

THE INTERNATIONAL
CATHOLIC WEEKLY

THE TABLET

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No time to lose

Timothy Radcliffe celebrates the New Year



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The synodal way to
save the world

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search for the sacred

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Formula One

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FOUNDED IN 1840

ONE COUNTRY,
TWO NATIONS

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Like a flash of lightning across a darkened landscape, the Covid pandemic has lit up deep fissures in modern society which might otherwise have remained hidden. It has illuminated, for instance, the fact that many workers essential in providing healthcare are among the least rewarded. And in prosperous Britain, children still go hungry. The closing of schools, either for holidays or because of Covid, means that children who relied on school meals for their main daily nourishment are suddenly deprived of it, with all the short- and long-term consequences that malnourishment brings with it. This is just not morally acceptable.

Britain is an unequal society. Boris Johnson's great contribution to political debate so far has been to identify inequality between different regions of Britain as a central policy issue. He coined the phrase "levelling up" to refer to what needed to be done to reduce social and economic inequalities, and has assigned a whole government department, under Michael Gove, to work towards this end.

But this owes everything to political expediency. Johnson's decisive victory in the general election two years ago depended on hitherto habitual Labour voters turning their backs on generations of family tradition and voting Tory for the first time. They did so largely because Labour under Jeremy Corbyn repelled them, and because they wanted Brexit done. The so-called "red wall" seats that changed sides were places that had missed out on the prosperity that much of the rest of Britain had enjoyed. They had once relied on heavy industry, but the economy had turned towards the financial service sector concentrated in London and the south east. The north had been neglected. "Levelling up" was the Tory remedy.

It may be somewhat hollow, but it has put equality back at the centre of the political debate. No political party has an approach which does it justice, for it is a profoundly radical idea. For Labour when it was last in office, inequality meant discrimination on the basis of criteria sometimes called "identities", such as race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and sex. Under the Equalities Act of 2010 many of these were given "protection", which meant discrimination on such a basis, for instance in housing or employment, was unlawful. But behind this was an assumption of an imagined group identity – the gay community, the black community, the disabled community – that was little more than a convenient fiction. Many of the circumstances contributing to deprivation were not identity-based, but owed more to social class: factors such as poor education, bad housing, low-paid work, and family background including single-parenthood.

The Equalities Act was an admirable act of social justice, but it left economic inequality largely unaddressed. Ten years on, the United Kingdom is even more unequal. And some of the poorest parts of Britain are in London, or in South Coast seaside resorts. Inequality is a moral issue, and morality must take precedence over economic efficiency. It was not fair that the north was neglected; it was unjust; it implicitly denied the equal worth of every citizen.

Pope Francis has said, "Inequality is the root of

social ills." The Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* declared that "excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace". And, for once, pragmatism and principle come together, for there is abundant evidence that more equal societies are more productive as well as more harmonious.

True "levelling up" would tackle some of the inequalities whose roots are historic. Most of the wealthy had wealthy parents, most of the poor, poor parents. Wealth buys privilege, which is transmitted to later generations. But the Catholic principle of the "universal destination of goods" means that private ownership of wealth must be subject to the needs of the common good. And the common good is never served when a few take more than their share, proving, as in Orwell's famous phrase, that "Some are more equal than others." The Catholic Church's ambivalent relationship with privileged private education – those independent institutions which used to be called "public schools" – deeply compromises its teachings on the evils of inequality.

The debate on inequality must also turn its attention to housing and employment. Decent accommodation is a human right, homelessness an outrage. An apartment where children have nowhere to do their homework ought to be regarded as uninhabitable, at least by that family. The issue of low pay and insecure work is dogged by assumptions that the United Kingdom in some sense is, or is becoming, a meritocracy, where people are rewarded on the basis of talent and effort. But these are deeply skewed assumptions, where a talent for bringing up children, say, is rated as worthless as it makes no contribution to the GDP. The sociologist Michael Young, who invented the term "meritocracy", warned of it becoming not a promised land of justice and equality but a dystopian nightmare, where those at the bottom of the heap were fated to stay there.

All these threads are waiting to be picked up, not just by politicians who want to see a better Britain, but by all those, ranging from religious leaders to media commentators, who are guardians of its moral heritage. Data on inequality in Britain is abundant; what is lacking is the will to tackle it. But "levelling up" will not go away, even if Johnson himself is no longer a fixture.

He called himself a One Nation Conservative, and most of his party nodded. But Britain still largely remains two nations "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws," as Benjamin Disraeli put it in his 1845 novel *Sybil, the Two Nations*. Too much of this is still true 150 years later. This is the supreme challenge of modern politics in 2020, a challenge to all parties and the whole nation.



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Pope Francis with asylum-seekers transferred from Cyprus to Italy with his help, during a meeting at the Vatican on 17 December, his 85th birthday

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It can take a brush with death and an experience of total dependency on others to open a window into a deeper sense of who we are and what we are here for / By **TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE**

No time to lose

PHOTOS: ONE/PRESENCE, PHILIPPE VALLAUX/OUT



Timothy Radcliffe pictured in 2019

I CELEBRATE this Christmas and New Year with extra delight. Not just because I am still alive after major surgery, but because I have learnt a little more of what it means to live. I hesitated to write about my illness. The sick can be self-centred; eyes glaze over as one recites the litany of one's pills and symptoms. Virginia Woolf tells the ill not to expect any sympathy. Those who are well need to get on with their own lives. I dare to do so because I hope it sheds a glimmer of light on our belief in our God who became incarnate.

I was admitted to hospital the day after the Assumption for an operation for cancer of the jaw. It took 17 hours. I was out, bar a minute or two, for 30 hours. Five weeks in hospital were eventually followed by six weeks of radiotherapy. But on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, I felt the first return of a hint of energy. There is still a long haul ahead but the corner has been turned. It is time to try to preach again.

This experience of illness was embraced by two great Marian feasts, which are both about Mary's body: the beginning of her life in the womb, and her sharing in Christ's victory over death. In the days after the operation, it was almost impossible to pray. I ran out of steam after the first words of the Our Father. Two prayers sustained me: the daily Eucharist livestreamed from Blackfriars, the gift of Christ's body, and the Hail Mary, whose few words embrace the drama of bodily life, from the conception of her child, then one pregnant woman greeting another, and finally our prayers for

help to live this present moment and face its end, "now and at the hour of our death".

The trauma of this operation, with the removal of several inches of my jaw and its replacement with bone and tissue from my leg, opened a small window on to the Incarnation, the embodiment of divinity. Is so much religion boring because we have shoved God back into heaven, remote from dangerous intimacy?

Aquinas asserted that "I am not my soul". If I stub my toe, it has no spiritual meaning, but surely every spiritual experience is bedded in our corporeality. Aquinas again: "Nothing is in the mind that is not first in the senses." Sickness plunges us into the messy confusion of our bodily life, where God embraces us, even if with infinite discretion.

Illness chipped away at the identity I had created and opened the door to a deeper one that was a gift to be discovered. Soon after I surfaced in the Blenheim ward of the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, a young doctor sat by my bed and asked simple questions, including: "Where are you?" I remembered the place was connected with Blenheim but it did not look like the palace. I could not answer. I hoped that he would ask me who was the prime minister so that I could reply that I was not sure if Boris knew! Instead he asked me who was the monarch, the only question to which I gave the correct answer.

I was, he said, disoriented. The separation of the world of my dreams and of woken reality

became porous. I read in the eyes of the nurses that I had been difficult. This time of confusion only lasted a couple of days, but it touched the heart of who I thought myself to be: a teacher and preacher, a writer for whom a certain clarity of mind was of the essence. The brief fragility of my hold on reality disclosed the profound unity of body, soul and spirit, whose dramas are interwoven. The Word became flesh and embraced us in our moments of clarity and confusion. He knows who we are even when we have lost our bearings and are engulfed in fog. I was blessed to discover that I was a brother of those who struggle with mental illness.

I have always loved to be up early, eager for the tasks of the day, but in those early weeks I was deprived of all agency. I lay there, connected to myriad tubes, which pumped in a sugary drip 12 hours a day and carried away waste. I was constantly injected, tested, examined. Even when the tubes began to be removed, I could do nothing, not even wipe my own bottom. I worried endlessly whether anyone would get me a bedpan in time. So my identity as an agent was also lost for a while. The nurses and doctors did their marvellous best, always asking my permission before any procedure. My fragile sense of self was nourished by their gaze and touch, their eyes and hands. We exist in the gaze others offer us.

THIS UTTER dependency was embraced by our God who became a helpless swaddled infant, incapable of anything, also needing his nose and his bottom to be wiped but held and beheld by his mother. He became the eyes and hands of God, gazing at edgy Nathaniel, at the argumentative Samaritan woman at the well, at the despised tax collector Matthew, and seeing God's friends and reaching out in touch to the sick. These nurses were ministers of the divine gaze and touch, as were my brethren who faithfully came and sat with me every day, even when I could not say anything.

Britain is a secular land, it is claimed, but the hospital was full of religion. A nurse showed me her favourite image of the Virgin. Another spotted my rosary and showed me hers. Others asked for prayers and promised them, whispering their allegiance to their God, Christian or Muslim. Most of them came from countries where religion is still part of the air they breathe. The NHS is said to be the religion of modern Britain, but it is a temple in which God is acknowledged and served every day.

A third challenge to my self-identity was in a sort of sensory deprivation. Like all of



I am the world's most rubbish firefighter: I can put out almost any fuel

my family, I love my food and drink. I have always hesitated over Paul's words, "For God's kingdom does not consist of food and drink" (Romans 14:17). Surely the word "only" has dropped out? Taste is a fundamental to the openness of the body to what is other and so one's sense of self. But for weeks I was "nil by mouth". I felt trapped within myself, and thought often of Hopkins' bitter lines: "My taste was me." When at last I could hobble around on a Zimmer frame, I loved to clean my hands with the sanitiser and smell the hint of alcohol.

I first woke with a raging thirst, which alternated with a panicky feeling that I was drowning in the liquid pouring down my throat. For weeks I was not permitted to drink anything, just to dampen my lips with a wet sponge. All I could think of was Israel's tormented desire for water as she wandered in the wilderness, not trusting in the Lord who brought forth water from the rock. I obsessively repeated the words from Psalm 81: "By the waters of Meribah I tested you." In this desert, one must trust in the Lord, for whom one thirsts. On feast days we sing those lovely words from Psalm 62:

O God, you are my God, for you I long,
For you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you
Like a dry weary land without water.

God became human to share our thirst and teach us how to live it well: a baby thirsting for his mother's milk, caring for 40 days in the wilderness, asking the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink, and finally dehydrated on the Cross.

In *Soif*, a novel by Amélie Nothomb, Jesus delights in thirst. "Having panted with thirst for a while, don't drink the goblet of water straight down. Take a mouthful, keep it in your mouth before swallowing it. Measure how marvellous it is." So once again, deprivation followed by new gift. "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). So often it was the words of Psalms that shone the light. How marvellous was that first sip of water, the beauty of which I had never known before.

The Hail Mary ends with asking for Mary's prayers "now and at the hour of our death". A previous bout of cancer had awoken me to my mortality. Now death had called to tell me that it was on the way. My consultant told me the survival rate for this operation is 60 per cent after five years. Is that a long time or short? I am not sure. I might live for much longer or less, but surely the summons is to live now. There is no other preparation for eternal life. Who are the people whose forgiveness I must seek? Who are those whom I love but have never told them? What are the acts of kindness that I must do today? There is no time to lose.

Timothy Radcliffe is a former master of the Dominican order. He is the author of *Alive in God: A Christian Imagination*. What is the Point of Being a Christian? and *I Call You Friends*. He lives in Oxford.



YOU CAN see how the rot set in. New Year's Day is the natural time for resolutions, a chance to give ourselves a fresh start, a reset, a blank page in life's new diary. The trouble is, though, that resolutions nowadays so often revolve round eating less, eating more healthily, exercising more, giving things up, and losing weight. And so, when you have sufficient numbers engaging in "New Year, New You" projects, you end up with communal expressions of abstinence, viz, Dry January and Veganuary. In combination, it's practically Albigenian.

The vilest aspect of these things is that 1 January falls right in the middle of the Twelve Days of Christmas. So, precisely at the time we should be carrying on with Christ's party season, right up to the Epiphany and sloping off only gradually until Candlemas, people are giving up on entertainment, even without the excuse of Covid. Christians are quite often countercultural, but for once, this involves eating and drinking more than our neighbours, and having a good time, always supposing we're allowed to. It's a challenge, of course, when we're being exhorted to eat plant-based food and drink smoothies, but as I maintain every year, we must somehow find the strength to eschew the diets and abstinence. It's a bit like the cultural clash between the Roman and Celtic calendar that preceded the Synod of Whitby, when the king and his entourage were celebrating Easter while his queen and her courtiers were still doing Lent. Except in our case, we're carrying on the celebrations, not the abstinence.

I AM IN Ireland at the time of writing so I am conscious that this is a bitter time of year. In my family home, the central heating isn't working and I am right back in the condition of my childhood, viz, cold quite a lot of the time. You can see the breath coming out of your mouth in the morning and you have to rush to put your clothes on so as not to get too cold while you're dressing. It doesn't help that I am the world's most rubbish firefighter: I can put out almost any fuel and have had to resort to the cheat's option of a bought firelog, a block presumably doused in paraffin, which cannot fail to light. My

next door neighbour would scorn solid firefighters; she got a fire going just by twisting bits of newspaper, so as to have a kind of bow shape, which lit brilliantly. In her house you could still see the importance of the hearth and the fire, a contrast with the chill everywhere else. Me, I'm like the coal-bitters, the men around the Viking fireside, who sat so close to the fire, they were said to eat the coal. Fire and light only really mean something when they're points of contrast to the cold and dark outside. The light that lightens the darkness meant something once.

AS EVER, my name day, the feast of St Melania the Younger, gets overshadowed by New Year's Eve celebrations. She, and her distinguished grandmother, both fourth-century Romans, aren't really celebrated much in the Western Church, but I intend to get to know her better. There's a newish biography of her by Elizabeth A. Clark which I want to read, which documents the trials of wealthy early Christians. Melania was "wounded by divine love" at an early age, so she wanted to give up her enormous wealth but her parents were having none of it and married her off at the age of 14 to an equally wealthy boy. She owned some 30,000 acres of land throughout the empire, and tens of thousands of slaves. Her annual income of 120,000 gold solidi is equivalent to over £30 million a year now. But her father, on his deathbed, allowed her to have her way and her first act was to try to free her slaves. Picture her chagrin when many refused. Being realistic, they assumed that she was trying to relieve herself of having to feed them, just as the Goths were about to invade Rome. It's an interesting insight on the slavery question. Her grandmother, Melania the Elder, was an even tougher nut; an ascetic who didn't hesitate to pull rank when it could be useful and used her wealth to found and support monastic communities. She was friendly with Augustine and, for a time, with St Jerome. Her feast day is on 8 June; that might be a better option.



Melanie McDonagh is a journalist and writer.

Some Catholics fear that the synodal process will lead to change in the Church; some fear that the synodal process will leave everything in the Church just the same. But the fundamental purpose of the synod is not to change the Church. It is to prepare the Church to save the world / By JENNY SINCLAIR

A synod for the world

JUST UNDER two years ago, Pope Francis announced that the next General Synod – the gathering of bishops from around the world in Rome that normally takes place every two years – would focus on synodality itself. The themes would be communion, participation and mission, and for the first time in the history of the Church it would invite all 1.37 billion Catholics to take part in a two-year process of listening and discernment.

A legacy of the Second Vatican Council, the aim of this “journeying together” – the literal meaning of “synodality” – is to bring Catholics closer to the mission of Jesus. In this “way of being Church”, the whole People of God comes closer together on the journey of bringing alive the Kingdom of God on Earth. It has been described as the largest and most ambitious listening exercise in the history of humanity.

Some Catholics, including some who have written to *The Tablet*, have responded more in fear than in hope: fear of change, or fear of no change. Others are trying to use the process to push a particular agenda; some see it as a cynical exercise in ecclesial politics; some dismiss it as a colossal waste of time. Can Catholics overcome this confusion and rise to the opportunity? I suggest that by reading the political and cultural signs of the times we can understand the fundamental purpose of this Synod. It is nothing less than God’s way of preparing the Church to save the world.

I have been a Catholic for over half my life, and my vocation has drawn me into listening and learning across the Christian traditions. My typical week includes conversations with friends from Pentecostal, Evangelical, Free Church, Catholic, Anglican, prophetic, charismatic and church planting backgrounds as well as the Religious orders. I cherish my Jewish friends for their unique witness, and I learn from my non-religious friends and contacts of all faiths and none, in civil society, business and politics. I listen across the political spectrum and across class and different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

This listening and learning does not dilute my tradition. On the contrary, it reveals a clearer sense of the calling of the Church, and the opportunities that the Synod presents. My personal journey has taught me that Catholic social thought (CST) can help us read the signs of the times. Inspired by the Gospel and informed by the learned experience of the Church in every nation over a hundred and thirty years, it is rooted in centuries of tradition and natural law. It helps us understand how political and philosophical



Pope Francis raises the Book of the Gospels at Mass in October to open the process that will lead up to the 2023 Synod of Bishops

ideas and policies affect the human person, and to recognise when social systems and cultural values are dehumanising. CST helps us to be politically literate in alignment with our faith, to avoid mission-drift and the corrosive influence of modernism and post-modernism. It is sometimes called the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice. It can help us discern our way through the Synod process.

