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## Love the Stranger

*Martin Nevell on the bishops' recent teaching document on migration*

**P**eter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, wanted Catholics to “blow the dynamite of Catholic Social Teaching”, instead of “putting it in a hermetically sealed container and sitting on the lid”. “Love the Stranger” is a forthright, warm and strong new teaching document published by the Catholic Bishops in England and Wales published in February this year, in the middle of the debate about the ‘Illegal Migration Bill’. Read in our current context, it is a clear challenge to attitudes that seem to be ones of widespread hostility to migrants and refugees in this country right now, and to the policies of the UK government as reflected in the ‘Illegal Migration Bill’, which has since been passed by parliament. The Bishops’ have attempted to expose some of that well hidden dynamite to the air, so as to help open some eyes and clear away some spiritual blindness.

“Love the Stranger” is a striking title. It is not the positive, practical but maybe a bit pragmatic “Welcome the Stranger”. But the warm, deeply felt, from the heart, “love” the Stranger. It is also a reference to texts from Deuteronomy and Leviticus." Leviticus 19: 33-34 says "When an alien – or stranger - lives with you in your land, do not mistreat them. The alien – or stranger - living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt.”



Ernst Barlach, *The Good Samaritan*, 1919

This relates to the first and most basic of the 24 Principles the Bishops list “to guide our response to refugees and migrants”. I'm not going to go through all 24 principles in the document, but I will pick out some that seem to me to be of particular interest.

That first principle is simply that our response to migrants and refugees is rooted in the innate worth of each human person. That is, it is rooted in the basic dignity and respect that is due each and every person, no matter what. So this applies to everyone. We are all made in the image of God. We are all sisters and brothers in the one family of God. We are all children of the one God, under the one sky. We are not different to, or separate from, people who happen to have been born and live elsewhere. *(Continued on p.2)*

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The Bishops say that everything else in their document, is built on this principle. Which they also say is based on Pope Francis' Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti". According to the Bishops, Fratelli Tutti "establishes the universal context which should underpin our response to migrants and refugees." Which is that "it expresses the need to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives." The Bishops state that Pope Francis's reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan is a call for us not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbour, but rather to actively decide to become neighbours to all.

They say that this is a call to recognize the rights of all people, "even" those born beyond our own borders.

The second principle of the Bishops document recognises the long established principle of Catholic Social Teaching of the "universal destination of goods". Specifically, this implies that "We in richer nations should not exclude others from the enjoyment of the riches available to us", just because of where they were born.

The fourth principle importantly states that they "recognise the right of all people to flourish in their homeland". They go on to state lots of things that flow

from that: that the wealthy nations have a responsibility to promote the conditions in which people can "flourish in the homelands": by, for example, fair trading relationships: by preventing companies and others based in our countries from engaging in corrupt practices and promoting the growth of corruption: by providing aid, and by tackling the climate emergency.



The other side of the coin from "the right of all people to flourish in their homeland" is the "right to migrate", which is Principle 7. This right applies to not only by those fleeing threats to their safety, but also by those seeking to build a better life for themselves and their families. What the government likes to call "economic migrants". This bears repeating: the Bishops say that economic migrants have a right to migrate, in order to build a better life for themselves and their families.

The Bishops do say, as we might expect Bishops to say, in Principle 8, that they "recognise that states have a right to control their borders". However, they also say that "such measures cannot be based on economic factors alone", nor can they only be based on what their own

citizens want, or think is good for them. States also have "obligations to the wider world" - to people outside their boundaries. In fact, in my understanding, the principle from Catholic Social Teaching of the 'preferential option for the poor' also implies that border control policies have to consider the needs of the poorest first, rather than the privileges of those within our borders, in the case of the UK and similar wealthy countries.

Principle 9 of the document is "We encourage the extension of safe routes such as resettlement programmes, visa schemes and humanitarian corridors, so that people can exercise their right to migrate in a dignified and humane manner". CSAN, the Catholic Social Action Network, an agency of the Bishops Conference, says perhaps more clearly, that "the Illegal Migration Bill... amounts to an asylum ban".

Principle 13 states, "We call for the sanctity of life to be prioritised in all border security arrangements and reject measures that place people in danger or deny reasonable assistance to those in need". This is in direct contradiction of the governments stated desire to "stop the small boats", apparently at any price. It also contradicts any arrest or prosecution of those working

to rescue people in flimsy boats trying to cross the Mediterranean or the English Channel or anywhere else.

Principle 14 states, “We call upon the government to avoid the use of immigration detention and arbitrary expulsion”. Again, this directly contradicts the government desire to deport people to Rwanda for not arriving 'legally'. This is a form of arbitrary expulsion.

Principle 15. says “We urge the fulfilment of obligations under international frameworks protecting migrants and refugees, such as the Refugee Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”. So, if there is any talk of withdrawing from such things as the European Convention on Human Rights, or other international agreements such as in these, we know where the Bishops stand.

