

# THE LONDON CATHOLIC WORKER

free/donation

summer 2024

issue 76



## A Church of Peace

*Signs of hope for a nonviolent Church*

In May this year, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales published a teaching document on militarism titled *Called to be Peacemakers*. Catholic Workers, believing in Gospel nonviolence and pacifism as we do, have never been satisfied with official Church pronouncements on these subjects. But the Bishops do have some helpful things to say, including taking ownership of some of Pope Francis' pithy remarks on the subject. My prayer is that our Church is on a journey to becoming a true peace church. So, in the spirit of Peter Maurin's call to "explode the dynamite of Catholic Social Teaching", we offer below some of the more trenchant and insightful words of critique and hope from our Bishops.

"Catholic Social Teaching offers us both a practical framework for action and an important source of hope in our approach to arms control and disarmament. The UN

Secretary General recently warned:

'Humanity now confronts a new arms race. Nuclear weapons are being used as tools of coercion. [They] are being upgraded, and placed at the centre of national security strategies, making these devices of death faster, more accurate and stealthier.'

"Weapons are fuelling conflict... with catastrophic consequences. Fratelli Tutti... encourages us to recognise all people as our sisters and brothers, wherever they are in the world. Arms control and disarmament are not naïve aspirations but real possibilities."

"'The total elimination of nuclear weapons [is] both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative' - Fratelli Tutti. [Meanwhile] the UK Government [has] announced plans to increase [the UK] nuclear arsenal... [we] emphasise the immorality of 'committing resources, which could be spent on the common good of our society, to stockpiling [nuclear weapons]'."

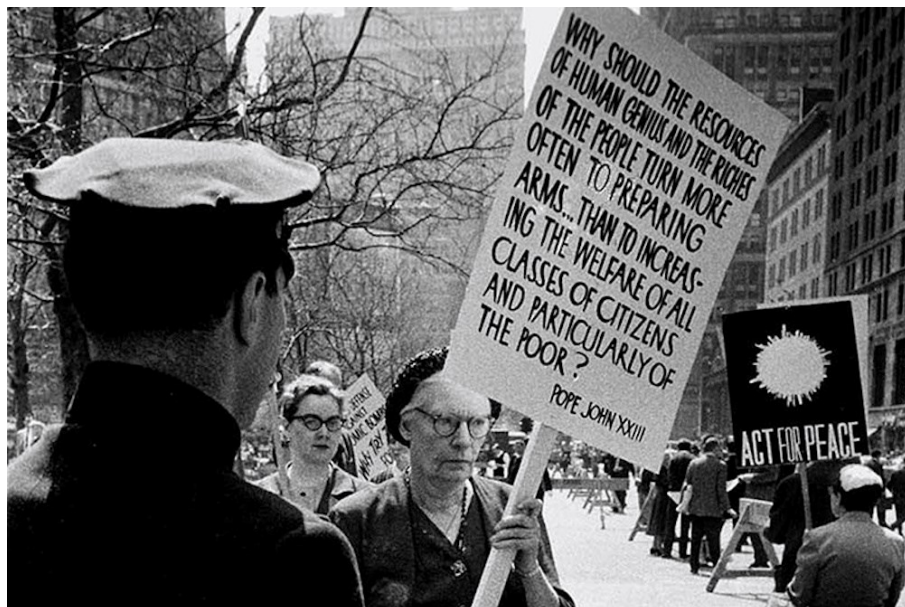
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“Pope Francis explicitly sets out that not only the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons but also ‘their very possession’ is to be firmly condemned; ‘the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral.’ [So] the Holy See has been a leading force behind the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)... to prohibit the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. Pope Francis... characteris[ed] the new treaty as ‘an exercise in hope’ [and the] Holy See [has] call[ed] for every country to join TPNW.”

“Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: ‘money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood. In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade.’ (Pope Francis). We stand alongside all those people of goodwill who are peacefully campaigning against the arms trade. The arms trade... is ‘a “grave sin”’ (Pope Benedict XVI) and an ‘industry of death’ (Pope Francis).”

“[We] support a moratorium on the development and use of



*Dorothy Day in “Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story.”  
Martin Doblmeier, CNS/Courtesy Journey Films, 2020*

lethal autonomous weapons [including] armed drones... kamikaze and swarm drones. [We] urge our government not to invest further resources in the development or production of lethal autonomous weapons systems. “The development of complex autonomous weapon systems is likely out of the reach of smaller states or non-state actors. However, once such systems are developed by larger states, it will not be extremely difficult to copy them ... the inevitable widespread proliferation of these weapon systems will fundamentally alter the nature of warfare for the whole human family’ - the Holy See.”

“While Jesus lived in violent times, he offered a radically countercultural approach: ‘He unfailingly preached God’s unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives’. He taught his disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44)

and to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (Ephesians 2:14-16).” [World Peace Day Letter, 2017]

“We therefore have an obligation to promote nuclear disarmament, to challenge the arms trade, and to encourage restrictions on the creation of ever more destructive military technology.”

