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Red for freedom of faith

ACN calls on UK to use influence in Nigeria and secure justice for Pentecost terror victims

Andy Drozdziak

Catholics have marked Red Wednesday this week by calling on the UK Government to help bring perpetrators of a Pentecost massacre in Nigeria, which saw 41 dead, to justice.

Red Wednesday – an annual event organised by Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN UK) – saw iconic buildings and monuments lit up in red to highlight the issue of Christian persecution.

This year's main event took place at a packed Ukrainian Catholic church in Mayfair, London.

Bishop Jude Ayodeji Arogundade of Ondo, Nigeria, whose St Francis Xavier Church was attacked on Pentecost Sunday, 5th June, said it was still hard to believe that the massacre, which left 41 people dead and seriously injured 73 others, had led to no arrests, six months later.

He also brought attention to "the unprecedented insecurity situation in Nigeria."

In response, ACN UK has highlighted Bishop Jude's campaign as the focus of action for Red Wednesday, as ACN UK's John Pontifex explained. "At Bishop Jude's request, we have released a petition calling on the UK government to use its undoubted influence in Nigeria to demand that the perpetrators of crimes against Christians be brought to justice," he told the *Universe*.



Stonyhurst College was one of a number of prominent landmarks around the world lit up red on Wednesday in support of persecuted Christians around the world

"This petition is being presented on all fronts to all communities, with as many signatures as possible, which we hope to present to the Home Secretary as soon as possible."

Bishop Jude lamented the "level of mayhem" imposed on Nigerians.

"No one or group of people should have the audacity under any circumstance to unleash the level of mayhem going on in Nigeria on innocent citizens," he said.

"The world must insist that terrorists, their sponsors and their sympathisers be brought to justice. Please, ask the Nigerian government to deploy all the legal instruments and political institutions for protecting and enforcing the rights and freedom of the minority to stop the killings."

"We have walked for life, protested and even called the President (Muhammadu Buhari) to resign if he is incapable of fulfilling the basic purpose of government – the security of lives and properties of citizens. Even at that, nothing has changed," he said.

"With 3,478 people killed as of June this year and the increased cases of terror thereafter," he said he strongly wished to appeal to the UK government and "all people of goodwill to compel the Nigerian government to stop the genocide."

"Thank you for your generosity, your kindness, for all you do for the persecuted churches around the world," he told ACN supporters.

The significance of the Ukrainian Catholic cathedral as host for this

year's main Red Wednesday event was also highlighted by John Pontifex. "It's reaching out to the whole way in which a Christian community has come under an enormous amount of suffering," he said.

"ACN has a long-standing relationship with the Ukrainian community, so we thought we would rejuvenate our relationship with them by having a service of solidarity with them in mind, but drawing in the wider theme of persecution against Christians."

During the event, the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, led by Fr Lawrence Lew, were said enthusiastically, and the Divine Liturgy (Holy Mass) was sung for persecuted Christians. Schools such as St Joseph's, Bedwell and the Marist School in Wood-

cote also supported Red Wednesday, with staff and students wearing red clothes. Stonyhurst College lit up its buildings and produced a video about the day.

The event was also marked worldwide. In Australia, ten cathedrals were illuminated, and the Cathedral in Canberra held a Night of Witness prayer event. In France, bells rang out from 100 churches all over the country, while ACN Germany invited guests from Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan to give witnesses in the Cathedrals of Regensburg, Mainz and Augsburg.

At the Vatican, Pope Francis highlighted the initiative on 23rd November, thanking Polish-speaking pilgrims at the Vatican for their participation. **Continued on page 2**

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Stress can pile on the pounds

IN COMPANION



Catholics voice concern as Hunt Budget offers little hope for struggling families

Government has a 'moral responsibility' to do more for the poorest in society

Andy Drozdziak

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Autumn statement has left Catholic justice charities "deeply concerned" about the effect of the cost-of-living crisis on families amid a bleak economic outlook.

Mr Hunt announced £25 billion of tax rises last week, which will hit hard many people who are not particularly well off, including some who are receiving benefits.

"The extent of the poverty in our country remains a scandal," Raymond Friel of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Agency) said. "In addition, we are

deeply concerned that the long-awaited social care reforms, a 2019 Conservative Manifesto pledge, will not now be implemented next year as planned."

Mr Friel also expressed his disappointment that no consideration was given to the removal of the two-child cap on universal credit payments.

"This is unfair on larger families and should be removed, or at the very least suspended pending a review of its impact," he said. He also noted a lack of support in the statement for people on lower incomes for the winter.

"Many people relying on benefits will struggle this winter to bridge the gap between their needs and what they receive, with inflation at a 40-year high and energy prices rising steeply," he said.



"We call on the government to update benefits in line with inflation immediately."

CSAN urged Catholics to get involved and to contact their MPs in

order to "describe the reality of poverty in their community and to share the good news of what the Catholic community is doing to meet this urgent need."

Vincentian charities also expressed concern, especially for families and recipients of Universal Credit. The charities, which comprise organisations across the world inspired by the life and work of Saint Vincent de Paul, called for greater support 'for the most vulnerable.'

"The announcement by the Chancellor was deeply concerning," the Vincentian charities statement said.

"The cost-of-living crisis will continue to be felt by people and families for the long-term and plans should be put in place to shield them from further financial harm. The OBR is projecting that this budget will accompany a decline in real household

disposable income by 7.1 per cent since 2021-22. We encourage the government to go further in its targeted support for the most vulnerable to offset this hardship."

Elements of the statements were welcomed, such as the raising of the state pension by 10.1 per cent and a new Windfall tax on energy firms, but the charities urged the Government to take their "moral responsibility" to the poorest seriously.

"The cost-of-living crisis continues to intensify, and with inflation set to remain high for the foreseeable future, it is the government's moral responsibility to ensure there is targeted financial support and a strong safety net in place for vulnerable people this winter and beyond in order to ensure they do not bear the brunt of the financial crisis," the Vincentian charities said.

CAFOD backs COP fund – but more work still needed

CAFOD has welcomed the creation at the COP27 summit of a 'loss and damage fund' to help countries hardest hit by climate change, calling it "a major step forward".

The fund will support countries that have contributed least to causing the climate crisis but which are seeing communities devastated by its impacts – including the loss of crops and livestock to drought or being displaced from their homes by rising sea levels.

Thousands of CAFOD supporters called for governments at COP27 to set up a loss and damage fund, joining marches around the UK in solidarity with people worldwide as part of a COP27 'Global Day of Action', while the Holy See intervened during ne-

gotiations to back calls for the fund from countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis.

Neil Thorns, director of advocacy at CAFOD, said: "The establishment of a loss and damage fund is a major step forward in supporting communities whose lives, livelihoods and cultures have been destroyed by the climate crisis.

"The next step is to ensure that the fund works under clear principles of justice and is capitalised without delay."

Despite the success of the loss and damage fund, other areas of concern raised by CAFOD were not addressed, according to Mr Thorns.

CAFOD had called for leaders in



CAFOD supporters campaign for the COP27 summit to honour promises made to help vulnerable nations in the face of climate change

Egypt to pledge to take action to reduce emissions generated by food production and to make local food supply chains more resilient to the impacts of the climate crisis.

Neil Thorns admitted that 'slow progress' had taken place in these ar-

eas.

"There was slow progress on work delivering sustainable food systems," he said.

"The Sharm El Sheikh work programme does not take the holistic approach needed if we are to reform

our broken food system which currently harms the planet and leaves people hungry. In 2023, we'll be continuing our campaign to fix our broken food system, looking at the ways we can stand in solidarity with small-scale farmers."

There was also despondency at the lack of ambition shown at COP27 to keep global warming below 1.5C, with COP26 President Alok Sharma saying hopes to do so were "on life support", and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak saying "more must be done" on climate change.

COP27: A chance missed. See pg 8 and 10



Red for freedom of faith

Continued from page 1

The Pope said: "I am grateful to you for uniting with persecuted Christians around the world these days by participating in the Red-Week initiative and praying for them in a special way at the shrine of Jasna Góra," he said.

Bishop Tom Neylon, lead bishop for Asia at the bishops' conference of England and Wales, encouraged prayer on Red Wednesday "for all those facing persecution and everyone working for change."

"Pope Francis reminds us that God created all human beings equal in rights and that freedom of conscience and religious freedom are inseparably linked to our

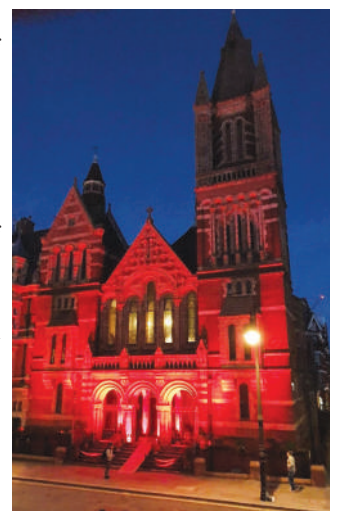
innate dignity. He emphasises that this is not limited to freedom of worship alone, but the right of all to live in accordance with their religious convictions," he said.

"Aid to the Church in Need has continuously shone the light on persecution of Christians across the world, including in parts of Asia where I have heard, first hand, about the threats and violence that people experience daily.

"On Red Wednesday, let us pray for all those facing persecution and everyone working for change."

Nigerian tragedy: See pg 19

Right, the Ukrainian Cathedral in London; left, Marist School



Eritreans issue plea to Church for help in freeing detained clergy

Andy Drozdziak

An Eritrean Catholic from London has responded to the unexplained arrest of a prominent Eritrean bishop by protesting and urging the bishops and priests of England and Wales to get involved in the cause.

Eritrean authorities are continuing to detain Catholic Bishop Fikremariam Hagos Tsalim of Segheneity, who was arrested at the Asmara International Airport on 15th October, along with three priests.

A day of Vigil and Witness took place at Westminster cathedral on 19th November between 12pm and 5pm to protest the bishop's arrest.

Aemro Iyasu from London's Eritrean community says the silence around the issue is concerning and has asked for help from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

"We want them walking in close proximity with us, to confirm us in our faith and enable us to remain in fraternity while working for Justice and Peace," he told the *Universe*.

People travelled on buses from Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and other parts of the UK for the vigil, attracting Eritreans of all faiths.



The vigil and protest outside Westminster Cathedral

According to freedom of religion group CSW, on 15th October Abune Fikremariam Hagos, the first Bishop of the Catholic Eparchy of Segheneity, was arrested at Asmara International Airport as he returned from a visit to Europe, and taken to an unknown location. Government authorities gave no reasons for his detention but a Catholic Church source from Adigrat said Bishop Tsalim has been outspoken against the war in Tigray.

On 12th October, the government also detained Abba Abraham Habtom Gebremariam, the deputy parish priest in charge of students at the Capuchin Society in Teseney. The previous day

Eritrean security agents detained Fr Mihretab Stefanos, the parish priest of St Michael's Church in Segheneity. It is believed all three are being held in Eritrea's Adi Abeito prison.

At the vigil, Aemro and his team offered fervent prayers for the clergymen's release. Colette Joyce, co-ordinator of Diocese of Westminster Justice and Peace Commission gave a speech to express solidarity with the cause.

A heartfelt prayer of 'Lord have mercy on us' was led by Eritrean Orthodox Deacon Yohannes Ghebrehiwet.

Aemro Iyasu added: "Mothers led a traditional Marian prayer asking for Our Lady's intercession for the release



of prisoners, well-being of youngsters and peace in our homeland," he added.

Recently, the Eritrean government has encouraged youth mobilisation for a war in neighbouring Ethiopia between the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the government forces and allied militias, forcing many young adults to hide or flee the country.

For 30 years, democracy has not been present under the leadership of President Isaias Afwerki.

It is against this background that the country's Catholic bishops recently called for democratic rule, which Aemro believes will come through the help of the vigil.

"The day of vigil and witness was successful in many ways," he said.

"It was an extension of our prayers from the privacy of our homes into the public square.

"We truly believe that nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

Church response to victims criticised by Irish archbishop

Sarah MacDonald

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin has lashed out at the "pathetic responses" to victims of clergy sexual abuse, criticising the "whitewashing" of crimes in the wake of the latest abuse scandal to rock the Irish Church.

Speaking during Mass on 21st November in Blackrock parish in Dublin, where the Spiritan order's Blackrock College is located, the archbishop said the courage of abuse survivors must be matched by "our unflinching com-

'Too often the response to abuse victims has not been good enough'
Archbishop Farrell



mitment to listen to the survivors and respond in truth and in justice to all of them."

His comments came in the wake of the broadcast of a radio documentary titled *Blackrock Boys* aired on RTE, which told the story of siblings Mark and David Ryan and their abuse by Spiritan Father Tom O'Byrne at Blackrock College in Dublin in the 1970s and 1980s.

Following the broadcast, a number of fresh allegations of abuse were made by former Blackrock College students and the other nine schools

linked to the Spiritans in Ireland.

The congregation, formerly known as the Holy Ghost Fathers, has been criticised in recent days for sending priests against whom allegations were made in Irish schools overseas to Canada, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Deceased Spiritan Father Patrick Hannan is alleged to have abused while teaching at St. Teresa's secondary school for boys in Nairobi, Kenya. The priest was a brother of the late Father Gerard Hannan, who is alleged to have abused while teaching at Blackrock College in Dublin.

The anger and revulsion over recent revelations is understandable and entirely justified, Archbishop Farrell said.

"Too often, those in leadership in dioceses and religious orders have failed to safeguard those entrusted to their care," he said.

Fr Martin Kelly, Spiritan provincial, said a review in 2012 by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland revealed that 48 members of the Irish Spiritans had abused over a 50-year period. The number has now reached 77.

Almost 300 people have contacted the congregation, which has spent more than \$5 million in settlements since 2004, with experts believing there are many more cases.

CAFOD Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

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NOV 27	NOV 28	NOV 29
NOV 30	DEC 1	DEC 2

In brief

Boohoo workers 'collapsing'

Workers at the fashion firm Boohoo are forced to walk the equivalent of a half-marathon per shift in a "sweltering warehouse", reported *The Times*. Staff at the retailer's warehouse in Lancashire have complained of "gruelling targets, inadequate training and ill-fitting safety equipment", with workers "collapsing in the aisles" and an ambulance called to the site once a month on average, an undercover investigation by the paper found.

The fast-fashion brand said that "making sure our people are safe and comfortable in their workplace is our highest priority".

Glazers ready to sell Man Utd

Manchester United's controversial owners say they are considering selling the club as they "explore strategic alternatives". The Glazer family bought the Premier League club for £790m (\$1.34bn) in 2005 but a statement from Old Trafford said the American owners will consider a number of options "including new investment into the club, a sale, or other transactions involving the company".

The news came on the day it was also confirmed that Cristiano Ronaldo had left Old Trafford by mutual consent.

King speaks of colonial 'sorrow'

King Charles has used his first major speech to a foreign leader as monarch to address the legacy of colonialism. Speaking in the presence of South African president Cyril Ramaphosa, the King said aspects of the relationship between the two countries "provoked profound sorrow" and called for future cooperation.

In a speech described as "conciliatory" by the *Daily Mail*, His Majesty added that "we must acknowledge the wrongs which have shaped our past if we are to unlock the power of our common future".

Firm presses on with deal despite Brexit

A European pork producer is to build a £100m gammon and bacon factory in the UK despite facing a "mountain of post-Brexit red tape." Danish Crown's 30,500 square metre factory, in Rochdale, will be powered by renewable energy and will create 300 jobs. Chief executive Jais Valeur said Danish Crown was obliged to produce a "heavy set of documents for each and every consignment or load into the UK", amounting to 33,000 additional pages per year.

Peers lead rebellion against harsh abortion buffer zone bill

A large cross-party group of peers joined pro-life voices in speaking out against introducing nationwide buffer zones during Committee Stage of the debate of the Public Order Bill, which took place in the House of Lords on Tuesday evening.

There was strong support from across the House for amendments that were tabled by Baroness Fox and Lord Farmer, which would limit the impact of the buffer zone clause that was introduced to the Bill in the House of Commons last month.

If the clause in its current form becomes law, 'buffer zones' around abortion clinics will be introduced nationwide, banning offers of help and alternatives to abortion.

In the debate, more peers spoke against the inclusion of Clause 9 than spoke in support of the plans, showing the strength of opposition to the change in the law.

Baroness Fox, who made it clear in her speech that she is a "passionate advocate of women's reproductive rights and bodily autonomy" spoke firmly against the abortion buffer zone clause in the Public Order Bill.

A number of peers, who spoke in support of the amendments tabled by Baroness Fox to the clause, sought to limit the range of acts potentially criminalised by this provision by ensuring buffer zones are necessary and proportionate, including removing "seeks to influence", adding a reasonable excuse defence, and reducing the punitive sentences for those found guilty.

A number of peers also spoke in



support of Lord Farmer's amendments that would require the Government to conduct a consultation to inform the evidence base around problems close to clinics ahead of giving powers to the Government to introduce buffer zones.

Lord Farmer said that the buffer zones clause is 'fundamentally flawed', adding that 'clause 9 is simply not

about public order. It chillingly polices access to the idea that is contrary to pro-abortion orthodoxy that there are other ways to approach this most difficult of decisions".

Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Beith, warned that the "historic rights of free speech could be damaged" and legitimate "actions of innocent people...could be made the subject of

criminal prosecution".

Labour peer Lord McAvoy said he had "looked through the Home Office review from 2018, and it is interesting to note how little evidence is provided there that these buffer zones are needed."

Additionally, Baroness Hoey spoke about the practical implications of Clause 9, saying that "the wording is so broad that individuals cannot know if their actions cross the threshold of criminal behaviour.

"With so many interpretations available, how can the police know when the threshold of criminality has been crossed? More to the point, is not the very purpose of freedom of expression and protest to 'influence', 'advise', 'persuade' or 'inform'?"

Lord McColl, the Lord Bishop of Manchester, Baroness O'Loan, Lord Cormack, Lord McCrea and Lord Balfe also spoke out against clause 9.

Right to Life UK spokesperson Catherine Robinson said: "Hundreds of women have been helped outside abortion clinics by pro-life volunteers who have provided them with practical support, which made it clear to them that they had another option other than going through with the abortion".

"There are laws in place to prevent harassment and intimidation and these should be enforced if and when necessary. There is no need for further draconian legislation".

Home Office minister Lord Sharpe of Epsom said that the Government will "respect the will of the Commons" after it voted to support buffer zones around abortion clinics.

Vulnerable left at risk of abuse by Scottish assisted dying proposal

Plans to legalise doctor-assisted suicide in Scotland would open the door to abuses affecting the most marginalised, campaigners say.

Better Way, a group of academics, disability activists and expert medics, says the development of assisted suicide and euthanasia legislation in countries like Canada is a warning to the UK.

Dr Miro Griffiths, an expert adviser on disability policy and spokesman for the organisation, told *The Telegraph*: "The development of Canada's euthanasia framework since it was introduced should trouble every politician in the UK who is being asked to back legal assisted suicide.

"Canada shows that laws of this kind are inherently unsafe and unpredictable."

He added: "The evidence heard in previous debates about assisted suicide makes it clear that legalising this practice in Scotland would jeopardise the safety, dignity, and equality of many Scots.



Holyrood proposals will place the most vulnerable in society at risk, say opponents of the legislation

"It remains a regressive and dangerous plan that must be robustly opposed."

Proposals to allow assisted dying in Scotland have been officially lodged at the Scottish Parliament and have the necessary support from MSPs to progress in the current session.

Social justice charity CARE are one of many groups opposing the plans, arguing that assisted suicide and eu-

thanasia are immoral, unethical and a threat to vulnerable citizens.

Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh Leo Cushley recently spoke out against the proposals. "Legalising euthanasia would send a message across the whole of society that lives which entail physical and mental suffering, or severe physical disabilities, can be considered no longer worth living," he told Scottish parishes.

"There have been considerable advances in end-of-life palliative care in recent years, but there is a real risk that the introduction of legalised suicide would gradually diminish funding for hospices with their wonderful and dedicated staff," he said.

"It is also likely to reduce investment in further important research into pain management."

The legislation proposed by MSP Liam McArthur would require two doctors to certify that a patient is terminally ill and has the mental capacity to make the decision to end their life. He has repeatedly said that the "ma-

majority of Scots" support the change, but campaigners warn that the bill is dangerous.

Dr Gordon Macdonald, of the campaign group Care Not Killing, which is spearheading opposition to the Bill, said: "Evidence from other countries shows that when assisted suicide or euthanasia are legalised, the safeguards promised are quickly removed and the law is extended to include more and more vulnerable people.

"People will come under pressure from others to end their lives for fear of being a financial or care burden. People with depression won't get the proper psychiatric support they need and palliative care services will continue to be underfunded.

"This is a very dangerous Bill and the proponents of a change in the law have failed to address these concerns or even to engage in a debate about them."

Pro-lifers maintain that the emphasis should be on introducing better palliative care across Scotland.

UK nuncio to leave as pope appoints him to key role

Andy Drozdziak

Pope Francis has appointed Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti as prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, bringing an end to his busy tenure as Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain.

The archbishop was appointed as Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain on 4th July 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. He served for just over two years.

During his time in the role, Archbishop Gugerotti became a familiar face during prominent and controversial political events, as well as public expressions of faith.

He regularly visited asylum seekers housed in the controversial Napier barracks in Kent to deliver a papal blessing and practical support. He explained that it was the desire of Pope Francis to support the asylum seekers. "The reason for today's trip was to go and give the picture with the blessing of the Holy Father to the residents of Napier Barracks," he said during a visit in June 2022. "Certainly the Pope is very attentive to their needs. The marginalised, the person in trouble, the person who sometimes is not well-



The nuncio greets asylum seekers at the Napier Barracks in Kent. Photo: Mazur

received... well, this is Jesus Christ. This is exactly what happened to Jesus."

He was also a prominent figure in Ukraine war protests, memorably declaring at the start of the war "Today we are all Ukrainians" during a 'Stand With Ukraine' rally in Trafalgar Square, London, in March 2022.

Standing alongside Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, Bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy in London, the archbishop assured the crowd that many prayers were being said for the con-

version of those who want war.

"Today we are all Ukrainians, all in solidarity with you," he said.

"We pray to God to convert the hearts of those who want war. Where is the reason, where is the heart, where is faith, where is progress? God says: 'I do not want your prayers when you kill.' Because the living man is the glory of God. We want love, not war."

Archbishop Gugerotti also met with then Home Secretary Priti Patel in March, to discuss the best ways to

support refugees from Ukraine.

Archbishop Gugerotti also supported a popular eucharistic festival at Corpus Christi church on Maiden Lane in London, participating in a eucharistic procession and a programme of events earlier this year. The 'Eucharistic Octave' strove to celebrate the richness and diversity of the Catholic Church and its love of the Blessed Sacrament.

The archbishop said that the Eucharistic procession is "the sign of our journey to Heaven, preceded by Jesus, present and loved in the monstrance we carry."

He studied Eastern Languages and Sacred Liturgy and was a professor of Patristics, Eastern Liturgy at the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Verona from 1981 to 1985.

He was first appointed as an official to what was then called the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, in 1985. In 1997, he became its Undersecretary, whilst also teaching at the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

In his new role with the Eastern Churches, he succeeds Cardinal Leonardo Sandri as prefect.

