

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

DEADLY RIVALRY IN PURSUIT OF AN ISLAMIC STATE

Ruth Peacock 26 August 2021: The Islamic State group ISIS-K has claimed responsibility for the attacks on Kabul airport which left 60 Afghans and twelve American servicemen dead. 140 people were injured. The explosions were detonated at a gate where US personnel were reviewing papers for the thousands of people trying to get into the airfield for a flight out of the country, and at a nearby hotel staging point for evacuations. ISIS-K and the Taliban share the goal of creating an Islamic state but they are rivals in pursuit of their aim. The deadline for foreign troops to get out of Afghanistan is Tuesday 31 August, but thousands of Afghans with relevant papers and foreign nationals are stuck in Kabul and still waiting to leave. American and British troops are continuing the evacuation process.

Response to the plight of Afghan refugees:

Bishops call on the government to create safe passage

Four bishops are pleading with the government to create safe passage so that Afghan people can find sanctuary without resorting to dangerous journeys. In a letter to the Guardian, Roman Catholic Bishop Paul McAleenan and three CofE bishops – Durham, Southwark and Bradwell – say the nation’s response should be led by pain and need, not restricted to quotas.

Bishop of Chelmsford in vanguard of support

Hours before the devastating attack at Kabul airport, the Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, described the situation in Afghanistan as catastrophic: “the human cost in lives devastated seems too much to comprehend”. She goes on to say that the diocese stands ready to care for refugees in East London and Essex and its Refugee Engagement Team is ready to support parishes in welcoming and supporting Afghan refugees over the coming months and years.

UK overwhelming response to Afghan resettlement

Care4Calais, a charity working with refugees in the UK, France and Belgium, is receiving donations for essential supplies for Afghans being housed in the UK. Bags of clothes and boxes of household goods are being sorted out by volunteers at collection points across the UK, and in Manchester the local storage facilities are full. Airbnb has worked with resettlement agencies to offer free temporary accommodation for 20,000 Afghan refugees fleeing the crisis. It says the response from hosts has been “overwhelming”

Valuing the dignity of refugees in the UK

As the UK prepares to resettle 20,000 Afghans, people working with existing refugees and asylum seekers are emphasising their dignity. Hagir Ahmed, the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Officer for the United Nations Association, based in London, says: “The narrative about refugees I would like to change is that they are sub-human and just looking to take advantage of the benefits system. Many are educated professionals and talented hard-working people, driven out of their countries due to war, natural disasters and persecution, often lucky to escape with their lives.” Aware of depression and mental health issues as refugees rebuild their lives, she is backing the London interfaith fun run this bank holiday Monday, organised by The Faith and Belief Forum and Maccabi GB, believing faith and belief can support friendship and community regardless of difference and division.

Religious origin of the Taliban

The Religion News Service carries an explainer from The Conversation on the religious origin of the Taliban, written by two academics, Sumit Ganguly and Soheli Rana. They explain it is rooted in Deobandi Islam, which emerged in India 10 years after an uprising against the rule of the British East India Company. They say that the Taliban insists on adherence to Sunni Islamic law, or sharia, as the path of salvation. It wants the revival of practices from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and upholds the notion of global jihad as a sacred duty. **Full article here:** <https://religionnews.com/2021/08/26/talibans-religious-ideology-deobandi-islam-has-roots-in-colonial-india/>

Source: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/religion-news-27-august-2021/>

A PRAYER FOR AFGHANISTAN

For those who are fleeing: sanctuary

For those who are staying: safety

For those who are fighting: peace

For those whose hearts are breaking: comfort

For those who see no future: hope

WHAT WAS ALL THAT BIDEN BASHING ABOUT?

Professor Ian Linden 27 August 2021

President Biden has taken a lot of stick over Afghanistan, some of it justified. From Tony Blair to the Tory back-benches, in Parliament and on the BBC, we have been treated to days of passionate denunciation of American withdrawal - announced, of course, long before the current rush to blame. A miasma of unreality and theatricality rose from all the understandable political emotion and anguish.

It is as if in Clausewitz's account of the nature of war, his mixture of emotion, chance and rational calculation, the rational can simply be ignored. "War is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will", Clausewitz wrote - to balance his war as 'politics by another means'. The Taliban applied his lesson successfully. From Trump to Biden, as a consequence of chains of policies, decisions, and mission-creep, and as a result of a successful insurgency against a corrupt government and foreign invaders, the US was finally forced to submit to the Taliban's will, negotiating and implementing its own exit from Afghanistan. It is not Biden's decision that will determine the outcome for thousands of fleeing Afghans seeking but the Taliban's.

According to Aristotle, a dramatic tragedy needs to obey the three unities of place, time and action. Reacting to the retreat into Kabul airport, the flights and chaos of the last week in and around it, we find political leaders playing their parts in such a tragedy.

The G7, calling for the USA to extend the withdrawal time to allow more Afghans to escape, pitted NATO members against an American President, a President who rationally calculated that this course of action would escalate into a disastrous fire-fight with the Taliban lobbing mortars into the airport and fierce ground assaults on US forces trying to hold a perimeter (as Daniel Johnson indicates *The Article* 25/08). It is and was a tragic dilemma. But it was Biden who behaved like a rational statesman and refused.

It is perfectly understandable that denial and raw emotion prompted the positions taken up by MPs who had served in Afghanistan and played military roles in the tragedy. But it is not obvious why so many others took the opportunity to scapegoat Biden. Did they seriously think that more troops flown into Kabul airport would have kept it open for flights without it becoming a modern Alamo? Did they advocate a position they knew would be untenable to put pressure on the Taliban? Were they just 'virtue signalling', or in the case of Britain just trying to 'punch above its weight'? And doesn't the appalling ISIS terrorist atrocity at Kabul airport suggest at least one area of common concern between NATO and the Taliban that will require cooperation?

Perhaps the Biden-bashing sprang from deeper causes than his misjudging the resolve to fight of the Afghan National Army who in many instances fled the Taliban without firing a shot, or even his failure to foresee the corrupt government would collapse like the proverbial house of cards. Given the lack of clear and up-to-date intelligence from rural areas, a hasty withdrawal was inevitable. The CIA can claim to have presented the Commander in Chief with sudden collapse as one of several possible scenarios depending on the amount of American force available on the ground and in the air. But in a matter of a week or two abandoning a vast armoury of US military equipment?

Apart from Canada, all the loudly lamenting G7 members have at some point passed through a significant period of imperial ambition, and some have experienced imperial grandeur. Their dream of defying the victorious Taliban seems a post-imperial fantasy. Perhaps these Prime Ministers and Presidents still believe in some inviolable right to order the world and export Western values, and couldn't recognise their own hubris and its consequences. Or perhaps we were watching a - deflected - fear of a US isolationism that long preceded Biden.

It is not as if US isolationism versus intervention was a new issue. Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff then US Secretary of State, and Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defence, along with Tony Blair and his chief of staff in the UK, Jonathan Powell, had debated the issue before 9/11 including drawing up criteria such interventions must meet. Tony Blair's wide-ranging 24 April 1999 speech in Chicago after the atrocities in Kosovo - justifying intervention and bombing - was a significant contribution. There was also the UN World Summit in 2005 on 'The Responsibility to Protect' that defined circumstances that required international intervention, looking back on the failure of any world power to intervene in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Blair, in a recent speech opposing American withdrawal called Biden's use of the slogan 'forever wars' as 'imbecilic'. But didn't Biden's decision to leave by 31 August comply with the very criteria for military action which Blair had proposed in his Chicago speech? In Chicago he had said "Third, on the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake?" Breaking the agreement to leave by the end of the month concluded with the Taliban would have been neither sensible nor prudent. It could not have succeeded without massive military re-engagement and loss of life.