**Martin Newell**

*Front Page image: Pope Francis sets a dove free at Wednesday audience, 15 May 2013*

# Prefer nothing to the love of Christ

*Br Johannes Maertens on the journey of personal spiritual growth and conversion*



*Saint Benedict delivering his rule to the monks of his order, Monastery of St. Gilles, Nîmes, France, 1129*

*It was a dream that I was dead and I was watching myself. I saw myself going to the foot of a mountain and climbing up, though I didn't really have to climb, I was lifted up. I knew I was going to my judgment. I was going up the mountain and I was afraid. I was thinking, "This is it. I am going to be judged. They're all going to be there and they're going to see everything that I've done..." But when I arrived there was just Jesus. I couldn't see his face but he was definitely there and he looked rather traditional, like a monk with a cowl over his face. There was light behind him so I couldn't see his face. And all he did was give me a huge hug. And it said volumes – I am still reading stuff into it. The first thing he said was, "You silly man. Why are you so worried? Did you think I didn't love you? I do love you. Nothing matters, you'll do as you are."*

— Gerard Hughes, SJ (1924-2014)

## Prefer nothing to the love of Christ

'Prefer nothing to the love of Christ' is probably the best-known sentence in the Rule of Saint Benedict, following closely after the first opening word of the Rule: "Listen". Benedict teaches us that faith is connected to the inclination of the heart and our active listening. "Listen, with the ear of your heart"; not just with your ears or brain, but with the deepest part of your being, "the ear of your heart". The first word of Benedict's 'Rule for Monks' is a verb, a command, situated in the human heart. Listen to what God and the people God speaks through are saying to you; faith needs to be heard not just by the brain.

*"Our real journey in life is interior."* — Thomas Merton

The Good News, the Gospel, is an invitation to an eternal relationship with God. Monastic wisdom reveals the difference between living faith and a moralistic code, law, or set of directives. An inward-oriented faith seeks to transform the person (conversion) towards a loving relationship with God, others, and creation. An interior faith seeks healing and redemption. Monastic men and women often feel directly called by God to conversion. When a monk is tonsured, he declares himself "dead to the world" and focuses on a new life in Christ. The monastic seeks to live out his baptismal vows radically. But this is only the beginning. By living a life of conversion and seeking healing, the monk or nun tries to open themselves. It is God who works inside the person, and this is a long process. Few have been granted a "fast-track" through the grace of God. For most of us, it takes our whole life. And when you think you have finally achieved it, you can start again; you have fallen. In the Benedictine way, we call this "*conversatio morum*", a vow the Benedictine monastic makes at the beginning of monastic life.

*"The vow of conversatio morum expresses our hope that, after a lifetime of learning to die to ourselves*



*so as to live for God, we will be truly 'converted', transformed into the image of Christ, so that we too may dwell in the presence of God, in the company of all the Saints. Our vow of conversatio morum is really a commitment to pursue holiness."*  
— Nuns of Conception Abbey.

The journey of conversion, redemption, and growth is for all Christians, laypeople as well as religious; we are all invited into a relationship with God through Christ. The word 'conversion' is too often used to indicate the need for the conversion of others, as if conversion is a one-off event. You do it once, and then go off converting others. How absurd!

*"The older I get, the more I meet people, the more convinced I am that we must only work on ourselves, to grow in grace. The only thing we can do about people is to love them."*— All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day, one of the founders of the Catholic Worker movement and a Benedictine oblate, emphasises that it is in meeting others—the homeless person, the poor man or woman, or the stranger—that we ourselves can be changed or converted. "The closer we are to the poor, the closer to Christ's love," she wrote in 1942. Later, she wrote, "The mystery of the poor is this: That they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for Him. It is the only way we have of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we

increase our knowledge of and belief in love."

I don't think faith can be achieved through a handbook or even Bible studies. While these might satisfy our appetite and need for knowledge, faith has a deeply mystical side to it. Foremost, faith needs to be relational. The heart needs to be open to receive the Word of God, which reveals itself through the Holy Spirit. If faith remains on the level of knowledge, it doesn't take root! A set of laws does not bring anyone closer to the truth in Christ (which is always love!). The Word, the seed, needs to grow in fertile soil—the human heart. That is where the passions are, where suffering happens, and where the battle occurs between choosing God or the self (anxiety). A person might feel attracted to the clear and structured life of a monastery, a strict moral rule book, or a simplistic 'Biblical' ideology, but let us not confuse that with faith in Christ.

### Mary of Egypt

Another, albeit different, great example is St Mary of Egypt. A woman called by God to faith and redemption even though she hardly had any knowledge of the Bible or Church teachings. She met Christ through an image, the icon of his mother at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, where she was during the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. However, she felt blocked from entering the church,



*Where the Olive Trees Weep, 2024*

which made her understand her own brokenness in the face of God and eternity. Her willingness to love Christ led her to a full life in Christ. She chose the life of a desert mother, understanding that this is where she would find inner peace. The way of Mary of Egypt became one of penitence and finding inner peace in solitude. Mary of Egypt was so imperfect that she would be scorned by many Christians today; some would even be tempted by the devil to stone her, yet she was a woman clearly loved and cherished by God.

