here: <https://tinyurl.com/PaxDonate>  
LINK: [https://www.gofundme.com/f/pax-christi-pilgrimage-for-peace?member=10313268&utm\\_campaign=p\\_cp\\_url&utm\\_medium=os&utm\\_source=customer](https://www.gofundme.com/f/pax-christi-pilgrimage-for-peace?member=10313268&utm_campaign=p_cp_url&utm_medium=os&utm_source=customer)

**Report compiled by Pat Gaffney and Joan Sharples**

## NAZANIN'S STORY IN IRAN IS NOT JUST A TRAGEDY, IT'S A WARNING

As Iran sentences Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe to a further two years in Iran, her husband outlines why the UK's secretive, unaccountable arms trade is a danger to British citizens and why his family remains haunted by an unkept promise made by the UK government:

Last week should have seen the latest hearing in the UK courts on a debt owed to Iran by a British government company long in the shadows, International Military Services (IMS). The dispute over this debt has lasted more than 40 years. Again, the hearing was postponed.

This week, my wife, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, was given a new prison sentence in Iran. That debt is the reason she has been held there since 2016.

IMS was set up in the 1960s by a UK body, the Crown Agents, and has been wholly owned by the Ministry of Defence since 1979. IMS sought to promote UK arms sales as Britain looked to project its influence post-Empire, and it was particularly successful in Iran before the Islamic revolution of 1979 overthrew the Shah.

The debt owed by Britain to Iran relates to a large sale of tanks to the country from the UK during the Shah's time. The Shah paid in advance for the tanks, but following the revolution they were not delivered, and the UK kept the money. The money withheld by the British government is the reason Nazanin has been detained in Iran since her arrest in 2016 while on a family holiday with our then 22-month old daughter, Gabriella.

A few weeks after she was arrested, Nazanin was told by her interrogators from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that while there was "nothing in her case", she was going to be held for leverage with the UK. Gradually they revealed she was being held to recover a debt. In 2016 she was given a five-year sentence in a secret hearing, which ended last month, ahead of this month's UK-Iran debt arbitration. When the debt case was postponed again, this week she was given another two years in Iran, a year in prison and a further year's travel ban.

There is a particular cruelty in recycling the same "evidence" for a second time. These past few weeks we had been thinking she was almost home. But now our horizons have to reset to 2023. It was a shock, but not altogether a surprise. Nazanin's fate has long been in the shadow of the vagaries of this court case in London, and in the hands of powerful, unaccountable old men still arguing over their money.

When Nazanin was first taken, the IMS debt court was still secret. We would only be alerted by its consequences for us, notably in autumn 2017 when Nazanin had a second case suddenly opened against her. At the time this was blamed on then foreign secretary Boris Johnson's careless mistake in parliament, which immediately put us at the centre of a political storm, with calls for his resignation in London and a torrent of propaganda in Iran. Less reported at the time was that Iran's elaborate response to the mistake also followed a secret hearing on the debt at the High Court in London.

When Mr Johnson subsequently promised to “leave no stone unturned” and signalled publicly that the debt would be paid, and then travelled to Tehran that December, that second case against Nazanin was dropped suddenly and she was classified by the Iranian judiciary as ready for release. Except the UK did not actually release the money, nor has it since.

We remain haunted by the consequences of a promise unkept. Four years on, last month Nazanin completed her sentence. Instead of being allowed to come home, she finally faced that second case. When the debt was postponed again, she was awarded a new conviction.

The secrecy of the London court was successfully challenged in 2019, and in January 2020 I attended an opaque, technical hearing alongside another of the hostage families. Mid-hearing there was an incandescent outburst from one of the other families, outraged at the games being played with people’s lives. He was ejected, and there hasn’t been a single hearing since.

The latest adjournment to the debt case paradoxically came at the request of Iran. Yet it is a coherent strategy on the part of Iran: pushing for an out of court settlement, and then squeezing some innocent people in the meantime. The UK’s response is also coherent, looking to minimise Iran’s leverage, and to manage any blame for the standoff being directed at them. But for the families of those held hostage, this is a tough game to watch.

The debt story is at first glance simple. After years of negotiations during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s when Iran had wanted the tanks and other arms, it eventually went to court to reclaim its money. After a series of court cases that began in 1990, Iran won a final award in 2009, with £380-million paid by the UK into the court in London. However, this money has still not reached Iran, ostensibly because of sanctions coincidentally imposed in 2008.

But it is also more complex. In the 1970s, under the Shah, who was a British ally, there was a scramble for contracts in the oil boom, which led to a series of largely forgotten deals between London and Tehran. Iran lent to the UK when it had turned to the IMF for financial support, ended up owning part of the new North Sea oil fields, and played a vital role in the UK’s efforts to defeat an insurgency in Oman. Numerous military industrial projects were discussed through oil-for-weapons barter deals. There developed a whole class of political brokers and special commissions.

Central to this was IMS, and the hundreds of contracts it brokered. There was a revolving door of foreign advisers reaching into Iran’s public purse for military toys, playing on the Shah’s fears and vanities, with a variety of access payments. But all this had consequences and fed into an angry revolution. Following the 1979 upheaval there was reluctance to shut down this trade. There was never such a clean break. Too many careers depended on it. The UK

did not let the Shah flee to his homes in London. It did not protest too strongly when British hostages were taken by the revolutionaries, unlike the Americans. The IMS office in Iran stayed open until 1988. Until the late 1980s, Iran’s Defence Procurement Office for international arms purchases was hosted on Victoria Street in central London.

In the early 1980s the UK helped the new Iranian government suppress communists in the country. In 1984, the UK’s rules on arms trading with Iran and Iraq were quietly relaxed, with the British parliament informed sometime later, around the time the US started getting itself into trouble with the Iran-Contra affair — when it secretly facilitated the sale of arms to Iran. And a few years later we ended up with the Scott inquiry into the British government’s scandals over arms sales to Iraq and the failures of accountability.

Meanwhile, IMS diversified into other countries, with contracts in every continent. With some creative accounting, IMS kept Iran’s monies, investing them in part in local government bonds, resulting in the British local taxpayer paying them interest for the use of these funds, now classed as commercial income. It allowed for a kind of alchemy, turning Iran’s public monies into a private income stream of interest paid by UK taxpayers and others, which could be used to pay “special commissions” to private individuals in return for public contracts with other states. Vitality, the façade of an independent company, even if entirely government controlled, kept it an income stream away from parliamentary scrutiny, effectively a form of government “off balance sheet”, where it could avoid answering questions.

Many of the deals brokered by IMS were also guaranteed by the UK taxpayer. When the deals didn’t work out, the government’s Export Credit Guarantees Department picked up the tab with the private suppliers, and then chased Iran to repay to the UK the bills it had guaranteed. Effectively, the alchemy reversed in the bad times with the costs nationalised for both the UK and Iran, often for many years. The government’s UK Export Finance is still chasing some IMS-related sovereign debt from Iran even now. Legally, some of this should not have been hidden away. In 1984, when the public arms-manufacturing company Royal Ordnance was being privatised, a clause was added to the Royal Ordnance and Military Services Act, promising that if IMS needed any more money from the government beyond a certain amount, it would come back to parliament to ask.

In 2002, IMS did indeed have to come and ask the taxpayer for almost £400-million, yet parliament was not notified. In 2010 the then defence secretary was paid a £5-million dividend by IMS, but this was, illegally, not returned to the Consolidated Fund, the government’s general bank account under the control of parliament. IMS’s accounts became subject to parliamentary scrutiny only under the current defence secretary, Ben Wallace.

Last year our MP was able to ask the National Audit Office, which monitors public spending, to check why there had been no parliamentary approval for the £400-million court payment. The NAO reported that it had been told that the Ministry of Defence had at the time obtained a legal opinion that it did not need to involve parliament, but unfortunately had now lost this opinion. For the dividend, no one would say what the government did with the money, just that the audit records were now long gone. The first set of IMS accounts subject to parliament (for 2019-20) were only released earlier this month. They had in fact been signed off last August, just weeks before IMS changed all of its directors.

Since 2013, the IMS court case with Iran has been adjourned 10 times. It has often felt like a façade for a political standoff, and a vehicle for avoiding questions, as once again this week the government line to the media was that it would not be appropriate to comment on ongoing legal proceedings.

We have requested numerous times to meet the IMS directors, unsuccessfully. Last weekend we pleaded with them to meet and discuss the impact of their decisions on British citizens held in Iran, worrying what bad things might be lying in wait. Again, they did not agree to meet. It has been sobering to discover we cannot get anyone to take responsibility for what is actually going on. It makes for a big gap where accountability should be.

Following Nazanin's new conviction, there was an urgent question debated in parliament. Nazanin watched it online at her parents' home in Tehran, stuck waiting for her new summons to prison, increasingly boiling at the complacency of the British government. It was the seventh urgent question on her case (to have two is a lot), but accountability was still left to the junior foreign minister, rather than the foreign secretary, to respond for the British government.

We were both struck by the lack of contrition, or acknowledgement of what the government has got wrong. The minister emphasised the UK's achievements, which served to delude parliament, and the government itself, given that it has not even managed to get Iran to uphold the minimum of Iranian law. There was a reluctance to see any fault but Iran's. The government was quick to emphasise that the imprisonment of Nazanin and the others was the fault of Iran. But it was less quick to acknowledge this as hostage taking, or the need to do anything different after five years to challenge the practice.

Yet for Nazanin's family, the essential issue is not this accountability gap, but the failure to provide her with adequate protection. This week Britain's foreign minister told parliament: "The UK does not and will never accept dual nationals being used for political leverage." Yet that is precisely what is happening.

Being caught as a bargaining chip between two states creates real challenges for what either is willing to see.

The UK has an incentive to downplay the human cost. There is a de facto acceptance of cruelty happening faraway. Early on, we often used to complain of the Foreign Office's reluctance to see the abuse endured by Nazanin. Ministers implied to parliament that perhaps it was not as bad as we claimed. The UK still advises families like ours to stay quiet.

