

# THE LONDON CATHOLIC WORKER

free/donation

advent 2024

issue 77

## Revolutionary Naivety

*Martin Newell reflects on our need to keep faith in revolutionary action*

**I**t felt like an exciting and inspiring time. I had been involved with Christian Climate Action for several years and was now getting involved with Extinction Rebellion (XR)—at, or even before, its beginning. The organisers seemed to have a well-organised and thoroughly researched plan to bring about the kind of revolutionary change that was—and still is—needed to respond to the climate and environmental emergency.

Of course, growing in understanding of the full urgency and scale of the climate emergency was not exciting. It was horrifying. What was exciting, however, was the possibility that this could really change things. The change needed to protect the life of God's Earth is a move toward a post-growth, post-capitalist economy. Perhaps something akin to the model described in Kate Raworth's *Doughnut Economics*—a space between ecological and social boundaries where just relations between humans and all life on Earth could flourish, and where all of creation could receive the love, respect, and protection it deserves as God's gift.

Hindsight is a fine thing, of course. By the summer of 2019, there were loud voices calling on XR to avoid scaring people too



*XR Protest, Photo by Alisdare Hickson, 2022*

much, and to be cautious about raising unrealistic hopes that would inevitably be disappointed. I did not really expect such revolutionary change, but I thought it was worth trying, and it seemed like the best opportunity I had seen—or had the chance to be part of—in my adult lifetime to create that change. In any case, I was convinced that taking part in XR was, for me, a necessary response to the climate emergency.

At its peak, XR seemed to me like a real

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Pentecostal miracle—an authentic expression of the life and work of the Holy Spirit. And I still believe that. Looking back now, on one hand, it seems to me that the (Divinely) providential combination of XR, Greta Thunberg and the School Strikes, and David Attenborough's TV show *Climate Change—The Facts* (which aired during the most famous XR Rebellion—pink boat in Oxford Circus and everything) did have a massive and almost revolutionary impact on national and global consciousness regarding the need to respond to this emergency. But on the other hand, it has obviously not brought about the more fundamental, non-violent, revolutionary change we were hoping for.

So my question is: What do we do after a 'failed revolution'? What are the choices, the right path? Where do we go after mighty struggles seem to have ended in defeat? How do we deal with the emotional fallout? It could be disappointment, or a temptation to despair. It could be grief. Or simply exhaustion. It could be like the miners' strike of 1984 and the Thatcher years, or the Extinction Rebellions of 2018-2020. Or the Latin American liberation struggles of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. The list goes on. My last proactive involvement in the 'climate emergency movement' was in autumn 2021, when I participated in two weeks of Insulate Britain (IB) blockades on the M25 and at Dover Port. After that, I had to stop, mainly because of personal and family challenges. But I also started questioning whether the strategies XR and IB were using had run their course, at least for the time being.

So now what? Last year, I read for the first time Gustavo Gutiérrez's famous book *A Theology of Liberation*. Published in 1970, during the struggles for liberation, justice, and freedom in Latin America, it kicked off the whole liberation theology phenomenon. A recurring theme of the book is that those who work only on the level of 'charity' or even 'reform' for the poor and oppressed are

naïve. What is really needed, according to Gutiérrez, is revolution.

I'd like to agree with that. However, the Latin American liberationists discovered they were not just struggling against the 'powers and principalities' (Ephesians 6:12) in the form of local elites and dictators. They were also up against the overwhelming power of the USA and its allies, including the UK.

Shortly after Gutiérrez's book was published, socialist Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile. Three years later, on 11 September 1973, he was deposed in a CIA-backed coup and replaced by the military dictator Augusto Pinochet. Similarly, the revolutionary Sandinista government took power in Nicaragua in 1979, but the US responded by funding the Contra guerilla war and imposing an economic blockade, successfully undermining popular support for the Sandinistas, who were eventually defeated in the 1990 elections. Elsewhere, the US funded and supported military dictatorships protecting extreme capitalism across Latin America. This includes the attempted CIA-backed 'Bay of Pigs' invasion and coup in Cuba, as well as the ongoing economic embargo.

In their own terms, the Latin American liberation struggles and their support from liberation theology appear to have failed. The same could be said of XR. On the other hand, Latin America is generally democratic today, and left-of-centre governments have been elected to support the poor, the indigenous, and the working class. Relatively speaking. Alongside that, the central themes of liberation theology—ideas like structural sin and the option for the poor—have become mainstream in Catholic Social Teaching and official Catholic doctrine. Similarly, although XR did not fully succeed, it did have a massive and positive impact.



*Pentecost, Engraving, Anonymous*

What does all this mean? The struggle for life, justice, peace, and freedom must continue, for sure. But what is the best way to direct our energies on behalf of God's suffering people—the oppressed and impoverished among the growing wealth of the elites—and on behalf of God's suffering Earth?

For myself, I see questions of strategy. There are also questions of personal calling, gifts, strengths, and weaknesses. Of emotional and spiritual pull. As well as personal, family, and other circumstances. Some might say I'm just experiencing burnout. Perhaps it's more a question of cycles, like the liturgical cycle, rather than a linear view of time where campaigns have a beginning, a middle, and end in success or failure?

For Christians, of course, we look to Jesus. As Dorothy Day said, even Jesus failed. He ended up crucified. Most of his friends left him, denied him, or betrayed him. It was the women who remained with him till the end. But that was followed by the seemingly miraculous success of the Resurrection! Yet even after that, life went on. The Romans continued to occupy, oppress, kill, and enslave for three more

centuries— 'a time, two times, and half a time' in the language of the Book of Daniel— until that empire collapsed. And history goes on.

I take comfort in what happened after the crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples took shelter and went home. Even after the resurrection, they had to wait for the revolutionary, spirit-led day of Pentecost. And after Saul's dramatic conversion, he spent months processing what had happened. Perhaps this is what happens. After being in the middle of dramatic events, everything needs to be processed. We need to find our feet again.

Maybe the '80-20' rule can help too. In Catholic Worker terms, this might mean a good balance is 80% of energy in the daily work and life of hospitality, with the remaining 20% in resistance or activism, trying to work for change on one level or another. In hospitality work, it's possible to see, feel, and experience the direct and immediate benefit of, for example, giving a meal to a hungry person, or a home to someone who is homeless. A human being, a sister or a brother in God's family, has clearly benefited. With activism, the benefits can be enormous, but often the outcome is disappointment, or it can feel like all that work and effort was ultimately futile in terms of seeing positive change. For three years of my life, the balance of energy was probably the other way around. So I, and others, need time to recover and regenerate. After all, even the army has tours of duty and time off afterward.