Archbishop laid to rest in Glasgow

The funeral of Archbishop Mario Conti, the Archbishop Emeritus of Glasgow, took place at St Andrew's Cathedral in the city last Friday.

The archbishop died at the age of 88, following a short illness, in Queen Elizabeth University Hospital on 8th November.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert, the President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland and the Bishop of Aberdeen, said that Archbishop Conti would be remembered with "real affection and appreciation" as "a good and faithful servant" of the Church.

He added: "He will be remembered for his ecumenical sensibility and his wide and appreciated involvement in dialogue with other Christians."

The archbishop had been a priest for 64 years and a bishop for 45 years.

He trained at St Mary's College, Blairs, near Aberdeen, and went on to study at the Scots College and Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

He was ordained a priest in Rome on 26th October 1958 and was one of the last surviving bishops to have been appointed by Pope Paul VI.

He was named Bishop of Aberdeen in February 1977 and chosen as Cardinal Thomas Winning's successor as the Archbishop of Glasgow in 2002.

Catholic support for women's day as it looks to end male violence

Andy Drozdziak

Catholic campaigners have joined forces to support women and girls who are exploited, oppressed and abused.

Friday 25th November marks the International Day for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Activism will last for 16 days under the banner 'Unite! Activism to End VAWG.'

CSAN and The National Board of Catholic Women have backed the campaign, telling the *Universe*: "Pope Francis calls us to unite to end violence against women and girls. He has said that 'to hurt a woman is an insult to God'. He has also spoken of the importance of supporting women who have been subjected to violence and ill treatment."

The campaign, led by the UN Secretary-General and UN Women since 2008, aims to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls and calls for global action to increase awareness, promote advocacy and create opportunities for discussion on challenges and solutions.

The joint CSAN/NBCW statement states that the current cost-of-living crisis has made the problem of violence against women and girls worse.

"Here in the UK, VAWG continues to be the most pervasive violation of human rights," they said.

"The cost-of-living crisis is exacer-



bating the problem as poverty traps increasing numbers of women and girls in situations where they are exploited, oppressed and abused. Migrant women with no recourse to public funds are not protected by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and are therefore particularly vulnerable."

They also highlighted the problem as a 'global issue', with the shocking statistic of a woman or girl being killed by a partner or family member every 11 minutes.

"Over the last few weeks in Iran, several young women have been attacked or killed while protesting against laws which forbid them to remove their hijab in public, and there are reports of systematic rape used as a weapon of war in Ukraine," they said.

"The UN has reported a global increase in VAWG since the pandemic, with 45% of women disclosing that they or someone they know has been subjected to violence."

These statistics "underline the importance of supporting women who have been subjected to violence and ill treatment."



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Sport and flourishing

Sir John Battle



Can sport contribute to human flourishing or is it an imposed distraction activity designed to keep us preoccupied for a while as the rest of life seems to become more complex and depressing?

The World Cup in Dubai has unearthed a series of disturbing contradictions surrounding the choice of venue, including the tragic and unnecessary deaths of migrant labourers brought in to build the stadia. Even the process of selecting Dubai in the first place remains under a cloud of alleged corrupt practices.

Before a ball was kicked, questions of human rights and clashing respect for very different cultures were inevitably repressed rather than resolved. Calls for a boycott persist and echoes of hypocrisy fill the newspapers.

Yet the games have kicked off with images of people coming together to cheer their teams on and share scoring celebrations and I can't resist seeking out the matches with contributions from our young Leeds United team as well as cheering on England.

Yet a very different expression of sport came at the weekend from rugby league as Leeds Rhino's superstar Kevin Sinfield undertook seven consecutive marathon runs to raise funds to tackle motor neurone disease, which has struck down his Rhino's colleague Rob Burrows.

Interviewed at half-time during last weekend's Rugby League World Cup final as he completed his marathons, Kevin was asked why did he do it? Thanking all those who supported him and donated, he simply said "People are good people and in these hard times we need to help each other".

He spoke movingly of his love for Rob Burrows and his family and of the real importance above all of friendship as the keys to life.

'Love' and 'friendship' are not words that usually dominate the sports reports, nor in political and economic reporting, but Kevin's words were a reaffirmation of hope in humanity and its capacity for deep supportive goodness.

There is a long neglected tradition of friendship in the philosophy and ethics of Aristotle and centred in Christian theology, not least by the emphasis on the 'friendship' key to the virtues crafted by St Thomas Aquinas. Notably St Aelred, Abbott of the Cistercian Abbey of Rievaulx from 1147-1167, wrote the seminal work *Christian Friendship* which remains a vital spiritual text.

Kevin Sinfield may not have read it but he gave the public a basic summary of it in practice and word last weekend, and in doing so contributed to redeeming the humanising possibilities of sport.

John Dunn's a brave man but he needs to soften his tone

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Caroline Farrow



In a disturbing case that went somewhat under the radar this week, a street preacher narrowly escaped prosecution after public order charges against him were dropped.

John Dunn, a cancer survivor and retired army veteran-turned-street preacher, was interviewed under caution and subsequently summonsed by the police thanks to allegations that he was preaching homophobia on Swindon High Street in November 2020.

Mr Dunn is a well-known local figure because he still manages to preach despite having lost his voice box to cancer.

Mr Dunn was arrested following an interaction with a female couple who said that they were in a same-sex marriage. The couple claimed that Mr Dunn shouted that they would 'burn in hell' at them, an allegation that he vehemently denies, noting that he is in any case incapable of shouting at anyone, thanks to his voice box.

Tellingly, the case was dropped because the couple refused to engage with the prosecution after making the initial allegations.

The case is troubling on two counts. First, and I am loathe to criticise a fellow Christian here, while Mr Dunn clearly didn't threaten the women, his preaching was unhelpful. While I will always defend those who preach the biblical position on sex and sexuality, as I have said time and time again, berating same-sex attracted people or focusing on nothing but homosexuality, isn't the way to bring folks to Christ. The



problem with street preachers is that if they aren't careful they confirm stereotypes about Christians being unloving, shouty judgemental sorts and can turn people away.

While Mr Dunn didn't tell these women that they would burn in hell, he did quote a verse from Corinthians about homosexuals not inheriting the kingdom of God. Spotting them holding hands as they walked past him, the preacher called out 'I hope you are sisters'. As Mr Dunn said, he did this out of loving concern, but nonetheless in terms of evangelisation, it was not the most helpful of techniques.

In his defence, Mr Dunn claims that his preaching has brought about the conversion of a notorious local drug dealer and petty criminal. In a world where women like me can be arrested and thrown into a jail cell on suspicion of posting a cartoon that offended a transgendered male on the internet (dear reader, I didn't), then its hardly surprising that Mr Dunn found himself on the wrong side of the law.

Probably most of us can empathise with the women. I have to admit that I too would take umbrage if a self-righteous preacher or campaigner shouted out a comment about me holding hands with my husband or children as I was quietly going about my business

down the street. No doubt, I too would have a brief moan, but would also shrug my shoulders rather than reporting it to the police. Being annoyed by other people is sadly part of everyday life. Nobody has a right not to be offended and we all need to grow a thicker skin. Recently I was out shopping with my teenage daughter when we encountered a street preacher who had an identical style to Mr Dunn. Whereas I was impressed by his courage and commitment, my daughter was horrified. She had never seen this kind of street evangelisation before and thought it to be judgemental and counter-productive.

Tellingly, instead of talking about what she had bought, or where we went for lunch, the street preacher was the first thing she spoke about to the family when we returned home because she had been so shocked by the sight of a man shouting at strangers in the street in the name of her faith. Partly this is due to her personality which is very different to mine and no doubt the inevitable result of seeing her mother under constant police investigation for upsetting people with her Catholic views on social media, but partly also because rather than encouraging children to develop their own views, schools seem to be inculturating children

that the most important value in life is to never say anything that may offend someone else.

Mr Dunn probably needs to be more alert to modern sensibilities if he wants to be effective, but that does not mean that what he does ought to be illegal.

His case is troubling, because if the women involved had decided that they wanted to pursue the case, then this man, with a long record of service to his country, would have found himself with a criminal record.

What is particularly chilling is that the Crown Prosecution Service were all set to argue the case because they said, 'parts of the Bible are abusive, no longer appropriate in modern society and would be offensive if stated in public'. This is absolutely extraordinary. What those who are responsible for upholding the law are saying is that quoting the Bible in public could or should constitute some form of offence or be illegal.

The passages cited by CPS in support of this argument weren't even to do with homosexuality but Old Testament passages from Leviticus and Exodus, so are they also essentially saying that the Torah is illegal too? The Bible has a long history in our law and Constitution and is traditionally presented to monarchs at their coronation.

It is in many ways a shame that the women refused to submit their evidence, because clearly this argument needs testing in court.

Whatever you think of the wisdom or style of Mr Dunn's efforts to evangelise, we have to remember that there is no legally enshrined right not to be offended. I'm also minded to think that if people are finding the Bible quite so offensive and upsetting, then they need some kind of desensitization programme, whether that be in school, or indeed on the streets.

Perhaps Mr Dunne really is doing the Lord's work after all, God bless him!

CONTACTS

The Universe Catholic Weekly is published by the Universe Catholic Weekly Ltd.

2nd Floor Oakland House, 76 Talbot Rd, Old Trafford, Manchester. M16 0PQ

www.universecatholicweekly.co.uk

General enquiries: t: 0791 849 9993
e: Info@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Editorial enquiries: t: 0743 661 7604
e: news@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Managing Editorial Director: Michael Winterbottom
e: michael.winterbottom@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 07753 987124

News: Andy Drozdzak
e: andy.drozdzak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

Director of Sales & Marketing: Andrea Black
e: andrea.black@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 0791 856 0608

Circulation Sales Manager: Michelle Jones
e: michelle.jones@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
e: sales@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 0743 661 7650

Finance & Operations Director: Mary Concannon
e: mary.concannon@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
e: accounts@universecatholicweekly.co.uk
t: 0743 661 7605

Administrative Support: Theresa Bowling
e: Theresa.bowling@universecatholicweekly.co.uk

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Qatar's cup 'tainted' forever, says chaplain

Andy Drozdziak

A leading sports chaplain believes that the winners of the World Cup in Qatar will be "stained" for years in the future.

The competition has been dogged by controversy since it was awarded to Qatar, with accusations of bribery and corruption. Moreover, a *Guardian* investigation said more than 6,500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have died in Qatar since 2010.

Sports chaplain and *Universe* columnist Fr. Vlad Felzmann believes the choice of Qatar as World Cup host is dubious. "Without bribery, I cannot imagine how Qatar got the FIFA contract," he told the *Universe*. "Whoever wins the Cup will have that title stained for years to come. Mixing ethics, politics and sport gives journalists much to write about."

Supporters have also reacted negatively to a lack of alcohol in Qatar and being told not to be "visibly under the influence of alcohol" or be shirtless at games, but Fr. Vlad said these issues should not be seen as a problem. Rather, "such cultural differences



Saka points to the sky after scoring for England

should make people think about Western standards. The differences of what is fine in time and place make the world entertaining," he said. "USA Prohibition lasted from 1920 until 1933. Bathing topless is ok in the south of France but not allowed in The Serpentine. Is the UK backward?"

England's World Cup campaign got off to a winning start in a 6-2 thrashing of Iran at Khalifa International Stadium, Doha. Using the social media moniker 'God's Child', Arsenal's Bukayo Saka pointed to the sky in an acknowledgement of his faith in God, as he

scored two goals in a man of the match performance.

He told *GQ* magazine that a Bible given to him by his father is an essential life item he could not live without. Saka is among a group of England players who display their faith publicly, regularly posting Christian quotes on social media such as 'God is great', 'The Lord is my strength' and 'God's plan.'

England's next World Cup group game is against USA today (Friday) at 7pm before they meet Wales in their final group game on Tuesday.

Football is fuelling a gambling epidemic

Anti-gambling campaigners are calling on the Government to treat gambling addiction as a public health issue after shocking new gambling statistics were published as the World Cup started.

A surge in suicidal gambling addicts turning up to A&E is adding to the pressure on the NHS and 'predatory' gambling firms are to blame, doctors have warned.

There has been a 42 per cent rise in demand for NHS gambling clinics, leading to health chiefs to call on gambling companies to "think hard about the human cost behind their profits".

New specialist gambling addiction clinics are set to open in Southampton and Stoke, adding to the five that already exist.

Matthew Gaskell, consultant psychologist and clinical lead at NHS Northern Gambling Service, said: "People start gambling as soon as they wake up in the morning. They're gambling in the shower, gambling while they're driving to work. The NHS is picking up the tab."

Around 2.2 million people are addicted to gambling or at risk of becoming addicted, and this number is expected to rise during the World Cup, where there will be more games and

further opportunities to place bets. The UK Government promised reform to gambling laws, but these were delayed for a fourth time this summer.

CARE's director of communications and engagement, James Mildred, urged the Government to bring in "robust, far-reaching reforms" to address the issue.

"With the World Cup on, you're going to see more people betting and all the while, gambling companies rake in the profits," he said. "The Government must introduce robust, far-reaching reforms that treat gambling addiction as a public health issue."

Most people being seen at NHS gambling clinics are young men, in their 30s, with strong links to football. They gamble on smartphones, which also give 24/7 access to online casinos and slot machines. Adverts pour fuel on the problem by encouraging 'in play betting', where punters can bet constantly during a football match.

Betway, a gambling firm associated with Premier League clubs, was recently fined £400,000 by a regulator for marketing gambling to children.

Chaplain for sport Fr. Vlad Felzmann told the *Universe*: "Gambling is a scourge that has ruined so many lives."

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COMMENT

‘Wealthy nations need to understand the consequences of not backing COP fund’

The UN’s Climate Change Conference in Egypt was the 27th such gathering since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Then, the science of global warming was in its infancy but world leaders were sufficiently alarmed to commit to a massive programme of financial transfers to countries likely to be worst affected.

Thirty years on, a deal was struck at Sharm el-Sheikh to establish a dedicated “loss and damage fund” of the sort that never materialised after Rio. Sadly, while that is a positive move, it is a triumph of hope over expectation to think this agreement is any more likely to be fulfilled.

The conference in Egypt has been dominated less by arguments over carbon levels than by who will pay for the damage caused by climate change. Developed countries such as Britain will be expected to make substantial contributions to the fund, based on their past industrial activity, even though the biggest emitters today are countries like China and India, who have made no such commitment to pay, nor do they propose to reduce emissions any time soon. That stance renders most of the COP targets set in Paris a few years ago unachievable.

Although there was agreement on establishing a fund, the details have yet to be resolved. The most controversial decisions have been kicked into next year, when a ‘transitional committee’ is expected to make a series of new recommendations for countries to adopt at the COP 28, a year from now.

Since most scientists do not think temperatures can be held down, the ramifications could be considerable and preparations will need to be made. For instance, droughts and famines in sub-Saharan Africa could lead to migration on a scale never seen before. Countries unwilling to contribute to mitigation measures now need to consider the implications not for today, but 30 years hence.

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76 Talbot Rd, Old Trafford,
Manchester. M16 0PQ
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In a two-page special, the Universe looks at the progress made at the COP27 climate change conference in Egypt and asks...

COP27: a win, a lose or a draw for the planet?

One big breakthrough but ultimately an inadequate response to the climate crisis

Matt McDonald

For 30 years, developing nations have fought to establish an international fund to pay for the “loss and damage” they suffer as a result of climate change. As the COP27 climate summit in Egypt wrapped up over the weekend, they finally succeeded.

While it’s a historic moment, the agreement of loss and damage financing left many details yet to be sorted out. What’s more, many critics have lamented the overall outcome of COP27, saying it falls well short of a sufficient response to the climate crisis. As Alok Sharma, president of COP26 in Glasgow, noted: “Friends, I said in Glasgow that the pulse of 1.5 degrees was weak. Unfortunately it remains on life support.”

But annual conferences aren’t the only way to pursue meaningful action on climate change. Mobilisation from activists, market forces and other sources of momentum mean hope isn’t lost.

One big breakthrough: loss and damage

There were hopes COP27 would lead to new commitments on emissions reduction, renewed commitments for the transfer of resources to the developing world, strong signals for a transition away from fossil fuels, and the establishment of a loss and damage fund.

By any estimation, the big breakthrough of COP27 was the agreement to establish a fund for loss and damage. This would involve wealthy nations compensating developing states for the effects of climate change, especially droughts, floods, cyclones and other disasters.

Most analysts have been quick to point out there’s still a lot yet to clarify in terms of donors, recipients or rules of accessing this fund.

It’s not clear where funds will actually come from, or whether countries such as China will contribute, for example. These and other details are yet to be agreed.

We should also acknowledge the potential gaps between promises and money on the table, given the failure of developed states to deliver on US\$100 billion per year of climate finance for developing states



by 2020. This was committed to in Copenhagen in 2009.

But it was a significant fight to get the issue of loss and damage on the agenda in Egypt at all. So the agreement to establish this fund is clearly a monumental outcome for developing countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change – and least responsible for it.

It was also a win for the Egyptian hosts, who were keen to flag their sensitivity to issues confronting the developing world.

The fund comes 30 years after the measure was first suggested by Vanuatu back in 1991.

Not-so-good news

The loss and damage fund will almost certainly be remembered as the marquee outcome of COP27, but other developments were less promising.

Among these were various fights to retain commitments made in Paris in 2015 and Glasgow last year.

In Paris, nations agreed to limit global warming to well below 2, and preferably to 1.5 this century, compared to pre-industrial levels. So far, the planet has warmed by 1.09, and emissions are at record levels.

Temperature trajectories make it increasingly challenging for the world to limit temperature rises to 1.5. And the fact keeping this commitment in Egypt was a hard-won fight casts some doubt on the global commitment to mitigation. China in particular had questioned whether the 1.5 target was worth

out all fossil fuels. Not in this text. And the energy text weakened in the final minutes.”

And as United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres lamented: “Our planet is still in the emergency room”.

Beyond COP27?

In the end, exhausted delegates signed off on an inadequate agreement, but largely avoided the backsliding that looked possible over fraught days of negotiations.

The establishment of a fund for loss and damage is clearly an important outcome of COP27, even with details yet to be fleshed out.

But otherwise, the negotiations can’t be seen as an unambiguously positive outcome for action on the climate crisis – especially with very little progress on mitigating emissions. And while the world dithers, the window of opportunity to respond effectively to the climate crisis continues to close.

It’s important to note, however, that while COPs are clearly significant in the international response to the climate crisis, they’re not the only game in town.

Public mobilisation and activism, market forces, aid and development programs, and legislation at local, state and national levels are all important sites of climate politics – and potentially, significant change.

There are myriad examples. Take the international phenomenon of school climate strikes, or climate activist Mike Cannon-Brookes’ takeover of AGL Energy.

They point to the possibility of action on climate change outside formal international climate negotiations.

So if you’re despairing at the limited progress at COP27, remember this: nations and communities determined to wean themselves off fossil fuels will do more to blunt the power of the sector than most international agreements could realistically hope to achieve.

Mohamed Adow, Director of energy and climate think-tank Power Shift Africa, said: It’s worth noting that we have the fund but we need money to make it worthwhile. What we have is an empty bucket. Now we need to fill it so that support can flow to the most impacted people suffering right now at the hands of the climate crisis.

Matt McDonald is Associate Professor of International Relations, The University of Queensland

COP27: Where did it all go wrong? See page 10

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Wrong place at the wrong time: why COP27 was never going to deliver

Mark Maslin, Priti Parikh, Richard Taylor and Simon Chin-Yee
Billed as “Africa’s COP”, the 27th UN climate change summit (COP27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, was expected to promote climate justice, as this is the continent most affected but least responsible for the climate crisis. Negotiations for a fund that would compensate developing countries for the loss and damage that climate change has wrought dominated the negotiations.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, well past the Friday deadline, member states agreed to establish such a fund – a win for developing countries.

However, who will pay and how this financial assistance will be delivered to help countries like Pakistan recover from climate disasters remains to be negotiated next year.

The COP27 agreement failed to go beyond the 2021 Glasgow climate pact’s promise to “phase down unabated coal power”, despite the Indian proposal that all fossil fuels should be phased out. The text also announced no new targets or commitments, threatening the goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C, established seven years ago in the Paris agreement.

Instead, there was a request for new country pledges, or nationally determined contributions (NDCs), for COP28 – another year’s delay.

Developing countries entered COP27 hoping for progress on three fronts: climate finance and the delivery of US\$100 billion (£84.6 billion) a year as promised in 2009, global decarbonisation, and recognition of the responsibility of developed countries to pay for loss and damage. Only one of these was achieved to any degree.

So why did COP27 fail? And what can be done before the next summit – COP28 in Dubai – to ensure progress?

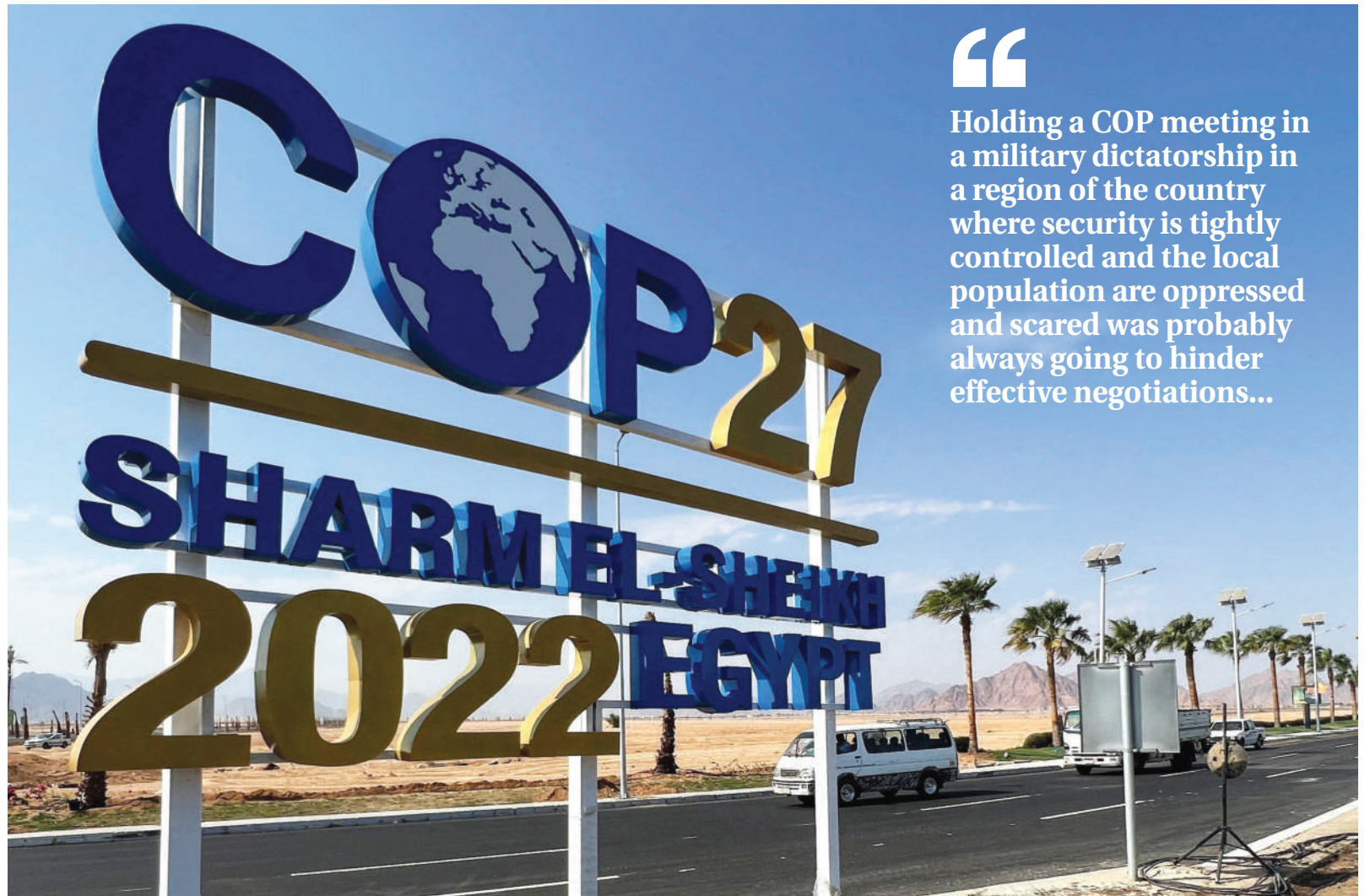
1. Geopolitics

COP27 was overshadowed by Russia’s war against Ukraine, which has strained pipeline supplies of gas, prompting many countries to expand domestic fossil fuel reserves.