For the postponement of last week's debt hearing, the Foreign Office emphasised to us that the delay was at Iran's request. It declined to explain why it had agreed, or to acknowledge whether it had done any risk assessment of the impact a delay would have for those Brits held by Iran, or that it had received any assurances that they would be safe – though it suggested such assurances would anyway have limited worth. After the previous postponement in October, Nazanin was taken to court for a second case, and after this one, she was convicted.

UK officials did not attend Nazanin's new trial, so as not to escalate relations with Iran. In parallel, in October, another British citizen was picked up by the IRGC and put into solitary confinement in Iran. Following the latest postponement, he was taken to the Revolutionary Court this week on secret security charges. The UK again decided not to attend and said it had not been asked.

The Germans had one of their citizens held for leverage also taken to court that day. By contrast, their officials attempted to attend. Unlike British law, German law requires it.

Even when faced with torture, the protection the UK offers its citizens detained abroad is discretionary. Forty days ago we submitted a lengthy medical report setting out the forms of torture Nazanin has endured these past five years. The UK's policy is not to assess such allegations, but to raise them with the detaining country and ask them to check. Thus far the UK has not done this with Iran. The power of discretion means that in the majority of cases where British citizens are allegedly subject to torture overseas the UK does not raise them with the other government.

The UK government insists it has no safeguarding obligations to protect its citizens, even when they are held over a debt owed by the government. The subtler arts of deflecting responsibility can slide into victim-blaming, using "dual nationality" as a rationale for why our cases are problematic and hard to solve. Early on in Nazanin's case, a British minister told us he had many "consular" cases on his desk. "They have a British passport," he confided, "but they are not really British."

For the first few years Nazanin was held, the government insisted it needed to respect Iran's judicial processes. We were told we had to understand that Nazanin was a criminal under Iranian law. Even this week, it still refuses to acknowledge Nazanin as a hostage. A minister once even told us we had made up Nazanin's link to the debt ourselves.

Oftentimes it feels like we live in a new era of “Gatsby government”, with the politics of a gilded era. There is a line in the *Great Gatsby* novel when the lead character Gatsby is abandoned to deal with someone else’s car crash. It encapsulates the erosion of accountability in the gilded age:

“They were careless people, Tom and Daisy — they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”

For me, this has resonance for politics these days. The most obvious carelessness in Nazanin’s story is well documented when in autumn 2017 we became part of the politics of court intrigue, and the collateral damage of its careless promises – when Boris Johnson made his mistake in parliament. We had our Icarus moment on the front pages, with all the cameras flashing. It is still what most people know about Nazanin’s case. And it means those cameras flash still.

The British government’s failure to bring her home has household resonance. It is still used as a marker of ministers’ frailties. It means that, unlike many other cases of those detained overseas whose families may have more foreign-sounding names, we are often seen on the news. These days we are “really British”. This keeps Nazanin safe. Many others are not so lucky.

But for me Gatsby government is not about personal frailties. It is about a deeper kind of carelessness. The problem is not a few ill-chosen words. It is rather the erosion of accountability, the gap between what makes the shiny spectacle, and what is repeatedly hidden away.

Nazanin’s story shows a kind of alchemy: a public policy pretending that IMS is a private operation in order to avoid scrutiny, and deflecting responsibility when things go wrong. It also highlights the risks of gaps in governance, for other revolving doors between public and private, and their economics of access and contracts at the public expense, far closer to home. And it shows the dangers in reverse – of the privatisation of pain, with public sins visited on ordinary individuals.

What does it mean when a national debt can be turned into a private tragedy, for which the UK government declares itself to have no safeguarding obligations? Particularly when all the while the Iranian authorities turn more and more private individuals into national commodities? When hostage diplomacy is growing worldwide? Moreover, it is an alchemy that invites

corrosiveness. The arms trade is a corrupting business with its revolving doors between a small pool of public and private decision-makers, its darker arts of persuasion through private inducements and other exploitations, alongside the public underwriting of long-term deals. So too is hostage-taking – it is a corrupting business for both sides. As the Iran-Contra affair showed, the personal agendas of leaders often come into play in its secret negotiations far more than they should.

There is something deliberately shameful about alighting on a young mother and baby as collateral and letting that separation endure for five years in a stand-off that denies her a second child.

The UK government wishes to expand arms sales as a way of building Britain’s new place in the world. The first risk is of course for those at the other end of the bombs. But more sales also make for more collateral damage.

The UK also needs to better protect its citizens detained abroad. Otherwise, while some people will continue to make their private fortunes from the arms trade in the name of national interests, other British citizens will pay the price when there is blowback, and still be asked to keep quiet while they sit in prison.

Our story is a window on a world often hidden away, on things that could do with some sunlight. But the lesson in our story is not of the past, what happened under the Shah or more clandestinely in the Islamic Republic’s early days. It’s not even about the present – for us a continuing life in the waiting room.

Our daughter Gabriella made an advent calendar to count down the end of Nazanin’s sentence, with some unanswerable questions when she didn’t come home, wondering what grown-ups’ promises can be relied on. We have not yet discussed with her what two more years without mummy means. Though again she wants me to sleep in her room at night.

Our story is actually a warning — for the future. As the UK avoids protesting to governments who are potential or actual arms customers, cases like Nazanin’s will become more commonplace.

What obligations does the government have to ensure its sins are not visited on its own citizens? With a government picking and choosing what protections it offers its citizens, it will be a question asked more and more.

**Richard Ratcliffe** 1 May 2021

- **Richard Ratcliffe** is the husband of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and has been campaigning for her release since 2016.
- **Declassified UK** is an investigative journalism organisation that covers the UK’s role in the world.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-01-nazanins-story-in-iran-is-not-just-a-tragedy-its-a-warning/>

## JESUITS IN BRITAIN WISH IMPRISONED PRIEST 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY'

27 Apr 2021: The Jesuits in Britain have marked the birthday of the imprisoned Indian Jesuit, Fr Stan Swamy, by visiting the High Commission of India in London with thousands of birthday cards signed by fellow Jesuits, school children and parishioners across the UK.

Fr Damian Howard SJ, Provincial Superior of the British Jesuits "We will continue to stand in solidarity with Fr Stan Swamy. He has dedicated his life to defending the rights of marginalised people in India. We must do everything we can to defend his rights." Jesuit Missions is leading the 'Stand with Stan' campaign in Britain. The organisation had asked supporters to send Fr Stan a birthday message and they received over 2000 cards in 2 weeks as people across the UK showed their solidarity with Fr Stan. Jesuit Missions will send the cards to Jesuits in Mumbai in the hope that he will be able to receive them in Taloja prison

Director of Jesuit Missions, Paul Chitnis said: "It is humbling to see so many heartfelt messages of support for Fr Swamy on his 84th birthday. Our deepest hope is that Fr Stan will be released from prison soon both for his own health and because the charges on which he is being held are manifestly unjust. We hope that will be soon so [https://www.jesuit.org.uk/jesuits-britain-wish-imprisoned-priest-%E2%80%98happy-birthday%E2%80%99?utm\\_source=Jesuits+in+Britain&utm\\_campaign=a355b9acf9-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_07\\_24\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_22ed05a35f-a355b9acf9-87595669&mc\\_cid=a355b9acf9&mc\\_eid=ddf37ee126](https://www.jesuit.org.uk/jesuits-britain-wish-imprisoned-priest-%E2%80%98happy-birthday%E2%80%99?utm_source=Jesuits+in+Britain&utm_campaign=a355b9acf9-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_07_24_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_22ed05a35f-a355b9acf9-87595669&mc_cid=a355b9acf9&mc_eid=ddf37ee126)

## RELIGIONS UNITE IN INDIA TO COMBAT THE SPIRALLING COVID-19 CRISIS

**Lianne Kolarin** 27 April 2021: Faith groups have been crossing religious divides to support those in need during the coronavirus crisis in India, a frontline journalist has said. Saurabh Vaktania, a reporter for *India Today*, told a Religion Media Centre online briefing that faith groups in India were "working around the clock" to help to support the many millions who have fallen victim to India's devastating second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vaktania and one other are the only of his colleagues not to have tested positive for the virus. He told the briefing of a five-storey Jain temple that had transformed into a Covid care centre with 200 beds. "Each and every patient has their own oxygen pipe to their bed," he said, adding that the situation is "much more grim than we are reporting". Organisations like this are "breaking religious boundaries", he said, to help those in crisis. He described the frontline workers as "exhausted" and "running out of resources". He recalled another incident in which a Muslim community performed funeral rites for a Hindu family, while dressed in full PPE. Christian schools, meanwhile, have also been converted into Covid centres. Everyone was "coming forward in whatever way they can to help each other", Vaktania added.

More than a million cases of Covid-19 have been recorded in a few days, while deaths have been steadily rising, to almost 200,000. Vital drugs, medical oxygen and intensive care beds are all in short supply, as the health system reaches breaking point during the pandemic's second wave. The government has been harshly criticised for its handling of the pandemic, with many accusing it of being slow to act by allowing large-scale events while misinformation spreads.

Tilak Parekh, a PhD student in religion and anthropology at Cambridge University, said it was no surprise that religious organisations were doing their best to fill the gaps. "There is an inseparability between religion and the secular in India," he said. "Religious organisations in India are part of the very fabric of the society in many ways, and they see their role to serve society with things like healthcare.

The online session heard from Bhavik Depala of London's Shri Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden — the largest Hindu temple outside India — which has launched an urgent appeal to help tackle the "unrelenting surge in infections". He said the fundraising drive enabled the "Indian diaspora" to help at this critical time when they cannot visit loved ones.

Nilesh Solanki of Sewa UK revealed that his charity has raised almost £100,000 in 48 hours, while its American sister organisation garnered \$5m in the same period. The funds, he said, will provide a digital helpdesk to assist people to navigate the healthcare system, while also supplying desperately needed oxygen. "It's important to align our efforts and

that he can read these messages of support in the peace of his own home."

Fr Stan Swamy SJ has spent his life working for and defending the rights of the poorest and most marginalised people in India. India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Fr Stan on 8 October 2020. He is detained along with 15 other human rights activists all charged with terrorism. Fr Stan vehemently denies these charges. He has spent 198 days in prison. Fr Stan is 84-years-old and his lawyers have applied for him to be released on bail on medical grounds. Fr Stan suffers with Parkinson's disease and is not able to receive the care he needs in prison. On the 22nd of March, the bail plea was rejected by a judge in Mumbai.