The aura of unreality surrounding this widespread denunciation of Biden, the assumption that America has only to say the word and the date of the exit could be changed, may spring from elsewhere: delayed recognition that US isolationism is here to stay, or fear that the USA was changing its strategic priorities, turning its back on Europe to concentrate on China. Nothing new here. Blair's Chicago speech ended: "I say to you: never fall again for the doctrine of isolationism. The world cannot afford it. Stay a country, outward-looking, with the vision and imagination that is your nature. And realise that in Britain you have a friend and an ally that will stand with you, work with you, fashion with you the design of a future built on peace and prosperity for all, which is the only dream that makes humanity worth preserving". There was surely some element of fear this was a fading dream lurking behind the attacks on Biden for his failure to consult with his allies.

Some clear and specific reassurances from the American President, if not some apology and explanation for the lack of consultation with his NATO allies, are long overdue. We must now respond to the consequences of the change in US priorities. But like COVID we are going to have to live with the Taliban More tragically, so are the Afghan people.

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

Source: <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/42919>

See also: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/nemesis-why-the-west-was-doomed-to-lose-in-afghanistan-911-taliban>

Pax Christi member Heather Kiernan writes: With the West's withdrawal from Afganistan dominating the news I wanted to post an extract from an article "*The Failure of War*" by Wendell Berry published in the Winter 2002 issue of 'YES!'

Berry writes: "If you know even as little history as I do, it is hard not to doubt the efficacy of modern war as a solution to any problem except that of retribution—the "justice" of exchanging one damage for another.

Apologists for war will insist that war answers the problem of national self-defence. But the doubter, in reply, will ask to what extent the cost even of a successful war of national defence—in life, money, material, foods, health, and (inevitably) freedom—may amount to a national defeat. National defence through war always involves some degree of national defeat. This paradox has been with us from the very beginning of our republic. Militarization in defence of freedom reduces the freedom of the defenders. There is a fundamental inconsistency between war and freedom.

In a modern war, fought with modern weapons and on the modern scale, neither side can limit to "the enemy" the damage that it does. These wars damage the world. We know enough by now to know that you cannot damage a part of the world without damaging all of it. Modern war has not only made it impossible to kill "combatants" without killing "non-combatants," it has made it impossible to damage your enemy without damaging yourself.

That many have considered the increasing unacceptability of modern warfare is shown by the language of the propaganda surrounding it. Modern wars have characteristically been fought to end war; they have been fought in the name of peace. Our most terrible weapons have been made, ostensibly, to preserve and assure the peace of the world. "All we want is peace," we say as we increase relentlessly our capacity to make war.

Yet at the end of a century in which we have fought two wars to end war and several more to prevent war and preserve peace, and in which scientific and technological progress has made war ever more terrible and less controllable, we still, by policy, give no consideration to nonviolent means of national defence. We do indeed make much of diplomacy and diplomatic relations, but by diplomacy we mean invariably ultimatums for peace backed by the threat of war. It is always understood that we stand ready to kill those with whom we are "peacefully negotiating."

Our century of war, militarism, and political terror has produced great—and successful—advocates of true peace, among whom Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., are the paramount examples. The considerable success that they achieved testifies to the presence, in the midst of violence, of an authentic and powerful desire for peace and, more important, of the proven will to make the necessary sacrifices. But so far as our government is concerned, these men and their great and authenticating accomplishments might as well never have existed. To achieve peace by peaceable means is not yet our goal. We cling to the hopeless paradox of making peace by making war...

Recent American wars, having been both "foreign" and "limited," have been fought under the assumption that little or no personal sacrifice is required. In "foreign" wars, we do not directly experience the damage that we inflict upon the enemy. We hear and see this damage reported in the news, but we are not affected. These limited, "foreign" wars require that

some of our young people should be killed or crippled, and that some families should grieve, but these “casualties” are so widely distributed among our population as hardly to be noticed.

Here is the other question that I have been leading toward, one that the predicament of modern warfare forces upon us: How many deaths of other people’s children by bombing or starvation are we willing to accept in order that we may be free, affluent, and (supposedly) at peace? To that question I answer: None. Please, no children. Don’t kill any children for my benefit.

If that is your answer too, then you must know that we have not come to rest, far from it. For surely we must feel ourselves swarmed about with more questions that are urgent, personal, and intimidating. But perhaps also we feel ourselves beginning to be free, facing at last in our own selves the greatest challenge ever laid before us, the most comprehensive vision of human progress, the best advice, and the least obeyed: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

SADIQ KHAN TELLS ORGANISERS OF LONDON ARMS FAIR TO CANCEL EVENT AND NOT COME BACK

Jon Stone Policy Correspondent *The Independent*: Sadiq Khan has told the organisers of an arms fair due to take place in London from 14-17 September to “reconsider” their event and not come back to the city. In letters seen by *The Independent*, the mayor said the fair’s presence in London was insulting to people who had escaped violence and made London their home, and that it threatened investment in the city’s Docklands, as well as costing too much to police. He argued that the capital was “home to many people who have fled conflict and suffered as a consequence” of weapons “like those exhibited at DSEI”. “For it to be used as a marketplace for those who wish to trade in weapons to some countries that contribute to human rights abuses goes completely against our values.”

DSEI, which stands for Defence and Security Equipment International, sees 1,600 exhibitors, selling weapons from sniper rifles and tanks to combat aircraft and warships, presenting to more than 30,000 attendees. The arms fair extends invitations to governments and militaries around the world, including many that are involved in conflict or that openly abuse human rights. Around two-thirds of countries classified as “not free” because of their human rights records received weapons licensed by the UK government over the past decade, according to research by Campaign Against Arms Trade – with DSEI representing a major marketing opportunity.

In his letters to the organisers the mayor cited the cost of policing the event, which in 2019 – in light of “significant opposition” to its presence – cost over £2.5m and involved 5,609 police officers. “I strongly urge you to reconsider this year’s event and any plans you have to host future events in the city,” he said in a letter to Grant Burgham, the event’s director. Mr Khan announced last year that he was relocating City Hall to the part of Docklands where, coincidentally, the event takes place, in order to save cash. But in his letter he said that he was “becoming increasingly concerned” about the impact the arms fair might have on securing investment and change in the area

In a letter responding to Mr Khan, Mr Burgham said: “The event serves only the interests of the legitimate defence and security industry, which is the most highly and tightly regulated in the world. “Teams from HMRC, BEIS [the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy], DIT-ECJU [the part of the Department for International Trade that deals with export control] and the other government agencies responsible for enforcing the law at DSEI are on site during setup and throughout the exhibition. We will be welcoming ministers from the UK government, as well as MPs from across parliament, who will meet British companies and underscore the important role that the defence and security sector plays. International official defence delegations are also invited to attend by the Department for International Trade, providing delegates with the opportunity to see equipment, much of it British-made, up close.” He said the organisers “respect the right to lawful protest”.

Kirsten Bayes, a spokesperson for Campaign Against Arms Trade, which campaigns against DSEI, said: “The mayor is absolutely right that this arms fair should not be taking place in September. He is also right to point out that so many people fleeing conflicts globally have made their home in east London, where the fair is due to take place: it will have a huge impact practically and emotionally on local people.