This principle is in accordance with the statement in Fratelli Tutti that international law is currently the best guide to morality in international relations, and in the behaviour of states. It is worth noting the impact that would have, in the light of, for example, the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, The Paris – and other – climate agreements – and the possibility of conducting wars.

Principle 18 states “We recognise that trafficking and slavery are exacerbated by a lack of accessible alternatives for migration or seeking sanctuary - efforts to tackle trafficking and slavery must therefore go beyond more active law enforcement; we also need to support people to flourish in their homelands, establish more safe routes for migrants and refugees, and work to eliminate the demand for those services that slave labour continues to meet”.

Principle 20 states “We support the simplification of routes to citizenship and opportunities for people to regularise their immigration status.” This is in direct opposition to what has happened in this country over the years. Having 25 years direct personal experience of the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, it is clear to me how successive governments have made it more and more difficult, lengthy, complicated and expensive



for the people we know to find their way from an initial granting of 'leave to remain' to finally achieving Citizenship status.

And finally, Principle 23 states “We encourage policies that give migrants and refugees the right to work, to facilitate their contribution to the common good of our society”. I'm sure all our experience is that the vast majority of people want to work and contribute to society. And that includes those who have travelled here fleeing persecution, poverty or war. They want to work, to support themselves and their families, and contribute to whichever country they live in. Not least because they come from countries where it is necessary to work simply to survive, even at the most basic level.

Many of us would want to go beyond what our Catholic Bishops have said here. But even if we do not, we have much to say to our government, our politicians, our churches, our parishes, our neighbours, our world. Let us give thanks for that today, as we continue to pray for the victims, the crucified of our world, and for conversion of the head, and of the heart, of our nation, and the opening of our eyes.

**Martin Newell**

## Home Office Vigil

*Bishop Paul McAleenan addressed the Home Office Vigil in June. Here is the transcript of his speech:*

**T**he reality of the life of a refugee, the hardships and hazards they endure opens this Refugee Week as we listen to the accounts of the latest tragedy off the coast of Greece. No doubt there will be investigations and enquiries into the tragedy, into the events of the preceding hours before the boat sank so that the truth can be uncovered. Those enquiries are important.

Our concern is not simply the events and decisions which took place immediately before that tragedy but the decisions and the policies which have been in place for many, many years which make such tragedies almost inevitable. The term safe and legal routes come to mind again. We see again the consequences of policies which do not include compassion, the theme of this year's Refugee Week. We see again the need for international cooperation.

When law and policies increase suffering, compound trauma, and put lives in danger, justice is not served. To advocate on behalf of migrants, refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers is not simply kindness but it is a plea for justice for the most vulnerable, it is to do what the law should do. Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers have had to abandon those things from which one has the right to expect stability and security, homeland, family, familiar customs. Our solidarity with them comes from this basic belief, that we have a duty, an obligation towards those who have lost everything.

When they encounter rejection, not surprisingly there will be consequences which impact upon their mental and physical well-being. There will also be consequences which impact upon the whole human family. So I repeat that to support migrants and refugees is not almsgiving but an attempt to build fraternity and unity by encouraging the sharing of resources.



Bishop Paul McAleenan Vigil address, [Mazur/cbcew.org.uk](https://www.mazur/cbcew.org.uk)

In Isaiah a verse describing the manner of the Redeemer in his pursuit of justice says of him, 'He does not break the crushed reed nor quench the wavering flame'. If someone has fled their homeland, crossed a desert and a sea and survives and is then detained, denied the right to work, threatened with deportation is it likely that the flame of hope which they managed to keep alive is going to be strengthened or extinguished?

We oppose Immigration systems which threaten to destroy hope, which divide people into categories giving different rights to each category. Whether a person is a citizen, a migrant or a refugee they have a dignity, that innate dignity is our starting point and one which what ever else we must keep in mind. To say we respect someone's dignity is one thing, though I don't think the word 'respect' captures the fullness of our obligation. The dignity of a person is so sacrosanct it needs to be protected and promoted, it involves relationship.

To meet a refugee and listen to their experience is very enlightening, informative and moving. We may not have met a refugee in the flesh; nevertheless we can stand with them and for them. That is what we are doing now, making a statement, declaring they are our brothers and sisters. So I thank you for all you do, for your presence here today at the beginning of Refugee Week. May our prayers and our work bear fruit for the good of all especially those who have nothing.

**Bishop Paul McAleenan**

# Scarred

*A report from the frontlines of the refugee crisis in Dunkirk by Br Johannes Maertens*



Dunkirk Refugee Camp, *Art Refuge*

**A**long the Dunkirk (Grand Synth) refugee camp there runs a path made of gravel, dirt, thorny bushes and shallow pits; the path lying between a railway track and a heavy-duty truck road. The women and men refugees and children walk up and down the path to get water, some food from the distribution tables in the afternoon or to try to see a nurse or medic. Some make use of supermarket trolleys to transport water but then take the dangerous road.