On the other hand, the climate and environmental emergency continues. Carbon emissions still rise. Many species are rapidly approaching extinction and some have already disappeared. The risk of crossing irreversible tipping points grows every day. Right now, I can only do what is at hand and pray to God for further miracles and Pentecostal days.

**Martin Newell**

## Externalisation

*Thomas Frost on our national failure to meet Christ in the stranger*

Those of us who are not saints are likely to find ourselves, eventually, asking the Lord ‘when did we see you a stranger?’ (*Mt 25:44*) We know in principle that what we do for the poor we do for Christ, but the definite moments when it becomes clearly imperative to act on that principle come up so rarely that, in practice, we generally do less than we should. We might recognise refugees and illegalised migrants today as some of those people among whom Jesus told us we should expect to find him, but we so rarely come face-to-face with them that we are not often so moved. Moreover, the state has set up its border regime in such a way as to make it as difficult as possible for us to be good.

As far as possible, asylum seekers are prevented from reaching Britain in the first place, but are kept in Calais, so that when the French police destroy the belongings of migrants and leave them to sleep in the cold, when they sink small boats at sea and leave people to swim back to shore, it is not really treated as a political issue here in Britain, despite the fact that our government directly funds it, and created in the first place the exceptional situation whereby the border is moved to Calais for the purpose of enforcement but not for the purpose of asylum. Those asylum seekers who do manage to reach the UK are without exception detained on arrival, and generally placed in an immigration detention system designed to isolate them. As far as possible, irregular migrants and the violence used against them, paid for by you and me, are kept invisible, so that people don’t, on the whole, think of these things as being done to human beings, but keep thinking in an abstract way about ‘securing the border’. This is one of the benefits of ‘externalization’ for the authorities.



*Calais Evictions*, Photo by Michel Spekkers, 2016

But there are limits to what the authorities can do in countries like Britain and France, with the remnants of a commitment to human rights and a relatively open media able to report on abuses. Consequently, the policy of British and European governments is increasingly to outsource border violence to those governments and other groups which can get away with it. In recent years this has involved substantial payments to the border agencies of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian states along the north African coast through which many migrants travel in hope of reaching Europe via the Mediterranean. In September, Keir Starmer visited Rome to praise the supposed successes of these initiatives in reducing the number of those crossing the Mediterranean, and announced that £4 million would be given by the British state to the Rome Process, one of the funnels through which aid to these agencies is poured.

We find that those crossing the Mediterranean are often more frightened of being returned to these countries than they are of dying at sea, to the point of refusing to send out distress calls until they are out of Tunisian or Libyan waters. The Tunisian government has openly adopted a practice of systematic pushbacks into the desert—men, women and children are driven out into the



Sahara and abandoned, often with no food or water and with their phones confiscated.

They are left to walk for days back to the coast or die in the attempt. Several mass graves have been found in the Sahara but there is no way of knowing how many have been murdered in this way, partly because the Tunisian government makes it virtually impossible for NGOs to operate there. A recent UN report found that twice as many people now die in the Sahara as drown in the Mediterranean. In exchange for this contribution to Europe's border security, European governments have given hundreds of millions of euros to the Tunisian government in the last few years, including €105 million in 2023 specifically to fund Tunisian border control, in full knowledge of the methods used.

The situation in Libya is, if anything, even worse. There is no centralised coast guard or border force in Libya, which has been split between two rival governments since the civil war, each of which is effectively a coalition of smaller militias; the role of a coast guard is undertaken by these various militia groups. Those migrants who are captured while travelling through Libya, or intercepted by the so-called coast guard at sea, suffer what a UNHRC report, published last year, described as 'an abhorrent cycle of violence'. The report found 'that migrants across Libya are victims of crimes against humanity and that acts of murder, enforced disappearance, torture, enslavement, sexual violence, rape and other

inhumane acts are committed in connection with their arbitrary detention'—sexual slavery is also systematic. It is normal for migrants detained in Libya to be held for ransom, either from their own funds or their relatives', to the extent that forced labour and extortion have become what the report calls a significant source of revenue for Libyan militias and state institutions.

Facilitating this, European governments, including the British government, have given tens of millions of euros worth of aid to Libyan groups in the last few years to fund their actions at the border. Furthermore, European border agencies routinely share the coordinates of migrant boats with the so-called Libyan coast guard, even when merchant vessels and civilian rescue ships are much closer, because civilian ships would be unable to return rescued people to Libya under international law, as an unsafe country. As an example of what happens to those returned there, the UNHRC report cites a documented instance of a boy, a refugee detained in Ayn Zarah in Libya, who having been tortured, and in immense pain, hung himself. His body was left hanging in front of other migrants for a day and half before it was taken down by guards. There are countless similar stories. In the same month as this report was published, the British government announced another £1 million in funding for Libyan border authorities.

All this is being done, at least in part, on our behalf and with our tax money. It would not be accepted if it was happening in this country, but because it is being done far away, to people who are not deemed to matter, it is barely even reported on. It happens with the tacit acceptance of people in this country because we allow migrants to be marginalised—because, for the sake of a sense of security here in the centre, we are willing to overlook the violence at the border.



