

May You Live in Interesting Times

by Ian Linden with Jane Linden



Introduction

Chinese curse or Chinese greeting, the proverb seems to fit the years 2017-2021 covered by this collection of blogs. These have been interesting times in all the ambiguity of the title. Blogging is ephemeral. I hope that pulling these blogs on-line together under thematic headings in chronological order will increase their life-span. Broaching some of these topics, getting some of the shared frustrations of the day into my website, may even have increased my own life-span. Dip in where your interests lie and explore.

Part One focusses on major themes that have characterised the period: Democracy and Politics, Human Rights and Terrorism. I have put Catholicism in this section because I believe Catholic social thinking has much to contribute to the politics we need in order to overcome our contemporary crisis, especially in a culture dominated by secular assumptions about society, governance and economics.

Part Two moves more into the realm of the big events and actualité: government policy and practice, BREXIT, and changes in the Conservative Party. The disruption created by these three has been prodigious. We have witnessed something unprecedented and potentially dangerous which will have an impact on generations to come as well as hastening the decline of the UK. But, yes, there is very little here on the biggest event, the COVID epidemic. With BBC News on the verge of running out of epidemiologists, virologists and behavioural scientists for comment, who can find much to

add?

Part Three might be called international affairs, or at least events in countries of which I have, for one reason or another, some professional experience and, I hope, some insights. The section is led by the USA and Africa where my family has lived, and the Middle East and North Africa whose conflicts, generally made worse by the West, have dominated the period.

Part Four, Observations, is what doesn't fit neatly into the preceding sections, or opens up different themes. Some thoughts on COVID are to be found here. Finally particularly those who turn to the Africa section may enjoy my other on-line book alongside this one: *Emirs, Evangelicals & Empire* which came out of research in Northern Nigeria.

Finally, my thanks to some fine-tuning editing by Daniel Johnson, editor of *TheArticle* blogsite for much of the period covered.

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Part I

Chapter 1

Democracy & Politics

1.1 The Big Red China Model

16/12/2018

The spectacular social and economic development of China, its vast size and population, have turned China into the ideological threat to the West. Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, South Korea in the 1970s, for different reasons, have all demonstrated that respect for individual human rights comes second to economic development. Discuss the condition of many countries around the world today and it's not long before the words "authoritarian" and "China model" enter the conversation.

Words are telling. Consider "authoritarian" – note not dictatorship or tyranny. Authoritarian is used to characterise dictatorships rich in essential resources or key allies. Maybe we are indicating a point on a scale of oppression. Perhaps if you harass, imprison or kill more than a certain number of your political opponents, the more condemnatory word dictatorship kicks in. Language subtly betrays attitudes and relationships.

"The China model" also bears thinking about. Is this on a national scale a matter of cultural choice and self-expression, an identity statement, like a particular car chosen by an individual? But the Chinese Communist Party ruthlessly imposes its uniform political and economic template. There is no choice if you are a Uighur Muslim, or a zealous evangelical Christian, or Falun Gong or a

young dissident, or a human rights lawyer or an investigative journalist.

Are we then inadvertently, unconsciously dumping the idea of universal values and undermining the integrity and interdependence of the UN Declaration of Human Rights as we celebrate its seventieth year? On what grounds do we soften reaction to violations of people's rights to different freedoms and give preference to economic rights? These questions have no easy answer.

If democracy, democratic culture and human rights – the complete UN list – are the touchstone of Western values and inform foreign policy, talking about different models risks becoming a hostage to fortune. Dictators are happy to talk about the Asian model or the African model of democracy, particularly when they are locking up their opponents, rigging their elections, manipulating religious sentiments, or playing on tribal or xenophobic fears of one sort or another. In most instances, these aren't different cultural ways of doing democracy. They are ways of reinforcing the idea that individual human rights confront social, political and economic rights in a zero sum game - when they don't. Their purpose is to justify abuses of power and the enrichment of elites,

The West may rightly be shy about claiming that genuine democracy and respect for individual human rights are no impediment to economic development. It has an inglorious history of colonialism to overcome. And Africa is a constant reminder. Rwanda is a near perfect example of the West's attitude. German and Belgian Trusteeship Rule in Rwanda prior to Independence in 1962 did little to promote economic progress and contributed to social divisions and the rise of ethnic identities. I tell the story in my *Church and Revolution in Rwanda* Manchester University Press 1974. Twenty years later the world failed to intervene to stop the genocide in which hundreds of thousands died. But did Rwanda really need authoritarian rule to achieve successful economic development?

Governments and some international NGOs present Rwanda and its economic

progress as a model for the whole African continent. It is indeed impressive, rags to relative riches without, for example, the diamonds of Botswana. But even given the imperative of neutralizing ethnic tensions after the genocide, President Paul Kagame did not need to eliminate political opposition for the country to prosper.

The massacre by the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front's military of at least 4,000 internally displaced Hutu in Kibeho camp on 22 April 1995 spelt the end to an initial post-genocide government of national unity. Criticism of government became hazardous. The later assassination of Colonel Patrick Karegeya in Johannesburg, and the attempted assassination of General Faustin Nyamwasa, former Kagame top intelligence officials, are two of the best documented cases of the perils of opposition.

In August 2017, Kagame won Presidential elections with 98.8% of the vote. According to Human Rights Watch, before and after the vote: "the Rwandan government continued to limit the ability of civil society groups, the media, international human rights organizations, and political opponents to function freely and independently or to criticize the government's policies and practices". A democratic culture requires the promotion of the UN Declaration of Human Rights as the fabric of politics, civility and social harmony. Dictatorships, Presidents clinging to multiple terms in office through rigged elections and violence against opponents, are not different models of democracy, whether African, Middle Eastern or Asian, or early stages of a China model. They are models of tyranny. And the cost of opposing tyranny continues to be paid by those who try to overthrow it, as demonstrated by the extinguishing of the ill-named Arab Spring.

There is, of course, hypocrisy, arrogance and hubris in the West's global promotion of its ideology of democracy. Gerrymandering in the USA, attempts

to render voting difficult for African-Americans, a referendum in the UK manipulated by fantasy projections of the benefits of a no or a yes vote, are striking own goals. So is the influence of parts of the mass media that thrive on echoing resentment and xenophobia, and foster an ill-informed electorate. Growing inequality, high levels of relative poverty in the USA and UK, torture and rendition to “black sites”, lend themselves to counter-challenge through authoritarian propaganda: they are a gift for those who deploy social and economic rights to deflect attention from their own violation of individual rights.

The West is not likely to win the ideological or ethical argument while economics and GDP growth provide the West’s dominant master discourse, demoting all else. We sing with dictators too often from the same economic song sheet. If democracies hope to occupy the moral high ground, they themselves need to set a better example and urgently reform their own political and economic practice. Meanwhile, when democratic leaders argue that they are engaging constructively with tyrannical regimes, they need to be challenged about what has been achieved by such engagement. And when the real motivation is transparently economic self-interest, the West’s ideological position and its moral argument simply founder on their own contradictions.

My old Professor at University College, Galway, used to remark that when he got into his small, beat-up car it would often drive straight to a pub. The big, red China model, with its disappearances, extensive surveillance of citizens, new facial recognition technology, social credit data, and, in Xinjiang, “vocational training centres” (re-education camps), is driving straight into a dystopian, Orwellian future. To governments tempted to jump on board, just don’t go there.

1.2 Whither British Politics?

6/3/2019

We may be in the middle of a sea-change in politics but how can you tell? We could be just at the beginning. Or the turbulence could subside and business as usual resume. But this time round it is hard to believe that our two major Parties will emerge from their current divisions unchanged. BREXIT now seems set to drivel on for months and continue to prove a powerful stimulus to division, disarray and permanent change.

So should we declare with China's first Premier, Zhou En Lai, when asked what he thought about the consequences of the French Revolution - or maybe it was the French student uprising of 1968: "it is too early to say"? Should we just shrug and switch off Channel Four news? That is very tempting but it would be a mistake. Beginning, middle or end of a political epoch, the changes now happening are full both of danger and new possibilities. The appearance of a small Independent breakaway group of MPs has potential. The Independent Group (TIG) is already scoring higher than the Lib-Dems in opinion polls, but it is too early to say if these opinions would convert into actual votes.

TIG as now constituted does not, though, provide a new look by replacing the top down Parties and London-based, middle-class politicians. The appointment of Chuka Ummuna as its spokesman (male, independent fee-paying school, solicitor, Streatham constituency), was probably inevitable given the preponderance of eight former Labour MPs. But it gives a sense of *déjà vu*, maybe heralding a return to the deadlocked policy clashes that got us into the present impasse. How is such a group to reach consensus on policy?

The Labour Party originated as a bottom-up, working class challenge to a two-Party status quo. TIG's title "Independent" has echoes of another historical

group breakaway, the Independent Labour Party. Founded in 1893 by Keir Hardie, it was a breakaway from the Liberal Party attracting those who saw the Liberals failing to champion the cause of the working class. It flew the Marxist flag.

Here comparisons with Umunna become unfair. Hardie was an exceptional and extraordinary man. The illegitimate son of a farm worker in Lanarkshire with a drunk stepfather, he went down the pit aged eleven for ten cruel years, educated himself through night-school, worked for the Evangelical Union, became a trades unionist, and first entered Parliament in 1892. Joining with Ramsay Macdonald in the mixed Labour Representation Committee, Hardie was a key player in the birth of the Labour Party in 1906. The dynamics and direction of the new Independent Group this year could scarcely have been more different. Perhaps it was the obvious class conflict shaping political life in Edwardian Britain that created heroic figures such as Hardie. They knew what they stood for, where they had come from and what they wanted to achieve and had the integrity and commitment to persevere. The past truly is another country.

Austerity, imposed after banks and financial services nearly bankrupted Britain in 2008, polarized today's politics - not full-frontal class conflict. Under economic pressures, the two major Parties each gave grew their own distinctive extremist Parties within a Party. The extreme Left of the Labour Party took control of the leadership and major intra-Party infrastructure which dominate both political preferment and policy. The majority of Labour members, Corbyn's famous grassroots, support REMAIN, and a People's Vote supported by Conference. But this is not Corbyn's policy. Labour Members of Parliament have problems with their Leave constituents over BREXIT. The extreme Right in the Tory Party hold the

Prime Minister and Cabinet to ransom, threatening to vote against them on BREXIT. UKIP entryism keeps more moderate Tories in line on BREXIT and immigration.

The irony of BREXIT is that, on the whole, the highest percentages voting Leave came from constituencies that would be most damaged economically by no deal or Prime Minister May's fudge-deal. Their Labour representatives in Parliament are therefore in the uncomfortable position of facing hostile local Party members and constituents if they point out the disastrous consequences for them of approving the forms of BREXIT on offer. Their political careers are on the line. Some MPs from Leave constituencies may genuinely think Leave will lead to pastures green and all will be well, all manner of things shall be well. Others don't, but wish to hold onto their seats. And some, for example Anna Turley, (Redcar in the North East with 66% Leave, 33% Remain) have the integrity and courage to tell it how it is and risk their political futures.

Both Tory and Labour centrists are fond of asserting that their Party is a 'Broad Church', a comforting comparison with the Church of England. They are probably unaware of the time in the early Church when bishops trampled each other underfoot, willing to kill and be killed for their version of doctrine. Better for both Parties to think again about proportional representation and let the two extremes form their own Parties and, unprotected, feel the harsh winds of a traditionally conservative British public opinion. We got our main revolution out of our system in the 17th century, and fought against ideological tyrannies in the 20th. We can surely handle extremists better in their own minority Parties. Other European countries are learning how to.

But first, our politicians need to weather today's divisions, turbulence and

change. What should guide them? Firstly, a firm and unwavering commitment to Justice, creating a just – fair - society as the main purpose for engaging in political life. Secondly prudence, knowing which virtue to deploy in dealing with a complex and painful set of decisions. Thirdly, fortitude, remaining faithful to their values despite the obstacles along the way, and overcoming fear for their own futures. These happen to be the first three Cardinal Virtues. But you don't need to be a Catholic to think they will be at a premium in the coming weeks.