We drove up together in a caravan with the team of Doctors For The World on to the path with an ambulance, a psychosocial activity van, a car for transport to the hospital and a van for the information team.

Seventeen refugees from different countries came to the 'caravan' that afternoon all with their own specific questions.

Standing near our large map of the world spread out on thistles and dirt, two Afghan young men asked me if I knew their country? One spoke a good bit of English and his younger slim gentle friend didn't. They showed me the route they took from Afghanistan to Dunkirk as they are on their way to England. These two young men were very motivated to make it.

Like these two young men a few hundred people live here in the camp, scattered and hidden in the green foliage, there are fewer people here than in the Calais camp, but the conditions are much worse. The landscape in Dunkirk is scarred by human activity, and people are scarred by the rough landscape and a lack of a real permanent human presence. Although many people pass by, refugees and volunteers, the place feels rough, desolate and not inhabited. Tents are hidden away in bushes. The stay of refugees in this temporary make shift camp is, in general very short, people come and go hoping to cross to England.

Meanwhile in the van a young woman took a seat waiting for the GP, and another young woman after her. I can't write about their personal stories nor about our assumptions about them, these are not mine to tell. Blisters, ulcers, and wounds on feet and legs caused by the absence of clean water were treated; four refugees, of whom two women, were taken to hospital and when we drove away from the dusty thorny path I looked into the eyes of an Ethiopian man, who looked lost, desperate and above all very alone.

**Br Johannes Maertens**



Br Johannes with volunteers at Dunkirk camp, *Art Refuge*

# Why Vigil?

Anne M Jones reflects on our Home Office vigil held in the wake of the Messenia migrant boat disaster



Home Office Vigil on 19th June, Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

Can 'vigil' be used as a verb? I think it can because the actions involved in joining this monthly event, 'Vigil for refugees', outside the Home Office, are complex.

We participate, meaning we have made a clear decision well in advance of the date, to get to Marsham Street, a journey that might take an hour or three.

We stand on hard pavement, are discomforted by the cold or rain dripping down to make our sheets of paper soggy, or welcome sunshine warming us.

All of our cognitive functions have been and are, engaged, which makes 'vigil' as a verb even more significant. But above all our emotions are engaged because it is mentally painful reading through the long list of refugees who have died in the month a year ago while seeking sanctuary. This is hard work- 25 drowned off the coast of the Canaries including 7 babies ... 1 unknown drowned off Amos ... 4 unknown ... a pregnant mother ... a woman shot at close range while trying to enter Greece.

Samos... 4 unknown ... a pregnant mother ... a woman shot at close range while trying to enter Greece.

If we pause through the readings to consider the terror of each person's situation the sorrow is unbearable. I might instead avoid the pain by focusing on the geography of each environment or reading the words correctly. Or sometimes I think of the Marys waiting outside the tomb.

So, in this way, 'vigil' is far more than standing solemnly to acknowledge something

significant. And it matters, as an ongoing fixture that absorbs my own sense of planning into my life. Why does it matter? First for me is that I have talked with teenage young men in Calais whose mothers have packed them off from Kabul or Aleppo, with the words, “You must go, you are not safe here.” These young men had no idea when or whether they would ever see their mothers again, and made potentially lethal journeys. At least they are still alive. But when tragedy occurs, do the mothers ever eventually know. And when they do, their grief will be fathomless. For those ‘unknown,’ who else is praying for them?

In the days when I packaged my teenage boys off to far places, with their new rucksacks, strong boots and a brownie camera I was anxious but almost totally certain I would see them again. As I did. But at times the fears and worries as they sent a postcard from Iran or Pakistan were overwhelming, and I today I pray for those mothers who will

never see their sons again. (And the irony is not missed at how easy it was in the 1990s for Western kids to travel east).

Secondly, bearing witness to appalling tragedies that could be avoided, matters. (Grenfell also keeps its vigils). I like to think that our vigil outside the Home Office stirs a few consciences.

Thirdly, we draw attention to ourselves and our intentions. “Just a bunch of religious nutters” might be the response from casual observers, but when they bother to stop and ask, some are genuinely interested, and the word ‘refugee’ takes on a human meaning in the way Pope Francis describes, ‘Every person has a name and a face and a story’.

Over the years that I have been vigiling, among our prayers, we have spoken the words: “Today we are called upon more than ever to welcome those fleeing from war...open our hearts and those of our country...to.”

those who need our shelter. ‘I have prayed and fervently hoped this, yet we now have watched, on April 20th, as our government criminalises refugees. This brought on another kind of pain for me because it flies in the face of everything my generation and I felt was still in place, namely some decent humanitarian values within our government.