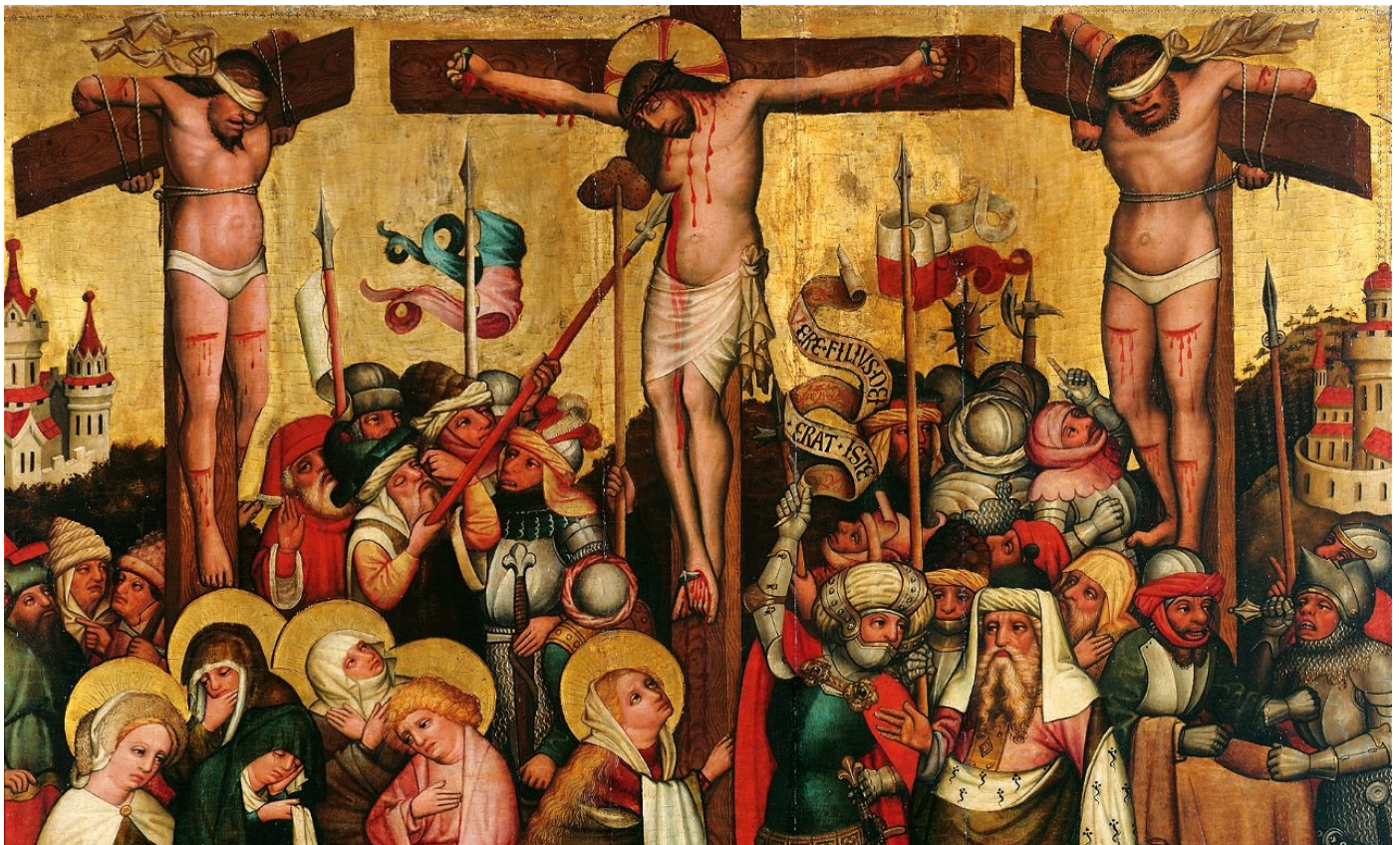
*Syrian & Refugees, Lesvos Island, Photo by Ggia, 2015*

This article was first given as a reflection at a monthly vigil outside the Home Office on Marsham Street, during which we name and mourn those killed each month crossing European borders. I hope that we thus play some small part in opposing the border regime. Christians in this country have an obligation to rehumanise in the public mind those who are dehumanised by state policy. We have as much as we can to bring people who are marginalised into the centre of our communities. We have to keep talking about these things in the centres of power, of government, of the media, of the churches, of our own communities.

Our religion, after all, began with a crucifixion. It was such an awful and humiliating form of death, as far as the Romans were concerned, that the crucified person suffered a sort of social death as well—they were placed in a state of exception, as

someone you couldn't relate to socially in a normal way. On the edges of settlements, they were marginalised in every possible sense. And when God came into the world that was where he chose to place himself, and for two thousand years we have been putting the cross right at the centre of our worship—that is what Christianity is. We are hypocrites, then, if we centre the cross but don't centre those being crucified at this moment. If there's any comfort to take from all this it's the certainty that, however successful or otherwise we are at this work of social rehumanisation, God will always be successful, because he himself won that victory on the cross. As Reverend Munther Isaac said at Christmas, God is under the rubble. God is in the deserts, in the detention centres, and at the bottom of the sea. If we want to find him, that's where he'll be. Jesus remains at the cross.

**Thomas Frost**



*Kreuzigung Christi, Meister von Laufen, 1457*



# The Flight into Egypt

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

The Flight into Egypt

for Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

He sharper than the cutting edge  
he angles handles makes tables  
foursquare the most tableish tables  
no-one else dare work so plainly  
tables to hide beneath when roofs  
fall in tables to seat dogs at  
tables to – he’s not about breaks  
the grain seems pleased in place glistens  
from its listening square chiselled  
as if by a sigh morning star  
and evening slow comfortable

So when seamed with sleep his eyelids  
illuminated from outside  
as if in a house on fire  
he listened plainly once received  
the burning word exile he chose  
without hesitation loving  
as if there were a choice acted  
on it with foursquare certainty  
in truth in blood-red haste he rose  
and woke his love

They went away



*Albrecht Durer, Flight into Egypt*

**Anthony V. Capildeo**

# Muggings

*Anne M Jones reflects on the dilemma of being short changed by those short of change*

Peter Maurin's Easy Essay on St. Francis, printed in this year's Summer LCW newsletter, refers to Johannes Jorgensen writing that 'St. Francis desired that men should give up superfluous possessions.' Similar words are constantly on my mind as I go about my daily business in London. I am typical of the guilt-ridden middle classes, all too aware of our good fortunes, born in the right generation at the right time. 1941 might seem an unlikely year, but I was fortunate enough to be geographically and socially placed to escape the worst events and their aftereffects. I am daily grateful for how things have worked out for me in the eighty years since.

A daily preoccupation of mine is how to give to the poor without becoming complacent, conceited, or indifferent. Living in London over the past 18 years, I've become increasingly aware that dropping £1 into a beggar's plastic cup might be repeated ten times within half an hour, which is a shocking indictment of the steady deterioration in life for some people in my city. So, like most of my friends, I now restrict my offering to one a day and focus on the small, organised charities that have sprung up in recent years to reach wider groups of



*Beggar Man and Beggar Woman Conversing, Rembrandt, 1630*

marginalised people. But I've been 'softly' mugged (meaning no threats, weapons, or violence were involved) at least twice .

On the first occasion, I was withdrawing money from a cash machine when a man tapped me on the shoulder, distracting me momentarily. He then snatched my card and ran off. I immediately rang my bank to stop the card, but the thief, having memorised my PIN number, had already stopped at another cash machine a few yards away and withdrawn £200.

