

The Current Crisis

and new beginnings

This issue of "The London Catholic Worker" is dominated by two themes: welcoming the stranger (or not) and the climate and environmental emergency, and our response as followers of Jesus, to this imminent threat to God's Earth and God's poor. These two are of course not unconnected. Climate refugees are already among us, even if some of them had to leave their homes due to wild fires that burnt down their houses in Wennington, Essex, just outside London.

Recently I went to an event celebrating 20 years of a parish "Justice and Peace" group. As I arrived late I heard a woman say "on Saturday, we are having a meeting about the current crisis..." I went over to ask her "which crisis do you mean?" In my mind, she might have been referring to the war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia (we have always had guests from Ethiopia or neighbouring Eritrea). Or the climate crisis. And at that time Liz Truss had just resigned as Prime Minister. So I really was not sure exactly *which* crisis she was referring to. Anyway, in reality she said she was from "Caritas Westminster" and she meant *the cost of living* crisis. Obviously. That is to say, obviously, I was on a different planet.

It feels like we are in the midst of so many crises right now. But maybe that is just me. Living and working with refugees and asylum seekers, it feels like we have been living in a permanent 'cost of living' crisis. Life is very costly. Or maybe it is cheap. God surely knows. It can be hard to tell from the way people sometimes get treated, pushed back to sea in small boats like so much driftwood.

Energy levels are at a low ebb here at the moment. But we have at least been able to do offer a widows mite to help with the wider cost of living crisis. Every week we get a very generous gift of bread from Dunn's Bakery in Stroud Green. At a time when there



"We must welcome the stranger as though we are welcoming Christ" - Dorothy Day

are fewer of us in the house to eat it, we have been able to pass on a few sacks to two local food banks each week. One at the Gospel Centre, and one at the St Ann's Community Centre. Eddie also helped out on Fridays for a while at St Ann's. It is good to be able to share our bread. It is a reminder that if bread is broken and shared there is enough to feed everyone, as Jesus showed us on that Galilean hillside. It is a reminder too of the words of Dorothy Day, "there was always bread" (check out page 9). *Continued on p. 2*

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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.

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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 Saturday 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!

When I first read those words, I thought she meant it in some kind of mystical, Eucharistic, way. And perhaps she did. But she was also being literal. In a house of hospitality, there is *always* bread, even if everything else runs out... It is a reminder of the saying that it is because we do not have enough that we share. It reminds us during Advent of Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom, that despite the apparent dominance of competitiveness, we can all live together in peace in God's creation.

Writing about bread is a reminder too of another theme of Jesus's life and words that feels appropriate right now. The seed that falls to the ground and dies, remains not a single grain, but brings new life. While it is literally winter outside (and inside too) it also feels like a bit of a post-Covid spiritual winter in many ways. Energy levels may be low, but there is a promise of new life. On Sunday, we have the first meeting of what will, please God, become the new 'London Catholic Worker dispersed community' (See page 5). And we are starting the process of establishing Giuseppe Conlon House as a registered charity. There were many reasons we never did that before, including Dorothy Day's entirely correct statement that "we do not need the permission of Holy Mother the State to do good work". However, please forgive us Dorothy, that is the path we are going down now for the house. The dispersed community bring new life to the Catholic Worker in London, please God, and the community in the house here will continue to be part of that new way of living the themes of Catholic Worker life which we hope will grow and take root.

These are the hopes, dreams, challenges and crises of our lives here at Giuseppe Conlon House right now. Please keep praying for us. We are always grateful for all your support, spiritual and material.

By Martin Newell

When Civilization Decays

An Easy Essay By Peter Maurin

When the bank account
is the standard of values
the class on the top
sets the standard.

When the class on the top
cares only for money
it does not care
for culture.

When the class on the top
does not care
for culture,
nobody cares
for culture.

And when nobody cares
for culture
civilization decays.



Meeting Jesus in the faces of exiles

By Simon Jones

it is difficult to keep count of the number of exiles in the north east of France. People come and go, some heading for England, others for Belgium and Germany. Many are moved on repeatedly by the police, having their possessions regularly dumped in a refuse wagon as makeshift camps are broken up and the exiles scattered to the four winds only to blow back into the area a day or two later.