The Washington Post recently reported that evidence had been planted on the computers of one of the accused human rights activists raising concerns about the evidential basis on which Fr Stan is detained. Fr Joseph Xavier SJ, a friend and colleague of Fr Stan said: "On a recent phone call from jail, Swamy's chief concern was the well-being of his colleagues and the organisation he ran. Even in moments of hardship or pain, Swamy will not complain. That is the kind of person he is."

campaigns to help with the Covid-19 pandemic in India so that help is given to the people who need it," he said. The money will also be used to educate and combat misinformation, a global issue during the pandemic but especially so in India where some religious leaders have contradicted government guidelines.

Mr Parekh said: "For religious people, their religious leaders are perhaps a more authentic and trustworthy source of information than even government ministers. When their religious leader speaks, it's akin to a sacred being or God speaking. "So ... when your guru or your swami or your or your priest says 'OK, don't wear masks', then ... you don't wear masks. If they say follow the guidelines, you'll begin to wear masks. So, they play such an important role." Much has been made of the government allowing the Kumbh Mela festival to proceed, as millions flocked to the Ganges for the occasion — driving infection rates right up. "Allowing the Kumbh Mela to go ahead was a misjudgment by the Indian authorities," Mr Parekh said.

Pamela Das, an editor at *The Lancet* who co-chairs the medical journal's group for racial equality, said the pandemic has brought "into sharp focus" the shortfalls of the healthcare system in a country riven by "social inequalities and inequities". This, she said, has been exacerbated by corruption and a "VIP culture" that has led to a black market for medical supplies and treatment. "The system is basically being overrun not only by demands, but by irresponsible medicine. So, a lot of people are not being treated properly," she said.

Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal a lecturer in Sikh studies at Birmingham University said before the latest spike, people had started to relax and let their guard down and that there was a "state failure" in combating this. "With elections coming up, the move to allow such religious events may have been done to win votes," she said. "State governments in India are possibly not enforcing restrictions for religious festivals because of the forthcoming elections. But faith communities nationally and internationally, people power, have come together to demand for food and oxygen."

<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/religions-unite-in-india-to-combat-the-spiralling-covid-19-crisis/>

## CAFOD CORONAVIRUS APPEAL SUPPORTS CARITAS INDIA

Thanks to your generous support for our coronavirus appeal, we have now pledged £200,000 to our long-term partner Caritas India who are responding in some of the worst affected areas. We continue to monitor the situation. With your support Caritas India are: Providing PPE to frontline health workers; Distributing medical kits to people with mild symptoms; Setting up safely run isolation and quarantine centres; Promoting lifesaving Covid and vaccine information.

Please keep praying for the people of India and those affected by the pandemic. You can use the Coronavirus prayers on our website. <https://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Prayer-resources/Coronavirus-prayers>

<https://cafod.org.uk/donations/picker?singleamount=25&regularamount=7&defaultuniversaltype=regular&Appeal=121945>

## BOAZ TRUST PRAYERS FOR MAY

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1: 52-53)

"Cast down the mighty, send the rich away. Fill the hungry, lift the lowly." ~ The Magnificat, Ben Wildflower's interpretation

Next week the legislative proposals for the Government's New Plan for Immigration will be announced in the Queen's Speech. It will come just days after the consultation, set up to enable responses to the Government's proposed asylum reforms, closes. Many of us may be tempted to doubt that our criticisms and concerns will be heard. There are, of course, many understandable reasons for us to feel hopeless in the face of such inhumane proposals. Yet it is important to remember that the announcement of the legislative proposals is not the end of our campaigning, but the beginning. It is the road ahead of us.

It will take all of us acting in faith, in hope, in love and in righteous anger to challenge these proposals and advocate instead for an asylum system that is rooted in compassion. In the days, weeks and months ahead, each of us will need to decide for ourselves what can be our response: whether that be writing (or writing again) to our MPs (however futile that may sometimes feel), educating ourselves further where our own knowledge is limited, challenging unhelpful narratives around asylum if and when we encounter them, going further to create a culture of welcome in our own neighbourhoods and communities.

We invite you to reflect on the question: 'what prayerful action can I take?' We can't do everything, but each of us can do something. And we must.

With best wishes, All of us at the Boaz Trust.

**Boaz Trust:** Serving destitute asylum seekers and refugees <https://www.boaztrust.org.uk/>

## HOW THE WOMEN OF THE BIBLE HELPED ME REIMAGINE MY BARRENNESS

*The following opinion piece is especially close to my heart. When my daughter died last June from natural causes the first thing people who hadn't known her asked was: "was she married, and did she have children?" — as if somehow being single and childless diminished her worth. Sadly, even in the 21st century, women are often measured in those terms. This stirring article speaks from the writer's painful experience - Anne O'Connor*

**Kaya Oakes** 22 April 2021

A few years ago, I was at a Sunday Mass at a church where a friend was serving as a deacon. It was Mother's Day, and at the end of the service, every woman in the congregation who was a mother was asked to come forward to receive a flower. Roses, I think. Red ones. As women filtered out of the pews around me and the priest smiled and waved them forward, I remained seated, sharing an embarrassed smile with the woman next to me. It was really nobody's business that we did not have children, but now everyone around us knew. I am stoic by nature and do not cry easily, but shame welled up inside of me, and so did a burst of unexpected tears. Embarrassed, I gathered my things and left.

Two years later, I had a hysterectomy. Hysterectomy is major surgery, with potential consequences ranging from early menopause to increased risk of heart disease if the ovaries are also removed. No one goes through it cavalierly. After three decades of severe monthly pain and heavy bleeding, I went to the emergency room one night and was told that multiple large cysts on my ovaries were beginning to rupture. After a series of follow-up scans and biopsies, it was clear that I needed surgery, which I had in May 2019.

My surgery took place about six months after the Vatican issued a follow up to its 1983 document on hysterectomies. This update took up the question of whether or not a uterus that is "no longer suitable" for procreation can be licitly removed from a woman's body. According to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a "defective" uterus, one that cannot support a pregnancy, can be removed without sterilizing a woman, because she is effectively already sterile.

The document does not go into the medical reasons why a woman would undergo a hysterectomy, but they are far from uncommon. After caesarean sections, a hysterectomy is the second most common surgery women go through, with half a million being performed annually in the United States. For most women, hysterectomies are a last resort after enduring years of crippling pain and severe bleeding from conditions like adenomyosis, fibroids, or because of cancer in the uterus, cervix, fallopian tubes or ovaries.

I have a condition called endometriosis. This causes infertility, severe pain and heavy bleeding, which in turn can lead to anaemia, fatigue, digestive issues, and in some cases is linked to an increased risk of cancer. One in 10 women has it, but it is difficult to diagnose, so many assume their pain is normal. I also had fibroids, problems with my uterine lining and a cervical polyp. In other words, my uterus was not only "no longer suitable"—it had never really worked properly. I was barren, and by

the time I had the surgery in my late 40s, I had mostly made peace with that.

But my church kept reminding me that this barrenness made me an outlier. It was not just the Mother's Day celebrations. It was also the constant talk about Catholic "supermoms," the focus on families with children, the praise of fertility and fecundity as the true measure of womanhood. As the daughter of a mother who worked full time, raised five children and was widowed at a young age, I recognize that bringing up a family really is a superpower and that mothers do incredible things. But women who don't have children — and are not women religious — also have many gifts to give the church and the world. I know we exist, and I know we're not alone. But we are hard to find in the Catholic imagination.

Catholics are accustomed to thinking about celibate, childless clergy and women religious, and we are accustomed to celebrating that choice. Celibate clergy can talk about how not having children frees them up to share love with more people and to be self-sacrificing, but in my experience, conversation among parish groups for women always focuses on children in one way or another. The first question I am always asked when I attend a new parish is whether or not I have kids, which is always an awkward, embarrassing and, frankly, invasive moment.

There are as many reasons why a woman may not have children as there are women, and I do not think interlocutors about my fertility really want to sit through a list of my medical woes. We are increasingly aware, for example, that it is not O.K. to greet someone by saying they look like they have lost weight. They may, after all, have cancer or be recovering from Covid-19, or they may have an eating disorder. They may be grieving or depressed.

Why, then, do so many people persist in beginning conversations by asking women if they have children? In her book *The Mother of All Questions*, the writer Rebecca Solnit says her comeback to this question is "Would you ask a man that?" and that this response usually ends the conversation. But she also writes that asking if a woman has children "assumes there is only one proper way for a woman to live."

So, like many other women in my situation, I have had to recast my understanding of barrenness to see it as a space of possibility. It took the help of a Jewish friend to get there.



Over the past year, as I have been working on a book about social and religious expectations of how women should be, I have also participated in a writing group made up of women who do not have children. This was just a coincidence — we never set out to make it exclusive. But I have found the group to be a helpful place to think through ideas about women who are outliers. And as I wrestled with the problem of failing to find examples of childless women in the Bible, one of my friends suggested I look into Queen Esther and the Purim story.

On the feast of Purim, the Scroll of Esther is read in synagogues as Jewish people celebrate her key role in their delivery from annihilation. Discovering that a pivotal figure like Esther, who saves her people from death, also happens to be childless, can help us understand that childlessness in Scripture cannot be understood only as a curse. For some of the women in the Hebrew Bible, childlessness ends when God “opens their wombs.” But for others, the absence or presence of children is simply never mentioned (and this in a book obsessed with lineage), yet these women are honoured and celebrated as heroic figures, prophetesses and deliverers of their people. Perhaps Esther never had children, but instead the Jewish people of Persia, saved by her quick thinking, become heirs to her legacy.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and one of the major prophetesses, is associated with Miriam’s Well, a miraculous spring that kept the Israelites alive during the Exodus. Since the 1980s, Jewish feminists have added a cup of water to the *seder* table to celebrate Miriam’s *mayim hayim*—the “living water” Jesus will later drink from when it is handed to him by a woman, also at a well. Letty Cottin Pogrebin says that for Jewish women, Miriam, who led her people through the parted waters of the Red Sea by singing and dancing, “introduced the notion of radical change as worthy of celebration.” And unlike her brother Moses, it is never mentioned that Miriam had children.