An off-duty policeman had witnessed the entire incident and insisted on taking me to the local police station to report it. When I later commented, 'What a sad way to lead a life,' the policeman gave me a look of sheer disbelief. He had no time for 'that sort of scum who need locking up.' The loss was later covered by my friendly, helpful bank, so I was completely unharmed.

Then, the other day, I was walking along an unfamiliar street when a distraught



woman rushed up to me and insisted that she wasn't asking for money, but could I please exchange some cash for a ten-pound note? She claimed the hostel she needed for the night refused to accept cash.

Though this explanation seemed odd to me, I wanted to be helpful. Looking into my bag, I did indeed have a ten-pound note, which I gave her. She began pouring the coins into my hand but suddenly switched to pouring them into my handbag.

I walked away, feeling smug (as I tend to after thinking I've been helpful), and decided to check the coins. Somehow, by sleight of hand, she had given me only £2. Over the next few hours, I cursed myself for my own stupidity. I warned other people, some of whom said this was an old trick, while others advised, 'Call the police.' Nonetheless, I decided to return two days later, and there she was—same place, approaching passers-by with a handful of coins, same patter. I went up to her and introduced myself, whereupon she beamed and said, 'Thank you, darling,' and attempted to kiss me on the cheek. I stepped back and said, 'You short-changed me.'

'Oh dear, did I darling? Let me repay you,' she cheerily replied.

'No, I wouldn't dream of taking it, but I think you need to get your life sorted out,' I

sternly told her, at which point she turned her back and walked off. Which is what I should have done as soon as she approached me. But, as I said, the urge to be helpful is in the DNA of most of us.

That ten-pound note, in any case, represented ten days of not dropping a coin into a plastic cup, so in that sense, it was superfluous to me.

The need to live on one's wits has been around since the beginning of society, and before the Welfare State, it was probably the *modus vivendi* for many. But this incident has made me wonder how many of us, in fact, graft from others perceived as far stronger than ourselves. I admit, I enjoy taking home souvenir table napkins and sugar packets if ever I'm invited to posh places to eat (increasingly rare these days, sadly). The recent scandal about our Prime Minister's wife accepting expensive clothes from a wealthy donor makes me wonder about the whole business of taking from others. I wonder why the acceptance of something we cannot get for ourselves is seen as self-enhancing.

The young man involved in my first mugging was, according to the policeman who kindly helped me, part of a large gang operating all over London for a gangmaster. Some months later, most of them were jailed for 18 months to 4 years. The cost to the state would have been

hundreds of thousands, and I wonder whether these desperate men benefited from prison. The second mugging involved a very desperate woman, and it has left me wondering whether I owe her any further obligation. She is clearly in deep trouble, and I know of several places where she might turn for constructive help—should she want it. Equally, I have to recognize that she is a self-determining human, clever and skilled in her strategies to survive in a difficult life.

My social work days are well and truly over, and I am now at the stage of trying to shed as many superfluous belongings as I can bear to part with. In the process, I am discovering that much of my stuff holds deep sentimental value, so my drawers and bookshelves remain stuffed, though no longer over-stuffed. I have to restrain myself from buying things that look lovely in the shop (charity shops, these days). In pondering these things, I discover—not without a wry smile—that I am facing my own deep flaws: greed and covetousness. It's an interesting revelation. While I am no longer of the self-flagellation mindset, at times it remains irresistible, and I conclude: 'Must try harder.'

I wonder what St. Francis would say?

**Anne M Jones**

## Kindness in Precarious Spaces

*Br Johannes Maertens' reflection at the Home Office vigil for refugees, Monday 21 October*

A few weeks ago, I was in the Dunkirk camp, where I regularly join Art Refuge\* in their work with the medical NGO Doctors for the World. The weekend before, around 1,000 people had crossed the English Channel from northern France in small boats, and four people, including a child, had lost their lives. In Dunkirk, the team informed us that early that morning the police had started 'le démantèlement' or the 'clearing' of the refugee tents and camp. We didn't really know how the mood or atmosphere would be. Would there be tensions between the communities? Between the smugglers? Or between individuals?

On the way to the camp, with our caravan of NGO vans and the ambulance, we saw groups of refugees standing on one side of the busy dual carriageway, all looking in the same direction. They were watching, from a distance, as their last dwelling places—tents, campfires, sleeping bags, or anything else they hadn't been able to take with them—were being removed into small waste vans. It was probably not the first time they had been exposed to this, nor was it the first time I had witnessed it, but even if people are staying in places where they aren't supposed to be, seeing people's improvised dwellings or shelters being dismantled and disappear is not easy. Perhaps the refugees were standing there wondering, 'Under which blanket will I sleep tonight? Will I be able to find a dry place? My good boots were in there,' and so on. Refugees are often people already struggling with being uprooted. This does not help.

The place where the NGOs set up the distribution was already very busy; more than 800 breakfasts had been given out by the charities. As we tried to set up alongside the others, refugees began coming to the team for medical help. With Art Refuge, we have a



*Refugees in Dunkirk, Art Refuge, 2024*

very long van at our disposal, with long tables. We tend to use both inside and outside spaces when it isn't raining. One of the 'tools' we use is a very large map of the world, which we lay on the ground, not too far from the van. As soon as I had laid the map (which consists of three large parts) on the ground, refugee men gathered around it. Standing at the edge of the world map makes you stop and look, or, you could say, take a step back and look at where you are.

'Where is Afghanistan?' one of the young men asks me. I am sitting on the map in the ocean area,— you don't want to sit on someone's country— so I glide my finger towards Afghanistan. His friend asks, 'Where is the UK?' I point to that little island off the coast of Europe, more towards the middle of the map. With their fingers and mine, we start retracing the route they took to Dunkirk: Afghanistan, Iran, Tehran, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and France. On our very large world map, the distance between Dunkirk and London is about only an inch and a half.

