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COMMUNITY, HOSPITALITY, RESISTANCE

Herod Built, Jesus Wept

Francisco Leitão on two kings and two kingdoms

It is a rare occasion when the slow and dusty work of archaeology manages to find an audience beyond the small world of academic journal subscribers. Yet, in 2007, the casual Daily Mail reader could have opened the paper to find the following bombastic headline: "A New Discovery May Solve the Mystery of the Bible's Bloodiest Tyrant". After 35 years of digging, the late Ehud Netzer and his team had finally found the tomb of the infamous Herod the Great. For those who don't know, Herod was a member of the Jewish elite at the time of Jesus, and ruled over Judea as a client-king of the Roman Empire. Most of us remember him for the brutal massacre of the innocents that we read in Matthew's gospel, according to which he ordered all boys under the age of two in and around Bethlehem to be put to death after being informed that the Messiah was coming. Even if that specific incident cannot be historically confirmed, his reputation for ruthlessness appears in many other extra-biblical sources and is almost impossible to deny. But cruelty is not the only thing he's remembered for. Among archaeologists working in the Holy Land, Herod is mainly known as the greatest builder in the history of the country, leaving more of a lasting imprint on the landscape of Israel than any other single person in history. There is, famously, the reconstruction and expansion of the Second Temple, the supreme symbol of Judean identity,

Christ before Herod, Woodcut, Albrecht Dürer, 1509

but his architectural ambitions sprawled far beyond Jerusalem. He built fortresses, palaces, aqueducts, ports, and even entire cities from scratch. This, then, raises a question: If the region is already filled with monumental evidence of his reign, why was the discovery of his tomb considered such a defining moment? One possible answer lies in its geography. The tomb was discovered inside a massive man-made mountain, rising some 700 meters above sea level, and housing an elaborate complex of fortified palaces and lush gardens. What makes this site unique, though, is its name. Herod had raised countless buildings in honour of friends, patrons, and emperors, but only here did he choose to name it after himself: Herodium. This decision clearly reveals his intentions: He wished this mount to be his everlasting memorial, a sort of proclamation of how he wanted to be remembered after his death. In the words of the great archaeologist Jodi Magness, "it's like we're hearing from Herod in the first person". So what does he want to tell us?

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Netzer's findings revealed a tall stone mausoleum resting on a square podium, encircled by eighteen Ionic columns and crowned with a conical-shaped roof. Historians and archaeologists were quick to notice a clear resemblance with the mythical tomb of Alexander the Great, and with those of later rulers who sought to place themselves in his lineage, all the way up to Augustus. Alexander, of course, was the prototype of the heroic and deified king, and anyone in the Hellenistic world of that time who wanted to legitimise their power would try to draw a connection with him. So here is Herod saying that he too was a dynastic ruler, one who laid claim to an outright divine status.

But Herod wasn't just a Roman king, he was also the "King of the Jews", and as such he needed to present himself as a legitimate ruler in the eyes of his Jewish subjects. Here, too, his monumental project can help us understand his intentions. Herodium was raised to such heights not only for the sake of grandeur, but also to command a view of the neighbouring town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of David. So, by restoring the Temple to its former glory and by establishing his tomb overlooking Bethlehem, Herod sought to claim his place as a royal Messiah in the line of David, coming to

Gloria in Excelsis, CW, 1947

redeem the kingdom of Judea and restore it to its former glory. Against this posturing of royal pretension, Matthew's gospel reading appears as a clear counter-narrative. He's engaging in a battle for the memory of Israel, a contest over what defines true kingship according to Scripture. The Hebrew bible, for Israel, is not just a text; it's the living memory of the community, the foundation of their identity. It answers the questions that we all ask ourselves: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? It's a story that lays claim to the present and the future of the community, it's contested and alive, constantly reshaped by those who claim to interpret it.

So Herod tried to shape that memory through monuments of stone and symbols of power, promoting a royal ideology to cast himself as the rightful successor of David and Solomon. Matthew will also place Jesus in the line of David by showing, for example, that he too was born in Bethlehem. But Matthew goes further. Not only is Jesus in the line of kingship, he is also in the line of the great prophets of Israel. He enters into this shared memory not as a builder of temples but as the fulfillment of a prophetic tradition, one that calls for justice, compassion, and liberation. And so throughout his gospel, Matthew will establish, for example, a clear correspondence between Jesus and the biggest of all prophets: Moses. Like Moses, he is rescued in infancy, travels to Egypt and is later called out of it, thus fulfilling Hosea's famous prophecy ("I called my son out of Egypt" Hos. 11:1). Like Moses, he endures a time in the wilderness; this time not for forty years, but forty days. Like Moses, his law is proclaimed from a mountain. Like Moses, he will speak for a God who sees through the imperial religion of order and triumph, a religion that guards the interests of those in charge, and like Moses, he will come to liberate people from bondage to that oppressive system.