Yesterday, at the International Workers May Day rally at Clerkenwell Green, I struck up a conversation with a woman holding a banner saying, ‘welcome refugees.’ I told her I liked her banner. She replied, “Someone just gave it to me, and they also gave me this, I don’t know what it means.” She handed me a badge that read ‘Stop Rwanda.’ I was baffled and asked if she had not heard about Rwanda. “No, I don’t read the papers or watch TV, so I protect myself from all the pain of the terrible things around me,” she said.

Her comment begs another question—why are we doing this? Why are we vigiling, i.e., travelling, standing, reading, suffering some sort of pain?

Perhaps part of the answer lies in those famous words of Martin Neimoller: ‘First, they came for the socialists, but I did not speak out because I was not a socialist...then they came for the trade unionists but I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist...then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew...then they came for me and there was no-one left to speak for me.’



Br Johannes Maertens addresses the Vigil, Mazur/cbcw.org.uk

Anne M Jones

# A Reflection on the Elbit Protests

*Rida Vaquas discusses the sacrifices of those protesting against Elbit Systems*

A few months ago, an old friend, Tom, messaged me complaining about the lack of good books at the police station. He'd been arrested. I asked what happened, and with characteristic understatement, he replied that he'd been 'involved in the Elbit stuff.'

Elbit Systems are Israel's largest private weapons manufacturer – and one with multiple factories in the UK and close relationship to the British state. Its UK factories, despite repeated denials by their spokespeople, manufacture drones that are then deployed by Israeli military. In May, their factory in Leicestershire became subject to a siege by Palestine Action activists – aiming to shut it down. Through targeting production and supply chains, Palestine Action hit Elbit where it hurts – in their stock prices. It comes at a cost: around fifty activists were arrested.

I asked Tom why he thought it was worthwhile braving arrest to take a stand against the arms industry. He said: 'We have more power than we think, to stand up to the arms industry in our backyard. They are making obscene profits out of death, and resisting that just feels so urgent. But it's a highly sensitive industry, and every disruption we cause cuts into those profit margins. And I think everyone who was there would say that the response from Elbit Systems showed that these companies are terrified of direct action like this.'

I have to wonder why I failed to be there. To make peace, as the Gospel calls us to do, is to strike out against the manufacture of death. It means making a serious attempt to stop the use of arms. In our society, if we seriously believe in peace, we need to resist the arms industry, an industry which reaps nearly \$600 billion in sales from a global culture of war. To target Elbit Systems is the start of that.



My friend's arrest reminded me that there is no belief outside of action. I might say all manner of very worthy things about the plight of Palestinians, the evils of war, and the British state's complicity in the massacre of innocents. But if I am not willing to put my skin in the game, to suffer for the end of suffering, the words mean nothing.

It is easy, all too easy, to make excuses for ourselves – of course I have a busy white-collar job and of course I don't want to lose it. But God did not call us to self-preservation; he called us to lay down our lives for each other and ultimately for Him. Rosa Luxemburg, a revolutionary socialist, was put on trial in February 1914, as she insisted that German workers must refuse to fight in a war against their French brothers. Someone asked her why she didn't run away; she said: 'I assure you that I would not flee even if I were threatened with the gallows... I consider it absolutely necessary to accustom our party to the idea that sacrifices are part of a socialist's work in life.'

If sacrifice is desirable for socialists, it's unavoidable for Christians. The Lord tells us to 'take up your cross and follow me' – and the early Christians knew this was no metaphor. Every time I fail to turn up, to bear witness to injustice and attempt to stop it, I am rejecting the Cross. The actions of those surrounding Elbit day after day reveal to me that an easy life is not a good one. May the Lord deliver me from my continued moral cowardice.

Rida Vaquas



# Why is renunciation important?

*A reflection on the importance of renunciation and rest in our lives*

In our daily lives we are buried beneath mountains of obligations, desires, ambitions. We are buried beneath other people's ideas, emotions, beliefs. Who we are is lost in the vortex of forces; we are unable to take control of our lives, we are drowned in stress and anxiety, we are unable to know ourselves.

We are covered in the layers of the external world and become so habituated to these layers that they become indistinguishable from us. We believe them to be part of reality, a necessary facet of our lives. This is not to say that these layers are 'false' or 'deceitful' or 'wrong'. They are just part of the experiential world. Nor is it to say there is some 'true self' which can only be discovered by renunciation – this is just a cliché. I do not see renunciation as some black and white path to 'truth over falsehood'. Instead I see it as yin to yang; an opposite of participation, which makes up part of our totality. In other words, it is precisely over-participation that makes renunciation so relevant.

Renunciation is a state of cleansing, a stripping away of external layers to reveal to what is left when those layers are not dominant. That part of us that is buried can once more be revealed.

Once you have renounced the experiential world you can remain in that state or follow the instinct to rebuild your life. But this time you can choose what layers you add with more care. Once you return to nothing, it is much easier to mindfully build back up to something.

Once you recognize that the layers are just layers, they lose their dominance over you; they become contingent, changeable. When you stop identifying so strongly with all of the things you are carrying, you are able to drop them and then only pick up what is actually good for you.