In the New Testament, Jesus first appears after his resurrection to another Jewish woman, Mary Magdalene, who runs and tells the male apostles what she has seen. This means that the earliest embodiment of Christianity is in a single, childless woman. Like Esther and Miriam, if Mary Magdalene ever had children, they are not mentioned, and that frees her up not only to be an apostle, but to spend time with Jesus to build a relationship of deep trust. Unfortunately, that relationship has been imagined by everyone from Nikos Kazantzakis to Dan Brown as carnal and regenerative, rather than platonic. Because what could two childless people possibly get up to other than sex and reproduction? But feminist theologians would rather

meet Mary Magdalene as she arrives: alone, unencumbered and ready to reinvent herself.

A shrine in Saint-Maximin-la-Saint-Baume, France, is believed to be Mary Magdalene’s last resting place. According to local lore, she arrived there in a boat without oars or sails and later spent her days in a cave, ministering to those who managed to find her.

For centuries, the more common teaching in the Catholic Church, despite a lack of evidence, was that Mary Magdalene was a repentant prostitute whose only option for redemption was to seek forgiveness from a man. Imagine if we had learned, instead, that she arrived in a new country of her own volition, shaped her own reinvention and led her community through dangerous times.

No woman deserves to be seen as one-dimensional. There are as many kinds of mothers as there are women without children. We must not reduce motherhood to pious clichés. We must recognize all the complexities that come with having children as well as the fact that the moral and ethical and psychological complexities all women must negotiate are not solely determined by their ability to procreate. If I was embarrassed and ashamed on the day the church called mothers up to the altar for flowers, imagine how much more painful that experience might be for the woman struggling with infertility, the woman with ovarian cancer or the woman whose child has died.

Our Catholic faith, rooted in the faith of people who lived in the deserts, has sometimes missed out on the complexities of women’s lives. But those who look at a desert and see lifelessness have missed the genius of creation that allows cacti to store water in their flesh, gives people the vision of building their homes in the side of cave walls, helps every kind of crawling and leaping thing to adapt. Like everything alive in the desert, women who live without children adapt and survive.

Sometimes it strikes me that this is what Esther, Miriam, Vashti, Judith, the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, Dinah, the unnamed daughters of Zelophehad, Deborah, Yael, Tabitha, Anna the prophetess, Mary and Martha of Bethany, and many of the women in the early church like Lydia, Junia and Phoebe—none of whom are described as mothers—had to do to survive in their own era. Any woman trying to recreate herself when others have looked at her and seen only emptiness may instead find other ways to nurture and care for the world around her.

Perhaps that does not earn us a flower, but that does not mean we cannot grow.

[https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/04/22/women-bible-infertility-scripture-240494?pnspid=g.Yx9fgFAX2Nn.vvHnXdn8.0nKoiUNCiBAjDsDpb&utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=9144](https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/04/22/women-bible-infertility-scripture-240494?pnspid=g.Yx9fgFAX2Nn.vvHnXdn8.0nKoiUNCiBAjDsDpb&utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=9144)

Kaya Oakes, a contributing writer for *America* magazine, teaches writing at the University of California, Berkeley. Her fifth book, *The Defiant Middle*, will be released in fall 2021.

## **UPCOMING SYNOD COULD 'TURN A CLERICAL CHURCH INTO A SYNODAL CHURCH'**

27 April 2021: **Q & A with Sr. Nathalie Becquart**, a member of the Xavière Sisters in France, one of the two new undersecretaries for the Vatican's office of the Synod of Bishops. Before becoming a sister, she studied economics and business and worked as a consultant in marketing and advertising. Becquart played a large role in the preparation for the 2018 Synod of Bishops on young people. She was a coordinator of the pre-synod and a speaker and observer at the synod. From 2012 to 2018, she directed the national office for youth evangelization and vocations at the French bishops' conference. Until her nomination as an undersecretary in February, she was a consultant to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, headed by Cardinal Mario Grech from Malta, since September 2020. The other undersecretary is a Spanish Augustinian priest, Fr. Luis Marín de San Martín, who was made a bishop on April 11 in Madrid. The three of them are to prepare the October 2022 Synod of Bishops, which will have the theme: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission." In other words, how to repair the church, an institution in crisis, torn by divisions, scandals and doubts.

### **What kind of signal does your nomination send to religious women all over the world?**

When I read the many messages I received from all sorts of people — men, women, religious, laypeople — after my appointment, I was very touched. I realized that many sisters received it for themselves. I was struck by the impact my appointment had because it resonates with the aspirations of many people, women and men, around the world.

I think the fact that the two undersecretaries, Bishop Marín and I, both belong to religious orders shows the importance of what the experience of religious life can bring to the church. Our experience of community life, spirituality, community discernment and chapter life can bring something specific to the whole church in its quest for synodality. "Synodality" means "discerning together." It supposes spirituality, dialogue and listening. Religious men and women have this experience of community life and spiritual life, and we also have the experience of the mission in our life of service to the poorest of the people. This could help define how to be a missionary church. Synodality is always missionary. My appointment can be read on three different levels: I am a nun, a woman and a layperson. I see it as a sign the synod will want to listen to the people of God.

### **Do you consider it important that a woman has been appointed to a position of power in the church?**

It is not the first time a woman has been appointed to an important post at the Vatican: More and more women, not all religious, are given important positions. My own nomination was made possible by other women before me. I feel like a small link in a chain. What is new is that my current position includes the right to vote [at the synod]. It gives it a form of visibility. It is not an isolated sign; it is a sign of continuity. It makes visible the fact that women are already in positions of responsibility in many local churches. In my different positions, I have held responsibilities in the church of France. I feel I can only do my job well if I am connected to people on the ground.

### **How concretely will you prepare the synod?**

It is a whole process, rather structured with different steps. At the Secretariat, we work with a team of about 15 people. We also consult with experts, and an important current task is to produce a preparatory document that will be sent for consultation to local churches. Everybody is invited to participate in the preparation of this event. The church is very diverse and decentralized. We cannot be sure that everybody will join in, but we want to encourage parishes, dioceses, bishops' conferences, all the different ecclesial bodies to embrace a synodal style. The fact that the pope says something is not enough for the whole world to follow. Our challenge is to promote synodality, a change in the way the church operates. All of this takes time.

### **What is the difference between collegiality and synodality?**

In a technical sense, collegiality is for the bishops. The First Vatican Council emphasized the primacy of the pope, with the view that the bishops received their authority from the pope and have to approve what the pontiff decided. The church was conceived very hierarchical. The Second Vatican Council debated a lot this question of collegiality and concluded that the pope was not separate from the college of apostles and that power could be exercised together by the pope and the bishops. Synodality, in today's sense as emphasized by Pope Francis, who is calling for a synodal church, means that the whole people of God, who, by their baptism, are called to be actors, are to participate in discernment. Yes, the challenge is now to see pastors not separated from their people. Vatican II has made things move, has rediscovered the vision of Christians from the first centuries, when the governance of the church was synodal and collegial.

Synodality is a fruit of the Second Vatican Council, a kind of rediscovery of a way of seeing the church first as people of God, people journeying together as pilgrims. What is complicated in the present situation is that we are in a transition phase, with two ecclesiologies that are colliding. On one hand, we inherit from more than 1,500 years a hierarchical, clerical

church where the clerics are separated from the laity. On the other hand, we can imagine a synodal church as described by the Second Vatican Council but which has not yet been received and implemented.

The situation of the church in the world is very varied, very contrasted. It is necessary to look beyond one's own parish. Several currents and sensitivities coexist within the Catholic Church. A majority of laypeople, including women, aspire to see a synodal church, but there is also some resistance from others.

### **Will there be more laypeople invited to the next synod?**

We will see! Synods evolve from synod to synod. There are several synodal instances; the one of the bishops remains a synod of the bishops. What is new is the emphasis given today in the new apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, promulgated before the 2018 synod for young people. This text insists that the synod is not only the month-long meeting with the bishops, but a whole process: There is an important preparatory phase at the local level, and then, after the synod, implementing the decisions is also a decisive phase.

We hope that the preparation of the synod encourages the people of God to take part in preparatory meetings, to discuss, to listen. This really is what the text says and what the pope would like to encourage. Religious communities should be very involved in preparations of this synod. It is important to listen to women, to young people, to poor people who do not always have a say.

### **Is the implementation of a synodal church the great project of Pope Francis' pontificate?**

Yes, we can say that. Pope Francis was elected to advance the reform of the church. In a major speech to mark the 50th anniversary of synods, in October 2015, Pope Francis said, "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the church of the third millennium." The synod could help us turn a clerical church into a synodal church.

In this time of crisis within the church, with all sorts of abuses and challenges, it is necessary to involve the laity in this vision of the synodal church. I am convinced that the conversion of the church to the mission is a very important issue. We'll find a way out of this crisis only if laypeople are involved. If we want to implement the ecological conversion that *Laudato Si'* calls for and the fraternal world described in *Fratelli Tutti*, the church has to be synodal.

To me, the challenge is to work as a team. Nobody can solve a crisis alone. It is true that the church is structured with a hierarchical principle that means the priest takes the final responsibility after discussion with others. Of course, someone should be in charge, and often, it is the priest. But if the discussion has been serious and real, the opinion of the priest is not necessarily the one that will prevail.

### **In the book you wrote with four other Xavière sisters, you explain that the current COVID-19 crisis has made even more necessary a transformation of the church. How?**

The crisis that erupted in a world that was changing fast has increased our feeling of interdependence. We realize that in a situation that is constantly changing, with safety measures evolving all the time, we have to become a church in movement, a marching church, listening to the Holy Spirit to discern every day how we can accomplish our mission. Many members of the church would like to be part of the process of decision-making in the church. This is something young people and women, in particular, demand now. They feel their voice is not heard enough.

The word "synod" comes from a Greek expression and means "to be together on the road." A synodal church is a place where everyone — laypeople, clergy, religious men and women, and the bishop of Rome — walks together. The reform of the church is even more necessary because of the religious and sexual abuses that have been uncovered recently. The church must be a safe place for all. It has now to admit it is fragile and to change the way power is exercised in order to get back some credibility.