But Matthew, again, goes further. His retrieval of scriptural memory doesn't stop with Moses. After describing the bloody massacre of Herod, he will quote the great prophet of

grief, Jeremiah, known to many as the "weeping prophet". Jeremiah lived very near the fall of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon, 500 years before Christ. He is often misread as a doomsday spook, a pitiable soul sulking in his miseries; but his words of anguish served a specific purpose, a purpose that goes to the heart of the prophetic vocation: to form a consciousness that represents a genuine alternative to the royal narrative, one that contradicts the presumed world of kings, showing both that this world fails to align with reality and that we have been taught a lie, after all. It's a defining feature of this royal consciousness to lead people into numbness, into an inability to care or suffer. The culture of Jeremiah's time was numbed and therefore unable to face the drastic historical ending that was to come. So Jeremiah knew that the only way to penetrate this numbed consciousness of denial was by the public presentation of grief. As the late Walter Brueggemann put it, "he knew that anguish is the door to historical existence", that embracing the end, even if painful, is what allows for a new beginning. The paradoxical insight of biblical faith that Jeremiah represents is the awareness that new life is born from despair, that genuine joy is forged in the crucible of lament, and that only by embracing the end can we speak the language of hope.

"It is precisely those who know death most painfully," writes Brueggemann, "who can speak of hope most vigorously."

So Matthew presents Jesus not only as king, but also as prophet; and it's the job of prophets, as Jeremiah shows us, to weep. Like Jeremiah, Jesus will weep later on in the gospels, when he approaches the temple and sees its looming end. It's the work of the prophetic tradition to grieve the end, the very end that the king cannot face, cannot prevent, and surely cannot grieve. So it is with us too, who find it unthinkable to imagine the end of our public institutions, the end of our ways of life, and the stories we tell ourselves. So it is with us too, who inherit this all-too-worldly consciousness that leads us to numbness, incapable of grief, anxious to preserve our identities, and blind to the violence around us. Bombarded with the constant influx of mass-mediated content, we're happy to drift along with the narratives we're fed, as long as our illusions of safety are kept intact. The current refugee crisis, with all its frantic political posturing, is only the visible fracture of a world already cracking at its foundations. It's a symptom of a much deeper problem that we haven't begun to reckon with, of an old world order straining towards its end. But make no mistake: Until that end comes, our leaders, like the royals at the time of Jeremiah, will ignore it. Like Herod, they will anxiously attempt to preserve things the way they have always been; and they won't shy away from the most brutal violence to hold on to the old ways. So, like Matthew, we too must enter into a battle for memory, for deciding what we should remember, what binds us as a community, and what answers we give to the questions of who we are, where we come from and where we're going. And so we remember the lives of all the victims of our fortress policies. And we decide to let go of the rabid nationalisms, the triumphalist claims and the supremacist views that are only bound to grow in the years to come. As Christians, we remember the God who came down, was born in a manger, spent his earlier years as a refugee and was finally put to death outside the gates of the city.

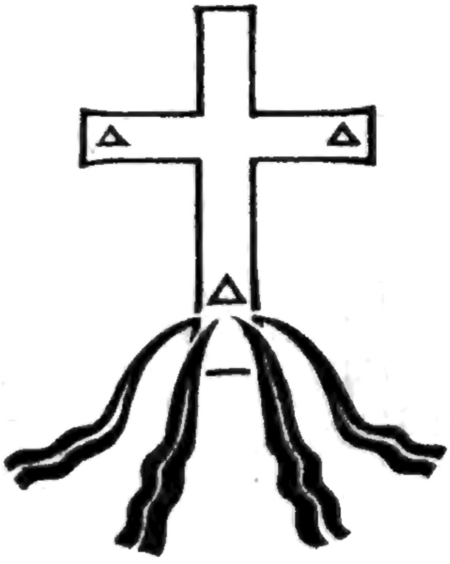
Like Matthew, we understand that accepting the coming of this man means letting go of a certain world. To accept this child as our Saviour, we must first accept the grief of a dying age. And so let us use this time of Advent to grieve. Because only through grief can we truly enter into the joy of Christmas.