The invasion meant that oil and gas-producing nations became more influential at COP27, undermining the negotiations. World leaders preoccupied with spiralling energy prices and the escalating cost of living were reluctant to act boldly on fossil fuels. This was reflected in the watered-down text in which the Egyptians slipped in a provision to boost “low-emission and renewable energy”, which is a nod to natural gas (cleaner than oil and coal but still a fossil fuel).

2. Timing and location

The timing of COP27 was unfortunate. Week one occurred during the US midterm elections



Holding a COP meeting in a military dictatorship in a region of the country where security is tightly controlled and the local population are oppressed and scared was probably always going to hinder effective negotiations...

when much of the world’s media was scrutinising its finely balanced outcome. Week two coincided with the G20 summit in Bali, which further diverted attention and meant many world leaders did not attend.

To make matters worse, negotiations stretched into the weekend, just when attention turned to the World Cup and associated controversies in Qatar. This is very different from COP26 when the world remained engaged throughout the summit.

The only protests allowed were those sanctioned by the Egyptian security forces within the venue. With media attention already restricted, the limited but important civil society presence at COP27 struggled to keep pressure on the hosts.

During the summit, the movement of local residents was restricted by numerous road checkpoints. Holding a COP meeting in a military dictatorship in a region of the country where security is tightly controlled and the local population are oppressed and scared was probably always going to hinder effective negotiations.

3. Lack of leadership

International diplomacy is difficult and takes a huge amount of time, effort and skill. The reason why

2021’s COP26 in Glasgow yielded agreements on deforestation, methane emissions and other issues was partly because the UK and Italian hosts worked hard to build consensus during the extra year provided by the pandemic.

Egypt’s presidency of COP27 underestimated this task. When the negotiations carried over to the wee hours of Sunday morning, Egyptian COP27 president, Sameh Shoukry, said: “It is really up to the parties [countries] to find consensus.”

This is in stark contrast to COP26, where the president of the conference, Alok Sharma, fought to the bitter end to secure an agreement. Negotiations were only ramped up in the last 48 hours to get an agreement on loss and damage, and even then, some of the larger emitters (China and India) have refused to contribute to the fund.

The biggest failure was the lack of trust. This is primarily because the US\$100 billion promised per year has yet to fully materialise. This is a relatively small amount of money when you consider Qatar has reportedly spent \$220 billion alone to host the 2022 World Cup. Money to support climate change adaptation has also not been forthcoming. The money is there, the issue is the will to allocate it where it is really needed.

And the biggest sticking point was

over loss and damage. At COP26, the US, EU and UK, with support from China, blocked the setting up of the Glasgow loss and damage facility, as they did not want to be liable for the effects of climate change.

In Egypt, a statement was released at the last minute saying that such a loss and damage fund would be set up after all. It’s a step in the right direction and was celebrated by developing nations. But there was no agreement about how large the funding stream would be, who pays, and critically, who controls and manages these funds. Currently, only 10 per cent of climate finance reaches local communities and the new facility will need to address this disconnect.

Countries like China and India pushed back on contributing to those funds. India resisted the inclusion of terms such as “current high emitters” in the text as it expects historically high emitters to contribute to the funds. This may have also been the case for China 30 years ago.

But now China’s historic emissions are nearly as high as the EU’s, so it points to per capita emissions and has restated its status as a developing country.

There are several lessons for COP28 and Dubai. First, start the negotiations now and work hard for the next 12 months so that all

countries are prepared to get a clear agreement by the end. And the next COP must run an open and transparent process so all countries understand what is being negotiated and trust can be repaired.

In Dubai, countries with relatively unambitious pledges must be pushed to increase their commitments so there is a chance of sticking to the 1.5°C limit with a focus on phasing out fossil fuels.

Finally, high-income countries and wealthier emerging economies must contribute to adaptation funds and a transparent and effective loss and damage facility.

As an African COP, COP27 wanted to centre the negotiations around climate justice. This idea will need to be at the heart of COP28 negotiations, as money will need to be put on the table for adaptation, loss and damages and a rapid ramp-up of renewables.

Mark Maslin Professor of Earth System Science, UCL

Priti Parikh Professor of Infrastructure Engineering and International Development, UCL

Richard Taylor Professor of Hydrogeology, UCL

Simon Chin-Yee Lecturer in International Development, UCL

Water Means Life – and that’s why we must back this appeal

WaterAid is inviting Catholic groups, parishes and schools across the UK to support its Water Means Life appeal this Christmas in order to help bring clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene to healthcare centres around the world.

The international charity’s appeal aims to raise £2.5 million between November 2022 and February 2023. Funds raised will bring water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities to healthcare centres in Mozambique and across the world.

WaterAid is also inviting supporters to a carol concert on 6th December at St. Paul’s Cathedral, with performances from the Choir of St Paul’s Cathedral, the City of London Sinfonia Orchestra, and international classical singer Carly Paoli.

Mansfield-born Carly performed for Pope Francis with Andrea Bocelli and Elaine Paige as part of the Year of Mercy in 2016. Her version of ‘Ave Maria’ was chosen by the Vatican as the official song for the Year of Mercy celebrations, and she has worked with the Vatican for different charities and in refugee centres.

Currently, one in four healthcare centres have no clean water on site and almost half of healthcare centres have no basic handwashing facilities, putting staff and patients at a greater risk of getting ill.

Maria, who is a nurse at Posto de Saúde de Napacala health centre in Niassa Province, Mozambique, said: “We use the water from the well for patients’ laundry, delivering babies and washing our hands between appointments.”

“The situation is very difficult. And when our well runs dry we’re unable to wash our hands. We have 16 com-

munities around the health centre in desperate need of water. Water for me is life and without it there’s no life.”

By fundraising for WaterAid this Christmas, congregations and community groups can help tackle the global hygiene crisis in healthcare centres across the world.

Wanji Wambari-Kairu, Supporter Exploration and Influencing Lead at WaterAid, saw the situation faced by health centres in Mozambique first-hand, and said: “Nurses, cleaners and doctors go above and beyond to treat their patients, but it’s not enough. When dirty water is the only option you have, every effort to heal risks bringing harm.

“It’s heartbreaking that 3.85 billion people use or work in a healthcare facility without basic hygiene services.”

“By joining WaterAid’s appeal, your church can start working with nurses like Maria and local communities to bring clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene to health centres like Posto de Saúde de Napacala and around the world. This will make a lasting difference and save lives.”

WaterAid has produced a range of free fundraising resources, including children’s liturgy session and fundraising ideas ranging from bauble decorating competitions to wreath making, a presentation on Maria’s story and a poster.

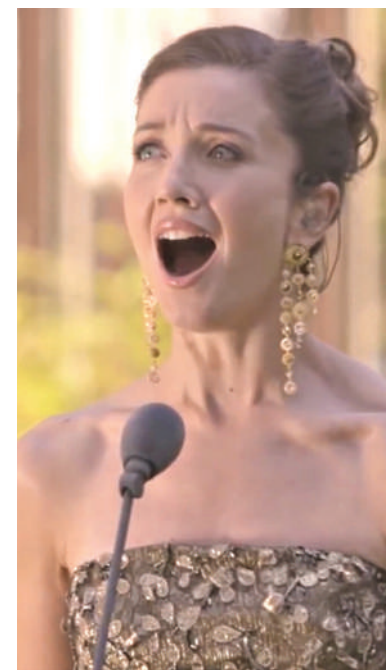
Churches can book a free WaterAid speaker to talk to their congregation about the campaign.

For more information, visit wateraid.org/uk/christmas Book concert tickets at www.wateraid.org/concert



Right, Water Aid supporter Carly Paoli.

Left, a bricklayer fetches water from a well in Meripo, Niassa Province, Mozambique. Photo: Etinosa Yvonne



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Washing medical utensils by the well near the health centre in Napacala, Niassa Province, Mozambique

Photo: WaterAid/ Etinosa Yvonne

CATHOLIC UNION

Keep the flame of religious freedom burning

by James Somerville-Meikle

I'm always struck when I go to Mass on Wednesdays in the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft in Parliament by what a great privilege it is to receive communion in this very special place.

On my way to the Chapel, I usually go through Westminster Hall – the place where St Thomas More was tried and condemned for remaining true to his conscience and the Catholic faith. I try to say a prayer to him as I rush past, usually cutting it rather fine for the start of Mass.

Westminster Hall seemed a fitting place to gather this week to mark Red Wednesday, the annual occasion to remember Christians around the world who continue to face persecution for their faith. A number of MPs and peers gathered at 11am for a moment of prayer and reflection as part of a series of events to mark the day.

Aid to the Church in Need continue to do outstanding work in leading the Red Wednesday events and giving politicians and others in the public sphere the tools to give witness to the persecuted Church, crucially in providing an evidence base and firsthand testimony.

The findings from its most recent report – *Persecuted and Forgotten?* – make for difficult reading. The report found that in almost every country surveyed between September 2020 and September 2022, the situation had got worse for Christians.

One of the countries on the list was Qatar, where the World Cup is taking place. The report said there had been “a sharp rise in reports of intolerance” in the country. It seems that Christian persecution is another abuse of human rights that football's governing body, FIFA, seem not to worry about.

Another country in the spotlight of the report was Nigeria. I had the very great privilege of hearing from Bishop Jude Arogundade, Catholic Bishop of Ondo Diocese, who attended the launch of ACN's report in Parliament last week. One of Bishop Jude's churches suffered a devastating attack earlier this year in which at least 40 people were killed.

He wanted us to pray for people in his Diocese, but he also reminded us of the influence that the UK has in his country. A number of Nigeria's politicians are frequent visitors to London for healthcare, and trade between the UK and Nigeria is valued at £5.5 billion.

This is an area where the Catholic laity can make a difference. Please consider contacting your MP and asking them to raise this in Parliament. Next time a politician asks for your vote, ask what they would do to help end Christian persecution. The cause of religious freedom still needs to be taken up in Westminster.



Bishops meeting backs Walsingham upgrade – and reinforces meat-free Fridays

Andy Drozdziak

Leading bishops have spoken out against buffer zones and urged Catholics to ‘refresh the practice’ of not eating meat on Friday.

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales gathered in Leeds for their autumn plenary meeting, at Hinsley Hall, from 14th-17th November 2022.

The bishops called plans to introduce ‘buffer zones’ around abortion clinics as ‘disproportionate and unnecessary.’

“Proposals to impose buffer zones outside abortion facilities raise concerns about freedom of religion, belief, association and expression,” they said.

“Clause 9 of the Public Order Bill as amended currently seeks to criminalise a range of activities within a 150m radius of an abortion clinic. Its broad formulation is disproportionate and unnecessary.

“Its implications extend beyond the perimeters of an abortion clinic and raise questions about the state's powers in relation to the individual in a free society, both those with faith and those without.” They pointed out a 2018 Home Office Review which showed that current ‘laws and mechanisms’ are already in place to protect women from any ‘harassment and intimidation’

Meanwhile, the bishops highlighted the ‘Friday fast’ as a penitential act which ‘has a considerable impact on lessening carbon emissions.’ The profile of the ‘Friday fast’ – abstaining from eating meat on Friday – has reduced in recent years, and now the bishops wish to encourage Catholics to ‘refresh’



There was delight at the news that the memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham has been upgraded to a feast in England

their efforts to undertake the practice once again.

“We urge all Catholics to refresh their weekly observance of Friday abstinence by refraining from eating meat on that day,” the bishops said. “In this way we dedicate to God the pressing need for us all to live more simply.”

They pointed to a recent Cambridge University study which suggests that cutting out meat on Friday ‘has a considerable impact on lessening carbon emissions by 55,000 tonnes each year.’

They added that it is also a way of being ‘in solidarity with those who face hunger and poverty every day, with the care of creation by recognising the environmental impact of meat production and in memory of the death of Christ, by which our broken relationships with each other and with God's creation are healed.’

The bishops also asked dioceses to set target dates for a stated reduction of carbon emissions.

In what were a busy few days, the bishops noted the ‘fruitful’ and successful visit and pilgrimage of the Relics of St Bernadette in autumn 2022, and announced that they had upgraded the Memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham to a Feast in England. The news of the upgrade was welcomed by Mgr. Philip Moger, rector of the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady, Walsingham. “I am delighted that the Holy See has been petitioned by the Bishops’ Conference to upgrade the memorial of Our Lady of Walsingham to a feast,” Mgr. Moger said.

“Clearly, both at the national shrine and in the diocese of East Anglia, 24th September is already an important Feast, but having it as a Feast nationally will help make the message of Our Lady's Annunciation, and the 11th century shrine at Walsingham which honours it, even more significant for our country.”

Take the Irish Church's digital calendar on your Advent journey

Archbishop Eamon Martin has launched the Irish Church's latest digital interactive Advent calendar.

Now in its ninth year, the interactive digital Advent calendar retains a unique and popular online presence. Behind the 28 virtual doors, the calendar offers resources for schools, parishes and the home with short inspirational video messages, some seasonal crafts for children and prayers to help keep Christ at the centre of Christmas preparations.

Welcoming this year's Advent Calendar, Archbishop Eamon Martin, Primate of All Ireland, compared the season of Advent to a journey. “Over the next four weeks we will journey towards Christmas while reflecting on the big themes and the personalities of the Advent season,” he said.

“Some of the major themes of Advent are: waiting and preparation, darkness and light, and the promise of comfort and hope. During this season, we meet big personalities such as John the Baptist, the Magi and, of course, Mary Our Blessed Mother, who embraced God's will completely and made a special place for God in her life.”

The archbishop also pointed to the importance of making ‘space for God in our lives’ during Advent.

Advent Calendar 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
1 27 Nov	2 28 Nov	3 29 Nov	4 30 Nov	5 01 Dec	6 02 Dec
8 04 Dec	9 05 Dec	10 06 Dec	11 07 Dec	12 08 Dec	13 09 Dec
15 11 Dec	16 12 Dec	17 13 Dec	18 14 Dec	19 15 Dec	20 16 Dec
22 18 Dec	23 19 Dec	24 20 Dec	25 21 Dec	26 22 Dec	27 23 Dec
28 24 Dec					

Nativity of Our Lord



‘The Advent calendar invites each of us to make space for God in our lives every day over the next four weeks’ - Archbishop Martin

the continued threats to life, of violence and the destruction of war. At home, many are struggling with the pressures of the increased cost of living and energy crisis. Perhaps this year, more than ever, we need an Advent journey filled with hope, promise and peace and, of course, the message of the Christmas angels: do not be afraid.”

“I thank all the content contributors to the 2022 Advent calendar. This year's theme of Synodality nicely complements our Advent journey as the word ‘synod’ conjures up the image of walking or journeying together as a Church.

Archbishop Eamon concluded: “The Synodal journey, and the Advent journey, remind us that we are all pilgrims on a lifelong pathway.

“So, over the next four weeks, let us walk together with family, friends and community so that everyone can experience the good news of this forthcoming celebration, and in particular those less fortunate than ourselves.”

• **The calendar will go live on CatholicBishops.ie on 27th November, the first Sunday of Advent.**

“Despite the hectic rushing around, getting the decorations and tree up, visiting and shopping, we are encouraged to travel on the Advent journey, pausing each day for a few moments to pray, reflect, and take some practical steps to enrich our experience of Christmas. The Advent calendar invites each of us to make space for God in our lives every day over the next four weeks,” he said.

“2022 has been a tough year for many – the people of Ukraine are going into Christmas with

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Ref: X0403 Price £8.75



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Deluxe Christmas card pack: Christmas Peace (Pack of 12)

Pack of 12 Religious Christmas Cards. 4.5" x 6.5" (11 x 16 cm) in 4 designs, embossed and gold foil stamped, featuring traditional Nativity image enclosed in gold-embossed wreath and wording: Christmas Peace. Inside Text: 'Wishing you a very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year'.

Ref: X0497 Price £5.95



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Advent Calendar x 2: Follow the Star/Jesus is Born

Two Religious advent calendars with envelope. A4 size: 11.5" x 8.5" (30 x 21 cm). Featuring 2 different nativity scenes, with windows for opening, with glitter. Each opening window has a motif or scene from the Christmas story, and pictures are translucent when held to light. Supplied with presentation envelopes.

Ref: X0171 Price £12.87



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Boxed Christmas Cards: Blessed Christmas (Pack of 16)

Box of 16 Religious Christmas Cards 6.5" x 4.5" (16 x 11 cm), with gold foil stamped highlights, presented in cardboard box. Four designs – with traditional nativity scene, and Christmas greeting. Inside Text: 2 Designs: 'At this Christmas season and throughout the New Year, May you be blessed with every happiness;' and 'Thinking of you at Christmas, May your Christmas be filled with peace'.

Ref: X0641 price £6.95

Advent Calendar: Come let us Adore Him

Religious advent calendar with envelope. A4 size: 11.5" x 8.5" (30 x 21 cm). Featuring children and their pets approaching manger with gifts, with festive border, with glitter. Each opening window has a motif or scene from the Christmas story, and pictures are translucent when held to light. Supplied with presentation envelope

Ref: X0191 Price £7.15



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Christmas Crib: 4.5 inch nativity figures with stable

Nativity set including eleven 4.5" (11.5 cm) resin figures and wooden Italian-made stable. Hand-painted movable figurines with gold accents. Wooden shed 15" x 10" x 5.5" (38 cm x 25 cm x 14 cm).

Ref: X0231 Price £77.90



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Christmas Crib: Nativity set 3.5 inch figures with stable

Nativity set including eleven 3.5" (9 cm) resin figures and wooden Italian-made stable. Hand-painted movable figurines with gold accents. Wooden shed 12.5" x 10" x 7" (32 cm x 25 cm x 18 cm).

Ref: X0286 Price £59.90

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Christmas Windproof Pillar Candle: Holy Night

Christmas votive candle in plastic outer, with Nativity design and gold foil decoration, and the first verse of O Little Town of Bethlehem on reverse. Tall pillar candle with laminated card outer, with metal base and metal windproof top, making it suitable for outdoor use.

2.5" x 6.75" (7 x 17 cm), with prayer on reverse. Burning time: approx 68 hours.

Ref: X0845 Price £4.50



BUY NOW



BUY NOW

Christmas Bells Wood tree decoration: Pack of three

Religious theme Christmas tree ornament – bell-shaped laser-cut wood hanging decorations, with Nativity design on gold starry background. 2.75 inch (5 cm) height, with string and gold foil highlights. Price for three assorted ornaments.

Ref: X0868 Price £5.50

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No one is born a slave

Dr Carole Murphy, Associate Professor at St Mary's University and Director of the Bakhita Centre for Research on Slavery Exploitation and Abuse, at St Mary's University, Twickenham, reflects on the history of slavery to the present day.

What is modern slavery? The UK introduced the Modern Slavery Act into legislation in England and Wales in 2015, partly in response to the growing referrals of suspected cases into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The Act defines slavery as servitude and forced or compulsory labour.

This incorporates a broad range of situations, including forced criminality; sexual exploitation; removal of organs; and securing services by force, threat or abuse, including from children and vulnerable people.

Potential victims are recruited through various methods: newspaper and internet adverts; immigration agencies; personal contacts; or family. Recruitment can take the form of a job offer, targeting vulnerable groups, for example homeless people. The 'Boyfriend' method, which is when an intimate relationship is established that includes an offer of a better life, is also used to trick victims who are then sold into slavery.

People recruited are often marginalised, poor, vulnerable and have mental and or physical health problems, learning disabilities, and substance use issues. However, some victims come from stable backgrounds and are well educated.

In 2021, 12,727 children, women and men were referred to the NRM – the framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support – for



criminal, labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, or a combination of these. Many of these victims are hidden in plain sight, in construction, agriculture, car washes and nail bars and remain invisible in the sex industry, drug trafficking trade and in domestic servitude.

Historically, slavery was accepted openly in society. The Code of Hammurabi, which introduced the legal status of a slave, reveals the inter-relationship of religion, law and slavery in its prologue. This code outlines a fully functioning slave system with 35 laws concerning slavery. All these laws are clear: a slave is not a real human being.

The idea of slavery being part of the natural order of societies was taken up by philosophers including Plato, who built a rationale for slavery based on the inherent inferiority of 'barbarians'. His pupil

Aristotle argued that slavery was good for both slave and master since each were achieving their true function. However, alternative ideas flourished which led to more humane treatment of slaves, within an emerging philosophy that maintained slavery was against "natural" law.

Despite this more humane philosophy, slavery continued to thrive in the expansion of various empires. To support this expansion, three main foundations of institutionalised slavery were established: an armed military that could use violence to enslave, a business market for slaves, and a religious elite that provided divine approval for slaves. While most religions were against enslavement of their own denomination, so no Christian could enslave another Christian, they were quite content to support slavery in both policy and trade. The growth of the transatlantic slave trade attests to

this and was supported by Church and state in all major countries involved in the trade.

However, it was also religious movements that promoted change. The Protestant Reformation, with its ideas of equal citizenship, played a part in sowing the seeds of the abolition movement. Adam Ferguson, a Scottish philosopher argues that "no one is born a slave; because everyone is born with his original rights". The Catholic late scholastics made similar arguments in disputes about slavery in the developing Spanish empire. And, of course, anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce was motivated by strong religious convictions.

Slave importation was banned in the US in 1808, although the southern US continued to grow its slave population by natural increase. But, just as the slave trade had grown, so did American slave resistance. The abolition movement

grew enormously over the following years. Support towards ending slavery came mainly through the publication of first-hand accounts of slavery, including the intimate and detailed accounts of its brutal reality.

Survivor Frederick Douglass escaped slavery in the US in 1838 and published his book *Narrative* in 1845. In an address entitled '*International Moral Force can destroy Slavery*', delivered in 1846, he stated: 'A slave is one who is to all intents and purposes a marketable commodity – common goods and chattels.'

The notion of a human being as a marketable commodity is common to both historical and modern slavery. His appeal for 'moral force' corresponded with abolitionists' pleas at that time, which were based on moral principles rather than economic or political arguments.

