

Peter Hennessy: What a post-Corona Britain needs | **Mary Dejevsky:** Could the virus bring down Putin?

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THE TABLET



Lockdown lessons

Karen Cunningham and Lauren Nicholson-Ward: Teachers on the front line

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Michael Banner on Jonathan Sacks • **Melanie McDonagh** on women deacons

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DEFEATING
COVID-19

NO POINT TO BLAME GAME NOW

As Alexander Pope put it, “To err is human ...” It is obvious that serious errors were made by various governments in the weeks before the coronavirus became a rampant pandemic, but efforts to point the finger of blame at specific targets are a waste of energy unless they lead to lessons being learnt. The Labour party’s new leader, Sir Keir Starmer, has been right to say that the point of critical scrutiny should not be to score political points but to encourage better decision-making in the future.

One such lesson, for instance, would be not to trust either the United States or China – or indeed other countries – to act in anyone’s interests but their own. Those two countries have become entangled in a crude blame game over coronavirus. Donald Trump, fearful of losing the forthcoming presidential election unless he can switch the narrative away from his failure to respond earlier to the threat of the pandemic, is claiming that China is criminally culpable for allowing the coronavirus to spread as it did, first in China and then to the rest of the world.

Perhaps – but, so what? There is no jurisdiction where China can be called to account. Everyone knows already that China is a corrupt and oppressive society. The fact that its leaders failed to take adequate countermeasures when the epidemic first appeared merely puts them in the same category as Mr Trump himself. Indeed, his lamentable prevarications and procrastinations have cost many lives. But saying so brings nobody back: what matters is that whatever mistakes were made are investigated effectively and

honestly and that lessons are learned. Effective and honest action from the government is overdue in Britain too.

It seems undeniable that in the early stages of the disease, Boris Johnson and his inexperienced team of ministers took their eye off the ball. The Conservative Party’s long-term neglect of the National Health Service was compounded by the unprecedented nature of the challenge it faced, with shortages in almost every department. But governments are made of human beings, and, as the poet said, human beings err. In recent weeks, bland reassurances that everything is under control have been contradicted by reports of blunders the following day. Pretending all is well, in order to avoid blame, damages public confidence and stands in the way of finding solutions.

The coronavirus is likely to be around for several months. The engineering industry responded brilliantly when called upon to make good the shortfall in ventilators, as did the Army and the construction industry when asked to provide new critical-care hospitals. Now the clothing industry should be urgently charged with manufacturing items of personal protective equipment for medical and nursing staff; the chemical and pharmaceutical industries should be mobilised to provide all the ingredients necessary for large-scale testing, which will be a key element in any plan to ease the lockdown. And so on. The defeat of the virus has to engage all our resources and imagination. Apportioning blame for the mistakes of the past is irrelevant.

WORSHIP
UNDER LOCKDOWN

CHURCH DOORS SHOULD STAY SHUT

Pressure on the British government to end the coronavirus lockdown is steadily growing, not least because every day it continues it inflicts a serious toll on the economy. The disruptions to everyday life it has caused also include the almost complete cessation of organised collective worship. Churches of every denomination, synagogues, mosques, gurdwaras and temples have all fallen quiet behind locked doors. This remarkable silence has happened with the blessing of the relevant religious authorities, who recognise that the deadly coronavirus can easily be transmitted wherever crowds may gather. “Thou shalt not kill” in this case translates as “Thou shalt not gather together in public”, which is a hard saying for people of faith whose main expression of it is through group activity.

Among those authorities are the leaderships of the Catholic and Anglican Churches. They have been criticised for it, but by and large their memberships have accepted the medicine while also looking for inventive ways to continue their religious observance. Online streaming of Mass from parish churches has been surprisingly successful in enabling congregations to join in the liturgy and participate spiritually if not in the flesh. The Church is more than a building. Take the building away, and the Church still exists.

These are among the reasons why the Catholic bishops in the United Kingdom should resist calls to press the government for an early release from lockdown so they could reopen their doors and resume normal church life. Proposals being studied by

the government include a partial relaxation of the restrictions, perhaps starting with primary schools, which are thought to be infertile ground for the epidemic to spread. But for some weeks at least, the precautionary principle would counsel strongly against exempting places of worship from restrictions.

Perhaps more promising would be for the government to start moving from a compulsory form of lockdown to a more voluntary one. Compliance is already largely voluntary in effect, as the police cannot oversee every supermarket queue. Indeed, the government’s own behavioural scientists have been surprised by the willingness of the great majority of citizens to cooperate freely, once they saw the need. So it could become a matter for religious leaders themselves to decide what degree of lockdown to continue with in their own case, trusting in their common sense and their duty to the common good.

But caution is required. Lives are at risk. Removing the statutory obligation to keep church buildings closed would merely transfer a difficult call from the government to bishops and other faith leaders. The bishops would need to explain more fully than they have done so far why, as an expression of social responsibility and Christian charity, they might decide to continue to keep church doors locked. Meanwhile religious communities have been finding novel methods of connecting their members one with another. It is proving an exciting stimulus to new ways of being the Church: virtual worship, and worship alone or with our families, can be the real thing.



25

Mgr Jozef Bart, rector of the Church of the Holy Spirit, prepares for the Pope's arrival on Sunday with the help of a nun

COLUMNS



Richard Leonard
'God does not send plagues to teach us things, though we can learn from them' / 9

Melanie McDonagh's Notebook
'The sins of the heart are worse than non-conformity with rules' / 10

Peter Hennessy's The Lion and the Unicorn
'The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves' / 13

REGULARS

Word from the Cloisters 15
Puzzles 15
Letters 16
The Living Spirit 17

CONTENTS

25 APRIL 2020 // VOL 274 NO. 9349

FEATURES

4 / A school on the front line

A head teacher of a Catholic primary describes how the closure of schools has changed the lives of the children, staff and parents / BY KAREN CUNNINGHAM

5 / 'We have rediscovered teaching as a vocation'

The crisis has brought out the best in teachers, parents and children / BY LAUREN NICHOLSON-WARD

6 / To Mrs Whitaker, with love

A moral philosopher remembers his old English teacher, 'who worked in what is *au fond* a profoundly sacrificial profession' / BY JAMES MUMFORD

7 / Could the virus bring down Putin?

An experienced Kremlin-watcher argues that Vladimir Putin's grip on power is looser than ever because of the threat to the country posed by Covid-19 / BY MARY DEJEVSKY

8 / 'Be still and know that I am God'

The leader of the Cistercian order reflects that this period of anxiety might bring a new awareness of the presence of God / BY MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI

12 / Sidestepping the destroying angel

Is the coronavirus pandemic divine retribution? Or is it a moment of darkness that might lead to strengthening the bonds that bind us together? / BY CATHLEEN KAVENY

14 / A window into God's love

The sermon given by the former Master of the Dominicans at the Requiem Mass for his friend David Sanders / BY TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE

NEWS

24 / The Church in the World / News briefing

25 / Pandemic spurs talks on church reform, says Kasper

27 / View from Rome

28 / News from Britain and Ireland / News briefing

29 / Chaplains at work in 'field' hospitals

COVER PHOTO: PA/TASS, YURI SMITYUK

BOOKS / PAGE 18

Michael Banner
Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times
JONATHAN SACKS

Rachel Kelly
The Well
Gardened Mind
SUE STUART-SMITH

William Joll
The Bass Rock
EVIE WYLD

ARTS / PAGE 20

Interview
Michael
Craig-Martin
JOANNA MOORHEAD

Radio
Heart and Soul:
Faith in Lockdown
France
D.J. TAYLOR

Music
The Strokes; Fiona
Apple; Thundercat
BRIAN MORTON

Television
Ride Upon
the Storm
LUCY LETHBRIDGE

A head teacher of a Catholic primary in one of London's largest housing estates describes how the closure of schools has changed the lives of the children, staff and parents / By **KAREN CUNNINGHAM**

A school on the front line

ON WEDNESDAY 18 March, all schools in England and Wales were told that they must close at the end of the week to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

A wave of emotions washed over the staff, children, parents and governors of my own school, St John XXIII Catholic Primary in White City Estate in west London, as the news was announced. Many unanswered questions were left in the air, one of the main ones being what impact the closure of the school would have on the mental health and wellbeing of our children and their families.

For the children, "coronavirus" was already a word they were beginning to hear every day: on the news, or overhearing adults talking about the havoc it was causing across the world. Adults were, of course, already concerned and anxious. Now children were suddenly being told that they would no longer go to school, or go to church, or see their grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins, or have play dates or celebrate birthday parties with their friends – or even be able to go outside to run around and play for more than an hour each day. No amount of words could prepare them for what the next few weeks would be like. The changes in their lives have been almost overwhelming.

It is too early to tell what impact Covid-19 will have on the families in our community. I know some who have become sick, or who have lost their job or had their income cut, which is leading to anxiety over paying mortgages and bills, or even being able to buy food for their families. It is a desperately difficult time for so many, and it is impossible to gauge the longer-term impact this will have on children.

THE STAFF AT St John XXIII have showed amazing commitment in the middle of all the uncertainties – and I have had similar stories from other head teachers of schools across London and beyond. The way they have worked together, supported each other and, most importantly, cared for our children has been an inspiration and a real joy to see. The main concern for all of us throughout the

build-up to the school closure was, how do we keep our children safe and happy? We tried to ensure that our children were not burdened with fears about the school closing or with worries about the virus. While the school was still open, their day continued as normal, as far as possible. In front of the children the staff remained cheerful, even while behind the scenes they were busy setting up Google Classroom, preparing learning packs and creating revision study guides and stationery packs for the children to use during the expected school closure.

ALL SENSE OF normality left the school on Friday 20 March. Although this was a sad day for the staff and parents, we made sure the children celebrated and had fun. Rather than wearing their uniforms, they came to school for their last day in brightly coloured clothes. There was dancing, singing, games, treats and a "social distancing" samba parade led by the School of Rock band and our music teacher, Mr Dalledone.

Saying goodbye to the children was the hardest part of the week. Although it was very painful, we all understood that what was happening was right. The main way to contain the spread of the virus was for people to stay at home and to maintain social distancing. The community is pulling together. Messages from parents have boosted staff morale, funding from charities is supporting vulnerable families, everyone understands the need to follow the restrictions.

The government announced that schools would remain partially open for the children of key workers or those in vulnerable families or with special educational needs. It's been a privilege to be able to support the families of those working on the frontline in the fight against the virus. As a staff team, we have been determined to stay open throughout this pandemic to do our bit for the good of others and to be the servant leaders that Jesus taught us to be.

In order to maintain the education of our children who are now spending their days at home with their parents, Mrs Gilmartin, the Inclusion Manager, developed our online



Above, pupils pictured during a DT class at the west London school. Inset below, head teacher Karen Cunningham

learning platform. Google Classroom was set up within a matter of days and staff and children were trained on how to access their learning at home. This has maintained a steady, manageable flow of work for the children during this school closure period.

I am a parent too, and I began with high hopes for what "home schooling" would look like. I devised a timetable, assigned parts of our home as mini-classroom spaces, and got the stationery ready. It took me about an hour to realise that my expectations had been wildly unrealistic. My children were far from ready for mummy to be suddenly transformed into their teacher. It took them more time than I had thought to settle into this new "normal" – and it took me more time than had I thought to teach myself Year 8 algebra. I now understand better the pressure that home-learning puts on a family.

This experience has fed into the work we set for our children. We have reconsidered the time it is realistic to spend on learning each day, and suggested active sessions to keep the children moving, as well as craft sessions and time spent learning from a screen or laptop or PC. On average, we set three pieces of work per day, plus daily reading. An English activity, a maths activity and then a weekly RE or topic lesson. There is no pressure for the work to be completed. We send regular emails to parents, assuring them that they only need to do what is manageable. It's not easy for parents. Some of our families live in small apartments; some do not have a garden. I have been inspired by the way they have responded to the tasks we have set.

IN THIS TIME OF uncertainty, there have been many positives to celebrate. Some families have never had so much time together, learning and playing and praying together. Many parents have volunteered to come in and help





THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

‘We have rediscovered teaching as a vocation’

The crisis has brought out the best in teachers, parents and children, writes **Lauren Nicholson-Ward**

support the school when we have been short staffed, and staff have made regular phone calls to parents and children to catch up on their home schooling, deepening relationships between teachers and parents. The community spirit has been wonderful.

It has also been a time to slow down, meditate and pray. This year, in a special way, Lent was a time for us to pray, to fast and to give alms. Although we weren’t together as a school, this Lent as never before we were able to truly reflect on the sacrifices of Jesus and to spend time thinking about how we can love and support others.

To pray more. One day last week, a group of us sat around the statue of Our Lady to pray a decade of the Rosary. At the end, the children of the key-worker families offered their prayers up to Mary. One of the Year 1 children, whose mother is a nurse, prayed: “Thank you for my mum, who is always there to help others.” It was a heartfelt, touching prayer that reflected how we all feel about our NHS staff.

To fast. Our local food banks and local authorities have been providing food and vouchers to support communities in need. When some were in the supermarkets panic buying, there were families in our communities who barely had the money to buy enough for that day’s meal. It has been a time for us all to reflect on what we could do without, and what we could share from our own household shopping for the food banks that support those in need.

To give alms. Our parents who are key workers – often among the lowest paid – give to others simply by doing their jobs, so that the sick are cared for and we can buy the food we need and receive our deliveries and travel if necessary. That is real giving to others.

When this pandemic ends – and even though it seems to be going on for ever, it *will* end – the world we will come back to will not be the same, for teachers, for parents and, most important, for children. It will be a world where we will pray for those who died and

EXTRAORDINARY times produce extraordinary responses. After the Prime Minister announced on 18 March that all schools would close at the end of that week, teachers raced to build online learning platforms and create packs of printed materials, stationery and art supplies for some of the children to take home. Staff delivered the teaching packs to parents already in isolation, phoned parents to see how they could support them, and donated money for food parcels for families in need.

We had to console school leavers who had come to realise that their examinations had been cancelled and whose futures were now uncertain. There were special assemblies and services to say goodbye to pupils in their final year. Despite the fear and uncertainty, teachers have shown that they are ready to serve, and to do it generously and boldly.

On the following Monday, staff and pupils were back in the classroom. The headlines suggested that schools were closed. In reality their doors, and their hearts, were wide, wide open. In my own school in the Midlands, a Church of England middle school, a dozen pupils arrived and lined up behind the cones which we had placed across the playground, spaced several metres apart.

We blocked off corridors so that we could use a limited number of rooms to ensure they could be regularly deep cleaned. Pupils listened to us explain that they must remain apart throughout the day, that they could not move seats or swap computers, share pens or stand too close when washing their hands. It was a surreal experience to see our usually bustling corridors almost empty and divided by barriers.

for those who mourn, and where we will pray for the men and women who worked selflessly to combat the virus and care for those who became sick. But we will pray, too, that children return to school and to the ordinary rhythms of childhood, smiling and feeling secure: excited to meet their friends and their teachers and to restart their learning with enthusiasm and energy. When we see their faces again – smiling and happy – teachers and parents will feel that life has returned to something like normal again.

What have we learned? Perhaps that, just as the Church isn’t a building but a communion, a school isn’t bricks and mortar or limited by a curriculum, but a community in service to others. I hope we’ll remain unafraid to take risks, to make bold decisions for the good of those we serve; we are more likely to be forgiven for thinking big and making mistakes than for being timid and over-cautious. I pray that schools will have forged deeper relationships with parents grounded in mutual understanding, compassion and fellowship. I hope we’ll never forget how adaptable and resourceful teachers, parents and children can be.

Since that first Monday when our new little world came into being, I have not heard one pupil question why they are still in school. Parents wearing their NHS lanyards continue to thank *us* as they drop their children off on the way to their next shift. The paths are decorated with chalk rainbows. And despite the dreadful reality of the reasons for it and the challenges it brings, and the serious issues it has undoubtedly raised about the resourcing of our schools, I am thankful for the new reality. It is more compassionate, more creative, more prayerful and more loving.

There has been a rediscovery of teaching as a vocation. I see a profession that is totally devoted to the service of children and the community, full of renewed gratitude for one another and for the small, everyday joys of the classroom. Many are saying that things will never go “back to normal” after this is over. I hope they are right.

Lauren Nicholson-Ward is the Assistant Principal and head of religious education at Christ Church Academy, Stone, Staffordshire.

Within all of this, as a school, we have been guided by the words of our patron, St John XXIII: “Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do.”

Karen Cunningham is head teacher of a Catholic primary school in west London and mother of four young boys.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

To Mrs Whitaker, with love

The moral philosopher James Mumford remembers his old English teacher, “who worked in what is *au fond* a profoundly sacrificial profession”

THIS ORDEAL is revealing things to us about who we cherish. Our own inevitable winnowing process, who we call versus who we are content to wait to see on the other side, may surprise us. “I didn’t think I would miss *her*”, we might think. So too, conversely, may other people’s inevitable winnowing processes hurt us. “I thought *he* would Zoom me at least.”