“Our view is that holding arms fairs anywhere is wrong: the industry makes its profits through creating death and disaster around the world. Local communities have stood up against these fairs wherever they have been held across the country, whether that is Liverpool or Glasgow, Bristol or Birmingham. Our country needs to say no to the trade in dreadful weapons, stand up for peace and human rights, and put an end to these arms fairs.”

The mayor’s written intervention goes beyond his previous criticism, in which he made his opposition in principle clear. As mayor he has little power to prevent the event from taking place.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/london-arms-fair-dsei-sadiq-khan-b1909875.html>
<https://www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/> <https://caat.org.uk>

THE WOMEN WHO ARE TURNING THE CHURCH UPSIDE DOWN

Ever since his election to the Chair of St Peter, Pope Francis has been calling for a synodal Church. But his plea has often fallen on deaf ears and most bishops' conferences have been slow to respond. However, one small group of Catholic women has enthusiastically seized the idea / By **Joanna Moorhead**, *The Tablet*

Everyone wants their lifetime to leave the world at least a tiny bit changed, and for the better; and it is possible that a piece I wrote for *The Tablet* in January 2020 could yield me my footnote. I wrote the piece in a pretty exasperated mood, fed up with the fact that Pope Francis says all the right things about women, and yet has done next to nothing to put our talents to use in leadership roles in the Church.

Catholicism, I argued, has its back to the wall and desperately needs to emancipate its women. In a world where women are at least legally entitled to parity at all levels (they may not always have it in practice, but that is another issue), where democracy is widely held up as the best form of rule and where girls are raised with every expectation that they can aspire to anything their male classmates can aspire to, it makes no sense to exclude them from a more equal role in the way the Catholic Church is run.

What was needed, I argued, was a synod. "A synod that, instead of ending with women [as the Vatican synods on young people and the Amazon both did], starts with them. And focuses on them. A synod that ends with not just the right sort of words but with a proper commitment to make change, inside the Church, centre stage."

A few weeks later, at a meeting of the pressure group, Catholic Women's Ordination, historian Penelope Middelboe was keeping her head down. "I was lying low, because I've been working for change for so many years and I'd begun to think nothing is ever going to happen," she says. "But then, someone mentioned your piece. And then one of our group, Mary Ring, said: 'We should do something about this. We should try to make it happen.' They started asking for volunteers, and I thought, you know what? I'm going to give it one more go."

Middelboe joined Ring; and a third campaigner, Pamela Perry, also put her hand up. Since then, the three women have been working tirelessly – through lockdown, on Zoom, meeting in person – to plan a lay-led, women-centred synod which will take place on 5-12 September, in Bristol and online. The vision has expanded to include other issues as well as the women question; and the original three are certainly no longer on their own. More than 900 others have signed up to be involved with the organisation they have founded, Root & Branch. Equally excitingly, they have teamed up with similar lay-led organisations in other parts of the world, and the Bristol synod will include contributions from like-minded Catholics in the United States, Australia, India, France and Austria, among others.

The Bristol synod, explains Ring, is taking its lead from Pope Francis, who has promoted the idea of synodality throughout his papacy, and who has intimated that he would encourage those who want to see change in the Church to take up the challenge, and make it happen. "The problem for Francis is that he's trapped, because the Church doesn't have a listening mechanism," says Ring. "It has a teaching mechanism and it knows how to tell us what we should believe, but it doesn't have the structures to allow lively debate amongst the people, and to take those forward."

It is not only the Pope, says Ring: priests, bishops and other clerical leaders are stuck in the same quandary; many are convinced that opening up dialogue with laypeople and giving them more traction in the way decisions are made about the Church's future is the only way forward in the twenty-first century.

"We've had a bishop or two, and many priests, get in touch with us and say privately that they're very interested to see what happens in Bristol," says Ring. "One problem is that there's a terrible fear amongst many ordained clerics about supporting an initiative like ours publicly. We'd love to have one brave bishop there in the hall in Bristol – not wearing his robes, much better to have him there in his jeans, sitting amongst us as one of us, and listening to what's being said."

One of the most forceful voices at the Bristol synod will be that of Mary McAleese, who for many represents the lay leader the Catholic Church desperately needs. Like many other campaigners for change, McAleese, who studied for a doctorate in canon law at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University after 14 years as president of Ireland, is critical of the official top-down synodal process that will begin in October, when dioceses across the world have been asked to consult with laypeople in the run-up to the next Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2023.

As reported in *The Tablet* last week, the vision of the bishops of England and Wales for the synodal process reserves discernment around what topics should be taken forward from the parish level to the global synod to the bishops alone. While all members of the Church have the right to speak, they also have "the obligation to allow those charged with the work of discernment the freedom to do so".

This means, Ring says, that the bishops' voice can "trump" that of the layperson. In other words, Rome's idea of synodality falls at the first hurdle, in that it gives laypeople because it's bishops, not laypeople, who decide what issues and points of view go forward.

McAleese is characteristically straight - forward in her summation of this process: it will, she says, give laypeople a nominal or at best negligible role. Bishops will make all the important decisions – just as they have done for hundreds of years. “It’s the twenty-first century, but the Catholic Church is still in the Middle Ages when it comes to democracy in its own processes,” she says. “The Church champions democracy in other contexts, but it’s still operating as an imperial power, in a world where the imperial system has broken down: it’s drained of all validity, and by sticking with it, the Church is running out of juice.”

In speaking out as he has done on synodality, and in seeming to encourage freedom of speech and a more equal decision-making within the Church, the Pope, according to McAleese, has “opened a Pandora’s box” that he isn’t going to be able to close. Synods in Germany and Ireland where laypeople have had an equal or leading voice alongside clerics have alarmed Francis, McAleese believes; he saw a “synod on synodality” as a way of mopping up the enthusiasm his words had sparked, but which he realised too late would be dangerous for Rome’s authority.

“Francis is a populist, and after his election in 2013 there was a mood for something to happen, and he quickly started talking about synodality. In other Churches, like the Church of England, synodality means all the faithful speaking together – and indeed in the Early Church that’s how decisions were made,” says McAleese. But Francis hadn’t got a proper plan – “he’s undisciplined, he’s not a strategist” – even though his words tapped into a zeitgeist in the Catholic West that felt its pressing concerns, such as the inequality of women, homophobia in the Church and forbidding divorced people to remarry, were not being properly addressed by the powers that be in Rome and in bishops’ conferences.

“The horse has bolted, and he can’t stop it now,” says McAleese. “In Germany, in Ireland, and now in Bristol, laypeople are taking matters into their own hands – this is a wakeup call for the hierarchy. But they’re not good at listening: they hear our voices as shrill, not as loving critics. They tend to respond in a martyred tone, or with a deaf ear. But if they don’t hear us now, the Church is in danger of becoming a largely irrelevant cult.”

What chance is there, though, of success for the women at the heart of Root & Branch, given that there is no requirement for Rome or the hierarchy to share power? Another speaker at the Bristol synod is American author James Carroll, formerly a priest, who has argued that the priesthood must be dismantled to “return the Church to the people”. He says he takes his sustenance from the events that led to the end of the Cold War in the 1980s. “All the experts said a violent cataclysm was inevitable, but along came a grass-roots movement that ignited people to demand change, and change happened. What the Church needs now is a Mikhail Gorbachev figure who will work out a humane way to end a corrupt, authoritarian system that’s in a state of internal collapse.”