By the early 20th Century, slavery became illegal in Europe, North and South America, and many other countries followed suit, outlawing the slave trade, then the practice of slavery itself. In 1833, Britain passed the Abolition of Slavery Act, ordering gradual abolition of slavery in all British colonies. However, despite this Act, and various other pieces of international legislation introduced in the 20th Century, slavery in its various forms persists across the world.


Estimates of victims of slavery in the UK stood at 10,000-13,000 in 2013. Due to its hidden nature, it has been hard to gauge actual figures. According to the most recent statistics published by the Global Slavery Index in 2018, 49.6 million men, women and children are living in modern slavery worldwide.

The Catholic Church has been outspoken about slavery since Pope Francis pronounced it as an "open wound on the body of society". As part of a response to this, the Santa Marta Group comprising of bishops and law enforcement was set up to tackle slavery internationally. In the UK, the charity, Caritas Bakhita House is part of a network of charities and organisations, including the Clewer Initiative, the Santa Marta group and the Bakhita Centre. The Bakhita Centre was established at St Mary's University as a result of a suggestion by our own Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. St Mary's University then established an MA and Certificate programme in Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Organised Crime which supports many professionals and volunteers working in this area.

Organisations such as Caritas Bakhita House alongside many other charities, support victims and survivors of modern slavery in their journey of recovery and re-integration. Through this support, they ensure that survivors, human beings once treated as commodities, are empowered towards restoring their humanity.



A bas relief sculpture on the wall of the Our Mother of Africa Chapel at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington depicts the African American experience from slavery to emancipation and the civil rights movement.



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In brief

Abuse audit reports in Italy for first time

Italian diocesan 'listening centres' for victims of abuse took reports from 89 people against 68 priests or other Church personnel in 2020 and 2021, the Italian bishops' conference reported.

Six months after promising to begin an annual audit of the Italian Church's child protection efforts, Archbishop Giuseppe Baturi of Cagliari, secretary-general of the conference, presented the report at a news conference at the Vatican.

The report makes no mention of any of the allegations being referred to the police or local civil authorities, although Fr Gianluca Marchetti, chancellor of the Diocese of Bergamo, told reporters the listening centers encourage victims to go to the authorities.

The Italian bishops' conference is working on a more in-depth study of clerical sexual abuse that will cover the years 2000 to 2021, although they have not said when it will be published.

Archbishop Baturi said that during that 20-year period, allegations against 613 priests had been forwarded to the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

When he announced the study in May, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, bishops' conference president, said focusing exclusively on the files forwarded to the Vatican would allow the Italian Church "to know and analyse, quantitatively and qualitatively, the data kept at the congregation while ensuring the appropriate confidentiality."

Pope plea for faiths to work in unity

Christians and Jews are called to give witness to their faith by "working to make the world more fraternal, combating forms of inequality and promoting greater justice," Pope Francis told World Jewish Congress members.

Before meeting the pope, the executive committee of the congress held a special session with Vatican officials and diplomats accredited to the Holy See. The gathering focused on strengthening the bonds between the Vatican and the congress, which represents Jewish communities in more than 100 countries.

Pope Francis said their visit itself "testifies to and strengthens the bonds of friendship uniting us" and builds on more than 50 years of official dialogue since the Second Vatican Council.

Catholics and Jews, he said, have learned to recognize that they "share priceless spiritual treasures," beginning from faith in the one God who made Heaven and earth, "who not only created humanity, but forms every human being in his own image and likeness."



The pope with members of his extended family after the service. His grandparents had emigrated from the area around Asti in 1929 for Argentina. Among those he paid social calls on were his second cousins Carla Rabezzana, who was celebrating her 90th birthday, and Delia Gai.

It's a family affair as pope urges Christians to open their hearts to Jesus

Pope Francis has held an emotional service in Asti Cathedral with many members of his extended family in the congregation.

The Mass for the feast of Christ the King and World Youth Day, was the only public event during the pope's weekend visit to the region from which his grandparents, Giovanni Angelo Bergoglio and Rosa Vassallo, and his father Mario immigrated to Argentina in 1929.

The visit was timed to coincide with the 90th birthday of Carla Rabezzana, the pope's second cousin. And, after landing in Portacomaro near Asti and stopping for a prayer in a village church, Pope Francis headed straight to Rabezzana's house for lunch.

After lunch, the pope visited a nearby home for the aged and then headed to the little village of Tigliole to visit another second cousin, Delia Gai.

The cousins and their families joined

an estimated 4,000 people for Mass with the pope the next day in the Asti cathedral.

In his homily, sprinkled with words in the Piedmont dialect his grandmother taught him, Pope Francis focused on how the kingship of Christ is different from any idea people usually have of a king.

"He is not comfortably enthroned but hanging on a gibbet," the pope said. "The God who 'casts down the mighty from their thrones' appears as a slave executed by those in power."

Accusing no one, "he opens his arms to all. That is how he shows himself to be our king: with open arms," the pope said.

With open arms, Jesus "embraced our death, our pain, our poverty, our weakness and our misery," he said. "He let himself be insulted and derided, so that whenever we are brought low, we will never feel alone. He let

himself be stripped of his garments, so that no one would ever feel stripped of his or her rightful dignity. He ascended the cross, so that God would be present in every crucified man or woman throughout history."

"This is our king, the king of the universe," Pope Francis said.

At the beginning of the Mass, Stefano, a local seminarian, was installed in the ministry of acolyte.

Departing from the prepared text of his homily, Pope Francis told Stefano and anyone else preparing for priesthood: "Do not forget that this is your model: do not cling to honors, no. This is your model; if you do not think of being a priest like this king, better stop here."

Urging members of the congregation to gaze upon Jesus on the cross, the pope told them Christ does not "give us the same kind of fleeting glance that we so often give him. No,

he stays there, a 'brasa aduerte', (arms open, in Piedmontese) to say to you in silence that nothing about you is foreign to him, that he wants to embrace you, to lift you up and to save you just as you are, with your past history, your failings and your sins."

By surrendering to Christ's love and accepting his forgiveness, anyone can begin again, the pope said. "Salvation comes from letting ourselves be loved by him, for only in this way are we freed from slavery to ourselves, from the fear of being alone, from thinking that we cannot succeed."

"Ours is not an unknown God, up in the heavens, powerful and distant, but rather a God who is close. Closeness is God's style; he is close with tenderness and mercy," the pope said. "Tender and compassionate, his open arms console and caress us. That is our king!"

Pope prays for Stalin's Ukrainian victims in the 1930s

Praying for peace in Ukraine, Pope Francis remembered both the victims of Russia's current aggression as well as the millions of victims of a Soviet-engineered famine 90 years ago.

"Let us pray for peace in the world and an end to all conflicts, with a special thought for the terrible suffering of the dear and tormented Ukrainian people," the pope said at his weekly general audience. "Saturday is the anniversary of the terrible genocide

of Holodomor, the extermination by starvation artificially caused by Stalin in Ukraine in 1932-33."

"Let us pray for the victims of this genocide and pray for so many Ukrainians – children, women and the elderly, babies – who suffer the martyrdom of aggression today," the pope said.

Ukrainians mark Holodomor Memorial Day on 26th November with prayer services remembering the dead.

As it still does to this day, Ukraine

was then a major producer of grain, but Stalin's orders to collectivise farms in Ukraine and confiscate most of the grain led to the famine, which Ukrainians believe was a deliberate attempt to destroy Ukrainian national identity after the formation of the Soviet Union.

Historians disagree on how many people died, although it is generally accepted that there were at least 3.5 million to five million victims. The website of the Holodomor Museum in Kyiv estimates at least seven

million people in Ukraine and three million Ukrainians in other regions of the Soviet Union were starved to death, but the numbers could be even higher because the communist totalitarian regime did everything possible to conceal the consequences of its crime.

It was forbidden to record the real number of deaths within the Soviet Union.

• Ukraine can defend itself, and more prayers for peace: see page 18

Vatican steps in to run Caritas after top officers suspended

Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis has suspended the secretary-general and other top officers of Caritas Internationalis, appointing a temporary administrator to oversee improved management policies and to prepare for the election of new officers in May.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, whose second term as Caritas president was to end then, loses his position immediately, although he has been asked to assist the temporary administrator in preparing for the future by taking 'special care of relations with the local churches and the member organisations,' a papal decree stated.

Caritas Internationalis is the umbrella organization for 162 official Catholic charities around the world, including CAFOD in England and Wales and the USA's Catholic Relief Services.

Pier Francesco Pinelli, a lay management consultant, will oversee the Vatican-based general secretariat after the removal from office of Aloysius John, who has headed up Caritas since 2019.

However, confusion remains as to why the dramatic move has been made. A statement from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, which has some oversight over Caritas Internationalis, said the



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and outgoing secretary-general Aloysius John

suspension of the officers "has no impact on the functioning of member organisations and the services of charity and solidarity they provide around the world; on the contrary, it will serve to strengthen such service."

It went on to say that, earlier this year, the dicastery "commissioned a review of the workplace environment and its alignment with Catholic values of human dignity and respect for each person."

There was "no evidence found of

financial mismanagement or sexual impropriety, but other important themes and areas for urgent attention did emerge," with "real deficiencies in management and procedures, seriously prejudicing team-spirit and staff morale."

The announcement of the pope's provisions came while some 100 Caritas representatives from around the world were having a two-day meeting in Rome.

Cardinal Tagle read the papal decree

to the assembly and, while acknowledging the news could upset or confuse some people, he said they should be reassured knowing that it came after "a careful and independent study of the working environment of the secretariat and the governance exercised by the people and bodies in charge."

The papal decree, he said, is "a call to walk humbly with God" and be open to a process of discernment, which includes acknowledging shortcomings.

Aloysius John, the secretary-general since 2019, was not present at the meeting, Vatican News said. John, a French citizen who was born in India, had been head of the organisation's section for institutional development and capacity building before his election as secretary-general.

Pope Francis confirmed that Caritas Internationalis' role was vital to the Church's outreach: "it assists the bishops in the exercise of their ministry to the poorest and most needy and collaborating in the spread of charity and justice in the world in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic Church."

However, "to improve the fulfillment of this mission it seems necessary to revise current regulations governing Caritas Internationalis."

Churches work to find common date for Easter

The pope has suggested that Christians of the East and West could finally agree on a common date for Easter after meeting the US-born patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East.

"Let us have the courage to put an end to this division that at times makes us laugh with the ridiculous possibility that Christians could ask each other, 'When does your Christ rise again?'", the pope told Catholicos Awa III, the patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East.

The catholicos, who was born in Chicago, was elected head of the Church in September 2021 and made his first official visit to the Vatican Nov. 19, before Pope Francis left to visit his relatives in the northern Italian city of Asti.

The Assyrian Church of the East, which is not in full communion with any of the Orthodox or Oriental Orthodox churches, began a theological dialogue with the Vatican in the mid-1990s over the timing of Easter and other issues.

During their meeting, Catholicos Awa mentioned his hope and the hope of many other Christians to find a way to celebrate Easter on the same day. Pope Francis thanked him and said, "I want to say – indeed, to repeat – what St. Paul VI said in his day: We are ready to accept any proposal that is made together."

Easter Sunday in 2023 is on 9th April, but for Orthodox Churches it will be celebrated on 16th April.

Discernment is your path to God

The spiritual practice of discernment, of seeing where God is at work in one's life and what God is calling one to do, includes examining what brings a sense of consolation and spurs one to do good, Pope Francis said.

Spiritual consolation "is a profound experience of interior joy, consisting in seeing God's presence in everything. It strengthens faith and hope and also the ability to do good," Pope Francis said at his weekly general audience.

Of course, everyone would like to experience spiritual consolation, the pope said. But it is a gift of the Holy Spirit and brings a joy that is not superficial.

"Consolation is an interior movement that touches our depths," the pope said. "It is not flashy but soft, delicate, like a 'drop of water on a sponge', as St. Ignatius described it."

Consolation is seen in the lives of "saints who were able to do great things, not because they thought they were magnificent, but because they had been conquered by the peaceful sweetness of God's love," he said.

"This is the peace that St. Ignatius discovered in himself with such amazement when he would read the lives of the saints and the peace that Edith Stein felt after her conversion."

"To be consoled is to be at peace

with God, to feel that everything is peacefully settled, everything is harmonious within us," the pope said.

But, he said, the consolation from God does not make a person want to just "sit there enjoying it, no, it gives you peace and draws you to the Lord and sets you on the way to do things, to do good things."

"In times of consolation, when we are consoled, we get the desire to do so much good, always," he said. It is the opposite of when a person is in spiritual desolation or sadness and has the urge to withdraw "and do nothing. Consolation pushes you forward, in service to others."

However, the pope said, "we must be attentive. We must distinguish between consolation that is of God and false consolation," which is a weak imitation.

"If authentic consolation is like a drop on a sponge, soft and intimate, its imitations are noisier and flashier," he said, and it leads people to focus only on themselves and not reach out to care for others.

"False consolation can become a danger if we seek it obsessively as an end in itself, forgetting the Lord," the pope said. "This is like seeking the consolations of God rather than the God of consolations."

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Public Engagement by Catholics for the Common Good

Monastery raided after claims Church supported invasion

Ukraine's security services have added to the tensions between Christian Churches in the region after they raided a historic monastery in Kyiv in an operation it says was aimed at stopping Russian agents using the site for sabotage, intelligence or weapons.

The Kyiv Pechersk Lavra Christian monastery is part of Ukraine's Orthodox Church (UOC), which was a member of the Russian Orthodox Church until Russian Patriarch Kirill's support of the war led to it breaking away from Moscow rule.

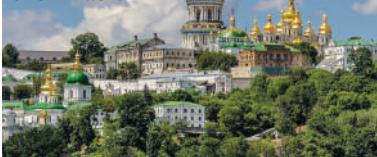
Despite this, some of the UOC's clergy have been accused of still covertly supporting Moscow, using their position to influence churchgoers and glorifying Russian advances. A video has emerged of pro-Russian propaganda being sung in the monastery.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Ukraine of being "at war" with the Orthodox Church and labelled the Kyiv government as "godless and immoral" while the Church's head, Patriarch Kirill, condemned the raid as an "act of intimidation of believers".

The Patriarch is a vociferous supporter of Vladimir Putin and has given his full backing to the Russian war in Ukraine.

Most Orthodox parishes in Ukraine are part of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), which was granted independence by the global Orthodox movement from Moscow in 2019. However, the historic Orthodox Church still exists, and its members look to Moscow for faith leadership. Little progress has been made on establishing a single unified Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

The monastery pictured before the invasion



Baby killed as shells hit maternity ward

Russian shelling on a maternity ward in the Zaporizhzhia region has killed a baby, Ukraine's State Emergency Service has said.

The two-story building in the city of Vilniansk was hit overnight and destroyed.

Footage from the scene shows emergency responders trying to dig through the rubble.

Ukrainian officials said a woman was in labour at the time of the attack, and that the baby that died was less than a year old.

A woman and a doctor were rescued from the rubble, and there is not believed to be anyone else missing.

Pope vows to help crack peace in Ukraine, as cardinal backs resistance to Russia

Carol Glatz

The Vatican is willing to do whatever it takes to broker a ceasefire and bring an end to the war on Ukraine, Pope Francis said.

"We are continually watching as the situation evolves concerning ways the Vatican's diplomatic efforts could help," he said in an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*.

He added that the Vatican Secretariat of State is working diligently every day, looking at every possibility and "giving weight to every opening that could lead to a real ceasefire and real negotiations," he said. "The Holy See

is willing to do everything possible to mediate and end the conflict in Ukraine."

"We are trying to develop a network of relationships that will foster a rapprochement between the parties, to find solutions.

Also, the Holy See does what it must to help the prisoners," he said, as well as provide humanitarian support "for the people of tormented Ukraine, whom I carry in my heart along with their suffering."

Asked about the prospects for reconciliation between Russia and Ukraine, the pope said, "I have hope.

Let's not resign ourselves, peace is possible."

"But we must all strive to demilitarise hearts, starting with our own, and then defuse, disarm violence. We must all be pacifists," he said.

Real peace comes only from dialogue, he said. "You don't get it with weapons because they don't defeat hatred and the thirst for domination, which will re-emerge."

Commenting on the string of wars countries around the world have engaged in over just the last 100 years, the pope said, "It is absurd." But what makes it even more infuriating and

sad is "knowing that behind all these tragedies are the lust for power and the arms trade."

"When empires grow weak, they seek to wage war to feel strong, and also to sell weapons," he said.

"I was told that if no weapons were made and sold for one year," he said, the savings would be enough to eradicate world hunger. "Instead, the vocation to destroy always prevails, which results in wars."

"Never ever ignore that there are millions of people and children dying of hunger. No one can be indifferent," he said.



Yuliia Zaika, a 9-year old Ukrainian girl, holds her cat as she stands in the shattered remains of her village, Moshchun near Kyiv, Ukraine.

Photo: Murad Sezer, Reuters

Turn the other cheek, yes, but resist injustice

Ukraine, like any nation under attack, has a legitimate right to self-defence and to seek justice, but great care also must be taken to defend the hearts of Ukrainians from hatred and a desire for vengeance, the Vatican Secretary of State has said.

When Jesus told his disciples to turn the other cheek, he was not ruling out self-defence, because "the Lord does not require unjust or impossible things," Cardinal Pietro Parolin said during a Mass for peace in Ukraine.

The liturgy at Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Ukraine, but it could not ignore how "nearly nine months of extensive warfare have reduced parts of the country to ruins, emptied of people, filled with debris and

shrouded in darkness," the cardinal said.

Unfortunately, he said, "the reality of destruction and suffering that images and statistics put before our eyes every day feeds the temptation to give in to disappointment and distrust."

With Andrii Yurash, Ukraine's ambassador to the Holy See, and most of the Vatican diplomatic corps present, Cardinal Parolin said prayers for peace is rooted in the same trust.

"We witness the horror of a war that has continued to sow destruction and death for so many months," he said. "We see, too, the failure of attempts to restore peace or find solutions leading to it, while blood and tears continue to flow."

"Nevertheless, we raise prayers to God for peace in Ukraine and every

country suffering from war so that trust in his promises of life will not fail and that they will soon find fulfillment," the cardinal said. "Despite the failures of human wills and human efforts, we ask God to pour out his Spirit on humanity longing for peace and to be delivered from the scourge of armed conflict."

The Gospel reading at the Mass included the line where Jesus tells his disciples, "When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well."

"They are words that tear at the heart of one who has been slapped and feels the injustice," the cardinal said. "How can the Lord ask us not to react to aggressors? Won't this yielding to abuse legitimise it? Can peace mean surrendering to injustice, resigning

ourselves in the face of aggression?"

But that is not what Jesus is saying, Cardinal Parolin said. Self-defence is legitimate. "In asking us to turn the other cheek, in fact, he does not ask us to yield to injustice," he said.

"Violence, the abuse of power and injustice always have a two-fold effect," the cardinal said. They "not only procure an external evil, but also produce an internal one, in people's hearts. Hence, while animated by the natural desire for justice, what arise are also hatred and a desire for revenge. And this is where the Lord teaches us to react with love. For just as it is legitimate to defend ourselves externally from those who attack us, we have an even greater obligation to defend ourselves inwardly from hatred and vengeance."

Nigeria risks going way of Afghanistan, says bishop as he pleads for west to help

Simon Caldwell

Nigeria is at risk of following the fate of Afghanistan and being overrun by Islamist insurgents unless the West acts firmly to prevent terrorist violence there, an African bishop told British politicians.

Bishop Jude Arogundade of Ondo, Nigeria, said the Christians of his country are suffering persecution so intense that it bordered on genocide.

He told politicians gathered in a committee room of the Houses of Parliament that “The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria has spoken against the unprecedented insecurity situation in Nigeria repeatedly but to no avail”.

“We have walked for life, protested and even called the President (Muhammadu Buhari) to resign if he is incapable of fulfilling the basic purpose of government – the security of lives and properties of citizens. Even at that, nothing has changed,” he said.

As reported on the front page of last week’s Universe, Aid to the Church in Need’s report on persecuted Christians in 2022 said Nigeria was staring at a ‘genocide’ of the faith unless more was done to protect Christians.

The bishop agreed, saying: “With 3,478 people killed as of June this year and the increased cases of terror thereafter,” he wished to appeal to the UK government and “all people of goodwill to compel the Nigerian government to stop the genocide.”

“Or, in the least, ask for help from other countries before Nigeria is overrun, as is the case of Afghanistan,” the bishop said.

“The entire nation is on the edge, apprehensive of a major offensive that may sweep round the entire country,”



Bishop Jude Arogundade of Ondo, Nigeria, visits a victim of the attack on St. Francis Xavier Church on Pentecost Sunday 2022.

**Below, the ACN report
Photo: Aid to the Church in Need**



he added. “Already, many embassies were forced to close down (the) last two weeks as a result of an intelligence report predicting (a) major attack in Abuja, the federal capital of Nigeria.”

Bishop Arogundade made his remarks at the launch in London of *Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians Oppressed for Their Faith 2020-22*, compiled and published by Aid to the Church in Need UK.

He recalled the 5th June massacre in his diocese – at St. Francis Catholic Church in Owo – which left 41 people dead and 73 other seriously injured.

He asked why “like other attacks on churches in Nigeria, no one has been charged for this crime?”

“No one should have the audacity to unleash the level of mayhem going on in Nigeria on innocent citizens.”

“The world must insist that terrorists, their sponsors and their sympathizers be brought to justice. Please,

ask the Nigerian government to deploy all the legal instruments and political institutions for protecting and enforcing the rights and freedom of the minority to stop the killings.”

The bishop added: “This pogrom is clearly terrorism to accomplish an age-long ethno/religious objective. The world must stop this evil and hold the perpetrators accountable.”

The ACN report investigated religious freedom in 24 countries over the last two years and found that there was an increase in the oppression or persecution of Christians.

They said Africa saw a sharp rise in terrorist violence, with more than 7,600 Nigerian Christians reportedly murdered between January 2021 and June 2022. They included 20 Nigerian Christians filmed as they were killed in May by terrorists from Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province.

The report identified state authoritarianism as the main driver of worsening oppression in Asia, with North Korea the gravest offender because it continued to routinely and systematically repress religious belief.

The ongoing rise of religious nationalism involving Hindutva and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist groups active in India and Sri Lanka respectively was blamed for increasing violence against Christians in South Asia, where authorities have also arrested Christians and the forced the cessation of church services.

The report noted that India had witnessed 710 incidents of anti-Christian violence in 2021-2022, driven in part by political extremism.

In one instance, members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party applauded during a rally in Chhattisgarh in 2021 as Swami Parmatmananda called for Christians to be killed.

Deacon issues apology after tweet upsets gay club gun attack victims

The Diocese of Oakland, California, has issued a statement of support for those killed and injured after an attack on a gay nightclub in Colorado, after one of its deacons said victims deserved their fate as being “disordered shouldn’t be a piece of cake.”

Five people were killed and 25 were injured just before midnight on 19th November after a gunman opened fire in the club. He was apprehended by clubgoers who disarmed him.

Many, including Catholics, took to Twitter after the attacks to show support for the gay community after the incident, with one saying ‘I have a friend who is transgender: a gentle, empathetic, compassionate person, a Catholic who goes to Mass every Sunday, and a person who suffers from depression and suicidal thoughts. All he said on social media, in response to the shooting, was ‘being LGBT hurts’. And a total stranger tweeted him saying ‘Being gravely disordered shouldn’t be a piece of cake.’