Renunciation can be a daunting process – shaving off the hair which gave you identity, leaving the job that gave you security, cutting off the friendships that you thought were forever, turning away from the promise of romance and love, reducing your power to consume goods, focusing less on pleasures of the world, abandoning the causes that you held to heart, giving up the path to 'progress'. But is it more daunting than being devoured by externalities, without ever experiencing what you are at your most basic foundation?

Not everyone will follow the instinct to renounce – not even for a short period of time. These people will find unhealthy ways to resume their destructive course, harming themselves and others. They might try to use therapy or medication to keep themselves 'stable' – this is like building a house in a swamp and spending your energy trying to keep it standing. Sometimes the house has to be left to collapse to the ground.

We only need to look at the sick capitalist society we are living in to see how far we have taken this fear of change. The 'developed world' drowns in its own meaninglessness, grows ever more unequal and corporate, pits everyone against everyone else, poisons and destroys the living world, burns people out in the workplace, turns spirituality into another commodity.

The path of renunciation is needed now more than ever. Not in the form of some corporate yoga session or 'guaranteed-results, life-coaching' marketed at white professionals, but a real rebellion against that unsustainable life in the first place. This renunciation is a revolutionary act, but only as a side-effect. Striving for political change is, after all, nothing more than an external layer.

The aim of renunciation is to find yourself, in the domain of yourself. It is a place necessarily beyond the good and evil of common morality, beyond 'progress', beyond obligation, beyond everything but you. How could it be anything else?

Sel Nyteshade

## Refugee Christians are searching for the community seen in Acts. Where is it?

*Br Johannes writes about the importance of the early Church's witness for the refugee crisis*

*“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favour with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”*  
(Acts 2:42-47)

For some Christians, this famous Bible quote from the Acts of the Apostles describes the early Church's first love—and as someone wrote, sometimes the Church has to rediscover that first love. For other Bible commentators, this image of the early church in Jerusalem is only an ideal; unattainable during our earthly life. The evangelist Luke wrote these words with the eagerness of the Resurrection and Pentecost freshly in mind. Yet, the text has been and still is an inspiration for religious communities old and new: people living and praying together, sharing their gifts and skills to the praise of God; new and old monastic communities, Catholic Worker houses and other intentional communities alike.

Yet anyone who has spent some time in community will know that community life can be challenging as well! And while for some it is healing and empowering, others might wither away if they aren't careful.

In our different Christian cultures, somehow we have adapted ourselves to accept that what



we believe and preach, we cannot always live in our different Christian cultures, somehow we have adapted ourselves to accept that what we believe and preach, we cannot always live up to ourselves. We are not always proud of it, but who actually gives away his second coat to the poor? “Anyone who has two coats must share with the person who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.” Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Although some people do, and they do more.

But imagine now someone reading this passage for the first time, someone outside our Christian culture for whom just confessing Christ or simply being baptized means the risk of being jailed or condemned to death: these words probably sound like heaven. These Christians probably are forced to live in solidarity with each other as the first Christians in Jerusalem had to.

On my last visit to the refugee camps in Calais, I met a man like that. A rather small man—middle-aged I think—came to me, and asked if he could have a word. He spoke a bit of broken English and referred to himself as a ‘broken man’ and he ‘hadn't always been like that’. It was almost miraculous how on that day his Google Translate fluently translated from Arabic to French and vice versa. And he added some English words he knew to the conversation. Now he was in the process of claiming asylum in France.

Ahmed was a Kurdish man who came from Iraq, at some time in his life he had converted to Christ and opened up to a relationship with GOD. He was obviously a man who prayed regularly, and he knew the early church in the New Testament. In confidence he said “in Christ we are all brothers” and “we are sheep of the same Shepherd, aren’t we?” I confirmed yes, but was thinking how he’s now expecting that I might be able to help him.

Ahmed challenged my faith with some of his questions and remarks. He was telling me about some of his current struggles. That GOD has always been there for him, but that now he didn’t understand where GOD was leading him. Looking for a safe country, he had been trying to get to the UK, but now decided to stay in France.

It puzzled him he had met no Christians. Where were they? Where is that Jerusalem community Luke writes about?

Although, he is not living in Calais anymore, he had come down to the Catholic Day Centre a few times. He said “it is the first time I see you here, where have you been?” while pointing towards my cross and habit (my blue monk’s clothes). I had to explain I live in London, and try to come two days a month. Trying to engage local people, I called one of the Roman Catholic Sisters into the conversation. She proposed he could go to

mass on Sunday (as Catholics do) and speak with the priest after. I knew that wasn’t what Ahmed was looking for. He was looking for the incarnate day-to-day expression of the Eucharist: to gather together (around the table) to thank and praise GOD, to break and share what we have and who we are with each other, as Christ did for us. To be brothers and sisters of the same Good Shepherd. He was looking for Christian community.