*

1.3 Has the West Lost the Plot?

29/5/2019

“A cycle of Western domination of the world is coming to a natural end. Their populations, on the other hand, can feel these large changes in their bones, and in the job markets. This, in part, explains supposedly politically aberrant – to the elites at least – events like Trump and Brexit”. So writes Kishore Mahbubani, a distinguished Singaporean diplomat, in the slimmest of slim volumes entitled *Has the West Lost It?*

Getting a view of the West's trajectory, as others see us, is a salutary experience. For Mahbubani the last two hundred years of overwhelming Western hard and soft power is a temporary aberration in two millennia of history. We are, he argues, returning to a world in which China and India are the largest economies and global power centres. But returning to a changed world. After the entry of a vast Asian labour force and growing Asian economies into the global market, taking advantage of Western experience

and technology, the West's share of global GDP inevitably began to shrink with the consequence that incomes in the West, except for those of elites, stagnated.

China, by entering the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the end of 2001, injected almost a billion low-paid workers into the global economy; this led to declining real wages and growing inequality in the West. Eastern European labour, visible and often blamed was by comparison only a minor depressant. Globalization between 1973 and 2015 saw productivity rise by 73.4% while wages rose by only 11.1%. An incredible 63% of Americans do not have enough savings to deal with a family emergency costing over \$500. The significance of these economic events and the growing inequality they created was ignored as the USA, responding to 9/11 by embarking on neo-con wars in the Middle East, had its government's attention diverted to military interventions.

Mahbubani argues strongly that a hubristic West has yet to come to terms with the policy implications of this transformed geo-economics and geo-politics. Our British perceptions of the world are skewed towards pessimism and, I would say, victimhood. Max Roser, an Austrian researcher into long term evaluation of living standards, based in Oxford University's Martin School for Global Development, has tracked the numbers in extreme poverty globally: 75% in 1950, 44% in 1981, below 10% in 2016. According to the OECD, the size of the middle class around the world doubled from 1.8 billion in 2009 and will hit 3.2 billion next year. The West still has a picture of a backward, underfed world instead of large pockets of dire poverty in war zones and, notably, in parts of Africa.

Mahbubani is highly critical of US military interventionism around the world, particularly in the Middle East. President Trump's approach has been to raise

military expenditure to unparalleled levels, to insist that other countries comply with the US' own regime of extreme sanctions against perceived enemies, and to start a trade war with China. "The setbacks to America's ability to shape the international environment to its advantage are not the result of declining capacity on its part", former Ambassador Charles Freeman said in a lecture at Brown University, Rhode Island. After decades of experience in State and Defense Departments and in the US Foreign Service, Freeman concluded: "They are the consequences of a failure to adapt to new realities and shifting power balances".

Has the West Lost It? deliberately provokes with a sweeping critique of the West. But I do not think the people of Kosovo and Sierra Leone would decry Western military interventionism. I doubt if, as Mahbuhani suggests, the EU's 1962 Common Agricultural Policy had been different, and not a beggar-your-neighbour-across-the-Mediterranean policy, that we would now have fewer migrants from Africa. And I would like the BBC's excellent More or Less programme to test his often shocking statistics, several of which are reproduced here. What worries me most is the unexamined assumption that democracy and individual human rights seem irrelevant to his analysis. Mahbubani surely does not believe that autocratic government and a police/surveillance State are needed before nations change from "basket case" to economic titan.

Finally, Mahbubani underplays the importance of international financial crises. While he does briefly mention the West's reaction to the Asian financial crisis of 1997-8, the impact of the global banking crash of 2008 is missing from his analysis. This is surprising because it was China's financial reserves on top of the US and European tax-payers billions which bailed out the banks, and China's 30-40% contribution to global growth after the initial shock that helped avoid another

Great Depression.

Mabhubani is right to conclude that Western governments did not do enough to prepare for and protect their citizens from the Asian ascendancy. And that this had political consequences. He attributes the Trump and BREXIT phenomenon to changes in the distribution of economic power and the resulting visible inequality in the West. The average income of a CEO in the USA in 1965 was twenty times that of their workers. By 2013 it was on average 296 times greater with “fat cats” much resented in the UK.

What should be done? Financial Times economics journalist, Martin Wolf, gave a pertinent answer: “The elites – policy-making, business and financial elites – are increasingly disliked. You need to make policy which brings people to think again that their societies are run in a decent and civilized way”. There seems little chance of this happening until we put BREXIT and Trump behind us, and accept that we must think in more realistic terms about the consequences of inequality and our role in the world around us.

See TheArticle.com 28/05/2019

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1.4 Does Lying Matter?

12/6/2019

Donald John Trump, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson and Nigel Paul Farage are the three political figures who garner the most public recognition in Britain today. They share and promote BREXIT’s underlying public anxiety about immigrants. This is their primary engagement with voters. Showmanship and outrageous - thus newsworthy - behaviour keeps all of them in the public

eye. Each, in his own way, disports himself to great effect in the grubby, if crowded, grounds of Chateau Celebrity.

Many people find these three men morally repugnant. But evidently many others do not feel the same, are not deterred by their fellow citizens' repugnance, and would like Trump/Johnson/Farage to wield political power. Fundamental to their political strategy is the blurring of the distinction between truth and falsehood. Trump is a pathological liar living in an Alice in Wonderland world. The Washington Post fact-checker clocked his 10,000th lie this April. I suspect he doesn't really grasp the concept of truth. He manages an average of eight public lies a day. Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson is a more intermittent and casual liar, and more selective in his choice of lies, tactical rather than pathological in comparison. Stockbroker Nigel, man of the people with his Coutts bank account, proffers more Piffle than Pfeffel in his interviews and speeches. But he has some very sinister friends and acquaintances, and keeps the source of his funds for his political work suspiciously obscure. Public support for them all continues.

Does lying matter? The 13th Century Dominican thinker, St. Thomas Aquinas, said that lying was making a false statement "at variance with his mind". I am not sure that all Trump's 10,000 utterances and tweets were "at variance with his mind". He believes the last thing he says. Then again our three celebrities may well imagine the public don't believe a word they say and don't take them seriously, goes the argument. I doubt that. True, politics and entertainment blend into each other these days; politicians are duly entertaining us and many of the electorate enjoy the big game. But lying is a corrosive thing. The Catholic catechism – I confess not my bedside reading – says that lying "sows discord, destroys society, undermines trust and tears apart social

relationships”. Not a bad description of Britain in June 2019. We laugh at our peril.

Most people would not go along with Aristotle and St. Augustine who took a very hard line on lying: lying is always wrong, no exceptions. A memorable Dominican priest, Father Finbar Synnott, who headed the South African Catholic Truth & Reconciliation Commission in the early 1970s, faithfully followed Augustine. At the peak of apartheid repression in the early 1980s, I used to stay in the Dominican Priory in Mayfair, Johannesburg – a confusing name for the British visitor as Mayfair was one of the poorest parts of town. The beat-up priory hid several young black activists on the run from the security police. When the phone rang everyone leapt across the room to take the call. I asked why and was told that, if Finbar picked up, he would feel obliged to tell the truth about the priory’s temporary residents, whoever was asking. His brother Dominicans were less Augustinian.

You became accustomed to ‘white lies’ in apartheid South Africa. The police must have known everyone was lying as the priory was shot up one night; and, rather unfairly in the morning, bullet holes were visible above Finbar’s bed. We concluded that sleeping soundly with a clear conscience had saved his life.

The lies that corrode British and US society are not ‘white lies’. They are profoundly injurious ones, a worrying aspect of our political culture’s decline. Trump, Johnson and Farage, deliberately or just instinctively, create a world of fake news, and in consequence an entire political generation is mistrusted; people do not know who or what to believe, or having made up their minds are unable to change them because contrary evidence is no longer evidence. An informed electorate, so important for democracy to work suc-

cessfully becomes impossible. In other places and at other times this state of affairs has led to authoritarianism and the assassination of journalists committed to the truth. I find myself hesitating to say we are a very long way from there yet. Is not suggesting that our future Prime Minister might prorogue Parliament to thwart the will of Parliament a first move in the authoritarian playbook?

We just cannot take the continuation of a healthy democracy, the rule of law, and strong governing institutions for granted. We need to ask ourselves what it means about us and our societies that three men known for their lack of moral values and personal virtues attract the spotlight of celebrity, become leaders, and are given power over us. And once we have asked ourselves, and not liked the answer, we need to speak out and vote accordingly.

See [The Article.com](https://www.thearticle.com) Lying Politicians will tear apart civilised western democracy

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1.5 Supreme Court: Why Were we Surprised? 25/9/2019

Many people will be surprised or dismayed by the Supreme Court's ruling on Mr. Johnson's prorogation of Parliament. Government briefings, Twitter, right-wing tabloids will feed the anger. "Unlawful? What's Lawful about denying 17.4m BREXIT!", the Daily Express banner headline today gives the flavour. We are due for a tirade along "War on the Judiciary" lines, People versus the Establishment: "Unelected", "Undemocratic" "Meddling in our Politics",

“Constitutional Coup” and so on.

It will be no use arguing that our democracy, political stability and constitutional arrangements sometimes require an independent referee between executive and legislature, particularly when the executive tries to avoid scrutiny and shows signs of becoming unaccountable. Which is of course where and when the Law has to intervene. Parliament is the primary law-maker. But, notably when big constitutional issues are at stake, courts take precedence over the rule of anyone else, elected or otherwise: Prime Minister, the Crown in Parliament, the Privy Council, and Lords Spiritual and Temporal. At such moments the court’s judgement may necessarily be political in the broadest sense of influencing the political realm in which the dispute has arisen - just as a referee’s decision will influence the outcome of a football match. Eleven referees in this case came to the same decision. Mr. Johnson was shown a yellow card.

The popular counter-argument will say the Prime Minister should be permitted in this case to treat the sovereignty of parliament with contempt because politicians have made a contemptible and unholy mess of things, and Mr. Johnson has promised to get things done and dusted to honour the 2016 Referendum result. It is rather like saying, after a football team has missed several goals, that the other captain can henceforth ignore the off-side rule, and if progress in the opponent’s half is slow, take over as referee to ensure victory for his team.

The Supreme Court did not mince its words. The impact of Johnson’s lengthy five week prorogation “on the fundamentals of democracy was extreme”. The exercise of the core Parliamentary function, to call the executive to account, make it answerable, a principle of parliamentary sovereignty and the basis of our democracy, was being impeded and no adequate explanation for this

obstruction had been provided. As I understand it, as a consequence, the Supreme Court was duty-bound to define the limits to the prerogative powers concerning prorogation exercised by the Crown on the advice of the Prime Minister through the Privy Council, and concluded that the Prime Minister had exceeded them.

The prerogative powers over proroguing were not before this judgement clearly defined. Why should they have been? As Peter Hennessy described it, the “good chap” premise of our constitutional arrangements prevailed. Good chaps don’t abuse our constitutional conventions. Those were the days.

The Supreme Court made law in the Miller and Cherry cases by their – unanimous – judgement. This is how law in this country develops and this is what the Court does. It defined the nature and limits of one prerogative power and drew the conclusion that the Prime Minister’s advice on prorogation was unlawful – he had provided no evidence that a lengthy prorogation was necessary while parliamentary oversight of government business was essential at a critical moment when constitutional change loomed on 31 October. The resultant Order in Council proroguing Parliament was null and void. Parliament was not prorogued.

I doubt if Tony Blair and Lord Falconer when they legislated for a UK Supreme Court in the 2005 Constitutional Reform Act (established on 1 October 2009) foresaw that fourteen years later the Supreme Court would be involved in an historic juridical intervention in constitutional conventions. Nor that a Prime Minister would be pulled up for unlawful conduct in the process. That’s serendipity for you.