The unsympathetic comment was tracked back to Deacon Rob Federle of the Oakland Diocese. His bishop, Michael C. Barber, said the deacon’s comments were “personal and not representative of the Church’s teachings” and that all the diocese was sending prayers and support to those affected.

Deacon Federle has since apologised for his comments, admitting they “lacked the Christian charity and were not befitting of an ordained clergy, or of anyone who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ.”

Bolsonaro breaks silence by announcing challenge to Brazilian election result

Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has announced he will challenge his defeat in the October election and called on the electoral authority to annul all votes cast on most of the nation’s electronic voting machines, citing a software bug. However, independent experts have said the problem did not affect the reliability of results.

Such an action would leave him with 51 per cent of the remaining valid votes and a re-election victory, according to Marcelo de Bessa, the lawyer who filed the 33-page request on behalf of the president and his Liberal Party.

The electoral authority has already declared victory for Mr Bolsonaro’s nemesis, former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, and leading politicians, including many of the president’s allies, have accepted the results.

Protesters in cities across the country have steadfastly refused to do the same, particularly with Mr Bolsonaro declining to concede.

Party leader Valdemar Costa told reporters in Brasilia that their evaluation found all machines dating from before 2020 – nearly 280,000 of them, or about 59% of the total used in the October 30 runoff – lacked individual identification numbers in internal logs.



Neither explained how that might have affected election results, but said they were asking the electoral authority to invalidate all votes cast on those machines.

The complaint characterised the bug as “irreparable non-compliance due to malfunction” that called into question the authenticity of the results.

Immediately afterwards, Alexandre de Moraes, who presides over the electoral authority, said the court would not consider the complaint unless the party offers a new report within 24 hours that would include results from the first electoral round on 2nd October, in which the Liberal Party won more seats in both congressional houses than any other.

Mr Bolsonaro’s less than two-point loss to da Silva on October 30 was the narrowest margin since Brazil’s 1985 return to democracy.

While the president has not explicitly cried foul, he has refused to concede

defeat or congratulate his opponent – leaving room for supporters to draw their own conclusions.

Many have been protesting relentlessly since the result was announced, making claims of election fraud and demanding that the armed forces intervene.

Mr Bolsonaro spent more than a year claiming Brazil’s electronic voting system is prone to fraud, without ever presenting evidence.

Brazil began using an electronic voting system in 1996 and election security experts consider such systems less secure than hand-marked paper ballots, because they leave no auditable paper trail.

But Brazil’s system has been closely scrutinised by domestic and international experts who have never found evidence of it being exploited to commit fraud.

The Senate’s president, Rodrigo Pacheco, said that the election results are “unquestionable”.

Sudan Dengue fever outbreak kills 26

At least 26 people have died in Sudan from Dengue fever in one of the worst outbreaks the country has seen in recent years, health officials said.

Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne disease that occurs in tropical areas of the world, usually spreading near stagnant sources of water.

There were 460 confirmed cases of the disease and a further 3,436 suspected cases, the Sudanese health ministry announced on social media. The figures were dated as being recorded on Monday.

Around 20 of the deaths were recorded in the southern Kordofan region, one of the areas where the outbreak was first reported by the Sudanese Doctors’ Committee in early November.

Several local media outlets put the official number of cases as much higher.

Dengue fever has flu-like symptoms and can often lead to organ failure and death.

Sudan has had two recent outbreaks that led to fatalities but UN officials said this latest one was more serious and had hospitalised more of its victims.

HEART OF THE MATTER

CINDY WOODEN



German Church ready to tough it out and stick to its own synodal path as Vatican voices its concerns

The timing could not have been more unfortunate. Just weeks after the German Synodal Path report suggested a liberal approach miles away from that of the Vatican on issues such as the role of women and gay rights at church, the country's bishops travelled to Rome for their 'ad limina' visit.

The meeting with the Roman Curia was not a "showdown," but it did make clear the Vatican's strong concerns about Germany's Synodal Path, especially official ministries for women and for a change in Church teaching about homosexuality, the president of the German bishops' conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing, admitted to reporters.

But "it was important to me to make it clear that the uncovering of abuse and structures that facilitated abuse in the Church have so shattered trust and called into question the authority of the bishops to such a degree that new paths are necessary in order to confront the crisis in the Church," he said.

The German bishops promise to reflect on what was said and heard, he said, but that reflection and the continuing dialogue with the Curia must involve those who "make up the largest part of the people of God: the laity."

"We are Catholics, and we will remain Catholics, but we want to be Catholics in a different way," Bishop Bätzing said. Claims that the German Church is moving toward a schism "are said from outside and meant to intimidate us."

A joint statement published by the bishops and the Vatican said the meeting with Curia officials was chaired by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. Formal presentations were made by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, and Cardinal Luis Ladaria, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, "who frankly and clearly entered into the concerns and reservations regarding the methodology, content and proposals of the Synodal Path."

"In the perspective of open and fraternal sharing," the statement said, "some proposals were put forward, such as a moratorium on the German Synodal Path, which was not accepted, and that of favouring an additional reflection and mutual listening in light of the perplexities that have emerged."

Bishop Bätzing told reporters that



The bishops of Germany and a number of heads of Vatican offices listen to Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, during a meeting as part of their 'ad limina' visits to Rome.

Cardinal Ouellet had accepted the role of the "bad guy" and proposed the moratorium.

"He said he was very worried, very worried that the synod in Germany could be a forest fire that spreads everywhere," the bishop said.

The joint statement also stressed "the importance and urgency of defining and deepening some of the issues highlighted, for example, those referring to Church structures, sacred ministry and access to it, Christian anthropology, etc."

The three apparently refer to the Synodal Path's: approval of a permanent "synodal council" of bishops and laypeople "to advise on major developments in the Church and society"; its call for women to be admitted to the diaconate and for a consideration of allowing women priests; and its call for a revision of Church teaching on homosexuality and its approval of blessings for persons in committed same-sex relationships.

At the news conference, Bishop Bätzing told reporters the role of women in the Church and the possibility of expanding women's ministries "is the most urgent question and the one that separates us most" from the Curia officials. "Women have put up with so much and are getting impatient. Many younger women say that a Church that denies all of this cannot be my Church."

As for allowing the blessing of gay couples, the bishop said members of

the Synodal Assembly are continuing their discussion. "But for me, as a bishop, these blessings for people who ask God's blessing for their committed relationship, I would not take that away from them."

In the wake of the clerical abuse scandal and with the release of a major study of its causes, the German bishops' conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics launched the Synodal Path in 2019. The process began with forums to discuss issues in the four areas the study identified as containing the "systemic causes" of sexual abuse and its cover-up: the exercise of power in the church; sexual morality; priestly existence; and the role of women in the Church.

At the news conference, Bishop Bätzing told reporters the bishops and the central committee are committed to concluding the Synodal Path with a fifth assembly in March. "A moratorium would mean stopping, it would mean not continuing work on these themes and texts. Here it was very clear, and

I'm glad it was in the communique, that this is not an option."

The Synodal Assembly meets to pray and discuss proposed documents setting out a theological approach to each of the four areas of study and separate documents making concrete suggestions for ways to address the concerns. After a first reading and debate on the documents, they are amended. After a second reading, members of the assembly vote on them. To pass, the documents must be approved by two-thirds of the German bishops and two-thirds of the laity, priests and religious in the assembly.

The recommendations in some approved texts can be adopted without approval from Rome, but others must be referred to the Vatican before implementation.

In his introduction to the meeting with the Curia, in a text released by the bishops' conference, Bishop Bätzing told the Vatican officials that "the issues we are dealing with in the four forums and at the synodal assemblies are also being discussed

in other parts of the Church," as is clear from the contributions national bishops' conferences have sent in as part of the process preparing for the world Synod of Bishops.

While the Synodal Path was mentioned during the two-hour meeting the 63 bishops had with Pope Francis, Bishop Bätzing said it was not treated in depth because the pope was scheduled to attend the meeting the next day with the heads of the Curia offices.

"It was irritating at first" that Pope Francis was not there, the bishop said, and no one from the Vatican explained his absence. "But now I would say the pope is a shrewd Jesuit and he allowed us to have this debate among brothers."

The bishops' office said the meeting with Pope Francis was an open forum "during which the bishops were able to raise their questions and issues, and the pope responded."

While "aspects of the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany" came up, the office said, the discussion also included providing pastoral care to people in changing times, understanding priestly and episcopal ministry, and the involvement of laypeople in the Church and the challenge of evangelization in an increasingly secularised culture.

"Political responsibility, social cohesion and prospects for peace in the face of global and regional conflicts" also were discussed, the bishops' conference said.



The uncovering of abuse and structures that facilitated abuse in the Church have so shattered trust and called into question the authority of the bishops that new paths are necessary in order to confront the crisis in the Church...

TALKING POINT

DALE GAVLAK

Migrants from Middle East left fearful as Sweden looks to tighten restrictions

A visitor coming from the Middle East to Malmö could feel quite at home with great falafel lovingly made by proud Palestinian owners of Falafel No. 1, reputedly the best offered in Sweden. Or a visitor could buy Arabic, Turkish, Indian and other foreign foodstuffs from a mall in Rosengård, a district drawing a vast array of ethnicities and migrant communities.

Home to more than 170 nationalities among its 350,000 inhabitants, this multicultural city on Sweden's southern coast has drawn refugees fleeing conflict and religious persecution at home.

But now Sweden's newly elected government is proposing to tighten restrictions on immigration, threatening asylum-seekers' hopes of a safe haven. In the past, Sweden has been viewed as Europe's most welcoming country for refugees.

Afghans here who have firmly established Christian convictions and professions of faith attested to by their churches told Catholic News Service they feel particularly vulnerable as they struggle to be granted asylum in Sweden. Rights activists familiar with the challenges Afghans face with migration in Sweden point out there is a 4-5 times greater risk of rejection for Afghan adults, even young adults, compared to those who are still under 18.

The change in migration policy due to the election comes as Open Doors, a leading persecution research watchdog, warns that Afghanistan is now the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. This follows the militant Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021 in the wake of the abrupt US military withdrawal. So,



Youssif Iskandarani and his Palestinian brothers founded the Falafel No. 1 stores in Malmö, Sweden. They based their products on their father's recipe of nutritious, hearty food using the humble chickpea. For many years, the falafel shops outnumbered McDonald's restaurants in Malmö. Photo: Dale Gavlak

any return there would likely mean certain death, as would a return to neighbouring Iran.

"We have already noticed that most political parties have changed their attitude toward immigration," Swedish Cardinal Anders Arborelius told CNS. "It has become much more difficult for refugees and asylum-seekers to get permission to remain in Sweden. It can also be difficult for religious sisters to get permission. Still, we hope that the new government will listen to the voice of the Churches and be more open to migrants from different parts of the world."

Bishop Saad Sirop Hanna, the apostolic visitor for Chaldean

Catholics in Europe, who is based in Sweden, told CNS it remains unclear whether the new government's proposals would be accepted by parliament.

"There is concern because some of the parties are a bit from the extreme right-wing, which they say are anti-refugees. We have to see the different laws that they are going to take. Maybe in six months to a year, we will understand if this government will do good or not," Bishop Hanna said.

Rights activists say they expect the migration policy will suffer under the new government. Asylum-seekers, they said, already face tough examinations, resulting in

some of the lowest numbers in Europe being granted asylum.

Recently, Sweden's ruling coalition arrived at a deal to set far-reaching policies on migration with the Sweden Democrats, who have neo-Nazi roots and who won the second-largest number of parliamentary seats in September's national elections, giving them substantial influence.

The Tidö Agreement proposes to drastically reduce the quota of refugees coming into Sweden from 5,000 per year to just 900. It advocates the possible return of people who have 'not integrated' – whatever that means – and ending the permanent residence permit system.

John Stauffer, the legal director and deputy executive director of the Stockholm-based Civil Rights Defenders organization, told *The Local*, an online publication, the deal makes "it more difficult to be a refugee or asylum-seeker." He pointed to concerns over stop-and-search zones, easier surveillance, stripping newly arrived immigrants of many benefits, and the detention of asylum-seekers while their asylum applications are processed.

The young Afghan men CNS met came to Sweden in 2015 as unaccompanied minors from Iran, where they initially fled from family after each experienced a deep personal encounter with Jesus. They caught boats to cross the Mediterranean, travelling first to Greece, then onward to Sweden.

They said they were forced to flee their homelands due to death threats from family and community members because of their faith in Jesus, so they sought what they thought was sanctuary and religious

freedom in Europe.

One man experienced a life-saving intervention during a difficult birthing and delivery, in which mother and baby were expected to die. A Christian friend encouraged the man to pray to Jesus, and his family lived.

Another said he saw himself in darkness when a powerful light invaded his room, and he witnessed the symbol of crosses covering his hands. Already disillusioned with what he witnessed of religious expression imposed by his strict family, he became rooted in Christ. Yet another experienced persecution from his family, but his newfound faith in Jesus and prayers provided peace as well as a sudden and total release from smoking and medication addiction after he arrived in Sweden.

Now, their families and friends back home and friends in Sweden know of their Christian commitment and outspoken faith. Returning home would mean certain death.

"It has been a painful issue that some Christian converts have been denied asylum in Sweden," said Cardinal Arborelius. "Some of them had to pass through a strange process in order to show that their conversion was sincere. We know that it could be easier for them to be granted asylum in certain other countries that are more open to their needs."

"I think such people have to hold firm to their faith," said Bishop Hanna. "Faith is a very deep issue known alone to God. However, there is no Christian country. There is Christianity in this country. They need to hold on to their faith and find a way to be integrated into this society."

Afghans will struggle for their lives this winter, says Red Cross

More Afghans will struggle for survival as living conditions deteriorate in the coming year, an International Committee of the Red Cross official has said, as the country braces for its second winter under Taliban rule.

The religious group's seizure of power in August 2021 sent the economy into a tailspin and fundamentally transformed Afghanistan, driving millions into poverty and hunger as foreign aid stopped almost overnight.

Martin Schuepp, director of operations at the Red Cross, said in an interview: "The economic hardship is there. It's very serious and people will struggle for their lives."

Sanctions on Taliban rulers, a halt on bank transfers and frozen billions in Afghanistan's currency reserves have already restricted

access to global institutions and the outside money that supported the country's aid-dependent economy before the withdrawal of US and Nato forces.

The onset of winter will compound the acute humanitarian needs that half the country is already facing, Mr Schuepp pointed out. "Prices are spiking due to a whole set of reasons, but also the issue of sanctions has led to massive consequences."

"We see more and more Afghans having to sell their belongings to make ends meet, where they have to buy materials for heating while at the same time face increasing costs for food and other essential items."

Sanctions are presenting a challenge in getting aid and the necessary supplies to the country, and it is key that all sanctions have

humanitarian exemptions so organisations like the Red Cross could continue their work, he said.

The Red Cross is already paying the salaries of 10,500 medical staff every month to ensure basic healthcare services stay afloat, Mr Schuepp added.

"We are very conscious that it's not our role to pay for salaries of medical staff. As a humanitarian organisation, we are not best placed to do it. We have done so exceptionally to ensure that services continue."

Mr Schuepp, who was making his first visit to Afghanistan as director of operations since the Taliban takeover, said the agency was feeding most of the country's prison population. "We have stepped up our support to prisons and prisoners, ensuring that food

is being provided in the prisons throughout the country," he said. "Today, about 80 per cent of the prison population benefits from such food support."

He described the Red Cross' role as a "stop-gap measure" that had become necessary following the collapse of the US-backed Afghan government once Washington began its final withdrawal of troops in August 2021.

The Red Cross has tried "to make sure that basic services continue" in prisons under Taliban rule, he said.

No country in the world has recognised the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as the Taliban calls their administration, leaving it internationally isolated. The religious group previously ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s and was overthrown by a US invasion in 2001.

A VIEW FROM THE PEWS



MICHAEL CAINE,
ST WINEFRIDE'S PARISH, LYMM, CHESHIRE

People who shine take world with them

Wherever we go on this earth, there are people we meet who make us feel good, seem to shine in our eyes and we want to be near them. What is it that makes these people so special?

They don't necessarily have to be great politicians, wealthy people or anyone who is famous. They could be anyone we know.

My own answer to this ability to automatically make them shine in our eyes is because of the way they conduct their lives. Think of anyone you know who has this ability to shine. Think of how they live their lives. Their great secret has been available to people all over the world ever since mankind was created. It's staring us in the face.

That secret is the way they give themselves as a service to others, without any thought of recompense, real humility. They demonstrate their love for all peoples no matter

who they are by being truly humble and helpful.

Their passion in life seems to be one of always wanting to give. Give their possessions and their time. There's always a smile on their face. They are the true Good Samaritans as depicted in the Bible. They care for all peoples in all kinds of ways, giving their time, their possessions, their skills and love.

They seem to have an extraordinary ability to make people feel wanted, good in themselves and most of all cared for. The people who meet them are never aware that they may even have their own deep concerns, which worry them greatly. It's the empathy they generate that makes others feel good in themselves.

Whenever they meet anyone who has real concerns, their empathy become immediately apparent. The worried person believes they've met



The Good Samaritan tends the wounds of the wounded traveller
Balthasar van Cortenboone
(1612–1663)

someone who not only understands their true concerns but truly wants to be of assistance. This great empathetic nature is a great relief to the concerned.

The receivers of assistance from such people, never for one moment worry about the person trying to help. They seem to be able to

generate trust without even trying to.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. The second is this. Love your neighbour as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.

The three great virtues are Faith, Hope and Love, the greatest of these is love, which our subject generates. Is this why they always seem to shine and make us feel good and want to be in their company.

We can all truly love our neighbour, whoever and whatever he or she is, but do we?

In search of digital temperance

Elise Italiano Ureneck

When we speak about the burdens that people bear, we tend to reference what they 'carry on their backs' or what's been placed on their shoulders. When it comes to the hardships of today's children and adolescents, we should think instead about what we're placing in their hands.

Last month, an American group called the Institute for Family Studies released a report on the relationship between family structure and teen tech use (specifically gaming, social media, video chat, online shopping and texting).

Given the ubiquity of devices and the social pressure exerted on kids to get them early and stay on them often, researchers wanted to understand how parents and families are navigating this gauntlet, serving as perhaps the last defence against addiction.

The short story is that teens raised in intact families (defined by their two married biological parents) use digital media an average of two hours less per day than their peers who are being raised in non-intact homes.

The authors conclude that this margin, which does have an effect on sleep, mental health and self-image, likely has to do with the fact that intact families tend to set and enforce more family rules, including around

the use of smartphones or tech devices.

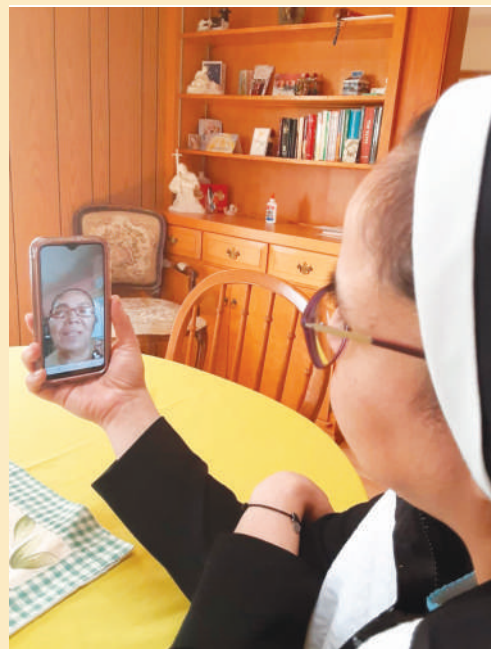
In the words of one sociologist whom I recently interviewed, "Marriage and family matter now more than they did 30 or 40 years ago when it comes to a number of outcomes for kids."

It turns out that technology use is now one of them.

What is shocking, however, is that children in intact families still spend an average of eight to nine hours a day on digital or social media, which the scholars note is a "staggering amount of time, considering the time children spend sleeping, eating, going to school, watching TV (which was not included as digital media) and participating in extracurricular activities."

There are any number of topics to consider in light of this statistic: how we as a society understand the value of the time we're given, whether or not we appreciate that we are social animals in need of embodied relationships, that there are important things that we are missing out on like play and recreation and that we need mental and emotional space that's free of comparison, affirmation and self-reference.

As a mother of two young children, I am cognisant of how my children are affected when I pull out my phone in their presence. I'm also aware of the fact that they are



growing up at a time in which most public spaces are adorned with televisions and smart devices.

As a mother who considers herself devoted to trying to help her children cultivate their imaginations, be comfortable with silence and socialise with others in

person, the battle with screens feels Sisyphean.

These are things that my parents worked at, but they counted on others to support their efforts: neighbours, parishioners, coaches, scout leaders and teachers were all in on the plan.

The institute's report confirms what many of us know: that parents are now the primary but also, in most cases, the only figures that can shape their children's relationship with screens.

The good news is that where families create tech-free spaces and periods of time, particularly around meals and bedtime, kids seem to be able to learn habits of detachment.

And when groups of parents join together in solidarity to delay giving their kids smartphones, their tweens and teens are more amenable because they aren't the only ones without them.

Those of us who came of age before the tech revolution understand the burdens that we're all now shouldering because we remember life without them.

While our children might have to hold these devices in their hands, perhaps we can preserve their innocence a little longer and give them a taste of how things were – and can be – with some technological temperance.

JOURNEY IN FAITH



CHRIS MCDONNELL

Take the time to appreciate the journey of Advent

The days of Advent tell the story of a journey, well, two journeys really. The first journey, told in the books of the Old Testament, gives an historical account of the Hebrew people, of their trials and tribulations and of their seeking to follow the call of God. The second journey, much shorter in time span, from the moment of Annunciation through to a birth in Bethlehem is the fulfilment of their trust, though in an unexpected manner.

The image of Visitation Mary meets Elizabeth, at the Church of the Visitation in the picturesque village of Ein Karem, some 7 km south-west of Jerusalem, shows two young women, both pregnant, face to face, greeting each other. It is a poignant image of a shared intimacy, two cousins, the mothers of Jesus and John.

The image of journey is recurrent in religious experience, the translation from one place to another, from one way of life to another, from birth to death, from sorrow to joy. In earlier days, journeys involved risk, often great risk and so became symbols of the difficult times we experience day by day. In many ways the same applies today. We should still be risk-takers, willing to be adventurous in what we do, showing trust in each other and in the care of the good Lord.

Advent, the Coming, is a time of

deep mystery, a time of expectancy, a time of waiting. You may have heard of the 'Advent group', a support Group founded in England the 70s to support priests who left ministry to marry, and their wives. Their first gathering took place at Spode House in Staffordshire, managed then by the Dominicans whose community lived in Hawksyard Priory. It took place in early December, in the first days of the liturgical season of Advent.

Looking for a name for the newly-formed gathering, they came up with the title of 'the Advent Group'. Not only was it appropriate to the Season, but it also matched the journey that these men and women were embarked on. After initial hostility from the some of the hierarchy, the Advent Group came to be recognised as a bona fide association whose intention was to fulfil a role within a caring Church.

The words 'see how these Christians love one another' are often quoted as the defining nature of a follower of the Christ. They are well remembered when we find ourselves being critical of each other, forming opinions that are judgemental, that seek only to highlight differences rather than reinforce a community of love.