But the best guess is that there are around 1,000 spread across a number of small camps in Calais and perhaps 500 to 750 in Grand Synthes, near Dunkirk — that number is harder to be sure of because of a fairly rapid turnover of the population.

I visited Calais for two weeks at the end of March/beginning of April 2022 to catch up with colleagues and meet up with a couple from Minnesota who are joining our team in the summer. I then visited again over the summer and in October. These were my first visit since lockdown and it was good to see the safe house we run for women and children continues to be in good health. We spent many happy hours enjoying the hospitality of Eritrean and Sudanese, Syrian and Iranian exiles and hearing stories of seeking sanctuary accompanied by great food.

Joseph and Rachel are American Mennonites and with their two children have been planning to join us for the past three years since we first met in London. They finally arrived in Calais in August and are settling into their work of coordinating the safe house. On top of that, they will offer support and hospitality to the scattered volunteers that are part of our loose team across the region.



On the first Friday of our trip in March, we visited our Peaceful Borders colleague Federica in Grand Synthe, a small town near Dunkirk. I wrote this to post on our Facebook page:

The wind cuts the swirling snow into your face as you shrink further inside your hood. Dotted among the trees, blue tarpaulins, green and white tents and a clutch of people huddled round a fire. Elsewhere a couple furtively sell cigarettes from a go-pack table. A man on a pallette smoking, others pulling blankets around their heads for warmth walk towards the distribution vans. The track is pitted and puddled, mud rendering it impassible at points. A train rolls by dragging containers to the port. A single man is putting up the frame for a larger shelter, made from branches cut and stripped from nearby trees. In the distance more encampments nestle in the wood, more scraps of life sheltering from the chill wind of a late winter blast and Europe's indifference to their fate.

In the midst of it is Federica, cutting a swathe through the thickets of humanity stopping to answer questions, give information, share a phone number or a joke, assess the lie of the land in this less-than-24 hour-old jungle. She has planned how they will get the water in, where the distribution of key supplies can happen, how food will be served. She is reluctant head of a rag-tag band of twenty-something volunteers making the difference between life and death.

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One man confesses that he hates his life; what's the point of it, he says, his hand a sweeping gesture inviting us to take in the scene. No one can live here, he says in despair. But he and a few hundred will live here until the police move in, trash this camp, destroy and steal all the possessions they can lay their hands on and drive the displaced into yet another stage of their journey, their final destination — a safe place to call home — still tantalisingly out of reach. This camp is rising to take the place of the one wiped off the map yesterday. It too will suffer the same fate. Few will notice. But Federica will know where each ends up and be there to accompany them as best she can.

Back at the distribution point, they have run out of shoes — there'll be more tomorrow ('but will they

be my size?' 'Will they be warm and waterproof?') — only have tents for families, are running low on trousers and coats. The tide of desperation ebbs and flows around the vans, you can smell the weary longing, the sense that life should not have led anyone here.

Grand Synthe, April Fools day, 2022. People displaced by conflict, persecution, war, drought, you name it, made fools of by the governments of the richest continent on the planet, indifferent to their journeys, their stories, their experience, their need. And we fools miss the God who comes in the face of the poorest to bless and challenge; this Lenten journey with Jesus in the wilderness strips the pretense of faith from our comfortable lives as we return to our car to return to our warm apartment and supper.



Left: St Francis of Assisi, by Fritz Eichenberg

Reverse St. Francis Prayer

Lord make me a channel of your disturbance.

**Where there is apathy, let me provoke,
Where there is silence, may I be a voice.
Where there is too much comfort, and too little action, Grant disruption.
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked, Grant me the willingness to listen
When laws dictate and pain is overlooked, Grant me the willingness to listen. . .**

**When tradition speaks louder than need, Grant me the willingness to listen. .
Disturb us, O Lord, Teach us to be radical.
Grant that I may seek rather to do justice than to talk about it;
To be with as well as for the poor;
To love the unlovable as well as the lovely;
To touch the passion of Jesus in the Pain of those we meet;
To accept responsibility to be church.
Lord, make me a channel of your disturbance.**

~Author Unknown

NEWS... NEWS ... NEWS

As you may have read on page two, we have begun a new chapter in the life of the London Catholic Worker.