Penelope Middelboe, Mary Ring and Pamela Perry hope that their eight-day “Inclusive Synod”, which starts with evening online events and culminates in weekend sessions that are open to both in-person and virtual participants, will open a new pathway for laypeople in the Church. Their event will culminate with “The Bristol text”, which will cover issues such as diversity, moral theology, the role of women and the role of authority in the Church. They hope to take their findings to Rome. No one who has met the women behind Root & Branch will have any doubts: these hopeful, committed individuals will make their voices heard. And if you’re a bishop reading this, I’d be so bold as to say, it’s very much in the interests of the Church that you listen to what they say.

Full information on the Inclusive Synod including how to book can be found at: <https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org>

UPDATE: Sr Myra Poole, SND, a lifetime campaigner for women’s ordination, will open the inclusive Synod. We are honoured that Mary McAleese will give our keynote speech on Canon Law, the Church and Human Rights legislation.

She will be joined by an impressive range of thinkers and leaders. These include the noted art historian Ally Kateusz; award-winning writer James Carroll; Catholic theologian, priest and author James Alison; campaigner for church reform Miriam Duignan; activist, writer and theologian Virginia Saldanha; and leading lay woman in the Church of England Christina Rees; educationalist, psychologist and feminist theologian Martha Heizer; barrister and broadcaster Helena Kennedy QC, and renowned theologian Ursula King. Other exciting speakers to be announced.

After dialogue with the hierarchy, religious, theologians, activists and yourselves, the inclusive Synod will agree four statements and the actions arising from them to take us forward. For more information about our journey towards the Synod or to register your interest visit: <https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org>

Cardinal Vincent Nichols has sent the following message to Root & Branch: "I assure you of my prayers for the success of your meeting, and I look forward to receiving its document when completed".

Root & Branch commented: “thanks to Cardinal Nichols for his gracious and kindly blessing. We will be very glad to share the Bristol Text with him. Thank you also to all bishops and priests who have wished us well as we endeavour to “walk together” and listen to each other. And to all parishes and deaneries who’ve been carrying R&B in their newsletters.

A RADICAL SHIFT AWAY FROM A CHURCH WITH INFLEXIBLE LAWS

Jon Rosebank 30 August 2021

With the culmination of the Root and Branch Inclusive Synod in Bristol less than a month away, Sept. 5-12, there are early indications that the so-called "Bristol Text" will be both deeply reflective and challenging to the current bishops' position.

The text will include brief, accessible statements on liturgical ministry, diversity, moral theology, and authority, backed by papers giving it historical and theological depth.

Four international teams of distinguished theologians, jurists and thinkers, both lay and religious, have been meeting to consider the results of the synod's year-long "journey of discernment."

Sources close to the process suggest that the Bristol Text will propose a radical shift away from a church that enshrines its teaching in inflexible laws, towards one that guides and enables the people of God to reflect for itself.

Rather than maintaining the laity in a state of spiritual and moral infancy, the text will advocate a church that educates and assists all the people of God to grow in spiritual maturity, able to resolve moral issues in the light of their own prayerful and informed experience, following the example of Christ.

If these suggestions prove accurate, the Bristol Text will encourage a new relationship between clergy and laity. The importance of such a text would be that it could be put into action straightaway. It would immediately liberate ordinary parishioners from fearful subservience to bishops and parish clergy and at once support direct lay action and education.

Above all, such a text would offer the church a resolution to its most pressing current conundrum: how to make its teaching useful in widely differing periods and contexts.

Instead of sclerotic inflexibility and the resulting casuistry, that can discover a loophole for a lapsed prime minister but not a practicing parishioner to remarry, the church will have the opportunity to guide and advise thoughtfully in the light of the love of Christ.

Contradictory responses

The church would no longer have to ban loving same-sex relationships in country A simply because it would be misunderstood in the entirely different circumstances of country B. The days would be over when the church finds itself shockingly obliged for (recent) historical reasons to rule that it is more serious a sin to ordain a woman than sexually to abuse a child.

Insiders within the Root and Branch synod suggest that private approaches to a number of English bishops and Vatican figures have produced contradictory responses.

On the one hand, certain of the bishops have expressed their private support but also the "fear" that prevents them speaking out.

On the other, several bishops have made it in practice impossible for information about the synod to reach the parishes. It has left ordinary parish clergy to make uninformed decisions about whether or not the synod falls within the teachings of the church. Meanwhile, every one of the bishops who has replied to their invitation to the synod's culminating weekend has said that he is "on holiday" during that particular week in September.

If the Bristol Text turns out to be as radical as early indications suggest, the bishops might reflect that it would have been better to have participated in the process rather than try to keep it at arms' length. However, vulnerable bishops, parish priests and Catholic theologians may be to censorship, the voices of prominent individuals associated with the synod, such as ex-president of Ireland Mary McAleese, Dame Helena Kennedy, and best-selling American author James Carroll, will not be so easily silenced.

It will make the apparently narrow agenda of the bishops' own synodal consultation of the laity all too starkly clear.

[Jon Rosebank was an accredited Methodist lay preacher before becoming a Catholic. For a number of years, he wrote homilies for the American Catholic homily magazine Good News. A former fellow of New College, Oxford and BBC executive producer, his book Partisan Politics, Looking for Consensus in 18th Century Towns, was recently published by the University of Exeter Press.]

https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/radical-shift-away-church-inflexible-laws?fbclid=IwAR3U8oRA13NqHDhggTGnLU74ydGmBH_JDzUEDPIjQkGSBfQIT-GAWn6h8GQ

A PARADIGM-SHIFTING LECTIONARY FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH

Christine Schenk 24 August 2021

Reviewing the Rev. Wil Gafney's new *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church* (Church Publishing) has filled me with gratitude and delight. This long-awaited resource is a rare combination of impeccable scholarship and pastoral usability. A Hebrew and rabbinic scholar and professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School, Gafney also happens to be an Episcopal priest who preaches regularly.

In the introduction to the new Lectionary she asks, "What does it look like to tell the Good News through the stories of women who are often on the margins of scripture and often set up to represent bad news? How would a lectionary centering women's stories, chosen with womanist and feminist commitments in mind, frame the presentation of the scriptures for proclamation and teaching?" Her questions led to two years of intensive labour developing Year A and Year W of the new Lectionary with Years B and C still to come. Year W is a composite single year lectionary for denominations that do not use a three-year cycle of lectionary readings.

Why is a women's lectionary needed? Gafney counts the ways. Citing statistics from the Pew Research Centre she notes that of the nearly 2.3 billion Christians in the world, about 1.4 billion engage Scripture from denominations that regularly use lectionary texts. An estimated 60% of U.S. Christians attend churches that regularly use lectionaries.

Because of the androcentric nature of biblical texts there are only an estimated 205 named female characters compared to an estimated 1,181 named men. But androcentrism is more than numbers. In a recent *Women Erased* presentation for Future Church, Gafney pointed out that because of male authorship, "Even when a woman is present, her story is serving a male story. If it's focused on her, the larger arc is still a male story." Given these realities — and the fact that the lectionary is a catechetical (teaching) text — it is unsurprising that in her introduction Gafney writes "not many of my students or parishioners can name even 10 women in the biblical canon."

Since lectionary committees — guided in part by the Scriptures themselves — have selected predominantly male-oriented texts, people rarely learn about biblical women on Sunday — or any other time for that matter.