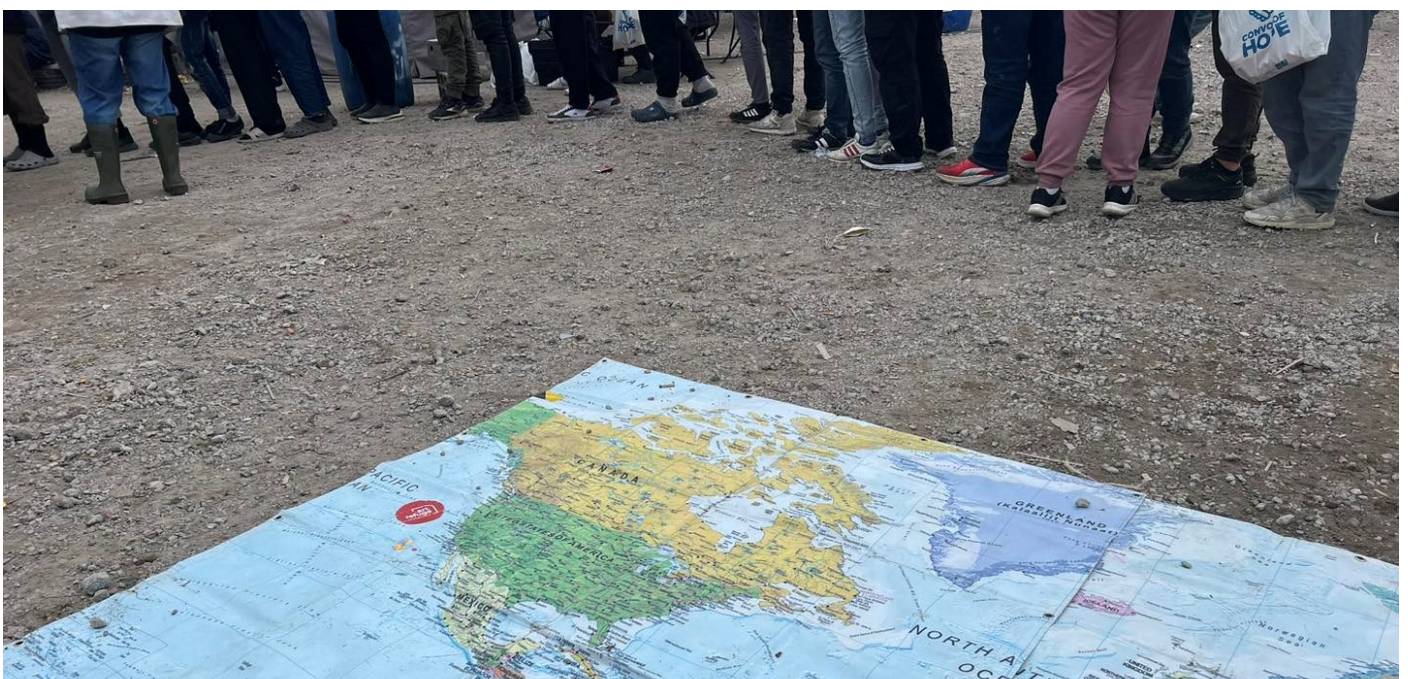
They have travelled a long way, these young lads. They have seen different worlds and are now in a wet, cold tent camp in the dunes of northern France. Several had journeyed for a year, three years, or even longer. Only a handful had been 'on route' for a few months. The map and some of the other

materials we use make people ‘time travel,’ as my colleague Miriam Usiskin likes to call it. In their minds, people travel back to where they came from (often home), they look at where they are going, and at where they are now. I think the map helps put things in perspective—what they have been through. All the materials and the setup we use have been selected over many years and have their ‘art-therapeutic’ significance, but that is for the art therapists to explain, not me.

Now, a young South Sudanese Christian and his friends show me proudly where they are from: South Sudan (although he mentions he was born in Khartoum). The group of young men were all around 15 or 16 when they left South Sudan for Sudan, through the desert to Libya, to Tunisia, being pushed back from Tunisia into the Libyan desert, being pushed back to Tunisia, and back to Libya again. Finally, crossing the dangerous journey on the sea to Lampedusa, then onto mainland Italy, and now, last week, Dunkirk, France. Their English was good, from their school days. I began to understand that it had been a long journey; they had been on the road for six years! They had a smile on their faces, like most young people in the world. Tunisia was ‘difficult,’ Libya ‘difficult,’ ‘very difficult.’

My colleague, Bobby Lloyd, had brought me some coloured tape, and we plotted out on the map the route these five or six young men had taken. A young man from Kurdish Iraq started mapping out his route and explaining where he came from, which route he took, and why he had left Kurdistan (bombings by the Turkish army). He came by the Serbian route. He was not alone—others from Kurdish Iran and some Afghans had come through Serbia and Eastern Europe. Even some Ethiopians had come through the Belarusian-Polish border, where they were hit and pushed back over the border by the Polish border force. Some had tried to cross the border nearby in Lithuania—but that was too bad. Not only did they get hit, but some said refugees were tortured there—their fingernails were pulled out.

The map began to fill up with all different colours of tape, representing the routes our young men had taken and the stories they were sharing. One of the Ethiopian young men said to his friend, ‘Your Vietnamese friend, where did he come from?’ and I quickly showed them Vietnam on the map. ‘So far!’ ‘Yes, it is,’ I said. So much further than they had already come. That day, we



*Refugee Map, Art Refuge, 2024*



only saw one Vietnamese refugee, but Dunkirk has, for a long time, had Vietnamese refugees passing through.

Sometimes people stand there silently, or tell each other—and us—parts of their stories. And of course, they look at the one-and-a-half-inch distance between Dunkirk and London.

People from different continents even listen to each other's stories. Others help translate. It gives people a different perspective, with everything they have been through, and all the hopes or hopelessness they carry with them.

Maybe plotting the routes on the map also 'roots' people in a certain way? But like my colleague Miriam Usiskin remarked in our debriefing after the work in the camp: 'Kindness'—there was kindness around. Even if we were in a more-than-precarious place, in a very difficult camp, when these young men gather around the map, or the young men, women, and children gather around our community table that we had set up, there was a certain kindness, hope, and even joy. And that made me think of the Gospel reading of Emmaus, which recounts the journey of two disciples on the road to Emmaus, unaware that they are accompanied by the resurrected Jesus. Both the disciples and the refugees are on a journey, burdened with uncertainty and loss, yet yearning for hope and safety.

For refugees, their journey often feels like an endless walk, a dangerous walk to Emmaus, filled with despair and uncertainty. But sometimes, where people meet and share their hope, kindness can be born. And from that hope and kindness, healing and a sort of resurrection can come.

In someone's journey, our mutual acts of kindness can be the beginning of something much greater. Maybe standing here today doesn't immediately change the dreadful reality or our UK and European policies—but our simple acts of kindness might save or change a person's life.