### **As a religious woman yourself, do you have a specific message for all the sisters in the world?**

Religious communities have to take their part in preparing the 2022 synod. For the first time, the International Union of Superiors General is named in the new constitution on the synod, *Episcopalis Communio*, as the actor for the consultation process through female religious orders. Everyone should be involved in this event and contribute to turn a clerical church into a synodal church.

**Interview by Elisabeth Auvoisin** a freelance journalist based in Paris

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/people/ministry/news/q-sr-nathalie-becquart-upcoming-synod-could-turn-clerical-church-synodal?fbclid=IwAR15J723-RsxJxlhEEG4Zq17UTan4BN56aHv-0-QyyXde1N5AApyUaLtDOs>

## BIDEN'S SPEECH OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE VISION FOR DEMOCRATS TO LOVE

The President, channelling his inner Elizabeth Warren, pitches an American utopia after a dystopian plague year.

**Susan B. Glasser** 29 April 2021

Candidate Joe Biden campaigned as the centrist exemplar of a return to pre-Trump normal, but President Joe Biden has moved swiftly to enlarge the scope of his ambitions far beyond the status quo ante. On Wednesday night, the ninety-ninth of his Presidency, Biden offered a striking vision of a country renewed by an activist government. Harkening back to the early-twentieth-century liberalism of his party forebears, Biden envisioned a new age of "once in a generation" federal investments in everything from child care to electric cars, while promising benefits as varied as free community college and an end to cancer. To anyone who remembered last year's Democratic primaries, the President's first address to a joint session of Congress sounded as if Elizabeth Warren, and not Biden, had won.

For just over an hour, Biden dazzled with the prospect of an American utopia — a stark contrast to the dystopian reality of our plague year just past. He spoke of "the largest jobs plan since World War II," universal preschool, of "meeting the climate crisis," and of the "chance to root out systemic racism that plagues America"; he called for gun control and immigration reform and cutting the prices on prescription drugs. He pushed for raising the minimum wage and equal pay for women and family and medical leave. Beyond a populist promise of higher taxes on wealthy corporations and people making more than four hundred thousand dollars a year, Biden did not mention the multi-trillion-dollar price tag that would come with his proposals. Nor did he talk about the remote chance of passage that so much of this agenda has on Capitol Hill, where, despite the general popularity of many of his proposals, gridlock prevails and the political reality is a fifty-fifty Senate. For the past four years, Donald Trump used his speeches to sell alternate realities to his supporters. Here, at last, was an alternate reality that Democrats could get behind.

In a response, Tim Scott, the Republican senator from South Carolina, called Biden's address nothing more than a "liberal wish list," a blunt summation about which it was hard to disagree. In many ways, there was a notable convergence in how Democrats and Republicans saw Biden's speech: as a breathtakingly ambitious set of proposals to use government as an instrument of social and economic transformation — an unabashed progressive platform unseen from a President in my lifetime. Republicans hated it; Democrats, for the most part, loved it. The Drudge Report christened him "Biden Hood," in honour of a program it summed up as "tax the rich, give to the poor." "We cannot stop until it's done," Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the leader of the Democratic Party's activist left wing in the House, enthused in a tweet. "Keep going." Few were entirely sure how Biden, who has long been seen as an avatar of genial Beltway centrism, had got to this place.

Part of the answer, of course, is the mess that Biden inherited, an interlocking set of crises unleashed or worsened during Trump's disastrous Presidency, from

the coronavirus pandemic and attendant economic damage to the attack by Trump and his supporters on the legitimacy of the election, which Biden called "the worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War." Another part of the answer is undoubtedly that Biden himself, after spending the better part of five decades in Washington, is a believer in the power and possibility of government to shape America for the better. Politically, Biden is best known as Uncle Joe, a humble son of Scranton who rode the Amtrak home to Delaware at night — but that overlooks perhaps a more relevant truth about the forty-sixth President, which is that he is fundamentally a creature of Washington: a senator for thirty-six years, and Vice-President and thus president of the Senate for eight years after that. "It's good to be back," he said, smiling broadly, as he opened his address on Wednesday night, in the building he knows so well. Congress is where he began his national political career, and now he has staked his Presidency on getting things done there, too.

Joe Biden is the sixth President whose tenure I have covered. All of them, until now, operated in the shadow of Ronald Reagan. Three of these Presidents—the two George Bushes and Trump — were Republicans, and each resorted, at various times, to Reagan's formula when speaking about the role of the federal government: as the problem, and most definitely not the solution to what ailed the country. Two were Democrats — Bill Clinton and Barack Obama — and while both often gave stirring perorations about the achievements of Democratic Presidents such as F.D.R. and L.B.J., they, too, were shadowed by Reagan's message when it came to outright embrace of big government, fearing to do so, politically, and often settling instead for incremental and more achievable change. Even the Obama health-care program that would ultimately bear his name represented a split-the-difference compromise between liberals, who wanted a single-payer national health-care system, and more cautious Democrats, who feared that was never going to be politically achievable without some interim steps.

Biden may yet close out his Presidency with a record that has more in common with Obama's or Clinton's than with Roosevelt's, but his early decisions suggest that he is starting out by making a fundamentally different set of choices. The result was the most avowedly liberal call to action I have ever heard a President make from that congressional podium. Unlike the long-time socialist Bernie Sanders, whom Biden beat in the Democratic primaries, he does not call himself a revolutionary. Unlike the self-styled populist Donald Trump, whom Biden beat in the general election, he does not call himself a disrupter. Were Congress to enact his proposals, Biden would end up as both.

Transformation, however, requires the passage of legislation, not just words. Washington is still Washington, as Biden knows better than anyone, and if

you don't have the votes you don't have the votes. Key Democrats as well as Republicans are sceptical of his costlier plans, and, so far, no G.O.P. votes have materialized for any of his major initiatives. At a hundred days, the politics are less transformed than Biden's rhetoric might suggest: in addition to the stubborn facts of a tied Senate and a House where the Democratic majority hangs on a handful of votes, the public remains as polarized and partisan toward this President as it was toward the last one. Biden's approval ratings, so far, are a straight-line inverse of those for Trump: about fifty-three per cent support Biden, which is just a percentage point or two higher than his share of the popular vote, last November. Biden's policies, however, are more popular: the \$1.9 trillion Covid-relief bill that was passed in the early days of his Administration has more than sixty-per-cent support, as does his over-all effort to fight the pandemic. Raising taxes on large corporations, as Biden proposes, is overwhelmingly popular, as are other ideas he offered in his address—making for a kind of poll-tested, policy-wonk populism that stands in contrast to the pitchforks-and-rage variant that Trump relentlessly peddled. Republican members of Congress may not like it, but Biden claims that bipartisan support from the public ought to count as bipartisanship, too.

It's early days yet, but this is where Biden's true genius as a politician may lie: he has turned his likability into a

**Susan B. Glasser is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, where she writes a weekly column on life in Washington.**

[https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-bidens-washington/bidens-speech-offers-an-alternate-reality-for-democrats-to-love-after-four-years-of-trumpian-fantasy?utm\\_source=nl&utm\\_brand=tny&utm\\_mailing=TNY\\_Daily\\_042921&utm\\_campaign=aud-dev&utm\\_medium=email&bxid=5ed0d2590aed9069ce740c0b&cndid=61253339&hasha=24ddda2474a488728d0b52fe155689f3&hashb=80bc33d031413e6b4c8fdf7829d0681b1423120a&hashc=3672bd64e4c7772761bf48c5ed223d774c6e49fa47440a5d1fc8804006f69960&esrc=growler-free-covid&mbid=CRMNYR012019&utm\\_term=TNY\\_Daily](https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-bidens-washington/bidens-speech-offers-an-alternate-reality-for-democrats-to-love-after-four-years-of-trumpian-fantasy?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TNY_Daily_042921&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_medium=email&bxid=5ed0d2590aed9069ce740c0b&cndid=61253339&hasha=24ddda2474a488728d0b52fe155689f3&hashb=80bc33d031413e6b4c8fdf7829d0681b1423120a&hashc=3672bd64e4c7772761bf48c5ed223d774c6e49fa47440a5d1fc8804006f69960&esrc=growler-free-covid&mbid=CRMNYR012019&utm_term=TNY_Daily)

## OBITUARY - FR JOHN KEARNS CP

**Paschal Somers** 22 April 2021: Fr John Kearns CP died peacefully in the company of loved ones in his home city of Birmingham on the evening of Wednesday, 14 April 2021, after a short spell of illness. He was 56 years old. Born in Birmingham, after completing his A levels, John worked for some years at the National Westminster Bank during which time he made good progress on the road to management in that career. However, it was then that he felt a call to religious life. Having been brought up attending the Abbey parish in Erdington it was natural that his initial enquiries in this regard should be directed to the Redemptorists who run that parish. Nevertheless, in response to an advert in a Catholic newspaper, John ended up paying a visit to Fr Timothy Cullen CP, the Passionist Vocation Director at that time, who was based at St Non's Retreat in Pembrokeshire. That encounter set him firmly on the road to becoming a Passionist.

He began his time of formation at Minsteracres where, on completion of his postulancy and novitiate, he made his first profession of vows on 13th September 1991. Between 1992 - 1995, John studied for a Bachelor of Divinity at Heythrop College, spending the first year at Cavendish Square before the College moved its location to Kensington Square. John lived with the Passionist community at St. Joseph's, Highgate, during his time of study. It was no surprise to his tutors and those who knew him that he gained a creditworthy degree and a host of friends along the way.