Francisco Leitão

God is a Starving Man

Thomas Frost on the Gospel the Far Right Forget

In September, tens of thousands of people descended on London to take part in what was probably the largest far-right rally in British history. As one would expect from such a large group, their messaging was not entirely coherent, but the general sentiment was that immigrants, and particularly refugees, are a threat to Britain and should be treated with as much cruelty and violence as necessary to deter them. Leaving aside false claims about migrants being more likely to commit crimes, and particularly sexual violence – a claim which has been made by virtually every wave of bigotry in the modern era – a commonly cited justification for hostility towards migrants is the idea that, through immigration, Britain is losing its "identity", an identity which the far-right is increasingly inclined to identify as specifically Christian. A significant minority at the march were carrying crosses, and a handful of the speakers were clergy from various denominations, some of whom led the crowd in prayer. Tommy Robinson himself claims to have become a Christian during his most recent imprisonment for contempt of court. He has spoken very little about it, and it certainly seems to have had no effect on his politics. But even the more outspokenly Christian figures of the far-right tend in practice to achieve very little integration of the Gospel with their politics. We do not find in figures like Calvin Robinson any particularly developed theology of the nation-state, or any explanation for the apparent contradiction between their hostility to impoverished migrants and the Gospel. They generally present themselves as defenders of Christianity, but have little to say about the religion itself, or the so-called "Christian nation", which they are supposedly defending.



Cross, CW, 1947

Still, this development requires a serious response. Sections of the far-right have made a claim about what Christianity is; we have to be able to respond with confidence, knowing that the authority of Scripture and the tradition of the Church is behind us. Thankfully, there has been a response from the leadership of the Church; the presidents of Churches Together in England released a statement condemning the appropriation of Christian imagery at the march to ends contrary to the Gospel, which is worth reading. But also, by a happy coincidence, a couple of months after the rally, Pope Leo published the first magisterial document of his papacy, *Dilexi Te*, which he completed from a draft written by Pope Francis before his death. The focus of the document is the poor of the world, and their centrality to Christianity and the Church. Jesus was a poor man who devoted himself to serving and preaching to poor people; the first thing he says in public about his own ministry is that he has been anointed "to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). This was not merely a "poverty in spirit" – Jesus was itinerant, and had nowhere to lay his head; his poverty must have come with discomfort and suffering, and he was born and died in a position of social exclusion. As Pope Leo puts it, "he experienced the same exclusion that is the lot of the poor, the outcast of society [...] not only as a poor Messiah, but also as the Messiah of and for the

poor." (DT 19). Thus:

Love for the Lord is one with love for the poor. The same Jesus who tells us, "The poor you will always have with you", also promises the disciples: "I am with you always". We likewise think of his saying: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me". This is not a matter of mere human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor, he continues to speak to us. (DT, 5)

To come closer to Jesus, we must be close to poverty, through direct experience or solidarity:

works of mercy are recommended as a sign of the authenticity of worship, which, while giving praise to God, has the task of opening us to the transformation that the Spirit can bring about in us, so that we may all become an image of Christ and his mercy towards the weakest. (DT, 27)

There is no arbitrary distinction between a set of spiritual practices on the one hand, and on the other hand encouragement to do good works; Christianity is a social religion, something we do together. Jesus' position in society, and the way he related to others, is the key to understanding how we are supposed to relate to each other.

Jesus was also a refugee. The Holy Family was forced to flee political persecution under Herod and seek refuge in Egypt, away from Herod's political authority, when he was a baby. Migrants without papers are often, of course, the poorest in our own society, because they are not entitled even to the inadequate welfare which is afforded to citizens. Jesus knew not only material poverty, but also the social exclusion which is often migrants' experience. Pope Leo notes that "The experience of migration accompanies the history of the People of God," in the lives both of Jesus and of exiled Israel, and:

For this reason, the Church has always recognized in migrants a living presence of the Lord who, on the day of judgment, will say to those on his right: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (DT, 73)

We ignore this at our peril. A genuinely Christian country would regard migrants as part of the Body of Christ and act accordingly. We would have to recognise a vision of the common good which genuinely included all of the people whom God has given us to love as our neighbours, which is everybody. Those who migrate, especially those who do so illegally, are doing us a valuable service. They are insisting on their own dignity, and their concomitant right to a decent life, against everything the modern nation state can throw at them. We should follow them in insisting on human dignity ourselves. Let us thank God that he has chosen to reveal himself in the poor, so that in enacting justice we come closer to him. Let us thank God that he reaches out to us with millions of hands every day. Let us thank God that we have a Church which still recognises these things in a time when most of our institutions have failed to. I will end with some words from the end of *Dilexi Te*:

For Christians, the poor are not a sociological category, but the very "flesh" of Christ. It is not enough to profess the doctrine of God's Incarnation in general terms. To enter truly into this great mystery, we need to understand clearly that the Lord took on a flesh that hungers and thirsts, and experiences infirmity and imprisonment. A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord's poverty, actually is; and this is far from easy. (DT, 110).

Thomas Frost

If You Share What Is Everlasting

Harry Wills on the Magi and the Meaning of the Other

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the Law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: '"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."' (Matthew 2:1–6)

Dream of the Magi, Kelly Latimore, 2025

One of my university teachers told us about the time he spent living in rural Africa. He was the only white Christian in a Muslim community. At first, he felt like a distrusted 'other'. Yet, they shared their space and resources with him and, by the end, no one could doubt the possibility of co-existence. According to the fear and hatred of 'otherness' that has become widespread in Europe, this village ought to have met the visitor with hostility and never have shared their material means with him. Given the history of colonialism in Africa, they certainly had more reason to distrust him than if the situation was reversed.