New CW Dispersed Community

Before we ever had a house, we had a group, or dispersed community, for 5 years from 2000 to 2005. We met, prayed, studied, planned actions and activities and shared our lives. As well as having the occasional speaker and even a party. That group was the foundation on which first Dorothy Day House and the Catholic Worker Farm in Hertfordshire, and later Giuseppe Conlon House, were built. After we began the houses the group kept meeting and supporting the houses for a long time. But nearly all those who were around then have moved on now, some to their heavenly reward. Covid of course has been a disruptor of so much, and has brought many things into view, and so it has been with us. It became clear we needed to rebuild our foundations. So we made a start.

The first meeting of the new Catholic Worker dispersed community was on December 4th, only a few days before the 90th anniversary of the day Dorothy Day met Peter Maurin (see page 7) . Maybe there is an echo of St Francis there? "Rebuild my church". Or the London Catholic Worker anyway. There were eleven of us. We celebrated the Eucharist, and listened to each other as we shared our hopes and dreams for this group and how we might live out Catholic Worker discipleship in our lives, as well as our concerns and anguish for the world we live in where there is, as Dorothy said, too much injustice, violence and suffering.



Above: Giuseppe Conlon House garden looking very 'Christmassy', after the December snow



Catholic Worker Cymru

In the summer, Dominic Belli visited us. He is now trying to start a Catholic Worker group in Wales, CW Cymru. Dominic tells us that Cymru means "friend", while "Wales" means "outsider" or "foreigner". If you are interested in this new venture, see page seven for more information. More new beginnings, a new incarnation!

Home Office Vigil

On the 3rd Mondays in November and December, we continued to help organise and participate in the monthly prayer vigil outside the Home Office for those who have died crossing the seas to get to Europe and the UK. It is moving to be there, especially as it was a year ago that the numbers crossing the English Channel began to rise so fast. As well as the tragic numbers of those who die trying.

Catholic Housing Aid Society and the CW

One interesting connection arising from the Home Office vigil has been to meet Robina Rafferty again. Robina was a long time the director of CHAS, the Catholic Housing Aid Society. Robina used to know Masie Ward (of then Catholic publishers Sheed and Ward) and Mollie Walsh, who had founded CHAS in 1956. Mollie was married to Bob Walsh. Together Mollie and Bob had started the first CW house in England, in Wigan in 1937, and taken over editing and managing the London version of the "Catholic Worker" newspaper. At that time, the "London Catholic Worker" was a full size newspaper, with a national circulation. It ran until the late 1950s. Their son John Walsh also volunteered for a couple of years in "Peter's Café", the community café we ran in Hackney for 6 years until 2013.

Small Boats and Loss and Damage - We are one body in Christ -

By Martin Newell

From a reflection given by Martin Newell at the monthly vigil outside the Home Office, Nov 2022

This month, today, we are faced with the shocking reality of a list of names of the dead over 3 pages long. Most of them did not die in some faraway place. They died trying to cross the English channel. There is not actually a fence along the middle of the channel to keep out the poor and the foreigner, but there might as well be. We have the image here, the icon, of Jesus behind barbed wire, behind a fence. It seems we, as a nation, want to keep Him there, at any price. The price of death. Of crucifixion. Not much has changed it seems since 2,000 years ago. Only the method of torture and execution, only our ability to keep the poor down, and to keep them out, has become more subtle, perhaps more effective.

We know this list of names, and snapshots of stories, is only a sample, only a beginning. In the year ahead, the list of names of those who have died trying to cross the channel is going to get longer, as the numbers of those 'small boat crossings' have continued to rise.

As a Passionist, I am aware that Christ continues to be crucified in his people today. I am aware also that Jesus is just one of the many millions or billions who have been crucified by injustice throughout history right up to this moment, this place. Jesus said he was at one with those who suffer: "whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me".

And this includes, keeping him behind barbed wire. It includes forcing boats to turn back and letting the people in them – the least of these- drown. It includes preferring to protect ourselves over welcoming those who come to us fleeing persecution, pov-

erty and war.

The challenge for us, the question for us, is do we feel the same, do we feel that 'whatever is done to the least of these' is done to us? If we do, then to what course of action does this impel us to take? How does that affect our lives? In what way can we act to try to create an understanding of this truth, this unity of the human

race, this unity of the family of God, in our country and in our churches, local and national?