### 'Biblical' Ideology

The problem with faith as a moral system or ideology in Christianity finds some origins in Augustine's concept of "original sin," which led Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) to his satisfaction theory of atonement in *Cur Deus Homo*. Much later, in the 16th century, the German Augustinian friar Martin

Luther (1483-1546) and the French lawyer Jean Calvin (1509-1564) framed salvation in a rigid 'legal' framework. Someone sins, does something wrong, thus breaks the law, and so punishment is needed, or someone has to pay this debt. In theology, we call this 'penal substitution atonement'. But where is God's grace in this? This is mostly a wrathful God.

The retired Canadian Orthodox Archbishop and Monk Vladika Lazar recently said, "What the doctrine has done to Western Christianity has been to reduce the Christian faith to a legal code of correct behaviour which is void of the element of internal struggle (*askesis; podvig*) for inner transformation and the transfiguration of the heart and mind of the believer. This legal code is expressed not in genuine morality but in a self-righteous and arrogant system of dead moralism when Christianity is reduced to an ideologically based programme of 'correct behaviour.' It is rendered lifeless and meaningless." At least for some, evangelical theology has moved on in the last century. Orthodox theology never agreed with penal substitution atonement, and within Catholic theology, alternative visions have always existed. Examples are found in the writings of John Eriugena (815-877), later in the writings of the Franciscan Duns Scotus (1265-1308), in the "Christus Victor," or in

the pre-Augustinian views on atonement of the early church.

To return to Dorothy Day, it was not an ideology or moral system that brought her back to faith in God (she already had a great sense of morality), but rather love and beauty: *"As she described it, the beauty of the created world convinced her that there must be a Creator. The joy of human love helped her to realise the beauty of divine love... She came to see that her life – and all our lives – are a search for love, a search for a love that is Supreme, for God."* — U.S. R.C.

Archbishop J.H. Gomez

The purpose of the Christian life is to grow closer to God, and let there be no doubt about this: God loves the sinner. It is God's will for all humankind to be saved (there is no predestination!). For Benedict, Christian life, and the monk's life, is a school of serving the Lord. In other words, it is a school in learning to love, which we do by learning to become

humble. To prefer nothing to the love of Christ implies that we open ourselves up to learning to know Christ. The love of Christ that comes before all else keeps us from judging others.

My personal relationship with God becomes clearer as I struggle in life with myself and in my response to who God calls me to be. First, I needed to learn to see and know my true self before understanding my relationship with God. God loves my true self, not my false self. And learning about myself often happened in relationship with other people. I have made many mistakes throughout my journey and one needs to ask for forgiveness. We will fail at times, if not all the time.

*"We need to fall, and we need to be aware of it; for if we did not fall, we should not know how weak and wretched we are of ourselves, nor should we know our Maker's marvellous love so fully."* — Julian of Norwich

To love God, to love neighbour, stranger, and enemy demands the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart, a deep sense of humility, and a relationship with God. How do we find God? It all begins with listening with the ear of your heart.

**Br Johannes Maertens**



*Dorothy Day, Maryfarm, NY*

# Where Olive Trees Weep

*Rose Chacko writes about life in Palestine under occupation*

I lived in Palestine from 2012-13 and visited for the first time in ten years last September. I wrack my brain about what part I can play in bringing an end to the horrors going on in that beautiful, hospitable, and magical country and know that whatever we do needs to be collective.

I recently watched an excellent documentary called “Where Olive Trees Weep,” about the multifaceted, brutal, and non-stop oppression Palestinians face under Israeli occupation. I would recommend it to everyone.

We continue to watch in horror as the atrocities in Gaza become more vicious and depraved daily, and we continue to watch our government completely ignore the mass murder and maiming of civilians while insisting on continuing to sell arms to Israel – to “defend itself.”

But we also continue to see ordinary people rising in resistance, saying “not in my name,” risking arrest and the derailing of their lives because they know what is happening is not OK; it is not normal, it is something evil they refuse to normalise and accept.



*Olive Tree, Sara Anne Miller, 2018*

I asked someone I know from the occupied West Bank to give me a brief summary of what Palestinians are facing there, to hopefully offer a tiny snapshot of what life is like in the “calmer” and “safer” part of occupied Palestine.

He wrote about how his generation, born in the nineties, had years of their lives stolen from them. He described the “popular schools” that were created after the massive Israeli invasion of the West Bank in 2002, which was followed by repeated incursions, making it unsafe to walk around the city.

Children stayed in their neighbourhoods, and lessons were given in storerooms by a local teacher, “because in those days the internet wasn’t available everywhere like today, and there was a lack of electricity”.

“It was not an adequate education,” he said.

“We will also never forget our friends, martyred as schoolchildren, who never got to complete their educations. After the 2002 invasion, we suffered for over 10 years until the economy improved, new infrastructure had been built, and the destruction left by the invasion had faded.” When he finished university, he said his dad had just set up a new project, a manufacturing plant, but “the occupation forces came and blew it up, causing us to fall into huge debt”. He said it took 8 years before the family could even start repaying the debt.