In our secular society, the days of Advent are very often a confusion of utter mystery and commercial

opportunism. We are encouraged to have the best-ever party food, enjoy every film imaginable and above all, spend on numerous presents – for what purpose?

Each year in our parish during the First Mass of Christmas, we listen to the Proclamation of the Feast of the Nativity. It begins with these words.

"To a people prepared, came the unrecognised Child, in his time, he came into our time and disturbed the peace. For each of us, half-people wandering in a lost world, peace comes with wholeness".

Expectation and reality were very different. The Christ-child, helpless and dependent, whose journey from Bethlehem would lead to Calvary and the garden of Resurrection, was not part of the story line. But each Advent we explore again the mystery revealed to us and live again Christ's birth.

Our Advent wreaths are set in churches to count off the weeks to Christmas, the growing light as first one, then two, three and four candles are lit, very often by young children in whose eyes we see the wonder and amazement as light from the taper passes to the candle and a new light glows.

So in the bustle and hurry of these coming December days, take time to pause and reflect on why we do what we do, what it is all about.

A few years ago, I remember hearing carols over the PA system of a shop towards the end of September, a little premature I venture to suggest, more to do with commercial gain than the reality of the Advent story.

Let's finish these few words and begin the days of this Advent with four haikus.

*Advent -1-
Fog found December days
in chill expectation
of the Lord's Advent*

*Advent -2-
Days of waiting
in anticipation of the birth
of him who comes*

*Advent -3-
Four flames shape my song
that this very earth must sing
fire in the desert*

*Advent -4-
Touch again the stone
that your open hands wear smooth
each silent morning.*



CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF FIDELITY



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CREDO

FR HUGH DUFFY

Don't be left counting the cost

Make a point then of reaching out to those around you with an act or acts of kindness

When did you last go out for a meal? What was the name of the waiter or waitress who served you? Are you finding it hard to remember or is it that you never even gave it a thought?

In fact, most people never learn the names of those who serve them, whether at a restaurant, at the car repairers at the local shop, bakery or butchers. They are just there, people to serve and rarely to be noticed.

Strange as it seems, the ideal to which Jesus calls us, and which he exemplified in his own life is, "service." He insists that if we really expect to count in the eyes of God, we must become people who serve (Mark 10 : 43). What's more, he insists we don't count the cost, and that we do whatever we do out of a sense of duty if we want to avoid the pitfall of egoism and pride (Luke 17 : 10).

Servers often work in great pain because they cannot afford to do otherwise although they are seldom noticed and rarely appreciated. Yet, without the servers and the dishwashers and the cleaners and the cooks, the restaurant would be nothing. Those who serve are important people: "Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest."

We almost never think of the men and women who collect our bins or take care of maintenance. We rarely notice the people who clean and change the beds in our hospitals or launder the sheets at the hotels we

use. We know the names of important people, athletes, film stars, politicians, but the "little people" escape our notice.

Jesus points out that we have put the cart before the horse. It is the caretaker who is just as favoured as the CEO, the orderly as the doctor, the teacher as the head, and the servant as the master. He turns everything upside down. True greatness, he says, is to be achieved by serving others.

"Name dropping" is an international sport. People like to tell others what important people said or did. They love to be able to say they read their books, visited their birthplace, slept in a bed they once used or, wonder of wonders, met them in the flesh. If we followed Jesus' teaching we might start another kind of name-dropping, mentioning what the caretaker said, or the nurse's assistant, or the waitress.

How revolutionary is this teaching of Jesus about authority! Have you ever noticed how politicians love to drop the names of ordinary people, like Joe the plumber, when seeking re-election? They do this because they want to appeal to the ordinary person and show how alike they are. The truth is, they are alike. But they should acknowledge this all the time, by their actions, and not only when they are running for public office.

Abuses of authority by those who



If we followed Jesus' teaching we might start another kind of name-dropping, mentioning what the caretaker said, or the nurse's assistant, or the waitress.



love to "lord it over" others was a real turn-off to Jesus (Mark 10 : 42). He cautions us to avoid that kind of abuse at all costs because the true meaning of authority is service. Jesus brings us back to this original

understanding of the term.

Everybody has ample opportunities to serve others every day by the way they treat them in the course of their work. Never look down on anybody, but treat him or

her with kindness. Kindness is service in thought, word and deed. It can be as simple as a smile, a pat on the back, an encouraging word, a helping hand, a grievance forgiven, a confidence shared. This kind of service to others can happen any way, at any place, and at any time.

Make a point then of reaching out to those around you with an act or acts of kindness. Do it at the earliest opportunity, and do it without an agenda or ulterior motive.

Do it because it is your duty.

Treasuring the value of repentance

Why is repentance so highly valued in the scriptures? Repentance is so highly valued because without it, you cannot live a good life, you cannot move forward in life with a pure heart and a clean conscience. Everyone needs to repent of sin, of wrongdoing.

The first words of Jesus to those he called to follow him were: "Repent and believe in the Good News," (Mark 1 : 15). Repentance comes first. It is the condition sine qua non, the indispensable condition without which you cannot live a good life or experience the Good News. Repentance, for the Christian, means turning away from a life of sin and compromise with the world to follow Christ (Romans 12 : 2).

It does not mean feeling bad or shameful about yourself. The Greek word for

repentance in the New Testament is, *metanoia*, which means thinking differently about yourself. It means to be convinced of another way, to change your mind as well as your convictions from going your way to going God's way.

This is how saints like Paul and Augustine viewed repentance. They saw it as liberation from a former way of life to embrace the unconditional love of God.

I like to think of repentance, positively, as responding to God's love by being transformed in your convictions and actions. God is love. He has chosen you, and he wants to shower you with his love. His son came on earth to manifest this love to you, in the flesh. The opposite is to "harden your heart," to be "stiff necked," to be

stubborn or recalcitrant about receiving the gift God is offering you.

St John the Baptist spoke about repentance to a "stiff necked" people in his day, and he paid for it with his life. We will shortly read about John the Baptist in the gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent, and how he tried to get people to repent.

It is still a problem now as then. Learning to repent is an on-going process because no one is perfect, and life is not static. As long as we live, there will always be opportunities to repent. We will always be prone to make mistakes, but as long as we can learn from them, and change our ways, there is hope.

Repentance frees up hope. It is not for the weak, but for the strong.



St John the Baptist spoke about repentance to a "stiff necked" people in his day, and he paid for it with his life.

Repentance frees up hope. It is not for the weak, but for the strong.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS



Advent is our sign to be patient as we prepare for coming of the Lord

27th November 2022

1st Sunday in Advent, A

1st Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

A happy future for all who seek the truth and work for peace

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Responsorial: Psalm 121: 1-2, 4-5, 6-9

R./: Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced when I heard them say: 'Let us go to God's house.'

And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. (R./)

It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord. For Israel's law it is, there to praise the Lord's name. There were set the thrones of judgement of the house of David. (R./)

For the peace of Jerusalem pray:

'Peace be to your homes!

May peace reign in your walls, in your palaces, peace!' (R./)

For love of my brethren and friends I say:

'Peace upon you!'

For love of the house of the Lord I will ask for your good. (R./)

2nd Reading: Romans 13:11-14

We are to wake from sleep and put on the armour of light

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the



day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy.

Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44
We must make ready for the day when Christ will come again

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Another Advent

What's another year? was the name of a song that won the Eurovision Song Contest long ago! Today we start another liturgical

new year, with the songs of Isaiah singing the praise of Advent. Our year of prayer will carry through to Christmas, then on to Jesus' Public life, then Lent and Holy Week and the drama of Easter and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then our time moves towards next Advent, when another year of liturgical prayer begins. This rhythm and pattern can be a blessing for us, providing a spiritual framework of meaning for all the bits and pieces of daily living, during the different seasons. The liturgical year can help us keep our lives grateful and centred on God.

We begin this season of Advent in a spirit of expectation. During this time we look forward not just to the birthday of Jesus at Bethlehem but also for his second coming at the end of time!

Here's an instance of a woman with something to teach us this Advent. Before we had mobile phones or WhatsApp or Voicemail, we depended on the humble landline. There was a mother in Mayo whose son in New York used to phone her up at eight o'clock every Sunday evening. As it neared the time her eyes were fixed on the telephone. No call in or out was allowed as she waited! She would not miss the joy of hearing her son's voice and all his news. That woman was a model for our spirit of waiting in Advent!

The key attitude is one of being alert, being ready, so as not to miss

the time of his coming, 'you must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect'. These words sound like a warning as though God were ready to pounce and catch us off guard with our affairs not in order! But they are also a promise, filled with hope. The coming of the Christ was and is the best of good news, a gift beyond imagining! It calls for joy and gratitude. Our response should be not fear, but awe and wonder. John Betjamen has expressed it beautifully in this Christmas poem: *'Is it true? and is it true, this most tremendous tale of all, a baby in an ox's stall? The Maker of the stars and sea become a child on earth for me, that God was man in Palestine and lives today in bread and wine.'*

Let's imagine ourselves in that stable on the first Christmas night. See there a girl from Nazareth with her quiet husband and a new baby. Then go up to Jerusalem and tell the priests what you saw. Say that helpless, newborn baby is the Anointed One, the long awaited Messiah, the Son of God. They would think you were out of your mind; they would accuse you of blasphemy; they would tell you that God is not like that. They have studied the scriptures and they know God cannot be small and vulnerable like that. But the Son of God has chosen to come among us just like that.

That is the great, joyful surprise of our faith. The presence of God among us is not what we expect, not where we expect. That's how we miss it. As we begin Advent, we are invited not to miss the amazing gift of God. Be awake and look for God in the most unlikely places. Find God's call to our goodwill in the doorway where the homeless sleep. Look for God's presence where refugees are corralled. Grace is present not only in comfortable places and spaces! God is looking out from the wrinkled faces of senior citizens. It's great to be alive and wide-eyed like a child, at the beginning of our new year of grace. We can welcome this time of Advent with a heartfelt céad míle fáilte

Some other sobering thoughts

Advent tends to be swamped by Christmas music and Christmas noise. It should be a quiet time, where we step back to the fundamental experience of Israel, the experience of trustful waiting on the Lord's deliverance. It's a desert time, when we try to empty our minds of the clutter of the past and when our hearts learn from the Prophets what are the deepest needs in our lives. Advent reawakens hope and longing for a better future. Not just a secure financial future for me or you, but a future of Redemption for the entire people.

Beyond all the worries and impassioned debates of politics and economics today are two deep and growing threats that we don't like to think about. They are threats of an apocalyptic level worthy of the fearful language of today's Gospel. One of these is the threat of nuclear extinction. The other is the threat of climate catastrophe.

The climate-change threat has grown slowly, like the rising waters of a tsunami, and awareness of it is muddied by a culture of denial, encouraged by commercial interests. Registering the full extent of the danger one is inclined to cry, "Only God can save us now!" We are tempted to ask, "How could God let his creation get into such a dangerous state? Where is Providence in all this?"

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH FR DOYLE

There's no such thing as a church blessing that doesn't count

Q. You previously said that receiving the Eucharist at Mass is valid regardless of who distributes it, so a family should not disrupt the congregation's flow to Communion just to receive from a priest. Because I have several young children who do not yet receive Communion, we sit where our priest will distribute the Eucharist, as it seems more valuable for my children to receive the blessing of a priest rather than a 'good wish' from a layperson. Can you explain more about blessings? A holy priest friend once told us: "If you're not a priest, you're just shooting blanks." Whose duty is it to offer prayers of blessing? What has the most merit and efficacy?

A. Normally, it is the priest who imparts a Catholic blessing. But your friend who made the remark about laypeople 'shooting blanks' is way off base – if he really believes that. There are many blessings that are done properly, and perhaps more appropriately, by laypeople. The most common example is the blessing of food, which many families do each evening around the dinner table.

The Church's *Book of Blessings* lists several blessings that are normally done by laypeople – including the blessing of sons and daughters by their parents (especially when leaving home or embarking on a new venture). Another particularly touching example recommended by the *Book of Blessings* is the blessing of a newly engaged couple by both sets of parents.

I have sometimes seen extraordinary lay ministers of holy Communion give a blessing to children too young to receive Communion, but technically that is improper. And actually, no one needs a 'blessing' at that point since, a few minutes later, the entire congregation will be blessed by the priest at the end of Mass.

One possibility, I would think, is just for the extraordinary minister to say to the child the words 'Jesus loves you,' without giving a blessing.

Q. I decorate my home with religious art that helps draw my heart and mind to God. At times, I find vintage religious pieces on online auction websites that I can't find elsewhere. I noticed recently that some online resellers have items like used chalices and vestments (stoles) for sale. Does it go against Church teaching to purchase such items to be used on a home altar for prayer and devotional practices only?

A. What you are doing is not only



Senior Kenia Viri serves as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion during a Mass. "At communion, one possibility is for the extraordinary minister to say to the child the words 'Jesus loves you,' without giving a blessing."

permissible, it is laudable. It pleases me to know that the items you describe will be used once again for devotional purposes. Sometimes people think that, once blessed for religious use, something can never change hands at a reasonable profit. That is incorrect.

What you are purchasing is not the blessing, but the material object. So even chalices or stoles once used in celebrating the Eucharist can be put to later use in the manner you suggest. You are not trafficking in spiritual goods, not committing the sin of simony. Simon the Magician, in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, tried to offer the apostles money so that he could bestow the Holy Spirit by laying his hands on people. That is not what you are doing at all.

Q. I understand that Catholics can't spread out ashes over the ocean after cremation, and that ashes can only be buried or kept at home. Both my sister and her daughter are Catholics. My sister told me that she has instructed her daughter to use her ashes as fertiliser on plants or trees after cremation. Is this

allowed?

A. This question, and many similar ones that I receive, reflects readers' continuing fascination with the disposition of bodily remains. You are correct in your understanding – almost!

The Church teaches that ashes from cremation should be buried or entombed in sacred ground, but not kept at home. In the Church's mind, cremated remains should be treated with the same reverence as the body of a deceased person.

In 2016, the Vatican issued an instruction regarding burial practices for Catholics. That document specified that either the body or the ashes of the deceased should be buried in sacred ground, and that cremains should not be kept in private homes or scattered on land or at sea, nor 'preserved in mementoes, pieces of jewellery or other objects.'

Burial in sacred ground, said the Vatican, prevents the deceased from being forgotten, and encourages family members and the wider Christian community to remember the deceased and to pray for them.

The Church's Code of Canon Law

continues to express a preference for burial over cremation because it more clearly expresses the Christian belief in an eventual resurrection when the person's body and soul will be reunited. As for using the cremains for fertiliser, that is in no way envisioned in Catholic teaching-or permitted.

Q. I am 92, housebound and I have been plagued by the thought that I might be committing a grievous sin for receiving holy Communion without going to confession first. With a clear conscience, I know I have not committed a mortal sin. I have not gone to confession for more than 50 years, but I did receive Communion weekly until the onset of COVID-19. Can I continue to receive Holy Communion?

A. Please relax and be at peace. You may certainly continue to receive holy Communion. If you have not committed any mortal sins, you are not obliged to go to the sacrament of reconciliation first.

Canon 989 of the Code of Canon Law says: 'After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess

faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.'

So, strictly speaking, one is obliged to go to confession only for mortal ('grave') sins. I am an advocate, though, of much more frequent confession, and I have read that Pope Francis receives the sacrament every two weeks.

Without any sense of urgency, I would suggest that you might go to church some Saturday afternoon to go to confession. I think it would bring you a sense of peace, and it would certainly be consistent with the mind of the Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: 'Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit' (No. 1458). Confession is a wonderful gift, given for us to know and experience the tender love and mercy of God the Father who loves us immensely. Why stay away any longer? The Father is waiting to embrace you as His beloved child, as he did for the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32.

Q. Something I heard a priest say at Mass bothered me. Reading from the Scriptures, he said: 'God raised Jesus from the dead.' While this statement doesn't dispute Jesus' divinity, it certainly doesn't affirm it – and it could easily be construed as a denial of Christ's divine nature. Could you comment?

A. You heard the priest correctly. He may have been quoting from Luke in the Acts of the Apostles (2:23-24): 'This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it.'

Neither this quote, nor any scriptural passage, negates the divinity of Jesus. The belief of the Church is that the resurrection of Jesus involved all three persons of the Trinity.

Galatians 1:1 speaks of 'God the Father who raised him (Jesus) from the dead'; Romans 8:11 attributes the resurrection to the Holy Spirit; and in the Gospel of John (2:19), Jesus, speaking of his body, says: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." So the act of raising Jesus from the dead was not accomplished by only one person of the Trinity, but was the work of all three.

SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

DAVID TORKINGTON



Lead kindly light from the darkness

Anyone who is committed to the spiritual life eventually discovers that, although they travel by faith and so cannot see where they are going, they are being led.

They will be able to see that they have been led all along by a kindly light 'despite the encircling gloom'. At the time they might have felt that 'the night was dark and they were far from home' unable to see 'the distant scene,' making one laborious step at a time. However, with hindsight they see that they have been led by 'Someone' who was, despite their feelings to the contrary, always close to them.

I was a Catholic Stoic

I was battling on in the Franciscan Noviciate being severely tempted to give up the journey that seemed to be so complicated, so dark, and so meaningless. Now with hindsight I can see the truth which I could not see at the time. I received a classical education in which the stoicism taught from Socrates of Athens to Marcus Aurelius of Rome, was taught side by side with the Christianity taught by Jesus of Nazareth. The confusion that obfuscated a clear and coherent understanding of the Gospel truths, was seamlessly continued in the noviciate in the instructions we were given and in the small library that had been carefully selected. There were no books on prayer to help complement the instructions on meditation and contemplation that were never given by the Novice master, nor by the student master in the years that followed. Instead, the little library was full of books on the virtues with which we had to adorn ourselves if we were to make ourselves into perfect Christians and exemplary religious.

Could I therefore be blamed if I wrote down a list of all the main virtues that promised to make me into the saint of my dreams?

I then put all the virtues in order of priority and decided to dedicate each month of the noviciate to attain them all, each in turn, month by month. I would begin with 'humility' that seemed to be the foundation of all the other virtues, at least according to the Christian Stoics.

After two months trying to master the virtue of humility I failed abysmally. Far from becoming more like St Francis of Assisi I became more and more like Uriah Heap.

When I failed to adorn myself with three more virtues in as many months, I knew I would have to become, either a better actor or receive some sort of supernatural help to do what was quite beyond me.

After praying over and over again 'Lead Kindly Light', two minor miracles saved me from disaster, however.



"In what is called 'purifying contemplation', a person is being prepared to be united with Christ's perfect contemplation through an ongoing inner spiritual cleansing."

My conversion to true Christianity

I believe the first came thanks to the meditation that I learnt from my school spiritual director. He insisted that progress in the spiritual life would only be made with endless and daily perseverance which I tried to maintain in my prayer life, after supper at school, and in the chapel after compline in the noviciate. Despite my evident failure to make myself into the saint of my dreams by my trojan efforts to master the virtues during the day, perseverance in two hours praying each evening came to the rescue. More precisely it was 'the kindly light' who led me despite the 'encircling gloom,' in which I found myself when 'Acquired Contemplation' led me into the real thing shortly after Ash Wednesday.

The real thing was dark and dismal and full of distractions compared with the sweetness and light that I had experienced in meditation. However, unknown to me the Holy Spirit was on my case beginning to change my life, starting with two minor miracles. I was just putting back into the noviciate library volume I of *Christian Perfection* by Alphonsus Rodriguez SJ. In this dry and dreary work the virtues were detailed in three dull and doleful volumes. It was while I was putting it back that I discovered a small spiritual masterpiece that had fallen behind an ancient tome on Canon law, thus hiding itself from the censors. They wanted us to concentrate on books on the virtues, that according to the novice master were conspicuous by their absence in our lives.

Introducing Fr Dominic Devas OFM

The little book was entitled simply *Pax Animae*. It was written by a Franciscan priest call John of Bonilla and translated from Spanish into English by another Franciscan, Dominic Devas. On the very first page I read the words that began my conversion from the hybrid Christianity in which I was brought up at school and into which I was to be further educated in the Franciscan noviciate.

The words were simply these. 'With God's Love all things are possible, but without it nothing is possible'. Within a few days there was another minor miracle. The Franciscan priest, Fr Dominic Devas who had translated the little gem that I kept by my bedside, was not only still alive and well and a member of our province, but he would be coming to give us our retreat. I could hardly sleep with joy and in anticipation of what was to make an otherwise miserable noviciate the turning point in my life.

The wisdom that I have never forgotten

He not only spoke with conviction and with a wisdom that was never heard again in a retreat, but he prayed for hours in the church each day, lost in the profound contemplation that he taught is the completion of the life of prayer. Far from being a sign of God's displeasure with me, the spiritual darkness in which I found myself was in fact the beginning of contemplation in which I had to be

purified by the Holy Spirit. The distractions and temptations that plagued me were to be seen not as obstacles but as opportunities to practise loving God when I seemed to receive nothing in return. I was taught to persevere, come hell or high water, trying to offer myself to God, sacrificing my time in endless acts of self-sacrificial giving, in imitation of the self-sacrificial giving that Christ offered to his Father whilst he was on earth. This is the only way pure selfless loving is leant.

The meaning of true Contemplation

In what is called 'purifying contemplation', a person is being prepared to be united with Christ's

perfect contemplation through an ongoing inner spiritual cleansing. This purification that begins in darkness gradually leads to light that is heartfelt when a preliminary purification enables a searcher to experience transitory glimpses of God's infinite love.

All this takes place, in, with and through Christ, in which purification eventually enables a would-be mystic to share in the praise, the thanksgiving, and the adoration that Christ himself continually offers to his Father.

But what we have tried to do in words, prayers, songs and in psalms, Christ does in an unutterable stillness when words give way to silence. Words unite those who are separate, but in perfect union silence reigns supreme, to say what can only be said in silent loving, in what is called, contemplation.

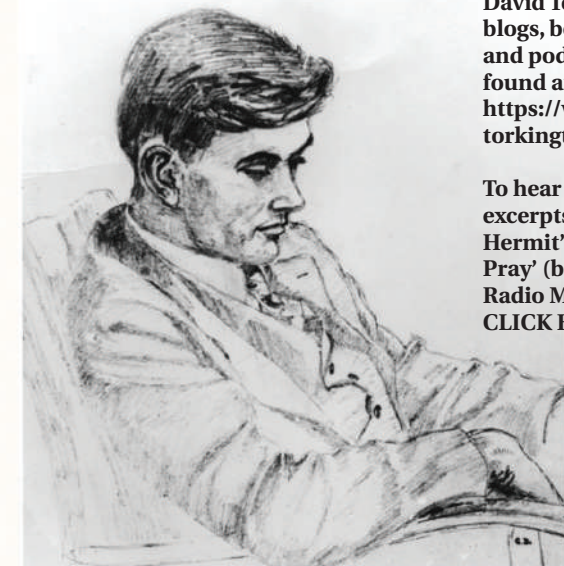
Our destiny, beginning here on earth, is to be so purified by the love of the Holy Spirit, that we can be taken up into Christ's silent all-consuming contemplation of his Father. Just as Christ's contemplation gives glory to his Father, so the Father gives glory to his Son and to those who pray in, with, and through him. God's glory is the mystical expression of his love. This love contains within it all the infused virtues that made Christ, and will make those who follow him, into the perfect human beings that our own stoical endeavour can never achieve.