For Gafney, "Androcentrism, sexism, and misogyny in the scriptures, in their translation, and in their preaching and liturgical use, hurts men and boys and nonbinary children and adults as much as it does women and girls." Exclusively male God language reinforces the idea that men image God and women do not. Most women and girls have never experienced their gender as being associated with the divine. Yet for those who have had that experience, writes Gafney, "it has been profoundly moving, rare, and even sometimes profoundly disturbing."

Centering the stories of biblical women and girls — whether named or unnamed — in a lectionary requires no small amount of scientific creativity. Text selection was second only to translation as Gafney's most time-consuming task. To this end, she prioritized passages in which women and girls were explicitly present while also selecting texts in which they were present but "obscured in plurals and other groupings, e.g., 'children,' 'Israelites,' 'people,' 'believers,' etc."

To establish a "female canon within the broader canons of scripture," Gafney used Accordance Bible Software to identify passages containing "explicit language for female persons." She also designed a second search to capture singular and plural constructions for feminine terms such as mother, daughter, sister, wife, mistress, etc. While the results were "not necessarily exhaustive" she found them "more than sufficient for the task."

A consummate Hebrew linguist, Gafney translated all of her own texts. She is well acquainted with Hebrew words and grammatical constructions connoting the female gender. To construct the new lectionary she matched themes from each of the liturgical seasons with texts from her newly created female canon. She then searched for "readings that shared thematic language or specific words that related to the liturgical season and first lesson" ("reading" in the Catholic context). Search results were saved according to location — Hebrew Bible (including the seven deuterocanonical books)*, Psalms, New Testament — which facilitated the selection of appropriate texts for each week's readings and psalms. She also used specific passages from the Psalms, Gospel or Epistles that came to mind.

Gafney's lectionary translations are accompanied by "text notes" that identify the original language and translation choices and "preaching prompts" that suggest ways to connect the biblical text to the experiences of contemporary believers. The new lectionary always uses a female pronoun for the Holy Spirit. In her text notes for Pentecost, Gafney writes that in the Hebrew Bible, the Spirit of God (*ruah*) is grammatically feminine, a fact that has been obscured because "translators have historically avoided grammatical constructions that would require a pronoun for the Spirit in the First [Old] Testament." In the Septuagint (the first Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the Christian Scriptures, the Greek word for "spirit" is neuter (*pneuma*). The upshot, writes Gafney, is that "In the breadth of the scriptures the spirit is anything and everything but masculine." This changed when Jerome translated the Bible into Latin.

Gafney continues: "The deliberate choice to render the spirit in masculine terms in Latin texts such as the Vulgate reflects theological commitments apart from the grammar of the texts. If we were to hear Jesus speak John 14:17 in Aramaic, we would most likely hear: 'This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees her nor knows her. You know her, because she abides with you, and she will be in you.'"

To help women and girls "encounter God in explicitly feminine language," Gafney used mainly feminine pronouns for God in the Psalms as well as occasional nonbinary pronouns. Here is an example:

... you who seek God let your hearts flourish.

For the FAITHFUL GOD hears the needy,

And those who belong to her and are imprisoned,

She does not despise.

Let the heavens and earth praise her.

The seas and everything that moves in them. (Psalm 69:32-34)

Following the practice of respected earlier translators, Gafney uses descriptive titles for God rather than the artificially constructed "LORD" (with large and small caps) used in mainstream translations to denote the untranslatable holy name, YHWH. She eschews this "common male human slave holding title," choosing instead to "preserve the ancient biblical and rabbinical practice of substituting something that can be said for that which cannot." Thus, diverse, biblically rooted titles for God recur throughout the Lectionary. Here is a small sampling: ONE WHO IS, SOVEREIGN, WISDOM, HOLY ONE OF OLD, CREATOR, GOD WHO HEARS, SHE WHO IS HOLY, WOMB OF CREATION and YOU WHO ARE.

Gender-expansive translations are another Gafney innovation in which named collections of people in the scriptures—"Israelites," "children," "people" — are expanded to include their gendered subgroups. For example, "Israelites" is translated to "the women, children, and men of Israel." She also commonly includes the matriarchs in genealogies, for example Abraham [and Sarah], Isaac [and Rebecca], Jacob [and Rachel]. Gafney's selections and translations avoid anti-Semitism using "Judeans" rather than the pejorative "the Jews" and she carefully modulates "dark/black" negative language to become "shadow" and "bleak/ness." Slave/slavery language is maintained, "rather than weaken or minimize" this horrific historical reality with the word "servant."

In developing her project, Gafney involved 63 "conversation partners" from 14 English-speaking denominations around the world. None were Catholic. This is sad but unsurprising given the Catholic hierarchy's well-publicised ban on female liturgical leadership. She also sought feedback from Protestant clergy, seminarians and lay leaders with a range of gender identities. This widespread consultation aided text and translation choices as well as Gafney's many practical suggestions. The latter are specifically designed to help ordinary congregations engage the Scriptures in new and personal ways even as they become more biblically literate.

Some practical suggestions for Protestant denominations include using the full lectionary for a three-year cycle or replacing a year in the three-year cycle currently in use. Practical suggestions for both Catholic and Protestant groups include using the lectionary for Bible study, as a resource in the theological classroom, and for personal prayer and devotional reading. All are encouraged to access the list of biblically rooted divine names for God to enrich theological language in liturgy and corporate or personal prayer.

Gafney dedicated her new lectionary "For those who have searched for themselves in the scriptures and did not find themselves in the masculine pronouns."

As one who often cannot find herself in the masculine pronouns of today's liturgical offerings, I am profoundly grateful for this beautiful, scholarly rendition of texts I have loved since childhood even if I didn't always see myself in them. As I — and many women and men like me — mature in contemporary consciousness, too many lectionary selections no longer adequately convey God's dynamic, eternally relevant Word. Instead they risk becoming a painful countersign to the Holy One in whose image all of us are made. I have written elsewhere about possible solutions to these pressing concerns within the Catholic context.

Of one thing I feel quite certain: Gafney's paradigm-shifting scholarship will influence biblical preaching and teaching for generations to come. It is time for Catholic liturgical leaders to follow her lead.

- St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk, an NCR [National Catholic Reporter – a US publication – Ed.] board member, served urban families for 18 years as a nurse midwife before co-founding FutureChurch, where she served for 23 years. Her book *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity* (Fortress, 2017) was awarded first place in History by the Catholic Press Association. She holds master's degrees in nursing and theology.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/simply-spirit/paradigm-shifting-lectionary-whole-church>

SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

A two-year 'synodal' process is taking place in the Catholic Church from October 2021 that culminates in the final Synod Gathering of Bishops in Rome in October 2023. The overall theme is "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission". It's an invitation for us, as Catholics, to 'walk together' and every member of the Church has the right to speak, and the obligation to allow those charged with the work of discernment the freedom to do so.

For the first time, the Synod Office in Rome has produced a comprehensive process which encompasses the stated aim of the Holy Father that the Church in today's world should have a vision of missionary communion orientated to evangelisation.

The process begins in the Particular (or Local) Church and then moves to the level of the Bishops' Conference. From there, discernment takes place in the Regional Area – for England and Wales, it would be steered by the European Council of Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) – before moving to the Universal Church with the final Synod Gathering of Bishops in 2023, *sub et cum Petro*.