He remarked on the restrictions on movement Israel places on Palestinians in the “big prison” that is the West Bank: “In this current time, in 2024, and before, if I wanted to go from Nablus to Ramallah, I’d have to wait for hours at checkpoints. And if, when I got to the front ..., I might be met with an Israeli soldier in a bad mood who makes me go back just because he’s bored. But if this soldier is in an angry mood, it’s very possible he could shoot me and I’d lose my life - for this reason, I prefer not to leave my city. So after the events of October 7, I have lost my job, due to the



difficulties travelling from town to town.”

His final summary was this: “We Palestinians in the West Bank live a tragedy, deprived of the most basic rights to live on this land. But whatever happens, we won’t leave our land just for someone else to come and enjoy it - whatever the consequences. In every Palestinian family, there is a harrowing story, a tragedy, and a deep pain inside. There are those who lost their families, those who lost their futures, and those who have been left physically disabled.”

Back to the documentary. At the end, one of the main protagonists, a Palestinian Christian female journalist and activist from Jerusalem who never stops fighting for her people, says something like: “We Palestinians have long given up on hoping others will rescue us. We can rescue ourselves. But what



*Where the Olive Trees Weep, 2024*

you have to do, is stop feeding the machine, and propping up this evil system.” She is talking about a settler-colonial system – Zionism – which renders Palestinians not simply worthless, but actively unwanted – to the point that Israeli soldiers habitually spray machine gun fire as they enter refugee camps at any time of day, injuring dozens with life-ruining injuries. No compensation, no acknowledgement, no redress. Not reported.

This is a system we are propping up; with every arms sale to Israel, every trade deal, and every bank funding operations on stolen land. A few years ago, the UN released a list of companies operating in Israel’s illegal settlements. There are also the arms companies making millions from the mass slaughter of the trapped and starved people of Gaza, and elsewhere. And others. The Palestinian journalist was calling on us to fight our own complicity, to break those links, to stop bankrolling an unjust and violent system of oppression and appropriation. We need to think about, explore, and discuss together ways we can start to do this. The Conservative Party fought hard to get a bill through at the start of this year. Dubbed the “Anti-Boycott Bill”, it was expressly about stopping public bodies, i.e. councils and universities, from divesting from Israel, or from companies operating in

its illegal settlements.

However, after calling the election, parliament was dissolved, and so was the bill, which had seemed on the brink of passing.

When it dissolved, just like that, when it had seemed a done deal, it felt like a weight being lifted suddenly – maybe like divine intervention. Maybe, I thought, God is giving us a boost and showing us one path to take. And at the same time, maybe He is showing how what seems to be unstoppable repression, and insurmountable obstacles, can disintegrate in an instant. What seems impossible right now, freedom for the Palestinian people, could materialise in a way we can’t imagine, in a way that will seem a miracle. A number of UK universities recently announced they are divesting from arms companies supplying Israel – a testament to the determination of students who have led protests across the country. This would not have been achievable – at any rate, not so easily – if the Anti-Boycott Bill had passed. It is a huge win and should give us hope. We must take advantage of this reprieve.

Let us pray for peace, freedom, and justice in Palestine and everywhere, and let us start organising together to break our ties to the oppression of others.

**Rose Chacko**

# 18 months of imprisonment: Free Ibrahima Bah

*Captain Support UK on the crime of Ibrahima Bah's wrongful imprisonment*

**O**n 14th December 2022, Ibrahima Bah was arrested hours after surviving a deadly shipwreck in the middle of the Channel. Four men are known to have drowned, including one of Ibrahima's closest friends, and up to five are still missing at sea.

Ibrahima was steering the dinghy across the Channel before it broke apart next to a fishing boat, the Arcturus. In court, Ibrahima told how he was threatened by smugglers and forced to drive the unseaworthy dinghy. Survivors recounted how, when the dinghy got into danger, Ibrahima did all he could to save them. He steered the boat towards the fishing vessel, telling his fellow passengers to keep calm. He kept the sinking dinghy close to the Arcturus while others clambered on board to safety. He was one of the last to get onto the Arcturus. Very sadly, however, others disappeared into the waves.

18 months later, the Sengalese teenager remains in prison. In February, an all-white jury in Canterbury found Ibrahima guilty of facilitating illegal arrival to the UK, and four counts of manslaughter by gross negligence. He is now serving a 9 year and 6 month

sentence. An appeal has been launched by Ibrahima's lawyers.

Ibrahima is being scapegoated for deaths at the border which are the direct result of violent policies designed to keep people seeking asylum out of the UK. When there are no alternative, safe routes to enter the country, people are forced to take dangerous journeys to reach safety. More than 400 people have died trying to cross the Calais border since 1999, a figure which is very likely to be an undercount. Every and each of these deaths is a direct result of racist State policies to curb migration.