In hindsight the judgement seems an entirely sensible and reasonable conclusion to a complex problem. The court has striven to make it comprehensible to the public. The Executive is answerable to Parliament, a simple enough starting

point. The judgement has nothing, nor could have anything, to say about BREXIT. Lady Hale repeatedly made this clear.

But this will sadly cut no ice in a divided society in which emotion takes precedence over the kind of rational argument proposed by the leading German philosopher Jürgen Habermas', an ideal of dialogue and conversation, which court proceedings at this level seem to model. As Mr. Johnson and the Daily Express doubtless wish, the BREXIT divide will determine how people view this historic moment in the workings of our judiciary and democracy. That it not the fault of the Supreme Court which has provided comforting proof that rational discourse has not entirely deserted this disunited kingdom.

See also TheArticle.com 25/09/2019

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1.6 Why Mr. Corbyn Should Depart... Now 14/10/2019

"We're ready and champing at the bit for an election", Jeremy Corbyn wrote to Labour Party members last week. He must have been using the royal "we". No-one I know in the Labour Party thinks he will win the next general election. Meanwhile 38 people who had lost love-ones, killed by the IRA, wrote to Mr. Corbyn asking for an apology for his repeated failure to single out IRA murders during the Troubles for condemnation, "giving succour" to the Republican movement.

Contrary to Mr. Corbyn's belief that he can repeat his performance in the June 2017 election – which he and his coterie and followers seem to forget he lost – the political situation has become significantly different. Boris Johnson

is an engaging campaigner. Theresa May wasn't. The Conservative Party are now aping Labour's sky-high financial commitments to public services. The Johnson and Swinson BREXIT positions will be clear in their manifestoes. And given the mind of the country's polarised voters, who seek resolution and clarity, Corbyn's laboriously acquired non-position on BREXIT will be a recipe for defeat. He is tarnished by his past. Quite simply he lacks political judgement.

The political charge sheet against Mr. Corbyn has filled up. The first charge was that he was an IRA sympathiser not a peace-builder. Two weeks after the Brighton bombing in October 1984 - aimed at killing Mr. Corbyn's parliamentary colleagues and notably Margaret Thatcher - he met in the House of Commons with two former, convicted, IRA volunteers, Linda Quigley and Gerard MacLochain, to discuss prison conditions. The insensitivity, or political stupidity, of this meeting after five had died and 31 injured by the IRA bomb beggars belief. Between 1986-1992 he attended official Irish Republican commemorations of dead IRA members. Peacemaking?

Mr. Corbyn, aspiring to be Prime Minister responsible for the country's security, has not provided any evidence to support his belated explanation for this behaviour, that he was working for peace rather than supporting the IRA. Seamus Mallon, the former Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and Deputy Leader of Labour's sister Party, the Social and Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), is damning: "I never heard anyone mention Corbyn at all. He very clearly took the side of the IRA and that was incompatible, in my opinion, with working for peace".

Let's be charitable to Mr. Corbyn. These were heady ideological times on the

Left and he was only a back-bench MP. Perhaps he believed himself to be a potential mediator. It was a time of liberation struggles around the world and, perhaps, he did not realise that the IRA were rivals of the burgeoning 1960s human rights movement that could have brought about change. IRA violence, at first ostensibly to protect the Catholic community, shut down democratic redress for Catholic and Nationalist grievances. The Provisional IRA did not, as had many of the national liberation struggles worldwide, taken up armed struggle as a last resort against tyranny. That is why the Irish Catholic bishops opposed them. The Provos ruthless violence pre-empted a peaceful struggle for human rights; and their strategy was rejected by the Official IRA. In a democracy there were other options as the SDLP tried to demonstrate.

Time moved on leaving Mr. Corbyn beached on the shoals of the 1970s. The second charge that he was anti-Semitic, exposed in March 2018, happened in 2012. Tower Hamlets Borough Council (with, note, a strong Muslim presence) ruled that an anti-Semitic cartoon by a graffiti artist, Kalen Ockerman, put up on a wall in Hanbury Street in London's East-End, had to be removed. It depicted Jewish bankers counting money on a monopoly board resting on the backs of naked black workers. Ockerman complained on Facebook about the mural's removal. Mr. Corbyn defended him on grounds of freedom of speech. "Why? You are in good company. Rockefeller destroyed Diego Viera's mural because it includes a picture of Lenin". The mural by Viera, a celebrated Mexican artist, was commissioned for the Rockefeller Centre in New York and removed as a result of a public outcry in 1934.

After this exchange on Facebook came to light, Corbyn admitted that freedom of speech does not justify reproducing Nazi anti-Semitism. As leader

of the Labour Party, he regretted that he “did not look more closely” at the mural. Even on cursory inspection, the grotesque beaked noses of the bankers copied the worst of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda. Had he viewed it through his anti-capitalist spectacles and simply missed its gross anti-Semitism? How could he not have noticed the similarities to Nazi portrayals? We will never know.

Time passed. With an election in the offing, Mr. Corbyn is stranded in his BREXIT dilemmas like a sick whale floundering in the Thames. The Times last week, harpoon at the ready, went on the attack with an investigation about his views on an Iranian Charity. Before he became leader of the Labour Party, Mr. Corbyn waxed lyrical about the London-based organisation, the Iranian Human Rights Commission (IHRC). The investigation turned up that the three directors of the Charity had unsavoury views about the West, Zionists, Sadiq Khan, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the European Court of Human Rights. One director— who would have believed it? — thought Iran had a wonderful record of “standing against injustice”. He saw the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, as an example to the world. The IHRC “represents all that’s best in Islam”, declared Mr. Corbyn in an interview. “I like the sense of values surrounding it”. Ignorance is not bliss in public life. Might it not have been prudent to have “looked more closely”? The defence case might be that the Charity Commission has recently spent two years investigating the Charity and required no changes. But the ill-informed accolades are offensive to many, many Muslims. Can the Labour Party afford a leader as careless in his judgements as this?

We all make mistakes and we try not to be like the Bourbons who “learned

nothing and forgot nothing”. But Mr. Corbyn’s repeated inability to “look more closely”, to demonstrate good political judgement and clarity of thought, has not been remedied by the passage of time, nor by the demands of leadership. The team he has assembled around him do not inspire confidence. He does not defer to wiser counsels. Today his ingrained ideological assumptions, his persistent lack of prudential judgement, form a major element of the BREXIT impasse. While he remains leader of the Labour Party three possible paths forward to resolve BREXIT, a Jonson agreement with the EU and a people’s referendum Mr. Corbyn makes more difficult, and a temporary government of national unity he makes impossible.

Sir Keir Starmer must now be given full authority to lead on BREXIT and allowed to perform his role as Shadow Secretary for Exiting the European Union.

Opinion polls suggest the public have concluded that Mr. Corbyn is part of the problem not part of the solution. For the common good, for the country, for the Labour Party, for all suffering under austerity, he should do the right thing and step aside gracefully now. “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is Vanity” (Ecclesiastes 12.8).

See TheArticle.com 14/10/2019

1.7 Manifestos: Manifestly Bin-Ready?**27/11/2019**

Most people have never read a Political Party Manifesto in their life. You might expect a creedal statement, a summary and explanation of a Party's core beliefs. "We believe in transnational financial capital, maker of wealth and tax avoidance. We believe in one holy, global, market economy, the forgiveness of greed, and the resurrection of one-nation Toryism ..." or something like that. Comparisons and choice of Party leaders being odious, and this a profoundly important election for Britain, I decided to read the Manifestos of the two Parties most likely to reach Downing Street. I found these a fascinating collage of aims, pledges, and some principled thinking, a unique, literary form.

The 2019 Manifestos remind me of hopeful Wedding Gift Lists— prudently un-costed by the sender – with a hint of those New Year Resolutions you make as an adolescent, knowing full well, come the second week in January, they will be abandoned. The Conservative Party does offer a second document costing its pledges which you can download, and Labour claims they have done the sums. And, of course both Manifestos are lengthy and comprehensive: 107 pages of Labour's *It's time for Real Change* and 64 pages of the Conservative's *Get Brexit Done. Unleash Britain's Potential*. Notice the two imperative verbs in the latter. This is to highlight strong leadership and that is why there are eight pictures of Mr. Johnson, hair carefully tousled, plus one picture of workers with a banner "We love Boris". A picture of the bashful, and much bashed, Mr. Corbyn appears but once in the Labour Manifesto. An unfortunate thought does intrude that the real change needed is in the leadership of the Labour Party.

The substantive, domestic contents of each Manifesto have, in the main, been covered by political commentators. But of foreign and international policies beyond the European Union, hardly a word. Both are worth looking at.

The Conservative Party's presentation "Britain in the World" is, as might be expected, defence and security heavy. But it does include in the section "Our Values" the commendable pledge "to seek to protect those persecuted for their faith and implement the Truro Review recommendations" (An exemplary review undertaken by the Anglican Bishop of Truro on religious freedom).

Animal welfare policy also puts in an appearance under values with a picture of a veterinary surgeon and the head of a large black dog. Well, we are a nation of dog-lovers. Lest the vote of cat-lovers is forfeit the Party balances the ticket by "advancing [feline] microchipping". The FCO will be relieved to know Animal Welfare will be promoted overseas - though the Ambassador to South Korea, a country where 300 or so restaurants have dog on the menu, may regret this. Remarkably the Animal Welfare section comes before the one on Climate Change. Yet there is no indication that advanced swimming classes will be provided for either dogs or cats.

The Labour Party in its excellent "A New Internationalism" section of its Manifesto bravely goes for Animal Rights with a charming badger photograph. So much for farmers' votes. They are commendably strong on human rights, international solidarity and social justice, as well as the role of diplo-

macy.

By far the most puzzling item in the Labour manifesto's internationalism section is to be found among its three "pledges" saying what they will do in the first year in power, presumably the most urgent priorities. The first of these is the promise to introduce a War-Powers Act that will require parliamentary approval for military action. Fair enough – though, as in the Sierra Leone civil war in 2000, military action may need to be taken very rapidly. The third is an important FCO-friendly £400 million to boost our diplomatic capacity. But the second is as follows: "Conduct an audit of the impact of Britain's colonial legacy to understand our contribution to the dynamics of violence and insecurity across regions previously under British colonial rule".

There are a number of possible explanations for this odd priority. The first would be the Manifesto drafters have read their Orwell. "He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past". Another would be that the idealistic student masses who flooded into the Party have run out of statues of bad people to pull down, or university lecturers with the wrong views about colonialism to ban.

Might the National Executive simply attend a course on colonial history in our universities? What more do we need to understand, for example about the impact of torturing Mau-Mau suspects in Kenya or, say, the Balfour Declaration's contribution "to the dynamics of violence and insecurity" in the Middle East? Do they really suppose all post-colonial ills can be placed at the door of British imperialism?

Party manifestoes are worth reading in full. They tell you a lot about what each Party's leadership thinks the public wants to hear. And in addition they are an opportunity to scrutinize a political Party's world-view and deceptions. Very useful for citizens, Manifestos provide a check-list of aspirations and promises which they can later call to account.

The current Labour and Conservative Manifestos give rise to two thoughts: first, the leadership of the Labour Party has completely abandoned the realist understanding of political possibilities of the Blair-Brown years; economic radicalism is brutally punished by capital flight. They have forgotten that redistribution of wealth and stability in society, increasing salaries and building better public services, can only be achieved from a broad base of popular support. Because they haven't established that base outside Party membership they won't win the next election. The second thought is that the moderate Conservative Manifesto means there is no real way of knowing if the Tories, if they come back to power on 13 December with a workable majority, will tilt back to a more one-nation stance, or surrender to its new-found extremism. The clear and present danger is that the extremists will win the day.

See also TheArticle.com 26/11/2019

1.8 Metro-Mayors & The Labour Party

8/1/2020

Sadiq Khan, Andy Burnham, Dan Jarvis, the three Labour mayors of London, Manchester and Sheffield are national figures. Why, as staunch members of an imploding Labour Party, supporters fleeing, opponents jeering, are they respected by a public with recognised contempt for politicians? The short answer is that the ‘Metro-Mayors’ – Jarvis the newcomer – to the best of their and their cabinets’ ability, improve the experience of big-city life. But they can only achieve what is possible within the limited budget given them by central government. No mean feat. London has 8.5 million people, Manchester 2.7 million and Sheffield City Region 1.4 million. And over the last decade their funding has been cut to the bone by government.