The ordeal may also be creating space to reflect upon whom we cherish among the departed, and why. My old English teacher has moved from the first category to the second; she was buried last week. I had called Mrs Whitaker to see how she was enduring self-isolation, aged 70. Fine, she reported. A

few days later she was out biking when she suffered a massive stroke. By the end of the week she was dead.

Pour away the ocean and
sweep up the wood,
For nothing now can come
to any good.

From “Funeral Blues”
by W.H.Auden

Some people are too important for front-page obituaries. They work too productively to worry about recognition. They do too well what is before them to do to leave enough time to ensure they get the deserved credit, and the accolades that come with it.

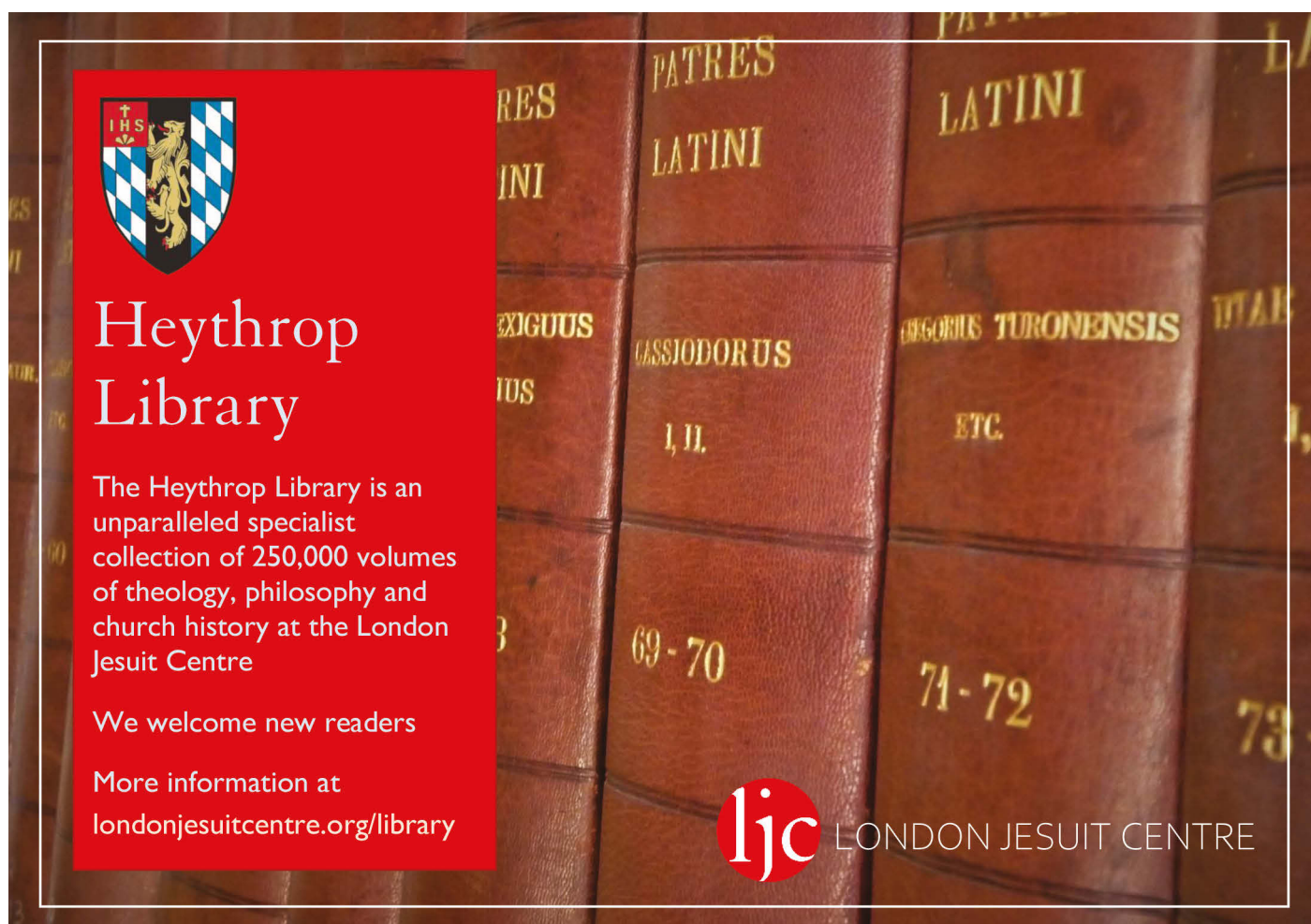
Certainly, as a teacher, she


worked in what is *au fond* a profoundly sacrificial profession. But her uninterest in career advancement even within that profession also allowed her to remain undeterred from its primary purpose: that curious, beautiful dialectical relationship between instilling in pupils a love of learning and imparting the skills so they could pursue that passion for themselves.

One thing that reveals, I think, is that some people could not have proved so pivotal in your life if they had had more concern with their own. I had always thought laying down your life for your friends, according to Christ the ultimate demonstration of love, is by itself *dramatic*. Think of the celibate Maximilian Kolbe

offering his life as a substitute for the father at Auschwitz. Or of the soldier throwing himself on the grenade. They laid down their lives for their friends, certainly. But perhaps there’s a more mundane form of this love. There’s staying up all night penning copious comments – she wrote *sides* on this student’s shoddy A-level essays on *Antony and Cleopatra*. Or the unpaid extracurricular tutorials to help me have a shot at Oxbridge. She was not rewarded or recognised for much of what she achieved. The secret of one person’s success is another person’s success remaining a secret.

James Mumford is a British writer on ethics, culture and literature.






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The constitution is being tampered with to enable President Vladimir Putin to remain in control indefinitely. Yet an experienced Kremlin-watcher argues that Putin's grip on power is looser than ever before – because of the looming threat to the country posed by Covid-19 / **By MARY DEJEVSKY**

Could the virus bring down Putin?

FROM CHINA, where the pandemic began, to the United States, where the disease has cut a swathe through New York and other major cities, via Europe and the United Kingdom, where the prime minister, senior advisers and members of the Cabinet have fallen ill, the debilitating effects of the coronavirus have everywhere spilled over into the political domain. The fallout could even sway the result of the US presidential election.

There is one country, though, where the political ravages of the virus are potentially more destabilising than almost anywhere else, and that is Russia. The disease could pose a bigger threat to order in the Russian state, and to its president personally, than any crisis Vladimir Putin (pictured) has faced over his 20 years in power.

There have been times in the past when Putin's grip on power seemed to falter – but not many. There was his ill-judged response to the Kursk submarine disaster just months after he first took office; the pensioner protests in the winter of 2005; and the fear that young Russians might try to emulate Ukraine's Orange Revolution or the Arab Spring.

The crushing of pro-democracy street protests between 2011 and 2013 exposed a new sense of insecurity in the Kremlin, while local environment and anti-corruption campaigns are monitored lest they one day coalesce into a national opposition movement. But the threat posed by Covid-19 is potentially more lethal.

ON A SOLEMN morale-boosting visit to a new isolation hospital near Moscow, Putin was shown on television enclosed in a bright yellow hazmat suit. But he was also shown cordially shaking the bare hand of Denis Protsenko, the chief doctor – who subsequently tested positive for coronavirus. Putin has since been in self-isolation and is holding meetings remotely. At 67, he is in the age group that the authorities have told firmly to stay at home. Putin's spokesman insisted the president would stay at work.

The timing of the pandemic's arrival is about as bad as it could possibly be. Russia is in a state of transition. Those born and educated under the Soviet system are bowing out and a new, entirely post-Soviet generation is coming to the fore. The health system, partly



PHOTO: PA/XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

reformed to international standards and partly not, is similarly betwixt and between. The number of cases has surged, with the vast majority in Moscow. If it spreads, there is a risk not only of the sort of equipment and staff shortages reported in the UK and elsewhere, but of resentment and dissatisfaction among patients and their families.

Putin has tried to pre-empt discontent within the health sector by raising wages, but some doctors are expressing despair at the prospects for coping with a pandemic. And if the system cannot cope, if funerals could not be held – as emotive in Russia as anywhere – unrest, especially in less favoured regions, could not be ruled out. It would not take much for this discontent to feed into a growing sense of failings in the wider economy.

Food supplies have so far held up well, with little panic buying, despite the Soviet-era empty shelves being well within living memory. But the impact of the coronavirus in depressing the world economy, and a dispute with Saudi Arabia that has brought oil prices down below \$20 a barrel, could push Russia into recession. If living standards decline, one of Putin's chief political supports – ordinary Russians' sense of well-being – would start to fade away. Having spent some of his political capital legislating for an unpopular rise in pension ages last year, the president does not have as much left in his kitty as he did.

In his state of the nation address in

January, Putin had proposed amendments to the constitution that seemed designed to ensure a smooth succession as his term drew to an end in 2024. They would have given constitutional status to the advisory State Council, given parliament, the Duma, more weight in relation to the executive, and confirmed that a president could serve only two six-year terms.

As the proposals went through the legislative process, however, they underwent changes that would in theory allow Putin to stand for re-election again. This has provoked some lively debate in the Russian media and is not a done deal. The changes had been due to be submitted to a referendum on 22 April, the early date suggesting Putin's concern to hold the vote before his ratings fell away.

Covid-19 has changed all that. On 27 March, Putin conceded the referendum would have to be postponed. As he set out ways to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus, his demeanour was low-key. A victory parade planned for 9 May to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany has been postponed, depriving Putin of the chance to reset post-Crimea relations with the West.

Putin has been less in evidence than might have been expected, with most of the disease containment measures delegated to the regions. This could be a pre-emptive move to escape responsibility if it all goes wrong – and it could go very badly wrong. Whereas Xi Jinping controlled the authoritarian levers necessary to impose an almost total lockdown on Hubei province, it is doubtful whether Putin has the means, even if he had the will, to do the same. The key to Putin's popularity has been his almost uncanny ability to stay just a fraction ahead of what ordinary Russian voters were thinking; that sixth sense seems less in evidence today.

PUTIN COULD weather the storm. Russia's huge expanse, its generally small family units and its relatively balanced population as between old and young could spare it from the worst of the pandemic. Russia has ample foreign currency reserves, a solid emergency fund for a rainy day and – thanks in part to Western sanctions – abundant supplies of home-grown food. But a pandemic, an inadequate health service, a flagging economy, an incomplete constitutional reform and the cancellation of a great national occasion hardly create a climate conducive to a smooth political transition – even one that is, in theory, four years away. In the coming months, Putin and Russian politics in general, could be in for a very rough ride.

Mary Dejevsky is a writer and broadcaster. She is a former foreign correspondent in Moscow, Paris and Washington, and a special correspondent in China and Europe.

DETAIL FROM A STAINED GLASS WINDOW (1922) BY DOUGLAS STRACHAN IN THE NORTH TRANSEPT OF ST GILES' CATHEDRAL, EDINBURGH



Christ depicted walking on the water to reach his disciples

The leader of the Cistercian order worldwide reflects that this period of anxiety, confinement and stillness might also be a time of new awareness of the presence of God / **By MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI**

‘Be still and know that I am God’

PERHAPS OUR first task as Christians, and as monks and nuns in particular, is to find a way of investing what is going on with *sense*. At heart, the drama society is currently living through is not so much, or not only, the pandemic, but the pandemic's consequences for daily life.

The world has stopped. Enterprise, finance, politics, travel, entertainment, sport: all have stopped, as if for a universal Lent. But that is not all. Public religious life has also stopped. There is no public celebration of Mass, no church assemblies or gatherings, at any rate none at which the faithful meet in person. It is like a great fast, a great universal abstinence.

The lockdown dictated by the risk of contagion is presented and experienced as a necessary evil. We have lost the ability to stand still. We stop only if someone stops us. To come freely to a halt has become near

impossible in Western (or for that matter, globalised) culture. We do not really stop even when on holiday. Only unwelcome accidents stop our breathless race to draw ever more out of life, out of time and, more often than not, out of others. Now, though, this epidemic has stopped us all, pretty much. All our projects and plans have been cancelled for God knows how long. And have not we, monks and nuns, got used to rushing around like everyone else, ever thinking about our life in terms of future projections?

By standing still, we rediscover the present moment, the instant given us here and now. This is the true reality of time. It points to the true reality of ourselves, of our life. As human beings we live only in the present. But we are always tempted to remain attached to a past that is no more, or to project ourselves toward a future that is not yet – and perhaps never will be.

In Psalm 46, God invites us to be still in order to recognise his presence among us: “Be still and know that I am God, exalted over nations, exalted over earth! The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold” (Psalm 46:10f.). God *asks* us to be still. He does not impose stillness. He desires us to be still before him and to remain thus freely, by choice, that is, lovingly. He does not stop us like a policeman arresting a criminal on the run. He wants us to be still the way we are still before a person we love, before the tender beauty of a newborn baby asleep, before a sunset, or a work of art that fills us with wonder and quiet.

God asks us to be still to recognise that his presence, as it is given us to know it, fills the whole universe; that this presence is what matters most in life. To be still before God is to recognise that his presence fills the present moment and gives our heart all it craves.

WHAT DOES THIS mean for our current situation? It means that it is within our grasp to live it freely, even if it has been forced upon us. Freedom does not consist in constant, unlimited choice. Freedom is the grace to be able to choose that which restores our heart to integrity even when all is taken from us. Even when our freedom has been taken from us, we are in the presence of God, and are offered the *greater* freedom of being still before him, acknowledging him as a friend. This is the great testimony of the martyrs and of all the saints.

When Jesus walked on the waters to reach his disciples in the middle of a storm-tossed sea, he found them unable to proceed on account of a contrary wind: “The boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them” (Matthew 14:24). The disciples were battling powerlessly against the wind that was preventing them reaching the shore. Jesus found his way to them as only God can, his presence utterly free and unconstrained. Nothing, no contrary wind, not even the laws of nature, can stand in the way of the gift of the presence of Christ coming to save humankind. “Early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea” (Matthew 14:25).

THERE IS, THOUGH, a storm of quite a different order that tends to resist the presence and friendship of the Lord: that of our distrust and fear. “But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear” (Matthew 14:26). Often, what we imagine we see through eyes disfigured by distrust transforms reality into a scary “ghost”. At such times, we actually nurture the fear that makes us cry out. Yet Jesus is also stronger than this interior tempest. He draws closer, makes us hear his voice. The friendliness of his presence carries a resonance of its own that fills us with peace: “But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid’” (14:27). “And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’”



God does not send plagues to teach us things, though we can learn from them

(Matthew 14:33). Only when the disciples recognise the presence of God and open themselves to it, that is, when they are still before it, does the wind cease to oppose them (cf. Matthew 14:32): “Immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going” (John 6:21).

CAN THIS HAPPEN to us now, in the situation of peril and anxiety in which we find ourselves, faced with the spread of the virus and the consequences, surely grave and long-lasting, that society will suffer? To recognise these circumstances as an extraordinary opportunity to welcome and adore the presence of God in our midst is not to deny reality or to renounce whatever human means are put in place to deliver us from evil. To think otherwise would be an affront to those, like the health professionals, who now sacrifice themselves for our benefit.

Further, it would be blasphemous to think that God sends us trials just to show his goodness in freeing us from them. God enters into our trials. He suffers them with us and for us, to the point of dying on the Cross. In this way he reveals that the sense of our lives, in trials no less than in consolations, goes infinitely beyond the resolution of present peril. The true risk that looms over our life is not the threat of death, but the possibility of living a senseless life, a life that is not stretched toward an ever greater fullness of life, toward a salvation greater even than the restoration of health.

The pandemic, with its corollaries and consequences, is thus for all of us an occasion to be still, not just because we have to be, but because the Lord invites us to stand before him, to recognise that he, at this moment, comes to meet us in the middle of the storm of our circumstances, in the middle of our fears, offering to renew our relationship of friendship with him: “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

LIKEWISE, WE should be aware that we are all responsible for each other, bound closely together for good or for ill through the choices we make, through the way we behave, even when we are out of sight or doing something that seems to us insignificant. This trial should also render us more sensitive to the trials that strike other people, other nations, whose suffering and death we often observe with indifference. Are we mindful, for instance, that while the coronavirus runs amok among us, the peoples of the Horn of Africa have for months suffered an invasion of locusts that threatens the lives of millions of people? Are we mindful of the migrants locked in Turkey? Are we mindful of the wound that still bleeds in Syria and throughout the Middle East? A time of trial can make us harsher or more sensitive, more indifferent or more compassionate. If we respond with love, the wounds that are left may, like those on Christ’s risen body, stay open and turn into a surging spring of compassion.

One task is entrusted to us monks and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Some Christians seem to have a very limited image of the Holy Trinity: nasty God the Father in heaven; sweet, lovely Jesus ... and the bird! While the creeds teach that there is one God in three persons, they act as one in creating, saving and inspiring. In John’s Gospel Jesus says he does nothing on his own (5:30); “the Father and I are one” (10:30); and “to have seen me is to have seen the Father” (14:9). Christians believe that Jesus came to fulfil the Old Testament; they believe, too, that everything in the Old Testament should be interpreted through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

This matters when we come to understand the meaning of plagues and other natural disasters. For the peoples of the ancient world, if there was a flood, plague or pestilence then God was saying something through it. But in the Gospels Jesus never sends a plague, a natural disaster or turns anyone into a pillar of salt. If Jesus isn’t into murderous retribution, nor, if we take him at his repeated word, is God the Father. Jesus is the incarnate correction to false views of how God works in the world.