Ibrahima is one of many who have been imprisoned under new laws implemented in 2022 under the Nationality and Borders Act. This expanded the Government's ability to imprison people for how they arrive into the country, whether or not they claim asylum. This is widely acknowledged to contravene the Refugee Convention.



*Ibrahima Bah, Kent Police*

At least 300 people have been convicted of their own "illegal arrival" after arriving on a "small boat" since June 2022. This includes many imprisoned for steering dinghies. Imprisoning them is a violent practice which compounds trauma, isolates individuals from communities, and deprives them of their liberty.

We will continue to support Ibrahima and others as they are imprisoned for exercising freedom of movement. Borders kill.

Today (14th June 2024) also marks the anniversary of the shipwreck of an overcrowded trawler, the Adriana, off the coast of Pylos in Greece. While an estimated 750 were on board, only 104 survived. Nine of these survivors were subsequently accused of smuggling offences, and, similar to Ibrahima, they faced life sentences. In May, the case against them was thrown out due to lack of evidence. We join global calls for justice for all victims of border violence and their families.

Free Ibrahima! Free all captains! Open the border!

**Captain Support UK**



## Feeling Seen

*Anthony V. Capildeo OPL is a Trinidadian Scottish writer of poetry and non-fiction. Recent work includes Polkadot Wounds (Carcenet, 2024), and an essay series on touch and mourning. They are Writer in Residence at the University of York.*

*I Stand Here Ironing – Tillie Olsen*

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.’ – John Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’

They will welcome refugees  
And ask, *Who is my neighbour?*  
*Beauty is truth, truth beauty*  
I stand here admiring

The greatest affront to them  
a handsome Arab father  
laughing cooking food to share  
abundantly a citizen  
of cities that are legend  
and living stone his children  
planting roses promises

*Beauty is truth, truth beauty*  
I stand here admiring  
They will welcome refugees  
And ask, Who is my neighbour?

Your place is to have no place  
Your face is an enclosure  
opened by greater powers  
You hold out an empty plate  
Petitioner the natural  
condition for you loser  
They want to feel compassion

They will welcome refugees  
And ask, *Who is my neighbour?*  
*Beauty is truth, truth beauty*  
I stand here admiring

The children look like children  
in family photographs  
of my family could be  
children of my family  
this should not make a difference  
but it does oh subtle fall  
all dead are equally real

# The Age of Insecurity

*Thomas Frost on Labour's failure to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable*

Members of the new Government have told us several times over the last few months that we have entered an “age of insecurity”. Keir Starmer used the phrase in June, as he was declaring his willingness to kill millions in nuclear strikes under unspecified circumstances, and his commitment to a huge increase in British military spending, to 2.5% of GDP. Rachel Reeves has used the phrase several times by way of diagnosing an illness for which her “securonomics” is the cure. The illness consists in political instability resulting in a lack of long-term investment; the cure consists in the creation of a new National Wealth Fund, which will invest £7.3 billion of public money into private businesses over the next five years, and in a refusal to substantially raise taxes or public spending, carrying on in all but name the policy of austerity which has caused so much needless suffering. And on the same theme, Labour’s manifesto proclaims an “age of insecurity” which necessitates “a return to the foundations of good government: national security, secure borders, and economic stability”, and an “enduring partnership” of the state with private business. As I write this the



Keir Starmer with British Troops, Stefan Rousseau/PA

new Government seems intent on following these promises through – Keir Starmer is telling the leaders of NATO about the urgency of increasing military spending, while his ministers insist there is no prospect of increasing public spending even to the minimal degree of ending the eugenicist two-child benefit cap.

Of course, many people in the UK are living in insecurity, and have been for many years: a third of households with people of working-age have less than £1000 in savings; several thousand people sleep rough each night; around a million undocumented immigrants live and work in this country with no employment protections, no ability to legally rent, and no access to public funds. And, of course, we all live with global insecurity, with a dozen or so competing nuclear-armed states expressing their willingness to slaughter each other’s populations given sufficient provocation; with ongoing wars fuelled by the arms industry which Labour continues to champion; with climate change

which Labour promises to do far too little to address; with around 120 million displaced people in the world whom Labour is committed to keeping out of our wealthy nation. Obviously, this is not the sort of insecurity which Starmer and Reeves are talking about. Labour has proposed – and the country has largely accepted – security for those who matter from the point of view of the British state. Labour’s “national security” will be achieved by subsidising a war of attrition in Ukraine, fought by conscripts and reducing still greater sections of the country to rubble, to end in a settlement almost certain to be no better for Ukrainians than that which could have been negotiated before the war began; and by a strengthened policy of nuclear deterrence which makes manifest a belief in the ultimate non-existence of the value of human life. Labour’s “economic stability” will involve propping up with public funds the conditions in which private capital can

continue to flourish, even at the expense of those in genuine economic insecurity.