The more complex answer, as Vernon Bogdanor recently argued in *TheArticle*, is that they are accountable and can give voice to the people who directly elected them. They also embody and express pride in their cities, promote a positive urban identity, offer hope, and show dignity in a country that has made itself the laughing-stock of Europe. Of the ten city-regions of George Osborne’s ‘Northern Powerhouse’ eight have directly elected mayors (there are 23 in all in England). Mayors do make a difference. Take Hackney in the 1980s: filthy streets, council estates neglected, schools failing, parks and public places a mess. In 2002 Mayor Jules Pipe, was directly elected and slowly turned the borough round. It’s now a great place to live. It’s even fashionable – which is a growing problem as incomers drive up property prices.

Millennials grew up with much talking and legislating by national govern-

ment about the role of local authorities: notably the Localism Act 2014, Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, though it was reform of the Greater London Authority under Tony Blair in 2000 that brought plans for a Metro-Mayor of London, first considered by John Major, into reality. The London mayoralty gave us ‘Red Ken’ and, along with Have I got News for You, launched Boris Johnson into the political limelight dangling on a wire, buying water-cannons which couldn’t be used and those nostalgia-trip Route Master buses - but which stopped you jumping on and off - while pouring money into an eco-fantasy bridge over the Thames. It later emerged that he was also funding a pole-dancing entrepreneur who happened to be his girlfriend. But, to Johnson’s credit, and that of the cycling lobby, he continued to cycle and persevered with the provision of cycle lanes. From City Hall to Downing Street proved to be a short cycle ride.

If, as Bogdanor suggests, the focus of devolution should be local Councils, opportunities and threats open up under a Johnson government. The immediate threat is that London could be punished for its strong support for REMAIN and for being a Labour stronghold. If the northern swing constituencies now ‘cloth-cap Conservative’ are to get their reward and not revert, somewhere else is going to feel the pinch. Rumoured reduction or abolition of London allowances for teachers, for example, would have dire consequences.

The picture of London as the heartland of smashed- avocado-on-toast breakfasting cosmopolitans queuing at Waitrose is a deceit. There is plenty of not so hidden poverty. Drugs dealing and gang-crime don’t come out of thin

air. 'Posh' Islington has the 4th highest level of child poverty in the country (47.5% - some 20,000 children). If the allocation of greater funds and attention to the 'North' is to be more than a political ploy, it must avoid taking from the poor of London to give to the poor in towns which have begun to vote conservative.

The opportunity for wider social and economic change begins with asking what is London doing right? How and why has an urban culture developed that is mostly colour-blind and at ease with ethnicity? About 90% of residents of Hackney felt "everyone got along together" in a recent survey. Courtesy and consideration for the old and disabled is widespread.

Yes, London has key national and international institutions, excellent comprehensive schools and health service. And yes, London attracts the ambitious, often the best, from around the world, and some get rich. Under all its mayors it has had strong leadership on racial issues even under terrorist attacks. So why not learn from it. Support the people who keep this city moving, who promote a vibrant economy, and try with inadequate resources to remove the face-to-face dark web of drug, knife and gang crime across its streets. In hard budgetary terms give elected mayors much more control over their city's expenditure and its allocation.

Reform of any kind is difficult. Nobody dares to revalue the decades-old Council tax bands because owners of houses whose value has risen fear having to pay more. Room for mayors to manoeuvre is small. A Prime Minister interested in more than political advantage would encourage its expansion. But to build creatively on the social and economic achievements of Greater London,

not denounce its citizens as a cosmopolitan elite, gives Mr. Johnson no electoral advantage at all.

Meanwhile, Mr. Corbyn has reverted to “resistance”. *Aux Armes, Citoyens*. The Labour Party will henceforth ‘resist’ centralisation and Tory Rule. But, in the real world, it has been leaders such as Khan, Burnham and Jarvis doing the resisting. They have created an urban governance model in opposition to centralisation and populism, doing the most they can within the limits set by their political opponents, retaining the notion that politics is about gaining power to work for the common good. They have resisted the Corbynist vision of power required principally for winning conflicts within the Labour Party.

So how should we describe Labour cities such as London, Manchester and Sheffield? The Labour Party Diaspora? Social democracy devolved? Urban democratic pluralism? We wouldn’t need border patrols along the M25. But if London were to gain just a little of the autonomy of a city-state – it has a larger population and economy than many UN member states – Labour members should stay to cheer not flee and jeer.

See [TheArticle.com](https://www.thearticle.com) 07/01/2020

1.9 Labour's Leadership Election: Virtue Signalling or Real Change?

27/2/2020

As the Labour leadership ballots arrive this week, Momentum is still managing to steer the holed Labour Party back onto the rocks. Sir Keir Starmer features in this dreary saga like a dragging anchor. Tony Blair is right that root and branch change is needed. Starmer probably agrees. But despite demonstrable survival and strategic skills, and consistently side-stepping the worst excesses of Corbynism, he can't yet safely speak of repositioning the Labour Party.

Political commentary now reads like political psychoanalysis. What has got into the mind of, and remains entrenched in, a Party that once won three consecutive general elections? Had the anointed one, Rebecca Long-Bailey, no choice but to assume the role of Corbyn continuity candidate embracing abject failure and political self-harm? If elected will Starmer be able to beat Johnson while engaged, one arm tied behind his back, in a struggle to return the Party to winning ways?

One theory is that socialist secularism has much in common with religious thinking. A residue of religious virtue seems to have jumped ship from the Churches to the Labour Party. Not the already acknowledged Methodist variety but signs of something more Catholic. Sixty years ago traditional Catholic schools taught that an action could be good in itself; what made a good act good was that it was pleasing to God. It didn't have to have an outcome, ending homelessness, bringing about equality, ending discrimination. Eating your hated cabbage in a school dinner, renouncing yourself by performing 'cabbage Acts', did not help starving babies - who stood like a reproachful African

chorus on the moral high ground. But the self-denial was pleasing to God. Similarly, many Labour members refuse to recognise that political actions must be effective; standing for Socialism is good in itself and a precious part of a virtuous identity.

The idealistic young, and old, who saw Corbyn as a secular Guide to the Promised Land and Socialism as a redemptive power were often uninterested in how to achieve effective outcomes from good policies. The policies themselves were the outcome, the more the merrier, virtue piled on virtue, bracing brassicas adding to the health and self-confidence of the Party. The recently coined phrase ‘virtue signalling’ – pejoratively and often unfairly - acknowledges an aspect of this emergent reality, but the phrase misses Labour Party members’ refusal to accept that politics demands a particular cluster of skills. Denouncing all and sundry is not a substitute for the absence of these skills. If it is to have an impact on Society, contemporary politics has to be about good outcomes, effective implementation of policies, and, of course, convincing the public they want your Party to form a government. Good words, pledges and good actions, however pleasing to Socialist values, do not cut it, and the public knows it.

Rebecca Long-Bailey is still narrowly Starmer’s chief rival for the Labour leadership, though massive constituency support for Starmer suggests that the current influence of Momentum in the Party may be less than usually perceived. Her position on equality and discrimination is more than virtue-signalling to Socialism. But take her recent stance on the counter-terrorism PREVENT programme. Last week speaking at the Kensington al-Manaar

Mosque Rebecca Long-Bailey rubbished the PREVENT programme on grounds of discrimination. This put her in the company of - some - Muslim communities, the N.U.T and UNITE.

Here her weaknesses and that of her backers were evident. Evidence-based policy making does not get a look-in. The government's counter-terrorism strategy was "clearly failing", she said. PREVENT alienated "Muslim communities", "set back our freedoms" and had "not made us safer". She wanted it scrapped and something new, but vague, to come out of a consultative process which would include Muslim leaders. Any facts explaining this blanket denunciation did not seem important.

For a start there are now more Right-Wing extremists admitted to the key Channel de-radicalisation part of PREVENT than Islamists. Nor is there any sense of a balanced assessment of the magnitude of the terrorist threat: according to Intelligence chiefs some 3,000 people "of interest" are being monitored and 800 live investigations going on. At least 24 planned attacks have been thwarted since the killing on Westminster Bridge in March 2017. Surveillance is massively labour intensive.

Prevention can only achieve so much. At the end of 2019, the annual number of referrals to PREVENT dropped to 5,738, their lowest since statistics were collected in 2016, but with the highest number yet deemed in need mentoring, 254 for Right-Wing extremism, 210 for Islamist extremism, participating in the Channel mentoring programme. Many others are given local authority support of one sort or another. About a third of referrals arose in the education sector, a third from the police, after reporting safeguarding concerns related

to terrorism under the 2015 Statutory Duty provisions; they were mostly males, and mostly under twenty.

Labour Party policy is only to review PREVENT. Government has a statutory obligation to produce a review by August 2020. Statistics do not stand up Long-Bailey's claims nor justify her intention to scrap a programme that is currently being improved. They might just as well be used to claim discrimination against the white working class of the West Midlands and North-West England, the main regions troubled with the right-wing extremism reported to the programme.

The Labour Party set up a PREVENT programme in 2003 as part of a broader counter-terrorism strategy. Not enough subsequent effort went into explaining the programme to teachers and gaining support from Muslim communities – which incidentally are far from united in their 'alienation'. Its past flaws have been widely publicised. But the way forward is to improve understanding and community buy-in and the quality of support and de-radicalisation mentoring undertaken. Instead the loudest voices are heeded and PREVENT is added to the usual Momentum refrain that nothing good could possibly have come out of the Labour Party pre-Corbyn. Historical humility is not their strongest point.

Labour Party members should heed Tony Blair's recent intervention as have the general public. Weber and Troeltsch made a useful distinction between a Church and a Sect. It can be applied profitably to the choice facing the Labour Party.

See also [TheArticle 26/02/2020](#)

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1.10 The Rule of 3: Putin, Trump & Johnson **22/9/2020**

Johnson pushes legislation through Parliament reneging on an international treaty. Trump denies that climate change is causing the devastating fires on the US West coast. Putin, we assume, is subverting the coming US Presidential elections by clandestine ‘active measures’. The insidious influence of the events shaped by Putin, Trump and Johnson is that it accustoms us all to the unacceptable and the unexpected. It becomes the new norm.

Who, other than a few cybersecurity experts, realised five ago that the KGB/FSB had long since been planning for a post-communist on-line war on democracy? Who imagined that 51 of 53 Republican senators would vote not to admit administration documents or subpoena witnesses at the impeachment trial of a US President? Who predicted that the Northern Ireland Secretary, following in the footsteps of a Prime Minister who illegally prorogued Parliament, would casually admit in Parliament that the UK would breach international law and that on hearing this the Attorney-General would fail to resign?

We are now routinely served up with a farrago of lies by way of explanation for such events, we watch the story eventually fall out of the headlines,

and move on to the next attack on our values and the rule of law. That's how things work. You gradually lose touch with reality. As Gandhi allegedly said when asked what he thought about western civilisation: "I think it would be a good idea".

You might, I suppose, complain about Trump and Johnson being lumped together. Of course as personalities they have their differences. Johnson does not have an unhealthy fascination with authoritarian leaders. Trump is not the product of Eton. But the way they both came to power has significant similarities: flawed rival candidates and a split opposition, showmanship laced with repeated punchy populist slogans, a concept of truth, if they have one, reduced to what they believe the electorate might like to hear at any particular time. For 'red wall' voters read 'rust-belt' voters. And in power also similarities: an unprecedented capacity for lying, putting their own interests over or equating them with those of the State, a systematic attack on the institutional fabric of their countries, beginning on this side of the Atlantic, with the civil service, the legal system and the BBC.