We, as a people, as a church, as a nation, have to connect the dots in that way. That we are, in fact, all connected in the deepest possible way. We are all one, whether we acknowledge that truth or not. We are all one body, as St Paul said. If someone else is hurt, so are we. If one part of the body is injured, the whole body is injured. It is the most vulnerable parts of the body that need the most care and protection. This is a truth that applies not just to the Church, not just to Christians, but to all people and all peoples. Christians are supposed to be those who recognise this truth, a recognition that we are called



Above: Prayer vigil protest outside the Home Office, in the rain

to share with others. A truth we celebrate when we celebrate the Eucharist, when we share Communion: we are all one, we are all one body, with the One who said "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." An injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere.

Pope Francis says somewhere – I think it was in Fratelli Tutti – that people have a right to not to have to leave home, country, and family, to be able to find work, to be able to escape poverty, escape violence. That is to say, that as well as welcoming those who do flee those realities, we have to ask questions about why they are forced by their reality, to come. We have to ask why they feel the need to leave home and family behind and borrow to pay extortionate amounts of

money to risk their lives on an uncomfortable and dangerous journey across countries and continents and seas. We ask these questions so that in finding some answers, we can try to create a world where far fewer people are forced to rupture the ties that nourish and support them, ties we call 'home', 'family' and 'culture'.

In particular, we have to ask questions of our own countries' contribution to this situation. We know about the historic injustices of Empire, and the ways they continue in a different form. We know of trade injustices and about exploitation. We know about the arms trade, wars and invasions that as always are based on foreign policies that have as their prime focus "protecting our – the UK's – vital strategic interests" – for which read 'continuing access to the resources of the world at a cheap price'. We know also about the 'wars of choice', designed so as to 'deter the others', to keep everyone in line, and make sure everyone knows who sits where in the world order.

Most recently, in a sense, we have become aware of the effects of climate change, as well as other aspects of the environmental crisis. The countries and people who are suffering the effects most are most often those, especially in the global south, who have done so little or nothing to cause it. And it is from those very same countries, and those like them, that so many have to leave to try to find a place of life and safety, now, already, and even more so in the future. Some of whom – some small proportion – risk their lives trying to cross the seas trying to come to Europe and the UK.

In recent years, and most recently because of COP27, we have been made aware of the phrase "loss and damage". In the case of the COP27, loss and damage due to climate change. In the case of those who feel forced to take the risk of trying to reach the UK, 'by any means necessary' - by 'Plan B' as some call it' – 'by land' – as Mussa who lives in our house calls it – the loss and damage is lost lives at sea, or crossing the sahara, or under a lorry or falling from a plane. The damage is to mental health, spiritual and physical health. To lost relationships of family and kinship. And so much more.

As disappointing as the Cairo COP27 was in agreeing plans on emissions reduction, the Loss and Damage fund is a recognition that we are all one, that everything is connected. It is a recognition that future plans to reduce emissions, particularly from the global south, is dependent on the wealthy and powerful recognising that we have a shared destiny. That injustices as well as climate emissions flow freely across borders. An injustice in one place will become an injustice elsewhere. At this point in history, the nations of the global south do not have to take it and just accept the injustice lying down...

Everything is connected. We are all one. After all, these days, in our globalised interconnected world,

loss and damage anywhere, will become loss and damage everywhere. The people of this country voted to leave the EU. There is of course a lot that can be said about that. But there is a clear sense in which it reflected a desire to cut ourselves off. To say 'stop the world, I want to get off'. To keep out people from elsewhere, as part of a desire to keep out chaos from elsewhere. But this is not possible. Everything is connected. Loss and damage anywhere will produce loss and damage everywhere. It is our abandonment of the EU that is the likely cause of the massive increase in the numbers of small boats trying to cross the channel, since the EU "Dublin Convention" no longer applies, and those seeking refuge can no longer be returned to the first country of entry to the EU. If we squeeze the balloon in one place, it creates a bigger bulge somewhere else. Everything is connected. The defining reality of existence is communion. We are all one, parts of the same Body. If one part is hurt, we are all hurt. Whatever we do to the least of these, we do to Christ, to each other, to ourselves.