I was reminded of that story when looking at the Nativity according to Matthew. We are told of 'Magi from the east'. Men from a different country, religion, and language, and who were widely suspected of sorcery. And yet there was something more important than their differences that brought them to the hospitality of a poor Hebrew family in Bethlehem.

Who were they? While there is some doubt, the term refers to Zoroastrian priests. Their religion, Zoroastrianism, was founded by the prophet Zarathustra who, much like Jesus, inspired a radical shift in the mainstream thought of his day, critical of the established order and traditional religious authorities, and promising a future world where evil is overcome by good. The appearance of the Magi in the narrative raises two big questions: What was the significance of Jesus' birth to them? And what do we learn from it?

First, I would like to mention something about the historic relationship between the two religions. There were, of course, significant cosmological and theological disagreements between them but one of the earliest Christian understandings of Zarathustra was that he "had been an Iranian counterpart of the (idealised) Hebrew prophets and had been sent, like them, to prepare the way for Christ" (Mary Boyce). Later, referring to the increasing influence of Christianity and other religions, the Zoroastrian king, Hormizd IV, is reported as saying "A throne has four legs, and the two inner legs

cannot support it without the two outer ones. The religion of the Magi likewise cannot stand without opposition." His proposed solution – mirroring Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12; 3:15–16 – was for Zoroastrians to perform good works in order to draw others to the 'Good Religion'.

Imagine a world where differences were always settled in this way!

To understand why these Magi might have been interested in Jesus, we can look at their scripture. Yasht 19, for instance:

...in order that the dead shall rise up, that the Living One, the Indestructible, shall come, the world be made wonderful at his wish… (Cf. Matt 16:16; Luke 20:38)

We worship mighty Khvarenah (Divinely-Given Glory)…, which will accompany the victorious World-Saviour and also his other comrades, so that he may make the world wonderful… (Cf. Matt 19:28; John 3:17, 15:26–27; Acts 10:38)

He will gaze with eyes of sacrifice on the whole material world, and heedfully will he make the whole world undying… (Cf. John 6:51)

Bad Purpose will be overcome, Good Purpose overcomes him. Overcome will be the lie, the truth overcomes it… Perfection and immortality will overcome both hunger and thirst… (Cf. Matt 5:6; John 6:35, 8:32, 16:33; Rom 12:21)

Consider also this passage from the Greater Bundahishna (34:6) which resembles the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31–33):

the Saviour will raise up all the dead. And all mankind will arise, whether just or wicked… In that assembly, everyone will behold his own good or bad deeds, and the just will stand out among the wicked like white sheep among black…

Zarathustra prophesied about a Last Day, Final Judgment, and resurrection of the dead (Greater Bundahishna). Texts concerning the Saviour also predict a virgin birth (Yasna 43:3). The World Saviour is a 'pastor for the poor' (Ahunvar, cf. 'Good Shepherd') and is ordained by God (Yasna 53:2). There are also instructions on charity and warnings against wealth. Given His comparison of the rich with camels trying to pass through a needle's eye (Luke 18:25), you could say Jesus is also a bit of a *zarathustra* (lit. 'he who can handle camels').

There are good reasons, it seems to me, why Magi were included in the story, with prophecies so reminiscent of our own 'world saviour'. On one hand, the text mentions their 'foreignness' but, on the other, we are drawn to see the common ground. The coming together of different people to share in a future hope.

There are other passages in the New Testament that deal with gentiles, Samaritans, the 'others' of various kinds and, in each case, the Teaching draws us closer together. It breaks down perceived differences and reveals what is important, that we are neighbours, a theme summarised by Paul: *You are all one in Christ Jesus*. (Gal. 3:28) If two people can come together in a shared hope, how different can they really be at heart? As the Christian *Didache* (1st century) says: 'If you share what is everlasting, you should be that much more willing to share things which do not last'. Today, however, the fear of the 'other' means an unwillingness to share land or wealth with those they see as 'foreign'. But how foreign can they be? I am willing to bet that, wherever we come from, we share a great deal of what is eternal: A humanity and the hope for a future.

As we can see from the Nativity, one of Jesus' first acts was to bring the 'other' to Him. As He says: *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also*. (John 10:16)

To Him be the glory and the power, forever. Amen

Harry Wills

To shout or not to shout?