Having made his final profession of vows as a Passionist at Minsteracres on 14th September 1995 (Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross), John returned to Heythrop that Autumn to begin a year's study for a Masters in Ethics. John's first pastoral placement was at St Anne and Blessed Dominic's in Sutton, also the location of the shrine to Passionists Blessed Dominic Barberi, Venerable Ignatius Spencer and Venerable Elizabeth Prout. He was ordained to the priesthood there by Bishop William Kenney CP on 5th July 1997 and became assistant to Fr Mark White CP as well as working alongside Sister Brigid Murphy CP in the local prison and with Sister Eileen O' Riordan CP on the parish. When Fr Mark moved and the Passionist monastery was demolished, John became Parish Priest and lived with Frs Luke Magee CP and Richard Appleyard CP. John always had a yearning to work with the disadvantaged and found his niche as chaplain to young offenders, notably at Hindley Prison near Wigan, a role he was to enjoy for over twenty years and in which he excelled.

moderating asset, suggesting that an ideological agenda when offered by a relatively non-ideological salesman does not sound all that threatening. Which, come to think of it, is pretty Reaganesque. Much like the Democrats during Reagan's Presidency, Republicans today are struggling with how to attack a President who seems like such a nice guy. Just about everything else about American politics has changed in the four decades since then, however, including the brute realities of Congress. Understanding that, Biden appealed to his former colleagues not with transformational rhetoric but with the pragmatism of the Senate-committee chairman who he was for so many years. He said, "It's within our power to do it," and "We can do it," and "Let's get it done."

In reality, he probably will not get it done, at least not all of it, but is there anything all that wrong with another hour or so of political fantasy in Washington? At least this time it was not the Trumpian variant of grievance and division. Biden made no mention of culture wars or admiring references to brutal dictators; he did not gaslight the nation about "criminal illegal aliens" or interrupt his speech to give one of the country's highest honours to a man famous for disparaging "feminazis." On the eve of his hundredth day in office, Joe Biden never publicly uttered the name Donald Trump, but being the un-Trump means Biden has already accomplished the first and most important promise of his Presidency.

His commitment to the marginalised was also witnessed in his co-founding of Austin Smith House, Sparkhill, Birmingham where he lived for the last eight years with fellow Passionist Fr Martin Newell CP in a house of hospitality for destitute asylum seekers. John made real the Passionist charism of 'keeping alive the memory of Christ's Passion' by serving the crucified of today and by being a true example of servant leadership and, like Saint Paul of the Cross, founder of the Congregation of the Passion, John saw the name of Jesus written on the forehead of the poor.

At the Passionist Province Chapter in 2013, he was elected as Provincial and was coming to the end of his second term of office when illness struck. As a true Passionist he accepted his diagnosis with admirable equanimity, telling concerned family and friends that he was 'at peace' with his situation. John looked on his time of suffering as his small part in the Passion of Christ. His faith was based on the belief that the Passion of Jesus is the most overwhelming example of God's love for each one of us. We pray that John's family, confreres, and friends find consolation and reassurance in knowing that John is now enjoying the risen company of the Lord whom he loved so well and served so faithfully in the least of his sisters and brothers. May he rest in peace. <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/42043>

## OBITUARY - MICHAEL BOURDEAUX

**Xenia Dennen** 16 April 2021: Michael Bourdeaux, who has died aged 87, founded Keston College in Bromley, south-east London, in 1969 as a centre for the study and dissemination of reliable information about religion in communist countries. He described the college in his memoirs as "my concept", and poured into it his "energy and commitment over a period of 30 years". It was an organisation that rattled the Soviet authorities; indeed Oleg Gordievsky, the Soviet double agent who once worked for the KGB and escaped to the west in the boot of a car, claimed at a Keston AGM that it was No 2 in the hierarchy of KGB hates, the first being Amnesty International.

Why was Keston so disliked? It uncovered unpalatable facts about the true situation of religious believers behind the iron curtain, and it demolished the communist propaganda that there was freedom of conscience in its "brave new world". The fact that religion persisted undermined party teaching as propounded by leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev, whose 1961 party programme promised that communism would be achieved in 20 years and religion would fade away. In Britain, too, not everyone welcomed Keston: Lambeth Palace, Baptist leaders and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office all shunned it up to the mid-1980s and the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev, because it "rocked the boat" and undermined quiet diplomacy. Yet, while rejecting Soviet misinformation and doublespeak, Bourdeaux also refused to take up an anti-communist crusade: his approach was balanced, even-handed and based on facts.

Michael was born in Praze, Cornwall, the son of Lilian (nee Blair), a primary school teacher, and Richard Bourdeaux, a baker who, Michael claimed, produced the best Cornish pasties in the county. He studied French and German at Truro school and found he had a facility for languages. His lifelong interest in Russia and its history and culture began thanks to a sensible RAF group captain, who at the start of national service sent him to a Russian interpreters' course in Coulsdon, Surrey. Then it was off to St Edmund Hall, Oxford, and a degree in Russian, followed in 1959 by a year at Moscow University as part of the first student exchange programme organised by the British Council.

That year was an important milestone in Soviet history, when Khrushchev launched an intense anti-religious campaign, and Bourdeaux witnessed the closure of churches and discrimination against religious believers. The experience led him to make religion in the USSR the focus of his life. After studying theology at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, he was ordained an Anglican priest in 1961. In 1964, on a brief visit to Moscow, he met two babushki at a site where overnight a church had been blown up. He was taken to meet a group of Russian Orthodox believers who described what was happening to them, and asked him to "be our voice and speak for us". Five years later Keston was founded, with the help of Peter Reddaway and Leonard Schapiro, two LSE academics.

Bourdeaux was one of the few who foresaw the collapse of the communist system. In 1984 he was awarded the Templeton prize (at that time given by the Templeton Foundation for "progress in religion"), and in his speech at the Guildhall in London he formulated his conviction that a combination of religion and nationalism would bring down the Soviet system: "I see an empire in the process of decay because there's no binding loyalty which will keep it together." A year later Gorbachev was elected general secretary by the politburo and a period of reform began, which led in 1988 to a volte-face by the Communist party on its religious policy. This, to Bourdeaux, marked the end of communism.

That year he attended the celebrations of the millennium of the Russian Orthodox church, and recorded in his memoirs the evening he spent at the Bolshoi theatre, where a real set of bells had been mounted as though in a church tower: "A curtain rolled back to reveal the bells, which rang out in a peal of thunder. No one in the theatre, Christian or atheist, could have missed the symbolism: for years the authorities had banned the ringing of church bells, usually even removing them from their stays and throwing them to the ground. Surely this was a pledge of a new beginning for the church in society."

Bourdeaux remained committed to a belief in the simple necessity and power of truth. His championing, for example, of independent Russian Baptists who refused to collaborate with the Soviet government led to President Carter intervening

to secure the release of one of their leaders, Georgi Vins. He was instrumental in securing the release of Irina Ratushinskaya, a Christian poet, and Alexander Ogorodnikov, the founder of a Christian seminar in Moscow.

From Keston's inception, it studied the present and the past: high-quality, well-researched journalism as well as academic study of the past were the focus of its work. Its reporting earned the respect of the media – if information came from Keston it was trusted. At the same time, Bourdeaux understood the importance of an archive, of gathering primary sources, samizdat documents, articles from the official and unofficial press in communist countries, as well as photographs and even anti-religious posters. This collection, the Keston archive, is a treasure trove for scholars studying the religious history of the former communist bloc. Keston College found a home in the early 1970s in what had been the parish school of Keston Common. The village belonged to the diocese of Rochester, which in 1990 made Bourdeaux an honorary canon. In 1994 Keston Institute, as it became, moved to Oxford, and gained a sister organisation in the US when in 2007 Baylor University in Texas offered to establish a new Keston Centre for Religion, Politics and Society, and to house the Keston library and archive. This centre and Keston UK today work in tandem, promoting the study of religion in former communist countries.

In the briefing pack produced when he was awarded the Templeton prize, Bourdeaux was described as “a mild, soft-spoken, ruddy-cheeked baker's son from a remote mining region in south-west England”. He commented in his memoirs: “Well, at least the ‘baker's son’ was accurate.”

Michael Alan Bourdeaux, theologian, activist and writer, born 19 March 1934; died 29 March 2021  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/16/michael-bourdeaux-obituary>

## REFLECTION FOR EARTH HOUR: RIDERS ON EARTH TOGETHER, BROTHERS IN ETERNAL COLD

More than 50 years ago, the world's media displayed a photograph, nicknamed "Earthrise," which had just been taken from Apollo 8, the first satellite mission to orbit the moon <https://www.nasa.gov/image-feature/apollo-8-earthrise>. Following its publication, the American poet, Archibald MacLeish, wrote the article below (25 December 1968). Together with the photograph, people began to recognise our interdependence ...

Men's conception of themselves and of each other has always depended on their notion of the earth. When the earth was the World — all the world there was — and the stars were lights in Dante's heaven, and the ground beneath men's feet roofed Hell, they saw themselves as creatures at the centre of the universe, the sole, particular concern of God — and from that high place they ruled and killed and conquered as they pleased.

And when, centuries later, the earth was no longer the World but a small, wet spinning planet in the solar system of a minor star off at the edge of an inconsiderable galaxy in the immeasurable distances of space — when Dante's heaven had disappeared and there was no Hell (at least no Hell beneath the feet) — men began to see themselves not as God-directed actors at the centre of a noble drama, but as helpless victims of a senseless farce where all the rest were helpless victims also and millions could be killed in world-wide wars or in blasted cities or in concentration camps without a thought or reason but the reason — if we call it one — of force.

Now, in the last few hours, the notion may have changed again. For the first time in all of time men have seen it not as continents or oceans from the little distance of a hundred miles or two or three, but seen it from the depth of space; seen it whole and round and beautiful and small as even Dante — that "first imagination of Christendom" — had never dreamed of seeing it; as the Twentieth Century philosophers of absurdity and despair were incapable of guessing that it might be seen. And seeing it so, one question came to the minds of those who looked at it.

"Is it inhabited?" they said to each other and laughed — and then they did not laugh. What came to their minds a hundred thousand miles and more into space — "half way to the moon" they put it—what came to their minds was the life on that little, lonely, floating planet; that tiny raft in the enormous, empty night. "Is it inhabited?"

The medieval notion of the earth put man at the centre of everything. The nuclear notion of the earth put him nowhere — beyond the range of reason even — lost in absurdity and war. This latest notion may have other consequences. Formed as it was in the minds of heroic voyagers who were also men, it may remake our image of mankind. No longer that preposterous figure at the centre, no longer that degraded and degrading victim off at the margins of reality and blind with blood, man may at last become himself.

To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold — brothers who know now they are truly brothers.