Labour have said very little about what the commitment to “border security” will involve in practice, but what they have said is deserving of scrutiny. In their manifesto they praise the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Hong Kong humanitarian visas, and the tiny, strictly limited, and now defunct Syrian resettlement program, while committing to the prevention of arrivals by small boat. Presumably in Labour’s ideal world they would allow in only carefully selected, relatively affluent refugees and only those conveniently fleeing from a geopolitical rival, while preventing anyone else from reaching Britain by some means yet to be determined. We know that, in the real world, no such thing will happen. The people most desperately in need of refuge will rarely be those to whom it is most convenient to give it, and apart from that economic desperation is already enough of a driver by itself to make men, women and children make lethally dangerous crossings of the Sahara and the Mediterranean to get here. Yvette Cooper’s vaunted Border Security Command will not be able to fulfil its much-repeated mandate to “Smash the Gangs”, because it will do nothing that British and French security forces are not already doing with little success. But the focus on

traffickers as drivers of irregular migration is intended to obfuscate the reality that people come to Britain in small boats because of political, economic and climatic problems in their home countries to which Labour has no solution. The question is not whether or not we want people to come here, because they are going to keep coming regardless. The question is whether we treat them as human beings once they’re here.

There is no compelling reason to be optimistic about the new Government’s answer. They have refused to commit to the opening of any safe, legal routes to asylum, despite this being the only means of claiming asylum they would theoretically be willing to accept. Nothing has been said about restoring to asylum seekers the right to work which the last Labour government took from them; nothing has been said about reporting conditions. The Rwanda plan has been abandoned, not on grounds of its inhumanity but because it would not deport people quickly or efficiently enough. Nothing has been said suggestive of anything except a continuation of the hostile environment. The obsessive focus on “smashing” traffickers is particularly concerning given that, in the face of the extreme difficulty of actually catching traffickers, the last Government tended to

scapegoat refugees themselves, charging anyone who happened to have their hand on the tiller at any point in crossing with “facilitating illegal arrival”, providing minimal legal representation, and imposing custodial sentences long enough to preclude their ever being granted asylum. The plan to invest the new force with “counter-terrorism style powers” is hardly suggestive of any greater commitment to due process or to justice.

Dorothy Day asked long ago: “what right has any one of us to have security when God’s poor are suffering?” If you have any money, if you are white, if you are a British citizen, the new Government intends to give you a false sense of security at the expense of the poor, of migrants, and of anyone else it can get away with robbing. We have to reject such security as the Government is offering us. Those of us who are Christians know where we are obliged to place our loyalties – in those who are hungry, thirsty, unclothed, unhoused, or strangers in a strange land. If we can take him at his word, to follow Jesus is to give up your cloak, your house, your food, your time, all your possessions, and your social standing. He certainly expects us to give up our nuclear deterrent and our border. In an age of insecurity, we try to follow him as best as we are able.

**Thomas Frost**



# Going Out of Ourselves

*Anne M Jones on her inspiring cycle for the victims of Gaza*

“**Y**ou know this is a bit mad, don’t you?” my fellow cyclist Chris Rose said to me when we met to discuss cycling up Mont Ventoux. I was already aware the plan was mad, Mont Ventoux being a 1,900-foot ascent in the foothills of the Alps and part of the Tour de France route. And I am 82. But if the definition of ‘mad’ is ‘out of touch with reality,’ what could be more out of touch than the mass killings of innocent people, possibly as many as 35,000, half of them children?

*“...the first gift of God is creation itself... it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own significance...”*  
(Laudato Si, 2015)

My feelings of rage at the daily reality in Gaza swirl around inside me. One way of containing the rage is through some form of activity, and cycling is my panacea.

To untangle the mix of reasons for my ride, I have drawn upon the recent work of Austen Ivereigh, interpreting his own experiences on retreat with Pope Francis (Ivereigh, 2024). The shocking events of 7th October 2023, the subsequent barbaric war in Gaza, are hedged around



*Anne Jones, Photo by PA Media*

with pompous words such as ‘right to defend’ and ‘international frameworks,’ but the reality flies in the face of everything every human being is given from the moment we are created—life and the capacity for love and joy. Pope Francis, writing about the Judeo-Christian tradition, wrote the words above, pointing out that we are created out of love and for love. Warm, loving feelings are a natural response each time we see a baby or small child.

The rage I feel at the ceaseless bombings is intensely linked with my own creativity as a mother who has nurtured three children, as a worker with young troubled people, and as a grandmother fortunate enough to have witnessed another generation born, loved, and nurtured into flourishing.

My own creativity would be less had I not been blessed

with good health, strength, and inner resolve from the care and compassion I received from the day I was born. Gratitude for love and the urge to give back to the world come naturally to those who have been well-loved, and this is enhanced through a sense of a loving God all around us in this world.

Pope Francis asks us to examine our own foundation for serving God, to look at ways of serving God that take us outside of ourselves. Each one of us does this in our own way and according to our capacities. Huge demonstrations each week in cities across the world are a testimony to how strongly millions of people feel about this war. They are also affirming of one another, but most importantly, towards Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, who report back how affirming these are to each of them personally.

But for me, it is not enough to march every week because we are asked to make the most of the gifts God has given us. In my case, I am blessed with health and strength sufficient to know that, with some training, I can confidently suggest a ride like this. And I was very fortunate to be warmly taken seriously by Chris Rose from

the small human rights organisation Amos Trust. Not many people take old women seriously.