Naomi Orrell's reflection on noisy protest

If we have ever met at a protest, you will know that I love making a bit of a ruckus. If someone jumps on the megaphone or starts singing a Billy Bragg song, I will be there singing it at the top of my lungs. While protest can take many forms, an essential part of protest for me is to be disruptive, to be in a physical space and claim ownership of it. But this is not without its limitations; we (and I include myself in this) can be guilty of making noise for noise's sake. Speaking from personal experience, sometimes the most disruptive protest can be entirely silent.

DSEI Protest, Maktoobmedia, Instagram

I have been thinking a lot about how we occupy this physical space, particularly as Christians. In particular, what is the role of Christians in those spaces? Are we there to bring peace, to simply be there as a sign of solidarity with the cause, making the other protesters know that we are "not like other Christians"? Is it enough for us to just be there, or do we also need to be willing to be disruptive?

Since joining the Catholic Worker, there have been three protests that have made me ponder the efficacy of noisy protest. The first was at the DSEI Arms Fair in September, a staple in the life of the London Catholic Worker. Every two years at the opening of one of the largest arms fairs in the world, people of all faiths and none descend on the Excel Centre as a visible witness to the horrors of the arms trade. We began our time there with a Quaker meeting for worship (perhaps the most obvious example of silent witness). I have often found meetings for worship moving, particularly when they are held in public. There was a moment when we became surrounded by police officers threatening to move us on. As an act of non-violent witness, a friend stood up and welcomed the police officers to the meeting. You could argue that this wasn't particularly effective – we weren't part of the group of protesters who were blocking the entrance to the arms fair, for example – but the stillness in that space felt similar to the moment of stillness Elijah experienced on Mount Horeb. In that moment, I experienced God not in the violence of the arms fair, but in a "moment of sheer silence" (1 Kings 19:12).

Buoyed up by this moment of stillness, I felt empowered to join a group of protesters outside the exit of the Excel Centre for a very different type of disruption. There we were as the attendees were leaving the fair, shouting "shame! shame on you!" At the time, I felt some discomfort doing this. I could see that some of the other people of faith remained silent, not engaging with the chanting. And who was I, a fellow sinner, to bring shame on people just doing their jobs? But in doing this, we engaged far more with the attendees than with the meeting for worship. The disgruntled attendees stopped and asked why we were shaming them, pushing back against us. Would we have had the same response if we had stood there in silence? After all, didn't Jesus speak uncomfortable truths to the authorities of his time (Matthew 23)? Didn't he also make a ruckus in the Temple (John 2:3–16) and, like the persistent widow in Luke 18, teach us to make our presence felt?

Another example comes, once again, from the Quakers, during the October Defend our Juries action in Trafalgar Square. The Quakers decided to hold meetings for worship every hour on the hour for the duration of the demonstration. This was in response to a call for a silent demonstration, certain that the disruptive nature came from the words on the placards the sitters were holding. About halfway through the day, a group of socialist organisers set up camp next to us and got thoroughly disgruntled with what we were doing. One of them got on a megaphone, shouting at us: "why are you silent? This is not the time for silence! Now is the time for action! Your silence makes you complicit!" It seems that silent contemplation can really annoy some comrades!

A few weeks after this, I attended an anti-fascist demo in Whitechapel. The local community had successfully stopped UKIP from marching through a predominantly South Asian area of London. Despite the fact UKIP had moved their march to Hyde Park, the anti-fascist organisers decided to stay in Whitechapel and keep a presence there. There were so many anti-fascist demonstrators that we filled Whitechapel High Street, occupying the road for a few hours at least. Despite the police trying to contain it, they couldn't stop us shouting, marching, dancing and, yes, even singing Billy Bragg songs. Walking away from the demo I experienced an unexpected moment of stillness; because the High Street had been blocked, all I could hear on my walk back to the tube was the sound of birdsong and the market-sellers. I found myself thinking about Psalm 62:

"Wait on God alone in stillness, O my soul; for in him is my hope." (v. 7)

In that moment, all I wanted to do was give thanks for the beauty of this moment but also the holy actions of the demonstrators that made this peace possible.

I don't write this article to have a definitive answer on whether we should be noisy at protests or not; perhaps it depends on what the situation demands. Even so, I offer this as a provocation to those of us who might want to avoid the discomfort of disruptive protest. So often I have found us Christians are reticent to be disruptive, resorting to candlelit vigils and silent prayer. I often wonder what the church would look like if we preached a gospel of noisy disruption. Imagine if our preachers told us to pick up a placard, grab your megaphone and take to the streets, the place where Christ is so often found. The Book of Proverbs reminds us to "speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute" (Proverbs 31:8). Perhaps a bunch of noisy Christians would do the world a whole lot of good.

Naomi Orrell

DSEI Protest, Maktoobmedia, Instagram

To the Edge And Beyond

Life and loss in the borderlands

Watergang du Nord, Calais. The narrow stream that flows along the northern edge of the Courgain Est playing fields. Willow scrub on its southerly bank once sheltered many dozens of Eritreans' tents. All that remains now is a broad carpet of wood shavings. Another campsite obliterated. The new site is an old site from which the Eritrean community was last evicted in 2022. Back then, it had become a swampland of puddles and mud.