It happened that that Sunday was the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, and I had to preach in my community. I didn’t need any inspiration anymore—my sermon on the Good Shepherd was made with this encounter. In my sermon I referred to Ahmed as he who is looking for the Shepherd who brings together people. The Shepherd, who makes the blind see, heals community and redeems. Ahmed was looking for other sheep to share his joys and pains, his faith and to figure out what GOD was calling him to in France. I seriously hope Ahmed finds answers to these meaningful and important questions in his life—and I hope he finds a Jerusalem community to be fully part of.

I love it when people challenge my faith like this, when I am reminded that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and need to take care of each other.

**Br Johannes Maertens**



## Barbenheimer Review

Thomas Dennehy-Caddick's film review of the recent *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* double bill

Much has been made of the stark thematic contrast between the simultaneously released *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*, to the point of receiving their own comical portmanteau: Barbenheimer. The differences are obvious: *Barbie* is a Toy-Story-esque fish-out-of-water comedy about a Barbie doll who must leave her pink and perfect 'Barbieland' in order to fix problems in the alternate and very imperfect 'Real World', whilst *Oppenheimer* is a biopic rooted in the very grey and male 'Real World', telling the story of the nuclear physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who became 'father of the atomic bomb'. Despite these differences, however, the films share a basic theme: in both the protagonists peer through the mirage that pacifies the masses and become haunted by mortality and moral evil.

Early in *Barbie*, the protagonist 'stereotypical Barbie' interrupts the perpetual party of Barbieland by asking if any of the other Barbies had thoughts of death. The music stops as all the other Barbies look on aghast. This realisation opens up a world in which stereotypical Barbie becomes vulnerable to embodied frailties and real injustices. A similar sequence occurs in



*Oppenheimer* at the Manhattan project's first 'Trinity' test of the nuclear bomb. As it explodes, the silent awe of others is contrasted with Oppenheimer's grim realisation that he has 'become death, destroyer of worlds'. Consequently a vision of nuclear holocaust intrudes on Oppenheimer's victory speech and his meeting with President Truman is polluted with Macbethian concerns that he has blood on his hands.

In both cases, however, the films hide how the weaknesses of their subjects crumble under the weight of this imposed subject matter.

When Barbie first interacts with a girl from the real world, she is condemned as a 'fascist' who promotes an oppressive view of women. After Barbie's innocent tears and a tour of Barbieland, however, the same girl is won over by the 'cool' world of possibilities Barbie opens up for her. Then Barbie's real origin in Bild Lilli, the sexually objectified 1950s play doll of the right-wing German

tabloid *Bild*, conveniently goes unmentioned in the whitewashed origin story that closes the film/advert's mission to reclaim Barbie as a pure idea open to endless reinvention.

*Oppenheimer* is similarly sanitized. The story is forced into that deeply stupid Hollywood genre of tortured genius films, which relentlessly *refer* to a protagonist's intelligence rather than the dialogue and drama itself displaying any of its own. Lots of well-known 'God doesn't play dice'-type quotes are thus crammed together alongside shots of Oppenheimer staring at clever things: TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Picasso's *Woman Sitting with Crossed Arms*, Stravinsky vinyls, Einstein on a walk, Oppenheimer's own blackboard scribbles. Meanwhile, his weaknesses are largely absent. His serial infidelity is reduced to a tragic love-triangle where the women initiate every dalliance and his brazen disregard for human life is traded for a largely fictitious guilt complex - in reality, Oppenheimer always defended the nuclear bombing of Japan, he proposed poisoning 'at least' 500,000+ German civilians, and he disturbed colleagues by his prizefighter-like post-Trinity test celebrations.

The film's most revealing omission is Linus Pauling, a close friend who rejected Oppenheimer's request to work on the Manhattan project because of his pacifist beliefs and who fell out with Oppenheimer after the latter unsuccessfully tried to seduce his wife, Ava. Instead, the one character to trouble Oppenheimer on screen with the idea that it is wrong to build a mass murder weapon (a misrepresented Isidor Isaac Rabi) is immediately won over by Oppenheimer's ingenious 'but, the Nazis...' argument. This is because the director Christopher Nolan did not want to trouble consciences with the idea that we are not merely victims of circumstance, but that we choose our future, for better and for worse.

The truth is that Oppenheimer was not chosen by the US military to lead the project solely because of his scientific achievements - there were other more obvious choices - but because his hirer Leslie Groves saw in him an 'overweening ambition' that would get the job done at all costs. These costs are, of course, absent from the film, for to let such suffering speak would be to let truth itself speak. Rather than the deaths and screams of Japanese innocents, then, the film closes with an hour-long sermon on our hero's technocratic attempts to limit nuclear arms proliferation and the state's technocratic

attempts to limit him. The problem is, the damage has already been done. As the film shows, Oppenheimer was a radical youth and in later life he acted on a deep fear of nuclear expansion. But ultimately the moral sense of his life was mortally wounded when he sought to murder the innocent for career and country: a tragedy even greater than the lives lost.