Read more on the Bishops' Conference Synodal Process page. <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/bishops-conference-synodal-process/#:~:text=%20Bishops%E2%80%99%20Conference%20%E2%80%93%20Synodal%20Process%20%201,Life%20%E2%80%93%20who...%205%20Footnotes.%20%20More%20> You can also download a printable PDF of this information.

Timeline

The Synod, which presents itself as a real "synodal time", will be opened by Pope Francis on **9-10 October 2021** and subsequently in the individual dioceses by the respective bishops, on 17 October.

The synodal journey will then be marked by three phases:

Diocesan Phase (Local)

October 2021 – April 2022

During which each individual faithful can participate in the diocesan consultation. This phase will end locally with a pre-synodal assembly: the culminating moment of diocesan discernment.

National Phase

A period of discernment will begin for bishops gathered in an assembly (Episcopal Conference). They will listen to what the Spirit has inspired in the churches entrusted to them. A 'synthesis' will be drafted and in due course sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops along with the contributions of each of the local churches (before April 2022).

Continental Phase

September 2022 – March 2023

Which will have the task of discussing the text of the first *Instrumentum Laboris*.

Synod of Bishops (Rome)

October 2023

Finally, the synodal journey will culminate with the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission".

Bishops' Conference – Synodal Process

As we journey together towards the Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in 2023 that examines the synodal church in the 21st century, here we offer some useful information prepared by the Bishops' Conference on the process. The title of the 2023 Synod of Bishops is *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. For the first time, the Synod Office in Rome has produced a comprehensive process which encompasses the stated aim of the Holy Father that the Church in today's world should have a vision of missionary communion orientated to evangelisation.¹ The process begins in the Particular (or Local) Church and then moves to the level of the Bishops' Conference. From there, discernment takes place in the Regional Area – for England and Wales, it would be steered by the European Council of Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) – before moving to the Universal Church with the final Synod Gathering of Bishops in 2023, *sub et cum Petro*.

ORIGINS

The process reflects the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. In this Council Document, the universality of the People of God is affirmed (LG§12) and by their anointing in the Holy Spirit, the universal body is "incapable of being at fault in belief." A presupposition for this important statement is a formation of the people in a lived experience of faith, foreshadowed in the Old Testament especially in the Exodus, from which the life of the Gospel is lived by those united to Christ in his new covenant (LG§9).

The sacrament of Baptism offers entry into the life of faith and love. The Eucharistic liturgy is the pre-eminent place that the Christian community gathers to celebrate this faith and love. So, the People of God celebrate this life of faith and love in the context of the Scriptures and the Eucharist. Thereby their faith in the Word of God and in the Tradition of the Church, through the Scriptures and the teaching office of the Church, is affirmed and nurtured. Faith is nourished through the hearing of the Word and the sharing of the Body of the Lord. Through these actions, the members of the Church enter into communion with him and all each other.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BISHOP

From this universal people, the bishops are chosen and consecrated and have an attention to the whole flock but, in particular, to the Church to which they have been appointed (LG§23). Their ministry is one of “pastors, masters of teaching, priests of sacred worship, ministers of government.” Theirs is the charism of discernment as they are the “authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses to the faith of the whole Church.”²

Therefore, the bishops have a key role in listening to the people of God in their particular Church, and under the power of the Holy Spirit, to hear and discern what is being said of that Church. “In virtue of this catholicity, each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the entire church, so the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to achieve fullness in unity.” (LG §13). Each local Church is a fundamental part of the Universal Church, so what happens in each local Church contributes to the whole. It is the first link in the communion of faith shared with the other churches and cemented in the unity of the local Church around the bishop. The diversity of the local Churches and their context brings different gifts to the whole, which contribute to it. This is key to understanding this synodal pathway.

ALL–MANY–ONE

The synod process is one of “journeying together” towards Christ – the Way, the Truth and the Life – who calls his people into a unity of purpose and mutual listening between people and pastors.

This journeying arrives at the Synod of Bishops gathering itself, which is presided over by the Bishop of Rome, who is called to speak as “pastor and teacher of all Christians” as the supreme witness to the *fides totius Ecclesiae*.³

The bishops are linked to the Bishop of Rome through the bond of episcopal communion and at the same time, are subject to him as head of the College of Bishops. The process therefore can be considered as an exercise of listening all-many-one; that is, the voice of the people of God in the particular church (all), must be heard, listened to and discerned by their bishops as the authentic pastors (many), who then gather with the Successor of Peter (one) who acts as a point of unity for the Universal Church.

The ultimate discernment is for the Pope who will offer a Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation based on what is presented to him throughout the process of mutual listening, in which the fruits of this discernment are published in a manner that reflects the life of the Church as always changing within its own context in the world, yet ever faithful to that which it has received.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This is an important phase in the life of the Church. In addition, we have answered some Frequently Asked Questions on the Synodal Process. <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/bishops-conference-synodal-process-q-and-a/>
Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas 19 July 2021

Footnotes

¹ This is echoed in *Evangelii Gaudium* §23

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#.E2%80%82A Church which goes forth

² Address of His Holiness Pope Francis “Celebration Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops” 17 October 2015 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

³ *ibid*

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/bishops-conference-synodal-process/>

EDUCATION SUNDAY 2021

Education Sunday is marked this year on 12 September – just after the new academic year starts. The theme for 2021 is ‘A word in season’, taken from Isaiah 50:4.

Churches Together in England (CTE) rightly describes teaching and studying as “demanding and privileged callings” and Education Sunday gives us the opportunity to give thanks to God for all who teach and all who study, for all who continually have to find the right words and deliver them with enthusiasm and graciousness. This is all the more poignant as we attempt to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers, pupils and leaders in our schools have suffered 18 months of disruption and uncertainty. For the second year in a row, GCSE and A Level students have been Centre Assessed or Teacher Assessed – a challenging situation for both teachers and pupils.

On 12 September, we pray that God will fortify those working to make our schools places of learning and sanctuary – not just teachers and leaders but all the support staff whose tireless work sometimes goes unnoticed. We pray for all our primary and secondary pupils – particularly school leavers who have had such a difficult journey in recent times – not to mention students in higher education and vocational training. https://www.cbcew.org.uk/education-sunday-2021/?utm_source=Newsletter+130821&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_campaign=Newsletter+130821&utm_id=Newsletter+130821

CHANGES IN LANCASTER DIOCESE

Maggie McSherry will be retiring from her post of Faith & Justice Administrative Assistant after 18 years. Her compassion, drive and commitment to her role has been invaluable and she will be greatly missed. We wish her joy in the next stage of her journey and extend a massive thank you for all her hard work.

Sue Grubic has been appointed to a new role of Faith & Justice Worker and Coordinator with the primary aim of promoting Catholic Social Teaching throughout the institutions of the diocese including parishes, schools and chaplaincies. Lancaster Diocese hopes to join with Marian Thompson's excellent quarterly publication *MouthPeace* which currently serves the dioceses of Shrewsbury and Liverpool. Sue's email address is ldfjsue@gmail.com

CAFOD OFFICE IN PRESTON TO CLOSE

Dear friends, we write today with some news. It is with heavy hearts that we tell you it has been decided that we close the CAFOD Volunteer Centre at St Walburge's Centre in Preston from July 2021. Our work will continue in the diocese, the focus will be on being out and about, visiting parishes and meeting volunteers where they are, once opening up has eased somewhat. In some ways our physical base is not important. It is all about the essence of our mission; to work alongside the world's poorest people. As CAFOD, we look forward to continuing to work alongside you as parish and school communities across the Diocese of Lancaster.