So, even though Covid-19’s origins are yet to be finally established, they have a natural explanation, and the way the virus has spread has been in measure the result of poor human decisions. God has not sent the pandemic upon us.

Whenever there is a local or a global catastrophe, whether it is the fire that destroyed the roof of Notre Dame or the spread of Aids, there are always some Christians who say that it has been sent as a punishment by God for various contemporary sins. This reveals a belief in God as a kind of extra-powerful figure ruling the universe, a chief executive who tolerates bad behaviour up to a point, but then his patience snaps and he stops the nonsense, sending a tsunami or a pandemic to remind us who is boss.

God as a vengeful tyrant is a neat if frightening solution to the deep pain in our lives: our suffering has to come from somewhere, and perhaps it is understandable that some seek the explanation that it is sent directly by God.

But there is a huge difference between God permitting evil in our world and God perpetrating such acts upon us. The Church teaches that the first proposition is true, but not the second, although listening to some Christians talking

about the coronavirus pandemic you would be forgiven for thinking it did. Because God wants us to be fully free, our world holds the possibility of our choosing evil; if it were otherwise, we would be marionettes. This is a world away from God directly causing suffering and destruction.

Just because sometimes people grow through pain and suffering, it does not mean God has sent these things as a test: rather this growth is a testament to God accompanying us through every moment, inspiring us to be in solidarity with all God’s children, so that together we make the best decisions in the shadow of death and the valley of tears.

Nor does God send plagues to teach us things, though we can learn from them, and we are learning a lot right now about our delicate relationship with the created order and how poor choices made in one place can have unintended consequences in other places. We are also learning that the best response to natural disasters or health emergencies is transparency, good government, honest reporting, human ingenuity, responsible citizenship, and valuing the common good; we are also learning how extraordinarily resilient some of us are in the face of tragedy.

How can I be so confident that God is not deadly by nature? Because the God revealed in Jesus Christ is not a tyrant but a lover, a God prepared to go to any lengths – even to give up his life on the Cross – to save us, even though we do not deserve it. John 1:5 says, “God is light, in him there is no darkness.” If that is true, plagues and pandemics cannot be part of an arsenal of weapons deployed by an angry God to punish us for our selfishness and greed.

Spiritual sanity in these difficult days rests in seeing that every moment of every day God does what he did on Good Friday: not intervening to prevent humanity killing Jesus, but not allowing evil and despair to have the last word. The power of amazing grace enables us to make the most of even the worst situations, to help each other in every way we can, and to let light and life have the last word. Easter Sunday is God’s response to Good Friday: life out of death.



Richard Leonard SJ is the author of *What does it all mean? A guide to living lives of faith, hope and love* (Paulist Press).

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

nuns in a special way: that of offering prayer and supplication, imploring salvation. By our baptism, by the gift of faith, by letting us encounter him through the Church, and by the gift of a particular vocation to live close to him in the “school of the Lord’s service” (Rule of St Benedict), Jesus Christ calls us to stand before the Father and to ask all things in his name. For this he gives us the Spirit who, “with sighs too deep for words helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26). Before entering into his passion and death, Jesus told his disciples: “I chose you ... so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (John 15:16). He did not choose us to pray only, but to be always heard by the Father.

OUR GREAT treasure is our poverty as men and women who have no power except that of imploring with faith. This charism is given us not for ourselves alone, but to contribute to the fulfilment of the mission of the Son: the salvation of the world. This awareness of our primary task of prayer for all should make us assume responsibility for our faith and for the round of liturgical prayer with which the Church entrusts us. At this time, when most of the faithful are deprived of the shared Eucharist that normally draws them together in churches, how deeply we should feel responsible for the Masses we may continue to offer in our monasteries, for the prayer of the Divine Office that continues to gather us together in choir. We do not enjoy this privilege because we are better than others. It is perhaps because we are so evidently *not* that it is given us. This should make our imploring humbler, poorer, and so more efficacious before the gracious Father of all. More than ever, let us be aware that all our prayers, all our liturgies, must foster in us an awareness of oneness with the entire Body of Christ, which is the Church, the community of all the baptised that opens its arms to embrace all humankind.

Each evening, in every Cistercian monastery in the world, we enter the night, at the end of Compline, by singing the *Salve Regina*. Let us do so conscious of the darkness that often shrouds humankind, instilling a fear of being lost in the dark. We invoke upon the world’s “vale of tears”, upon all the “exiled children of Eve” the sweet, consoling light of the “merciful eyes” of the Queen and Mother of Mercy, praying that the gaze of Mary may show us Jesus in every circumstance, every peril, opening our eyes to see the presence of Jesus consoling us, healing us, saving us. Our entire vocation, our mission, finds expression in this prayer. May Mary, “our life, our sweetness, and our hope”, grant us to respond with humility and courage, offering our life for the peace and joy of the whole human race.

Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori OCist is the Abbot General of the Cistercian order.

The sins of the heart are worse than non-conformity with rules



OUR LORD got quite irritable with those Pharisees who criticised the disciples for not washing their hands before eating; right now, I fancy, our sympathies would be with the obsessive hand washers. But there was more to his riposte to the Pharisees in the gospel of Mark that should make us think. He said, twice, “Can’t you see that nothing that goes into a person from outside can make that person unclean because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer?” (Thus he pronounced all foods clean.) It is one of the very rare occasions when the gospel writer actually glossed the text.

Well, of course Our Lord spoke with authority and his point was that the sins of the heart are worse than non-conformity with rules. But given that one hypothesis – not the only one – to account for the spread of the coronavirus is that it derived from the consumption of bats sold in Chinese wet markets (possibly via pangolins), I am starting to have a little more sympathy with the concept of unclean food.

That list in Leviticus 19 about winged creatures the Jews should regard as detestable includes the bat (as well as the ibis, pelican and hoopoe). Without wishing to designate any of God’s creatures unclean, perhaps we could note that there are some that are probably best avoided. Bats, for instance. I’m not sure what the Bible says about pangolins.

ALAS, the lockdown hasn’t meant doing anything useful like learning a foreign language or taking up needlepoint. I have however dipped once or twice into the terrific study edition of the New Jerusalem Bible, edited by Henry Wansbrough OSB.

The Acts of the Apostles are laid out, as they should be, like a story, in chapters; whereas what we listen to in church are little extracts. If children in Catholic schools had the chance to read the Acts of the Apostles a chapter at a time, like a normal book, its character as a series of adventure stories might be better understood. (To say as much isn’t to say they are untrue, as when we say someone is telling stories.) All those episodes with magicians and shipwrecks are quite exciting. One of the last things you ever learn in a Catholic school is Scripture – other than carefully selected bits of the gospels. It might be worth a try.



THERE’S BEEN a lively correspondence about the issue of women deacons in this paper. It’s interesting to note that St Paul’s greeting to “our sister Phoebe” in Romans 16 does indeed call her a deacon but the word is sometimes translated as “servant”, which tells us something about the actual office.

The issue seems to be whether deacons are regarded as a preliminary step to the priesthood or as an office in its own right, which is how it works in the case of many male married deacons. The example of the Church of England is problematic here. When it took the decision to ordain women as deacons, it did so on the understanding that this would not automatically mean that they progressed to the priesthood; in practice, once the step had been taken, that was precisely what happened. It increased the pressure for women to move to ordination as priests and bishops.

As far as I can see, the nearest we get to the office of woman deacon in the Catholic Church is in the person of the parish sister, the nun who takes on the job of catechesis and sacramental preparation. If they were ordained as deacons I shouldn’t mind a bit.

IN HONOUR of Max von Sidow, who died recently, I rewatched Ingmar Bergman’s 1957 film *The Seventh Seal*, in which he plays Antonius Block, a crusader returning to Denmark during the Black Death, who takes on Death himself in a game of chess.

The first time I saw it, I was bowled over; the second, I found it a simple exposition of agnosticism; this third time, a depiction of a soul seeking God and finding silence – the condition of many Christians. Each time, I was captivated by the player-actor, Jof, and his vision of the Virgin, crowned, teaching the infant Jesus to walk in the fields.

It’s interesting though, that the thing that makes the viewer’s flesh creep is the reading from Revelation that begins and ends the story: “And when the Lamb had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour”. It’s that silence that haunts Antonius Block.



Melanie McDonagh is senior writer at the London Evening Standard.



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Is the coronavirus pandemic divine retribution for our sins? Or is it a moment of darkness that might lead to a strengthening of the bonds that bind us together? / **BY CATHLEEN KAVENY**

Sidestepping the destroying angel

“Because of the destroying angel standing over the town, a day of prayer is needed that we may prepare to meet our God.”

YOU MIGHT think these words were written by a contemporary fire-and-brimstone preacher reflecting on the coronavirus pandemic. But they were penned by Boston’s most renowned Puritan preacher, Cotton Mather (1663-1728), urging his congregation to respond appropriately to God’s wrath, which was punishing the people with a devastating outbreak of smallpox.

Puritans in eighteenth-century Massachusetts did not believe in separation of

Church and State. They were convinced God had a special covenantal relationship with New England, modelled on and even replacing the biblical covenant between God and Israel.

If the people of New England fulfilled the obligations of the covenant, they would receive unparalleled spiritual blessings and worldly prosperity. If, however, the people deviated from their obligations by sinning, God would punish them in proportion to their wrongdoing.

No one doubted that prayer was an essential weapon in the fight against the smallpox infestation. But did it have to be the *only* weapon? Famously, Cotton Mather said “no”. He encouraged and defended local efforts



to develop a smallpox vaccine. He listened attentively when his slave, Onesimus, told him about methods of inoculation used in Africa. Widely read in science and medicine as well as theology, Mather discovered that Onesimus’s account correlated with reports from Turkey describing efforts to impart a mild case of the disease in order to secure immunity.

WHEN A smallpox epidemic infested New England in the spring of 1720, Mather sent a letter to all local medical practitioners, urging them to give serious consideration to the inoculation method. While most demurred, Zabdiel Boylston, a local minister with an informal medical practice, took up Mather’s suggestion. Conscripting members of his own household into his research efforts, he attempted to inoculate two slaves, as well as his own young son, by applying pus from a smallpox sore into a small wound inflicted on each subject. All three survived.

Mather did not see himself as theologically inconsistent in recommending inoculation. He was affirming a central tenet of the broader Christian tradition: divine will for human beings does not only operate directly, but also through secondary causes such as scientific experimentation and medical progress. But Mather’s support for experimental medical efforts did conflict with the covenantal imagination in several ways.

As the influential American historian Perry Miller pointed out, the method of inoculation itself is troubling, because it works by deliberately inserting a divine instrument of destruction into the body of a member of the community. If medical efforts blunt the epidemic without any concomitant improvement in the people’s moral character, how can the smallpox infestation be a specially tailored divine correction? The implication of this line of reasoning was too terrible to contemplate: maybe God was not particularly interested in New England after all.

COTTON MATHER is interred in Copp’s Hill Burial Ground in the North End, where he is surrounded by his worst nightmare: exuberant expressions of Italian Catholic culture. But the influence of the Puritan covenantal imagination on American sensibilities remains strong. Many Americans still believe that the US is divinely called to special blessings – and subjected to specially designed divine punishments when citizens fall short of their duty.

So, naturally, some preachers view the coronavirus pandemic as God’s punishment for the sins that beset the nation. And some religious believers are calling for a day of repentance in order to turn back God’s wrath. But what sins to repent? Unlike the morally homogeneous Puritans, we have no consensus about the offences provoking divine anger.

Different factions conscript the virus to shore up their respective moral narratives. Social conservatives proclaim it is divine punishment for transgenderism and sexual

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impurity; liberals view it as retribution for our exploitation of the Earth's resources. Both sides have one thing in common: they each think God's condemnation in the pandemic applies to other people, not to them.

I would like to make a counter-intuitive suggestion: rather than proclaiming a day of penance, we should hold a day of thanksgiving. We can give thanks together for workers in the health-care sector. We can all be grateful for the brilliance and ingenuity of the global scientific community, racing to find an effective vaccine. We can all proclaim appreciation for the many acts of kindness our fellow citizens have shown to vulnerable neighbours, and the steadfastness of those who work in the food and delivery industry.

Gratitude unites, it does not divide. And by starting with gratitude, we can begin to identify the only sins most of us can do anything about – our own. Gratitude to God, and to others, invites a healthy self-scrutiny. Are we doing our part? Are we contributing what we can to the common good? Are we raising up the next generation to care for the most vulnerable? Or just to focus myopically on their own kith and kin?

GRATITUDE ALSO helps us take the long view. The seeds of our deliverance from today's pandemic may have been planted decades ago. Accomplished and compassionate health-care workers do not spring into existence full-grown. God's concern for us today was operating years ago, in the day-to-day lives, education, and families of the people we depend on now. It is the patient, thoughtful preparations and advances made in ordinary times that will provide the resources to surmount our challenges in times of crisis.

The great twentieth-century Protestant theologian Karl Barth argued that God's message begins and ends with gracious mercy. It is true that divine judgement casts a shadow, but the shadow must never be allowed to eclipse the light. God's "No" to sin is always in service of the divine "Yes" to a relationship with humanity and all of Creation.

The Puritans knew this, although it didn't always seem that way. The minister Michael Wigglesworth wrote "God's Controversy with New England" in 1662, when the land was suffering a drought. Speaking in God's voice, the poem portrays destruction as the inevitable consequence of sin. There could be more punishment to come: "I'll strike at once an all-consuming stroke; Nor cries nor tears shall then my fierce intent revoke." While clearly revelling in the drama, Wigglesworth does not leave people without hope: "Ah dear New-England! dearest land to me; Which unto God hast hitherto been dear, And mayst be still more dear than formerly, If to his voice thou wilt incline thine ear."

Ultimately, the point of a trial is not to break a community's relationship with God, but to make it stronger.

Cathleen Kaveny is a professor of law and theology at Boston College and a past president of the Society of Christian Ethics.

The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves



It's perilous, perhaps even foolhardy, to try and write the history of an event as it is still unfolding. But so extraordinary are the times that this is exactly how I am filling the 12 weeks the NHS has instructed me to stay at home along with 1.5 million others deemed to be specially vulnerable.

Of one thing I am sure. Henceforth, those who write the history of Britain post 1945 will divide it into BC, Before Corona, and AC, After Corona. Ours is an experience laced with sorrow, loss and widespread anxiety.

Never before have we been both collectivised – the huge surge of extra state power requiring us to be the "Corona state" itself embodying the liberties we have temporarily lent to the government – and atomised at the same time.

It is impossible to be as detached and coolly analytical about what is unfolding as a professional historian should be, but I have chosen two methods to increase my chances. I am keeping a daily "Corona Britain" diary. Historians have a tendency to tidy things up when an event is over. Diaries can be an antidote as we travel a baffling arc in the cycle of our collective and individual histories.

And I have started to write a book about the refreshed and extended duty of care which might make the weather in our post-corona politics and society, and lead to a substantial array of improvements and reforms in the early 2020s that would be a worthy memorial to those we have lost and those we have still to lose, as well as ensuring that the year of loss is not followed by a decade of squandered opportunities and narrow partisan politics.

I have sensed the possibility of this each Thursday evening at eight when we come out of our houses, lean out of our flats and cheer, clap, rattle our pots and pans to show how much we cherish our NHS staff and all who work on the front lines in care homes, pharmacies, stores, transport and delivery or one of the three-quarters-of-a-million volunteers. I am not alone in hearing in that glorious cacophony the sound of a people and a nation rediscovering their better selves.

The question is: can it – will it – be

sustained post-corona and be turned into something durable? Long ago we did exactly this in the decisive war and post-war years of the 1940s, which also shaped the Queen and to which she returned in her short but moving address from Windsor Castle last week. That great burst of reform and social betterment was powered by a formidable "never again" impulse – never again would we have to go through an economic slump like that of the 1930s; never again would the bulk of our people suffer chronic multiple deprivations.

In 1942, the greatest social arithmetician of the age, Sir William Beveridge, produced a map for the pathway to reconstruction. He saw "five giants" on the "road to recovery": WANT, DISEASE, IGNORANCE, SQUALOR and IDLENESS.

Beveridge's key insight was that all five had to be struck simultaneously if the outer crust of deprivation was to be cracked and the whole scheme would only work if full employment was maintained. There has never been a report like it, before or since.

The wartime coalition government of Winston Churchill began the implementation; the Attlee governments of 1945-51 completed it. It was the heart of a post-war consensus, of Britain's post-1945 "new deal".

A new Beveridge is above all what post-corona Britain needs. We already have the "never again" impulse. Can we find the people to draw us such a plan? Can we see those in the political class who can conjure the words to carry the spirit and the skills to turn it into policy and practice?