*Barbie* exhibits a similar moral compromise, but this time it doesn't center around the protagonist - after all, Barbie is a doll with no soul to sell - but with the film's director, Greta Gerwig. A darling of independent cinema, the director, writer, and actor has been skewing mainstream for a while now, having progressed from writing and acting on low-budget mumblecore films such as *Frances Ha* (excellent) and *Mistress America* (OK), which praise authenticity to the point at which it collides painfully with our culture's inauthenticity. Her subsequent work directing *Lady Bird* and *Little Women* lands a softer blow, but is still committed to resisting the ideological and economic oppression of women. Barbie, however, plays nice, especially cutting back on economic critiques. And while it references the Barbie brand's commodification of the female body, the punches at Mattel Corp are carefully pulled. This is not to say it isn't a funny and intelligent film.

*Barbie's* narrative stages cleverly track life stages. The opening Barbieland sequence is innocent childhood play: girls play dress up and boys play fighting. Then, like adolescents, when Barbie and Ken go into the 'Real World', they discover 'Patriarchy'. Whilst young Ken-men wield this power, Barbie-women are enslaved by it, until an older enlightened Real World woman injects a strong dose of feminist critical theory, enlightening the enslaved Barbie dolls. Here, however, the story becomes unmoored as the answer of what to do about it is exchanged for a cheap joke: the Barbie dolls must flirt their way to power. A final coda tries to redress this absence but the film's answer to women's liberation is abstract self-actualization, without any collective sense of how we can address injustices. This ignores that self-actualization is so often denied to women by the modern West's 'feminization of poverty' and gender-based violence. Again, Hollywood keeps such realities well from view and proposes the abstract, atomized self as the solution.

Ultimately then, both Gerwig and Oppenheimer prove that while we may attempt to wield the state-capitalist complex to our own will, ultimately the system can and will only wield us, as it continues to churn out all those Barbies and bombs.

**Thomas Dennehy-Caddick**

# Antimilitarist roots : Nonviolent resistance for a world in crisis

*Luis Tinoco Terrejon looks back on his time in London for the recent WRI conference*

This was the War Resisters International conferences in London from June 16th until June 18th. Joséphine and myself (Luis) were representing a section for the WRI that is Agir pour la Paix, based in Brussels. We arrived a day sooner in London on June 14th. We were lucky to stay at the Giuseppe Conlon House, a house of hospitality run by the Catholic Worker movement in London. We were so warmly welcomed. It definitely made our stay in London even more nicer. It was very inspiring to be part of this community for a couple of days and share the daily life of local activists. Big thanks for that!

This international gathering was organized in two different moments : first the council / assembly of our network with the renewal of the WRI council ; and a three day of conferences.



War Resisters International Conference 2023

The first event was essentially for the WRI members and new ones in order to discuss future strategies for the network. And we proudly elected a new council with new members, mainly from Asia, Africa and South America. The second event was open to everybody around discussions about the growing militarisation of our

world and how to organize ourselves to keep on with our pacifist nonviolent fight. A great moment to update our different realities, share experiences and re-think or adapt our activities to this changing world. It was a great moment of renewal for our grassroots movements.

**Luis Tinoco Terrejon**

## GCH House Update

We have a number of significant updates from the passed few months. Firstly, we have completed our recent round of work on the house, which included the removal of more asbestos and the installation of a new shower room.

This was all wrapped-up in late April, when live-in volunteer Thomas Caddick got married to Natalie Dennehy. The Dennehy-Caddick's held their reception at Giuseppe Conlon House before setting off on tandem to Rome for their honeymoon, where they had a chance to tell Pope Francis all about their cycle.

In June, Fr Martin Newell was convicted of 'public nuisance' alongside eight others for his part in an Insulate Britain protest at Dover Port in 2021, for which he got community service, a suspended sentence and court costs. We thank God he is doing his 'time' at Scope charity shop and not Pentonville Prison!

Soon afterward the court hearing, we were joined by Thomas Frost, who is now living with us for a year as a volunteer following his English undergraduate studies at St Andrews.

Last but not least, Colette Joyce, a member of our community, made her final vows to consecrated life at GCH in July. We wish her every grace and blessing in her wonderful vocation!

# Looking at the Thames after the Messenia boat disaster

*“The time shall come, when free as seas or wind  
Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,  
Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,  
And seas but join the regions they divide;”*  
- Alexander Pope, from “Windsor Forest”

and we enter the water where it leaves us  
in stream or sink or drainpipe,  
turning with our rain and sewage  
out of our sight

to a morning of wind on the water,  
plastic bags and dead wood drifting  
on the cold clear river where it turns  
into the blank eastern distance.