September. The weeks of summer dry have ended; torrential cloudbursts now herald the change of season. After a night of heavy rain, the fence is a festoon of wet clothes and bedding. Five sodden blankets topped by a sheet of plastic will serve as a soft underlay for Zehra's tent. The sun emerges and there's now a holiday feel. The grass, newly mown, is a sward of alternating dark and light green stripes. A pot of food bubbles on a fire. There's music, Massawa delicately plucking the strings of a krar, a traditional Eritrean instrument. Finishing his tune, he passes the krar to Fikru who plucks and sings. Elsewhere, a game of dominoes is underway. Dawit is deep into a book.

Calais Draughts, Alex Holmes, 2025

You want morning coffee? Hayat proffers a small paper cup emblazoned with the words 'Café Royal, Switzerland'. The coffee is intensely sweet.

How is UK? Fireside, it's the question asked again and again. This time it's Ariam who's asking. And then, Ariam, you tell your story. How you escaped from Eritrea to Israel only to be deported after five years to Rwanda and then pushed by the Rwandan authorities into Uganda. How you journeyed to Egypt, married and became the father of three children. Your dream is to reach the UK and have your family join you. But today is the very day that the UK government has added to its 'one-in-one-out' flagship deterrence deal with France by putting a halt to refugee family reunion.

A sudden electrical charge pulses through the campsite; everyone is immediately on edge. Robel and Hamid stride towards the gate at the field entrance to check who might be approaching. After a recent night attack, two Eritreans keep guard throughout the hours of dark. Yusef describes how his fingers were slashed and needed stitches. Now, Yusef, you sit on the edge of your seat clutching your bandaged hand, your eyes following Robel and Hamid. This time the approaching group are new arrivals, an Eritrean family with two children. The relief is palpable; the electrical charge dissipates.

But the police clearance that occurs every second day is expected and the camp must be dismantled. Anything left will be taken away. Within minutes it becomes a ghost site, emptied of people and possessions. There remains just a residue of occupation: Yohannes' wheelchair, a single trainer, a pair of trousers on the perimeter fence sporting the words 'The Past'. And close to the edge of the smouldering fire, the abandoned krar. It will be dusk before anyone will dare return.

Wissant, a village at the Channel's edge, down the coast from Calais. Another story told. Your story, Abbas. "Fishermen rescued you on your way from Libya to Italy, where you were the only survivor of a shipwreck

involving 58 people. In 2012, you were one of the first to testify that the Mediterranean border is killing people, but the UNHCR blocked the broadcasting of your testimony. You spoke of your route, Sudan, Lalibela and the restaurants in Addis Ababa. About the war when you were a child and how you left Assab by stepping over dead bodies.

Eventually you were resettled in France where the psychiatrists wanted to pump you full of drugs. Rightly, you didn't want to take them. What's the point of taking medication in order to conform to a society that excludes us, destroys us, imprisons us in individualism? You have shown us once again, and once too often, how the border kills and how important it is to fight for freedom of movement." Words of tribute spoken at your graveside, Abbas. A single candle flickers in a glass jar. Hands are placed on your coffin. Gently you are lowered over the edge and into the dark earth.

Alex Holmes

From the Archives: Mid-Winter

Dorothy Day's 1935 editorial on the suffering and glory we share in the Mystical Body

I'd like to have everyone see the poor worn feet, clad in shoes that are falling apart, which find their way to THE CATHOLIC WORKER office. A man came in this rainy morning and when he took off one dilapidated rag of footwear, his sock had huge holes in the heel and was soaking wet at that. We made him put on a dry sock before trying on the pair of shoes we found for him, and he changed diffidently, there under the eye of the Blessed Virgin on the bookcase, looking down from her shrine of Christmas greens. But his poor, red feet were clean. Most of the men and women who come in from the lodging houses and from the streets manage cleanliness, what with the public baths. I heard of one man who washed his underwear in the public baths, and sat there as long as he could in that steam-laden, enervating atmosphere until it was not quite too wet to put on. For the rest, it could dry on his skin. Not a pleasant thought in bitter weather.

Our prayer for the new year is that "the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it."

It would seem, however, that the glory comes only through suffering this present day when we look upon the Mystical Body reviled and assaulted in Mexico, Spain, Russia, not to speak of the physical suffering of the poor all over the world.

WE REPEAT–
The only immediate remedy is the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. When asked what is the program of THE CATHOLIC WORKER by those who are interested in political action, legislation, lobbying, class war, we reply–It is the program set forth by Christ in the Gospels. The Catholic Manifesto is The Sermon on the Mount. And when we bring THE CATHOLIC WORKER into the streets and public squares, and when we picket the Mexican consulate, it is to practice the spiritual works of mercy–to instruct the ignorant and to comfort the afflicted.

Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. There is no use looking for a revival in business, a return of prosperity, until the hearts and minds of men be changed. If we wish for a program, let us look into our own hearts. The beginning is there.

Dorothy Day

Humans And Our Edges

James Catterson reflects on living in community

Over the past two years, I've lived in three intentional communities. As my current chapter living at the London Catholic Worker (LCW) as a live-in volunteer draws to a close, I thought I might reflect on my time here and note a small handful of things I've learnt across my experiences in intentional community.

I didn't really know what to expect in coming to the LCW as a long-term volunteer. I vaguely heard about the project from a friend in 2023, then throughout 2024 the LCW sat at the back of my mind as a possible intentional community I could be a part of. After getting in contact in late 2024, I visited shortly afterwards in early 2025. It's such an interesting experience to dip your toes into an established community and wonder how you could fit into it. It can be quite vulnerable actually, to consider – "How could I complement this? Would I fit in here? What will this place teach me or mean to me?"

Well, it turned out that living at the LCW has been a gift that I didn't quite expect. I have worked alongside other young live-in volunteers who care a lot about people, the injustice that we are seeing, and faith in God. I have lived alongside a household of men with vastly different stories to mine who have truly welcomed me in like a brother, a son, a friend. I have even gotten to be involved in the current chapter of their stories. I have met volunteers who come to cook for the community, drive for the community, live in the community to help for a week; all who generously give of their time, finances, stories, joy, and love in a way that I can't quite comprehend. Although living in community can be hard, I believe that it allows us to face the reality of our humanness as we experience living alongside one another's hard and soft edges day in and day out.

Here are a handful of things intentional community has taught me:

Living in community means letting yourself have a bad day in the community and being okay to wear that. Especially when you're in a role, such as a volunteer. It says, "Yeah this is my home. And I'm human. This is where I have my good days, my bad days, my in-between days".

Living in community asks you to think of mercy regularly. Living with multiple other people means your edges will rub up against other's edges. I often have to choose to show grace – to choose to be forgiving

and not hold a grudge, to choose to still be kind when I'm agitated, to accept it when I can't have my preferred way.

Living in community means that you need to make time in your week to do something on your own, or something that is just yours. Going for a few runs during the week is something that is solely mine. I am alone, I am moving my body, I am seeing different houses and different people, I am breathing deep breaths.

Living in community means making decisions together. We are a bit of a yes generation – feeling the need to answer straight away, and often for the answer to be a yes. It's been a big learning curve that when someone asks a question, instead of answering straight away, to reply with "I'll let you know after I've checked with the others". Humbly, it helps you to see something in a different light, and respects that the community is home to multiple people and views.

Living in community means getting sleep and having a sacred space. Being able to switch off, letting your room or a nook be your introvert haven, is vital. I stand by the concept that I am always more loving if I've had enough sleep and some alone time. Even if that's a nap on a day when you're not feeling it.

Living in community ultimately means seeing the human in one another: embracing the human imperfection. Clichéd as that sounds, it's something I think I'll stand by forever. Often, you don't have the choice of the exact kind of people you live in community with. Maybe someone really gets on your nerves. I'm often someone who takes a first impression of a person and holds onto it. But time and time again, I am surprised as I learn about people, how I am softened to them, to their edges, their story, their vulnerabilities, their gifts.

James Catterson

The Trinity, Jaroslav, 2025

The Unmourned

A new poem by Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

1.
If I die
let me be unmourned,

no tears,
or eulogies –
the ordinary nothing suffices.

Like a shadow
breaking down
into shards on the threshold
and vanishing.

I go in, no one there.
I leave.

I have lived.

2.
I have carried a sated face
for God.
Or could that be my face?

On the way to life are pilgrims
and choruses,
my mother beating her chest.

3.
Elsewhere is a place.
The tautological rhythm in breathing.

I search amongst the flocks of the unnamed,
the threadbare fabrics left in the sun,

for creatures –
any, on top of the burnt hills.

4.
I have no life to live.
The muzzled barking in the backyard is
mine.

5.
They medicated
me for me.

With each tablet I swallowed
I befriended a new fear.

6.
I learnt to write 'Palestine' in Arabic
before I wrote my name.

For almost my entire life,
I was angry at this order.

Not anymore. Now I can see
in my own impending death

that a name is never merely a name
or a sound, but a remembering

akin to endeavouring to remember.

7.
Wretchedness, O wretchedness, tell me what
it is that is not flesh.

8.
I say to whoever comes to us:
This is a body, my body,

that is yet to be enunciated,
organs, anonymous,

waiting to germinate, but if you insist
on coming, come when time

surreptitiously becomes another.