SEVEN YEARS ago Pope Francis said, “We are living not through an era of change, but a change of era.” He was not alone in recognising an unravelling, marked by a breakdown in trust, polarisation, social fragmentation and symptoms of distress, including rises in loneliness, addiction, self-harm, depression and nihilism. Most of these signs of dark times have accelerated since the start of the pandemic but they were not caused by it: they are part of a decades-long trend. A radical individualism and hyper-liberalism, on the left and the right, has driven the commodification of human beings and an over-reliance on technocratic solutions to human problems. This era has deeper roots still, beginning with the Enlightenment, which despite its many benefits, resulted in a turning away from God. It led to a profound loss of the sense of the transcendent nature of the human person. The dire consequences of this loss were inevitable.

Whether it is human trafficking or zero hours contracts, the medicalisation of sadness or dating apps, the elevation of academic qualifications over vocational work or the promotion of mobility over community – the

combination of the dominance of capital and the technocratic paradigm has had catastrophic effects on our institutional and social relationships and our sense of belonging. The family, community and our sense of place have all been undermined, there is a crisis of purpose and alienation, particularly among the young. The social and economic damage takes visible form in the degradation and abandonment of whole communities.

THIS ERA has affected the churches too. Many have become inward looking, falling out of relationship with people, becoming marginalised; some have been infected by secular modern and post-modern philosophies or distracted by the culture wars. Many churches do not know who they are and no longer understand their civic vocation. Clerical sexual abuse scandals and the pandemic have accelerated this trajectory of decline.

We, the Church, the people of God, have a unique vocation to counter these dehumanising trends, but we are not well prepared. We are held back, by a lack of awareness of what’s going on, by exhaustion from managerial solutions such as parish reorganisations or unrealistic financial projections, and, crucially, by flawed and inadequate formation as Christian disciples.

And yet God *is* at work; the profound changes under way are God’s way of purifying and renewing the Church to be fit for the task ahead. We are in a time of deep spiritual malaise, but this era, which has been so hostile to humanity, is unravelling. We are on the cusp of change and the Church needs to be ready to respond. All my conversations and encounters tell me that our country needs a Church which is a gateway to the Holy Spirit, and which understands and takes its place in society.

IT IS VITAL that we understand what the Synod that is now underway is about – and what it is not about. The Synod is not about saving the Church. It is about saving the world. If we don’t understand that this is its purpose, then it will become inward-looking, and we will fail the world. Pope Francis emphasises that the Synod involves “discernment of the times in which we are living, in solidarity with the struggles and aspirations of all humanity” in order to deliver the Church’s mission in a de-sacralised world. Quoting from the Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium*, he described its task as “proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God”.

In journeying together we invite the Holy

Spirit to work through us, the people of God, in everyday life, at all levels and across all societies. For this reason Francis has written that the Synod "is not a parliament or an opinion poll" – it should not be confused with the General Synod of the Church of England. Rather, in our hearts, in every diocese in every nation, this "walking together" is about nothing less than revitalising our vocation. Each of us is called to a distinctively Christian role, according to our gifts and abilities, in the social and spiritual renewal of our country.

CST shows us that there are three kinds of power: money power, state power and relational power, the power that human beings build together. The churches must help to generate relational power, in order to resist the dehumanising tendencies of money and state power. Relational power should be at the heart of the new formation that the Church needs. Only the renewal of local relationships can lead to the emergence of a new politics of grace. And only that will bring forth a new settlement for the common good.

The individualism of the modern world is an obstacle to grace. Too many Christians are stuck in a consumerist model: go to church, get something, and go home again. All too often, Christian life lacks the fellowship of mutual love and support. One woman told me she had been struggling with terrible debt for two years. She had gone to Mass every week but hadn't told a soul about her troubles. Why didn't that parish have a culture where she was known, where she could be real, loved and supported?

TO DEVELOP relational power, we need to become a relational Church. That requires reframing our conception of "church" as more than a local institution, more than a place of worship. It is to conceive of church as a community of faithful people committed to a place, outward-facing to the world, living in loving friendship with others in the neighbourhood, and with a commitment to building local relationships – personal and institutional. The need for these relationships is especially great in places that have been abandoned: politically, economically and spiritually.

To be in relationship with our neighbours, we must be at home together. But the declining Church has fallen out of relationship with large parts of the population. In particular, too much of the Church in Britain, like too much of our politics, has suffered from middle class dominance. When we welcome diversity, we must include class. Otherwise we will draw the wrong conclusions. When we hear Pope Francis call for a "poor Church for and of the poor", we must remember that "the poor" means not only the destitute but also working class communities, which include many ethnicities and political opinions. Francis is right to insist that the Church needs to be evangelized by the poor. To be receptive to that evangelizing, middle class Catholics need to be open to building the common good with people from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, and resist temptations to dominate the space.



The official logo for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

If we are to make a positive contribution to the Synod process, we need to treat it as more than an internal Church matter. It must be seen as a new way of being "Church", to make way for the Kingdom of God, to be the embodiment of love in a desecrated world. The institution of the Church is there to serve the *Missio Dei* – it is not an end in itself. An instrumentalised and agenda-driven Synod will fail. But one approached with humility, grace and an openness to the Holy Spirit could transform the world.

This is not about winning an argument. We must listen to voices across the Church and stop being tribal. Everyone, even those we dislike and fundamentally disagree with, has a part to play. We, the people of God, need to trust each other, where we are lay, Religious or ordained. There is a need to restore trust not only between laity and bishops, and between laity and clergy, but between clergy too. This is difficult in the context of decline and in the wake of abuse scandals and their coverups, but it is essential if we are to have "an ear [to] listen to what the Spirit is saying" (Revelation 2:29).

We must listen to other Christian traditions with openness and respect. We must learn from those of other faiths and from our non-religious neighbours: God speaks and acts through all kinds of people. If we are anchored in Christ, this will enrich, not weaken our tradition.

The Archdiocese of Liverpool has already completed its initial synodal process. In launching its new pastoral plan, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon declared, "We are not going to be able to return to business as usual and we should put our trust in what God is doing." He shared his sense that "the only thing we know about the future is that it won't be the same as it is now ... if we walk with each other in the name of the Lord then he is walking with us too: there may be a strange warning of our

hearts as that happens. I really think these are exciting times – I'd go as far as to say that this is the most important day in the life of the Church this millennium. We need to become the Church that God is calling us to be."

FUNDAMENTAL to becoming "communities of place" are core practices of prayer and discipleship. Many of us may be unfamiliar with what being in relationship with the Holy Spirit is like. The "cell" group can be the key to this. It is often in small, faithful groups that the Spirit transforms, where people journey together, engage deeply with Scripture and talk honestly about what really matters.

If the synodal process is to fulfil its purpose, we must be open to transformation, both personally and collectively. Each parish needs to discern its identity as a people rooted in place, in relationship with its neighbours and with God. To resist the dehumanising tendencies that have so damaged our life together, our posture must always be to assert our transcendent nature as embodied human beings, and to be open to the reality of the Trinity: surrendering to the primacy of God, welcoming the help of the Holy Spirit, accepting the grace of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ into our lives.

Pope Francis has warned, "If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod." So we should always be attentively listening. We can ask every day, "Lord, what do you want of us?" If we can't walk together on this road, the Church will continue to decline and fail to live out its vocation.

A synodal process at such a time as this is not just an ecclesial exercise. It is a call to renew the world.

Jenny Sinclair is founder director of Together for the Common Good. This article was written with the help of Phil McCarthy, former CEO of Caritas Social Action Network.

The Tablet Newman Intern

We are looking for our Tablet Newman Intern for 2022. The Newman internship is now well established as a springboard for a career in journalism.

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SARA MAITLAND

The original Santa almost certainly did exist, even if we don't know much about him



not exist".

Shall I tell you something? He doesn't. And didn't. Nor do the reindeer, the white beard, the toy factory in the Arctic, and the team of hard-working dwarves. The original Santa, St Nicholas of Myra – who traditionally lived between 15 March 270 and 6 December 343 – almost certainly did exist, although we do not know much about him and we can be reasonably certain that he did not plunge down other people's chimneys last week, chanting "Ho. Ho. Ho." (He is said to have pushed bags of money anonymously through the windows of the poor.)

And at some point, usually somewhere between the ages of about eight and twelve, the "belief" in Father Christmas evaporates. I do not think that I have ever met anyone over fifteen who still believes in Father Christmas in any literal sense, but equally I have never met an adult who resents being "lied to" as a child on this topic, nor found anyone damaged by the story. This is very different from many of the lies that children are told, directly or indirectly by the adults in their lives: that it is better to be white than black, better to be male than female, better to be rich than poor, better to be straight than gay, better to be a grown-up than a child.

Most of the people I know have emerged from a belief in Santa not only undamaged but enhanced, and go on – fully, deliberately and joyfully – to recreate this "lie" for the next generation. My parents did a very lovely thing – they had six children, and there was nearly the same gap in age between the oldest five of us, and between numbers five and six (the classic "afterthought" baby). This meant, of course, that most of us were abandoning "childish things" like faith in Father Christmas at precisely the time "our baby" was becoming fully conscious of them.

My parents allowed and encouraged us to join in the "deception"; this led to some rather splendid and creative games – one year we rigged up a complex ringing of sleigh-bells on the balcony for her benefit. Before Christmas, I had a deeply pleasing email from my daughter; she had been hoping to bring

my granddaughter from the US for Christmas – so I was expecting to be back on Santa duties after a break of several years, and, rather sadly, for a child I do not know as well as I'd like to. Santa therefore sought assistance from my daughter, who emailed in reply: "We all know that when Santa visits the Lee Maitland household his stocking filler game is on point. So, I leave it to his discretion!" I will not pretend I was not proud. When this "next generation" person is big enough (not for a while yet!) I look forward to explaining to her how her great-grandparents – whom of course she can never know "really" – supported and encouraged Santa in his duties and joys.

This business about Father Christmas does seem to me to be a good example of how easy it is to muddle things up. "Lying" and "telling stories" are not the same thing. We know they are not for many reasons – and one of them is because the Gospels make it entirely clear that a substantial part of Jesus' teaching technique was the telling of fictional stories (usually called "parables") – and since the Gospel writers certainly had no interest in presenting him as a liar in any sense whatsoever (and contemporary believers share that commitment) the purpose of these two-thousand-year-old tales cannot possibly be to trick or deceive us. The best fictions (story-tellings) are not tricks or "naughty" lies, they are creative narratives (stories) designed to reveal truth to parts of ourselves that "science cannot reach". One of the specific and important tasks of growing up is learning to distinguish between stories and lies: between imagination and deceit; between art and advertising; between science and soul – not in order to "prefer" scientific truth over other kinds of truth, but more simply to be more able to use both of them for their profound and lovely purposes.

Perhaps here we can see a practical purpose in allowing some bishops to be married! It might make them more sensitive to the realities of childhood faith and experience.

Santa does not exist. But it is good for Christian children to hang up their stockings in faith and Joy.



Sara Maitland is a novelist and writer

The climate catastrophe loomed and the Covid virus continued to wreak havoc, but every week Tablet cartoonist **Jonathan Pugh** managed to raise our spirits



The government decided that churches could stay open, despite calls to close them because of a sharp hike in Covid infection rates.
16 January 2021



The bishops were criticised for failing to consult before opting to use the gender-exclusive ESV translation in the new lectionary.
20 February 2021



It was announced that Holy Week liturgies would be severely curtailed because of continuing concerns over the Covid virus.
13 March 2021



The Irish bishops called for feedback from lay people on the discussion process as it embarked on the synodal pathway.
17 April 2021



Covid restrictions were eased in churches but the sign of peace remained banned and masks remained obligatory.
22 May 2021



Twice-divorced Prime Minister Boris Johnson married Carrie Symonds in a Catholic ceremony in Westminster Cathedral.
5 June 2021



A conference in Oxford was told that the environmental activism of women was often overlooked by the Church.
3 July 2021



Catholic groups demand that the Church responds with more urgency to the challenge of the climate emergency.
14 August 2021



Young adults call on Catholic dioceses and institutions to divest from fossil fuels ahead of the COP26 summit in Glasgow.
25 September 2021



The continuing fall in the number of seminarians training for the priesthood coincided with a shortage of HGV drivers.
30 October 2021



Hundreds of pilgrims walking to the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow call for climate justice for the global south.
6 November 2021



Bishops update their pandemic guidance, urging anyone with Covid symptoms to stay at home and not go to Mass.
18/25 December 2021

The legacy of Edith Stein – the brilliant philosopher and contemplative Religious who died in Auschwitz – is sometimes contested; few would argue with her insight that spirituality and the life of the intellect are together the ‘root and ground’ of life / By PETER TYLER

A contemplative in action

ONE HUNDRED years ago, on 1 January 1922, a German Jewish woman, one of the most gifted thinkers of her time, undertook an act the reverberations of which continue down to the present. The woman, Edith Stein, had been born in Breslau (then part of Germany, now Wrocław in Poland) in 1891 to a large, middle-class Jewish family and would later be known, after her entry into the Carmelite Order, as Sr Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Canonised in 1998 by Pope St John Paul II who, the following year, made her a co-patron of Europe, her life and legacy continue to be contested, not least by Jewish and Catholic groups who each claim her for their own.

Who was this woman whose family described her as “a book sealed with seven seals”? On that cold January day in 1922, the Feast of the Circumcision, this enigmatic woman entered the parish church of St Martin in Bad Bergzabern, a spa town in the southern German Rhineland-Palatinate, with a group of friends in order to be baptised into the Catholic Church. As with so much of Stein’s legacy, there exist several versions of the events that led up to this life-changing act.

The most influential is from the posthumous biography written by her former novice mistress, Mother Teresa Renata de Spiritu Sancto. According to this account, the key moment seemed to have occurred in 1921 when Stein, a brilliant young philosopher, was staying at the home of old friends from university, the Conrad-Martiuses, at Bad Bergzabern.

Since the Great War, the Conrad-Martiuses had sought to set up, in Stein’s words, “a home for phenomenologists” at their orchard in the Palatinate. Mother Renata describes the scene thus: “It happened, however, that during one



Edith Stein as a student in Breslau, 1913-14. Opposite, below, a statue of St Teresa of Avila in San Juan Capistrano, California

of these holiday visits, the married couple had to go out. Before they left, Frau Conrad-Martius took her friend over to the bookcase and invited her to choose as she pleased. They were all at her disposal. Edith herself recounts: ‘I picked at random and took out a large volume. It bore the title: *The Life of St Teresa of Avila* written by herself. I began to read, was at once captivated, and did not stop until I reached the end. As I closed the book, I said to myself: ‘This is the truth.’”

“This is the truth.” Although disputed by later biographers, Mother Renata’s account has a ring of Steinian truth. Even if it didn’t happen exactly in the manner she described, it was clear that Stein immediately felt an

empathy with the sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite saint. Like Teresa, Stein had had a life of enormous struggle, especially over the previous few years. She had begun her study of philosophy at the University of Göttingen with Edmund Husserl, the influential pioneer of phenomenology. A firm German patriot, even before her studies were completed, in 1914 Stein had volunteered to be a nurse at an isolation hospital in Moravia for injured and sick soldiers of the Austria-Hungarian Empire at the outset of the Great War. This was followed by intense study at the University of Freiburg. Although she was awarded a doctorate for her thesis on the “Problem of Empathy” in 1916, despite her strenuous efforts, she was to be denied a teaching position in a German university. She had been one of the first women to be awarded a doctorate in Germany but academic positions at this point were rarely extended to women; even her doctoral supervisor, Husserl, was grudging in his recommendation. In her confusion and stress, it is easy to see how she would empathise with the struggles of her Spanish forebear.

A spark having been lit, Stein told her biographer that she decided to attend Mass in Bad Bergzabern before approaching the parish priest about conversion. She recounted: “Nothing was strange to me. Thanks to my previous study, I understood even the smallest ceremonies. The priest, a saintly-looking old man, went to the altar and offered the holy sacrifice reverently and devoutly. After Mass I waited until he made his thanksgiving. I followed him to the presbytery and asked him without more ado for baptism. He looked astonished and answered that one had to be prepared before being received into the Church. ‘How long have you been receiving instruction and who has been giving it?’ The only reply I could make was, ‘Please, your reverence, test my knowledge.’”