**Bro Johannes Maertens**

*\*On a monthly basis, I try to join the Northern France team of Art Refuge in Dunkirk and Calais. The team is led by Bobby Lloyd, visual artist and art therapist, and Miriam Usiskin, art therapist and Senior Lecturer at Hertfordshire University, MA Art Psychotherapy.*

*Art Refuge uses art and art therapy to support the mental health and well-being of people displaced due to conflict, persecution, poverty, and climate emergency, in the UK and internationally. More info at [www.artrefuge.org.uk](http://www.artrefuge.org.uk).*



*Emmaus, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, 1918*



# Obituary: Edwin Kalerwa

*Nora Ziegler remembers the life and contribution of our dear former guest Edwin*

**O**n 10th September 2024, Edwin Kalerwa passed away in hospital, after suffering from cancer. Edwin lived at Giuseppe Conlon House from 2016 to 2018. He was also a member of the congregation at St Martin in the Fields in London, as well as Watford Chess Club, and he volunteered for many years with the charity Groundswell. Recently he studied IT and was designing a website where he hoped to platform discussions about politics and activism.

I first met Edwin when he came to Giuseppe Conlon House in 2016 during a time when he was homeless and fighting for his right to stay in the UK. He was only supposed to stay for a few weeks, so we gave him a spare bed behind the bookshelves. Being homeless had damaged his health in many ways. He often seemed anxious, worried that people were stealing his things or conspiring against him. He had brought all his belongings with him including furniture. We spent months putting him under pressure to sort out his stuff, his case, his life, and reminding his caseworkers that his stay with us was only supposed to be temporary.



*Edwin Kalerwa, BCC, 2022*

From the beginning, I treated Edwin as a problem that I needed to solve. Edwin told me that we did our best, that we worked very hard in a difficult environment. He blamed the Home Office and the conservative government for his situation. But he was also honest about the hurt and disappointment he experienced while living with us. I am sharing this because I want to be honest about the small part of his life that he spent living with us, even if some of it is painful.

I reached out to him a year ago and we met up a few times. Only a few months ago in the summer, we met up in London and had lunch at a Kenyan restaurant. He told me how he wished we had let him stay with us as long as he needed, long enough to sort out his papers.

He talked about how difficult it is when everyone treats you as a number, when it feels like nobody really cares and there's nobody you can trust. He described how difficult it is to think about anything, to

make plans or act when you are so stressed. He also talked about the retreats we used to organise and how sometimes it felt like we were a family.

His honesty and generosity deeply moved me. It has inspired me and given me strength to engage compassionately with people whose actions have hurt me or other people. Edwin understood the complexity of people, our emotions and mental health, our relationships, conflicts and the power we exercise. Edwin was a great chess player. He offered to teach me once, but I felt too patronised to take him up on it. We were planning a trip to Snowdonia. He wanted to challenge himself and climb a mountain, but I had some doubts. He was also passionate about politics. We spent hours on a sunny day, sitting in Red Lion Square, talking about colonialism, gender, education, trade unions... He wrote an article for this newsletter about climate change, and another very candid article about his experience of homelessness. I am so grateful that we were in touch again and that I was able to get to know him more as a whole person, not just as a guest in a Catholic Worker house. Thank you, Edwin, for all you have shared and given of yourself.

**Nora Ziegler**

# Politicians Must Rule in Favour of God's Will for Planet Earth

*We reprint the climate change article Edvin Kaleriva wrote for our newsletter during his time with us*

Researchers have concluded that industrial and agricultural emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and other GHGs threaten to change the climate rapidly over the next 100 years and beyond. This may have dramatic consequences for both people and the environment. Much uncertainty remains, but the message is clear: climate change poses a risk to future generations, and this risk needs to be taken seriously. While the first steps to combat climate change have been taken, the most difficult decisions still lie ahead. It is not just governments that must act: progress will only be made if there is widespread support from all sectors of society, including local authorities, NGOs, relevant industries, communities, and individuals. For policy-makers it means incorporating climate change considerations into their day-to-day and long-term decisions. For corporate executives, it means including the potential costs of both climate change and actions to minimise them in their business and investment calculations. For individual citizens, it means favouring climate-friendly products and services and adopting climate-friendly habits and lifestyles.

The international community must act, and we must reconstruct a reverence for God's creation that allows us to have the strength and courage to do everything we can to respond to climate change. The international community has made some momentum on climate change, yet it must do more. The issue was addressed in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Since the Convention entered into force in 1994, governments have been quantifying their national greenhouse gas emissions and developing strategies for dealing with climate change. Tougher emissions—control targets, more rigorous



*Creation & Eden, Bible, Robert Barker, 1610*

national policies, and intensified international co-operation have been high on the agenda, especially since the Kyoto conference in December 1997 and the subsequent debates. Governments adopted the Convention in response to the dramatic progress scientists have made in understanding how the Earth's atmosphere system works. So while there has been some progress, it is a shame that Trump has taken the USA out of the Paris Accord, a revolutionary agreement. Clearly, certain politicians—even those who claim to be Christians—are not understanding the threat of climate change for what it is.

A religious perspective, then, might give policy-makers and politicians the incentive to act over the long-term to help resolve this critical issue. Genesis gives us two creation narratives—the first proclaiming, 'and God called the Light Day' (Genesis 1:5) and the second stating, 'Lord God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew' (Genesis 2:5.) These both tell the story of creation, but with a contrasting style. In God, creation has a depth of meaning that shows that man-made

climate change can not be declared as the work of God. Just as the scorching east wind, like the Arabian sirocco, destroyed plants and grass, so God was understood to destroy human pride (see Psalm 103:15-18; Jeremiah 4:11). Just as a plant springs up, fresh and green, only to be withered before the blast of the hot desert wind, so human empires rise, only to fall before the face of God.

Examining the Bible helps us to realise, then, that man's obsession with consumption is negatively affecting God's creation. Namely, our effect on the environment has led to pollution and a slow destruction of the environment. This moral failing and the immoral activities of humans on earth seems to be separating man from God. The failings involve extraction of natural resources without regard for future generations, and turn our resources into merely something to barter and exchange. For example, pollution is contributing to complications with our natural health. In addition, unsafe production methods

— full of human errors due to use of artificial systems— create a mode of consumption which is certainly not compatible with what God intended.