Johnson, surfing on his 80 seat majority when he is not hiding, is causing grave damage to Britain. But Trump, in charge of the most powerful nation in the world, is in a different class. We know about his repeated and telling refusal to condemn Putin's actions, however egregious, his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, and from the nuclear treaty with Iran which had curtailed its nuclear weapons programme, his Israeli 'peace plan' which was a smokescreen for annexation of chunks of the West Bank. No less dangerous is what we don't know, notably whether Putin has some leverage over Trump

through the old KGB's technique of kompromat. What we do know is that his erstwhile lawyer- fixer, Michael Cohen, was negotiating for a Trump Tower in Moscow at the very time Trump was claiming he had no financial dealings with Russia.

As the US Presidential election approaches, Putin's attempt to undermine the democratic process in the USA, and his relationship with Trump, ought to be foremost in US voters' minds. The hope once was that the report by FBI chief, Robert Mueller, published in April 2019, would decide the red-hot question whether the President of the United States had been coerced into relations with a foreign power contrary to his country's interests. But the terms set for the Special Counsel's report meant the scope of his investigation was strictly limited. Trump put enormous pressure on Mueller making it clear that any pursuit of his financial dealings crossed a red line, and the White House obstructed the investigation of his contacts with Russia. 'Collusion', widely suspected at the time, is not a legal term though Mueller found ample evidence of it amongst Trump's close associates. In the words of Luke Harding's* recently published *Shadow State* (Guardian Faber), this included 'secret meetings, offers of dirt, encrypted messages, hints and whispers. The Russians comprehensively penetrated Trumpworld, we learned'. The Report could neither assuage nor vindicate the horrific security concerns this suggested since Mueller was required narrowly to prove co-ordination or conspiracy with State agents of a foreign power - and for that he could not find enough evidence.

Harding's new book provides an in-depth explanation of why Mueller was fated to produce a report that pleased very few and solved nothing. Each

of Shadow State's twelve chapters provides a detailed snapshot of the Russian kleptocracy in action. Trump often uses the phrase 'drain the swamp' in his frequent attacks on US democratic institutions. Harding describes the inhabitants of a real swamp, the Russian State apparatus, the exponents of 'active measures' targeting the American voter, the intelligence agencies FSB and GRU and their 'cut-outs', oligarchs and organised crime, interacting with the seedy coterie around Trump, networking in murky financial and political waters for their mutual benefit. This book illuminates the counter-intelligence concerns which the Special Counsel felt obliged to sidestep.

It would be comforting to think that Trump supporters got to read this book. They really do need to be aware of the kind of waters in which their President has been swimming before they let anger at the 'Washington elite' overwhelm their decency. And all those former Labour voters who supported Johnson and want to give him the benefit of the doubt, should look at Trump to see what happens when you become accustomed to the unacceptable.

Luke Harding is an award winning investigative journalist who was Guardian correspondent in Moscow from 2007 until 2011 when he was deported.

See TheArticle 16/09/2020 'We have become accustomed to the unacceptable'

1.11 Can Democracy Survive a Political Culture of Lies? 1/2/2021

Lying, half-truths, ‘misspeaking’, or obfuscation are now political skills much as was rhetoric in ancient Greece. Honesty and frankness – and there are many honest politicians – come as a welcome surprise. Many blame governments’ general disposition to avoid the truth and cover up how they got us into our current mess. They have certainly contributed to mushrooming belief in conspiracies.

The implausible has become plausible. A public accustomed to being hoodwinked and manipulated has become prone to mistrusting the trustworthy as trust in those with power evaporates and the line between truth and falsehood is deliberately blurred. Groups form networks around misinformation shared on the internet. It is not all to governments’ disadvantage. People confused are easier to control.

The internet has accelerated a privatisation of truth creating different worlds, mind-sets and ideologies each with their different certainties. The internet giants now sustain political sub-cultures with targeted flows of information and misinformation alongside targeted advertising. And targeting depends on what the data-brokers know about us, what we think and what we want. In the digital world the idea that the CIA staged 9/11 as well as the type of sweater you like are both passed on in ‘packages’ of data travelling at lightning speed along networks of cables. Someone in the internet’s human infrastructure gets vastly richer in the process. And it is not going to be me or you.

What happens after we lift the lid on our laptop and log on, or pull down the

endless tweets on our mobile phone, is hidden from all but the canniest members of the IT aristocracy. Talking heads on TV lying to us risk being exposed in their lies but there is no transparency whatsoever on the internet. There we are plied with cookies and the cookies make our data available, data which is sold on by whom or to whom we know not. This is just one reason I recommend in passing James Ball's *The System: who owns the internet, and how it owns us*, published by Bloomsbury last year. It tries to explain to my generation, those who sat at school desks with inkwells not laptops, how it all began, what goes on, why and how something can be done about it, and how the paradox of the 'privatisation' of our politics accompanies our loss of privacy.

The overall impact of the internet is ambiguous like that of all epoch-changing technologies. On the one hand it is a tool of direct democracy. People find each other, are alerted to their strength in numbers, decide to act, sometimes to take to the streets against authoritarian rulers. We are beginning to see the impact in Russia. The original dream of Tim Berners-Lee and other founders of the internet - still glimpsed in Jimmy Wales Wikipedia - that they were creating a benign mode of communication and information flow that would defeat the limitations of time and distance, still lingers on. Families and friends can keep in touch, or rather communicate with each other though not 'in touch', and whole libraries of information are a few taps away.

On the other hand people in reinforcing cyber-enclaves share and absorb misinformation and pernicious fantasies. The silo syndrome is older than you think. Amongst the earliest users of the nascent internet in the 1980s

were US white supremacists and militias. A quarter of a century ago, the Oklahoma bomber, Timothy McVeigh's bedroom was reported to be like a computer laboratory. More recently Da'esh online recruitment was famously professional. The 2017 Unite the Right riots in Charlottesville showed how effective online recruitment can be in bringing together disparate groups.

Why this receptiveness to lies? Yale history professor, Timothy Snyder's believes that the decline of local newspapers ended the kind of reporting that readers could verify for themselves. If you spelt the names right of the winners of the flower show people were going to believe you got the big stories right too. And heaven help you if you didn't. National newspapers were too distanced for many - and thus a shared local community perception of social reality was lost, replaced by shock-jocks' ranting, extreme right websites, and whatever Big Lie was circulating nationally or even internationally. Enter far right the heterogeneous mob that attacked the Capitol.

Authoritarian regimes are well aware that the truth is their enemy. We owe the rapid spread of the Coronavirus to an entrenched culture of falsehood and deception within the Chinese Communist Party. At all costs Party officials tried to avoid delivering bad news for fear of the messenger being punished. Putin seems genuinely frightened by Alexei Navalny because he is brave enough to defy the kleptocracy's terror tactics to the point of repeatedly risking his own life. His courage and ability to survive assassination attempts have inspired Russian youth. The truth may not always set you free but it has got 100,000 people out onto the streets of Russia's

cities.

Against this grim background are there lessons for our own small island? First, democracy cannot thrive if the electorate is routinely misinformed by government and by a partly supportive Press disguising deceit, incompetence or worse. We are becoming aware that democracy cannot be taken for granted. And increasingly citizens are taking action to defend it.

Finally, there is an accepted right to truth. The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides a basis for the right of victims of grave human rights violations and their families, as well as society as a whole, to find out the truth. It has not been without results, notably the Truth Commissions. The UN has an annual Right to Truth Day on 24 March chosen to coincide with the date of St. Oscar Romero's assassination in El Salvador. It is an interesting example of Catholic thinking about human dignity converging with UN thinking about human rights, two approaches often thought of, and presented as, dissonant.

Actually the Catholic tradition also puts truth into a wider human rights context. Pope John XXIII, less than two months before he died of cancer in 1963, writing in his encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) addressed not just his Church but all people: "before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on truth. St. Paul expressed this as follows: 'Putting away lying speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour for we are members one of the other' (Ephesians IV.25). Not a bad text for the Republicans in the USA and the Johnson coterie here in the UK to consider.

See TheArticle 01/02/2021

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1.12 Government Corruption: Scrutiny, Democracy's Defence 18/3/2021

If impunity is the handmaid of corruption, scrutiny is corruption's enemy. Governments shrink from critical examination. The last thing they want is transparency. Getting things done becomes more complicated. When it comes to naming their most disliked piece of legislation, Ministers most likely would plump for Labour's Freedom of Information Act (FOI) 2000, raved by many who voted for it. That sinking feeling, trying to remember what was said in incautious emails, meetings, or printed within departmental reports, is vice's compliment to scrutiny. And it was, of course, a 2008 FOI request to the House of Commons, unsuccessfully challenged in the High Court, which revealed the British parliamentary expenses scandal.

The resilience and effectiveness of official procedures and bodies designed to scrutinise the conduct of the Executive and ensure its integrity are a measure of the health of a democracy. A truth-telling Press is vital. Journalists around the world investigate behind the lies, spin and obfuscation that obscure the reality of their governments' motives and behaviour even if they can't directly control it. Sometimes it can cost them their lives or imprisonment.

In the USA, Trump's strategy was to get the highly politicised mass media to convince his supporters that any critical examination of his behaviour and lies was 'fake-news' - quite a good translation of the Nazis' word 'lügenpresse' (lying Press) as Yale History Professor Timothy Snyder has pointed out. We saw the ultimate consequences on 6 January in the Capitol. Right-wing bias in newspapers and mass media, as well as social media silos now the sole source of information for many, is a pressing problem for democracies such as our own. Scrutiny of the sensational and the personal cannot replace serious investigation of policy and malfeasance.

Our Parliament has hands-on responsibility for scrutinising the use of Executive power and calling it to account with, in well-defined circumstances, the judiciary as final arbiter. So when the Executive makes efforts to elude parliamentary scrutiny of its integrity and performance, its policies and legislation, and the Right-wing Press attacks the judiciary, alarm bells should start ringing. Parliament, and within its limits the judiciary, are the two institutions that can stop government meandering down the road to corruption with the resultant erosion of democracy and its premise and promise of representation of the people.

There are more ways than one to avoid parliamentary scrutiny. The phrase 'Henry VIII's clauses' recalls Henry's rule by proclamation referring today to amendments to parliamentary Bills which by means of secondary legislation, that is by Ministerial fiat; such government statutes are intended to expedite implementation of policy but enable parliamentary scrutiny to be bypassed. Parliamentary Select Committees focussed on the work of particular government departments, or on wider issues, can step in here. Since the 1980s, they have

become a major vehicle of democratic scrutiny. In recent years the sittings of the Audit Select Committee, overseeing government's financial reporting and disclosure procedures and performance, have proved particularly revealing.

The Liaison Committee whose members are chairs of Select Committees holds an annual stock-take with whoever is Prime Minister. In August 2019, Boris Johnson highlighted his attitude to accountability by proroguing Parliament to forestall further debate about BREXIT, an act the Supreme Court unanimously found unlawful, a textbook example of the judiciary safeguarding democracy. Johnson also found on three consecutive occasions that he was unable to attend the Liaison Committee, once allegedly because he was kept too busy by BREXIT. Since BREXIT was what the Committee expected to hear about, Dr. Sarah Wollaston accused him from the chair of avoiding accountability. His perfunctory performance in May 2020 when he did appear suggested that perhaps he was too lazy to master his brief on topics the Liaison Committee would examine. The pandemic had made hiding from the public no longer an option.

The Hansard Society, an NGO specialising in research on Westminster and parliamentary democracy, has described ways how Parliament can be marginalised that are difficult to challenge legally. No piece of parliamentary business has been more complex and subject to avoidance of scrutiny than the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Act (TCA). Run the negotiation right up to an internationally agreed deadline and, 'oh, sorry', tell Members of Parliament they have only four days over Christmas to read a 1,246 page Treaty. Then, after its publication, allow 24 hours to discuss and pass its Implementation Bill. As the consequences

of Johnson's BREXIT are emerging with minimalist scrutiny, have Mr. Rees-Mogg refuse to extend the life of the 'BREXIT Select Committee' beyond 16 January 2021.