The priest, Fr Eugen Breitling, satisfied with her answers, was able to arrange Stein’s baptism, which was followed by her First Communion on the 2 January and by Confirmation on 2 February (the Feast of the Presentation), which was administered by Bishop Ludwig Sebastian in his private chapel in Speyer. At her baptism, Stein took two new Christian names, Theresia and Hedwig; the former in reverence to her spiritual sponsor, St Teresa, the latter in appreciation of her earthly sponsor, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, her old philosophical friend.

Soon thereafter, Stein took as her spiritual guide Mgr Joseph Schwind, vicar general of

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Reaching your goal one step at a time

BY RACHEL KELLY

IT'S THAT time of year. Resolutions, or our failure to keep them, loom large. Is it possible to lose weight, eat more oily fish, quit smoking, spend more time with our families, take up yoga, adopt mindfulness, go to church every Sunday and keep up that Pilates class – or achieve even one of these classic New Year resolutions?

Sadly, research suggests that many of us abandon our resolve and settle back into our old patterns. A 1988 American study from the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania found that only 19 per cent of those who make resolutions actually fulfil them within two years, and more recent studies find a similar pattern.

How then do we stick to our resolutions? There are three vital ingredients to making meaningful change. First, psychologists suggest we focus on "subordinate" rather than "superordinate" goals: the first refers to specific and concrete goals, while the second type of goals are more abstract or vague. Decide that your aim is lose ten pounds over the next six months (a subordinate goal), instead of saying to yourself "I resolve to get in shape" (a superordinate goal).

Dr Jamie Arkell is a consultant psychiatrist at the Charter Nightingale Hospital. When working with patients on making resolutions and forming new, healthier habits, he says he has learned to be

really specific with his patients in this way. "I ask them, when in the day will you do it? Before or after you brush your teeth or on a bench between the underground and your office?"

The second trick is to Make. One. Change. By adopting just one clear resolution, we are more likely to succeed than if we spread ourselves too thin (pun intended) on multiple goals. Focussing on one goal at a time starts a virtuous circle: I've kept to one resolution, so I can keep to another.

The third key is to approach

your goals in a compassionate and kindly way, especially when you fall off the wagon, which we all will from time to time. Perhaps you've temporarily lost your yen for Zen. Maybe you've become frustrated with meditation or gobbled a packet of biscuits (McVitie's Dark Chocolate Digestives are my favourite).

When I find myself in that situation, I try not to berate myself. Sometimes I try and imagine talking to myself as if I were a child. I would talk to a child in a loving and forgiving way. Being kind and self-compassionate is just as important as picking a subordinate goal and focussing on just one thing.

Wishing you all the happiest of New Years and love and luck in keeping your resolutions.



Rachel Kelly is a mental-health advocate and adviser to Compassion Matters, a charity which supports schools, teachers and young people to explore compassion.

the Diocese of Speyer and, at his suggestion, she accepted a position at St Magdalene's, a Dominican sisters' training institute for women teachers located in Speyer. She entered the training institute in Easter 1923 and stayed until March 1931. Among her other duties she taught German literature to the students there, living a quasi-monastic life, including taking personal vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The later events of Stein's life are well known: her entry into the Carmelite convent in Cologne in 1933, her flight to Holland as the Nazis took power in Germany, and her eventual capture and deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was murdered on 9 August 1942.

The significance of those hidden but fruitful years between her baptism in 1922 and her entry to Carmel 11 years later is sometimes overlooked. The events of 1922 seemed to initiate a new period in Stein's life, a "vocation" no less, in response to the unique circumstances within which she now found herself: a German Jew who had left her religion; a single, laywoman with no "official" status within the Catholic Church; an acknowledged member of the Göttingen phenomenological circle who, unlike her male colleagues, was unable to find a university position because of her gender; and a seeker of truth who wanted to meld together the various strands of her life. In her "intellectual apostolate", she sought to bring Catholic theology and Church teaching, as exemplified in the writings of thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, into conversation with the

contemporary philosophical world. This was marked initially by a series of notable translations of the works of Aquinas and Newman, in particular Aquinas' *Disputed Questions* (for which she also provided a lexicon of contemporary philosophical terms) and Newman's *Letters* and his *The Idea of the University*.

IN MANY WAYS, despite not having a university post, this would be one of the most philosophically fruitful periods of Stein's life. Concerning this "intellectual apostolate", in February 1928 she wrote to a former student, now a Dominican Religious, Callista Kopf OP: "Immediately before, and for a good while after my conversion, I was of the opinion that to lead a religious life meant one had to give up all that was secular and to live totally immersed in thoughts of the Divine. But gradually I realised that something else is asked of us in this world and that, even in the contemplative life, one may not sever the connection with the world. I even believe that the deeper one is drawn into God, the more one must 'go out of oneself'; that is, one must go to the world in order to carry the divine life into it."

This was Stein's recipe for an intellectual apostolate of "contemplation in action". As she says to Sr Callista, she never believed

that religion "is something to be relegated to a quiet corner or for a few festive hours"; rather, it should form "the root and ground of all life". After her baptism, by adopting a simple life of prayer whilst continuing to cultivate her intellectual life, Stein developed a fruitful intellectual apostolate that took the synthesis she was developing between the insights of phenomenology and thinkers such as Aquinas and Newman beyond the academy. (Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II, was to be profoundly influenced by her writings.) Indeed, if we are to take one lesson from Stein's life for the challenges facing us today, it would be that the spiritual dimension cannot be removed from the fabric of a truly intellectual life, or vice versa, if we are to be true to our whole composition as human beings: body, heart, mind and soul.

This idea of spirituality and philosophy together being the "root and ground" of life would become one of the great fruits of her "baptism into truth" that cold January day in 1922. One hundred years later, we so desperately need to rediscover that mutually enriching spirituality and "living philosophy".

Peter Tyler is professor of pastoral theology and spirituality at St Mary's University, Twickenham, south-west London. His book *The Living Philosophy of Edith Stein* will be published this year by Bloomsbury Press.



The Victorians loved to tell their children fairy tales drawn from medieval German legends – but they had a problem. At the centre of the story there is often a murderous mother / By MARY BOYLE

The land of make-believe

DRAGONS. Treasure. Heroes. Kings and queens. Dwarfs. Battles. Destiny. The stuff of fairy tales.

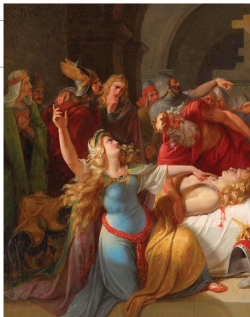
These ingredients of an enduringly successful brand of fantasy literature, from J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis to Eva Ibbotson and J.K. Rowling, are essentially medieval tropes. The roots of this genre lie in a Victorian trend for cutting new fairy tales from old cloth. The English Middle Ages provided plenty of material, as did classical antiquity, but another port of call was the land of fairy tales itself: Germany; home to *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, originally known as the *Children's and Household Tales* (*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*).

But Germany was more than just an enchanted forest. A growing nineteenth-

century interest in all things German, partly prompted by the marriage of Victoria and Albert, was accompanied by a drive to locate the beginnings of English culture and democracy in an "Anglo-Saxon" past, shared with other "Germanic" nations and opposed to present corruptions supposedly introduced by the Normans.

This in turn justified an English claim to a share in the creative outputs of medieval Germany, and so it is no surprise that late-Victorian and Edwardian writers identified the perfect raw material for a children's book in a thirteenth-century German epic, the *Nibelungenlied* ("The Song of the Nibelungs").

What triggered this sudden fascination with the *Nibelungenlied*, almost 70 years after



Kriemhild at Siegfried's body declares Hagen as his murderer and swears revenge

it had first been brought to English attention in the second decade of the nineteenth century? Disappointingly for medievalists like myself, dense publications with extensive footnotes rarely pique public interest. But Wagner did. In 1876, his *Ring des Nibelungen* received its first full performance in Bayreuth, and its London premiere followed six years later. Rather than straightforwardly adapting his German source, Wagner creatively fused the Norse tradition with aspects of the *Nibelungenlied*. This made the subject matter even more appealing: at its most expansive, Victorian Teutomania also contrived to include Scandinavia. English versions of the *Nibelungenlied* immediately began to flood out, often citing Wagner directly.

As well as providing a public interest hook, the *Ring* offered a template for the mingling of Norse and German material that recurs in children's adaptations. The Norse material, after all, had better dragons.

In some ways, those dragons were a sideshow. Rewriting the *Nibelungenlied* for children was primarily educational, and entertainment value was simply the hook. The didactic purpose was not the triumph of good over evil of modern medievalist children's fantasy, but the promotion of the epic as English children's cultural inheritance.

IN 1880, Lydia Hands introduced *Golden Threads from an Ancient Loom* by arguing that "a story so popular amongst our Teutonic cousins, ought not to be altogether unfamiliar to the youth on this side the German Ocean". Thomas Cartwright took an even stronger line in *Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer: A Twice-Told Tale* (1907): "As to the whole story, you cannot help liking that if you are a true child of the North for, as William Morris has said, it is 'the Great Story of the North which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks'." The idea was not new: Thomas Carlyle, Cartwright's source for the German material, had claimed in 1831 that the narrative "belongs specially to us English Teutons as well as to the German".

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But there was a hitch. Truth be told, the material was not quite perfect for children. The *Nibelungenlied*'s bleakness horrified its medieval audience and it would have no chance of receiving a twenty-first-century PG rating. Its fairy-tale features exist alongside sex – consensual and non-consensual – and extreme violence, including a child's decapitation, the immolation of hundreds of men and drinking blood from corpses. The sex was considered far more problematic than the violence and, while the former was generally expunged, much of the latter found its way through. Even so, this was not without difficulty: much of the violence was orchestrated by a woman. And not just any woman: a mother, the princess who should have lived happily ever after.

So what went wrong? Like all good fairy tales, the *Nibelungenlied* starts with a beautiful princess who is dreaming of her future husband. But it does not end when that princess, Kriemhild, marries the prince, Siegfried, nor when they are crowned, nor when their son is born. Instead, the prince is murdered by Kriemhild's kinsman, Hagen, and her brother. For good measure, Hagen then steals Kriemhild's treasure hoard, a gift from Siegfried, and sinks it in the Rhine. Kriemhild swears vengeance and contracts a second marriage for the sole purpose of effecting it. Years later, she achieves her goal, wiping out all of her brothers and their forces, and decapitating Hagen herself, after which she herself is killed.

Even if the point of the adaptations was not to depict an ordered world in which the just were rewarded and the wicked punished, it was an unavoidable conclusion that the characters of the *Nibelungenlied* provided very poor moral examples for a juvenile nineteenth-century audience, and Kriemhild offered some of the worst. This was particularly glaring when it came to her role as mother, repeatedly subjugated to her desire for vengeance. After Siegfried's death she dispatches their son to live abroad, freeing herself to plot – quite the opposite of fairy tales like *Rumpelstiltskin*, in which the princess fiercely resists separation from her firstborn.

Later, things are even clearer cut: Kriemhild

uses her second son as bait to get her revenge under way, leading directly to the child's murder. This is itself toned down from Gudrun, Kriemhild's Norse parallel, who kills and cooks her sons. Both display the behaviour of a wicked stepmother – though such characters were often nineteenth-century revisions, introduced to create a distance between motherhood and cruelty. Hansel, Gretel and Snow White were originally persecuted by their biological mothers. Later twentieth-century children's fantasy increases that distance, replacing the wicked stepmother with a more remote stand-in who does not join the original nuclear family – the Queen of Underland in Lewis' *The Silver Chair*, Mrs Trollope in Ibbotson's *The Secret of Platform 13*, or even Rowling's Petunia Dursley. Understandably, then, Kriemhild's sacrifice of her son was a chief cause of outrage, despite her culpability for countless other deaths. What were our nineteenth-century authors to do?

Kriemhild's first maternal failing was easily solved: her older son plays no role in the narrative and was frequently omitted, leaving her with no child to abandon. When it came to her ill-fated younger son, Ortlieb, adapters tended not to reuse the tactic of simply eliminating him, unless it was the side effect of a rather more drastic solution – several authors simply curtailed proceedings with Siegfried's death. Even those who adapted the whole story felt that serious intervention was necessary here, whether or not they made any further effort to redeem Kriemhild's stories.

In Gertrude Schottentfels' *Stories of the Nibelungen for Young People* (1905), Ortlieb does not meet a premature end and Kriemhild is essentially a good mother. Although her kinsmen end up dead on her instructions, Schottentfels distances Kriemhild from the violence, explaining that these executions were both suggested and authorised by a knight. Kriemhild just about remains a fairy-tale princess of "the good old days of long ago" – after all, even Snow White tacitly authorised her tormenter's painful fate. At the end of the story, the family unit remains intact, even if we do not quite stretch to happily ever after.

OTHER ADAPTERS maintain the child's death, but depict it as collateral damage, not the result of Kriemhild's appalling parenting. Cartwright calculates that it would be too alienating to depict his protagonist as responsible for the death of her son, even if she is a "wicked woman". He records "Hagen starting the slaughter by striking off the head of Kriemhild's young son", but not that Kriemhild had put the child in harm's way to create an excuse for retaliation. Lydia Hands, meanwhile, transforms Kriemhild from the nightmare woman who sacrifices her child for revenge to a doting mother driven mad by her son's murder. At this, a rather non-specific interest in vengeance becomes a semi-suicidal desire for her enemies' deaths, and all of her subsequent actions are accompanied by references to insanity. This reduces Kriemhild's culpability for her active participation in the carnage: insanity was a common

basis for the acquittal of violent women. In law and literature, it offered an explanation for the dramatic violation of gendered expectations. Hands even anchors Kriemhild's wrongdoing in the destruction of her motherhood: she is not a bad mother, but a devoted one.

Wicked mothers, it seems, were a step too far for Victorian and Edwardian children's authors. The child-murderer Gudrun does not get a look-in. Kriemhild, even at her most whitewashed, remains transgressive, but her motherhood is taken out of that equation.

Little has changed. This is part of the same pattern which saw murderous fairy-tale mothers recast as stepmothers, and which has demanded ever since that mother figures, however unpleasant otherwise – Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, Narcissa Malfoy – maintain complete, even redemptive, loyalty to their children. For our adapters, motherhood directed their understanding of Kriemhild. For the medieval Kriemhild, it was a sidenote of limited and terrible utility, hardly a fitting cultural inheritance for Victorian and Edwardian children. No wonder she had to be changed for the nineteenth century.

Mary Boyle is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow and Junior Research Fellow at Linacre College, Oxford. She is the author of *Writing the Jerusalem Pilgrimage in the Late Middle Ages* (D.S. Brewer, 2021).



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Pope Francis

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COLIN THUBRON

PHOTO: ALAMY/NEEL SHREVE



Among the believers

Peter Stanford finds the push and pull of religion running like a thread through the journeys of one of the greatest living travel writers

AS COLIN THUBRON makes his way in the pages of his latest book, *The Amur River*, across the vast, empty grasslands of Mongolia, a mental picture of him as a pilgrim gradually forms in my mind. He is, after all, travelling essentially alone (though, at just short of 80 at the time, with guides to aid him). And he is often on foot and silent on the solitary track.

Moreover, as he walks, he is by his own description opening himself to the timeless

environment around him where steppe and forest converge. "A near-sacred wilderness" is how he refers to it, in the shadow of Burkhan Khaldun, a holy mountain believed to loom above the birthplace in the twelfth century of Genghis Khan, the mighty and still revered founder of the Mongol Empire.

"There is some truth in that," Thubron replies, mulling over the connotations of being described as a pilgrim as we sit on either side of a fire in the elegant west London

home which he shares with his wife, the American Shakespeare scholar, Margreta de Grazia. "I suppose I am looking for experience and a sensuous understanding of what a culture is like to be in, or a landscape, and receiving some understanding that way, rather than anything intellectual. So there is a sense in which it is embarking on a journey that is going to yield something in the way of empathy and understanding. That is as close to pilgrimage as I can get. But I am not travelling in the classic pilgrimage way to a specific place. I am travelling through places."

THERE IS a precision in the distinction he is teasing out as he talks that only a well informed observer of religion, religious rituals and traditions, could make. And Thubron has, for more than half-a-century, been observing at close quarters most of the world's great faiths as part of his prize-winning accounts of his travels, starting in 1967 with *Mirror to Damascus*, where he charms a Mother Superior into giving him a bed for the night in her convent. Indeed, monasteries are one of the leitmotifs of his books.

After Damascus, he gradually extended his reach for subsequent books to nearby Lebanon, then Jerusalem and then Cyprus, with their mix of Eastern and Western Christians, Jews and Muslims. Subsequent journeys, though, saw him immerse himself in Hinduism and Buddhism in Tibet, along the Silk Road, in the newly independent Muslim nations of Central Asia, and now in the Far East, where in *The Amur River* he covers the almost 3,000 miles of its banks that are in large part the border between China and Russia.