It took two more years of drudgery in contemplative purification before light followed my darkness, but that, as so many irritating books end with, is another story!

David Torkington's blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com/>

David Torkington reads from *The Hermit* – Episode 1

by David Torkington | Jan 18, 2021 | Mystical Prayer, Podcast | 10 comments



David Torkington's blogs, books, lectures and podcasts can be found at <https://www.davidtorkington.com>

To hear David read excerpts from *The Hermit* and 'How to Pray' (broadcast on Radio Maria England), [CLICK HERE](#)

Archbishop makes the case for youth as he joins civic leaders on Feast of Christ the King

On the Feast of Christ the King, St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham welcomed civic guests representing the cultural, political, religious and academic life of the city, and those frontline workers and service providers whose work has been so vital.

Archbishop Bernard Longley gave the last word from his homily to Cheryl Pereira, who came to share her message of faith on behalf of the youth of the Archdiocese.

In his homily, Archbishop Bernard emphasised the importance of looking forward to Advent and the second coming of Christ.

"November is the month for remembering, as autumn turns to winter and the year draws towards its close – and there has been much to remember over the course of the last year, as well as those events and developments that we wish we could forget but which are now written into the long story of our common humanity," he said.

"This Sunday, the Feast of Christ the King, is about looking forward, with the season of Advent just a week away and the build-up to Christmas already transforming the landscape of the city-centre.

"For Christians, November – with its recollection of the faithful departed – leads into Advent's remembering of Christ's first coming; the focus of our Christmas celebrations."

"But Advent begins by looking ahead to the second coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom of God – picking up the



theme of today's Feast of Christ the King and anticipating the joy of entering God's house and encountering again the companionship of all those who have died looking forward to eternal life."

The Archbishop also commented on the 'vital part' played by an active and vibrant youth service.

"The welcome presence of our young people at today's Mass reminds us of the youthful character

of our city, with one of the highest percentages of young people in the country. In our liturgical calendar, as well as being the Feast of Christ the King, today is also designated as World Youth Sunday within the Catholic Church," he said.

"Our young people play a vital part in living out their faith by witnessing to others in their words and deeds – reflecting the message of the Gospel, that our lives can be

judged by the way we treat other people. This morning we are going to receive a message from Cheryl Pereira, one of the cathedral altar-servers, speaking on behalf of the young people who are active in the life of the Church."

"The Civic Mass is an important opportunity to pray for God's blessing upon our city. As we continue to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, we pray for

all the people who have served us and on whose dedication and skills we depend. They deserve our prayers as they give of their best to assist all those who are most in need during difficult and unsettling times."

Guests included the His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant, John Crabtree, The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Cllr Maureen Cornish and the High Sheriff of the West Midlands, David Moorcroft.

Your support all adds up for CAFOD

Jo Lewry thanks the 'amazing' CAFOD parish volunteers who organised a series of soup lunches and cake sales to raise funds for the Harvest World Food Crisis appeal. Here's her report which just shows how many small projects across the diocese add up to a considerable donation to this amazing Catholic charity...

Donna, a parish volunteer at St Edmund Campion parish in Bournemouthe, organised a soup lunch on 7th October family fast day and raised over £200. **The CAFOD group at St Edward the Confessor church** in Chandler's Ford held a soup lunch on fast day as well.

Cathy from Corpus Christi Wokingham also organised a soup lunch on fast day and raised £190.

Jude and Deirdre, parish volunteers in Southampton, held a soup lunch at St Edmund's on Tuesday 25th October and raised £180.

Patrick and Isobel, parish volunteers at St Joseph's Maidenhead, told me about their soup lunch. "On Sunday 23rd October, Mission Sunday, parishioners of St Joseph's Church enjoyed a fabulous soup lunch in the Parish Centre in Aid of CAFOD's Family Fast Day appeal for the World Food Crisis," they said. "Members of the Vision Group, the Mothers Prayer Group and the UCM united to provide three soups, crusty bread, homemade cakes, tea, coffee and biscuits to make this a fabulous event enjoyed by a truly International Congregation."

"The sixty or more parishioners who enjoyed this sociable gathering

lingered and chatted and many came back for seconds – and thirds. They were very generous, as always, in their financial support for CAFOD. The cash amounted to £214.15, while the new lanyards, with a QR code attached, gathered even more donations.

"These funds will be added to the proceeds of the Family Fast Day collection. Many thanks go, also, to all the parishioners who helped to make this event such a success."

Finally, **Sue Meese**, parish volunteer at St Francis of Assisi in Ascot, and **Marie-Claude Marchesi**, parish volunteer at Our Lady Queen of Peace, Southbourne organised cake sales on 9th October.

Thank you so much to all our amazing volunteers for your fabulous fundraising.



We're shining a light on successful science plan

Six months into a project aimed at helping young scientists move from primary to secondary schools, and it has already been hailed a success.

A three-year pilot scheme spearheaded by the Sacred Heart Catholic High School, Newcastle, is under way, and pupils are benefiting from the charity-funded project which sees secondary school teachers working with primary schools.

Six Catholic primaries are involved in the Shine initiative which helps ensure the young pupils have all the skills needed to continue studies of biology, chemistry and physics at secondary level.

The £90,000 funding package was announced in March by Shine, an education charity, and the money is helping support the transition between schools, with a particular focus on helping disadvantaged pupils. The initiative was developed by regional network Schools North East.

"The science project involves secondary

'Pupils need to feel more confident about talking about science when they reach secondary school – and this project is doing just that'

teachers collaborating with primary teachers to develop a fully resourced Key Stage 2 science curriculum," said Alex Robertson, science teacher at Sacred Heart.

He added that primary teachers could not be science experts as their knowledge base already had to be 'so broad', but the project would see them receive support and training alongside focused resources to help.

The money comes from Shine's Bridging the Gap Fund and a new Science Hub has been

specially created for primary school teachers to develop their knowledge of sciences.

The first stage of the initiative created teaching resources for years three to five, and Mr Robertson said some teachers have been using the material ahead of its official roll-out this month because it was so useful.

"I would like to see more confidence in pupils when they start secondary school and I would like them to feel more confident about talking about science," he said.

Another aim of the scheme is to help parents feel more involved by giving them marking schemes so they can see examples of what it should look like.

Sacred Heart Primary, English Martyrs, Our Lady & St Anne's, St Bede's, St Cuthbert's in Walbottle, and St Cuthberts, Kenton are the Catholic primary schools participating.

Their feedback has been positive, with pupils and teachers already gaining from the project.



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AROUND THE PARISHES & EDUCATION



The Universe Catholic Weekly's guide to Catholic life in your neighbourhood

To Bamenda, with love from Portsmouth

Angela Waldren, a parishioner at St Joseph's Copnor, and co-ordinator of Portsmouth Friends of Bamenda (which is in Cameroon), shares news of Bamenda Sunday celebrations in Portsmouth. Guernsey parishioner Liz Dene also shares how the Bamenda Sunday celebrations went in Guernsey.

Angela: "On Sunday, 6th November 2022, Portsmouth Friends of Bamenda, celebrated Bamenda Sunday at St Joseph's Church Hall, Copnor. Approximately 72 people sat down for a delicious three-course lunch and wonderful company. "This lunch has been offered at St Joseph's for almost 30 years, when Fr

Francis Isherwood became parish priest and having served for many years in Bamenda.

"He asked parishioner Sylvia Foster if she would do a lunch, and it started in a small way with about 20 people. It's grown over the years, and this year we had to close the list because too many people wanted to come.

"My husband and I, with a small band of friends/helpers, started helping with the lunch more than 20 years ago, and took it over completely when Sylvia Foster became too ill to do it."

Liz: "This year, Bamenda Sunday coincided with a cake sale arranged by the pupils of St Mary and St Michael Primary School to raise funds for their school after the Mass at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Guernsey. At the Mass, I was asked, as a member of the Portsmouth Bamenda Committee, to speak about the links with Bamenda and how money raised in the parishes is used to improve the lives of our brothers and sisters in the Archdiocese of Bamenda. I told the

children that just £30 would pay school fees for a primary school pupil for a year.

"Clearly the children were listening attentively as they asked their head teacher, Helen Willetts, if the money raised from the cake sale could be sent to Bamenda to pay the school fees for three primary school children to attend school in rural Bamenda.

"The generosity and selflessness of the pupils from St Mary and St Michael School is a wonderful example of their understanding of the Gospel message to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Below, some of the pupils selling the wonderful array of cakes that were on offer at the cake sale.



Two more historic churches added to East Anglia's list

Keith Morris

The diocese of East Anglia has more listed churches than any other Catholic diocese in England – and two more have just been added to that number after a recent review of by Historic England on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport.

The review has also seen a number of East Anglian churches promoted to even higher levels of

Left, 'from the monumental to the modest, from a timber-framed mission chapel to gothic glories in stone, the listed buildings in the diocese's care testify to East Anglia's deep Catholic heritage'

protection – recognising their significance as important examples of English church architecture.

New churches added to the list are **Our Lady of the Annunciation** in King's Lynn, which has been designated as Grade II listed. Also added to the list at Grade II is **St Felix's church** in Felixstowe, recognising its unique contribution to local and regional design heritage.

A number of presbyteries have also been given protected status, including those belonging to **St Joseph's church** in Sheringham, and **St Peter's** in Gorleston.

The review has also seen the level of protection for a number of churches increased, with the magnificent church of **Our Lady and English Martyrs** in Cambridge having been redesignated as Grade I listed.

Paul Raynes, operations and

finance director for the East Anglia diocese, said: "From the monumental to the modest, from a timber-framed mission chapel to gothic glories in stone, the listed buildings in the diocese's care testify to East Anglia's deep Catholic heritage and the devotion of generations of donors, architects and builders. The Secretary of State's listing decisions recognise the national importance of these physical expressions of our faith."

Not all of the decisions have yet been published by Historic England, and it is expected that further churches in the diocese of East Anglia will also be added to the list.

Matthew Champofficer for the East Anglia diocese, said: "This is wonderful news for the diocese, and a great recognition of the part these buildings play in the regions varied and diverse history."



Happy Somedays founder Joe Farrar

Safe place for sport is thriving at St Paul's

St. Paul's Catholic high school in Wythenshawe was delighted to welcome Joe Farrar from the Happy Somedays group to speak to Year 8 pupils.

Happy Somedays is a group where everyone is welcome to come along and join in football or fitness sessions. The group, a safe space for people to enjoy football and fitness, has become a massive hit in Wythenshawe.

Joe set up the St. Paul's-based club following a football injury when he found it difficult to find a welcoming club. He thought that others might have experienced something similar and were unable to enjoy playing football because they felt they lacked the ability or confidence to join a team.

Joe explained: "We want to enable all people regardless of race, sexuality, ability or anything else that may have prevented them in the past to achieve everything they ever wanted to."

"We hold a number of sessions each week, all with one thing in common – a love for football or fitness e.g. Pilates and Box Fit."

"We are an incentive as opposed to a club," Joe added.

"We found people wanted to play football, for example, but not have the constraints of being a club. It's casual, so people can pick it up when they want. We created a safe space and an environment that participants can thrive in and, at the same time, improve their mental health."

St. Paul's Year 8 progress leader Susie Delaney said: "Our pupils were interested to hear about Happy Somedays, which has opened the door for many local people in the community to get fit without any fear or worries. It is a truly inspiring achievement."

"The group is now extremely successful with many men and women attending each session."

Deputy Headteacher Mike Whiteside added: "We are delighted to have Happy Somedays based at Saint Paul's. They have removed the stigma from sport and fitness and ensure that the sessions are inclusive for all."

"The sessions are a safe space where people can exercise, chat and thrive."

School gradings hit after Ofsted inspections

Hundreds of schools in England have been downgraded after being re-inspected for the first time in years.

Watchdog Ofsted said it inspected more than 500 schools in the last academic year that were previously exempt from regular inspection, having been rated outstanding.

The exemption, introduced in 2012 and lifted in 2020, meant schools that had been judged outstanding were legally exempt

from further regular inspection, unless there were specific concerns.

Just 17 per cent of the 370 schools which had a graded inspection retained their outstanding grade when they were re-inspected in the 2021-22 academic year, Ofsted said.

On average, the last inspection for the schools that were re-inspected was more than 13 years earlier, it added.

The watchdog's chief inspector, Amanda Spielman, said the results

showed that "removing a school from scrutiny does not make it better".

Of the previously exempt schools that were re-inspected, 62 per cent were downgraded to a rating of good, while 21 per cent were judged to require improvement or were said to be inadequate.

Results were "concerning", said Ofsted, and a higher proportion of previously exempt school now require improvement or are inadequate, compared to national figures.



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GARDENING

Homes urged to help our feathered neighbours as numbers decline

Garden birds are struggling: Becky Thomas offers four ways we can all help them thrive

More than a quarter of Britain's birds are now on the RSPB's red list, meaning that their numbers are in severe decline.

Some of the recent additions to the red list are thought of as common garden birds, such as the greenfinch. Others, such as the swift and house martin, only spend spring and summer visiting the UK before migrating to warmer climes. But the environment they encounter in the UK, as well as along their migration routes, affects their survival significantly.

Many of the species that we feed in our gardens and on balconies are under threat. Here are four ways to help them.

1. Clean your bird feeders and bird baths

In the wild, with a few exceptions such as starlings, birds don't come into close contact with each other much. This lack of contact makes it harder for diseases to spread.

Bird feeders change this dynamic. The presence of a bird feeder means that many individual birds from many different species feed in the same area. This leads to the spread of disease, because birds often poo where they eat, leaving pathogens to infect the next visitor.

The greenfinch, a once common garden bird now added to the red list, has suffered because of this. The disease trichomonosis, which used to just infect pigeons and doves, has spread to greenfinches with deadly consequences. Regular cleaning of your garden bird feeders and bird baths can reduce this risk.

2. Install bird nesting boxes

Many people help birds by putting up nest boxes in their gardens. But these boxes are mostly made for robins and tits who nest in open boxes, or ones with small holes. These nest boxes mimic the crevices and holes that would be available in mature trees.

Swifts and house martins are new entrants to the red list, and both of these will readily use man-made nesting places if we provide them – with a few modifications for their needs.

House martins will nest in a pre-made or home-made nest cup which mimics the mud nests house martins make for themselves.

Swifts will nest in boxes, but they take



a bit more work to attract. The best way to do this is to play their screeching call from a speaker placed close to the nest box, to get them to investigate and hopefully nest.

You can make nest boxes attractive to these species by installing them in the eaves of your home, as they need them

to be up high so they can take flight from them easily.

3. Add some insect-friendly plants

Many of the species entering the red list, such as the house martin and house sparrow, feed on insects. Insect numbers have declined rapidly, so it is no

surprise that these avian predators are finding it hard to feed themselves and their chicks.

You may love a neat and tidy garden or balcony, but set aside an area to be a bit messier and weedier to attract insects. Adding pollinator-friendly plants, such as lavender, foxglove and sedum, could

really boost insect numbers – natural bird food – in your garden.

4. Reduce dangers to birds

Pet cats are predators and can target species like house sparrows, which remain on the red list. Even the presence of cats could be enough to scare birds, reducing the number of young they may be able to have. This may have a more damaging impact on bird populations than the number of birds killed by cats.

If you own a cat, there are ways for you to reduce its effect on bird numbers. A collar with a bell is an effective way to warn birds and other animals about a cat's presence.

In addition, consider restricting when cats are allowed outside to just the daytime, as birds can be more vulnerable in the very early morning when they wake and start to look for food.

Alternatively, you could keep cats inside entirely. It is very common in Australia and the US for cats to remain indoors.

These changes may seem small and your garden or outdoor space may not be big, but gardens in the UK cover more area than all of our nature reserves put together. Encouraging wildlife in these garden habitats can make a big difference.

Becky Thomas is Senior Teaching Fellow in Ecology, Royal Holloway University of London



HEALTH

Muscle-building exercise in later life can be secret to ageing gracefully

Muscle is important for good health – here's how to maintain it after middle age, says Bradley Elliott

While it's almost unnoticeable to begin with, nearly every cell, organ and biological process gets a little bit worse every year we're alive from age 30 or so. The sum of these processes is what we know as ageing.

For most of us, loss of muscle strength and mass are some of the first and most obvious age-related changes we see. While this might only start out as a couple of extra little aches and pains, over time a lack of muscle mass can lead to a number of issues – including poor balance, frailty and loss of independence. It's also associated with a myriad of health problems, including higher risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease and even dementia.

While researchers aren't entirely sure why muscle mass decreases so much as we get older, the good news is that we do know regular exercise can help lessen this impact – and can even delay some of this inevitable muscle loss. Regular physical activity is also shown to lower risk of preventable diseases, maintain physical function well into old age, and even improve immune function.

Get moving

Given how important muscle is for our health, the best way to maintain it after 30 is to keep moving.

But let's say you're someone who hasn't regularly exercised in a few years, or has never done muscle-building exercises before.

First and foremost, remember that ageing doesn't mean you need to avoid heavy exercise. Our research suggested that younger and older men recovered in a similar manner to heavy muscle-building resistance training, so long as the training was tailored to each participant's fitness level.

However, it's important to consider your abilities before you begin exercising. A common mistake people make after being off training for years (or even decades) is trying to do what they used to do, or doing too much too quickly in those first workouts. This may lead to injury, so it's important to build your workouts up gradually.

Realistically, the best workout plan to follow is the NHS's physical activity recommendations for 18–65-year-olds. This says people should aim to be physically active most days, and do muscle-building exercises at least two days per week.

But what kind of muscle-building exercises should you do? Well, there's actually a myriad of different types of resistance exercise to choose from, and all



are more or less equally as beneficial as the other. The cliché people immediately think of is large, muscular people lifting heavy weights in a gym, but there are many more options out there.

So if you prefer doing bodyweight exercises such as pilates, using resistance bands, or hard work while gardening over lifting barbells, that's what you should aim to do twice a week. Enjoyment counts for a lot, especially if it means you'll keep doing your new exercise routines.

Endurance-based exercise (such as walking, running and cycling) are also very good for you in multiple ways, beyond just building muscle and improving heart health. There's also a very clear relationship between longevity and doing light physical activity daily.

However, it's important not to do too much of a good thing – especially high-intensity, resistance-based training. Research shows that doing more vigorous high intensity physical activity than recommended isn't associated with substantial

benefits to longevity.

For clarity, this data doesn't suggest the high intensity is negative in terms of health, just that more isn't necessarily better.

From a dietary point of view, many older people don't eat enough protein. Sufficient protein intake is necessary to increase and maintain muscle mass – even more so if you're regularly exercising. Current guidelines recommend a minimum of 0.8 grams of protein per kg of body mass per day for all adults.

'Endurance-based exercise (such as walking, running and cycling) are also very good for you in multiple ways, beyond just building muscle and improving heart health...'

But you'll need to double this to 1.6 grams per kg of body mass if you're looking to build muscle. So for a person who weighs 70kg, they would need to eat around 112g of protein per day to build muscle. This would be the equivalent of eating approximately one large chicken breast, a protein shake, three eggs and a can of tuna (though it will vary depending on what products you use, so be sure to check the labels).

This seems to be especially important for physically active older people (over 60 years of age). It's also good to spread the protein you consume evenly throughout the day to help your body absorb so much protein as it can per meal.

While muscle will still inevitably decrease with age no matter how much you exercise, being physically active often is still one of the best ways we know of when it comes to maximising both good health and fitness and lifespan. And the earlier you make exercise a habit, the better off you may be in old age.

Bradley Elliott is a Senior Lecturer in Physiology, University of Westminster



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FOOD

Fruity, fresh and spicy: a perfect treat

THAI GREEN PRAWN CURRY

It only takes a bit of effort to make an authentic Thai Green curry. All the flavours from the paste mix delightfully together with the other ingredients for a deliciously fresh dish, ideal served with Jasmine rice.

INGREDIENTS

For the paste:

- 2 or 3 green chillies
- 6 heaped tbsps of freshly chopped coriander
- 3 lemongrass stalks, finely chopped
- 3 tsps of minced root ginger
- 4 tsps of minced garlic
- 2 tbsps of oil
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- 1½ tsps of ground coriander
- zest of 1 lime
- juice of 2 limes

Other ingredients:

- 300g tiger prawns
- 4 tbsps of oil
- 200g green beans or mangetout
- 200g baby corn
- 400ml coconut milk
- 100g tinned pineapple pieces
- 3 tbsps soy sauce

METHOD

1. Add all the paste ingredients into a food processor and blend to form a thick smooth paste or chop all the paste ingredients very finely and mix to blend.
2. Heat the oil to very hot in a wok and stir fry the beans and baby corn for 40 seconds.

3. Add the curry paste and then the coconut milk and pineapple pieces and bring to a boil.

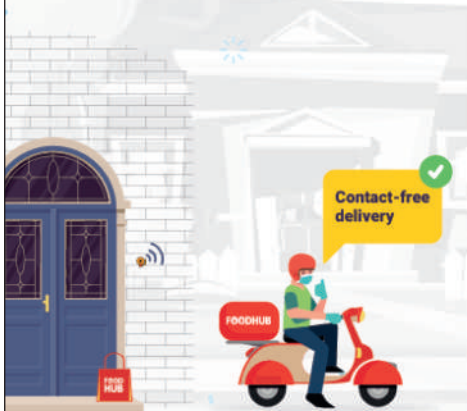
4. Turn down the heat slightly and simmer the curry for 5–7 minutes to reduce the consistency.

Serve with rice and freshly-baked naan.


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CHOCOLATE COCONUT TRIFLE

Trifle of all varieties is a good option for pudding, whether for family dinner or for a special occasion. However, this coconut and chocolate version is something quite different – and quite special.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (397g) tin of condensed sweetened milk
- 400ml milk
- 200ml coconut milk
- 3 egg yolks
- 2 tbsps cornflour
- 8 tbsps cocoa powder
- 200g desiccated coconut
- extra milk, for dipping
- 200ml whipping cream, whipped to stiff peaks
- 100g desiccated coconut, toasted
- chocolate shavings, to decorate

METHOD

1. Whisk together the condensed milk, milk, coconut milk, egg yolks and cornflour in a saucepan over low heat.
2. Heat gently, stirring until thickened to a custard.
3. Remove from the heat and divide the custard in half. Mix the cocoa powder into one half, and 200g coconut into the other. Set aside to cool.
4. Dip the sponge fingers briefly in milk, making a single layer of biscuits in the bottom of a trifle bowl. Top with either the coconut custard or chocolate custard, then another layer of biscuits.
5. Alternate layers till all ingredients are used, then top with the whipped cream. Sprinkle the top with the toasted coconut and chocolate shavings.
6. Chill the trifle in the fridge for 4 hours before serving.



LIFESTYLE

Modern-day stress can leave you piling on the pounds

When you have to resort to lying on your back to zip up your favourite jeans it usually means it's time to cut back on the chocolate and crisps and reassess your diet. However, a bloated stomach is not necessarily the result of over-eating. Your new-found weight gain could be due to stress...

If you are eating a healthy balanced diet and take some moderate, regular exercise then chances are your bloated tummy is down to your stressful lifestyle. In the UK, more than a quarter of women find they can expand by as much as a whole dress size when suffering from an upset stomach, according to a survey by anti-diarrhoea tablet manufacturer Imodium Plus.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that stress is bad for your health. Yet, while most women are aware of this, many still haven't made the link between stress and stomach upsets. So, while many women try to watch their weight, only a fifth of them believe stress can be associated with diarrhoea and bloating.