The dogmatic notion that God has ceded the earth to man, and therefore it is the right of man to plunder and abuse the resources without concern for God's spiritual creations, can be interpreted as disobedience to God's will and what he had intended for mankind. We must understand the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must intercede and assist in our personal decisions as well as those of policy-makers, moving the heart and turning it to God as well as opening the eyes of the mind and giving us joy. Surely this will allow Christians to long for truth as well as an understanding of it. Through looking after God's creation and realizing how we have affected our natural environment, we will be able to reconstruct our relationship with God.

Edwin Kalerwa

## God and Mammon

*Peter Maurin's Easy Essay on the idolatry of Capitalism*

Christ says:

'The dollar you have  
is the dollar you give  
to the poor  
for My sake.'

The banker says:

'The dollar you have  
is the dollar  
you lend me  
for your sake.'

Christ says:

'You cannot  
serve two masters,  
God and Mammon.'  
'You cannot,  
and all our education  
is to try to find out  
how we can  
serve two masters,  
God and Mammon,'  
says Robert Louis Stevenson.

Peter Maurin



# The Divine Sophia

*Tom Bennett on the power of Divine Love to overcome all division*

There are two ways through life: the way of Nature and the way of Grace.' Thus begins Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011), a coming-of-age film chronicling the spiritual and domestic struggles of a Texan family in the 1950s. Animating the drama is the austere patriarch figure, played brilliantly by a crew-cut Brad Pitt, whose private failures as an aspiring concert pianist take their toll on his wife and children. With our perspective tidily framed by the opening dichotomy, we watch each character as they decide between that which 'doesn't try to please itself' and that which 'only wants to please itself'. But is the question of Grace and Nature a zero-sum game?

We are currently enjoying a 'Bulgakovian moment' in contemporary theology. Despite being condemned by the Patriarchate of Moscow for his writing, Russian Orthodox thinker Sergius Bulgakov is finally being recognised for his unique insights into Christian thought, complex as they can sometimes be. It is, perhaps, this difficulty that has sparked some controversy, as more traditionalist readers of his work find fault with his shocking, brilliant and elusive ideas about Sophia, the Wisdom of God. To elaborate as best possible this tricky (and historically polyvalent) term, a useful starting point might be Jordan Daniel Wood's definition: 'the divine splendor, the Shekinah, the entire content of the



*Icon of Sophia, Novgorod*

divine essence resplendently manifest and brilliantly burning with love in and among the 'Three Persons.' As this rather majestic language would suggest, it is, in fact, a word that originates in scripture, specifically Proverbs: 'The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.' (Prov. 3:19-20 NRSV).

Bulgakov attempts with Sophia to bring together 'Lord' and 'earth', Creator and Creation, without introducing a fourth figure into the Trinity (as his detractors would argue) or collapsing into the kind of dualism that Malick promulgates in *The Tree of Life*. But how exactly does he avoid these two pitfalls? Giving a full account of Bulgakov's sophiological

metaphysics is, of course, beyond the scope of this piece. But one facet of his approach provides us an alternative to the more common, binary arguments about Nature and Grace. It is the aspect of his thought that draws not only on his immediate intellectual predecessors (like Vladimir Solovyov) but earlier patristic figures too. It is the idea of Sophia as symbol for the presence of God in our creaturely world. It is the very experience we can all attest to when material existence appears to announce divinity itself, as the unspeakable beauty of a sunset or the wonder of a newborn's laughter. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins knew it well, writing that 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God'.

Robert de la Noval, a leading scholar on Bulgakov, takes this notion further when he argues that Sophia is the 'condition for the possibility of the incarnation of God as a human being'. With our charged world comes the possibility of the Logos made flesh, which logically means, for Bulgakov himself, that 'man possesses in himself an uncreated-created principle, he pertains to the eternity of the divine world. Belonging to the created-animal world, he is at the same time god by grace.' Not to be misunderstood as a vague form of pantheism, or worse a form of self-divinising heresy, Sophia is the created



world's yearning for God.

It would be an oversimplification to characterise Nature and Grace in *The Tree of Life* as simply either/or. In one of the most poignant moments of the film, following the death of his son, Pitt's character (positioned largely as the embodiment of Nature so far) chastises himself for the way he has treated his boy: 'When he was sitting next to me at the piano, I criticised

the way he turned the pages.' In a rare moment of self-awareness and humility, he goes to on to lament that he made his son 'feel shame, my shame'. Here, Malick deftly brings together the two ways of Nature and Grace he had suggested in the beginning were divergent paths. If Malick's step here is tentative, Bulgakov may offer us a fuller vision. After losing his own son prematurely, he articulated perfectly what may happen

when you open your human heart to grace: 'For the only time in my life I understood what it means to love not with a human, self-loving, and mercenary love, but with that divine love with which Christ loves us. It was as if the curtain separating me from others fell and all the gloom, bitterness, offense, animosity, and suffering in their hearts was revealed to me.'

**Tom Bennett**

## Farmfest 2024

*Paul McMullen sums up the continuing success of the Catholic Worker Farm's annual music festival*

**T**he Catholic Worker Farm near Rickmansworth has staged its very own fund raising music festival almost every year since the early Noughties. It is one of our main fund raising activities and helps us to provide a home and welfare to 18 homeless women and children who generally have no access to benefits from the state or local authorities. Over the years the Farm has helped around 650 women in this way. Mary House (a separate residence within the farm) is one of the few facilities in the country that can offer refuge to women with children who have refugee or undetermined nationality status.

The Farm is blessed with a lakeside location and several acres of green space in the Colne Valley Regional Park. It is a stunning venue for a festival and can accommodate a couple of hundred people camping overnight, although because of its easy access



*Main Stage, Farmfest 2024*

to London by public transport, most festivalgoers arrive on a day ticket. Each year the community, with the help of a growing number of volunteers, provides an exciting array of food and drink whilst on the stage a line up of emerging talent, from these blessed isles and occasionally further afield, hammers out a wildly eclectic range of music. The festival can be a bit of a testing ground for artists to try out their skills in the sphere of outdoor performance. For others it's a place to bring well known and loved music to a wider audience. Scott Albrecht who manages the whole enterprise, recently with a lot of artistic support from his son Francis, has assembled a technical crew who

deliver a very tight and professional experience, all the more amazing because none of the crew or the performing artists receive monetary reward for their efforts. The rewards are drawn from other realms than the economic and I think this is the secret success of the festival, for it forges a living link between those engaged in the worlds of art, music and technology, those in the ministry of acts of mercy and those who are suffering oppression and who would otherwise be in desperate circumstances.