Let us pray for ourselves, for each other, for our country, for our churches, for our government, that we recognise these truths and act accordingly. As we continue to pray for and with, witness to, and remember those who are the victims of our forgetfulness. Amen.

CATHOLIC WORKER CYMRU A NEW COMMUNITY

On 9th December 1932 Dorothy Day, an award-winning bohemian New York journalist returned home from an assignment to find a man in her house. His name was Peter Maurin. He had been told they should meet up as they think alike. From that the Catholic Worker was born and the world is that little bit better. It's about working with what you have and being bold!

CELTIC CHRISTIANITY & HOSPITALITY

There's a long history of Celtic Christianity. There's also a long tradition of Celtic hospitality. Here in Wales we too suffer with a fractured society where the "least amongst us" often go unnoticed, unloved and unassisted. Catholic Worker Cymru wants to show the love Jesus has for those on the margins. By following the example and spirituality of Dorothy Day we can do that. We need people who can identify the need and work alongside the marginalized and those our system has put on the outside. Please contact me if you wish to be part of it. Or, you may just want to know more or to see what you can do. Please either email or phone me.

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Contemplative Prayer and Non-violent Climate Protest

By Jonathan Herbert

I'm sitting on the road at an Insulate Britain road-block and there's a tremendous amount of noise going on. Blaring horns, furious volleys of abuse from delayed motorists and the more subtle 'we agree with your cause but this isn't the way to bring about change'. I've been trained in my non-violence workshop not to respond, so I just sit and concentrate on my breathing, slow and calm, focusing on a point in the road. My training also taught me that when I go to ground I do so calmly and gently lowering my body lowering my voice. It sounds a bit like the classic entrée to prayer, slowly calming our body mind and breathing to enter that place of encounter with God and our deepest selves'. Whether I'm protesting sat in a road, or sitting on a bench early in the morning in the chapel at Hilfield, I'm convinced that prayer and non-violent protest are deeply connected.

Contemplative prayer and protest are both counter-cultural in a society that stresses achievement and material reward. Doing nothing sitting in contemplative prayer or sitting quietly in protest are a direct challenge to what Joanna Macey calls 'the Industrial Growth Machine'. One challenges the continuous motion that capitalism depends on, by stopping the free movement of vehicles and commodities, the other by challenging the urge to be continuously busy and doing something. Neither are easy and require discipline and a strong sense of intention. The noise of traffic, horns and the shouts of confused and angry motorists, mirror those inner voices of distraction we all face when we seek to enter the deeper reaches of prayer. To protest and pray are both acts of faith and rarely bear immediate or quantifiable fruits. Both demand making time, a letting go of comfort and certainty and are an entering into a cloud of unknowing.

The first time I was arrested, I decided to 'go

floppy' which meant I became dead weight and it needed 4 police officers to carry me away. It also meant that my whole body was completely relaxed. At that moment I began to understand more fully the 'Prayer of Abandonment' of Charles de-Foucault. 'Father, I abandon myself into Your hands'. Contemplative prayer with its letting go of all requests, desire for results and imagery is a handing over to a higher power, and in a similar way the non-violent arrestee hands themselves over to the power of the state. Being handcuffed, led away, stripped of your possessions imitates the 'kenosis' of Jesus as he enters his passion. This letting go reaches its fulness in



his dying words 'into your hands I commend my Spirit.' Words we repeat each night at compline. In the contemplative journey, it's this abandoning of one's self into God's hands that is the means to a greater freedom.

Francis of Assisi, struggled for a while with the question of whether he should withdraw from his active life of preaching and commit to a more permanent contemplative pattern. When he asked Clare and others, they encouraged him to hold both together. I always find it a tension to be both contemplative and active and it's something that requires careful discernment in getting the balance right and requires the willingness to con-

stantly adjust to find equilibrium. Surprisingly I often encounter this balance best following an arrest and in the waiting.

Once arrested you can wait for hours for the police transport to turn up, then there's the



queueing up to be booked in by the desk sergeant, then the waiting in the cell. The cell can have a sense of timelessness, often without natural light, and lit all night. Stripped of a watch, the prisoner is best trying to live in the moment. Once the door clangs shut all you can do is wait. For me this time is often conducive to prayer, and helps me understand a little more what it means to enter into the timeless heart of God and I begin to understand RS Thomas phrase 'the meaning is in the waiting.' Of course, there are frequent interruptions for photographs, fingerprints, interviews etc but returning to your cell can be like returning to your mantra or breathing to overcome the distractions in prayer.