This problem is set to become even more widespread as two-thirds of women experience poor work-life balance levels, according to the study. With high stress levels and little time to eat and exercise properly, the chance of women developing stress-related



digestive health problems such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and diarrhoea is significantly increased.

This stressful modern lifestyle is not only affecting women's waistlines but also their self-esteem and happiness. A bloated stomach leaves more than half of female sufferers feeling self-conscious,

while 56 per cent feel unattractive because of it. Furthermore, two-thirds of sufferers say their clothes don't fit them properly because of the bloating.

The psychological implications of an unsightly blown-out gut are far-reaching, as half of all women say they just do not enjoy life when they are bloated. Eight per

cent even say it is affecting their work. This is bad news when you consider that a fifth of women suffer from the condition more than once a month.

Younger women are incapacitated the most and half suffer from not only an upset stomach but the associated symptoms such as bloating too. A quarter of women admit they would like to do something about it but just don't know how to treat the problem.

Experts are calling the poor digestive health trend 'stomach stress' but claim it can be successfully managed and even dispelled with the right treatment. Gastroenterology expert Nick Read says: "The increase in the incidence of IBS and regular bouts of diarrhoea, cramps and bloating, particularly for those with stress-prone personalities, clearly demonstrate that the effects of stress for many women are commonly felt in the stomach."

Fortunately, though, by improving their lifestyles, managing their stress levels and self-medicating with products to relieve the symptoms, stomach stress is completely treatable."

So next time your favourite jeans are feeling a bit tight round the waist and you threaten yourself with another diet-remember, it might not be those cream cakes after all.

CINEMA

Top Gun with brains, as *Devotion* delivers

Devotion is a new action war drama film based on the bestselling book *Devotion: An Epic Story of Heroism, Friendship, and Sacrifice* by Adam Makos. This film portrays the story of two US Navy fighter pilots during the Korean War and how the war built a strong bond of friendship between the two.

The plot centres on the friendship between Jesse L. Brown (Jonathan Majors) and Tom Hudner (*Top Gun: Maverick*'s Glen Powell), two fighter pilots from distinct backgrounds. Brown is the son of a sharecropper who is doing anything to be the first Black carrier pilot in the Navy, despite the discrimination that he faces.

Hudner on the other hand comes from a wealthy white family and loves to enjoy life in country clubs. But when he hears the news about the war, Hudner turns

down the opportunity to study at Harvard and decides to fight for his country instead. That is where Hudner meets Brown, and the two would later go on to become the most celebrated Navy wingmen.

The film is directed by J.D. Dillard, whose previous projects include the sci-fi thriller *Sleight* (2016) and the survival

horror *Sweetheart* (2019). The screenplay is written by Jake Crane and Jonathan Stewart.

The film is given a steady three out of five review in *The Guardian*, whose film critic Charles Bramesco calls the film 'sturdy if unexceptional,' though he hails Majors and Powell as 'two abundantly charming leading men' who you feel

would have done better if not for being 'hamstrung by straightforward material.'

'Military men down to their bones, Brown and Hudner both put on a brave facade as they respectively wrestle with external hardship and self-imposed guilt, stowing their angst under a plain appearance.'

If you're expecting *Top Gun*, Korean War style, you'll be disappointed. While there's action in the air, the film deals more with the relationship and dynamic between the two men than with flying sequences and pilot etiquette. The screenplay is more invested in the grounded portrayal of these men and their relationships than their exploits in the sky.

Discussing Film was more praiseworthy, saying the film is an 'emotional rollercoaster', with praise for

Majors and Powell's performances in particular, since they 'pack an emotional punch that will leave your heart aching.' Reviewer Britany Murphy praises the 'presence and grace' of Majors and Powell throughout. '*Devotion* is one of those films where each conversation is felt, and no other duo than Jonathan Majors and Glen Powell could have handled these roles with such presence and grace,' she writes. "Through every interaction and beat, you're completely locked in. Whereas the battle scenes are some of the best seen in a modern war movie, on par with the high-stake tension of films like *1917* and *Dunkirk*, I would have been extremely content watching a movie that was strictly emotional one-on-one conversations between Majors and Powell."

Devotion is in cinemas now



Jonathan Majors and Glen Powell deliver surprisingly nuanced, thoughtful and sensitive performances as the two airmen during war

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Tantalising hope of Cleopatra's tomb opens up a host of ethical questions

HISTORY

Jane
Draycott



It couldn't have been a case of better timing. Egyptologists celebrating the centenary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, now have a promising new archaeological discovery that appears to have been made in Egypt.

Excavators have discovered a tunnel under the Taposiris Magna temple, west of the ancient city of Alexandria, which they have suggested could lead to the tomb of Queen Cleopatra. Evidence that this is really the case remains to be seen, but such a discovery would be a major find, with the potential to rewrite what we know about Egypt's most famous queen.

According to the ancient Greek writer Plutarch – who wrote a biography of Cleopatra's husband, the Roman general Mark Antony, and is responsible for the lengthiest and most detailed account of the last days of Cleopatra's reign – both Antony and Cleopatra were buried inside Cleopatra's mausoleum.

According to Plutarch, on the day that Augustus and his Roman forces invaded Egypt and captured Alexandria, Antony fell on his sword, died in Cleopatra's arms, and was then interred in the mausoleum. Two weeks later, Cleopatra went to the mausoleum to make offerings and pour libations, and took her

own life in a way that is still unknown (a popular misconception is that she was bitten by an asp). She too was then interred in the mausoleum.

In the days that followed, Antony's son Marcus Antonius Antyllus and Cleopatra's son Ptolemy XV Caesar (also known as Caesarion, 'Little Caesar'), were both murdered by Roman forces, and the two young men may likewise have been interred there.

If the mausoleum of Cleopatra has not already vanished beneath the waves of the Mediterranean along with most of the Hellenistic city of Alexandria, and is one day found, it would be an almost unprecedented archaeological discovery – a discovery that could rewrite history

While the tombs of many famous historical rulers are still standing – the mausoleum of Augustus, Antony and Cleopatra's mortal enemy, in Rome, is one example – their contents have often been looted and lost centuries ago.

One notable exception is the tomb of Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, uncovered at Vergina in the late 1970s. The tomb was found intact, and this has enabled decades of scientific investigation into its contents, advancing our knowledge of members of the Macedonian royal family and their court. The same would be true if Cleopatra's tomb were discovered, and found to be intact.

The amount of new information

Egyptologists, classicists, ancient historians, and archaeologists could glean from its contents would be immense. For the most part, our knowledge of Cleopatra and her reign comes from ancient Greek and Roman literary sources, written after her death and inherently hostile to the Egyptian queen. We do not have much evidence revealing the Egyptian perspective on Cleopatra, but what we do have, such as honorific reliefs on the temples that she built and votives dedicated by her subjects, gives us a very different view of her.

The ethics of unearthing Cleopatra's remains

To date, no other Ptolemaic ruler's tomb has been found. They were

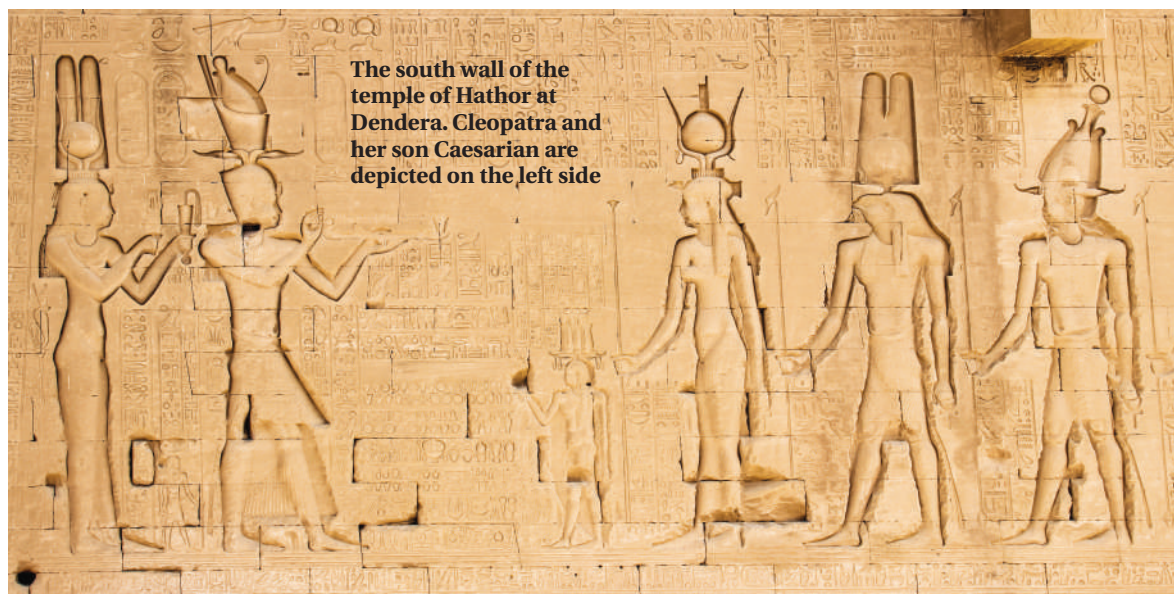
reportedly all situated in the palace quarter of Alexandria and are believed to be under the sea with the rest of that part of the city.

The architecture and material contents of the tomb alone would keep historians busy for decades, and provide unprecedented amounts of information about the Ptolemaic royal cult and the fusion of Macedonian and Egyptian culture. But if Cleopatra's remains were there too, they could tell us a great deal more, including the cause of her death, her physical appearance, and even answer the thorny question of her race.

But should we be hoping to find Cleopatra's remains, and to analyse them? From Tutankhamun to the ordinary ancient Egyptians whose mummies have been excavated over the centuries, there has been a long history of mismanagement and mistreatment.

While the days when mummies were unwrapped as a form of entertainment at Victorian dinner parties have thankfully passed, concerns are increasingly being raised by those who work in heritage about the appropriate treatment of our ancestors.

While the discovery of Cleopatra's tomb would be priceless for Egyptologists and other scholars, is it fair to deny the queen the opportunity for peace and privacy in death that she did not receive in life?



The south wall of the temple of Hathor at Dendera. Cleopatra and her son Caesarion are depicted on the left side

Jane Draycott is a Lecturer, Classics, University of Glasgow

Having faith in Jack – it's what makes best coaches stand out

FAITH IN SPORT

Fr Vlad Felzmann

As we know, faith is not a verb. We can't 'faith' anything. Its verb is to believe, with at least five connotations:

1. Veracity. I believe you are telling the truth.

2. Perception. I believe you are human (you might be a cunningly disguised Martian.)

3. I believe in ... exercise, generosity and kindness. I believe in Arsenal FC: Values – that can be externally monitored. As many a UK congregation knows, I believe in keeping my homilies at Mass short. The shortest? "If you were arrested for being a Catholic Christian, would there be enough evidence for the Crown Prosecution Service to take it any further? Going to church does not count. The Mafia do that." (14 seconds)

4. I have 'the conviction of things not seen'. (Heb. 11: 1) I believe in Revelation, in The Creed. I believe in

Jesus Christ and his commitment to me; so I strive to live his values through my virtues, helping God make this world a better place. I believe Arsenal can win next weekend's game – and, eventually, silverware. This faith gives me hope – life's paramount virtue. I believe that I have forever; I live as I might die tonight.

5. Commitment. When I say, "I believe in God" I am saying: "I have committed myself to God. God and I have a Covenant. The Father and I are one." I believe in helping people improve the quality of their lives through sport.

You cannot 'force' somebody to believe in anyone or anything. To succeed, a manager has to earn the trust, the belief, of his or her squad. They need to communicate and act in such a way as to make this happen more readily. In the majority of cases, nobody wants a leader who clearly does not appear to know what they are doing and who is lacking in confidence

To instil confidence in their team, fine coaches help them to learn and develop, to focus on their strengths, and be supportive – even when they fail. To believe that nothing is impossible, to be fearless in their pursuit of reaching the top, is a

strong conviction for any individual, and an even stronger creed for a team.

The power of belief resides in its ability to do two things: to create and share a vision, and generate and sustain resilience.

To help players believe in themselves and perform at their best, top coaches tell their players that they care for them, they do not give up on them and never let them call themselves quitters or losers. They also maintain their enthusiasm and always stay positive.

Managers can lose faith in players and, of course, players lose faith in their manager – and cease to get results. When that mutual faith is simply not there, horrible things can happen.

We saw this recently at Manchester United in Erik ten Hag's relationship with Cristiano Ronaldo, with the result that Ronaldo has now left.

Research has shown that there are at least ten reasons why coaches fail.

1. They compromise. A coach, with multiple world and Olympic successes behind him, has asked that his gravestone has two words engraved on it: "No compromise". Coaches who do not succeed have inevitably compromised during their preparation. It may have been compromise to an administrator to pacify a political situation, or to a player who felt training was too hard

2. They lack belief in themselves. If you do not believe in your own ability to succeed and in your own capacity to be victorious, how can you inspire it in others? Confidence



Man City and England star Jack Grealish

(not arrogance) is the catalyst for all great sporting success stories.

People who say, "I can" and "I will" and give everything they have to the achievement of the impossible, inevitably succeed.

3. They copy others. Winners are originals. They have their own belief in themselves and their squad.

4. They rely too much on learning from only within their own sport. To be great, you have to look outside of your sport, even into the corporate world, the military, the academic world, and the arts: anywhere excellence thrives and people are achieving.

5. They rely too much on emotion. Emotion in coaching is a killer. Emotion in sport is for the friends, family and fans of players, but for coaches and athletes, emotion is as unwanted as a serious injury. Coaching is about being calm, confident, composed, clear and credible.

6. They fail to engage with their squad. Poor coaches coach at their players. The great ones coach with their players. They engage the hearts and minds and inspire them to be even more than they ever dreamed they could be.

7. They lack persistence. Coaches who stop trying must fail. Great coaches never, ever, give up. Their commitment keeps them keeping on.

8. They lack vision: Great coaches can "see" the future of their sport and – given the qualities of not only their players but also those of the opposition – to dream up the optimal tactics of their team. They

have the ability to share their vision with their squad.

9. They do not spend enough time maximising their strengths: Coaches who spend too much time trying to overcome weaknesses and in doing so allow their strengths to be unmastered, only end up being mediocre at everything.

10. They do not learn from their own – and their team's – mistakes. Great coaches see the past as a rehearsal for the future.

Though they may not always realise it, parents are like coaches for their family. So, if you are a parent, why not re-read this list and see how you perform?

Sir Alex Ferguson and Manchester United (1986 to 2013), Brian Clough and Nottingham Forest (1975-1993) had mutual faith in each other. Today, clearly, Jürgen Klopp and Liverpool (2015- 2022) have that mutual faith, as seen in strong relationships with players.. (see picture)

Current Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has distinguished himself as one of the best coaches of all time by leading the Blues to four Premier League titles. He is also known for making one of the most expensive football transfers in Premier League history. In 2021, Manchester City signed Jack Grealish – who, incidentally, was educated at St. Peter's Catholic School – from Aston Villa for £100m in the biggest deal in British football history.

Only time will tell whether Pep's faith in Jack was sound.



A delighted Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp

IN PICTURES...

Editorial Contact: [Andy Drozdziaak – News@universecatholicweekly.co.uk](mailto:Andy.Drozdziaak@universecatholicweekly.co.uk)

A pictorial round-up of the past seven days...

German artist Volker-Johannes Trieb lit 20,000 candles at Stadium Struenkede Castle during the opening game of the World Cup to commemorate the deaths of thousands of migrant workers in the construction of infrastructure for the tournament in Qatar



The northern lights, or the aurora borealis, created from a collision between electrically charged particles from the sun that enter the atmosphere of the earth where the particles are redirected by the earth's magnetic field towards the poles, displays over Arbaer near Selfoss on the south coast of Iceland.



Scottish Ballet Principal dancer Marge Hendrick as The Snow Queen during a photocall for The Snow Queen, at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Edinburgh.



Ella', who is Iranian and has been living in Scotland for seven years, helps to create the Women Life Freedom mural on the side of St John's Church on Princes Street, Edinburgh.



Above, Nico Martin with his illuminated, charity fundraising 'Festive Mini' car, at the Mini Plant in Oxford. The driver of a Mini decorated in 3,000 twinkling lights hopes to "bring little moments of joy to people's lives" this Christmas and raise over £10,000 for charity.

Right, Springer Spaniel, Jac, who helps sniff out faults on the power network, at Braehead electricity substation in Renfrew for his 'owner', Scottish Power. Jac is able to help identify faults on the power network deep underground.



Redcar's former steelworks site, which has dominated the Teesside skyline for over four decades, are brought down by controlled explosion.

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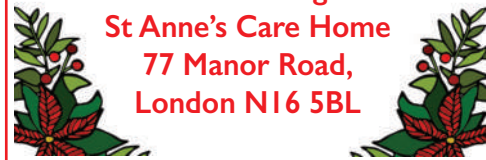
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LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form

Weekday Cycle II, Sunday, 27th

November: First Sunday of Advent

Isa. 2:1-5; Ps. 122:1-2, 4b-5, 6-7, 8-9 r. 1;
Rom. 13:11-14; Mt.24:37-44

Monday, 28th November: Monday of the
first week of Advent Isa.4:2-6; Ps. 122;
Mt. 8:5-11

Tuesday, 29th November: Tuesday of the
first week of Advent, Isa.11:1-10; Ps.72;
Lk.10:21-24

Wednesday, 30th November: St.
Andrew, Apostle, Rom.10:9-18; Ps. 19;

Mt.4:18-22

Thursday, 1st December: Thursday of
the first week of Advent Isa.26:1-6;
Ps.118; Mt.7:21,24-27

Friday, 2nd December: Friday of the first
week of Advent, Isa.29:17-24; Ps.27;
Mt.9:27-31

Saturday, 3rd December: St. Francis
Xavier, priest Isa.30:19-21,23-26; Ps.147;
Mt.9:35-10:1,5,6-8

Extraordinary Form Calendar

according to the Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)

**Sunday, 27th November: First Sunday of
Advent,** Rom. 13:11-14; Lk. 21:25-33

Thursday, 1st December: Feria, Rom. 13:11-
14; Lk. 21:25-33

Monday, 28th November: Feria
Readings of Sunday repeated

Friday, 2nd December: St. Bibiana, virgin
and martyr, Eccclus. 51:13-17; Mt. 13:44 t -
52

Tuesday, 29th November: Feria
Readings of Sunday repeated

Saturday, 3rd December: St. Francis
Xavier, confessor, Rom. 10:10-18; Mk.
16:15-18

Wednesday, 30th November: St. Andrew,
apostle, Rom. 10:10-18; Mt. 4:18-22

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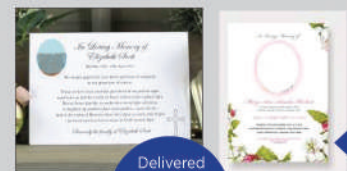


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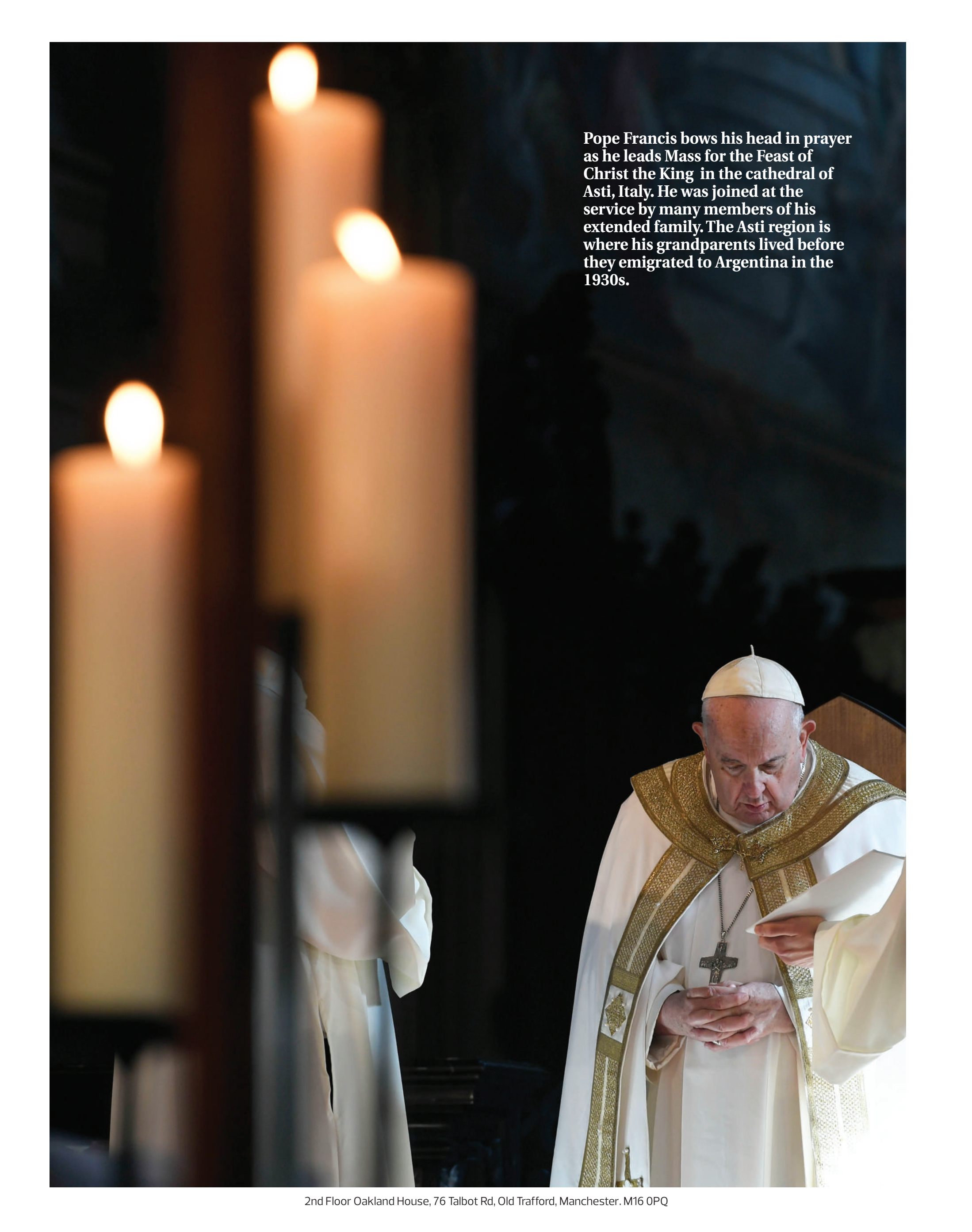


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A photograph of Pope Francis in prayer during a Mass. He is wearing white papal vestments with gold embroidery and a white zucchetto. He has his hands clasped in prayer and is looking down. The background is dark with several lit candles, creating a warm, solemn atmosphere.

Pope Francis bows his head in prayer as he leads Mass for the Feast of Christ the King in the cathedral of Asti, Italy. He was joined at the service by many members of his extended family. The Asti region is where his grandparents lived before they emigrated to Argentina in the 1930s.