Yet he does so without baggage, in all senses. In practical terms, he travels light. "I have never been worried about luxuries," he says, "or even necessities sometimes. I've never thought of myself as any age. Perhaps it helps to be innumerate." Glances of mortality do, however, creep into the pages of the new book. "In a hotel mirror," he writes, "I have seen with surprise an old man in his eightieth year, then forgotten him ..."

But without baggage, too, in his own lack of formal religious belief. His youthful "rather conventional" Anglicanism, he explains, did not survive the transition into adult life that for him came after the trauma of the death, in a skiing accident, of his sister, Carol.

"I DID BECOME in my teens a very keen Christian. At my prep school, we had a private chapel and it was all rather seductive to me for reasons I couldn't quite analyse now. At public school [Eton, which he has described since as tending to instil a "ritualised uncaringness" in its pupils], I became a bit more serious and later, immediately after leaving, there was something called the Stewards' Trust."

This organisation, founded in 1953 and still very much around, practised, Thubron remembers, "a very low-church, Pauline Christianity. Once a week we'd go along for this rather serious Bible study group." If it

was some sort of prop as he emerged into the world and decided against taking the conventional route into university – choosing instead to find a job in publishing – any personal faith “faded away rather quickly” thereafter.

“I had been in a dream and then, within a week of one another, my sister was killed and I joined a publishing company in London. In other words, I suddenly became adult.”

While his grieving parents found comfort in their faith – “I can remember well being rather astonished to find them praying together in their bedroom before sleep for a short while” – loss sent him in the opposite direction.

“For a while I attempted to keep Christianity but it seemed to be restrictive of my imagination and of everything I wanted to explore. I had to maintain what to me seemed like a major intellectual limitation that there were things I could not entertain, things that I was obliged to believe and feel. That became increasingly intolerable.”

He realises, too, with hindsight, that he was grieving. “I became very concerned about where my sister was. I can remember scrutinising verses of the Bible and being unhappy, in particular at the one in Matthew [25: 31-

46] that consigned the goats to hell and the sheep to Heaven. This seemed unreasonable to me, not because there was any reason why my sister would be among the goats. On the contrary, but still it felt like a huge injustice to me from what I knew of my fellow human beings. I lost my faith overnight.”

As well as his travel books, Thubron also writes critically acclaimed novels, having made the Booker Prize longlist in 2002 with *To The Last City*. But it was in *A Cruel*

Madness, published in 1984 and set in an asylum, that he gives a fictionalised account of his rejection of Christianity.

Now 82, and looking in fine fettle as he recovers after brushes with long Covid, vasculitis of the veins in his head and a hip replacement, he is softly spoken, slightly hesitant in his delivery, self-deprecating and effortlessly charming. His high forehead, thick hair and rather guarded eyes combine to remind me of the actor Bill Nighy. In the flesh he exudes that same broad wisdom that he conveys on the pages of his books in his apparently effortless, pared-back and beautiful prose.

He may, he suggests, have left formal attachment to religion behind without regret, but he has spent sufficient time around it since then to recognise its pull. “It still appeals

to me in some way, even in my latest book with the idea that Genghis Khan of all people had a land that is holy to him. There is a sort of aura about it.”

In *Little Gidding*, T.S.Eliot writes of the effect of walking in the footsteps of past generations of believers. “You are not here to verify, / Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity / Or carry report. You are here to kneel / Where prayer has been valid.” Did being in lands that Genghis Khan and Mongolians to this day believe to be sacred have a similar effect on Thubron?

“There was certainly something, probably because I am very visual in my thinking, that if the land seems to evoke such feelings in me naturally, then I am drawn to it and believe it. And in this instance, unlike most of Mongolia, you get these mountains all around you and no people at all. An empty land is very strange. In certain Buddhist beliefs there is a living presence in the land.”

Buddhism, he says, does entice him – “just as mysticism appeals to me, whether it is within Christianity or Islam”. But with any pull, there is also for him a push. “There is something else in Buddhism that I couldn’t quite grasp – that one should dispense with need, with passion, because that is what inhibits spiritual growth. I can understand what is meant by it, and why, in the difficult and hard times in which the Buddha was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

teaching, one should wish to disassociate oneself from the worldly. For myself, though, I would rather put up with the desire and the passion." It is, he suggests, more fully human.

In 2011 Thubron published *To a Mountain in Tibet*, an account of another ostensibly pilgrim-like journey, this time to the mountain of Kailas in the western Himalayas, holy to both Hindus and Buddhists. It was made in the wake of his mother's death, which much preoccupies him as he intersperses in its pages travel writing with memoir. At one stage, he even describes addressing his dead mother into the thin air on the mountainside with the question, "Where are you?", the same question he struggled with after his sister's death.

Did he get any sort of answer? "If I had been in my twenties, I might have been hoping for a kind of epiphany," he reflects, "but because of my age I had become less and less susceptible to epiphany. After my mother's death, my birth family had gone [he has no biological children] and it seemed wrong just to continue life in the ordinary way. So I looked for something sacred, that was not quite of my world, or the ordinary world."

He didn't, he explains, want to go to somewhere "specifically religious" – though he is attracted to Mecca, he adds as an aside, but he has never been able to go since it is closed to non-Muslims. "Buddhism was the closest I could get to something that is to my mind more universal and less binding, legalistically or in terms of belief. But above all Kailas is an object of sanctity in itself. It is a beautiful shape, calling out for veneration. It is sacred, or whatever I mean by sacred ..."

IT IS THAT spirit to arrive at his own definitions, and to test human endurance to do that, even to the point, he admits, when he has found his life in peril in sticky situations en route, which is such an essential part of the magic of a Colin Thubron travel book. Does nothing, I wonder, daunt him?

"No, you sort of accept the risks much more easily [when you are] out there. What you risk is part of what happens. And – speaking to a journalist – it is also good copy. You almost feel as if there are two of you going sometimes. You are looking at yourself up to a point because you know that you are going to be a figure in your narrative. So there is one of you who is experiencing things, and the other sitting on his shoulder watching things."

But to spend so much of his life travelling might also suggest that there is something he is trying to get away from. He has heard the question before and shakes his head. "I'm not a dissatisfied person. Maybe too self-satisfied. I do not think of a journey with an expectation that it will change me."

He has identified another reason why he may not quite be a pilgrim.

The Amur River: Between Russia and China is published by Chatto & Windus at £20 (Tablet price £18).

ONLINE EVENTS

Better the devil you know: An introduction to the noonday demon of acedia



Join Fr Toby Lees OP as he explores acedia looking at the writings of Evagrius, Cassian and Aquinas. You might not have heard of it, but you will recognise the symptoms when you hear them!

THURSDAY 13 JANUARY 2022, 7.00-8.00PM GMT

The Synodal Pathway – Good News for Catholic Women?



Natalie K. Watson, Publishing Editor of the *Pastoral Review*, in conversation with Tina Beattie, Catholic theologian and novelist, Daisy Sriblin, CEO of the Catholic charity Million Minutes, and Alana Harris, Director of Liberal Arts and Senior Lecturer in Modern British History at King's College, London, and Penelope Middelboe from Root and Branch who is a writer, historian and former charity CEO talking about synodality and the experience of women in the Catholic Church

WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY 2022, 6.00-7.00PM GMT

Synod Watch Two – Synod wisdom from the Religious



Continue your Synodal journey with *The Tablet* as Synod Watch Two explores Synod wisdom from the Religious, gaining an insight into the Religious Orders' response to the Synod and their experience of discernment. Join Christopher Lamb and a panel of representatives from the Religious Orders as we gain an insight into a unique perspective on the Synodal journey.

WEDNESDAY 26 JANUARY 2022, 7.00P-8.00PM GMT

Robots, drones and smart churches? Catholic Social Teaching and the Artificial Intelligence Revolution



Natalie K. Watson, Publishing Editor of the *Pastoral Review*, in conversation with Sean McDonagh, eco-theologian and author of *Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs*, about the ethical and theological implications of Artificial Intelligence

THURSDAY 27 JANUARY 2022, 6.00-7.00PM GMT

TO BOOK YOUR TICKETS VISIT: WWW.THETABLET.CO.UK/EVENTS

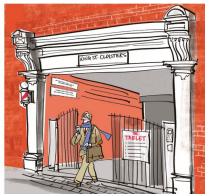


Voices of the Spirit

SISTER PAMELA Hussey, who would have been 100 on 7 January, died peacefully on 13 December in Apley Grange, the Harrogate care home of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

"Mine might be described as a life of two halves or, more accurately, of two continents, South America and Europe," Pamela herself once wrote. Though her parents were English, she was born and brought up in Buenos Aires. In November 1942, at the age of twenty, she sailed from Argentina to Britain to "do her bit" for the war effort. In 2018, when she was 96, a delegation from the French Embassy arrived at Apley Grange. The community gathered around as Pamela was presented with the Légion d'Honneur – France's highest honour – for her service during the war. Her work and those of her fellow code-breakers at Bletchley Park had saved many lives.

Pamela returned to Argentina after the war, but "a desire for a deeper commitment" drew her back to Europe and to becoming a member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Aged nearly 60 "the two continents of my life came together again" when she went to work for CIIR (the Catholic Institute for International Relations): she stayed for 25 years. A tireless



campaigner, speaker and writer, in the 1980s she visited Central America several times, working especially in El Salvador. Ian Linden, former director of CIIR, wrote in his tribute on the ICN website: "Pamela felt deeply the betrayal of women who had fought against the Latin American dictatorships and who were expected after victory to return to traditional roles." George Gelber, another colleague and friend for many years, told us, "She had such a clear sense of what was right and wrong and her vigorous opinions were always refreshing"; Sylvia Gelber added, "Pamela was such a constant, inspirational

presence. A joyful revolutionary spirit, fierce and independent."

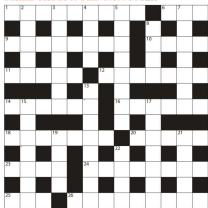
A FEW days before Sister Pamela's death another spirited woman Religious, Margit Slachta, who died in the US in 1974, was reburied in Budapest's Fiume Road cemetery.

Margit was the first woman to be elected to the Hungarian parliament, where she promoted workers' rights and defended the wellbeing of women and families. She founded the Sisters of Social Service, who lived among the people as teachers, nurses and midwives. In the late 1930s, she published articles opposing anti-Jewish measures in her newspaper, *Voice of the Spirit*. When it was suppressed, Margit published it underground. When the Nazis occupied Hungary in 1944 and began the deportation of Jews, her sisters arranged baptisms and sheltered people in their convents. One of Margit's sisters, Sára Salkaházi, was executed and Slachta herself was beaten and only narrowly avoided being murdered. In 1985, Slachta was recognised as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

In the words of Cardinal Péter Erdő, the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, who presided at the reburial ceremony, Margit "represented in words and in action" the notion of Christian love.

PUZZLES

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 786 Axe



Across

- 1 Traditionally, the trade of Jesus' father (9)
6 Balaam and the ---, 1626 painting by
Rembrandt (3)
9 Tommaso and Giuseppe -----,
eighteenth-century brother composers of
liturgical music and oratorios (8)
10 Priest and scribe who returned to
Jerusalem after the exile (4)
11 Unnamed biblical queen, Balkis or Bilkis in
the Quran (5)
12 French name of Stephen the Martyr (7)
14 Turn away from sin or do penitence (6)
16 Type of governmental administration
employed by 22 Down at the time of
Christ (6)

- 18 Apostate (7)
20 Christmas decoration sometimes called
"Christ's thorn" (5)
23 Longest river featured in the O.T. (4)
24 Subdivision of 16 Across (8)
25 High Priest of Shiloh, according
to Samuel (3)
26 Territory of 22 Down now mostly forming
part of Greece (9)

Down

- 2 Strict US Mennonite Christian sect (5)
3 Short moral story often used in Jesus' teachings (7)
4 Hebrew patriarch who according to Genesis lived for 950 years (4)

- 5 Letters of the K.J.V. Bible, in particular (8)
 7 One of an ancient mystic noble Arabic
 order with charitable aims, allied to
 freemasonry (7)
 8 Foremost religious and secular scholar of
 Anglo-Saxon England (673?-735) (4)
 13 Oldest independent African country (8)
 15 Book and major prophet of the O.T. (7)
 17 Next month in letter-writing (Latin) (7)
 19 Hebrew for "delight" (4)
 21 Book of rites predating Confucius
 during China's Catholic history (variant
 spelling) (2,3)
 22 Only extant example of a city enclosing a
 country (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 1 January
The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 6GY.
Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk, with Crossword in the subject field.
Please include your full name, telephone number and email address,
and a mailing address. Three books – on Paul, Theology and Christian
Ethics – from the OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the
sender of the first correct entry drawn at random.

■ We are processing entries but there may be a delay in notifying winners and sending out prizes. Please keep entering.

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SUDOKU | Challenging

8		3						
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2	9							3
				3				
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	1							4
		9					2	

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

7	8	3	4	5	9	2	6	1
5	6	1	8	2	3	9	7	4
9	4	2	6	7	1	3	5	8
1	5	4	7	3	2	6	8	9
3	7	9	5	8	6	1	4	2
8	2	6	9	1	4	5	3	7
4	1	8	3	9	5	7	2	6
6	9	5	2	4	7	8	1	3
2	3	7	1	6	8	4	9	5

Solution to the 4 December crossword No. 784

Across: 1 Isobel; 5 Cigar; 8 Bocca; 9 Solomon; 10 Vera; 11 Delaware; 13 Exist; 14 Yeats; 19 Asperges; 21 Tara; 23 Allegro; 24 Oasis; 25 Aaron; 26 Odessa. **Down:** 2 Sycorax; 3 Brae; 4 Lester; 5 Collared; 6 Gamma; 7 Ranger; 8 Bevy; 12 Estragon; 15 Tharsis; 16 Panama; 17 Tesoro; 18 Mars; 20 Polar; 22 Dove.

Bible stories

● It is rare for me to agree with Melanie McDonagh but I found myself agreeing with her wholeheartedly about the need to expose children to the “fabulous stories” in the Bible (Notebook, 11 December).

When teaching in Catholic primary schools, I would have loved to have replaced the mandatory Religious Education programme with Bible stories. Ensuring that children hear these stories not just once, but revisit them time and time again throughout their primary years would give them ownership of them and prove a lot more engaging than much of what is currently on offer in Religious Education in some dioceses.

(DR) ELLIS FIELD

BURTON UPON TRENT,
STAFFORDSHIRE

Modern martyrs

● November 10 was the anniversary of the executions of four Christian martyrs who must be among the most significant of modern times. Yet their names are scarcely known outside their homeland and the date passed virtually unnoticed in this country.

The anniversary is marked every year in Germany with ecumenical prayers said throughout the country. Known as the four Lübeck Martyrs, they were a middle-aged Lutheran pastor, Karl-Friedrich Stellbrink, and three young Catholic priests, Eduard Muller, Johannes Praske and Hermann Lange; and were executed by guillotine on 10 November 1943.

Lübeck, a town in northern Germany, had been heavily bombed by the RAF on the night of 28–29 March 1942 when thousands were killed. At morning service on Palm Sunday, 29 March, Pastor Stellbrink preached that the bombing was a divine judgement against the evils of the Nazi regime.

Investigations revealed that he and the three priests were close friends and had been meeting secretly and shared the

deep conviction that the Nazis’ actions and ideology were contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

They were charged with listening to enemy broadcasts and spreading malice and sedition and given the inevitable death penalty. It is said that the blood of the four mingled on the floor of the execution chamber. Their lives and deaths demonstrated that Christ’s fundamental teaching is not confined to one Church or denomination and gave a vivid example of ecumenism long before its time.

Could not the Catholic Church now honour them by setting in process a cause for the beatification of all four? Pastor Stellbrink died for the same faith as the three priests. Pope Francis would thus have the opportunity to give powerful endorsement to Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism. Such an action would no doubt shock

traditionalists but it would give a much-needed message to the world.

JOHN MULHOLLAND
ALTRINCHAM, CHESHIRE

We need PR

● Among his proposals for “dramatic constitutional reform” (“Out of control”, 18 December), Conor Gearty mentions proportional representation (PR). The continued use of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system for Westminster elections, used by hardly any other country in the world, prevents the UK from legitimately calling itself a proper democracy.

Up to about half a century or so ago, one-party governments almost invariably received something approaching 50 per cent of the vote. It seemed reasonable to most people that a party with that level of support had a legitimate right

of the Church if there had been such outright disregard for a papal decision when *Summorum Pontificum* was promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI.

MARTIN CLITHEROE
BEDFORD

ARCHBISHOP Arthur Roche, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, is absolutely correct when he identifies the supporters of the Tridentine rite of Mass with the forces of counter-revolution.

Given that it is now acknowledged that the Old Mass and the New Mass represent contradictory and opposing religions, a fact to which Pope Francis himself attests, then of course they cannot co-exist and one of these two rites has to be trashed. It is only Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and the Society of St Pius X which have always recognised this huge contradiction between the two rites, and the recent statements of the Holy Father could be seen as belated official recognition of the position of SSPX.