The CAFOD office in Lancaster Diocese was opened in Preston by Bishop John Brewer in April 1998. It has been a big part of the journey of CAFOD in the diocese and in many ways we are sad to leave it. However, the physical building is much less important than the vision and culture of CAFOD, dedicated to the principle of creating a culture of encounter in all our work, that you embody in your generous support and prayer.

In the coming months and years this support will be all the more important as we work with the most vulnerable to rebuild after the pandemic and work to counter the effects of climate change.

We will continue to work alongside you, based at home and travelling around the diocese, to support the work of CAFOD overseas and here at home. During the pandemic CAFOD has offered much more online to enable parishes and schools to pray, to engage, and to stay connected. As we open up more, these offerings will continue and we will find new ways of talking to each other.

Emma Nolan 07769 931373 enolan@cafod.org.uk **Patrick Gardner** 07920 565 454 pgardner@cafod.org.uk

Email: lancaster@cafod.org.uk

Address for all donations: CAFOD Head Office, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JB

Thank you for your ongoing support and prayers for CAFOD's work.

With our very best wishes and prayers,

Emma and Patrick

Advance notice of September dates

This Harvest Family Fast Day (Friday 1 October), we are focusing on the climate crisis. As Pope Francis tells us, "Both the global catastrophes, COVID and climate change, prove that we do not have time to wait. Time urges us, and as COVID-19 demonstrated, we do have the tools to face the loss. We have the instruments. This is the moment to act. We are at the edge".

At CAFOD we see again and again how years of development work are swept away overnight by extreme weather. The climate emergency is here and now for so many communities we support. The world's poorest people have done the least to cause global warming, but are being hit hardest by its impact.

Your generosity throughout these strange times has made a genuine positive difference in the lives of the communities CAFOD supports on your behalf. Thank you for everything you have done during this last year to raise money or awareness for our work. We are incredibly grateful.

We know that parishes have been struggling financially and there is anxiety about the future. Coronavirus is a crisis that affects us all and the long-term effects of the virus on the lives of those in poor communities will be devastating. As a result of the pandemic, 150 million people are set to fall into extreme poverty and an additional 130 million people will be left hungry.

There is much we can do to help, and we need you more than ever! This Harvest appeal, let us bring our parish communities together to help the poorest and most vulnerable people. In the Amazon rainforest, our local experts are working with communities to replant and restore damaged forest so that they can stay and sustain their home.

CAFOD Harvest Family Fast Day envelopes are due to be distributed at Masses on 25th/26th September and returned at Masses on 2nd/3rd October. We will also be promoting online giving again this Fast Day.

REFLECTIONS

Fr. Denis Carter has prepared reflections on Columban mission, adapted from the experiences of Columban Missionaries on assignments around the world. There is one reflection for each week of August but these can still be used in September.

Week 1: Losing weight

"But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are." Philippians 2:7

I recall the words of a neighbour a few weeks after I arrived in Condevilla, a barrio on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. I had recently moved in to live with a family and was trying to relate as friend and neighbour as well as resident priest. He said to me in the course of the conversation: "Padre, you are a man of weight in this barrio". He was referring, of course, to the presumed cultural superiority and economic clout that my North American identity gave to me. I had to spend the next two years or so "losing weight".

By emptying himself of his being God, Christ commits himself to a radical way of mission relationship. His self-emptying was the doorway to mission. As a result, he could do mission with empty hands. He could relate to people as brother, servant, pastor, prophet. With empty hands, aware of our vulnerabilities, frailties and fears, we too reach out in mission
Frank Regan (Peru, Britain)

Reflect: *How important is it to embark on mission with humility?*

Week 2: Exploiting the poor

"Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate." Proverbs 22:22

What if you had been born in Africa on the Ivory Coast, or in Ghana? What if you had been born in some other country of the South? What gives us the right, because of historical accident, to take for ourselves all the wealth of the earth and pollute it and destroy it at a level which is not sustainable? We have no right to do that. So, I think we need to keep pushing the powerful Group of Eight (G8) world leaders to actually do something about it. Not next year, not when all the conditions they impose on poor countries are fulfilled, but now.

If we, the dominant 20 percent only take for ourselves the vast majority of the goodness of the earth, and at the same time pollute at a level of 40 times more than what anyone else does in the Third World, then what sort of a society do we have?
Brian Gore (Philippines, Australia)

Reflect: *What obligations do we have to the poor from our standpoint as citizens of one of the world's rich and powerful countries?*

Week 3: Learning humility

"Pay attention to this, foolish and senseless people who have eyes and see not, who have ears and hear not." Jeremiah 5:21

The Asian tsunami of December 2004 must teach us humility with respect to the natural world and

indigenous peoples. We tend to think that modern human society has the technological capacity to dominate nature and solve any environmental problem, but this is not the case. In fact, the disaster demonstrated that humans lack the sensitivity of other living species. In Thailand, a handful of tourists had elephants to thank for their lives. The animals felt the earthquake and sensed the tsunami coming, their keepers said. They began to trumpet inconsolably and turned to move inland.

Indigenous peoples too had sufficient affinity with the natural world to know that something was wrong. The Onge tribal people of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, for example, largely escaped the waves. They fled to high ground when they noticed the sea level receding in an unusual way. According to Survival International, their awareness of the ocean has been accumulated over 60,000 years of inhabiting the islands.
Ellen Teague (Nigeria, Britain)

Reflect: *Why has mainstream human society grown away from an affinity with God's creation?*

Week 4: Interfaith by radio

"He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their region. And he did this so that they might seek the deity and, by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him; and indeed he is not far from any of us." Acts 17:26-27

When Pope John Paul II invited leaders of different Faiths to pray with him in Assisi in January 2002, it was arguably the high point of his long Pontificate. His extraordinary initiative showed respect for other religions and recognised that God relates with people in many different ways. About the same time in Pakistan, and no doubt elsewhere, people of goodwill sought greater acceptance of religious differences through interfaith meetings.

We should not need a 9/11 or the more recent tragic events of 7/7 to shock us into seeking harmony with other religions. But such meetings at least bring some good out of the violence. Dialogue between religious leaders is important as they explore differences and, more importantly, points of unity. But we must not forget ordinary people. Where I work, in Pakistan, we use radio to reach illiterate people, especially in remote villages, who are most at the mercy of fanatics.
Colm Murphy (Korea, Belgium, Pakistan)

Reflect: *What can we learn from this scriptural quote?*

<https://columbans.co.uk/reflection/7811/reflections-on-mission-for-august/>

RIPPLES OF HOPE FESTIVAL

Part of the Autumn Winter 2021 Theatre Season at Home, Manchester

The Ripples of Hope Festival celebrates the power of people to make human rights a reality for all. With events including the unveiling of a new poetic response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an In Conversation with Hillary Rodham Clinton and three days of discussions, workshops, storytelling and performances, this brand new 5-day festival asks us to:

- Think about the challenges we face as communities and as humanity;
- Celebrate the power of people to make change; and
- Explore how we can – together – take action in our communities and across the world to create a future that truly serves people.

After a year that has isolated and divided us, the Festival is a place to meet, share ideas and experiences – and to get excited about changing the world for the better. Add your voice to a weekend of exhilarating and challenging debate, intimate conversations, inspiring stories, workshops and performances, as we explore the world we can create together.