Brexit wore us out – three-and-a-half scouring, souring years in which the worst characteristics of our politics were on display. The corona experience, though suffused in tragedy, has shown us the very best of ourselves once more.

We can do it. It is entirely up to us.

The road to 2050 can be the remaking of us; a high road, not a low road for the country and our people to travel.



Peter Hennessy is Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary University of London and an independent crossbench peer.

Timothy Radcliffe, former Master of the Dominicans, gave the following sermon at the Requiem Mass for his friend, David Sanders, at Blackfriars in Oxford on 30 March

A window into God's love

THE RAISING of Lazarus is a story about a family, about friendship and about a brother. So it says something about what it means for us to remember and pray for David. His family is taking part online, and we think of them. We have received innumerable messages from his friends, and welcome them too. And we Dominicans are of course his brothers, and also his friends.

Friendship is fundamental to our Dominican spirituality. Dominic was a man of many friendships, especially with women. An easy friendship between men and women was from the beginning part of our preaching.

Blackfriars was refounded almost a hundred years ago by Bede Jarrett, and it was said that he had a natural capacity for friendship. Bede wrote: "Our lives are made and marred by our friendships. In the worlds of nature and grace, love is more powerful than reason, heart than head, friendship than law." He said that fidelity in friendship is "the most beautiful thing on Earth".

Friendship matters because it is a sharing in the life of God, the eternal friendship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Every friendship teaches us something about the life of God. That is why we need many friends, many windows into God's love.

David and I joined the order the same day, in 1965. I must confess that I didn't at first like him much. He was always going on about "When I was in Africa", which made me feel very inexperienced. The breakthrough came when we were using a terrifying machine to clean potatoes which threatened to cut off our fingers. We both burst into laughter and that was the beginning of our friendship. Friendship grows out of shared joy.

Jesus enjoys the company of Lazarus and



David Sanders (left) died on 30 March, aged 81. He had incurable cancer and had contracted Covid-19.

He grew up in a north London parish run by Olivetan Benedictine monks. After studying

English at King's College London he went to Tanganyika for three years, teaching in a school run by German Benedictine missionaries, and was there during the Zanzibar revolution in 1964, which led to the formation of the united Tanzania.

his family and weeps for his friend's death, as some of us weep today. Above all David enjoyed people. He was endlessly fascinated by people and wanted to know all about them, and why they thought what they thought. When he came back from his chemotherapy sessions, we would meet and he would tell me about the nurses and doctors he had seen. He was interested in their particularity, their individuality.

This gives us a tiny glimpse of how God loves each of us. God does not love humanity in general. According to Aquinas, God knows the uniqueness of each of us in a way that we do not. When we glimpse that, we cannot but love others. Hatred is in a sense abstract. That is why Bede Jarrett taught us to delight in particular friendships. We should only beware of particular enmities.

The raising of Lazarus shows God's love incarnate. This is love made flesh and blood. It takes the form of Jesus going to visit a sick

Later, he took part in Roger Scruton's enterprise of smuggling Western intellectuals into meetings with Czech dissidents in pre-Velvet Revolution Prague.

He joined the Dominican order in 1965, and was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Christopher Butler on 2 October 1971 at Blackfriars, Oxford. He held many different posts within the province including Prior of Blackfriars in Cambridge, senior tutor in the Hall and Studium, and Master of Students. He edited the journal *Priests and People* – which became *The Pastoral Review* – for 13 years.

In his last years Sanders – who had taught in Jamaica for nine years – was the enthusiastic coordinator of the St Martin Mission campaign, raising money for the Dominican apostolate in the Caribbean.

friend, even though it will cost him his life. The divine love is brought down to earth.

David's friendship was down-to-earth. He always brought one back to reality. If I was in a tizz about something, I would talk with David. He had the gift of cutting to the quick, putting everything in perspective. Often I could not quite follow his reasoning, but the conclusions rang true. *Veritas*, the motto of the order.

He showed this realism supremely in how he faced his death. When he discovered he had cancer, his first reaction was to ask if I had a good book on death. He was curious as to what it would be like. He said to a friend, "I have been preaching on the Resurrection for all these years and I had better show that I believe in it." And so, when death was near, he rang me on his mobile to say goodbye. The next day he asked the nurses to let him die in peace. Now his curiosity will be satisfied.

In the middle of the drama at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus turns to his Father. "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." He bears witness to what is at the core of his being, his relationship with his Father. David knew that he was a man of prayer. When we joined the order, the English Province was in a state of chaos. David taught me that one could only survive and flourish if one was rooted in prayer. Not just the Liturgy of the Hours, but daily, silent prayer. Being quiet in the presence of the Lord. Listening every day for the Lord's voice.

So let us now pray for him. He was not perfect. We ask the Father to forgive him his sins. And we give thanks for this wonderful brother, friend, brother-in-law and uncle.

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THE
TABLET

Remembering a beloved Austin Friar

MY OLD headmaster died last week, and although I knew there were more powerful sources of authority in the universe, it was difficult for a schoolboy to imagine them. That Fr Bernard O'Connor was firm but kind was part of the formative infrastructure of my childhood.

Bernard O'Connor was born in Dublin in 1927. He was one of a group of talented Irish Augustinians who established Austin Friars School, Carlisle, in 1951. He taught Maths, became housemaster of Clare House, and then headmaster. He went on to negotiate the independence of the Augustinians in Britain from the Irish Province in 1977, becoming the first Provincial of England and Scotland.

He moved into parish work in Longtown, near Carlisle, then served in parishes in Dundee, London and Birmingham. Gifted with great clarity of mind, his interventions in both provincial and general chapters were models of clear exposition and incisiveness. His occasional letters to the editor of this paper always came with a self-deprecating covering note that did not disguise his con-



fidence that he had a point worth making. He was once in the frame to be Prior General of the Augustinians. He died on 16 April of Covid-19, aged 92.

Fr Paul Graham, an Austin Friars old boy who went on to join the Augustinians and has had a couple of stints as Provincial himself, told us: "If the Holy See were ever to look for a miracle to support Fr Bernard's cause, he got me through O-Level Maths."

READERS' LETTERS tell of both the heart-break and the unexpected glimpses of grace

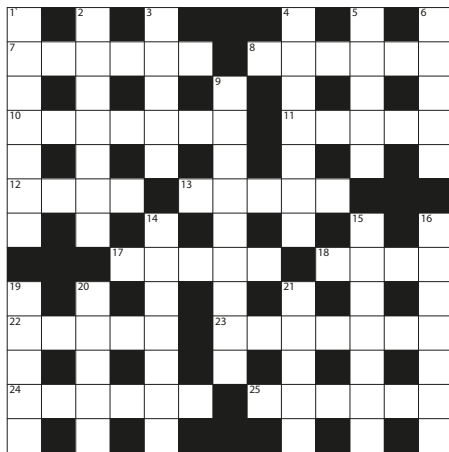
amid the Covid storm. Hilary Lagden's husband died of cancer in February. Because of the restrictions, "My entire support network was seized from me just when I needed it most," she writes. "Devastated with grief, and having never lived alone before, I found it hard to get out of bed. I was in shock from my loss, isolated from the Church, isolated from family and friends and isolated by my deafness with only my Hearing Assistance Dog, a black cocker spaniel, for company. I was completely unable to pray. I could only hope that God heard my groans of despair."

Hilary found the closure of her local church particularly hard to bear. But something unexpected happened. "On my third day of isolation I began to feel a little different. I'd had no distractions to stop me thinking about my loss, nor had I been under any pressure to join well-meaning friends for lunches or outings that would've distracted me for a while, and then only served to emphasise my loneliness when they were over. Being alone is giving me a blanket of protection before I have to emerge into the normal world again. I have discovered that 'aleness and loneliness' are not as unbearable as I thought they would be."

"I have been thrown in at the deep end", she writes. "But in enforced solitude I have found a very remote glimmer of peace forming."

PUZZLES

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 704 Alanus



■ We cannot process entries or prizes at present. Please keep entering. Winners will be notified and prizes awarded as soon possible.

Across

- 7 ----- Caeli, hymn and Advent Mass from Isaiah 45:8 (6)
8 Iberian city with Gothic cathedral dedicated to Santa Maria (6)
10 City victim of eruption of Vesuvius (7)
11 Santa Maria ----- Minerva, church in Rome containing the tombs of St Catherine of Siena and Fra Angelico (5)
12 A currency of the Middle East (4)
13 Reluctant prophet saved from drowning by a huge fish (5)
17 Patron saint of the physically and mentally ill, one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers (5)

- 18 Niels ----, Danish physicist, winner of the Nobel Prize for work on atomic structure (4)
22 Medieval manager and pilgrim with a Tale for Chaucer (5)
23 City in the Netherlands, birthplace of only Dutch pope, Adrian VI (7)
24 St Peter -----, French Marist martyred (28 April 1841) as missionary in Oceania (6)
25 Of the nature of, e.g., Bucephalus and Incitatus (6)

Down

- 1 Scriptural texts for the Mass that change each day and are spoken or sung (7)
2 A ceremonial cloth placed upon the lap of a bishop when he is seated at Mass (7)
3 Product associated with Spanish town famously painted by Goya (5)
4 Saint (tenth century), reforming

- Archbishop of Canterbury who restored monastic life (7)
5 Totally selfless love as Christ taught in John 13 (5)
6 Lion in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* (5)
9 He helped bring down the body of Christ from the Cross (9)
14 Assyrian city whose people repented after the preaching of 13 Across (7)
15 Saint, husband of Anne and mother of Mary (7)
16 English composer of *War Requiem* and *Missa Brevis* (7)
19 Max -----, German Romantic composer especially of major works for violin (5)
20 Parisian artist, early Impressionist, associated with painting dancers (5)
21 National from the Middle East (5)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 25 April, The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. 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 Augustine, Christianity and Thomas Aquinas – from the OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random.

Prizes kindly donated by

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SUDOKU | Challenging

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2					9			3			
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6			3					9	5		
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Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

Solution to the 4 April puzzle

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

Solution to the 4 April crossword No. 701

Across: 1 Sacre; 4 Of Arms; 9 Martinu; 10 Urban; 11 Irma; 12 Diatonic; 14 Common; 19 Trumpets; 20 Loki; 22 Coeur; 23 Showers; 24 O'Neill; 25 Tract. Down: 1 Summit; 2 Chrome; 3 Evil; 5 Faustina; 6 Rubens; 7 Seneca; 8 Numismatist; 13 Corporal; 15 Stucco; 16 Eugene; 17 Bodega; 18 Tissot; 21 Coat.

LETTERS

• THE EDITOR OF THE TABLET •

✉ 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY @ letters@thetablet.co.uk

All correspondence, including email, must give a full postal address and contact telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to shorten letters.

Global authority

● You were right to say in your editorial that the world will not return to “normal” after the pandemic (“Shaping our brave virtual world”, 18 April), but the idea that in the digital age this will trigger the decline of “globalisation” and a reversion to the primacy of the nation state raises many questions.

Pope Francis in his recent Urbi et Orbi address used the biblical image of the storm at sea (Mark 4:35–41) to tell the world that we are all in the same boat and we need to row together. It was a call for the unity of humanity and another plea to world leaders to find ways in which we can live together in our common home.

In last week's *New Statesman* John Gray questioned whether it is possible to find global solutions to global questions. “Geopolitical divisions preclude anything like world government,” he added, since the different powers would compete to control it.

But David Miliband sees an opportunity after the crisis for the international community to reboot the global settlement that followed the Second World War and move away from the fortress mentality of recent years.

The Church has a voice here and Pope Francis was being prophetic in his call for unity. So was St John XXIII in 1963. Whether it is climate change or the pandemic, his words could have been written last week.

“Today the universal common good presents us with problems which are worldwide in their dimensions; problems, therefore, which cannot be solved except by a public authority with power, organisation and means coextensive with these problems, and with a worldwide sphere of activity. Consequently the moral order itself demands the establishment of some such general form of public authority.” (*Pacem in Terris*, 137.)

KEVIN McDONALD
ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS OF
SOUTHWARK, LONDON SE1

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

Virus opens a spiritual powerhouse

FOLLOWING ON from the report (News from Britain and Ireland, 18 April) that the congregation of Wrexham diocese trebled at the virtual Easter services this year, I just have had the privilege of taking part in a Zoom community liturgy for the second Sunday of Easter. The Liturgy of the Word lasted 45 minutes. It was prayerful and thought-provoking; there was good singing and a lovely interaction between the 31 participants. There was real long-distance fellowship, humour, and no collection. This new community is a lay initiative and it will meet every Sunday at 9 a.m.

This is one of numerous initiatives in response to Covid-19. I heard that Fr Richard Gibbons, parish priest of Knock, in three days over Easter, blessed 900 homes. The people of that parish will never forget such a brave gesture as they saw their priest blessing them from the front gate.

Beyond lockdown we all need to ponder the many different forms of worship,

because a spiritual powerhouse is opening before us that we never encountered before. A new church could well mean a staying-at-home community, and not just for the elderly and infirm. We are encountering the beginning of a powerful and radical form of prayerful worship.

(FR) TOM GRUFFERTY
PORTSMOUTH

HOW ASTONISHING it was to see the Urbi et Orbi blessing from Rome this year. For once we could appreciate the great St Peter's Basilica for itself, not just as a background to events of the papal year.

A sense of awe and mystery pervaded the immense empty spaces, bringing out the beauty of tessellated pavements, gilded ceilings, the great supporting pillars straining upwards, seeming to come alive, the silence.

DENIS BAYLIS
BEDWORTH, WARWICKSHIRE

On the bright side

● I am finding the lockdown a relief. At first, I wondered whether I would ever want to go back to the other way of life: relief organist, helping in choir, leading the RCIA.

I have repotted the plants, sorted the garden, weeded the filing cabinet, filed all the stray piles of paper. I am taking regular exercise and enjoying the spring sunshine and the exuberant growth of the green spaces near me. I am catching up on reading periodicals and books and the pile by the bed is at last diminishing.

In addition, I can participate in the streamed Masses from the comfort of my home and meditate before the Blessed Sacrament (streamed) 24/7. My shopping is done by kind neighbours (I am 78). I have had lots of phone conversations, some with people with whom I had almost lost touch. This slower pace suits me. Of course, I miss, as we all do, the physical experience of being in church, both for Mass and for private devotion.

I feel deeply for all those who have been bereaved or suffered hardship because of this pandemic. I feel mean writing this letter as I am aware of so many facing so much hardship. But I must acknowledge that personally, I have benefited. I trust that when we are once more allowed out I shall have more to offer than before, as I have had more time to think about it all. Praise God for this unexpected gift.

MARION MORGAN
BRISTOL

● Things could be worse. Pope Innocent III, in conflict with King John, placed England under an interdict from 1208 to 1214. Baptisms and extreme unction were allowed. But not the celebration of Mass, weddings and funerals. Perhaps the churches were closed. Certainly, the clergy felt out of pocket.

(MGR CANON) NICHOLAS FRANCE
SOUTHAMPTON

● I would like to assure Christopher Howse (Notebook, 18 April) that a hot water bottle,

a radio play and knitting are still consolations.

JANE O'MAHONEY
LAUNCESTON, CORNWALL

Corbyn's commitment

● Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has a decades-long commitment to peace, human rights and global justice.

How surprising then to read in a book review by Terry Philpot (11 April) that “Corbyn has a long, murky and well-documented history of association with terrorists, Islamists and anti-Semites”.

Corbyn was arrested for protesting against apartheid in South Africa at a time when Nelson Mandela was still described by the British government as a “terrorist”. He urged dialogue with the Sinn Féin leadership even prior to the Hume-Adams peace talks which gave birth ultimately to the Good Friday Agreement.

He has also sought consistently to engage all sides in the Middle East in the search for peace and justice.

LETTERS

When we read in the beatitudes Jesus says “Blessed are the peacemakers”, are we to believe he meant only insofar as we could stay entirely aloof from people whose views and attitudes are not our own, and which we may even find reprehensible?

(DR) SIMON HEWITT

(DR) MICHAEL CALDERBANK
WEMBLEY, MIDDLESEX

Lost feast

● I was glad that Cardinal Vincent Nichols reminded us of the relevance of the historic devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour (Easter Arts, 11 April).

I still treat 27 June as the feast day for this Marian devotion. However, the Bishops of England and Wales decided some years ago to remove this feast from the Calendar and passed the responsibility for celebrating Our Lady's feast to the Redemptorists in the United Kingdom.

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland did the same. The feast seems to have disappeared from other liturgical calendars such as Ireland, the United States and France.

It is not as if there are no free dates in the Calendar. A move of St Cyril of Alexandria from 27 June to an uncommitted

date earlier in the week would allow the restoration of one of Our Lady's feasts to the date enjoyed since the nineteenth century, if not earlier.

JOSEPH FLEMING
PANTYMWYN, FLINTSHIRE

Visible women

● Dr Anne Inman (Letters, 11 April) need not despair of seeing women contributing to livestreamed Masses.

Holy Week services streamed from the cathedral here in Aberdeen were enriched by the presence of the St Andrew's Community, a group of young women who live on the cathedral premises so are part of the “household”. They formed the congregation, did the readings, and sang the psalms, some plainchant and some Taizé chants.