The only difference now between Pope Francis and SSPX is one of approach: which rite of Mass should we destroy?

JOSEPH BEVAN
DOVER, KENT

to rule. In the last 50 years, however, not a single government has reached even 44 per cent (with the exception of the 2010 coalition where the two parties in combination received over 50 per cent). One-party governments took overall power in 2005 and 2015 on vote shares of 35 and 37 per cent respectively, which is ludicrous.

There is now an unsolvable case for some form of PR to be adopted for Westminster elections, with the inevitable, and in my view desirable, consequence of coalitions or looser agreements between parties. Among other advantages, this would help reduce the tribalism and divisiveness which permeates modern British politics, particularly since the 2016 referendum. To put the case more starkly: PR gave us Merkel, FPTP gave us Johnson.

ALAN PAVELIN
CHISLEHURST, KENT

No more browsing

● One of the problematic delights of being retired is finding oneself in the Aladdin's Cave of the Sally Army shop.

I can't be the only browser startled to discover on a shelf what looks at first glance to be a bundle of books from my own library but which on closer inspection, includes all sorts of unknown treasures, volumes on Keats and Pascal and Boulez, handsome, good as new, originally very expensive books, all on offer, three for a pound.

It's a glorious compensation for being old and poor, without access to a decent public library. But the chill sets in as one realises why those amazing books were there, so shockingly undervalued. Because next it will be my own lifetime's library of powerful, priceless books and scores which my kids decide just have to go – their lives being so insanely busy, their accommodation so meagre, that the next generation is very unlikely to have the scope to browse and discover what they don't realise they are looking for.

In a world where we can have any book or film we think we would like, at a click, so long as it's on the Audible, Netflix or Google menu, it won't be long before any kind of serendipitous discovery, any truly independent and creative thinking, any

familiarity with what's not commercially viable, becomes impossible.

MADELEINE PIKE
CAMBRIDGE

Irish rights

● In your editorial ("The future of Ireland", 11 December) Ireland is described as an exemplary modern secular state where human rights are secure and freedom guaranteed.

The most basic and greatest of all human rights is the right to life and thousands of Irish people are not afforded this right, as the lives of unborn children are terminated in Irish hospitals every day. This is such a stain on Ireland's human rights record that I'm astounded by an assessment of Irish life by a Catholic weekly negating this fact.

Freedom of conscience is not respected in Ireland, where pro-life politicians have been expelled from political parties and promotion in the field of medicine is damaged if the candidate doesn't share a purely secular view of the human person.

(FR) GREGORY O BRIEN
LEIXLIP, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND

Cromwell's plan

● Thomas Cromwell did in fact have a "master plan" after the Dissolution of the Monasteries

(Books, 18 December). Many at the time had very few residents and Cromwell aimed instead to create new dioceses to cater for the shifts in lay population that had been taking place ever since the Black Death.

However, Henry took much of the money and the plan had to be shelved. Use was made of it when dioceses were changed in the nineteenth century.

GUY NEELY
CHISLEHURST, KENT

Devotion to Mary

● Margaret Hebblethwaite enjoys going to churches where the Salve Regina is sung ("To Mary through Jesus", 18 December). But her article also references the Magnificat. This canticle is sung daily in

Anglican cathedrals throughout the UK, in college chapels at Oxford and Cambridge and so forth. Catholic devotion to Mary is unquestionable but I suspect it is Anglicans who are most familiar with Mary's great revolutionary song.

ALAN MASTERS
AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

● The article about Protestant and Catholic attitudes to Mary reminded me of a long-ago ecumenical service attended in Donegal. In the light of the date (15 August, the Feast of the Assumption) and the congregation, the priest told a

story about a Protestant vicar and Catholic priest arriving at heaven's gate.

Jesus greeted them both and, to the Protestant minister, said: "May I introduce you to my mother – I don't think you know her." Turning to the Catholic priest (who was feeling quite smug), Jesus said: "May I introduce you to my mother – I think sometimes you confuse her with my Father."

MAGGIE BEIRNE
LONDON W5

Still British

● Professor Gribben ("Columba's unfinished mission", 11 December) asks: "Why should Picts abandon the gods of their ancestors to worship a deity who had not prevented the imposition of the Roman Empire or the destruction of the English Church?"

But when Columba died there was no "English Church". The Anglo-Saxons who had conquered most of Britain were pagan. What they destroyed was the (Romano)-British Church, which survived in Wales. The paganism of the "English" was what Pope Gregory the Great remedied. The monks he sent landed in Thanet, carrying the image of Christ painted on a board, in the year of Columba's death, 597.

MICHAEL ALEXANDER
OXFORD

THE LIVING SPIRIT
AND LITURGICAL CALENDAR

We do not make enough of suffering, we do not rejoice in this coin that is given us to pay our debts and those of others. I should welcome my sick headaches, but usually I rebel, thinking how if I had been a bit more sensible I could have avoided it. But then often it cannot be avoided, it just descends on one. So it should be welcomed in those cases at least as an opportunity of quietly enduring without complaint and submitting and accepting the will of God. The sacrament of the present moment.

DOROTHY DAY

THE DUTY OF DELIGHT: THE DIARIES OF DOROTHY DAY, EDITED BY ROBERT ELLSBERG (MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2008)

The Wise Men from the East were, above all, men of courage, the

courage and humility born of faith. Courage was needed to grasp the meaning of the star as a sign to set out, to go forth – towards the unknown, the uncertain, on paths filled with hidden dangers. We can imagine that their decision was met with derision: the scorn of those realists who could only mock the reveries of such men.

How can we not think, in this context, of the task of a Bishop in our own time? The humility of faith, of sharing the faith of the Church of every age, will constantly be in conflict with the prevailing wisdom of those who cling to what seems certain. Anyone who lives and proclaims the faith of the Church is on many points out of step with the



prevailing way of thinking, even in our own day. Today's regnant agnosticism has its own dogmas and is extremely intolerant regarding anything that would question it and the criteria it employs. Therefore the courage to contradict the prevailing mindset is particularly urgent for a Bishop today.

POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI
FROM A HOMILY PREACHED ON THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD, 6 JANUARY 2013

The deeper we get into reality, the more numerous will be the questions we cannot answer.

FRIEDRICH VON HUGEL

FROM LETTERS FROM BARON VON HUGEL TO A NICE, EDITED BY GWENDOLEN GREENE (J.M. DENT & SONS, 1928)

+ CALENDAR +

Sunday 2 January:
Second Sunday after The Nativity (Year G)

Monday 3 January:
Christmas feria or The Most Holy Name of Jesus

Tuesday 4 January:
Christmas feria

Wednesday 5 January:
Christmas feria

Thursday 6 January:
The Epiphany of the Lord

Friday 7 January:
Christmas feria or St Raymond of Penyafort, Priest

Saturday 8 January:
Christmas feria, The Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord

Sunday 9 January:
The Baptism of the Lord

♦ ♦ ♦

For the calendar for the Missal of 1962 go to www.1962.org.uk

NUYEA YORK – A MUSICAL HISTORY OF LATIN NEW YORK. Arte documentary • ANTONY GORMLEY, SONIA BRYCE and others discuss their work.

Manchester Art Gallery • SPENCER, Princess Diana biopic, Curzon Home Cinema • All links at WWW.TINYURL.COM/TABLETDIGITALARTS

Keep the faith

Religious themes are now thoroughly mainstream on screen, says **Mark Lawson**

IT'S A SCREEN DRAMA, due for release in three weeks' time, that seems likely to stand as one of the cultural highlights of 2022. And its title has a double meaning: *Mass* relates both to fatalities from an American school shooting and to the service at the Episcopal church that is the film's single location, where a meeting room has been hired for a truth and reconciliation session between two couples whose children were centrally involved in the massacre.

Full discussion of the film, featuring extraordinary work by debut writer-director Fran Kranz and actors Jason Isaacs, Martha Plimpton, Ann Dowd and Reed Birney, should wait until its release this month; but a film that deals with the issues of forgiveness and redemption in a Christian context (albeit with broader application), and in which a crucifix on the wall is visible in most scenes, confirms the continuation of a striking recent trend.

Because those who lament modern secularisation often cite a decline in religious broadcasting, So-called "God slots" – reserved, through internal and external (the regulator Ofcom) rules, for faith programming – have progressively reduced. Holy programming is now almost wholly a BBC preserve, and mainly on Radio 4 (*Sunday, Sunday Worship, Something Understood, The Moral Maze*). BBC TV has *Songs of Praise* in a slot of reduced prominence and, for the festival seasons, a frequent supply of travogues in which moderately well-known people undertake quasi-pilgrimages.

Yet despite all this, stories of faith are now, to an unpredicted and unprecedented degree, at the heart of TV. As covered in these pages last year, three of the most successful dramas – figuring high in Best of 2021 surveys and prize shortlistings – directly and profoundly explored Catholicism.

Kate Winslet powerfully portrayed a darkly mourning but deeply moral detective in *Mare of Easttown* (Sky-HBO), and BBC1 featured Adrian Dunbar as Superintendent Ted Hastings, a lone Catholic in a police force corrupted by Freemasons, in Jed Mercurio's *Line of Duty*: Hastings' Belfast vernacular had the unlikely consequence of "Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the wee donkey" trending on Twitter. A fictional co-religionist was Sean Bean as Mark Cobden, a teacher serving a jail term for killing someone while drunk-driving, in *Time*, written by Jimmy McGovern. In a key scene, a warden filling out the prison induction forms, asks about Cobden's faith. Told he is a non-



Jason Isaacs and Martha Plimpton in *Mass*

believer, the official starts writing "C of E" (an old English joke) until the prisoner insists he is recorded as a Catholic non-believer, a new McGovern joke that turns serious when Cobden's attempted redemption is helped by a Catholic nun serving as a prison chaplain.

NOT SINCE mid-twentieth-century publishing seasons when Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and Muriel Spark each released a new novel have Catholic doctrine and theology been so at the core of popular fiction. And nor was this unofficial trilogy a brief freak. Anyone constructing a film season featuring Catholic TV drama could also include McGovern's *Broken* (2017), a predecessor to *Time*, with Bean as a Merseyside priest who heroically saves parishioners from widening gaps in the state safety net. Another must would be the second series of *Fleabag* (2019), in which Phoebe Waller-Bridge character's attempted seduction of the priest played by Andrew Scott showed him breaking but then regaining his religious discipline.

Such lists can be broadened ecumenically to include Judaic hits – *Unorthodox* (2020), *Schitt's Creek* (2015-20) and *Shtetl* (2013-21), all on Netflix – and Anglicanism: *The Vicar of Dibley* (BBC, 1994-2020), *Rev* (BBC, 2010-14), *Grantchester* (ITV, since 2014) and *Call the Midwife* (BBC, since 2012).

There are also major series featuring three possible posthumous outcomes: Netflix evenhandedly dramatises heaven in *The Good Place* and eternal damnation in *Hellfire*, while BBC1's *Ghosts* has fun with spirits haunting former resorts. And, with an impartiality that

will please the government and Ofcom, recent TV has also featured dramas with an atheistic or anti-religious perspective – Ricky Gervais' *After Life* (Netflix) and the Philip Pullman adaptation *His Dark Materials* (BBC-HBO) – and even a fiction predicated on paganism: *The Third Day* (Sky).

So that's 15 successful or long-running TV fictions in which the characters' faith is central. Why? Well, the first explanation for this phenomenon is business. It makes economic sense for streaming networks such as Netflix and HBO-Sky to offer something for every possible demographic, increasing the chance of selling subscriptions to them. These new content behemoths are therefore much less likely to reject an idea as "too religious" or "niche", in the way that traditional networks, that aim for a large single audience rather than multiple smaller ones, might.

Second, there's an artistic motive. Plays from *Antigone* (441 BC) by Sophocles, through Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604), to Lynn Nottage's *Sweat* (2015) gain narrative tension and moral heft from a web of divine or human rules against which characters chafe. Because these days, in a majority western culture of determined non-judgementalism – where it can seem that murder and child abuse are the last broadly shared community taboos – it is ever harder for writers to find scenarios that include the crucial dramatic obstacle of moral wrong.

But for people of serious faith, crises of Greek or Shakespearean depth still feature. Professional dilemmas and decisions that cost DS Mare Sheehan and Supt Hastings sleepless

PHOTO: #500 UNCLELEVER STREET

nights of conscience would barely register as problems to an agnostic cop. The peak-time TV dramas of Jimmy McGovern, though the writer has himself lapsed from Catholicism, demonstrate time and again Greene's observation that Catholic theology invigorates fictional plotting and psychology because what is expected of the faithful sets the stakes so high. *The Fleabag* priest and the young woman protagonist of *Unorthodox* face restrictions on their sexual self-expression that will seem like science fiction to most contemporary viewers. The Catholic students in Lisa McGee's sitcom *Derry Girls* (Channel 4) face both political restrictions on which boys they dare date and religious strictures on what they can do with them. A classic definition of drama – that someone or something is trying to stop someone getting what they want – is most easily available to modern writers through faith frameworks.

IT'S TRUE that, even as deism becomes more visible in the broadcasting mainstream, its dedicated tributary feels under increasing threat of drying up. What is now BBC Religion & Ethics (a unit with various past names, including Religion, then Faith) divides its output between Worship and Features, the latter once known as Factual, until the editorial policy unit panicked about the application of impartiality standards rules to concepts.

Features feels safe for as long as reality TV stars can be persuaded to walk the Camino de Santiago, but Worship risks being a collateral victim of the pandemic. A weakness of broadcast services is that a single place and faith are represented each week. In mid December, for instance, BBC Radio 4 offered "a service of jazz carols for the Third Sunday of Advent from Highfields Church in Cardiff", while *Songs of Praise* was "in Lincoln to explore its famous Christmas market".

But during lockdowns, it was more than compensated for locally by Zoom worship, which, in addition to those suddenly locked out of their place of prayer, also reached people permanently excluded by sickness, immobility or remoteness. Such was the expansion of congregations that many venues are (in common with theatres) extending digital attendance even when in-person attendance is possible.

Surely, then, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Department should consider offering direct funding to worship centres around Britain to online services. And, rather than focusing entirely on traditional broadcast coverage, faith leaders might usefully unite to campaign for Digital Worship Grants.

There is a possible future in which the narrative aspect of faith broadcasting migrates to Drama and the worship element to local places of faith – Sky's *Mass* and Mass from your parish both on your home screen. In my view, this should be seen as advance, not retreat, for religious broadcasting.

Mass streams on Sky Cinema on TV, and in selected cinemas, from 20 January.

Searching for a voice in the echo chamber

Cancel culture and fear of causing offence has led to a crisis of confidence at the BBC, says D.J. Taylor

BACK IN the late 2000s I went to a New Year's Eve party given by a couple who knew Mark Damazer, then controller of BBC Radio 4. Damazer, a courteous and affable man, went around the gathering asking people: what did they could be done to improve it? My advice was to sack John Humphrys, cancel *The Moral Maze* and decommission *The Archers*. Damazer, who took this at face value, gravely replied, alas, that he could do none of these things.

A decade and more later, Humphrys has skipped off into retirement but *The Moral Maze* and *The Archers* are still going strong. Meanwhile, criticism of Radio 4 is going stronger still. Some of the brickbats tossed in the direction of Mo Bakaya, the station's current kingpin, are simply malicious: one discounts practically every story about the BBC that appears in a Murdoch newspaper merely because they can be traced back to the quivering hand of their proprietor.

Libby Purves, though writing in *The Times*, took a more moderate line – declaring herself

a diehard fan, but lamenting that the station had turned into an echo chamber for modern metropolitan opinion, took no interest in anything that happened beyond the M25, and fell over itself to conciliate every fashionable neurosis it could find. There were also some withering remarks about the entity known as "Radio 4 comedy", which Purves found unremittably left-wing and – much worse – not actually funny.

How much of this is true and, if true, how much does it matter? I am with Purves on the defects of Radio 4 comedy, while wondering how any serious national radio station, like any serious national newspaper, can avoid becoming an echo chamber for modern metropolitan opinion, given that we live in a highly centralised country whose cultural and political fixers are mostly quartered in London. Far more demoralising, though, for anyone sitting down to plan the 2022 schedules (or rather the 2023 schedules, what with the station's inordinately long lead times), is what might be called a crisis of confidence.

Like any other major institution in the UK, Radio 4 is frankly terrified – terrified of saying the wrong thing, of employing the wrong people, of taking the wrong side in any of the cultural debates currently animating our national discourse, of offending the government, of offending Her Majesty's opposition, of offending minority interests, of offending majority interests, of breaking self-imposed rules about representation and bias that 90 per cent of its listeners would scarcely know existed.