Pope Francis reminds us, "...it is better to live a shorter life serving others than a longer one resisting the call to God" (p.12). We express our gratitude for being created. But back to my rage again, and some historical contextualisation is relevant as I reflect back in some disbelief: growing up in the shadow of WW2, I learned about the UN Declaration of Human Rights and attended sixth form conferences on world citizenship. I was led to believe that genocide and atrocities would never happen again. Yet there have been over fifty wars since 1945, genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, and possibly now in Gaza—precise definitions are awaited, but I cannot wait, and I feel I owe it to my grandchildren's generation to call attention to the futility of trading in words while suffering is prolonged. This is part of serving others. In serving, we are called to watch out for narcissism, worldliness, and triumphalism: "...The second temptation is more subtle for anyone with a sense of mission... triumphalism (is) a sensational show of power..." (p.60).

Easier said than done, because when I have told some people and observed their reaction, I saw initially in myself the



*Mount Ventoux, 2014*

potential for a smug glow until I stopped the conversation in its tracks, reminding us all that I am doing this to raise money for children in Gaza. The response has been a pause for reflection upon what the words conjure up, and many people have said, "Do this for me."

This brings with it a huge responsibility to do my very best to make a good go of this. Which means training up and down the Surrey hills, in all weathers (including a hailstorm). Focusing on getting out of the house ready for a day on the hills instead of meeting a friend for coffee or going to an art gallery truly takes me out of myself.

And yet, what better way to connect with that life spirit, or '*ruah*' (God spirit), in the plants, trees, birds, and insects (*Laudato Si*): while cycling, I revel in the wonderful created world of sky and hedgerow, flowers and birdsong, and recall the poetry of Gerard Manley

Hopkins that "...the world is filled with the grandeur of God."

Worldliness is hard to avoid; some basic kit is essential, like a (much needed) pair of trainers, but being a vain sort of person, I could not resist buying in a colour that matches my bike. I simply have to forgive myself here. Raising money is not without some unease because I feel some discomfort asking friends; also, the company organising the donations has a quiet way of extracting additional donations for itself by instantly adding a percentage of a sum as it is donated, and it takes some time to find out how to avoid this. Capitalism red in tooth and claw. In the 'just-giving' universe, a sense of competitiveness not far from the surface can be generated, and so it is good to be warned about triumphalism.

However, I enjoy knowing that the money coming in will benefit the Al-Ahli children's hospital and a trauma centre





*Anne Jones pictured over the finish line, Photo by PA Media*

and Gaza Sunbirds, a project for Paralympian cyclists.

In serving God, we are asked to reconsider 'suffering': to not mind our own suffering. However, it is impossible to equate the suffering in Gaza with any of the self-imposed privations I have described as 'suffering'. Being caught in a hailstorm? There was a way out for me after just half an hour's ride to a train station and an hour's journey home. And leading a restricted life for a few months, in which priorities of exercise, good food, and rest over social events, has brought the joy of personal space for new spiritual insights.

Nonetheless, in the preparations, many narcissistic features come to mind, such as maintaining the good level of health I am

blessed with. I have lapped up the Zoe study lectures led by Professor Tim Spector (online), which emphasise the value of good nutrition and exercise as one ages. Notably, a recent study suggests we unlearn traditional niceties, such as offering to carry shopping bags for an older person, because weight-bearing exercise is good cardiovascular exercise.

A counterbalance to this self-absorption is the expectation that we continue to listen, and webinars from those Gazans who can be filmed, and from the West Bank, make me acutely aware continually why my own statement matters. For example, words from the Gaza poet Najwan Darwish, 'Exhausted on the Cross,' and works of artists Amer Shomali, Shareef Sahan

(Amos Trust webinars April 3 and April 23, 2024), reports from the village of Sebastiya (Hanwell-Sebastiya association webinar April 24, 2024), and words of Father Romanelli, parish priest of the Catholic church in Gaza (ICN 26.4.24) that people in Gaza "are sad, weary and heartbroken."

So, it is not mad to be eighty-two and cycling up a mountain.

(A final recommendation to potential pilgrims: my bedtime book has been *The Path to Rome* by Hilaire Belloc, about his 40 mile a day walk through thick and thin from France to Italy).

**Anne M Jones**

*To donate contact:*

[anne.150@phonecoop.coop](mailto:anne.150@phonecoop.coop)



## From the Archives

*Peter Maurin on St Francis' life of pilgrimage*

According to Johannes Jorgensen, a Danish convert, living in Assisi:

1. Saint Francis desired that men should give up superfluous possessions.

2. St Francis desired that men should work with their hands.

3. St Francis desired that men should offer their services as a gift.

4. Saint Francis desired that men should ask other people for help when work failed them.

5. Saint Francis desired that men should live free as birds.

6. Saint Francis desired that men should go through life giving thanks to God.

## GCH House Update

Over the last couple of months at Giuseppe Conlon House, we have undertaken a major renovation of the old presbytery. We needed to replace the old asbestos flooring that ran throughout and carry out significant fireproofing, damp-proofing, and insulation work. We used this opportunity to do a bit of redecorating and install a new kitchen-diner, which will hopefully make our winter mealtimes a lot warmer. We wish to thank all of our generous donors who made this work possible – we couldn't have done it without you!