I find that if I can stand the waiting and the not knowing and not give in to frustration or distraction in both the chapel and the police cell, then I begin to understand that famous saying of the Desert Fathers 'go and sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.'

Originally published in "Franciscan", the newsletter of the Society of St Francis (SSF) : <https://www.franciscans.org.uk/> . Jonathan Herbert lives at Hilfield Friary, Is Chaplain to Gypsies and Travellers in Salisbury Diocese. He is a member of Christian Climate Action.

The Final Word is Love

By Dorothy Day

We were just sitting there talking
when Peter Maurin came in.

We were just sitting there talking
when lines of people began to form,
saying, "We need bread."

We could not say, "Go, be thou filled."
If there were six small loaves and a few fishes, we
had to divide them.

There was always bread.

We were just sitting there talking
and people moved in on us.

Let those who can take it, take it.

Some moved out
and that made room for more.
And somehow the walls expanded.

We were just sitting there talking
and someone said,

"Let's all go live on a farm."

It was as casual as all that, I often think.

It just came about. It just happened.

I found myself, a barren woman,
the joyful mother of children.

It is not always easy to be joyful,
to keep in mind the duty of delight.

The most significant thing
about The Catholic Worker
is poverty, some say.

The most significant thing
is community, others say.

We are not alone anymore.

But the final word is love.

At times it has been,
in the words of Father Zossima,
a harsh and dreadful thing,
and our very faith in love
has been tried through fire.

We cannot love God unless we love each other,
and to love we must know each other.

We know him in the breaking of bread,
and we are not alone any more.

Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too,
even with a crust,
where there is companionship.

We have all known the long loneliness
and we have learned that the only solution is love
and that love comes with community.

It all happened while we sat there talking,
and it is still going on.

(Postscript to "The Long Loneliness")

Passing the Tipping Point - Living in a 'post progress' era

"Repent... flee from the wrath that is coming" (John the Baptist, Luke 3:7)

Living and working with asylum seekers draws my attention to what happens in parts of the world where the people we live with come from. Personally, living in a neighbourhood in Pakistan for seven years made the impact of the recent catastrophic, apocalyptic, definitely **'biblical' Pakistan floods very real. Living with people** from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia makes the realities of the climate induced droughts, crop failures and extreme hunger they are suffering right now all the more real.

These kinds of realities brings a particular focus when trying to understand and discern essential dynamics and patterns in the world today. An essential task when trying to respond to the urgings of Jesus to "read the signs of the times". This focus leads me to an important conclusion regarding the new context that we live in now, in our **'global village'**. Which is, that overall, globally, human material welfare has already started to decline.

My guess is that by 2030 there will be a climate disaster on the scale of the floods in Pakistan every year, somewhere in the world. And from now on, any apparent **'economic growth' will be outweighed by the impact and costs of repairing the damage from such multiplying disasters. We live in a new a new kind of 'post-growth' or 'post-progress' era. The question will be how to cope** with material decline and increasing environmental blow-back from our profligate ways.

Some might say, "no great shock there", and move on. We have lived for so long with the illusion of progress. But we are living in a time when that illusion will be stripped away. We have been sowing the wind, now we are beginning to reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7) Famine, hunger and food insecurity are affecting more people now than they were a few short years ago. The Millenium Development Goals of eradicating hunger and extreme poverty are becoming more distant, not less. More and more lives are being devastated by floods, hurricanes, droughts and wildfires, not to mention Covid. And not just faraway in the global south. This is the fruit of our **disregard of God's Earth, our mother, sister and neighbour** (cf Laudato Si).

Ever since I can remember there has been an assumption that, materially speaking, things are, and will continue to, **'get better'**. In Prime Minister Harold Macmillan told the British people in 1957 that they **'had never had it so good'**. Materially speaking, this was true for the vast ma-

jority. Since then there have been six decades of almost continuous economic growth. There has been what seems an almost miraculous, frankly mindboggling, transformation in our lifestyles and of the technologies that we use in our daily lives and in our work places, and even in our churches and our expressions of our faith. This has been true not just in the affluent west, but globally.