All this is probably inevitable in the current climate, but it can make for very tedious programming, not least the plethora of items that seem to have been placed there to show that the Corporation is sensitive to a particular issue rather than to make a decent radio feature about it. As for all that bold, imaginative commissioning that every incoming Radio 4 big cheese always puts at the centre of their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Broadcasting House in London, headquarters of the BBC

Laura Gascoigne highlights the must-see art exhibitions of 2022

Shadows on the sky

THE ARTS HAVE long led the way on "levelling up", but despite the proliferation of new regional galleries, art exhibitions tend to be imports from elsewhere. Not so with the Laing Art Gallery's autumn exhibition. The return to the North East of one of the British Library's greatest treasures, the **Lindisfarne Gospels**, on display at the Newcastle gallery from 17 September, is a matter of immense regional pride. It has inspired a programme of celebratory events, including light projections illuminating the facade of Durham Cathedral and a Festival of Flame recreating the complex patterns of the manuscript's "carpet" pages in installations of thousands of tealights.

The delayed exhibition was originally intended to mark the 1,300th anniversary of the death in 721 of Eadfrith of Lindisfarne, the cleric credited with having scribed and illuminated the Gospels' 518 pages in the scriptorium of the monastery founded by St Aidan on Holy Island. At the time, Northumberland was the most powerful kingdom in England and, judging by the manuscript's combination of Celtic, Germanic and Mediterranean decorations, the most cosmopolitan. The manuscript "is many things to many people but, first and foremost, it is a book created in the North and of the North", says Simon Henig of the North East Culture Partnership with justified pride. The scriptoria of the South produced nothing to match it.

In February the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham strikes another blow against London-centrism with the first ever UK exhibition of **Carlo Crivelli** (1435-1495). Ikon's director Jonathan Watkins has long been fascinated by the Renaissance painter, and his dream of staging an exhibition became a reality after the gallery won the £150,000 Ampersand Foundation Award in 2019. Ikon is known for its contemporary programming, so it's no surprise that Watkins is keen to highlight Crivelli's post-



Carlo Crivelli's Virgin and Child (c.1480)

modern credentials, claiming that he was "as radical as Magritte". Crivelli developed his singular style in the Marches, where he moved from his native Venice after serving time for adultery with a sailor's wife. It's the visual games he plays with perception that prompt comparison with Magritte. In his *Madonna and Child with Apple* (c.1480), a monstrous fly sits on the ledge in front of the Madonna; it seems completely out of proportion with the figures in the painting until we realise the *trompe l'oeil* insect is in our space. Even more disturbingly, in *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (c.1485) a decorative swag of apples above the kneeling saint appears to cast shadows on the sky behind it – hence the exhibition's title, "Carlo Crivelli: Shadows on the Sky" (from 23 February).

COMPARED to the novelty of a Crivelli exhibition, a **Raphael** show can seem all too familiar. But London's National Gallery hopes to do something very different with its major exhibition (from 9 April), which was originally planned to mark 500 years since the artist's death aged 37 in 1520. The show will cast

Raphael as the ultimate multidisciplinary artist: painter, draughtsman, architect and designer of everything from tapestries to stage sets. Alongside his famous Madonnas, the show will feature several revelatory portraits reminding us of his great talents as a portraitist. Not all loans are yet confirmed, but it's hoped they will include Palazzo Barberini's nude portrait of *La Fornarina* (1518-20), the mistress said to have hastened the sex-addicted artist's demise – though his hectic work schedule may have had more to do with it.

Raphael's career lasted a brief 20 years; but **Vincent van Gogh's** was half that. The tragedy of the artist's short life has focused attention on his 30 self-portraits, half of which will be reunited in a special show (from 3 February) inaugurating the Courtauld's new exhibition space. Joining the gallery's famous *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889), the series from across the artist's career will be bookended by the early *Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat* painted in Paris in 1886 and the final *Self-Portrait with Palette* (1890) from the asylum at St Remy, both on loan from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Alongside his paintings by Van Gogh, the Courtauld boasts the most important collection of works by **Cézanne** in Britain, but in autumn London's Tate Modern will steal its thunder with a major exhibition devoted to the artist (from 6 October). Among promised highlights are a deliciously sun-dappled early oil sketch of *Bathers* (1874-75) from New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art – "Come on in," it seems to say, "the water's lovely!" – and a couple of equally inviting still lifes from the Art Institute of Chicago and the J. Paul Getty Museum. The apples in Cézanne's still lifes have a way of spilling into our space so we feel we could reach out and pluck them. "With an apple, I will astonish Paris," the Provencal painter once boasted. Like Crivelli, he plays with our perceptions of reality – but his apples never cast shadows on the sky.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

plans, this kind of thing is very difficult to achieve when your greatest fear is not to offend. For the freelance – I speak from personal experience – the commissioning process is a kind of endless obstacle race, full of unexpected hurdles and detours designed to produce something that may be challenging, or novel, but whose greatest virtue will be its blamlessness.

Like Libby Purves (inset), I am a Radio 4 dihard who thinks that the station, at its best, espouses a kind of collective sensibility that puts most of the other collective sensibilities on offer in the UK's cultural firmament to shame. What it needs is the courage of its con-

victions and a determination to broadcast material without worrying what social media, *The Guardian* or the *Daily Mail* might say about it.

Easier said than done, of course.

But writing down a list of the radio programmes I most enjoyed in 2021, I discovered that the top two were *A Home of Our Own*, Lynsey Hanley's series about the housing crisis, and Ian Hislop's survey of Anglo-Saxon nationhood, *This Union: The Ghost Kingdoms of England*. Each of them benefited from top-notch presenters who had clearly been given a fair amount of leeway in how they approached

the task. The Hanley series, though wide-ranging and fair-minded, struck a genuinely radical note and ended up by proposing rent controls and what sounded very like nationalisation of the land.

But Bakaya's task is nearly insurmountable. He has to keep his core audience without ignoring the modern world, bring in the under-50s but not succumb to trendiness, while preserving his independence and declining to kowtow to vested interests. At a time when large sectors of government and opposition are gunning for the BBC, all this will be hugely difficult to bring off.



PHOTO: ALAMY/NEWS

Speaking volumes

A look forward to a cornucopia of New Year reading

MAGGIE FERGUSON

PHOTO: ALAMY, AUSTIN KASE



Part of an indoor maze built with 250,000 books, inspired by Jorge Luis Borges, created by Brazilian artists Marcos Saboya and Gualter Pupo

THREE YEARS ago, Erik Varden (inset, top), Cistercian monk and Bishop of Trondheim, astonished reviewers with *The Shattering of Loneliness*, an extended essay on what it means to be human. Now, in *Entering the Twofold Mystery* (January, Bloomsbury, 272 PP, £14.99; *Tablet* price £12.99), he examines what we can learn from monastic life.

In *Reality+* (January, Allen Lane, 544 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50), David J. Chalmers argues that we can – and increasingly will – live a meaningful life in virtual worlds. *The Caliph and the Imam* (August, OUP, 400 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50) by Toby Matthiesen illuminates the age-old division between Sunnism and Shiism that continues to shape events in the Middle East.

Former nun Karen Armstrong (inset, right) argues passionately in *Sacred Nature* (June, Bodley Head, 288 PP, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.49) that we need to practise “deep ecology” by recovering a spiritual bond with the natural world. Equally concerned with ecology, George Monbiot, in *Regenesis* (May, Allen Lane, 304 PP, £20; *Tablet* price £18), offers a possible new future for food, people and the planet.

In *The Hardest Problem: God, Evil and Suffering* (September, Hodder, 192 PP,

£12.99; *Tablet* price £11.69), writer, journalist and theologian Rupert Shortt sets out to do for the present generation what C.S. Lewis did with *A Grief Observed*.

Historian and long-term *Tablet* friend Peter Hennessy divides post-war British history into BC (before Covid) and AC (after Covid) in *A Duty of Care* (March, Allen Lane, 240 PP, £20; *Tablet* price £18). Examining the “five giants” Sir William Beveridge believed society had to battle – want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness – he argues that successive post-war governments have failed to address them.

2022 marks the 450th anniversary of the death of John Donne. In *Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne* (April, Faber, 224 PP, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.29), Katherine Rundell – fellow of All Souls, acclaimed children’s author and tightrope walker – examines the myriad lives of a scholar of law, a sea adventurer, a priest, an MP and, of course, a poet of genius.

A century after the publication of *The Waste Land*, Faber offers the second volume of Robert Crawford’s life of T.S. Eliot – *Eliot*:

After the Waste Land (June, Jonathan Cape, 480 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50), tackling Eliot’s conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, his separation from Vivienne Haigh-Wood, his marriage to Valerie Fletcher and the publication of *Four Quartets*.

In May, William Collins publishes Miranda Seymour’s hauntingly titled *I Used to Live Here Once* (448 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50), a biography of the troubled genius Jean Rhys.

Our news reporter, Madoc Cairns, is already busy reviewing *Dream-Child: A Life of Charles Lamb* by Eric G. Wilson (Yale, 544 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50), a study of the life and legacy of the Romantic essayist.

If it’s political biography you’re after, Michael Crick’s *One Party After Another: The Disruptive Life of Nigel Farage* (Simon & Schuster, 608 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50) is looking promising to our reviewer and lobby correspondent, Julia Langdon.

Books about books seem increasingly popular, and three in the pipeline look captivating. *Stalin’s Library: A Dictator and his Books* (February, Yale, 272 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50) is a life of the twentieth-century’s most self-consciously learned dictator.

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PHOTO: ALAMY, AUSTIN KASE

PHOTO: LARRY COAK

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Chronicles of a Cairo Bookseller (January, Corsair, 240 PP, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.49) is Nadia Wassef's account of setting up and running a fiercely independent bookshop, and "a celebration of the power of words to bring us home". From Canongate, in February, comes **No One Round Here Reads Tolstoy: Memoirs of a Working-Class Reader** (368 PP, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.29).

There are three memoirs I especially look forward to. **Outside, the Sky is Blue** (February, Tinder Press, 416 PP, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.29) is Christina Patterson's heartbreaking but joyful account of growing up with a sister with schizophrenia. Andy West's **The Life Inside: A Memoir of Prison, Family and Philosophy** (February, Picador, 352 PP, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.29) is described by Terry Waite as "an authentic, fascinating and deeply moving story about the different ways people search for freedom". In **Mother's Boy** (March, Jonathan Cape, 336 PP, £18.99; *Tablet* price £17.09), Booker winner Howard Jacobson (pictured) reveals how he became a writer, and what it means to be both English and Jewish.

It is 75 years since Anne Frank's diaries were published, and in that time they've been read by 30 million people. But one question has haunted generations: who betrayed Anne and her family, and why? In **The Betrayal of**

Howard Jacobson



Anne Frank: A Cold Case Investigation (January, William Collins, 336 PP, £20; *Tablet* price £18), Rosemary Sullivan reveals the shocking truth.

Also looking back to the Second World War, **The Island of Extraordinary Captives** (February, Sceptre, 496 PP, £20; *Tablet* price £18) by Simon Parkin uses previously classified documents to tell the story of Churchill's internment of all German and Austrian citizens in Britain, many of them refugees who had fled Nazi oppression.

Covid has boosted an interest in books by doctors. One-time GP Chris Nancollas is working on a round-up review of three of them: Roopa Farooki's **Everything Is True: A Junior Doctor's Story of Life, Death and Grief in a Time of Pandemic** (January,

Bloomsbury, 240 PP, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.49), Gavin Francis' **Recovery: The Lost Art of Convalescence** (January, Profile, 144 PP, £4.99; *Tablet* price £4.49) and Vanessa Martin's **The Great Ormond Street Nurse: The Life of a Trainee Nurse at GOSH in the 1960s** (January, Welbeck, 370 PP, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.09).

The new year is a time for new leaves, and three books offer up market self-help: Emma Gannon's **(Dis)Connected: How to Stay Human in an Online World** (January, Hodder & Stoughton, 192 PP, £9.99; *Tablet* price £8.99), Johann Hari's **Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention** (January, Bloomsbury, 352 PP, £20; *Tablet* price £18) and Cathy Rentzenbrink's **Write It All Down: How to Put Your Life on the Page** (January, Bluebird, 240 PP, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.49).

The coming year will bring poetry collections by *Tablet* contributor Fiona Benson, and T.S. Eliot Prize-winners Ocean Vuong and Michael Longley. Our poetry editor, Michael Glover, particularly looks forward to **Hurricane Watch** (January, Carcanet, 464 PP, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50), new and collected poems from Jamaican poet Olive Senior.

And there are novels on the way from, among others, Ali Smith, Julian Barnes, Anne Tyler, Tessa Hadley, Hanya Yanagihara and Isabel Allende – who will celebrate her eightieth birthday in August.

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NEWS BRIEFING

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The **US** Supreme Court refused to overturn a New York State mandate that requires healthcare workers to be vaccinated. The mandate contained an exemption for those who cannot receive a vaccine for medical reasons but did not include an exemption on religious grounds.

Two healthcare workers who refused to get vaccines because stem cell lines derived from an aborted fetus were used in testing sued to keep their jobs. But, in a 6-3 vote, the court ruled that the state's interest in protecting the health of patients and other health care workers trumped the conscience rights of the individuals.

Myanmar's bishops led a quiet Christmas of "silence, prayer and solidarity." It was to be celebrated in the "spirit of closeness to people who suffer", said Bishop Alexander Pyone Cho of Pyay in a pastoral letter.

Priests, nuns, Religious and laypeople were urged to use any available funds to assist "people who have fled their homes, have found shelter in the forests and are suffering, due to the military persecution in Myanmar". Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon called on the faithful not to lose hope amid what he called "repugnant violence".



Left-wing candidate Gabriel Boric (pictured) won **Chile's** presidential election to become the country's youngest-ever leader. The 35-year-old former student protest leader defeated his conservative rival, José Antonio Kast, a devout Catholic, by 10 per cent. Boric promised to curb Chile's neoliberal economic model. The bishops said the result represents "a new opportunity for the country."

A group of migrants from refugee camps in **Cyprus** who are being resettled in Italy at Pope Francis' expense helped the Pope celebrate his **85th birthday** on Friday. "You saved us", an African boy told Francis during a meeting in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace a day after the 12 arrived from Cyprus. The Pope will provide for 50 migrants to resettle in Italy.

Prayers for Typhoon victims

The Catholic Church in the **Philippines** declared 25 and 26 December as National Days of Prayer after 400 people were pronounced dead in the wake of Typhoon Rai, which flattened villages in the Mindanao and Visayas regions on 16 December. At least 50 people are still missing, and more than 300,000 people fled their homes. Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, president of the bishops' conference, added that the Church's Solidarity Fund would be used for the emergency response. He encouraged "everyone to remit all collections to Caritas Philippines that will then plan and implement our overall response." On 20 December, as churches in the affected regions held services by candlelight, Pope Francis said: "I express my closeness to the population of the Philippines, struck by a strong typhoon that has caused many deaths and destroyed so many homes."

Hostages freed

The remaining 12 hostages of a group kidnapped by an armed gang in **Haiti** two months earlier were released on 16 December. Seventeen missionaries representing US-based Christian Aid Ministries, including 16 Americans and one Canadian, were kidnapped from a vehicle on 16 October. Some were released in November.

In his Christmas message, Maronite Archbishop Samir Nassar of **Damascus, Syria** described the Christian community as "an heroic family". He recalled 11 years of "a war, compounded by sanctions, blockades, migration, misery, death and indifference", and applauded the commitment of

the Syrian people to live "with dignity" despite many problems, austerity and long isolation. He said that families, "poor and cold", like in the manger in Bethlehem, had remained "firm in the faith".



The patriarchs and heads of the Churches of **Jerusalem** issued a Christmas statement calling for dialogue to create a "special" zone aimed at "safeguarding the integrity" of the Christian quarter in the Old City. They said its uniqueness and heritage should be preserved for the good "of the local community, our national life, and the wider world". Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo (pictured), Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Jerusalem, highlighted concerns about "radical" groups that attack and prevent regular celebrations in certain parts of the city.

A human rights group in **Indonesia** denounced religious authorities in South Sulawesi province before Christmas for going back on a decision, following protests by Islamic groups, to allow signs to be put

up in public places offering people Christmas greetings. The provincial Religious Affairs Ministry had issued a letter on 14 December allowing other government offices to display Christmas greetings to help promote religious harmony. However, the next day, Islamic groups calling themselves the United Muslims Forum protested, claiming this had created "anxiety" among local Muslims.

Travel bans on **southern Africa** from late-November were based on "a deep-seated racism" and could have a severe impact on the poor in the region, where many livelihoods depend on the tourism industry, said Fr Russell Pollitt, director of the Jesuit Institute in Johannesburg.

Suspected Islamist militants decapitated a church pastor in the Macomia district of **Mozambique's** oil-rich northern province of Cabo Delgado a week before Christmas. They forced his wife to carry the head to a police station and inform authorities.

Seafarers from a fishing vessel abandoned in **Mombasa, Kenya** since March 2021, are being supported by the global maritime charity Stella Maris after the ship's owner stopped providing wages, or food and fresh water. The charity is helping 10 seafarers with the support of Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa.