Join local and international community activists, performers, poets, organisers and artists as we delve into our five core themes: Dignity & Justice, Equity & Equality, Arts & Culture, Activism & Participation, Environment & Climate Change

Events include:

Wed 15 Sep 19.15 Hillary Rodham Clinton in conversation with Baroness Helena Kennedy QC. In this candid, far-reaching conversation, Secretary Clinton (joining by Zoom) and Baroness Kennedy (on stage at HOME) will explore the human rights progress we've made; the next challenges we must overcome; as well as what Secretary Clinton has learned in her extraordinary life about the power of people to create change; the nature of leadership; and the meaning of hope.

Fri 17 Sep 19.00 The 2021 PEN HG Wells Lecture delivered by celebrated novelist and activist Elif Shafak introduced by the President of English PEN and renowned human rights lawyer Philippe Sands QC.

Elif Shafak is an award-winning British-Turkish novelist. She has published 19 books, 12 of which are novels. She is a bestselling author in many countries around the world and her work has been translated into 55 languages. Her latest novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and RSL Ondaatje Prize; and was Blackwell's Book of the Year. *The Forty Rules of Love* was chosen by BBC among the 100 Novels that Shaped Our World.

The PEN HG Wells Lecture showcases visionary writing and new thinking, and is held in honour of the former PEN president, author, visionary and human rights campaigner HG Wells. Wells foresaw the creation of the worldwide web, most notably in a series of talks and essays entitled *World Brain*. Other revolutionary ideas set out in *The Rights of Man* influenced the development of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

English PEN is one of the world's oldest human rights organisations, championing the freedom to write and read. They are the founding centre of PEN International, a worldwide writers' association with 145 centres in more than 100 countries. With the support of their members – a community of readers, writers and activists – they protect freedom of expression whenever it is under attack, support writers facing persecution around the world, and celebrate contemporary international writing with literary prizes, grants, events, and their online magazine *PEN Transmissions*.

Fri 17 Sep 20.30, Sat 18 Sep 19.45, Sun 19 Sep 19.45 A Poetic Declaration: Percy Bysshe Shelley declared that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". The Ripples of Hope Festival is delighted to have commissioned and unveil a powerful new body of work: *A Poetic Declaration*.

Three evening events. Simon Armitage has convened 30 poets appearing live and virtually from around the world to create a unique poetic response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Join Simon as he hosts the poets as they unveil this work for the first time, with music from Jaydev Mistry.

Tickets

Day Pass – £20 For those less able to pay at this time – £6 Concessions – £10

Day Pass includes access to all events at HOME until 6.30pm that are part of The Ripples of Hope Festival, plus online access to all events including evening livestreams. Day pass holders have a choice of activities throughout the festival.

Weekend Pass – £48 For those less able to pay at this time – £15 Concessions – £24

Tickets for evening events including the Poetry Declaration, the PEN HG Wells Lecture with Elif Shafak and In Conversation with Hillary Clinton are available separately.

Ripples of Hope Festival Wed 15 Sep 2021 – Sun 19 Sep 2021 <https://homemcr.org/event/ripples-of-hope-festival/>

PUBLIC PRAYERS IN CHESTER FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Christian Aid urges us to pray for climate justice. It is generally accepted that many of the world's poorest people, who have done the least to cause global warming, are the most likely to suffer from drought, flooding and extreme weather conditions. As Christians concerned with justice, we should come together to pray for all those suffering from climatic changes, and for those in power who need to make decisions necessary to stabilise and protect our climate. In order to raise public awareness of these issues, a small group is planning weekly prayer meetings in public in the centre of Chester over the next couple of months, leading up to the COP26 conference in Glasgow in November. Please join us in this important act of Christian witness in Chester. Meetings will start on Tuesday 3rd August at 11.30 am at the Cross in front of St Peter's. After about 15 minutes we will move on to repeat our prayers near the entrance to the Cathedral. For further information please contact Brian Rowe on 07752 949 832.

DIARY DATES

SEPTEMBER

1 September-4 October Season of Creation <https://seasonofcreation.org/>
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/ourwork/environment/season-of-creation/>

The Climate Sunday initiative is calling on all local churches across Great Britain & Ireland to hold a climate-focused service on any Sunday before COP26 (November 2021). The Season of Creation (1 September– 4 October) may also be a suitable time. Encourage your priest to celebrate a special Mass – resources from <https://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Prayer-resources/Climate-Sunday-Mass>

3-6 Boarbank Hall & the Ecological Conversion Group It's YOUR Parish and YOUR Planet... Come and get stuck in! On zoom. Building on an earlier very successful and lively series of shared experiences. If you missed out on these occasions please consider joining this zoom meeting. (and if unable to do this the next will be on 15-18 October 2021).

Open to anyone interested, it's not compulsory to be from Lancaster Diocese! To apply, simply email Sr Margaret Atkins margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk

5 Climate Sunday an ideal time to invite parishioners to sign the climate petition. The cards are free from the CAFOD shop: <https://shop.cafod.org.uk/collections/frontpage/products/eyes-of-the-world-petition-card>

5-12 Root & Branch Inclusive Synod <https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org>

14-17 Stop the Arms Fair <https://www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/>

15 'God Treads Softly Here: You do not Hear Her Coming' An evening of words and music for Christian Aid with Trevor Dennis, Brian Heald and Lionel Clarke, St Mary's Handbridge, 7.30pm – 9.00pm. No tickets fee but there will be a chance to give to Christian Aid, either in the church or online. Three previous evenings raised £8,850. Let's see if we can bring the grand total to over £10,000! To reserve seats in the church, please email trevordennis11@gmail.com, 01244 638441. If you prefer, you can watch the evening on Zoom, or catch up with it afterwards on the St Mary's Handbridge YouTube channel, and you will be given a link to an online-giving page, set up by the Chester Christian Aid Committee. Cheques made out to Christian Aid can be posted to 'Christian Aid, c/o The Parish Administrator, St Mary-Without-the Walls, Overleigh Road, Handbridge, Chester CH4 7HL'.

18–26 Great Big Green Week - a National Week of thousands of events celebrating how communities and groups are taking action to tackle climate change and protect green spaces, and encourage others to get involved too. Everyone is invited. Can you help plan an event or join others locally - <https://greatbiggreenweek.com/>

15-19 Ripples of Hope Festival <https://homemcr.org/event/ripples-of-hope-festival/>

21 UN International Day of Peace

OCTOBER

3 Virtual London Marathon. Ever dreamed of doing the London Marathon, but thought the travel and the distance was too much? How about taking on the Virtual London Marathon for CAFOD? You get the whole day to cover the 26.2 miles (you can even take breaks!) and you can do it wherever you are. You'll even get the t shirt and medal when you finish! [Virtual London Marathon 2021 | CAFOD](https://cafod.org.uk/Fundraise/Sponsored-challenge-events/Virtual-London-Marathon) – sign up here: <https://cafod.org.uk/Fundraise/Sponsored-challenge-events/Virtual-London-Marathon>

5-10 The Camino to COP - People's walk for the planet - This pilgrimage for climate justice will be in Cumbria between these dates. Join for a day, offer support or find out more at: <https://caminotocop.com/>

- **Read NJPN's weekly column** online on Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com or find articles be uploaded onto our website at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk
- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resources for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.
- **Sign up** for regular news and information from NJPN including a **new fortnightly e-bulletin with a comprehensive round-up of current events, campaigns, e-petitions and resources** (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues for NJPN North West) at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact ebulletin@justice-and-peace.org or admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk 020 7901 4864

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