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/national/science/nasa/122568sci-nasa-macleish.html>

Earth Hour 27 April [www.earthhour.org](http://www.earthhour.org)

## YOUNG PEOPLE DESERT CHURCH AFTER SAME-SEX RULING

Sarah Mac Donald 29 April 2021, *The Tablet*

As many as 700 mainly young people formally left the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Antwerp in the two weeks following the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's publication of its Responsum barring the blessing of same sex unions, Bishop of Antwerp Johan Bonny has revealed.

The bishop, interviewed by *The Tablet* Rome correspondent Christopher Lamb, spoke about the "dramatic" backlash among "mainly straight people" who saw the Vatican document as "a step too far" during a discussion about the Church's ministry to LGBT Catholics and same-sex couples.

In the webinar, hosted by *The Tablet*, he said that as many as 2,000 people had cancelled their baptismal registrations in the Flemish dioceses in Belgium, a traditionally strongly Catholic country. Criticising the lack of consultation with bishops and Vatican departments with responsibility for family life ahead of publication, Bishop Bonny, a theologian who worked in the Christian unity office in the Vatican, also hit out at the document's "theological weakness" and failure to reflect the developments in biblical theology, sacramental theology and moral theology. "It's as if it was written in the time of Pius XII," he said. But the practical cost of this, he underlined, was the loss to the faith of Church members. "It's not about principles or theories – it is about real people and that is my concern. That is our responsibility in front of God our Father," he said.

The CDF, as an important congregation in the Vatican, he said, should be "at the top of biblical and theological scholarship, and not behind an ordinary level of quality". He also noted the document's failure to take into account what the human sciences are saying about sexuality and developments in civil society, as many countries have legalised marriage or civil partnership for LGBT couples and this was now part of the experience of many catholic families.

Bishop Bonny, who attended the family synods in Rome and has called for the Church to offer blessings to same-sex couples, asked how the Church can move ahead on such delicate questions without synodal collegiality and regretted that "there was hardly anything of that around" the Responsum. "It's not in tune with *Amoris Laetitia* at all," he stated and added that the post-synodal apostolic exhortation emphasised looking to the positive elements and not condemning people before you talk to them. The three main verbs in *Amoris Laetitia* are, he said, to accompany, to integrate, and to discern.

He noted that the Responsum had quoted one paragraph in *Amoris Laetitia* from the Catechism of the Catholic Church which says there is no similarity between a marriage between a man and a woman and a homosexual marriage. "Already in the synod, it was said that this is not true. There are plenty of similarities. Nobody says it is the same, it is not the same. And there are indeed major differences. But to say that there are no possible similarities or analogies, not even the slightest, it's not true. So, it's repeating something that everybody knows is not true."

The Belgian prelate added: "What we propose here is not to extend sacramental marriage." He went on: "There are different ways of loving and taking care of one another and taking up your responsibility in the Church and in society. So not all should be the same, there are differences. But there are so many possibilities that are coming from the Scripture and from the tradition of the Church, to walk together with people, to bring it before God and to ask God's blessing on it."

Asked about Rome's concern that the blessing of same sex couples would be seen as affecting the Church's teaching on the sacrament of marriage, Bishop Bonny said, "We should avoid equalizing everything, as if it doesn't matter, as if all is the same. People know that not all is the same. But it is not a question of sacramental marriage or nothing." He suggested that there had to be more variety and graduality not only in consciousness but also in liturgical ways of expressing that, building towards the fullness of the sacraments.

American ethicist, Professor Lisa Cahill, who is J. Donald Monan Professor at Boston College and whose research has focused on family, sexuality and ethical issues said the Responsum "seemed like an irrelevant backlash and even regression, particularly in light of *Amoris Laetitia*, which says very strongly that even people in so-called irregular family situations are still vehicles of sanctifying grace". Noting that Responsum seemed a contradiction to *Amoris Laetitia*, she added, "It seemed like one last strike against a changing culture which certain elements would rather preserve in pre-Vatican II condition."

Theologian Sr Gemma Simmonds of the Margaret Beaufort Institute in Cambridge said she was both "baffled and disappointed" by the Responsum. "I was disappointed because it is so much in contradiction to what Pope Francis himself said, and his whole pastoral approach to the issue of same sex attraction. I looked in the document for some element of a pastoral understanding or for the Church's pastoral mission and I found none. I wondered what had happened to our



understanding that God is love. And anyone who lives in love, lives in God, and God lives in them. That seemed to be entirely absent from the document.”

The spiritual director and expert in pastoral formation also said she found “the whole understanding of what a blessing actually means, and what it conveys, to be extraordinarily narrow and beyond my understanding. Given that priests and bishops across the world have and continue to bless weapons, nuclear warheads, all sorts of things - who has the power to bless and what do we mean by the blessing of someone’s house... So, in the same way that I was disappointed by it, I was also baffled at what the theological purpose of this statement was.”

Asked about Jesuit Fr James Martin’s suggestion that the Catechism be reworded to replace the term “objectively disordered” to “differently ordered”, priest and theologian Fr James Alison, who has written widely on LGBT issues, said “differently ordered is fine”. “The question is, what are the moral consequences? If you say people are differently ordered, in that case, then their acts would be good or bad according to circumstances, rather than intrinsically bad. And I think that means conceding effectively what the CDF has denied since 1975, which is that the same sex orientation is a positive thing. They have chosen to define it rigorously as a negative thing, in order to preserve the intrinsic evil of the act.” Of the need for a shift in moral theology by the CDF, Fr Allison stated, “Yes – a simple recognition that the existence of sexual orientation would be a great start.”

On the CDF’s 1975 ‘*Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*’, Professor Lisa Cahill noted that the Vatican dicastery did distinguish between orientation and acts and said that the orientation is not sinful. “But on a larger issue of changing the terminology of moral theology, I don’t disagree with [James] Martin’s term ‘differently ordered’ but I think it’s a mistake to keep trying to work out the reality of same sex couples or gay and lesbian people within this older terminology that is so concerned about tying everyone down into very careful definitions, so we know exactly where to put everyone and how to set boundaries around them. I see *Amoris Laetitia* as doing something really different.”

For Bishop Bonny, he said he would like the Church to be like a family in which everyone is brought together. Likening his role within that family to a grandfather, he said, “For me, as a bishop, I do not say I agree with everything, or that I find it nice, but they are mine and I should be there for them. And it’s my responsibility to make them feel part of that family that is the Church, not only by welcoming them in a passive way, but also by giving them a responsibility in an active way to make them together co-responsible for what is happening in the Church.”

“Are there ways to do it more or less in a liturgical way - there are; and we have to work carefully on that. But to be able to work on that we first have to be open to discussing it, not ignore it – not put it away.” The Bishop of Antwerp also said the Church’s catechism can change. “It was written 30 years ago and there are areas, like the one we are discussing, in which society, culture, moral theology developed fast and radically in the last 20-30 years. The Catechism is not of divine right, it can be changed by the Pope. Pope Benedict changed some paragraphs in the Catechism.”

“The Catechism can change just like canon law. A number of canons of canon law were changed. Think of the question of sexual abuse. Canon law has been changed according to what we now need to clean up that dirty question. The Catechism is a book that is open to historicity and progress. I think there are paragraphs, which in a collegial way, could be changed for the best of the Church and for the best of our pastoral work we have to do.”

Sr Gemma Simmons also noted that in the Catechism itself, when talking about the fact that many people are born with a developing understanding of themselves as same sex attracted, says it’s a mystery. “Even the Catechism acknowledges that we human beings are a mystery to ourselves and we don’t understand everything about ourselves and our understanding of human anthropology is unfolding. Therefore, it seems to me that any pastoral approach worth its name, has to have within it that unfolding pastoral understanding of the fact that we shift and we move and we grow, and as time and knowledge in various areas, both scientific and theological, develops, we find a new language, we find a new way of being able to understand the mystery that we are to ourselves.”

Noting that in *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis talks about the need to develop a culture of encounter, Sr Simmons asked, “Where that sense of a need for a culture of encounter is present in the Responsum because it seems to me, what it’s representing is precisely a culture of refusal to encounter a human reality, our human mystery. And when we encounter the other in that mystery, we need to be open to the truth of how they see and understand themselves.”

Responding to Bishop Bonny’s revelation of the loss of hundreds of young people to the Church over the Responsum, the Congregation of Jesus Sister said, “We are losing people in the Church. We are bleeding women who were walking away, we are bleeding young people, and we are bleeding older people who find that the reality in which they live no longer finds a response within the church of acceptance and blessing.” She said the biggest pastoral question is “how do we help people to grow in grace? How do we help each other, all of us as sinners, to grow in grace? We don’t do that by slamming the door in one another’s face.”

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/14098/young-people-desert-church-after-same-sex-ruling>

## DOCUMENTARY ABOUT FR JAMES MARTIN'S LGBT MINISTRY SELECTED FOR TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

**Michael J. O'Loughlin** 20 April 2021: A Martin Scorsese-produced documentary about James Martin, S.J., and his ministry to L.G.B.T. Catholics has been selected to be part of the Tribeca Film Festival in June, the organization announced Tuesday. The documentary, *'Building a Bridge,'* is based on Father Martin's 2018 book of the same name. "The film follows Father Martin and the lives he has impacted, including a grieving Pulse mother, a family with three queer siblings, and a college student trying to reconcile his gay and Catholic identities," reads a statement from the documentary's creators. Father Martin is an editor-at-large of America.

"Tribeca Film Festival is the perfect place for us to premiere this documentary," Evan Mascagni and Shannon Post, the film's directors and producers, said in a statement. "We are so proud of this film and grateful for the opportunity to show it amongst so many talented filmmakers, especially at the first major U.S. festival to be held in person this year and during Pride month."

Father Martin said he was moved to write his book following the 2016 shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, which left 49 people dead. He has urged church leaders to be more welcoming, emphasizing aspects of Catholic teaching that call for treating L.G.B.T. people with "respect, compassion and sensitivity." Some Catholic leaders have criticized Father Martin's ministry, challenging him to be more clear about the church's teaching that condemns homosexuality. The film also features Michael Voris, the founder of the website Church Militant, which regularly publishes articles and videos denouncing Father Martin and his ministry.

In 2018, Father Martin spoke at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin, a global conference hosted by the Vatican's family and laity office, about how parishes could welcome L.G.B.T. Catholics. The following year, he was received at a private audience by Pope Francis.