Compiled by **James Roberts** and **Ellen Teague**.

«The frame» is for kids of all ages. Fit nine smaller frames into the large green frame, and then the square, circle, and triangular shapes. Each small frame and shape comes in red, yellow or blue. This substantial **wood-based** coffee-table puzzle is 28cm square and stands 2cm tall. Assemble once, admire the result, then try different configurations (because there are many). Get yours at onevillage.com

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“Look at this image in difficult moments like yours of humiliation ... looking at that image gives us strength.”

Pope Francis, addressing victims of domestic abuse, urges women to gain strength from gazing on the Pietà (see below)

ROME / New guidelines ban ordinations and confirmations in the unreformed liturgy

Vatican lays down the law on Old Rite

CHRISTOPHER LAMB

THE VATICAN has issued further restrictions on the Old Rite liturgy, ruling that its use in ordinations and confirmations is banned while emphasising that newly ordained priests must receive formal “authorisation” from the Holy See if they are to celebrate the pre-Vatican II Mass.

The new guidelines, released in a question-and-answer format, heavily restrict celebration of all the other sacraments in the Old Rite and stress that no priest should celebrate more than one pre-Vatican II Mass in a day. They state that any priest refusing to celebrate Mass with his fellow clergy cannot use the Old Rite.

The ruling places a question mark over the future of traditionalist orders that seek to attract new recruits on the basis that they exclusively celebrate the sacraments according to the older form. They often refuse to concelebrate the ordinary form of the Mass.

But Pope Francis has said the reforms to worship that took place following the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council are “irreversible”.



A New York priest celebrates a Mass in the Old Rite

and on 16 July 2021 issued the ruling *Traditionis Custodes*, which re-imposed restrictions on the unreformed liturgy.

The Old Rite requires priests to say the prayers of the Mass in Latin, often inaudibly, and facing *ad orientem* (facing east with his back to the people). Although many are drawn to its contemplative, otherworldly style, the liturgy has become a rallying point for dissent from the Francis pontificate and Vatican II.

The Holy See’s policy on the Old Rite is that it can be celebrated as

an exceptional concession, but cannot be presented as an alternative, or superior, form of the liturgy. The issue is not the use of Latin, but the promotion of a pre-Vatican II vision of the Church.

The latest guidelines, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, are designed to help bishops across the world implement Francis’ document.

Traditionis Custodes overruled John Paul II and Benedict XVI’s lifting of restrictions on the Old Rite, which was done to help bring about “concord and unity” in the Church. But Pope Francis, following a consultation of bishops across the world that has not been made public, said that the concessions had been exploited by traditionalists to “injure the Church ... and expose her to the peril of division”.

“It is sad to see how the deepest bond of unity, the sharing in the one Bread broken, which is His Body offered so that all may be one, becomes a cause for division,” Archbishop Arthur Roche, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, wrote in a letter

accompanying the guidelines.

The latest guidelines seem designed to tackle a trend in some seminaries where students for the priesthood gravitate towards celebrating the pre-Vatican II liturgy.

Any priest ordained after *Traditionis Custodes* needs the “necessary authorisation given to the diocesan bishop by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments” to celebrate the Old Rite and which is “not merely a consultative opinion”.

The Pope has issued warnings about the tendency towards neo-traditionalism among some of younger clergy, once telling some fellow Jesuits in Africa: “Have you never seen young priests all stiff in black cassocks and hats in the shape of the planet Saturn on their heads? Behind all the rigid clericalism are serious problems.”

One senior priest, speaking on condition of anonymity, told *The Tablet*: “This is a necessary correction. In some places, a serious division was beginning, where not only was the 1962 Missal seen as superior to that of Paul VI but it was proclaimed as such.”

Pope decries domestic violence as ‘satanic’

POPE FRANCIS has described domestic violence against women as “almost satanic” while connecting the plight of victims to the suffering of Mary who was left “humiliated” after the death of Jesus, writes Christopher Lamb.

He was speaking during a discussion on Italy’s TG5 television network with three women and a man living in difficult circumstances. “The number of women who are beaten and abused in their homes, even by their husbands, is very, very high,” he said in answer to a question by a woman named Giovanna, a mother of four children and a vic-

tim of domestic violence. “The problem is that, for me, it is almost satanic because it is taking advantage of a person who cannot defend herself, who can only [try to] block the blows,” he said. “It is humiliating. Very humiliating.”

Giovanna, who escaped her violent home with her children, asked the Pope about regaining a sense of “dignity” after suffering abuse. “I see dignity in you because if you didn’t have dignity, you wouldn’t be here,” Francis said. He recalled the image of the *Pietà* in St Peter’s Basilica, which shows the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus.

Francis said that this shows “the mother who raised him, totally humiliated,” but, at the same time, she “has not lost her dignity”. He added: “Look at this image in difficult moments like yours, of humiliation ... looking at that image gives us strength.”

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Pope has spoken out several times against domestic violence, which has increased in a number of countries as lockdowns left women trapped at home with their abusers. In Italy, calls to violence centres from March to May 2020 increased by 73 per cent.

The televised discussion with Francis took place in the Casa Santa Marta and included Maria, a homeless woman; Pierdonato, who served 25 years in prison and Mariastella, an 18-year-old who has struggled during the pan-

demic. Speaking about prisoners, the Pope described overcrowding in prisons as “not human” and said that every inmate needs to know when their sentence will come to an end.

Francis urged Mariastella to prioritise direct contact, rather than just virtual contacts, with people.

“In the lockdown you missed contact with your friends, with your family. We need this contact, face-to-face contact, but there can be a temptation to isolate ourselves in other ways, for example, getting in touch by cellphone only,” he said. “If you want to use the phone, use it, but may this not eliminate contact with people, direct contact, contact of going together to school, going for a walk, going together to have coffee, real contact and not virtual.”

LEBANON / 'Compassion and love will be enough,' says shopkeeper

Christians face Christmas of austerity and suffering

ROSABEL CREAN

CHRISTIANS in Lebanon have been looking to the true meaning of Christmas to find support and comfort amid the deepening two-year economic crisis, which has upturned the lives of residents and seen the local currency depreciate by 95 per cent.

For the Christian community, strained by the rising cost of living, widespread unemployment and minimal state assistance, the economic depression has threatened a Christmas of austerity and deprivation. Described by the World Bank as one of the worst financial downturns globally since the 1850s, living conditions have collapsed with shortages of medicine, fuel and food stuffs.

A decision by Lebanon's cash-strapped state to cease subsidising essential goods caused chaos, with residents regularly undergoing hours-long power outages and petrol rationing. The government, dogged by infighting and systemic



PHOTO: ALAMOTHEA, BEILA JAWICH

'Christmas is Christmas, even though we are now poor'

corruption, has failed to stem the crisis.

Shopkeeper Mariam Chehab told *The Tablet* how despite there being less food on the table and presents to give this year, the message of the festival prevails.

"Christmas is Christmas, even though we are now poor. And the Christmas spirit, the spirit of Christmas is existing now and forever," the 30-year-old said from

her clothing shop in Geitawi, a characteristically Christian quarter of east Beirut. "Even if we cannot afford to eat meat, it is OK because Christmas is being with the family, [and] going to church. Even if you are not making money, even if you are not having gifts, the spirit of Christmas like compassion and love, it will be enough for us, us Lebanese."

Since October 2019 when the economy began to crumble, food prices have jumped 576 per cent, according to the World Food Programme. The astronomical level of inflation has left one in five families, like Ms Chehab's, struggling to put food on the table.

One butcher in Geitawi was selling a kilogram of beef for 260,000 Lebanese pounds, the equivalent of \$173 at the Central Bank's official exchange rate. The butcher said he was forced to double the price in the space of only a few weeks, following the freefall of the pound against the US dollar on the parallel market, which dictates

the street price of goods.

The monthly minimum wage of 675,000 Lebanese pounds is now worth just \$25 at December parallel market rates, having been worth \$450 two years ago. It has crippled the once middle-income country, with three-quarters of the population now in poverty, according to a recent UN report.

Lebanon holds the highest ratio of Christians per capita in the Arab world, estimated at around 36 per cent of the 6.8 million population. It is home to 12 sects, with the largest being Maronite Catholics. Other groups include Greek and Armenian Orthodox, Greek Melkites, and Syriac Orthodox.

Maronite Catholic Nadine Nader, who runs a toy shop with her husband Joseph, said this year Christmas will be more special, in light of the mammoth explosion in Beirut that destroyed swathes of the capital, and has left many still dealing with the trauma 17 months on.

"Because the situation is difficult, people will return to the Christmas meaning. In past years, with all the feasting, the dressing up, and the parties, people forgot the real meaning of Christmas," the mother-of-four told *The Tablet*. "But now, with all the daily stresses like the coronavirus, the food and medicine shortages, we go back to our prayer."

AUSTRIA

Schönborn says getting vaccinated shows love of one's neighbour

CARDINAL Christoph Schönborn told journalists in a TV interview on Austrian state television on 18 December that people have a duty to get vaccinated, writes *Christa Pongratz-Lippitt*. The Austrian government plans to introduce countrywide mandatory vaccination in February.

"Vaccination is without doubt a matter of Christian love of one's neighbour. There is no such thing as freedom without responsibility or obligations. And, especially during a pandemic, the duty to protect one's neighbour is the condition for living together in freedom," Cardinal Schönborn underlined.

The Church's response was the response that philosophy had always given: "Freedom is something unbelievably precious. It is

only limited by one thing – namely the freedom of others. We must above all protect others," the cardinal emphasised.

The government and the experts had to pay heed to the health of the majority. It seemed that the pandemic could not be overcome without a certain percentage of vaccination coverage. "Of course mandatory vaccination, even if it is only temporary, is an encroachment on personal liberty but that applies to every law," the cardinal said.

At the same time it was important to take the relatively high number of people who were afraid of being vaccinated seriously, he added. Cardinal Schönborn expressly warned people not to be taken in by "pseudoscientific

ideas" and conspiracy theories.

Four days earlier, on 14 December, former CDF Prefect Cardinal Gerhard Müller, whom Pope Francis appointed a member of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura in June 2021, outlined his conviction that a "strong financial elite" was using Covid policies worldwide in order to "enforce conformity" and to "take over total control".

In an interview with the traditionalist Catholic organisation the St Boniface Institute, German Cardinal Müller said that wealthy individuals are using the coronavirus to "push through their agenda", and specifically cited Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros.

The 73-year-old cardinal also singled out Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and Klaus Schwab, head of the World Economic Forum. But it was Cardinal Müller's mention of Soros that led Jewish leaders to push back.

In response to the interview,

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, which represents more than 700 rabbis, called on the Vatican to "clearly distance themselves from such crude statements and positions".

Interviewed by Alexander Tschugguel of the Austrian St Boniface Institute, Cardinal Müller spoke of the "illegitimate influence of super-rich elites in various countries". On 16 December the cardinal told CNA Deutsch that he had not used "anti-Semitic codes" as his critics had claimed and only used quotations from the Bible concerning Creation and parables.

"Some of [Cardinal Müller's] opinions are abusive and add to the already existent tension in society. I do not share them," conference president Bishop Georg Bätzing told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 21 December. "His choice of words is absolutely inappropriate. That simply will not do."

AFRICA

Floods mar Christmas amid continued violence

AS CATHOLICS in eastern Africa prepared to celebrate Christmas, situations in South Sudan, Sudan and Ethiopia dampened the spirit of the season, *writes Fredrick Nzeili and Francis Njuguna.*

Catholic Bishops in South Sudan drew attention to the urgent need for humanitarian aid after floods submerged homes, roads, markets, schools and churches, displacing thousands. In Sudan, Bishop Tombe Trille Kuku of El Obeid said his people were celebrating Christmas amidst a continuous revolution. The destruction of property and the suppression of peaceful demonstrations both contradicted the aims of the revolution, the bishop said.

In Ethiopia, Catholic bishops have expressed sadness at the war in Tigray. Many people have died, been displaced or imprisoned and many women raped in the war. But the clerics said the sound of the church bells would defeat the darkness. "We have a firm belief in God that this darkness will pass away," the bishops said in a plenary statement.

Catholic bishops in Ghana have expressed their concern over a "growing culture of insults and disrespect among the Ghanaian people ... especially in our nation's political arena".

■ Pope Francis has appointed Nigerian Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu of the Diocese of Abia State as Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Office in Geneva.

SPAIN

Church festive despite volcano

VOLCANIC ASH and lava blasting out of the Cumbre Vieja volcano on the Spanish island of La Palma since September last year have formed part of two cribs in a nearby church over Christmas, *writes Ellen Tagoe.* Fr Domingo Guerra, priest of Holy Family Parish, said on 16 December: "Although our church lies at the foot of the volcano, it hasn't closed for a single moment since the eruption began and is now preparing for the birth of Jesus, reflecting the reality we're living through."

VIEW FROM ROME

Christopher Lamb



THE number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life has been in decline for decades across large parts of the Church. Annual figures released last October show the biggest decreases continue to be in Europe and numbers are also down across North and South America and Oceania.

During Benedict XVI's papacy, various initiatives were launched seeking to reverse the trend; in 2009 Pope Benedict held a "Year for Priests" to focus the Church's attention on ordained ministry. Francis, however, has said very little about the "vocations crisis", preferring to create a culture in which everyone in the Church discerns his or her vocation.

That is, until now. During a recent discussion with fellow Jesuits in Greece, Francis talked about the decline in the numbers in the Society of Jesus. When he joined in 1958 there were 33,000 Jesuits; now the number is roughly half of that.

"This situation is common to many religious orders and Congregations," he said. "It has a meaning, and we must ask ourselves what it is. In short, this decrease does not depend on us. The Lord sends the vocations. If they do not come, it does not depend on us. I believe the Lord is giving us a teaching for religious life. For us it has meaning in the sense of humiliation ... What does the Lord mean by this? Humble yourself, humble yourself!"

For Francis, in other words, the lack of vocations is a moment for soul-searching and reform. Looking for sociological reasons to explain why vocations are drying up can only offer "half the truth", he says. It is only by learning the lesson of humility that a path to a better future opens.

The Pope's remarks are also important because they come ahead of a major conference on vocations entitled "Toward a fundamental theology of the priesthood" due to take place here next month. The three-day event in February is being led by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the 77-year-old Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, an internationally respected, yet cautious, theologian. The French Canadian is seen as a possible candidate for the papacy by those worried about the direction in which Francis is leading the Church. The symposium, which will include a contribution by the Pope, is being organised by a research centre based in Paris founded two years ago by Cardinal Ouellet; among its sponsors is the conservative group, the Knights of Columbus.

The relationship between ordained ministry and the common priesthood of all believers, the place of women in the Church, and clerical celibacy are all on the agenda. Yet it looks as though the symposium organisers – while

being careful to speak the language of synodality – are focused on maintaining the status quo. Could the Pope's words on vocations be read as a subtle challenge?

IS 2022 likely to see a papal reshuffle of the leaders of Vatican departments? It was widely speculated before Christmas that Cardinal Peter Turkson, the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, could be leaving. The Ghanaian prelate is 73, two years shy of the episcopal retirement age, but having served in his current post for five years he has submitted his resignation to the Pope. This is routine for any prefect of an office in the Roman Curia. Furthermore, the long-anticipated new constitution on the Curia is likely to recommend that leaders of departments serve no more than two five-year terms. Cardinal Turkson has been working in Rome since 2009. The next twelve months are also likely to finally see the publication of the constitution, and that could well coincide with personnel moves.

Turkson is the only African to lead a Vatican department and leads an office which is closely aligned to Francis' agenda. It was also tasked with establishing the Vatican's Covid-19 commission. Despite this, the department, which was created in 2016 by merging four pontifical councils, has experienced internal tensions. In July of last year, Cardinal Blase Cupich, the Archbishop of Chicago, carried out a review of the operation at the request of the Pope; not long after, Fr Augusto Zampini Davies, a dynamic senior official in the dicastery, announced he was leaving. His sudden departure surprised many.

Turkson, meanwhile, said it is up to the Pope to accept or reject his resignation.

CARITAS, the Church's charitable arm, has a royal fan. Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, was seen in Rome with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle at the celebrations to mark Caritas' 70th anniversary last month.

The duchess had met Cardinal Tagle, the president of Caritas (and Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), in Bahrain, where he was consecrating the new Our Lady of Arabia Cathedral, and she had mentioned her support for Caritas' work. He invited her to join the anniversary event, and I am told she is keen to support some of its projects. Fergie, who works with many charitable causes, was pictured with the cardinal and the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, Chiara Porro, on the Casa dei Cavalieri di Rodi, which overlooks the Forum of Augustus.

NEWS BRIEFING

FROM BRITAIN AND IRELAND



The Prime Minister's special envoy for **religious freedom**, Fiona Bruce MP (pictured), has received a petition calling for more action to stop the forced conversion and marriage of Christian and other minority-faith women and girls. She was presented with the 3,210-signature petition by Aid to the Church in Need UK's head of press and information, John Pontifex, in a meeting at Westminster.