Easter Sunday Mass, said by the bishop, was streamed from St Joseph's, Woodside. The readings were all done by women, filmed in their own homes, and some music was supplied by a family group – four girls with their parents – also from home.

So women are definitely visible in livestreamed Masses in this part of the country, and I expect we are not alone.

(DR) SHELAGH NODEN
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC, ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL, ABERDEEN

Catholic tune

● Ian Thomson writes (“A song of hope”, 11 April) about “Wa Habibi”, a song that has been viral on the internet over the past couple of weeks. It is in fact an Arabised version of a traditional Catholic hymn tune, often sung during Lent before the Second Vatican Council to the Redemptorist Edmund Vaughan's text, “God of mercy and compassion”. The tune is a traditional French melody, said to have been borrowed from an opera by the Italian composer, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-36).

PAUL INWOOD
HAWANT, HAMPSHIRE

Dreary vision

● In Anthony Gardner's timely article on Wordsworth (“Wordsworth's retreat into orthodoxy”, 18 April) there is an unfortunate error in one of the quotations. Wordsworth wrote of the “visionary dreariness” of what he saw in his childhood when he was once lost in the hills (a startling and disturbing oxymoron), not a “visionary dreaminess” (a mildly comic, Romantic cliché). It is the unshowy precision of his language when intimating spiritual truths about creation that makes Wordsworth essential reading at this time; and read in the

light of *Laudato Si'*, there is nothing unorthodox about the radical, earlier version of “The Prelude”, whatever the later, Anglican version of the poet may have thought!

ANDREW CARTER
SCARBOROUGH, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Healthy scepticism

● Many of those who now come out on to the streets on Thursday evenings to applaud the NHS will be among those who watched as Jeremy Hunt slashed its funding to such an extent that the junior doctors went on strike, and who then voted his government back into power at the next general election. Is this hypocrisy, collective amnesia or contrition?

PETER ENTWISTLE
PRESTBURY, CHESHIRE

Back to Church

● Melanie McDonagh (Notebook, 11 April) worries that with our churches being closed, we might lose the habit of attending. Some might, but when our churches do reopen it could also be seen as an opportunity to invite our lapsed friends to return with us. “I'm going back to Church tomorrow, come back with me.”

NEIL TULLY
FLINT, FLINTSHIRE

THE LIVING SPIRIT

AND LITURGICAL CALENDAR

Now, therefore, enter your own inmost heart, and make a dwelling-place for God. Make Him a temple, make Him a house, make Him a pavilion. Make Him an ark of the covenant, make Him an ark of the flood; no matter what you call it, it is all one house of God. In the temple let the creature adore the Creator, in the house let the son revere the Father, in the pavilion let the knight adore the King. Under the covenant, let the disciple listen to the Teacher. In the flood, let him that is shipwrecked beseech Him who guides the helm.

God is become everything to you, and God has made everything for you. He has made the dwelling, and is become your

refuge. This one is all, and this all is one. It is the house of God, it is the city of the King, it is the body of Christ, it is the bride of the Lamb. It is the heaven, it is the sun, it is the moon, it is the morning star, the daybreak and the evening ...

If you have this, then you have everything. If you have everything, you have nothing more to look for, and your heart is at rest.

HUGH OF ST VICTOR
FROM *COMFORT*, EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER HOWSE (CONTINUUM, 2004)

No doubt, one who loved men as [Christ] did would have longed to heal all their sickness, to enlighten



all their minds, to transform the world by miracle upon miracle of love, but God did not will that for him.

On the contrary, he willed that he should be, humanly speaking, a failure, should be nailed to the cross and suffer there in helplessness. Indeed, the moment in which his love was consummated, in which the crisis of his redeeming power was reached, was when the hands that could heal with a touch were nailed back out of reach ...

CARYLL HOUSELANDER
FROM *THE LETTERS OF CARYLL HOUSELANDER*, EDITED BY MAISIE WARD (SHEED & WARD, 1965)

◆ CALENDAR ◆

Sunday 26 April:
Third Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Monday 27 April:
Easter feria

Tuesday 28 April:
Easter feria or St Peter Chanel, Priest and Martyr or St Louis M Grignon de Montfort, Priest

Wednesday 29 April:
St Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor, Patron of Europe

Thursday 30 April:
Easter feria or St Pius V, Pope

Friday 1 May:
Easter feria or St Joseph the Worker

Saturday 2 May:
St Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor

Sunday 3 May:
Fourth Sunday of Easter

◆◆◆

For the Extraordinary Form calendar go to www.lms.org.uk

BOOKS

• OUR REVIEWERS •

MICHAEL BANNER is dean and fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge

RACHEL KELLY's latest book is *Singing in the Rain* • WILLIAM JOLL was a London art dealer and now lives in the Hebrides

The centre cannot hold

A powerful defence of morality does not know where to start

MICHAEL BANNER

Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times

JONATHAN SACKS

(HODDER & STOUGHTON, 384 PP, £20)

TABLET BOOKSHOP PRICE £16 • TEL 020 7799 4064

IMAGINE THERE is to be a debate at the Cambridge Union, or some similar locale. The motion: "This House believes in morality". Who would you want as a proposer?

I doubt that you could do any better than Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. He is a powerful debater. He has ready to hand a stock of authorities, old and new, to make his case on behalf of morality, lands some flashy blows on the chins of his opponents, and rounds it all off with whimsical humour. In support of morality, he assembles a notable array of witnesses – on a single page, George Washington, Alexis de Tocqueville and John F. Kennedy are lined up on behalf of the claim that religion is essential to the fabric of a free society. Against morality's detractors, or supposed detractors, he doesn't pull his punches – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud gave us postmodernism, which in turn has given us a post-truth world. And what's the difference between the mafia and a postmodernist? "The mafia makes you an offer you can't refuse; a postmodernist makes you an offer you can't understand."



It is often said about elections that in the end the result depends on the few undecided voters, and for all I know it's the same with debates at the Cambridge Union. There will be a good number of people who would like where Lord Sacks is coming from, as they say – think of them as the choir to whom he is preaching. And there will be a good number, perhaps, who don't – perhaps they don't quite recognise the dystopian picture of modern life from which the case for morality promises to save us. So it will be down to the swing voters, who will be charmed or not, as the case may be.

The real question, however, is not about winning a debate, but about winning an argument, which is a fundamentally different enterprise. "The best philosophers go slowest," said Wittgenstein – and they go slowest because they want to arrive at their conclusions by the longest not the shortest route. Postmodernism doubtless provides some promising material for comedic knockabout, but the philosopher wouldn't want to win easy laughs, but to take on postmodernism's arguments in their most telling form – even if that means presenting them more powerfully than they have been presented by their proponents, and even if that makes the case against your favoured position stronger than any you have yet encountered.

Lord Sacks finds himself, of course, in the perilous position of anyone who is cast in the role of a "public intellectual". If you focus on deserving the noun you will probably

endanger your possession of the adjective, and vice versa. And yet he walks his difficult path with considerable aplomb, so that the most important tension in his book is created not by the conflicting demands of the role, but by the altogether more fundamental matter of two very different starting points for his thought about morality.

On the one hand, and early on, Lord Sacks picks out Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* as a great influence on him, quoting the famous (it really should be infamous) claim from that book that "we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality", and that we are headed for a new dark age. But, as Lord Sacks immediately points out, the pessimism of this prognosis is not one he shares. He is resolutely hopeful about morality.

THE THINKER who tries to combine these two starting points is bound to struggle, I suggest. The pessimist is inclined to think that morality needs saving, and saving in particular by some sort of wide-ranging and far-reaching intellectual defence which takes us, as Lord Sacks does, from Socrates to Nietzsche, from Adam Smith to Derrida. But the optimist is not typically an optimist in virtue of having been convinced about the robustness of these dialectical manoeuvres, but on account of a sense that morality is something that humans just do. The optimist (and Hume, for example, was a moral optimist in these terms) thinks that defending morality by long and twisting arguments is about as vital to its continuance as is a tortured defence of music, friendship or cooking to the persistence of those activities.

Pessimism makes a bleak diagnosis and prescribes a demanding course of treatment; optimism sees the patient in a rather different light, and eschews the proposed regimen. Of course the optimist and the pessimist are likely to have words with each other as to the merits of their respective claims. But Lord Sacks wants both of them on his side at the same time. It may be deemed the master stroke of an accomplished debater to have all opinions on his or her side; but if the argument, and not just the debate, is to be won, the tensions would need to be accepted and resolved rather than effaced.

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Leave comfort root-room

RACHEL KELLY

The Well Gardened Mind

SUE STUART-SMITH

(WILLIAM COLLINS, 352 PP. £20)

TABLET BOOKSHOP PRICE £18 • TEL 020 7799 4064

THERE IS only one problem with reading this delightfully titled and delightful book. And it is one the author, Sue Stuart-Smith, a psychiatrist and psychotherapist who is married to the landscape architect Tom Stuart-Smith, herself identifies on page 182.

At the start of her chapter on “War and Gardening”, in which she describes how soldiers fashioned flowerpots from spent German shell casings in the First World War, she admits: “More than once in the course of writing this book I have felt rueful about sitting at my desk while Tom was outside in the sunlight getting on with things in the garden.”

Her plea that we need to rediscover nature in the modern world is so powerfully argued that I too wondered why I was sitting indoors reading her book on a sunny afternoon, rather than grabbing a trowel and digging as if my life depended on it.

Because, Stuart-Smith argues, in many ways our lives do depend on our connection with the natural world. Recent studies have found that elderly people who garden live longer and

**It seems odd
that horticultural
therapy is
not more
mainstream**



PHOTO: GIULIA DUEPUNTOZEROC

have a better quality of life; prisoners given the chance to grow plants are less likely to reoffend; and vulnerable young people who garden are more likely to stay in education.

Some of the ground is familiar, but Stuart-Smith brings fresh discernment. She recounts the parable of Maurilius, the fifth-century Bishop of Angers. A woman entered his church begging him to deliver the last sacrament to her dying son, but he pushed her away. Finishing Mass was more important. The boy died without his blessing; the bishop was distraught and travelled to England, where he spent seven years as a gardener for a nobleman. This is usually interpreted as his doing penance. Stuart-Smith concludes it was more benign. Maurilius wanted to make things good again, and he did this by turning the soil and making a garden.

I also welcomed Stuart-Smith's insights

from her long career as a doctor. Given that the evidence of gardening's benefit is so compelling, why is horticultural therapy not taken more seriously as a standard treatment for anxiety and depression? (Full disclosure: we actually met for coffee a few years ago to talk about this; I had written a memoir about my experience of severe depression and how nature, as well as poetry, had helped heal me.)

It seems especially odd that horticultural therapy is not more mainstream, given that the idea that gardens and nature can help people recover from mental illness first became prominent as long ago as the eighteenth century.

Reformers such as the British doctor William Tuke (1732-1822) campaigned against the appalling conditions that the mentally ill were subjected to. Tuke believed the environment could be curative. In 1796 he built an asylum known as The Retreat, in countryside near York, where patients could garden. Well into the twentieth century, many institutions continued to have large walled gardens, in which flowers, fruit and vegetables were cultivated by patients and used in hospitals.

Everything changed dramatically in the 1950s because of the introduction of, and belief in, new and radical drugs. The main focus of care switched to medication, where it has largely remained.

Thankfully, we are beginning to come full circle. Levels of anxiety and depression have increased. This, coupled with the growing body of evidence on nature's beneficial effects, is giving green interventions a new impetus. Schemes whereby GPs prescribe a course of gardening are on the rise. They might also prescribe Stuart-Smith's book – to be read only after the sun has gone down.

Sister act

WILLIAM JOLL

The Bass Rock

EVIE WYLD

(JONATHAN CAPE, 368 PP, £16.99)

TABLET BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29 • TEL 020 7799 4064

THIS IS Evie Wyld's third novel, following on from *After the Fire, A Still Small Voice* (2009) and *All the Birds, Singing* (2013), and it is considerably more ambitious in scope. Not only is it consciously separated from the Australian/non-British streak in her make-up that fed the imagination that made those books so powerful, it incorporates a triple narrative – and a large cast – that demands constant attention from the reader. I formed the impression on first reading that

Wyld had chosen this format to allow a free play between parallel narratives so as to encourage a form of ambiguity and cross-fertilisation, but I also found the break-up of the structure confusing.

There are three narrative strands, all set in North Berwick – although there are staffage scenes in London – and the physical atmosphere of the Bass Rock and its surroundings are wonderfully evoked. Anyone who has spent time on the east coast of Scotland will recognise the truth of Wyld's descriptions of light on the colour of rock and water. The earliest narrative is concerned with witchcraft and male thuggery, has a male narrator, and is set in the far past. Of course it is linked by language to the other two, set soon after the end of the Second World War, and in the present day, but I was not wholly convinced by the link.

The two more modern parts are excellent, albeit sometimes quite confusing. For me,

the most successful episode was a winter picnic, on the beach, into which one of the narrators is dragooned by a deeply sinister priest and a quartet of local harpies. Ruth, the unwilling hostess, is addressed by Janet, the *Obergruppenführer* of the group: “Now I understand Betty has organised sandwiches – fish paste and cucumber ...’ She looked up at Ruth and Ruth nodded. ‘If you could say yes, dearie, that’ll save me looking up after every item, thank you. Now, pork and egg pies?’”

Ruth is married to a profoundly annoying man, perhaps verging on caricature, certainly designed to be two-dimensional, but it is the relationships between women in this tessellated work that triumph, notably that between Viviane and Maggie. I wholly recommend this book but you may need to give it two goes – I did. And some readers may be reminded of *Cul-de-sac*, a 1966 film by Polanski that floated into my mind when I was reading it.

How Catholicism coloured my life

Michael Craig-Martin talks to **Joanna Moorhead** about his latest work in support of the NHS, and the education that paved the way for his art

NONE OF us was expecting the virus crisis: but perhaps, Sir Michael Craig-Martin muses, artists were among those best prepared to weather it. That's certainly the feeling from his own perspective, at least. "To begin with, I've lived alone for many years, so I'm used to my own company," he tells me. "On top of that I often work from home, and I've got an office here. So I've not had to reinvent myself – it's more of the normal."

That, though, is about the practicalities: when it comes to the terrible realities of the moment, the pandemic has been every bit as seismic and unsettling for Craig-Martin as it has for everyone else. Which is why he was so pleased to get his latest commission – a colour-your-own thank-you poster for NHS staff, downloadable from the BBC website. "To have something so specific to do at the moment, when you're feeling helpless, and to be able to use what I can do positively was a real treat," he says. We're speaking on the phone, but I get a tangible sense of his warmth and thoughtfulness.

The poster features gerberas – known as African daisies – which bloom in a riot of colours. And colour is at the heart of Craig-Martin's long career: he's well known for his array of bright, bold images, mostly highlighting everyday objects. They burst with colour, lifting them to a new level and invariably taking the viewer's spirits soaring alongside.

So he feels very much like an artist for the moment – and what's more, he says, the pandemic is changing his view of the objects he wants to portray. Where once there were light bulbs, safety pins, sunglasses and coffee cups, stand by for post-virus Craig-Martin works that feature organic items – the fruit, flowers and vegetables he's currently sketching when he gets in from his forays to the supermarket.

"It's the only place I can go right now, and they're the most interesting things in there," he says. "They're naked, and they're colourful. I've been doing lots of drawings of them – and of course, it's not fruit and vegetables and



flowers I'm known for. But somehow, at the moment, drawing fabricated objects didn't feel so interesting, in the circumstances."

Now 78, Craig-Martin's life boomeranged from this side of the Atlantic to the other, and back. Born in Dublin, his family moved to the US when he was a young child, and there,

One version of Michael Craig-Martin's poster

he tells me, he lived a life in an area peopled by Irish and Italian immigrants steeped in a level of Catholicism that was commonplace at the time, but extinct today. And it was the Church, and the education it provided, that



COMING SOON

Warren Lee The pianist gives a piano recital on Facebook Live on 25 April as part of At Home with the London Mozart Players www.tinyurl.com/tablet-LMP

proved to be one of two forces underpinning his artistic career (the other was Yale, where he went on to study).

But his schooling came first, and in particular, it was the years he spent at his Benedictine high school in Washington that would prove pivotal. Most, though not all, of the teachers were monks; and they gave him a way of looking at life and the world that was “intelligent, clever and sophisticated”; a teaching model so thoughtful and open-minded that, paradoxically, he believes it actually made it possible for him to later stop being a Catholic. And certainly as an artist, it offered an exciting and life-enhancing breadth.

“It introduced me to modern art, to the theatre, to architecture, to literature,” he says. In today’s world, he considers faith education to be untenable, and yet he knows he owes a huge amount to his own school and all it gave him.

As well as its education, being raised Catholic gave him access to a world of colour. “The Church I grew up in still had a culture from the Middle Ages, based on images rather than words. Our church had stained glass windows and statues and paintings; it was a visually based environment, and that definitely had a big impact on me.” Today, he says, he works with black outlines “and what are they, if not stained glass windows?”