If you would like to help us repeat the success of this year's festival either by donating food, music, art or serving as a volunteer then we would love to hear from you. The festival is held on the August bank holiday weekend and generally runs from Friday to Monday.

**Paul McMullen**

*For more info contact Scott Albrecht on 0798 347 7819.*

## Advent Reflection

*'Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent' preached in Munich by Alfred Delp, 7 December 1941*

**T**he Second Sunday of Advent adds a new word, a message about man's authenticity. Someone who encounters the Ultimate, who knows about the end, must let go of every compromise. In the presence of the Ultimate the only thing that survives is what is authentic. All compromise shatters there. All cheap negotiating shatters there. All half-truths, and all double-meanings, and all masks, and all poses shatter there. The only thing that stands the test is what is authentic. It has evolved into what it was intended to become. Reality is ordered according to the authentic and healthy, to that which is true in being, and true in words, and true in deeds. Try removing from our lives—from our presence—everything that is inauthentic in being. Remove all cramps, all poses, all arrogance and hubris, and all human rebelliousness. How much of our lives disappears with these things? How much space would be freed up—and for what purpose? Really, for man, for God, and for life itself—think how much room would become free for life that is suffocating now! Now take from our lives all that is inauthentic in our speech. Take the lies away. How different relationships would



Virgin & Child with St Anne and Infant St John the Baptist, Da Vinci, 1500

be, if no one needed to figure on the other person speaking with a double meaning, or guardedly, or camouflaged—let alone deliberately lying! If a word were a word again, and a sentence were a sentence again, and a fact counted as a fact, how very different life would be!

In the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent, the figure of John the Baptist appears. Our Lord says of him: 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed driven to and fro by the wind? Or what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Look, those wearing soft clothing are in the palaces of kings. Or why did you go out? What did you want to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is the one of whom it is written, 'See, I send My messenger before You to prepare the way for You' ' (Mt 11:7-10). This figure of John stands before us, solitary, austere, and weathered by the storms and lonelinesses of the desert and weathered by the storms and lonelinesses of the prison—but authentic.

The figure of John demonstrates two laws about authentic people and shatters two dangers to which man's authenticity generally succumbs. He shatters two situations in which an authentic man so very often suffocates and drowns. The first law and the first danger: the prophet stands before the king. And the first point: do not permit regard for private security or personal existence to make you into an inauthentic person. So very often throughout history, whenever prophet and king have encountered one another, the king is always in the superior position. What is easier, what is simpler, than to muzzle a prophet! Yet, indeed, hasn't it been—not the voices of those who went into the palaces and were welcome there—but rather the voices calling in the wilderness who filled the cosmos, who prepared the way, who directed people toward Advent, and who arranged for the proper meeting with the end and the Ultimate?

Prophet and king! The prophet must have known that the king's power and force and majesty would fall upon him and crush him if he said, 'Non licit: That is wrong because it is inauthentic and is not in accordance with the divine

order.' And John said it, and he was crushed, and he was brutalised, and—for all time and eternity—he stands as the witness within history, as the witness before the face of the Lord, as authenticity itself. And he was right!

Along with that are the second law and the second danger. Futility or ineffectiveness do not dispense one from speaking the truth, declaring what is wrong, and standing up for what is right and just. How could this prophet think he could interfere in the family history and family scandals of the king, and be successful? Whoever considers

success, or makes his decisions or attitudes dependent upon whether something is futile or certain of success, is already corrupt. Then authenticity no longer means his personal encounter with what is real; it is rather his personal dependence upon success, upon being heard, on popularity and applause, and on the roar of the great throngs. He is already corrupt. And woe, if the prophets are mute out of fear that their word might not be heeded.

You must let people notice that you know about the end and have grasped that one of

the essential features of life is called Advent. And that means encounter with an Ultimate and Absolute. And that means being impressed, being forged in this loneliness with the Absolute, and therefore, whenever it is time to give testimony, being untouched and untouchable when faced with compromise, half-measures, silence, anxiety, or cowardice. May God grant that we have people, that we have prophets, who unseal the actual meaning of Advent to us, and who are authentic, and who offer an authentic witness!

Alfred Delp

## GCH House Update

Ahead of the arrival of their first child in November, Tom and Natalie Dennehy-Caddick moved to West London after a combined six years in Giuseppe Conlon House, with Tom remaining closely involved with community as an external volunteer and trustee. We have been very blessed, though, to welcome in two more live-in volunteers, David and Francisco, who have been a great help in our recent refurbishment work. When the next phase of this work is completed later this year, our guests and volunteers in the Church hall areas to move to new rooms, which will allow us to open a small night shelter in the hall in the new year. If you would be interested in volunteering for this proposed project, please let us know.

## The Catholic Worker in the UK

London CW: Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Road, London N4 1BG; Tel: 020 8348 8212; Email: londoncatholicworker@yahoo.co.uk ; Web: www.londoncatholicworker.org ;

*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; Email: thecatholicworkerfarm@yahoo.co.uk ; Web: www.thecatholicworkerfarm.org

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

Glasgow Catholic Worker: Email: glw@catholicworker.org.uk; Web: 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.*

Rimoaine House: The Wirral, Merseyside; Tel: 0151 953 0220 ; Email: rimoainehouse@yahoo.com

*Rimoaine House is a community house practicing mutual aid and hospitality. As a house we are supported by and involved in the Methodist Church. We are friends of the Catholic Worker movement and would love to be in touch with anyone in our area interested in hospitality, faith and social justice.*

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

# Giuseppe Conlon House Wishlist

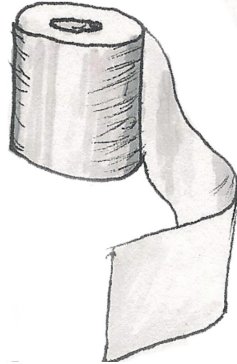
## FOOD

- Tinned tomatoes
- Peanut butter
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Rice
- Jam
- Long-life milk
- Porridge oats
- Noodles
- Hummus
- Soy sauce
- Spices & herbs
- Cereal
- Juice and squash
- Chilli sauce
- Nuts
- Tinned fish



## TOILETRIES

- Toilet paper
- Toothbrushes
- Shower gel
- 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.

Please do not donate pork products! Many of our guests do not eat pork for religious reasons.

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>	
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<b>49 Mattison Road</b>	
<b>London N4 1BG</b>	