Bruce said: "In my role, I am committed to action to stop this denial of freedom which impacts the lives of so many young girls in such a fundamental way."

Cardinal urges vaccination

As Covid cases rose before Christmas, **Cardinal Vincent Nichols**, president of the bishops' conference of England and Wales, encouraged people to take up Covid vaccinations and boosters when offered by the NHS. "The call 'Get

vaccinated! Get boosted!' is more and more pressing," he said. "The need is more urgent, especially in London." Cardinal Nichols added his voice to that of Pope Francis who reflected that, to be vaccinated is "an act of love".

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon

has confirmed that any new Covid restrictions would not involve the closure of churches or places of worship. The Scottish government's decision severely to limit public worship last year was strongly criticised by Catholic bishops and other faith groups.

Senior scientists, including Sir Harry Burns, who was chair of the Catholic Church's committee monitoring the Covid outbreak, confirmed that there was no hard evidence that churchgoing was implicated in the transmission of the virus, provided that precautions were observed.



Sr Pamela Hussey (pictured), beloved of justice and peace campaigners in the UK and Central America, died on 13 December in the Harrogate care home of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. She was 99 years old and would have been 100 on 7 January.

An Anglo-Argentinian, Hussey left Buenos Aires in 1942 for wartime Britain, where she worked in Scarborough as a wireless telegraphist in an offshoot of GCHQ Bletchley, where she is on the roll of honour.

In 2018, she was awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the French government for her services during the Second World War. She received letters from two popes, Benedict XVI and Francis, congratulating her on her diamond jubilee as a nun.

Another accolade included an MBE in 2000 for "services to human rights in Latin America". Her books included *Free From Fear: Women in El Salvador's Church* (1989) and *Women Making a Difference with Marigold Best* (2001). (See *Word from the Cloisters*, page 17.)

Missionaries honoured

Five Irish missionaries have received Presidential Distinguished Service Awards for the Irish Abroad, which were presented by President Michael D. Higgins in December.

The awards, set up by the Irish government and conferred each year by the president of Ireland, recognise the significant contributions of members of the Irish diaspora.

Among the 2021 winners were Sr Orla Treacy, of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is principal of Loreto Rumbek in South Sudan, which incorporates a secondary boarding school, a co-educational primary school and a healthcare facility; and Br Colm O'Connell, of the Patrician Brothers, an athletics coach known as "the Godfather of Kenyan running".

Sr Pat Murray, of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Fr Kevin O'Hara, of the St Patrick's Missionary Society, and Sr Louise Horgan, a Good Shepherd sister in Thailand, also received their 2020 awards, as last year's ceremony was postponed due to Covid-19.

Leaders of the Catholic Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland have expressed solidarity with those overwhelmed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a joint message, Archbishop Eamon Martin and Archbishop John McDowell said that many people have not just had the two worst Christmases ever, but two of the worst years ever.

Compiled by **Ruth Gledhill**.

EDITORIAL

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THE TABLET

www.thetablet.co.uk

1 King Street Cloisters,

Clifford Walk, London W6 0GY

Tel: +44 (0)20 8748 8484

Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk

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Lisa Ottway

Email: lisa@ottwaymediasolutions.com

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Mob: +44 (0)7958 046147

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PERSON IN THE NEWS



Archbishop Justin Welby: "Christians, a continuous presence in the Holy Land for 2,000 years, are too often obscured or forgotten beneath the competing perceptions of Middle East geopolitics."

ST BENET'S

Catholic hall at Oxford puts temporary halt on admissions

A CATHOLIC hall at the University of Oxford is to halt temporarily the admission of undergraduates due to a "challenging financial situation", *The Oxford Student* has revealed, writes *Madoc Cairns*.

St Benet's Hall, a "Permanent Private Hall" traditionally associated with Ampleforth Abbey and the British Benedictines, has said in a joint statement with the University of Oxford, that, for the time being, they "cannot be confident that the Hall can support a new undergraduate cohort for the full duration of their studies". Out of 130 students at the Hall, roughly two-thirds are currently undergraduates. St Benet's hopes to purchase two buildings, 38 St Giles and 11 Norham Gardens, from the Ampleforth Abbey Trust over the coming months.

With the hall unable to confirm to the university that it would own the college's buildings over the 2022 academic year, the joint decision was taken to temporarily halt undergraduate admission.

The university and St Benet's stated that they were "considering options for the Hall to move to a sustainable financial model" but that their duty of care towards students meant that, without guarantees of support for the duration of a degree, new undergraduates could not be admitted.

A spokesperson for the trust said: "The trustees of Ampleforth Abbey Trust and the governing body of St Benet's Hall are working with the University of Oxford to seek to agree a sustainable model for the Hall. All parties are conscious of their main duty of care to the students and staff and hope decisions about the future direction of the Hall can be made as soon as possible."

MISSION / McKeown urges Mass attendance and calls for church renewal

Bishop spells out that synodal Church brings people to Christ

SARAH MAC DONALD

STAYING AT home to watch Mass on TV is no substitute for going to church, Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry has warned. "Because the missionary Christ is in Holy Communion, staying at home to watch Mass on TV is no substitute for being part of the missionary congregation, fed each week by the Body of Christ. That is a huge challenge for us as we move forward," he said.

In a homily at St Eugene's Cathedral in Derry, Bishop McKeown said mission is "an antidote to a selfish culture that leaves people feeling lonely and unfulfilled" and he challenged parishes on how ready they are to bring Christ to others in the community.

A missionary Church, he said, is energised. "A frightened, defensive church is unhappy, and can easily go to war with itself."

Noting Pope Francis' definition of the Church as a community of missionary disciples, the Bishop of Derry said an inward-looking Church is not the Church of Christ and is not modelled on Mary.



"A politically strong Church without a missionary heart is useless. Church renewal is not based on how we update our teachings and practices to become popular. We seek to please the Lord, not the passing fads of those who think they are important or smart."

"Our only question has to be whether we are effective in making new disciples for Christ. And the need for profound renewal is based on the fact that we have been failing to bring many hurting and idealistic young people to know Christ and his mercy."

"The question is not about how we bring them to us. The real and

awkward question is about [how] we bring them to know the love of God and the divine dream that Christ has for each one of them."

Talk about a church synodal way is not focused on us, on going where we feel comfortable, Bishop McKeown said. Jesus was asking the faithful to step out of the boat and come to him. The church community has to make space for all to participate. "But the purpose of the Church is to bring Christ to the people of our time."

He described Mary as the model of the first disciple who bears Jesus with her. "Our own culture emphasises that I ought to obey my thirst, feel good, and never say 'no'. It is all about me."

"The starting point for the disciple of Christ is to ask, where can I bring Jesus to another person? Our companionship with Jesus is meant to prepare us to share the One whom we have welcomed into our midst. Mission is an antidote to a selfish culture that leaves people feeling lonely and unfulfilled. How ready is our parish to be urgent in bringing Christ to others in our community?"

Glaswegians open homes to COP activists

MORE THAN a thousand residents in Glasgow opened their homes enabling activists from around the world to find accommodation during November's UN Climate Change Conference, according to a new report, writes *Ellen Teague*.

The low-cost home-sharing platform made it possible for people on low incomes to attend COP26 – both the main conference and hundreds of fringe events in the city.

The COP26 Homestay Network arranged for locals to make their spare rooms available for visitors to book. The report records that 1,260 local residents

in the Glasgow area opened up their homes, enabling 1,696 activists from 127 countries to find accommodation. Faith groups played their part in this.

Prices for accommodation in Glasgow skyrocketed during COP26, held between 31 October and 12 November, as private land-

lords and hotels took advantage of the increase in demand.

This made it almost impossible for many activists to find a place to stay, especially those from the least privileged countries that are most affected by climate change. Human Hotel worked with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and the COP26 Coalition to provide accommodation space. Glasgow Churches promoted Human Hotel. The report from Human Hotel, titled "A report about solidarity, friendship and collective action", indicated that 50 per cent of residents that helped out hosted people for free, for up to 21 days.

THE TABLET ONLINE

This edition of *The Tablet* went to press before Christmas. For the latest news and analysis visit our website: updates, new stories and blogs are added regularly.
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SYNODALITY / New Tuam archbishop says local assembly already under way 'dovetails' with global process

Duffy embarks on 'voyage of discovery'

SARAH MAC DONALD

THE NEWLY appointed Archbishop of Tuam has said he is "very conscious" of the declining number of clergy in the Irish Church and the "dramatic decline" in the number of men studying for priesthood.

Archbishop Francis Duffy, who will be installed as Archbishop Michael Neary's successor on 9 January, said that the situation in Tuam is the same as in most Irish dioceses, and that the "decline in vocations has been sustained for a number of years".

"As priests get older, energy levels go down to some extent; so that is another challenge. I think it is important to face it, address it in whatever way we can, and plan for the future."

The 63-year-old said that during his eight years as Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, he had always highlighted the reality of declining priest numbers. "It is



Archbishop Francis Duffy

important that people know that while they have a priest now, in a year or two, they may have no resident priest and that a neighbouring priest will be looking after their pastoral care," the archbishop said.

He said he would be listening carefully, visiting parishes, meeting priests, parishioners and pastoral councils in Tuam to find out how things are on the ground as part of his "voyage of discovery" in the west of Ireland diocese.

There are currently two students studying for the priesthood in Tuam and recently three permanent deacons were ordained. "They are part of the future, but it has to be much wider than that," said Archbishop Duffy.

He described the synodal process which the global Church has embarked on and which the Irish Church is undertaking ahead of a national assembly as "vital".

A native of Kilmore diocese, Archbishop Duffy highlighted that Kilmore has a "very long tradition of synodal pathways in terms of assemblies" and had held three assemblies over the last 20 years.

In the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, where he was appointed bishop in 2013, even before the Pope announced the global synodal process, the diocese had decided to have an assembly and began preparing for it in 2019.

Due to the Covid pandemic, the assembly process had been held up but people in the diocese felt

they were well placed to "dovetail" this local diocesan assembly with the global synodal journey and the national one. "We felt that our priority was our diocesan assembly, and then we would use that to prepare for the Synod in Rome and also the national synodal pathway as well – parallel tracks with a lot of overlap."

Describing Ardagh and Clonmacnois journey as "a parishioner-led assembly", he said it was important to capture as many groupings as possible and listen to them, from people on the margins, to people who are very active. The steering committee had decided to have an extra preparatory session to take account of Covid because the pandemic was a profound experience for many. "We felt it put some things into a different perspective and people might have different views after a year and a half of the pandemic. It was important to capture that," the archbishop said.

Cafod says climate change has brought Afghanistan to brink of famine

CAFOD has launched an appeal for the people of Afghanistan who it says are in "desperate need of help", writes Ruth Gledhill.

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August, life for people there deteriorated rapidly, the overseas development agency said.

"Afghan families are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance: food, water and shelter. As winter approaches, Afghan people are facing extreme hunger and poverty. It threatens to push many

who were already suffering further into poverty and hunger."

Cafod has local partners who are preparing to provide food, shelter and cash assistance to vulnerable families.

The aim is to support more than 4,000 displaced Afghan families by enabling them to gain access to clean drinking water through the provision and installation of 200 water tanks, and providing them with hygiene kits.

Writing for *The Tablet* online,

Cafod executive director Christine Allen said: "Even before the Taliban takeover in August, the latest upheaval in more than 40 years of war, Afghans were suffering a devastating third wave of Covid. But what has brought the country to the brink of famine is climate change."

Meanwhile, the anthropologist Jane Goodall is urging people to stop contributing to animal gifting programmes. Along with some scientists and faith leaders, Dr Goodall said animal gifting programmes hurt gift recipients by burdening them with more mouths to feed in areas where food and water are often scarce.

A DIPLOMA in catechetics offered by the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh will be available again in 2022 and will be accessible to Catholics from all over the world, writes Brian Morton.

The diploma was launched last year and managed largely to avoid any limitations imposed by the pandemic.


It covers a wide range of topics using Zoom technology, tutorials and workshop retreats.

Sr Anna Marie McGuan of the Sisters of Mercy administers the diploma.

She described the diploma as centring on the individual's "faith journey", emphasising that while its aim was to extend knowledge of Catholicism, the

more important ambition of the course was to surprise students with "things you thought you knew but somehow forgot; the power of Scripture and what it's about; the role of virtue in the Christian life".

Sr Anna Marie can be contacted via the archdiocese by anyone interested in participating.



RESIST CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
FARM STREET

**Regular Mass
& Service Times**

Sunday 18:00 (Saturday Vigil)
08:00 (9.30 (Family)) 11:00 (Latin)
12:30 17:30
Weekdays: 08:00 13:05 18:00
Saturdays: 08:00 18:00 (Saturday Vigil)
Bank Holidays: 13:05

All Masses are currently livestreamed
on our website.

Opening hours

The church is open daily
from 07:30 to 18:30.

Confessions

Monday to Friday: 12:00 - 13:00
Saturday: 10:00 - 12:00

Also by request. Please phone
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www.farmstreet.org.uk

Beyond the grid

ADRIAN CHILES

I'M NO GREAT FAN of Formula One; it just doesn't particularly grab me. But being a general enthusiast for sport, I like a climactic conclusion to a contest as much as the next man, so I wasn't going to miss the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Lewis Hamilton was up against Max Verstappen for the drivers' championship title. Normally this is done and dusted long before the last Grand Prix, but this year they'd been neck and neck for months and, thrillingly, the winner was to be decided in this final race of the season. With so many of us having become engaged in what was happening, this was Formula One's golden opportunity to win a new audience. For many people it would have been the first time they'd ever made an appointment to watch a Grand Prix. What a showpiece; what a shop window.

And they blew it. I can't explain in detail what unfolded because, despite the commentators' attempts to clarify matters, I remain baffled as to the specifics. But this is what it boiled down to: Lewis Hamilton had built up a big lead on Verstappen and was on the brink of winning the race and the title. Job done. Then another car crashed and, while it was cleared out of the way, something called a safety car came out, behind which all the drivers tootled around the course in an orderly manner until they were good to go again.

What happened next must have been to the consternation of fair-weather



Free of charge, millions of us cast our fresh eyes on Formula One and concluded that its race rules are idiotic

motor racing fans like me the world over. Surely we had every right to assume, once the coast was clear, the safety car would get out of the way and the race would resume with some kind of staggered start so the remaining cars would be spaced out as they were when the race was held up. So, if Hamilton had been 17 seconds ahead of Verstappen in second place – which he was, roughly – he'd retain that advantage. But no! Off they went again with Verstappen tucked in just behind Hamilton and, because he was on new tyres, he was able to overtake his adversary on the one remaining lap and take the title.

This was the point at which millions of potential Formula One fans around the world looked at each other and said, "Nah, this sport is barking mad. Not for me." I called my twin godchildren, both knowledgeable fans of the sport, and asked them to explain what on God's green earth was going on. "I know," one of them said. "It's stupid." I could hear their shrugs on the phone.

It all put me in mind of the kickabouts I'd have as a kid which would go on for hours. At some point it would be time for the players to go home for tea so, whether the score was 6-3, 11-24 or 41-0, someone would shout "Next goal wins!" and the next team to score would be declared that day's champions. To my incredulity, Formula One, perhaps the world's most expensive sport, hadn't managed to come up with anything better than this.

It fascinates me what kind of groupthink was in play for those managing the sport, to conclude this was the best way. Is this what management consultants get paid so much for? Does someone in a company decide they need a fresh pair of eyes on something, so bring in some consultants to identify patently obvious problems? Well here, free of charge, millions of us did just that. Free of charge, we cast our fresh eyes on Formula One and concluded that its race rules are idiotic. Our advice? Change them. You're welcome.

Adrian Chiles is a radio and TV presenter.

Glimpses of Eden

JONATHAN TULLOCH

PADDLING IN the little river, I noticed a strange stone shining in the mud. I picked it up. No stone, but a shell. A beautiful, blue bivalve shell with silver and gold contours. As I tried to work out what it could be, a bowl of moulles marinère popped into my mind. Had someone enjoyed an unseasonal seafood barbecue upstream and tossed this shell away? Excitement grew as I realised that I was holding some kind of mussel, and it was still alive.

Putting it back on the riverbed, I rushed



home to research my discovery. After so many years of nature-watching, you don't often find species that you've never even heard of, but this was one – a swan mussel.

The largest of our six species of freshwater mussels, the job of the swan mussel is to lie in the soft mud on the riverbeds, lakes and canals, and filter impurities from the water. They have a fascinating life cycle. When their mother releases them as larvae (called glochidia), they drift on the current until chance leads them to a trout, pike, perch or stickleback. Fixing on this fish, they feed harmlessly on their host's skin mucus for a few weeks until they've developed a shell. Then they drop off and lie in the mud for up to 10 years.

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