Small matter that the TCA agreement, the most important document affecting the future of our country since the declaration of war on Nazi Germany, defines our relationship with our largest trading partner, involving 27 European countries, for years to come. Not that the EU treated its own Parliament any better allowing provisional implementation before the TCA went to the EU Parliament for ratification. But then the EU's Parliament is in reality often a fig-leaf for rule by summitry, heads of State and the Council of Ministers, with the Commission acting as political and technical Sherpas. In short, our government has taken back control of our own democratic deficit - with great benefit to its donors and friends.

The pandemic has meant urgency has become more plausible as an excuse for short-circuiting Parliament. Everything is urgent or, at least, becomes urgent when indecision, the hallmark of the Prime Minister, repeatedly creates crises requiring immediate action. Parliament and Opposition are required to rubber-stamp legislation and guidance with far-reaching implications for the economy and daily life.

But why not hear from and consult with Parliament upstream when broad strategy ought to be debated? Johnson's repeated - faux Churchillian - martial language ignores the fact that we faced the enemy with a government of National Unity. Johnson cannot be accused of leadership in uniting the nation: he sees the Opposition as no less his enemy than the EU. For political effect, timely

suggestions from Keir Starmer are publically ridiculed only to be implemented days later.

Government pandemic projects have been a pretext for massive misspending of taxpayers' money. Details of PPE contracts, sometimes redacted, have been withheld until forced into the public domain by intense legal pressure. In a normal government in normal times, Dido Harding's stewardship of taxpayers' money would result in resignation. Meg Hillier M.P., chair of the Public Accounts Committee, concluded recently that "despite the unimaginable resources thrown at this project Test and Trace cannot point to a measurable difference to the progress of the pandemic, and the promise on which this huge expense was justified - avoiding another lockdown - has been broken, twice". In the words of Sir Nicholas Macpherson, a Cross-Bench peer and former Treasury Permanent Secretary to three Chancellors (under Blair, Brown & Cameron), this was "the most wasteful and inept public spending programme of all time". But as he tellingly remarked last week, "the extraordinary thing is that nobody in the government seems surprised or shocked".

Meanwhile government 'levels up' in the North with 'bungs' to Conservative constituencies such as Richmond, Yorkshire, the Chancellor's seat'; 40 out of the 45 areas getting regeneration funding have a Conservative member of Parliament. Government contracts generated by the pandemic disproportionately went to the companies that just happen to be linked to Tory donors and friends. 30,000 laptops for poorer children known to be least equipped for online learning short of their delivery target? A free school meals scandal involving a private company? Cherchez le Tory

donor.

To date the slide into unaccountability has been held in check by the strength of our institutions dedicated to the scrutiny of government conduct. This includes NGOs such as the Good Law Project; the High Court recently found that: “the Secretary of State [Health] acted unlawfully by failing to comply with the Transparency Policy” in a case involving COVID contracts. Efforts to avoid such scrutiny have been deliberately, sometimes accidentally, multiplied in the last few years. The consequences are becoming visible.

As Thomas Paine said of the Paris aristocrats prior to the French Revolution: “A body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody”. Not an ideal state of affairs in a pandemic. Not a good time for Global Britain to challenge China and Russia. Not an ideal state of affairs in a democracy anytime.

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1.13 Rowan Williams & St. Benedict: What Kind of Society do we Want to Live In? 1/4/2021

Vacuous worn-out words and phrases are a telling feature of our contemporary political pathology. The saddest, often poured like ketchup on shallow relationships, is ‘community’. Saddest because community is a deep human need. Humiliation, alienation and lack of belonging are poorly disguised behind frequent use of ‘community’. A true understanding of com-

munity, and therefore how to nurture it, is essential for a healthy political culture.

Today, almost any grouping of people with a single common characteristic is at risk of being called a community: the scientific community, the BAME community, the community of plastic bag manufacturers, the help save the hedgehog community (I must declare an interest here), the European Economic Community (before it became a somewhat disunited Union). Any group can become a victim of stereotyping. It is a short step to treating their common character trait as inherent or to make sweeping negative generalizations about a particular group; this is what is generally meant by racism.

Even if we resign ourselves to the portmanteau nature of that word ‘community’ we encounter a second problem: group identities obscure the many individual differences found amongst members of a group. I remember a Muslim friend whispering to me during an interfaith discussion: “I wish sometimes I could just be me and not always the Muslim woman”. I imagine a Catholic bishop might secretly feel the same. And if we view cultural difference in a pluralist society only in monochrome rather than in its technicolour reality, community relations will remain stuck in a black and white picture of exclusion/inclusion and integration/separation.

But perhaps we make things worse by asking the wrong questions. People talking about community, however vaguely, are usually referring to a good thing, something desirable. But we are aware of exceptions. Not all communities are a good thing and we know they can be oppressive, coer-

cively enclosed, violent places. So why not, as the stereotyped Irishman is credited with saying, start from somewhere else? Ask instead what kind of behaviour, which virtues are required to create good community, the sort of community we want to create when we emerge from Covid and its restrictions.

What constitutes and creates good community? Working together for the common good is one key. Sociability flows most easily from hands to heart to head. Schools and universities require much professional expertise and organisation for the flow to be in the opposite direction: head to heart to hands. To be recognised and acknowledged, above all to contribute and to be needed, are fundamental human needs that, when realised, build community.

The loss of community felt by being made unemployed is so intense euphemisms are used. People are 'let go'. 'Made redundant' too accurately describes the painful reality. The devaluation of low paid labour is deeply divisive. As the American political philosopher, Michael Sandel says there is a deep problem when the idea of the common good we carry in our heads, and how to achieve it, is defined by market mechanisms. No wonder that societies and nations rooted in individualism and consumerism, its citizens striving for self-sufficiency and self-mastery, find the creation of a common life so difficult.

Another key to community is historical humility, shared memory and the disposition to learn from the past. Is there anything we might learn from past conscious efforts to create community? Rowan Williams in his re-

cently published *The Way of St. Benedict*, about the founder of western monasticism, looks as far back as the sixth century for guidance. It's a short book with long sentences; in a chapter on 'Benedict and the Future of Europe' he asks. "In the half-secularized, morally confused and culturally diverse continent we now inhabit, does the Holy Rule still provide a beacon for common life?" And then the former Archbishop of Canterbury argues cogently that it does have something to say to us. A not so surprising conclusion for viewers of 'The Monastery', the memorable 2005 TV reality series which followed a group of people – several without any religious convictions - spending time with the monks of Worth Abbey.

Benedict's Rule, aimed at building and sustaining community, picks out honesty, accountability, transparency, the peaceful resolution of inevitable conflicts, and stability as the necessary virtues and features of monastic life and the characteristics of a good Abbot. Lord Williams argues for their contemporary salience as political virtues for governance. For instance honesty "is not simply the matter of being transparent about your expenses (although that helps). It has something to do with whether or not society expects in its political class a degree of self-criticism and self-questioning". He also underlines the responsibility of civil society. "An honest society ought to be able to guarantee the possibility for those in public life to acknowledge fallibility or uncertainty", he writes. And in political leadership Rowan Williams seeks 'stable and nurturing habits' omitting - with Christian charity - to add how alien these political virtues seem to the present Prime Minister and his Cabinet.

Remarkably St. Benedict's guidelines do still speak to our contemporary condition. "Good governance and government", Rowan Williams writes "is always about engagement with the other, a developing relation that is neither static confrontation nor competition, but an interaction producing some sort of common language and vision that could not have been defined in advance of the encounter." Where are dialogue and constructive interaction to be found?" The grim reality is that our political culture seems the antithesis of what Benedict proposes for sustaining a harmonious, stable community.

The Way of St. Benedict was published last year. It performs an important task by invigorating and making meaningful the worn-out but essential word 'community'. And as our intellectual horizons disappear in a haze of slogans, deceit and half-truths, perhaps we can learn from the sixth century how to restore them.

See TheArticle 01/04.2021

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1.14 The Common-Nonsense of Nationalism

23/4/2021

The pandemic has shed a revealing light on the way we organise society and international relations. The global distribution of vaccines against COVID-19 presents a sorry tale of nationalism versus globalisation. The death toll amongst the poor and vulnerable in Britain starkly reveals the underlying values of our political culture.

The production of vaccines, as in most realms of scientific endeavour, has been an international effort, one that has shown the value – and one of the drawbacks - of public-private partnerships. The iron law of the market is that those who pay most for scarce resources acquire them, or at least get them first. Pharmaceutical companies can and do work effectively for shared aims with national governments but that does not mean the profit motive and markets have magically disappeared. That said the rigours of the market do not excuse what is now called ‘vaccine nationalism’.

Economic globalisation has created transnational supply chains, allowing goods to be sourced where labour is cheap with just-in-time delivery giving competitive advantage. But if you run out of essentials for manufacturing a vaccine in bulk, for example vials to put the vaccine in, plus stoppers, needles and syringes to inject it, or even lipid components of the serum, you can be as nationalist as you like, there will be delays in vaccinating your people and more will die. Quite apart from the oft repeated and obvious truth, highlighted by the plight of India and Brazil, that with a mutating lethal virus that easily crosses borders ‘until everyone is safe, no-one is safe’, vaccine nationalism is delusional.

Vaccine nationalism is well described as common nonsense, a useful term invented by the Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan. He wrote that common sense “commonly feels itself omni-competent in practical affairs, commonly is blind to the long-term consequences of policies and courses of action, commonly is unaware of the admixture of common nonsense in its more cherished convictions and slogans.” Governments taking no responsibility for the plight

of those beyond their borders claim they must fulfil their primary duty to protect their people, deliberately ignoring the interdependence of both lives and livelihoods in the 21st. century and the last three decades of the 20th, our most recent phase of globalisation. Classic common nonsense.

Britain as a nation trading globally, London as a transport hub, means that our borders are permeable to the virus and to the people who may transmit it. What does ‘take back control’ mean in this context? We can thank the clever snake-oil salesmen of BREXIT in part for this particular common-nonsense slogan. Britain’s population is aging and part of growing old is the onset of different ailments and declining strength. Who in that age-group would not wish to ‘take back control’? Tune in to bus conversations about what the nurse said and which medicine does the job best. Transpose to fears about the NHS ‘being swamped’ by foreigners and hey-presto you’ve got a Wizard-of- Oz grade slogan particularly appealing to the old. But it’s still common nonsense.

BREXIT nationalism expressed in ‘taking back control’ is not just, as Peter Osborne, calls it, ‘an assault on truth’, it is plausible because it contains a grain of truth. Our success with mass vaccine distribution is in striking contrast to the mistakes made by the European Union. The Commission’s own mess is compounded by the ponderous national regulatory procedures of each member state. Warnings about alleged dangers have created widespread distrust in AstraZeneca, producing one of the most easily distributed, safe and effective vaccines on the market. Vaccine nationalism is not uniquely British.

Current conflicts can be viewed in ways other than through the prism of nationalism. The principle of subsidiarity, action should not be taken at a higher level unless it cannot be taken effectively at a lower level, offers an alternative way of looking at them. This sounds all very Catholic and what my old Professor at the University of Galway would call ‘amorphous’. In fact the term was first used to describe the principle of Calvinist Church governance, or so claimed the Cellule de Prospective (Forward-Planning Unit) set up by Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission in the early 1990s. Article 5 of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 states that the ‘EU does not take action (except in the areas that fall within its exclusive competence), unless it is more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level’. That’s subsidiarity though you may not have noticed. The UK would have done well to have heeded the principle instead of creating a centralized Track and Trace system bypassing existing local public health systems of infection control.

The other political principle highly relevant to the tension between nationalism and globalization has also become central to Catholic Social Teaching. It is solidarity, a commitment to the common good of all that transcends national frontiers. Both the pandemic and climate change show that solidarity is not just a utopian concept or a counsel of perfection in an imperfect world but an urgent necessity. Vaccines and vaccination are a global common good for all humanity. Globalisation, and many of its features, may not be the last word but its present reality requires nothing less than the application of the two principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. They must inform any new social contract.