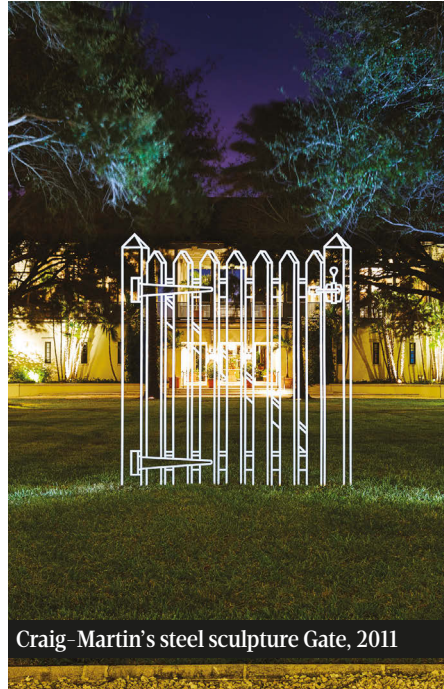
And his best-known work, *An Oak Tree* – a conceptual piece comprising a glass of water on a shelf with a text mounted on the wall – was, he confirms, inspired by transubstantiation. “I was trying to engage with maximal change with minimal effect and I thought: transubstantiation, that’s the answer.”

RELIGION, HE SAYS,

was tied up with a sense of the philosophy of life. “And what I took from that was the idea that the special existed in the ordinary. And I think that underlies everything. You don’t need to look for the special, it’s not necessary. All you need is right there in the ordinary.”

Craig-Martin surely took all he’d learned about education in his Benedictine schooldays with him to Goldsmiths in London, where he taught for more than 20 years after he returned to this side of the Atlantic in the mid 1960s. Goldsmiths was to make him as famous as his own art, because while there he influenced a whole host of emerging talents including Damien Hirst and Sam Taylor-Wood. But it’s the ethos he helped create that he remembers with greatest pride. “It was based on the idea of absolute respect for one another,” he says. “The students had an amazing array of people to teach them, and they

© MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GAGOSIAN; PHOTO: ARIC ATTAS



Craig-Martin's steel sculpture Gate, 2011

could seek out the ones who spoke a language they recognised.” It was all about maximising potential, he says – and the students who left the art world to work in different occupations gained just as much as the Hirsts and the Taylor-Woods.

What depresses him today, aside from the pandemic, is the state of the education system and how the “extraordinary creativity”

of the British schools and universities that began in the 1960s and continued into the 1990s has been undermined by regulations and tick-boxes. “What we did at Goldsmiths depended on trust, not regulations,” he says. “I never knew what hours I was supposed to be working – I just taught, as much as was needed.”

Now, he fears the virus may make more of an impact on higher education than almost any other sphere. “Higher education is going to be devastated, possibly more than anything else, because the foreign students won’t be here any more.”

Until recently, Craig-Martin had always been struck by how his generation was “the luckiest of all ... we’d known no wars, no great cataclysm”. All that is over now. “Normal has gone,” he says. “Everything will be changed.”

• Versions of Michael Craig-Martin’s poster for the NHS can be downloaded for colouring in at:

www.tinyurl.com/tablet-MCM1 and
www.tinyurl.com/tablet-MCM2

RADIO

Virtual belief

When to stream and when not

D.J. TAYLOR

Heart and Soul: Faith in Lockdown France

BBC WORLD SERVICE

ON THE outskirts of Paris the local wildlife is making a noisy comeback: owls, deer, foxes, all kinds of hitherto nervous fauna are using humanity’s enforced sequestration as an opportunity to make their presence felt. So this excellent World Service documentary (19 April), part of the long-running *Heart and Soul* franchise, began with its presenter, John Lawrenson, attending to a volley of hooting sounds. But the question was: reduced to silence, solitude and quiet reflection, how were France’s religious communities going about practising their faith? According to Lawrenson and his ecumenical collection of interviewees, the coronavirus crisis had inspired “brilliant new ways” of worshipping and communicating.

Some of this, naturally, involves the greater use of technology. Fr Guillaume, a priest attached to a “super-presbytery” at Nogent-le-Roi, with 40 churches in its care, is officiating at Masses livestreamed over YouTube. Some of his colleagues, involved in a home-schooling project designed to help local children with their English, could be heard singing along to the Beatles’ “Yellow Submarine”. Elsewhere, the mosque at St-Denis was using Zoom and WhatsApp to keep in touch with its congregation, while a rabbi from the seventeenth arrondissement spoke warmly of the “social networking experiences” that were facilitating daily prayers.

Virtual attendances, as elsewhere, were on the up. At the same time, the lack of real-life interaction meant some things had to be put on hold. Confession via telephone was a step too far, Fr Guillaume explained: the priest had to be physically present. Similarly, there were one or two Jewish prayers that required a live audience.

If the first half of *Faith in Lockdown France* concentrated on practical responses, the second strayed into the thornier territory of trying to make sense of it all. Here the general opinion, whether expressed by Christian, Muslim or Jew, was that it offered a chance to show our mettle. Meanwhile, as Lawrenson noted, something else hovered in the air above the talk of apps and stoicism. It was the widespread belief that, post-virus, nothing could ever be the same again in our relationships with the world we inhabit. A huge reservoir of moral-cum-spiritual capital has been built up, and those involved in creating it are desperate not to see it squandered.

MUSIC

Soundtracks for the new abnormal

Three zingers for the zeitgeist

BRIAN MORTON

The Strokes: *The New Abnormal*
CULT/RCA

Fiona Apple: *Fetch the Bolt Cutters*
EPIC

Thundercat: *It Is What It Is*
BRAINFEEDER

DESPITE THE ravages of the other global pandemic (hip-hop, that is) rock music still seems to be in rudely good health. There is no current band ruder than the Strokes, who have made a 20-plus-year career out of rich-kid obnoxiousness and a refusal to play the media game.

Strokes albums come along infrequently – it's part of their schtick that they don't really need to work – and it's now seven years since *Comedown Machine*, but they couldn't have come up with a more zeitgeist-grabbing title than *The New Abnormal* (Cult/RCA).

The band has been rather good at grabbing the moment. Their classic *Is This It* became a kind of alternative soundtrack to the 9/11 aftermath. The new one references Trump's



America rather than the coronavirus lockdown (they were big Sanders supporters) but the title seems doubly relevant now.

Squabbles between the members meant that the last two albums were partly disowned, but the band seems united now, and united in nostalgia for the kind of music they grew up with. Billy Idol and Tony James turn up with a co-credit on “Bad Decisions”; “Brooklyn Bridge To Chorus” is pitch-perfect new wave; and the opening “The Adults Are Talking” is joyous, subtle guitar rock. Singer Julian Casablancas masters everything from Lou Reed snarl to a falsetto that rivals Prince. Maybe a bit retro, but great stuff.

Also slowish out of the blocks is singer Fiona Apple, whose last album *The Idler Wheel ...* came out in 2012. The drop-quote from *Fetch The Bolt Cutters* (Epic) has to be “Kick me under the table all you want/I won't shut up”. Apple doesn't do pretty. She isn't so much a throwback to Sheryl Crow and Alanis Morissette as the true keeper of that ruthlessly honest, self-revealing flame. While the Strokes don't do inwardness, preferring to observe youthful foibles from the VIP area, Apple is a ruthlessly honest singer, or like Casablancas, sometimes just a talker: “Shameika” and “Fetch The Bolt Cutters” are delivered in a hoarse, urgent speech-song.

The other artist perfectly soundtracking the new abnormal is a virtuoso bass player called Stephen Bruner, whose musical persona is the martial arts videogame-inspired Thundercat and whose new album *It Is What It Is* (Brainfeeder) is another maturely chastened look at life in 2020 that takes in potty-mouthed Steely Dan funk, deep sadness at the loss of friends, and urban anxiety, but constantly leavened by his faster-than-fingers-can six-string bass and an unshakeable instinct for melody. One song, “Existential Dread”, is less than a minute, but it sums up the Thundercat philosophy: “As long as I keep breathing/I know I'll be all right”. Elsewhere he recommends dancing as the best specific against sorrow. It's not a bad prescription.

TELEVISION

A rich, rounded, powerful journey

The priestly saga is back with a punch

LUCY LETHBRIDGE

Ride Upon the Storm
CHANNEL 4

THE SECOND series of the magnificent Danish drama, *Ride Upon the Storm*, is only three episodes in and already I feel thoroughly wrung out by it. At the end of the first series last year I wrote that I hoped we would see some more women getting their “dark night of the soul” in future episodes – for the gigantic, tormented figure of the pastor, Johannes Krogh, so dominated the action that women occasionally felt relegated to the kitchen. Now, however, they are moving to the centre.

The death of the Kroghs' priest son, August, 18 months before, has devastated his parents, Johannes and Elisabeth; his embattled, embittered wife, Emilie, has since given birth to his son, Anton; his brother, Christian, the unfavoured son of his father, has become a bestselling mindfulness author and started up a business, Open Mind, for spreading Buddhist teachings. And August's old church is about to be sold off to the highest bidder due to a declining congregation. To Johannes'

horror, the highest bidder might be a Muslim education centre.

Poor Johannes, played with such unforgettable conviction by Lars Mikkelsen: he is a great, creaking tree buffeted in a relentless wind. *Ride Upon the Storm* has always seemed to be as much about masculinity as Christianity, but early indications are that in the new series, it is the female characters who begin to get coloured in. Johannes is surrounded by adaptability, compromise, emotional sharing, by saplings that bend in the new modern breezes but do not break, by women who want to talk of feelings and, sometimes, anger. Alone he howls his anguish at a world that seems filled with lightness, frivolity and pale common sense, all enemies of his own towering convictions. He still rages over Bishop Monica – remember her? – who says, “When the time comes, we'll do a nice closing ceremony,” over her shoulder as she leaves a meeting on the future of August's church.

For 250 years the Kroghs have been pastors of the Danish Church and now even members of Johannes' own family are going in for therapy, meditation, dreamcatchers, naming ceremonies, Halloween parties (“with spaghetti”) and candles (“It's an import, it's not Danish”). Elisabeth even visits a spiritualist to try and make contact with the son she has

lost. Johannes cannot speak his grief and it is tearing him up inside, the only relief he seems able to manage is bouts of boxing which leave him physically bruised and punished.

When in the last service in August's church, he stands at the lectern and says, “Here I stand, I can do no other”, it is as if he speaks for a whole world on the brink of extinction. At the end of episode two, there is a scene with his baby grandson which is so moving that I had to press pause

to gather myself before going on.

I'm noticing more in this series how beautifully shot this slow, powerful drama is. There are so many moments of visual beauty: the long, panelled grey corridors of the vicarage; the wintry water that constantly seems to be lapping nearby; old brickwork and yew hedges in cool Scandinavian light; Johannes standing, battered with uncomprehending grief in August's church, its furniture wrapped in plastic ready to be taken away, the crucifix on its side against the wall. The camera lingers on Mikkelsen's austere but expressive face, framed by his pastor's frilled collar like a portrait by a Dutch master.

Ride Upon the Storm is a challenging watch, its effect relying on cumulative passions rather than cliffhangers, but it's so well worth the effort. Its characters are rich, rounded and real, and its themes are mighty.



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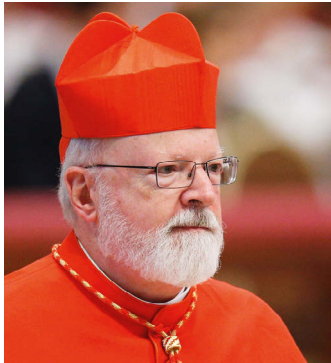


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NEWS BRIEFING

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD



This year's "One Boston Day", to remember the victims of the 2013 **Boston Marathon** bombing, was marked by a virtual interfaith prayer service that included Boston's Cardinal Sean O'Malley (pictured), Muslim leader Shaykh Yasir Fahmy, and the Revd Liz Walker, a Presbyterian minister and former TV news presenter.

Opening the virtual service, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh said: "Whenever I need the Church, the Church is there for me, and whenever the Church needs me, we are not always there for it. Right now we need the Church ... When this is over, we have to be there for the Church."

Catholics provide hope

In **Kenya** last week the Archdiocese of Nyeri and the Diocese of Kitui joined forces to launch a call centre supporting people suffering in the coronavirus pandemic. Hope4u aims to raise more than a million dollars to provide people with food and other necessities. In Mombasa, the archdiocese is also providing emergency food and funds, while in Nairobi's Kibera slums, Religious sisters are handing out food vouchers to needy families.

The number of Covid-19 cases in Kenya has risen to 270, with 14 deaths. The government has imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew and has restricted movement in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale.

Meanwhile Fr Richard Onyango Oduor appeared in

court in Nairobi last week accused of having "negligently spread an infectious disease" after reportedly failing to observe quarantine orders on return from a trip to Italy. The Catholic priest denies the charge and was released on bail.

Priests hand out face masks

Catholic priests have distributed more than 500 face masks door to door in **Abidjan**, according to Fr Emmanuel Wohi Nin, secretary general of the Ivory Coast Catholic Bishops' Conference. He said: "We bring the prayer we say every day for the whole of humanity that is suffering, but in addition we have decided to offer free face masks to the poorest and most vulnerable populations."

Zambia's Catholic bishops have set up a Covid-19 Response Fund to help prevent the spread of the disease and support health facilities responding to the pandemic. Bishop Moses Hamungole of Monze said the fund will support projects for the sick, elderly, people with mental and physical disabilities, orphans and the poor.



President of **Tanzania** John Pombe Magufuli (pictured) last weekend called for three days of prayer nationwide for a successful deliverance from the coronavirus pandemic. "Tanzanian compatriots ... I urge you to use these three days, 17-19 April, to pray to God for His protection and healing," tweeted the President, who is a Catholic.

Tanzania has not imposed any restrictions on movements or closed its borders, but has suspended social gatherings and ordered the closure of educational institutions.

However, crowds have been attending public Masses, allowed by the government, with some restrictions in place.

Duterte urged to aid jobless

Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos last week called on the government of President Rodrigo Duterte of the **Philippines** to do more for those made unemployed by the coronavirus lockdown. "We strongly demand that the Department of Labour and Employment immediately release financial assistance to all affected workers," said the bishop. Despite the risk of being shot, many poor people still go out looking for food or work.

Catholics in **Pakistan** are being asked to reach out to at least two vulnerable families in their neighbourhoods suffering during the coronavirus lockdown. Fr Ryan Joseph, Rector of the Saint Pius X Seminary in Karachi, said: "We told the faithful: look for the poor and needy of any religion in your neighbourhoods and help them; buy food for poor families." Fr Arthur Charles, of the church of Sant'Antonio in Karachi archdiocese, said that food packages were being given to "900 families in the parish who live below the poverty line". In Lahore, Archbishop Sebastian Francis Shaw has donated 15,000 face masks to health and other workers.

Muhammad Saad Kandhalvi, the leader of a prominent Indian Muslim group, Tablighi Jamaat, has been charged with manslaughter after a large rally held in **New Delhi** in March was blamed for spreading the coronavirus. Police say that Saad, who denies the charge, ignored two notices to end the event at a mosque in the capital.

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, head of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the **European Union**, has said the coronavirus pandemic could deliver a mortal wound to an EU already paralysed by the refugee crisis and by the growing individualism of its member states. Writing in the Italian Jesuit magazine *Civiltà*

Cattolica, the Archbishop of Luxembourg said: "Lack of solidarity during the coronavirus crisis can become the fatal wound. I fear that for many this will mean a disenchantment with the European project."

Catholic organisations in Europe have condemned the granting of far-reaching powers to **Hungary's** premier Viktor Orban, enabling him to rule by decree without parliamentary scrutiny during the coronavirus crisis. The 11 Catholic groups, including Justice and Peace Europe, the European Parishes Colloquium, Pax Romana and Pax Christi International, said: "This pandemic will not be overcome if democracy is humiliated or fundamental rights trampled on."



In **Egypt**, the Coptic Studies Centre of the Library of Alexandria has launched online lessons on St Corona (pictured). Professor Ezzat Salib, expert on Coptic heritage at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, made the first broadcast last week on the Facebook page of the library. Coptic Christian communities in Egypt celebrated Easter without being able to go to churches owing to coronavirus security measures.

Thirty-five Catholic groups, including the **Malta** Catholic Youth Network, Charismatic Renewal and the Legion of Mary, are backing the condemnation by Archbishop Charles Scicluna of the closure of the country's ports to boat migrants from North Africa as a protection against Covid-19.

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

For daily news updates on the top stories, visit www.thetablet.co.uk



“Whenever I need the Church, the Church is there for me, and whenever the Church needs me, we are not always there for it.”

Boston Mayor Marty Walsh at the ‘virtual commemoration’ of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing (see page 24)

ROME / Hierarchy is in ‘crisis all over the Western world’, prelate warns

Pandemic spurs talks on church reform, says Kasper

CHRISTOPHER LAMB

THE MAN described as the “Pope’s theologian” says the Covid-19 pandemic is spurring discussions on reform inside the Church. “The Church is in a crisis all over the Western world,” Cardinal Walter Kasper (inset) told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* last week.