We have also recently said goodbye to a number of members of our community. Our dear guests, Aron, Michael, and Rachid, have all managed to move on to new accommodation, and Colette will be moving to Tottenham to continue her important Justice & Peace work.

Finally, on Wednesday, 11 September at 7.30 pm, we are proud to present actor/playwright Michael Myers' one-hour stage play *The Priest's Tale*, a solo adaptation of the account of atomic-bomb survivor Fr Wilhelm SJ from John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. Refreshments provided.

## The Catholic Worker in the UK

London CW: Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1 BG ; Tel: 020 8348 8212; E: londoncatholicworker@yahoo.co.uk ; Web: [www.londoncatholicworker.org](http://www.londoncatholicworker.org) & [giuseppeconlonhouse.org](http://giuseppeconlonhouse.org) ; Twitter: @LndnCathWorker ; Facebook: London Catholic Worker

*At Giuseppe Conlon House we run a house of hospitality for homeless and destitute asylum seekers who are not allowed to work or claim benefits, and organize acts of prayer, witness and nonviolent resistance.*

The Catholic Worker Farm: Lynsters Farm, Old Uxbridge Road, West Hyde, Herts, WD3 9XJ ; Tel: 0923 777 201 ; E: [thecatholicworkerfarm@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thecatholicworkerfarm@yahoo.co.uk) ; Web: [www.thecatholicworkerfarm.org](http://www.thecatholicworkerfarm.org)

*The Farmhouse offers hospitality, accommodation and support to destitute women and children, and have a poustinia and hermitage retreat.*

Glasgow Catholic Worker: email: [glw@catholicworker.org.uk](mailto:glw@catholicworker.org.uk); website: [www.catholicworker.org.uk](http://www.catholicworker.org.uk)

*The Glasgow Catholic Worker offers a place of welcome for asylum seekers and destitute refugees in the centre of Glasgow at the Garnethill Multicultural Centre, open Sat 9:00 – 1:00, and a soup kitchen on Friday nights. They keep a regular vigil at Faslane Nuclear Base as well as having monthly meetings and prayers.*

When you have finished with this newsletter, please pass it to others!

# Giuseppe Conlon House Wishlist

## FOOD

Instant coffee  
Tinned tomatoes  
Cooking oil  
Kidney beans  
Lentils  
Chickpeas  
Rice  
Noodles  
Herbal tea  
Fruit Juice and squash  
Peanut butter  
Honey  
Sugar  
Chilli sauce  
Soy sauce  
Breakfast cereals  
Porridge oats



## TOILETRIES

Toilet paper  
Disposable razors  
Bars of soap  
Toothbrushes  
Toothpaste  
Shampoo



## CLEANING

Eco-friendly products  
Washing Powder  
Bicarbonate of soda  
Multi-purpose cleaner  
Cream cleaner  
Toilet cleaner  
Floor cleaner



## MISCELLANEOUS

Umbrellas

## SUPPORT OUR WORK

At Giuseppe Conlon House we run a house of hospitality for destitute asylum seekers unable to work or claim benefits. We are a part of the radical, Christian, pacifist Catholic Worker movement started in 1933 in New York by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. For more information visit: [www.catholicworker.com](http://www.catholicworker.com).

## DONATIONS WELCOME!

We are not paid for this work. We receive nothing from the government. We rely on our readers' donations to pay bills, volunteer and guest expenses, building repairs, printing, and household supplies.

Please do not donate pork products!

Many of our guests do not eat pork for religious reasons.

## WAYS TO DONATE

**Cheque:** send cheques payable to 'London Catholic Worker', to 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1BG

**Online banking:** London Catholic Worker, Triodos Bank, Account No: 20066996  
Sort Code: 16 58 10  
IBAN:GB98NWBK60000410 018573

**Paypal:** visit our home page [www.londoncatholicworker.org](http://www.londoncatholicworker.org)

**Standing Order:** to arrange a standing order use the adjacent form on the left.

Standing Order Form <small>Please use block letters</small>	
I wish to pay the London Catholic Worker £10/ £20/£40/other amount <input type="text"/> per month/ other	
Payments to be made monthly/ other First Payment to be made on: <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> / 14 and monthly thereafter	
Name of your bank <input type="text"/>	
Address of your bank <input type="text"/>	
Your account name <input type="text"/>	
Your account number <input type="text"/>	
Your bank sort code <input type="text"/>	
Please pay:	For the Credit of: London Catholic Worker
Triodos Bank	Account Number 20066996
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Bristol BS1 5AS	Until further notice the sum of the value indicated above
Signed	Date
Your email address: <input type="text"/>	Your Name and Address <input type="text"/>
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