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1.15 Politics & Football

1/5/2021

The Super-League fiasco with its pleasing echo of David defeating Goliath bears thinking about. Fans spoke eloquently about the values that would be trampled if the club owners got their way. But why don't we find the same values referred to in vox pop about next week's elections?

TV and Radio's vox pop, long-stemmed microphone shoved under the nose of citizens going about their lawful occasions, is mostly depressing and irritating. A cheap substitute for the experts and their analysis? Media folk virtue signalling by listening to the public? "How do you feel about 20% of the young people in your town being unemployed? Ask a silly question and you'll get a silly answer as my mother-in-law used to say. Yet 'how do you feel about the Super-League' uncorked passionate responses, thoughtful, lengthy, essentially moral and political – with a small 'p'.

The responders' reactions were not of shock or surprise at the venal nature of Premier League football. Since at least the 1980s when investigative journalist, Geoff Seed's *World in Action* documentary on Manchester United had shown how, in anticipation of the forthcoming massive commercialisation of club football, Manchester United's owners were dubi-

ously buying up shares like they bought up boy footballers. The greed-led failings of UEFA and FIFA are also well known. But to the indignant fans the Super-League was a step too far. And it helped that the step was being taken by multi-millionaire owners, who happened not to be British.

Geoff Seed, third of five generations of Manchester City fans, reflecting on the public outcry, shared his own memories of what football had meant to working class communities. Supporting your local club had cemented relationships between the generations in families. Shared experiences and memories built community. In the 1930s his Great Aunt was given lifts to away-matches by first team players. Difficult to imagine today. In the late 1950s Burnley's chairman Bob Lord – known by some as the 'Khrushchev of Burnley' – who epitomised the mill-owner mentality of football chairmen tried to peg players' salaries to £20 a week. Football as a sport had changed almost beyond recognition but the old values were being demonstrated by fans outside glittering stadiums home to the six British clubs who proposed to join the Super-League.

Community, though, was not the only value asserted by protesting crowds. There was the threat to the relationship between the minnows and sharks of football. The Super-League spelt an end to redistribution of wealth from TV rights and merchandising, from the world of players on £200,000 a week to the struggling little clubs. And a sharp reduction to support for the promotion of football amongst young amateur footballers. Making a different point, fans complained that sealing off the elite teams within a new League would kill football's drama. There would be no more giant killers like Leicester

City. Where would be the rewards for courage, skill and dedication? Where the punishment for their absence? What would happen to the merit in football's meritocracy?

The contrast between the top football club owners and fans was stark. Local versus international, 'somewhere' people versus 'nowhere' people, the football born in traditional working class culture – now a part of national identity – against that of international elites, sharing versus greedy exclusion. It was as if the dilemmas at the heart of British politics had been prised open, the choices laid bare. Yet the angry interlocutors who understood and defended their values within competitive sport did not seem to relate such values to wider society and to the possibility that such values might be voted for and inform government.

The recent protests were not the first time aroused fans had taken decisive action against greedy owners. The reaction to Malcolm Glazer's take-over of Manchester United in 2005, landing the club with responsibility for loans he had taken out to buy it, resulted in the formation by the 'Red Rebels' and of the break-away FC United of Manchester. The new club was fan-led and fan owned.

For some overt politics you need to go north of the border to Celtic's 'Green Brigade'. The club's origins in the 1880s were charitable, helping the underdog, the newly arrived Irish immigrants. Palestinian flags appeared during a 2016 match against the Israeli champions Hapoel Be'er Shiva in protest at Israeli government human rights violations, incurring a UEFA fine for illicit use of banners. Fans reacted by crowd-funding two Palestinian relief organisations,

matching the fine. Then there was the reaction to the Lazio ‘Ultras’ and the Lazio-Celtic match of 24 October 2019. Fascist salutes and rival mocking of Mussolini in Glasgow streets and on the terraces brought back 1930s-style confrontations. Wider politics has always passed through the Celtic turnstiles.

The Super-League fiasco does seem to show that popular culture in Britain is not politically inert, not a kind of ethical desert of indifference and inaction. The current national campaign boycotting social media carrying racist comment on matches shows the wider influence of Black Lives Matter - and clubs and players seeking some moral credibility. We may want to keep politics with a big ‘P’ out of sport – though boycotting South African teams during apartheid did undermine the assurance of white supremacy - but sport is too important a part of national life for it not to be a channel for the expression of values. The question is: why aren’t the values we’ve seen popping up about the Super-League in vox pop also surfacing as people disclose their voting intentions for the elections this May? And, as our democracy is eroded, why are these values not transferred to electoral engagement, judgement and action?

One answer might be that throughout all the different forms of media sport is reported in great detail, factually and analytically. Fans can verify coverage and reporting itself benefits from the willingness of fans to digest and share complex information which can be fitted into explanatory frameworks that have real meaning. On the other hand access to politicians for political journalists is limited. On the job, they are met with ‘gaslighting’, obfuscation, and refusal to answer questions. Facts are in short supply; instead

there is the latest spin, lies, scandal and cover-up. In the face of instances of downright biased reporting the public begin to doubt their own perceptions, memories and understanding of events. Many are reduced to simple propositions. “Voting makes no difference”. “Politicians? They’re all the same”. But are footballers, coaches, managers, referees and owners all the same? The crowds of rejoicing fans last week indicated that the public doesn’t seem to think so. And they’d vote out the owners if they had the chance.

See TheArticle 28/04/2021

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1.16 Keir Starmer & The Vision Thing

14/5/2021

If Sir Keir Starmer ever feels ‘the hand of history on his shoulder’ it will most likely be a hand holding him back. Bad enough being in opposition with scant access to mass media, far worse when the best you can do is deliver your speeches to a COVID-free empty room. He still has to deal with a mutinous crew for whom doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result remains the measure of socialist purity.

It’s always said that charisma is vital for today’s leaders if they are to connect with voters. Being ‘charismatic’ means enjoying a mutually invigorating relationship with your audience. They respond to you, feel that you are speaking for them. A mysterious process of reciprocal reinforcement takes place. Tony Blair enjoyed more than his fair share of it, and it helped him win

three elections in a row. There were serious efforts to tackle child poverty. Public services were improved. Voters believed he and New Labour wanted what they wanted, besides good public services, a good job, a nice house, a car. Their aspirations were the Labour Party's and he would help them succeed.

Boris Johnson, with a pocket full of captivating slogans – levelling up, taking back control - has it too. And he too evidently chimes with voters. His transgressive remarks signal he would not look down on them or accuse them of racism or bigotry. Keir Starmer commands the socially distanced Chamber of the House of Commons as he once commanded the court room, but struggles under present circumstances to form that vital relationship with the general public. He has yet to be rewarded with a 'People's Princess' moment and to connect emotionally.

Then there is the vision thing and communicating it. There are two problems here. First, Jeremy Corbyn definitely had a vision but it was not the vision the voting public or many in his Party shared. Second, Oppositions' big ideas, tend to be taken over and fed into government rhetoric or simply derided. Yet, these problems are also opportunities.

One opportunity came out of the shenanigans involving Angela Rayner: a Shadow Secretary of State for the Future of Work. If the best the Conservative Party can manage in the Queen's speech is a reheated version of their own failed skills training paid for by loans the financially insecure are unlikely to take out, then the political terrain is not as fully occupied as it might seem. Upskilling is, of course, important. Government pays lip-

service to creating ‘quality jobs’. But there is much rhetoric rather than action. And fear that quality jobs are a distraction from quantity of jobs. They aren’t.

Rayner will now ‘shadow’ a number of ministers across government departments and will have the opportunity to promote a policy of ‘Good Work for all’. She faces an open goal. Skills and Apprentices are located in the Ministry of Education under the blunder-prone Gavin Williamson. The Secretary of State for Work & Pensions, Therese Coffey, is on record as proposing pensioners should pay national insurance. And right-wing Etonian Kwasi Kwateng leading Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy presents a tempting target.

The experience of COVID has changed public thinking about the value of different forms of work. This is to Ms. Rayner’s advantage. The public is now more aware of the profound injustice of the social and economic value of jobs bearing no relationship to pay and rewards. NHS workers, social carers, bus drivers appeared in a new light as ‘essential workers’, some outstandingly courageous.

Work today is more precarious and pressurized than thirty years ago. Even pre-COVID some 30% of jobs were insecure. The development of the gig economy has suffered minor setbacks but persists. Many of the millions in self-employment end up with an income below the minimum wage. Elsewhere, particularly in NGOs and better paid jobs, the expectation of unpaid overtime goes unchallenged. To be in work is not to get out of poverty as government ministers repeat and as those resorting to food banks illustrate. The economy

suffers. Low investment, poor people management, poor pay and low productivity go together.

Angela Rayner has a strong body of innovative thinking and research to call on. At a recent on-line St. Mary's University conference on workers' rights, celebrating the 130th anniversary of the first papal encyclical on the world of work, the economist Will Hutton described the growth of private equity company and the Special Purpose Acquisition Companies (SPACS). Alongside the ephemeral working relationships of the gig economy such new ephemeral forms of ownership and financing have been springing up. The real owner of a SPAC is deliberately obscured like that of a Panama-flagged ship. Employees literally have no idea who they are working for. Transparency is needed for more than countering tax avoidance. But there are also companies acknowledging serious social responsibility which are willing to broaden their purpose beyond profit. But they are still few. Labour could promise to support the growth of such initiatives by promising changes in company law.

Angela Rayner has available , for example, The Good Work Plan produced by the respected policy strategist, Matthew Taylor, formerly head of No. 10's Policy Unit, and commissioned by the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. The plan was published by the May Government in December 2018, but it has gathered dust under Boris Johnson. Work should offer fairness, respect, team work, voice, representation on boards, work-life balance, opportunity to develop and use skills to the full and consideration for mental health. In short, wellbeing , sense of purpose, an overall movement from worker as Fordist automaton to a creative auton-

omy within the workplace with control over work- life balance. Turning purposeful ‘Good Work’ into a public policy objective, as an integral part of reducing unemployment, has been bruited for years but still not implemented.

Put this all together and radical reform of the world of work should be par excellence Labour’s vision thing. The Labour Party needs to be the Party identified with the Future of Work. In the fast advancing world of AI and with the push of new technologies to combat Climate Change, creating ‘Good Work’ requires radical change and innovation in economic thinking across a wide front. Going to the country with a clear strategic vision for the future of work would be swimming with the tide of public concerns, would mean working with Labour’s traditional union backers and would appeal to both youth, women, low income workers, and ethnic minorities. Focusing on work avoids the false binary choice between bringing home traditional Labour voters or the Party for the middle-class, for graduates, youth and the big cities.

Far from demotion, the leader of the Opposition has given Angela Rayner the opportunity to be at the cutting edge of Labour’s renewal and fight-back as a visionary Party of the future. She should seize it with both hands.

See TheArticle 13/05/2021

1.17 Meritocracy & Its Discontents**12/6/2021**

Ordinary people versus elites: call it populism, call it what you like, it's an addictive story especially for politicians. If 'the people' decide you are on their side and vote accordingly, you win. In the USA and Europe the story has begun to lose some of its electoral appeal but it has not gone away.

Michael Sandel's *The Tyranny of Merit* is one of the most important books of 2020. In his 1958 satirical critique *The Rise of the Meritocracy* the sociologist Michael Young (later Lord Young of Dartington) introduced the term to describe a political system in which education, ability, talent, hard work and achievement are rewarded with wealth and power. Sandel also argues convincingly that meritocracy generates a sense of failure and exclusion in large groups of people. And that this sense of failure and exclusion fuels popular resentment and anger against elites.

The term meritocracy has rather faded but what it describes has become more prevalent. The populist opposition between people and elites accords with many people's social perception, experience, and their sense of how things are but lacks analysis of the causes of their strong feelings. Populism's rise has coincided with the decline of social democracy and its offer of equality of opportunity. That offer brought Tony Blair three terms in office and Obama two but ran out of steam in the last decade. Both Trump and Johnson are able communicators of the populist message "I am on your side against the elites". But why was social democracy's offer of equality of opportunity rejected?