In a statement about the documentary, Father Martin said he hopes the film will prompt Catholics to reflect on how to create a more inclusive church. "I was so happy to learn that *'Building a Bridge'* had been accepted by the Tribeca Film Festival, since it will help more people see the kinds of outreach that the Catholic Church is doing with L.G.B.T. people," Father Martin said. "I'm especially grateful to Martin Scorsese, the executive producer; and Evan Mascagni and Shannon Post, the directors; for making such a sensitive documentary with so many different voices. I pray that church leaders will see what is possible with this kind of pastoral ministry, and that L.G.B.T. people feel more welcome in what is, after all, their church too."

The Tribeca Film Festival, founded in 2002 to spur economic activity in New York following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre, will run June 9-20.

[https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2021/04/20/building-bridge-documentary-film-james-martin-lgbt-catholic-priest-tribeca?pnspid=jOU8rfVGBI2NmI0\\_rsXThV2qcJNkd7al89WxfOds&utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=9050](https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2021/04/20/building-bridge-documentary-film-james-martin-lgbt-catholic-priest-tribeca?pnspid=jOU8rfVGBI2NmI0_rsXThV2qcJNkd7al89WxfOds&utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=9050)

## CHRISTIANS AWARE RELEASES NEW BOOK: 'IT'S THE JOURNEY'

**Barbara Butler** 3 May 2021: *'It's the Journey'* is a new book written by Timothy Biles, a retired priest of Salisbury Anglican Diocese. It is a wonderful collection of stories from his travels for many years all over the world. The stories are uplifting, depressing, surprising and true. The book is divided into sections: Culture clashes, Victims and heroes, That's war, God of a hundred faces, Journey's joys. There are coloured photographs throughout and it is attractive, interesting and thought-provoking.

In this book he reflects on his experiences of life in lands dominated by the Muslims of Pakistan, the Hindus of India, the Buddhists of Sri Lanka and the Jews of Israel-Palestine. He finds heroes and victims from all the faiths as wars and turbulence drive people to support each other in the search for safety and a life worth living.

Barbara Butler is the Executive Secretary of Christians Aware.

*'It's the Journey'* - £14 + £4 p&p from Christians Aware, 2 Saxby Street, Leicester LE2 0ND or you can order by emailing the author: [timbiles35@gmail.com](mailto:timbiles35@gmail.com) <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/42117>

In Luxor, Egypt, Tim tells of a visit to a home where his host was rich because he had water and animals. He offers incredible insights into refugee camps and their mostly dignified and very brave inhabitants. Throughout his book Tim introduces readers to remarkable people including Archbishop Elias Chakour, Brother Andrew of the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf, and Father Bede Griffiths.

"Whilst it is true that the meaning is in the journey not the destination, Tim Biles has been to some fascinating places. He has collected his reflections on a series of vivid encounters and made them into good stories. What I like most of all is the way in which he opens the experience to us and does not try to resolve the puzzles, dilemmas and contradictions he encountered. He enjoys life and loves people. In seeking meaning, his own beliefs and values become clear but he leaves us with work to do."

## THY KINGDOM COME 2021

Thy Kingdom Come is an ecumenical prayer movement for evangelisation, uniting Christians in nearly 90% of countries worldwide from the Ascension to Pentecost. On 9 March 2021, their team hosted a virtual launch event <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A00k78VubMw> to unveil plans for this year's Thy Kingdom Come, taking place from 13-23 May.

Acknowledging that Britain is approaching the early stages of a phased return to socialising, after what has been an extremely challenging year, the aim is for Thy Kingdom Come to be a blessing and to serve the Church where the need is greatest; by providing free, spiritually nourishing resources for all, to deepen and refresh their faith. Now in its sixth year, Thy Kingdom Come has grown from an initial call to prayer from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to the Anglican Communion, to a worldwide ecumenical prayer movement uniting Christians from across 65 different denominations and traditions.

New resources for 2021 will include an 11-part children's video series called Cheeky Pandas packed with Bible stories, prayers, animation, worship songs and interviews with special guests including CTE Pentecostal President Pastor Agu Irukwu and his wife Shola (Jesus House), adventurer Bear Grylls, CBeebies presenter Gemma Hunt and Revd Nicky Gumbel (HTB and Alpha), to name a few. The video series (available from early April onwards) can be used as part of church at home, gathered church (online and offline) and in school assemblies. Similar to last year, the series will be the main content in the Family Prayer Adventure Map and App. <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/cheekypandas>

For youth, Thy Kingdom Come are working with the Archbishop of York's Youth Trust to produce a selection of youth resources including a series of video reflections from young influential Christians such as the current Methodist Youth President Phoebe Parkin, rapper and author Guvna B, Worship Leader Elle Limebear, Spoken Word Artist Joshua Luke Smith and many more.

Other new resources include a Novena and the Prayer Journal, written by the Archbishop of York to inspire readers to re-encounter the love and joy found in Jesus Christ. <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/resources/new-2021>

The award-winning Thy Kingdom Come app, available in nine languages, will for the first time, include audio content from 24/7 Prayer's Lectio 365, with audio reflections from Pete Greig, Archbishop Justin and 24/7 Prayer GB UK Director, Carla Harding. <https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/apps/thy-kingdom-come>

Explore the Thy Kingdom Come 2021 website for more details on this year's plans.

[https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/604813/Home/News/Latest\\_news/Thy\\_Kingdom\\_Come.aspx](https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/604813/Home/News/Latest_news/Thy_Kingdom_Come.aspx)

<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

## DIARY DATES

### MAY

#### 10-16 Christian Aid Week Virtual events:

- **Quizian Aid** 7pm Saturday 8 May. A fun-filled online quiz has returned from last year, suitable for all the family. It'll be hosted by some special guests, who will be announced soon.
- **Song of the Prophets** Join us on Tuesday 18 May to witness the debut performance of a new orchestral work *Song of the Prophets: A Requiem for the Climate*. There will be an address from Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, and a panel discussion with climate campaigners. Christian Aid has collaborated with Chine ke! Orchestra - Europe's first majority-BME orchestra - and St Paul's Institute, on this new piece of music based on Christian Aid's climate change work. **Further details:** [www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week/virtual-events](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week/virtual-events)

**12-14 Sitting Among the Ashes:** An Online conference on spiritual accompaniment. Led by Andii Bowsher and Paul Bodenham. Email [andii.bowsher@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:andii.bowsher@northumbria.ac.uk) to register.

**13 1pm Raise your voice in faith for climate justice:** How you can influence COP26 and your nation's climate change commitments. Christian Aid Webinar. <https://bit.ly/3sdFb5s>

**13-23 Thy Kingdom Come** ecumenical prayer movement for evangelisation, uniting Christians in nearly 90% of countries worldwide from the Ascension to Pentecost.

[https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/604813/Home/News/Latest\\_news/Thy\\_Kingdom\\_Come.aspx](https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/604813/Home/News/Latest_news/Thy_Kingdom_Come.aspx)

**15 11am – noon. Why should we support The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill – Q&A.** Christian Climate Action [https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZldeCuqjoqE9G8bVqo9C69MmmaS40wtqYx?fbclid=IwAR3Q24l\\_6zwxPjTojt0Z7iyjkyLzLEVlyFUuCeEJctkVnH46xpLlqw107qY](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZldeCuqjoqE9G8bVqo9C69MmmaS40wtqYx?fbclid=IwAR3Q24l_6zwxPjTojt0Z7iyjkyLzLEVlyFUuCeEJctkVnH46xpLlqw107qY)

**15 International Conscientious Objectors Day** <https://www.ppu.org.uk/international-conscientious-objectors-day>

**15-21 PILGRIMAGE FOR PEACE – PAX CHRISTI FUNDRAISER.** Make your own Pilgrimage for Peace. Walk, cycle, run, dance, pray... whether as an individual, a group, a school, or a family. Set yourself a challenge, get sponsored for it, and raise funds to support Pax Christi's vital work for peace. Or donate to support one of the planned events listed on the Go Fund Me page. See some exciting ideas here, find out more and register: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/register-you-interest/>

**16-24 Laudato Si' week**

## 23 Pentecost Sunday

**25-26 Balfour Project online afternoon conference: Israel/Palestine: in search of the rule of law.** Exploring the distance between international law – which Britain has pledged to uphold – and the lived reality in the occupied Palestinian Territory. Speakers include Dominic Grieve, Baroness Hale of Richmond and Philippe Sands plus panel discussion with Jack Straw, MPs Wayne David, Layla Moran, Joanna Cherry and Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, moderated by Lord Alderdice. The Balfour Project works for Peace, Justice and Equal Rights in Israel/Palestine, acknowledging Britain’s historic role and current responsibilities. Details and registration: <https://balfourproject.org/rule-of-law>

## JUNE

**1-30 30 Days Wild** Do something outdoors each day <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/30-days-wild-2021-sign-your-pack>

**5-13 Churchyards** are often treasure troves of biodiversity. As part of **Caring for God’s Acre’s “Love Your Burial Ground week”** the Church of England is asking churches to use the week as a springboard to start recording the wildlife within their churchyards. Churches Count on Nature - Could your church get involved? Encourage your local wildlife group.

**14-20 Refugee Week** <https://refugeeweek.org.uk/theme-of-refugee-week-2021-we-cannot-walk-alone/>

**24-25 ‘Life on the Breadline’ End of Project Conference**

Conference Programme: <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/events/end-of-project-conference/>

Register here: <https://coventry.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/life-on-the-breadline-end-of-project-conference-reg>

**CAFOD ONLINE TALKS – check events here:** <https://cafod.org.uk/Volunteer/Online-talks>

**NJPN continues to have a weekly column in *The Universe***, and some of these are uploaded onto our website at [www.justice-and-peace.org.uk](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk)

- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News [www.indcatholicnews.com](http://www.indcatholicnews.com) an invaluable free resources for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.

- Sign up for regular news and information from NJPN including **a new fortnightly e-bulletin with a comprehensive round-up of current events, campaigns, e-petitions and resources** (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues for NJPN North West) at [www.justice-and-peace.org.uk](http://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk) or contact [ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org](mailto:ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org) or [admin@justice-and-peace.org](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org) 020 7901 4864

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