9.
I am the equal of the void.
I say to you, Reader.
To the privilege
that is white reading.
That is white erasure.

To the inanity of writing in peace.

GCH House Update

Life in our house is constantly changing. Guests and volunteers move in and out, and with them come shifting meals, conversations, and the small surprises that mark our days. One week we receive a huge donation of cabbages and live on cabbage stew; another week, focaccia, and we are eating Gouda toasties with unusual pickles. There are some constants in our routine; morning meetings, night shelter shifts and morning and evening prayers. Every other Tuesday at 7.30pm our Bible study: live-in volunteers, guests, neighbours and external volunteers gather to read scripture together and apply it to our shared context. We all aim to see the face of Christ in each person who crosses our path; in the man who knocks on the door asking for donuts, the woman down the road struggling with her television and one another as we navigate our own hardships.

At present there are five live-in volunteers; Me (Moya), Thomas, Harry, James, and Naomi and ten guests. With two guests remaining in our night shelter, which is being wound down as people move on to winter shelters. Today I visited one of our guests in a detention centre. When asked if he had family in the UK, he said: "I have family, not biological, but you are my family."

Family here is found not only in joyful moments – spontaneous singing around the dinner table, impromptu screenings of football matches, jokes about the Spice Girls – but also in the harder ones – detention visits, difficult appointments, and the quiet patience of walking with people through fear and uncertainty.

We continue our work despite governmental injustice, personal challenges, and our consistent lack of funds, because this house is a vocation rather than a lifestyle choice. Dorothy Day wrote, "We have all known the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." This community extends beyond those currently living here. Nora, a former member, recently visited and recognised her handwriting on an old sign. Martin and Johannes drop in regularly and we hope to partner with Conor and others on a new winter project. These ongoing connections, woven together with our amazing network of external volunteers, form a community beyond the fifteen of us in the house and stretching across the country. This house is far from perfect, but it is a glimpse of the Kingdom, arriving in cabbage stew, mismatched chairs, late-night conversations, and the belief that Christ comes to our door every day, disguised as the person asking for help.

Moya Barnett

The Catholic Worker in the UK

London Catholic Worker: Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1BG; 020 8348 8212; londoncatholicworker@yahoo.co.uk; londoncatholicworker.org

The Catholic Worker Farm: Lynsters Farm, Old Uxbridge Road, West Hyde, Herts, WD3 9XJ ; 0923 777 201; thecatholicworkerfarm@yahoo.co.uk; thecatholicworkerfarm.org

Glasgow Catholic Worker: glw@catholicworker.org.uk; catholicworker.org.uk

Rimoaine House: The Wirral, Merseyside; 015 1953 0220; rimoainehouse@proton.me

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
Herbal tea
Sugar
Peanut butter
Honey
Chilli sauce
Soy sauce
Cereal/Porridge
Long-life milk
Coconut milk
Fruit juice/squash

CLEANING

Eco-friendly products
Washing Powder
Anti-bac spray
Cream cleaner
Toilet cleaner
Floor cleaner
Dishwasher tablets
Washing-up liquid

TOILETRIES

Toilet paper
Disposable razors
Bars of soap
Toothbrushes
Toothpaste
Shampoo
Shower gel
Deodorant

Charity Gift Declaration—Multiple Donations

Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate.Gift Aid is reclaimed by the charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

I want to Gift Aid my donation of £_____ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to GIUSEPPE CONLON HOUSE CIO.

☐ I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

My Details: Title ____ First name or initial(s) _____

Surname _____ Full Home address _____

_____

Postcode_____ Date_____

Please notify the charity if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address, or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Standing Order Form

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

I wish to pay Giuseppe Conlon House CIO £10/£20/£40/other amount_____ per month/other_____

First payment to be made on: ____/_____/_____ and monthly/other thereafter.

Name of your bank: _____

Address of your bank: _____

Your account name: _____

Your account number: _____

Your bank sort code: _____

Please pay: CAF Bank, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4JQ. For the credit of: Giuseppe Conlon House CIO Account number: 00037144 Sort code: 405240

Until further notice the sum of the value indicated above.

Signed_____ Date _____

Please return to: Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Rd, London, N4 1BG

Your name:_____

Your address: _____

_____

_____

_____

SUPPORT OUR WORK

At Giuseppe Conlon House we run a house of hospitality for destitute asylum seekers without recourse to public funds. 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.

DONATIONS WELCOME!

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

OTHER WAYS TO DONATE

You can also send a cheque payable to 'Giuseppe Conlon House CIO' to 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1BG, or donate online via our website. If you would like to make an online bank transfer, these are our details: Giuseppe Conlon House CIO, CAF Bank, Account No: 00037144, Sort Code: 405240, IBAN: B61CAFB40524000037144