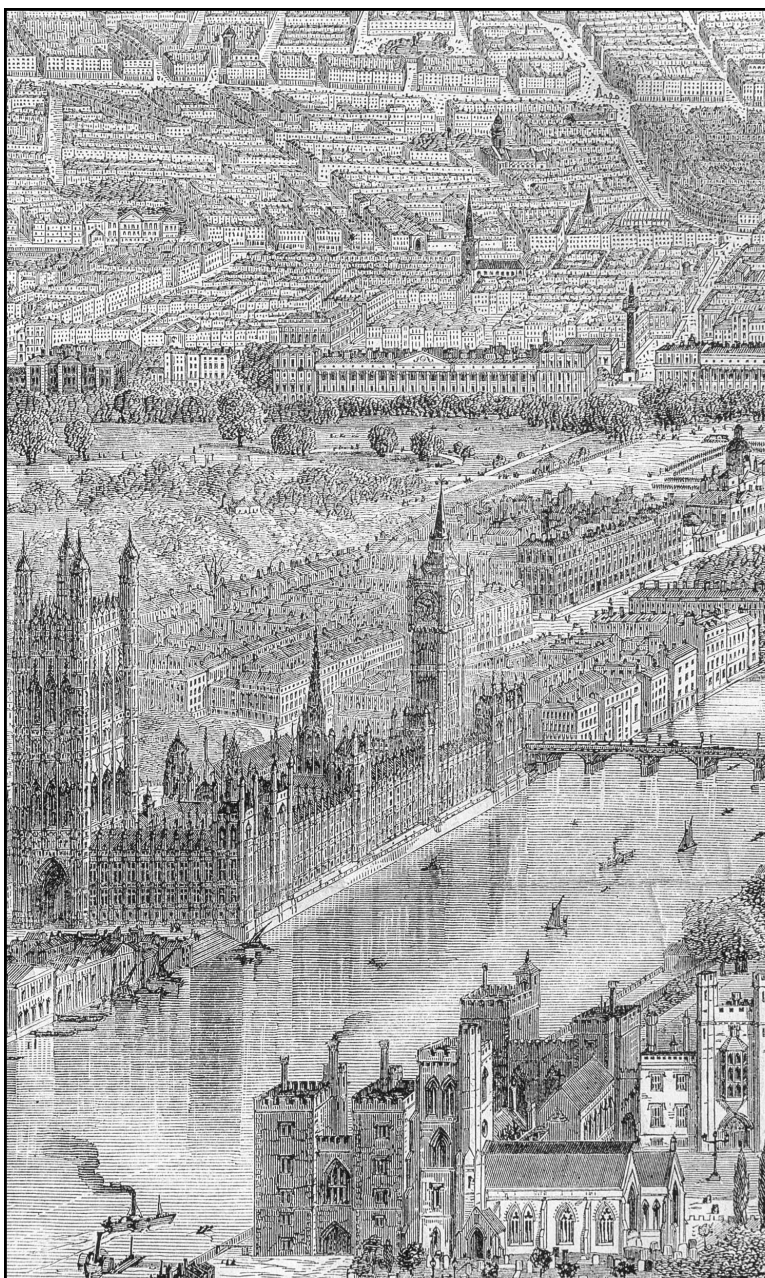
But when in the morning a wave on the water  
rises to our attention,  
or the bridge rises,  
or there is rain on our shoes,

then the river is under our feet  
and under the cold eastern  
and the blue southern seas,

and we will, if we sit and wait,  
or work or walk or sleep,  
watch it turn back to us,

twist through us.

Thomas Frost



## The Catholic Worker in the UK

London CW: Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1 BG ; Tel: 020 8348 8212; E: london-catholicworker@yahoo.co.uk ; Web: www.londoncatholicworker.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 ; Web: 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; website: 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. We 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

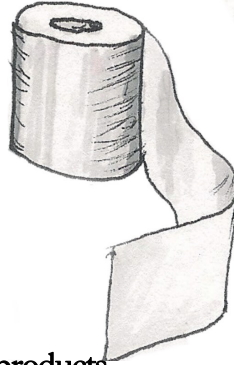
## FOOD

- Chopped tomatoes
- Peanut butter
- Cooking oil
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Oats
- Noodles
- White vinegar
- Hummus
- Soy sauce
- Spices & herbs
- Honey
- Cereal
- Juice and squash
- Herbal teabags
- Chilli sauce
- Nuts and seeds



## TOILETRIES

- Toilet paper
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Shampoo
- Liquid soap
- Razors



## CLEANING

- Eco-friendly products
- Anti-bacterial spray
- Bicarbonate of soda
- Multi-purpose cleaner
- Toilet cleaner
- Laundry detergent
- Floor cleaner



## 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.

## 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 <input type="text"/>	
Payments to be made monthly/ other First Payment to be made on: / / 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
Deanery Road	Sort Code: 16 58 10
Bristol BS1 5AS	Until further notice the sum of the value indicated above
Signed	Date
Your email address:	Your Name and Address
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Please return to :</b>	
<b>London Catholic Worker</b>	
<b>49 Mattison Road</b>	
<b>London N4 1BG</b>	