The 87-year-old prelate said that responses to the pandemic, including the suspension of public liturgies and closure of places of worship, show that “the Church has no choice but to face a discus-

sion on reform”. His remarks came as the new president of the bishops’ conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, endorsed the blessing of committed same-sex relationships and ordaining married men.

Ahead of the family synod in 2014, Francis asked Cardinal Kasper, a former president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to put forward proposals on how divorced and remarried Catholics could be readmitted to the sacraments.



The cardinal told the newspaper that changes were needed as a result of the sexual abuse scandal, which has “deeply shaken” the Church’s credibility, “especially that of its ministers”.

But he warned against any “simple innovation that throws the old overboard and considers that it has to reinvent the Church”, and to instead go back to the Gospel.

Reform, he argued, must look to connect church structures to Jesus’ life and message, something

which Francis has repeatedly called for during his pontificate.

Bishop Bätzing, also speaking to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, said that he wants to shift perceptions of the Church’s teachings away from being seen as “prohibitive morality” disconnected from people’s lives.

On same-sex couples, the bishop argued that “for a long time in moral theology we’ve said that, if it’s true love that lives commitment and faithfulness, we must recognise it ... if people decide for themselves how they live, can’t we tell them that their relationship is blessed by God?”

The bishop said the final document voted on at last October’s synod on the Amazon stressed that more importance was placed at the synod on priestly ministry than clerical celibacy.

■ **AS THE WORLD** slowly recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a risk it will be struck by an even worse virus – that of selfish indifference, Pope Francis said at the Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday, writes *James Roberts*.

This dangerous virus is “spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me and that everything

will be fine if it is fine for me. It begins there and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress,” he said in his homily at the Mass, celebrated on the twentieth anniversary of St John Paul II’s naming of the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday.

The pandemic “reminds us that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer”, the Pope said. “We are all frail, all equal, all precious.

“May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us: the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health

of the entire human family,” Francis urged.

“Let us welcome this time of trial as an opportunity to prepare for our collective future,” he said, because without a vision that embraces everyone, there is no future. “Let us show mercy to those who are most vulnerable for only in this way will we build a new world.”

GERMANY

Bishops push for lifting of Mass restrictions

GERMAN bishops have expressed their disappointment this week that German Chancellor Angela Merkel did not announce that the suspension of church services and religious meetings would be lifted, writes *Christa Pongratz-Lippitt*.

In a statement from the German bishops’ conference, the president, Georg Bätzing, Bishop of Limburg, said: “This is difficult to understand in view of the relaxations in other fields of public life that have now been announced. We have accepted the suspensions up to now because we held them to be appropriate and wanted to

contribute to preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

“However, the suspension of public religious services encroaches massively on people’s right to practise their religion freely and was particularly hard to bear for the faithful during Holy Week and the Easter Triduum,” Bishop Bätzing said.

Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne agreed with Bishop Bätzing, saying: “Now that [some of] the suspensions are being lifted, the churches must be opened for public services.”

On Friday last week, the reli-

gious communities in Germany met representatives of the Federal Republic and the German states to discuss the suspension of religious services. Fr Karl Jüsten, the Catholic Church’s liaison officer for relations with the state, told domradio.de afterwards that the Church might be more impatient to lift the suspensions than the other Christian denominations since receiving the Eucharist was “decisive” for Catholics.

Discussion was already under way on how this might be possible when the celebration of public Masses under strict hygienic conditions was resumed.

“Several suggestions have been made such as using tongs or laying the Eucharist out on the altar and allowing the faithful to take a host, or for the priest to use disposable gloves. What must be guaranteed under all circumstances is that

the coronavirus is not spread when distributing Communion,” said Fr Jüsten.

Meanwhile only 12 per cent of Germans are in favour of holding local church services during the crisis according to an INSA-Consulere poll commissioned by the daily, *Tagespost*. A clear majority think it unnecessary.

The poll, conducted between 10 and 13 April, asked 2,108 adults whether they agreed with the statement: “Local church services should be allowed during the corona crisis as they are part of primary care.”

The poll results showed that 15 per cent of German Catholics were in favour and 69 per cent against; 24 per cent of the members of the Free Churches were in favour and 60 per cent against, and 13 per cent of Protestants were in favour and 71 per cent against.

RUSSIA / Senior priest speaks of 'some dissatisfaction' with the closure of churches

Catholics follow Orthodox on Easter lockdown

JONATHAN LUXMOORE

RUSSIA'S Catholic Church is following the example of Orthodox leaders in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and is counting on local authorities not to use the crisis as a pretext for imposing new curbs on religious communities, according to a senior priest.

"At present, there's no unified, standardised federal regulation on quarantining across Russia at state level, and local rulers can make their own rules," said Mgr Igor Kovalevsky, the secretary-general of the Russian Bishops' Conference.

"Catholics here are generally aware of the seriousness of this problem ... But there's been discussion as to whether churches should have closed, and some people are dissatisfied."

The Moscow-based priest spoke as Orthodox Christians celebrated Easter last Sunday, according to the old Julian calendar. In a *Tablet* interview, he said that Russia's Catholic Church had encouraged its members to accept local government regulations during the pandemic, and had not heard of any confrontations at places of worship. He added that Catholic churches would reopen once their Orthodox neighbours took a decision to do so, and hoped that the current crisis would have no lasting effect on the country's minority religious communities.

"The authorities have had to work much more with the Orthodox majority Church, making sure it informs its faithful about quarantine rules," Mgr Kovalevsky said. "At present, the Catholic Church is developing



Bishop Virgil Bercea of Oradea

peacefully and calmly in Russia, so we need not worry unduly. Our concerns reflect the same concerns as the Russian state."

President Vladimir Putin declined to attend the Easter vigil in Moscow's Christ the Saviour basilica, unlike in previous years, although his spokesman, Dmitry

Peskov, said he had lit a celebratory candle instead in the chapel of his Novo-Ogaryovo residence.

Meanwhile, in an Easter message, the Russian Church's leader, Patriarch Kirill, urged Christians to watch Easter services on TV and refrain from visiting churches.

Church leaders across Eastern Europe's 11 mostly Orthodox countries issued similar appeals, although some insisted places of worship should remain open for small congregations. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I called on the Orthodox faithful to resist any "sense of alienation" from the "agonising decision" to close churches, adding that he believed the "unprecedented crisis" had "revealed the power and value of love and solidarity".

In Romania, Bishop Virgil Bercea of Oradea, from the Greek Catholic Church, which combines the eastern rite with loyalty to Rome, also defended the decision to close places of worship, but told *The Tablet* that the Covid-19 restrictions had reminded Catholics of "the nightmare of communist rule".

(See *Mary Dejevsky*, Page 7.)

UNITED STATES

Pockets of resistance emerge on Mass attendance

SOME religious leaders, including a few Catholic clerics, are challenging the US government's social distancing regulations, most of which ban gatherings of more than five people. As is now customary in the United States, many dis-

putes are landing in the courts, writes *Michael Sean Winters*.

Bishop Peter Baldacchino of La Cruces, New Mexico, became the first US bishop to announce plans to begin public liturgies again, but insisted that only five people,

besides the priest, would be allowed to join any one service. All the participants would have to keep six feet away from each other. In Boone, North Carolina, a parishioner at St Elizabeth of the Hill complained that Fr Brendan Buckler offered a public traditional Latin Mass on Easter Sunday. Karen James told the *National Catholic Reporter* she saw 22 people enter the church, which would have violated state and diocesan regulations.

In Kansas, a court overturned Governor Laura Kelly's rule that gatherings be limited to fewer than 10 people, even though six deaths and 80 cases of coronavirus have been traced to religious gatherings. US District Court Judge John Broomes' order still required congregations to observe social distancing. The judge explained his ruling, saying: "Churches and religious activities appear to have been singled out among essential functions for stricter treatment."

BELGIUM: Cardinal Jozef De Kesel has temporarily delegated his responsibilities as head of both the archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels and the Belgian bishops' conference while he undergoes treatment for an undisclosed illness, writes *Tom Heneghan*.

A statement on 14 April by the bishops' conference said that De Kesel, 73, "is currently suffering from health problems. It is not a coronavirus infection. Due to the proposed medical treatment just started, the cardinal will not be able to continue performing his duties for a few weeks."

De Kesel took over the Brussels

archdiocese in 2015 and the bishops' conference the following year, when he was also created a cardinal. The archdiocese has three auxiliary bishops – one for its Flemish-speaking areas, one for francophone areas and one for the federal capital Brussels — who have taken over his diocesan duties. The two vice presidents of the episcopal conference – Tournai Bishop Guy Harpigny and Antwerp Bishop Johan Bonny – and its secretary general will cover for him.

In a statement on the coronavirus last month, De Kesel said that it "places us before an obvious fact: we are and remain fragile beings".

CHINA: The Diocese of Shanghai has cancelled all pilgrimages in May, including the popular feast day of Mary Help of Christians on 24 May. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all pilgrimages to the shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan have been cancelled for this year, writes *Ellen Teague*.

The shrine, which is located to the west of Shanghai, is China's national Marian shrine, and on 24 May hundreds of thousands of Chinese Catholics travel to Sheshan on pilgrimage from various Chinese provinces, as well as from abroad. The decision to cancel this year's pilgrimage was agreed with the local authorities.

"This is the first year that the shrine has been closed on reasonable grounds," a Shanghai Catholic told AsiaNews, adding that, "on other years there were political closures and restrictions". In his 2007 Letter to Chinese Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI chose 24 May as the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China to ask Our Lady of Sheshan for strength in the face of persecution, unity among Catholic communities, and commitment to the good of Chinese society. Since 2008, the Shanghai Religious Affairs Office and the state-sanctioned pro-Beijing Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association have tried to make it harder for Chinese Catholics to visit Sheshan.

PORTUGAL

Fátima's celebrations go ahead without the faithful

PORTUGUESE Catholics, and others, have reacted angrily over the past few days to news that despite all the restrictions on gatherings and recommendations on social distancing, the government plans to allow public celebrations for 1 May, writes *Filipe Avillez*.

By contrast, for the first time in a century, the 13 May celebrations in Fátima will take place without the faithful, as decided by the local bishop, even though there are expectations that public Masses may be restored by then.

There has till now been little resistance to containment measures and Portugal has been dealing relatively well with the pandemic, with death and infection rates well below those of other European countries such as Britain, Spain, France and Italy. But many Catholics were taken aback when the government announced that commemorations for 1 May, International Workers' Day, and for the 25 April revolution which ended the dictatorship in 1974, were to go ahead, although scaled down.

■ **WORLD YOUTH DAY** and the World Meeting of Families have been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Vatican announced on Monday. The World Meeting of Families was to take place in Rome in June 2021, and World Youth Day was being organised by Lisbon for August 2022.

A short notice published on the Vatican website stated that "due to the current health situation ... the Holy Father, together with the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, has decided to postpone the next World Meeting of Families ... and the World Youth Meeting to June 2022 and August 2023, respectively".

Pope Francis has also created a new commission to deal with the pandemic, which will be led by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Its aim is "to express the Church's concern and love for the entire human family in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic".

Meanwhile the Vatican Secretariat of State named a Bank of Italy official, Giuseppe Schlitzer, to head day-to-day operations of the Financial Information Authority (AIF). Mr Schlitzer replaces Tommaso di Ruzza, who was suspended as part of a police investigation.

VIEW FROM ROME

Christopher Lamb



CARDINAL George Pell has re-emerged on to the public stage with characteristic aplomb. Just four days after his convictions for child sexual abuse offences had been unanimously quashed by the Australian High Court, he threw himself straight back into the thick of the culture wars with an engrossing interview with Andrew Bolt of Sky News Australia.

It's clear from the interview, broadcast on 14 April, that the 78-year-old prelate intends to continue to try to influence church affairs and that he will remain a leading light among those Catholics who have set themselves against Pope Francis' reforming agenda. On Holy Saturday the Vatican's former treasurer sat down for a 50-minute discussion with Mr Bolt, one of Australia's highest-profile conservative commentators and one of the cardinal's most vocal media defenders. Egged on by Bolt, Cardinal Pell suggested that his prosecution in Australia was motivated by his enemies, in particular because of his pro-life stance and his outspoken defence of the traditional family. He even hinted it could be linked to the opposition he had stirred up trying to root out financial corruption in the Vatican. This has little currency in Rome, where the general view is that the cardinal's worst enemy is himself.

"You and the Pope are not close," Bolt observed. "He is very much on the left and is a global-warming preacher. You are a conservative and a climate-change sceptic. He has been a weak leader, and you've demanded reforms of your Church. On this matter [abuse charges] has the Pope supported you as you would have wished?" Pell admitted that he and the Pope did not see eye-to-eye theologically but insisted that he had been "very supportive". Francis is, he told Bolt, "owed respect". But the cardinal's reluctance to challenge Bolt's attack on Francis was telling.

For many of the Pope's opponents, Cardinal Pell, a scholar and skilled administrator, is seen as a powerful buffer against the direction Francis wishes to take the Church. During the conclave in 2013 that elected Francis, Pell is believed to have been among those supporting Cardinal Angelo Scola.

In my new book, *The Outsider: Pope Francis and His Battle to Reform the Catholic Church*, I detail how, while the cardinal was called to Rome by Francis to reform Holy See finances and was part of the Pope's inner circle of advisers, Pell opposed Francis over *Laudato Si'*, the two family synods and the Amazon synod. In an interview with me in 2014, the cardinal took issue with a question I posed over whether Jesus might have given Communion to divorced and remarried Catholics. "They killed Jesus," he replied. In other words: "No!"

In 2017, Pell sat down for a private dinner with Scott Pruitt, then administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency, who rejects the scientific view that climate change is caused by human activity.

Pell is now a free man and almost everyone in the Vatican, who had always been sceptical of the charges brought against him, is breathing a sigh of relief. But Pell's release is also a boost for those pushing an alternative ecclesial vision to that advanced by this pontificate.

DIGITAL audiences for the Vatican's online output are at an all-time high. There were 14.5 million views on the Vatican News website during Holy Week – where all the Pope's lockdown liturgies have been livestreamed – and 5.5 million users. Holy Week last year saw 1.5 million users and 3.5 million views.

In spite of their popularity, Francis is ambivalent about livestreamed liturgies and audiences. He warns against "virtualising" the Church. During one of his early morning homilies recently he referred to a bishop who had "scolded" him for not allowing a larger congregation – safely socially distanced from each other – to be present in St Peter's at the livestreamed liturgies "so that the people can be seen". The Pope added: "It's true that right now we should build this familiarity with the Lord this way [virtually] ... but in order to get through the tunnel, not to stay here."

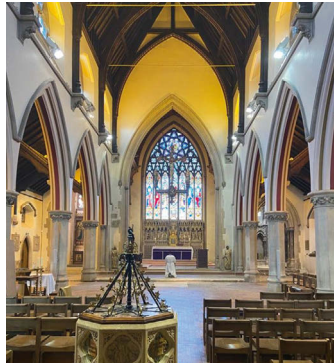
He is reflecting a tension between the necessity for the Church to be visible online, and the realisation that the Christian community is not merely digital. Francis' pontificate is characterised by a desire to "touch the wounds" of humanity, to embrace the poor, refugees and the marginalised. That's not possible with social distancing. The 83-year-old Pope uses every digital avenue to connect with people during the pandemic, while at the same time stressing that the community of the Church is never just a virtual, or gnostic reality.

THE HOLY SEE – under fierce criticism for its attempted *rapprochement* with the Beijing regime – has taken another tentative step towards rebuilding relations with China. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Jesuit journal overseen by the Secretariat of State, has launched a Chinese digital edition. The fortnightly periodical, which this year marks its 170th anniversary (it's precisely 10 years younger than *The Tablet*), now has a website in Chinese. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, led by the entrepreneurial Fr Antonio Spadaro, a close adviser to Francis, has also set up an account on WeChat, the popular Chinese social media and messaging app.

NEWS BRIEFING

FROM BRITAIN AND IRELAND

PHOTO: FACEBOOK



Shrewsbury Cathedral (pictured) has recorded the largest congregations in its 170-year history since it started live streaming services.

On Easter Sunday, 11,446 people watched Mass online, more than 10 times the usual attendance of 1,000 people. The highest number of service views was on Good Friday, when 13,594 people watched the liturgy. The monthly total of unique views exceeds 83,000, with some 33,307 logging in for the first time. As well as daily Mass, the cathedral livestreams liturgies including morning, evening and night prayer, amounting to more than 40,000 hours of streaming in the last month alone.

£15,000 for hospices

The English and Welsh bishops' conference's **Day for Life** fund, which supports projects that protect the dignity of the person, has donated £15,000 to Hospice UK's coronavirus

appeal. Bishop John Sherrington, the Conference's lead for life issues, said that hospices are in desperate need of resources, adding: "This donation can help provide personal protective equipment for those who work there and so ensure the continuation of care and support for those who are dying at this time of crisis."