The benefits of this economic growth and material improvement have certainly not been evenly distributed, especially in recent years. It is debatable whether this material improvement has made life a better experience, or made us better people. But it would be foolish to dispute that it has happened. While some places and times have had downs as well as ups, the overall picture is clear, and the main debates have been about sharing out the increasing material benefits.

However, all this 'economic growth' has been sowing increasing environmental devastation over the years, and its consequences are coming home to roost. The apparently inevitable increase in material prosperity has seemingly been a result of an unstoppable tide of technological change that has swept all before it. I am sure the technology will continue to develop, at least in my lifetime. But we are now at a point in history where that apparently never ending process of increasing material prosperity of the human race has now - already - ended.

Environmentalists and climate scientists talk about **'tipping points' and 'points of no return'**. Some talk of social and economic collapse as the Earth systems that sustain us are disrupted. Many talk of the collapse of the **world 'civilisation' as we know it. A collapse similar** to that of the Roman Empire. Others talk of possible human extinction. All those are somewhere in the future, near or far. Or in the case of some environmental tipping points, even if we may have already crossed them, we do

not know yet, and will not know for some time.

However, one tipping point we have already passed is that human material welfare has already peaked and started to decline. There is enough social conflict when it is about sharing out the benefits of growth. The challenge now will be how to prepare for and how to respond to the increased social and international conflict that results from **struggles over how to share out a smaller 'pie'**. We are seeing this on a small scale in the UK right now. The number of strikes right now are at least in part a reflection of a struggle to deal with the short term economic decline resulting from the Covid pandemic and resulting lockdowns.

Ultimately, we face a spiritual challenge. We live in a **society that has for so long identified 'growth' with 'economic growth'**. Growth is a basic human goal, but the growth that really matters is spiritual growth, human growth. Economic growth has been a poor substitute for the real thing. Our addiction to it has stunted our ability to really live, and to see beyond it. As people of faith, we need to rediscover what really matters, what spiritual growth really is. The Catholic Worker devotion to voluntary poverty, to a real simplicity of life, can help us. Jesus taught that material prosperity is spiritually dangerous, it crowds out the life of the Spirit. De-toxing from addiction is always painful, but we have to if the human race and the life of God's Earth are to survive and be renewed.

Like the Prodigal Son, we may soon be 'eating the food given to the pigs', and yearning for the house and comfort of our youth (Luke 15). My most optimistic reading of the signs of these times, is that we may wake up sooner rather than too late. And waking up, we may be able to turn around, repent, before social collapse takes hold even here in the UK. Maybe in 40 or 50 years time the Earth and her life sustaining systems will begin to recover. But it will take a long journey of painfully repenting of our profligacy,

of seeking new ways, of longing for our Father's house.

A key question is how will the pain be shared out? Some of the countries of the global south are making it clear that they will not surrender their dream of material prosperity without a fight. The loss and damage must be shared out equally. Climate emissions do not respect borders. The wealthy nations will have to respect the reality of our common destiny on one Earth, under a common sky, with a shared climate. If not, then the likes of India and Indonesia will continue to burn coal and other fossil fuels, and will not be brought to heel by the wealthy and powerful. The poor may be the main victims (as usual) of this crisis they have done almost nothing to create, but this time the poorer nations have some bargaining chips. A friend recently compared it to nuclear deterrence. It is another version of MAD – 'Mutually Assured Destruction'. Except that this time what has to be deterred is not something that could happen, but something that is already happening. May God bring us conversion, repentance, and courage to be open to the truth and respond in love. By Martin Newell

BAD APPLE ZINE

Bad Apple is a new magazine put together by former Giuseppe Conlon House community members Nora Ziegler and Ghazal Tipu, and London CW member Henrietta



Cullinan, among others. It is subtitled "Interfaith Blasphemy Activist Spirituality". The provocative title is followed by provocative articles. That is to say, challenging articles that provoke thought and reflection. Sometimes the challenge is to anarchists, sometimes it is to activists of various hues, sometimes to Christians or people of other faiths. If you are interested to read more, or subscribe to the mailing list, see: www.badapplemagazine.wordpress.com

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