BBC Scotland has re-broadcast a documentary about seminarians at the Pontifical Scots College in Rome. *Priest School* was originally aired in December 2019 as *Sgoil nan Sagart* on BBC Alba, the country's Gaelic service. The repeat was welcomed by Bishop John Keenan of Paisley, who said it would help mitigate the restrictions that inevitably affect this year's **Vocations Awareness** week, and "cause some of those who watch to consider what it is God wants of them and how they can respond by considering a vocation".

The National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW) has welcomed Bishop John Sherrington's warning that lockdown could be life-threatening for victims of **domestic abuse**. Celia Capstick and Freda Lambert, coordinators of the Social Responsibility Committee of the NBCW, said that parish safeguarding officers are in a good position to listen and help. They called for their

contact details to be placed on parish websites.

Bishop Brendan Leahy has spoken of the impact of the pandemic on Church services and sacraments, particularly the postponement of First Holy Communion and Confirmations. In a statement after Sunday Mass at St John's Cathedral, the **Bishop of Limerick** said that he would write to children preparing for the sacraments to encourage them despite the delay. He will invite them to write back or send a drawing to tell him what they are learning about Jesus or the Holy Spirit.



A member of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) with more than 25 years of service in the Middle East and Africa has been appointed as the new National Director of World Missions Ireland. The appointment of **Fr Michael P. O'Sullivan MAfr** (pictured) by

the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples was welcomed by Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA, chair of the Board of World Missions Ireland, who said that Fr O'Sullivan's knowledge of the missionary challenges facing the Church today would bring a new dimension to the work. Founded almost 200 years ago, World Missions Ireland is the Pope's official charity for overseas mission.

The Irish Church's development agency, **Trócaire**, is warning that, as they try to cope with the coronavirus pandemic, Malawi has just one intensive care bed for every million people while Sierra Leone has no ICU beds and South Sudan has only two ventilators for 12 million people. The agency is urging those who want to help to make financial contributions online or via the phone. It is asking that Trócaire collection boxes be retained by those who took them home until it is safe to return them. The boxes are usually returned after Easter Sunday.

Aid to the Church in Need is to hold a virtual Mass for **persecuted Christians** on 13 May. The Mass, which will be celebrated at Farm Street Church in Mayfair at 10 a.m., coincides with the feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

Compiled by **Liz Dodd**.

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PERSON IN
THE NEWS

Philip Egan, Bishop of Portsmouth, on the decision to close churches for private prayer: "Are we reversing the hierarchy of values, putting physical health above spiritual?"

CORONAVIRUS / Doctors, nurses and volunteers, as well as patients, praise the work of an active ministry

Chaplains at work in 'field' hospitals

ELLEN TEAGUE
and SARAH MAC DONALD

CATHOLIC chaplains in Britain and Ireland have spoken of their experiences ministering to those sick and dying in hospital with coronavirus.

Fr James Mackay, parish priest of Our Lady of Walsingham, Custom House, east London, is heading a team of nine priests at NHS Nightingale London, with regular phone support from his bishop and vicar general. "It is incarnational how we are a field hospital," he told *The Tablet*.

Fr Mackay is allowed to bring sacraments to the sick and dying at their bedsides and minister to staff and bereaved families. By contrast, his Anglican counterparts have been asked not to minister at patients' bedsides by their bishop. Fr Mackay said that Anglican chaplains "want to get stuck in" but can only minister remotely.

"The first patient to die in the Nightingale was a Catholic and in the presence of his wife and two nurses I anointed him," he said. Wearing full protective gear, he used a cotton bud to administer the oil and hovered his hand over his head, which was "just as profound" as touching the patient, and was "massively meaningful" to the patient's family in Ireland. He baptised another patient, at the request of his son.

Three patients have died at the Nightingale among 30 patients overall, with several hundred others expected in the coming weeks.

Fr Mackay has been in every day since the hospital opened, and the chaplaincy is available 24 hours a day for end-of-life care. As well as praying with non-Christian colleagues and patients, he said there was also an active ministry to staff and volunteers.

"The ministry is very fruitful in terms of spreading the Gospel," he said. "We are already feeling value in the response of doctors and workers to us, who are saying that it is good that we are here."



Fr James Mackay

In the Archdiocese of Birmingham, Fr Craig Fullard, a hospital chaplain with the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, told *The Tablet* that trusts in the archdiocese had invited chaplains into the hospitals. They are given training and provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and are told they are needed for staff and families, as well as patients.

"The chaplains are allowed to visit wards, following all the hospital guidelines," he said, "and we can anoint using cotton buds." He explained that sacramental care is very important for patients and he spends significant time supporting staff too.

He described the ministry as "a new way of being parish" and expressed his admiration for the "amazing front-line workers who are in there for 12-hour shifts".

Bishop Paul Mason, who chairs the Healthcare Reference Group of the English and Welsh bishops' conference, said this week that whatever support chaplains are giving, in line with policies of the hospitals in which they serve, it is "a great opportunity to give witness and is much appreciated by patients, families and staff".

Official church policy, particularly amid reports of shortages of PPE, is for priests to provide as much pastoral care as possible by non-face-to-face means, to reduce the spread of the virus. This would include offering spiritual

Communion. However, hospital trusts have varying policies. Bishop Tom Williams, an auxiliary in Liverpool with a background in chaplaincy himself, said: "In Liverpool archdiocese, and mainly because of our high percentage of Catholics in the population, we have a strong tradition of cooperation and support from our hospital trusts." He told *The Tablet* that chaplains "are often the bridge between the clinical teams, the patients and their families".

In Dublin some of the 76 lay and ordained chaplains serving in the archdiocese have described harrowing scenes in the city's hospitals. Shauna Sweeny, a lay chaplain at Tallaght University Hospital in Dublin, said: "Patients have not seen their family in weeks and feel isolated and lonely. Families are at home waiting to hear from the hospital and feel helpless."

Typically, families would be with their loved ones morning, noon and night, she explained, but that cannot be the case now. Yesterday, she tended to a young man with a young family who was dying.

"His wife and brother came in to say their last goodbyes to him. I facilitated the visit with them; they had 15 minutes to see him and say goodbye as they would never see him again. They were surrounded by people with masks,

goggles, hair nets, and no faces to see. This alone put so much fear in them and they too were instructed to wear the full PPE. It is utterly heartbreaking. The reality of the current situation feels inhumane and not what we as carers are used to."

Tallaght hospital has ensured that every ward has access to iPads so that patients who are well enough can speak to their families over the internet. If patients are too unwell, the chaplain calls the family after visiting the patient and lets the family know how their loved one is doing. "It gives the chaplain an opportunity to connect with the family and see how they are doing as well," said Ms Sweeny.

Fr John Kelly, also a chaplain at Tallaght University Hospital, agreed that chaplains were there to connect people, sometimes in their last moments.

"On Good Friday I visited Mary, a patient I had met on many occasions during her treatment for cancer," he said. "She recognised my voice behind the protective mask and goggles. Having listened to her fears and sense of isolation I was able to connect her by Zoom to her husband and two sons. This was the last time they were able to see and hear their mother's voice. After her death the nurse and I placed a wooden cross in her hand as we prayed for her."

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TABLET 180
SINCE 1840

PANDEMIC / Public health director cautions against visiting churches for private prayer

Row breaks out over church closures

LIZ DODD

SENIOR CATHOLICS are calling on the government and their bishops' conference to reopen churches for private prayer, despite a medical expert warning that doing so will contravene lockdown measures in place to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The Universe Media Group, which publishes the newspaper, *The Catholic Universe*, wrote to the prime minister last week urging him to permit Catholic churches to allow people limited access for private prayer because they provide "essential services to the public".

The call was echoed by the Bishop of Portsmouth, Philip Egan, who said in a tweet: "On this Divine Mercy Sunday I wonder again about the closure of our churches for private prayer. I know it's an emergency and so temporary measures are needed. But are we reversing the hierarchy of values, putting physical health above spiritual? Let's pray we can reopen soon."



The decision to close churches was taken after the government announced strict lockdown measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The lockdown prohibits all but essential outings for daily exercise, or to get food and medicine.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols said in a statement announcing the closure: "It's not essential for people to travel to go to church in order to pray. We have to learn more and

more that our prayer is rooted in our hearts and can be shared with our families. Open churches will only tempt people to travel. And that is not good practice now."

In a separate tweet last week, Bishop Egan also called on Catholics to visit their parish church during their exercise "in order to touch it – wipe it clean afterwards! – and in a moment of prayer unite yourself with the Risen Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament".

Professor Jim McManus, a director of public health, vice president of the Association of Directors of Public Health UK and health-care advisor to English and Welsh bishops, told *The Tablet* Bishop Egan's advice could lead people to contravene the lockdown guidance.

"Catholics need to be seen to be living the restrictions on others as an act of solidarity and charity to help stop the spread of this virus. If our Holy Father is embracing and living these restrictions, and praying through them then we should do likewise," he said.

"Social distancing means we avoid journeys wherever possible and don't touch surfaces we don't need to. This protects others and ourselves from spreading the virus. If you can easily exercise in a way which takes you to or past your parish church as part of exercise then stopping for a moment to bow to the Blessed Sacrament is fine.

"Some of us live several miles from church and making a journey solely to do that fails to live out these guidelines and is not keeping faith with the burden we all have to bear right now," Professor McManus said.

Care homes suffer from lack of PPE and testing

ELLEN TEAGUE

CATHOLIC care homes are suffering from a lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff and inadequate testing, *The Tablet* can confirm.

Andrew Quinn, chief executive of Father Hudson's Care in the Archdiocese of Birmingham, said that St Joseph's Care Home in Coleshill had to share PPE with other adult care services over the Easter weekend.

Further PPE was purchased "at considerable cost" from other suppliers and private companies, Mr Quinn said. "The local authority and NHS have been as helpful to us as they can be, and we have a

great relationship with them, but what they could provide was extremely limited. Up to now care homes have not been a priority but we think that is changing."

The lack of testing "is almost as serious as lack of PPE", Mr Quinn said. Three residents have died with the virus, but two weeks ago, with more than 20 staff self-isolating after showing symptoms, there were no testing facilities to confirm whether or not they were virus-free.

Meanwhile, one senior care leader worked a double shift of 20 hours to ensure a resident who needed end-of-life care had a familiar face present, and three members of staff have moved in to the home.

The resident chaplain, Fr Peter Blundell, is able to anoint the sick, following church guidelines, and the home has produced a booklet of prayers and hymns that can be read to those who are very sick or dying.

Carol Hill, director of Catholic Care in Leeds, told *The Tablet* that its staff must be self-isolating with symptoms in order to be tested, which she described as "too late". "We feel the virus spreads before symptoms emerge," she said. She feels provision of PPE is inadequate.

Claire Learner of St Joseph's Hospice in north London also expressed concern about a lack of PPE, saying: "We're not given any priority as a specialist palliative care provider even though we are regulated as a hospital by the Care Quality Commission and not adult social care."



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Traveller film 'reinforced prejudices'

LIZ DODD

THE NATIONAL Catholic chaplain for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) has strongly criticised a Channel 4 documentary that he said "sensationalised" important issues and could reinforce prejudice.

Dispatches: The Truth About Traveller Crime focused on offences allegedly committed by GRT communities, focusing on one community in Lutterworth, Leicestershire, and others in the

UK, which Fr Dan Mason said face extraordinary levels of racism and discrimination.

"Almost every man, woman and child has suffered some form of hate speech or hate crime," said Fr Mason, adding that the "sensationalist language and dubious statistics" were dangerous and irresponsible.

"Coming amid a national crisis, and a pandemic that's hitting minority communities so hard, is particularly unacceptable," said Fr Mason.

A spokesman for Channel 4 told *The Tablet*: "We stand by the journalism in this programme, which examined an important issue that was addressed fairly, accurately, and with due impartiality in accordance with the Ofcom Broadcasting Code."

"Channel 4 regularly addresses uncomfortable issues and any delay in transmission would have been unfair on the contributors."

"The statistics were drawn from government and police sources and analysis of the association

between crime levels and some Traveller sites was undertaken by highly professional people."

"The programme included contributions from Travellers and Traveller advocates as well as people who detailed their experiences of living near certain Traveller sites and who questioned the authorities' approach to criminality."

"Other representative groups were approached but did not respond or declined to take part in the programme."

■ The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has emphasised that all people with Covid-19 must be treated fairly, given that all are made "equally in the image of God", writes Ruth Gledhill.

Entering the public debate on the allocation of scarce resources for treatment, Bishop John Sherrington, Bishop Paul Mason

and Bishop Richard Moth issued a joint statement on "coronavirus and access to treatment".

It comes as the bishops' conference announced a weekly Mass for the sick and healthcare workers, which will be celebrated by a different bishop and livestreamed from his diocesan cathedral. The Masses will take

place every Thursday at 7 p.m., with the first due to be celebrated by Cardinal Vincent Nichols in Westminster Cathedral.

Bishop Mason told *The Tablet* that the Church has been following the debate about allocation of treatment resources closely. They waited until now to issue the statement because, among other

reasons, they did not want to create an unnecessary sense of alarm. He also emphasised that the Church's position was substantially the same as the official position of health services and the government, adding: "In no way can we judge the quality of a person's life by how young, fit or healthy they are. We are all made in God's image."

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Sharp practice

ADRIAN CHILES

WHEN ALL this first started, there was only one thing I panic-bought – a dartboard. My dad first showed me how to throw a dart about 40 years ago. On that day I achieved a promising level of competence, in that more darts actually hit the board than missed it. With such a great start in the game, the future was full of promise. I was given a dartboard for my bedroom and I've played, irregularly, ever since. I'm sorry to say that over four decades my game has improved not at all. Lockdown presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change this.

It's a funny thing with darts, I've never been a great fan of it, but I've always been dimly aware of the goings-on in the game as some kind of sporting cultural backdrop to my life. Eric Bristow was a big figure in my youth. After university I did a week's work experience at a local newspaper, the *Solihull Times*. Eric was appearing at a pub in the area doing some promotion for an electronic darts thing, and I was sent along to cover the event. I was so nervous I could barely hold a pen. Unless you count overtaking Jimmy Greaves on the M1, this was my first encounter with a celebrity.

"C'mon," said Eric. "Let's do the chat at the bar."

I nodded and made some kind of noise indicating I thought this was a good idea. He ordered two pints of lager and produced a packet of gold Benson &



Unless you count overtaking Jimmy Greaves on the M1, this was my first encounter with a celebrity

Hedges out of which he took two cigarettes. I'd stopped smoking about a year before, but without hesitation took one of them, got a light from Eric, *the* Eric Bristow for goodness sake, and smoked it like a pro as the two of us shot the breeze on his life and times. I suppose it has to count against him that he filled me with beer and started me smoking again, but the man was charm itself. May he rest in peace.

I remember him telling me his love of the game started with his love of the mental arithmetic. Every time I struggle with subtractions on my long journey down from 501, I think of him. I've

become so bad at it, that if I post a score high enough to take me down past 400, 300, 200 or 100, my heart sinks, for that's when the maths gets tricky.

I've also, in a bid to improve, been working on my action. My reasoning being that there must be something fundamentally wrong with it for me to be so consistently hopeless. I read somewhere that the ideal position for the front foot is for it to be pointing directly at the target. And read somewhere else that the ideal position for the shoulders is at a right angle to the target. This all makes sense, but to achieve these two things at the same time requires a degree of flexibility I no longer possess. The first time I attempted it my whole body was trembling to such an extent that throwing a dart with any accuracy at all was quite impossible.

Furthermore, I read somewhere else that the best way of holding the dart was with only the thumb and forefinger. Since the shaking elsewhere subsided, I've enjoyed some success with this grip. But I've just looked at Eric on YouTube and not only are his shoulders nowhere near side-on, he seems to have all of his fingers hooked over the top of the dart as he throws it. And sometimes the little finger sticks right out like he is sipping tea in *Downton Abbey*. There's nothing for it: I'll have to go back to my oche, back to the drawing board, and start all over again.

Adrian Chiles is a radio and TV presenter.

Glimpses of Eden

JONATHAN TULLOCH

THOUGH WE'RE marooned on lockdown, the birds are on the move. This morning, breakfast mug of tea in hand, I stood on the backdoor step, listening to a loud chuckling, rising from the cowfield ash tree. A flock of fieldfares had gathered in the still leafless branches. Each autumn, up to three quarters of a million of these members of the thrush family arrive in Britain, and spend the following months wayfaring through the countryside, feeding on worms. In April, they make their way back to their breeding grounds in Scandinavia and



Russia. This little flock, with its fieldfare gurgling sound, was on its way back home.

The birds careered out of the ash tree, and threw themselves into the arms of the

cherry tree. An urgent message to return to their native forests was waiting for them there. The brilliant, gleaming white, wasn't winter frost, but blossom. Time to go! They rose again. The flock tossed itself higher, and like a sail catching the wind, began to billow away through the sky and their voices slowly faded. The silence didn't last long. A different note took over from the fieldfare's hyena giggling. A trilling, twittering melody – the year's first swallow arriving from Africa. Even as we hunker down, we're in the middle of epic journeys.

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