Sandel goes beyond saying that for most people since the 1980s the ‘American dream’ has been just that, a dream. He takes the feelings of those whom the dream eludes seriously. If you believe there is a ladder available for you to climb out of poverty which you have failed to climb you feel a failure. Conversely if you’re at the top of the ladder you feel your prosperity is deserved. You earned it by hard work and personal virtue. And those at the bottom suspect that the people at the top blame them, disapprove of them, regard them with disdain, to quote Hillary Clinton, as ‘a basket of deplorables’. It is those feelings that populists exploit.

Sandel while a Rhodes scholar at Oxford was strongly influenced by the communitarianism of his Canadian philosophy professor, Charles Taylor. Sandel’s own communitarianism challenges the individualist conceit that people succeed or fail as lone individuals so that those who succeed deserve their advantages. It is a belief that can only be sustained by ignoring the countless ways in which each person is shaped and influenced by their environment. The middle and upper-middle class have helpful social networks, private tutors and full book-shelves at home. The wealthiest have parents who can pay the fees at public schools which ease their way into Oxbridge or the US Ivy League. At the bottom of the ladder are children whose parents are too poor to take them to the theatre or on foreign holidays, too unsure and fatigued working at low-paid jobs to supervise homework, and may even be neglectful.

Sandel strongly makes the case that the great US divide in income is closely correlated with college education, or lack of it, what he calls ‘the sorting machine’. He demonstrates how admission to the elite Ivy League US universities

opens a fast-track to membership of the top 1% of wealthy individuals in the USA. “The children of poor and working class are about as unlikely to attend Harvard, Yale and Princeton as they were in 1954”, he writes. Attempts are made by universities to counter this sorting machine, companies seek talent irrespective of ‘credentialism’, but little has changed in the US measure of merit over recent decades. Polling has shown an astonishing relationship between voting behaviour and educational attainment. The best predictor of a pro-Trump vote was lack of a college education. And who more adept at connecting with the shame and fury of those who felt themselves despised by a ‘metropolitan elite’, the denizens of the “Washington swamp”.

In Britain, it is a Russell Group university education that opens the door to high-income jobs and provides the Oxbridge credentials for a specially privileged minority within a minority. Only 2% of Oxbridge admissions are white working class children. The 7% of children in private education take about a third of Oxbridge places. The Labour Party is losing the working class to Trump-lite politics while gaining the well-heeled and well educated in big cities. When security and prosperity are the ‘merited’ reward for an elite education, coinciding with years of wage stagnation and low incomes, the anger and humiliation of those who are not financially successful become socially and politically significant.

Sandel argues that poorly paid work and its contribution to society are undervalued in every sense. This began to be recognised when, for instance, during the pandemic bus drivers risked their lives to keep public transport going. If wealth remains the reward for elite education too little consid-

eration is given to the emotions of those who do not attain it. Too little consideration is given to human dignity, to what Sandel calls ‘contributive justice’, being acknowledged as playing a constructive role in society with a voice that is listened to, which social democracy overshadowed by ‘distributive justice’. “Finding ourselves in a society that prizes our talents is our good fortune, not our due”, he writes. We haven’t earned the attributes we are born and grow up with. We need the humility to acknowledge this. A society based on deliberation about the common good at the heart of its politics, rather than individual consumerism, will encourage practical solidarity. A meritocratic society is not culturally predisposed to do this.

So far, so chastening: Sandel with great gusto is sawing off the branch on which I and many friends have been sitting for the last sixty or more years. The G7 leaders who have been meeting in Cornwall need to have some of Sandel’s critical vision of the future. Just an idle thought but it would be good if after all the self-congratulation they tucked into his book on the way home.

See TheArticle 11/06/2021

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Chapter 2

Human Rights

2.1 The Poisonous Legacy of Radko Mladic

12/12/2017

Bosnia's Nobel Prize Winner, Ivan Andrić, in *The Bridge on the Drina*, tells the story of the country's rich life across the centuries through the history of a bridge crossed by travellers, traders and different waves of invaders. It is a story of persistence, resilience, and adaptation. For this reason, while working recently in a programme with Serb, Croat and Bosniak youth, I suggested that we adopt the image of a bridge as a possible national symbol of communities coming together, of mediation and reconciliation for a divided society. Bosnia Herzegovina (B-i-H) has several beautiful bridges across several beautiful rivers. A Bosnian colleague gently pointed out that it might not be a good idea: dead bodies were thrown over the bridges during the 1992-1995 Balkans wars.

The memory of the Bridge on the Drina came back to me when the sentence of life imprisonment was given to the Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić in The Hague. News of his sentence had been awaited with some trepidation. Anything less from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia would have been seen as a terrible betrayal by Muslim Bosniaks. Srebrenica, the genocidal murder of 8,000 Bosniak men and boys, had been given international coverage and attention, but it was only part of Mladić's war crimes. New mass

graves were being discovered only a couple of years ago elsewhere. Sarajevo suffered terribly.

As in most modern wars, there were the television pictures, the iconic press photograph of emaciated men in concentration camps that communicated the brutality and horror of the war. Walking down by the river where the valley narrows in Sarajevo, the city stretched out along it, through the old town with roads running parallel between the two mountains, I found myself summoning up images of snipers during the siege picking off desperate people below venturing out for water and bread, images I had never seen. It must have taken intense hatred and dehumanisation to have a woman trying to feed her family in your sights and pulling the trigger.

Mladić's sentence and punishment, however appalling his war crimes, cannot be a moment of unalloyed joy for the Balkans. Justice had prevailed. The top brass had not got away with it. Yet Mladić had survived on the run in Serbia, clearly protected, until 2011. A 2009 survey suggested that significant number of Serbs felt he had been doing his duty. For some he is still a hero. Much the same sentiments would be expressed by some Croats and Bosniaks about the perpetrators of crimes committed by some of their own armed forces during the wars. Mladić in court was unrepentant, in denial, shouting defiance and abuse to the last. The trial had lasted five years. This was not some final closure.

Mladić's poisonous legacy lives on in the struggle to find a common narrative, a modicum of shared symbolic capital between the three historical experiences, Croat, Serb and Bosniak, in the families woken by their father's night-time screams, in additions to extensive war memorials in the town centres. There is even lacking a shared youth music culture; no one pop star is equally accepted by each of the three groups. Though youth want to leave the past

behind.

The 1995 Dayton-Paris Accords, an extraordinary piece of mediation, brought hostilities to an end. Yet what emerged was the hybrid Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, politically a creation that made Lebanon look like a centralised state. This political framework has allowed a political class in each ethnic group to play the ethnic card in power games and in the accumulation of assets and resources. B-i-H lies at 83rd in Transparency International's Corruption Index next to Jamaica and Lesotho.

Young people in B-i-H are acutely aware of and resentful of the divisions in their country. They are united in a shared contempt for their respective political classes. Their future lies largely in emigration to Germany, if they can manage it, though the country has obvious underdeveloped tourist and other economic potential. They feel particularly sore about Croatia being granted membership of the European Union and not B-i-H.

B-i-H needs support. It is significant that it was NATO that brought the Balkans wars to an end not the European Union. And the major international interventions have come from UN agencies and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE. Yet this was the worst outbreak of violence and genocide in Europe since the Second World War. If the European Union is to move forward with a serious foreign policy, it could start now with a co-ordinated attempt to help B-i-H. The youth need a future that enables them to continue their efforts to overcome ethnic divisions and to avoid leaving their homeland to make a living. The trial of Mladić, far from being a closure, needs to be treated as the beginning of a concerted effort to overcome the legacy of the 1992-1995 wars visited on the next generation.

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2.2 On the Murder of Adversaries

18/3/2018

It is an instructive exercise to list the number of governments in my life time who tried to, or succeeded in murdering those they saw as their outstanding adversaries. Or to use the more polite term, engaged in extra-judicial killings. Some murders were perpetrated by democratic or semi-democratic governments. Of these almost all have given up the practice.

A sliding scale might be applied. Killing troublesome leaders such as Patrice Lumumba, Fidel Castro, Dag Hammarskjöld, Steve Biko at one end. At the other, killing nationals at home and abroad. Mr. Putin, presiding recently over administering radioactive polonium and spectacularly poisonous organophosphates to disloyal spies, by this reckoning, falls off the scale altogether.

Motivation for the killings, of course, varies from one end of the scale to the other: simply getting rid of a major threat to projection of power as an end in itself. A bullet or a parcel bomb suffices for routine elimination. Ice-picks went out with Trotsky. What has been horrifying about the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei and Yulia Skripal is the flagrant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention: the total disregard for contamination of bystanders in another State, police and first responders particularly at risk. While deaths from US drone strikes in pursuit of a targeted killing in another State, result in what is euphemistically called “collateral damage”, this is taking place in an entirely different context of violent conflict with a terrorist adversary, and, I believe, serious targeting limitations to avoid the death of civilians. This is not an excuse for extra-judicial killing just a reflection on a potentially facile

attribution of moral equivalence. Both bring shame and dire consequences on their governments but, rightly, in unequal measure.

The current revulsion against Russia is intensified by the insultingly ridiculous responses, conspiracy theories, lies and palpable nonsense from authorised interlocutors for the Russian Federation. It is not enough to distinguish between the Russian people and their ruling kleptocracy. It is evident from the support for Putin that a large number of Russians share in an emotional nationalism expressed in fear of encirclement, encroachment by NATO on their near neighbours, and a visceral paranoia born of a history of invasions and an addiction to autocratic and powerful leaders. Both the USA and Russia have been humiliatingly defeated in wars in the last half century. Make Russia great again, make the USA great again, brings out the electorate and wins elections. Cocking a snook at adversaries plays well with Mother Russia and overrides considerations of the rule of law and international opprobrium. The end result is worrying if for different reasons in each case. So is the problem a clash of different political cultures: our values versus theirs? Up to a point. If David Cameron had stripped off his shirt and had photographs of himself riding a horse in Oxfordshire distributed by Conservative Central Office – apologies to sensitive readers - the British response would have been derision. I don't think his constituency would have taken to him throwing people around on the judo mat either. Though judo seems to have taught Putin a lot about tactics globally: use their strength against them. Or perhaps the Taliban in Afghanistan provided the lesson.

Putin is now responding to his perception of a much weakened USA and UK, the former saddled with an incompetent, erratic, narcissist President, the latter with a weak Prime Minister determined to hold her political Party together at any cost as her meagre legacy. Because of the dominant Tory ideological Brexiteers, and the naïve, bungling leadership of the riven Opposition, this spells

“make Britain little England again”. With Russia and the USA facing each other behind proxy militias and armies in Syria, we face a perilous passage through the next few years. Reinstating an active hotline between Moscow and key western capitals is urgent as is making understanding the psychology of Russian nationalism key to our foreign policy. We were spared a nuclear holocaust in October 1962 by the personalities of John F. Kennedy and Nikita Krushchev. Today it is Trump and Putin who potentially have to deal with the accidental miscalculation and confrontation that leads towards nuclear war. Avoiding this eventuality should take precedence over other foreign policy considerations and geopolitical advantage. Mrs. May has shown good judgement on these provocations without burning the boats we need to retain in future in the perilous seas ahead. That there are more important forces to contend with than her back-benches may be the beginning of wisdom, if not electoral gain.

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2.3 On Becoming a Terrorist-Sympathiser

6/4/2018

His story was typical of thousands of people. He had fled Turkey before police could detain him as a prominent supporter of Hizmet (Service), a moderate, pious and tightly organised Muslim movement that had attained considerable international outreach. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared Hizmet a terrorist organisation after the failed military coup against him of 15 July 2016. It was set up by Fethullah Gulen in the late 1970s.

I suppose that makes me “a terrorist-sympathiser”, not because I supported the attempted coup, but because I support the many Hizmet members who didn’t support the military coup and played no part in it but are now perse-

cuted.

He was sitting alone in the back of the restaurant. At first I didn't recognise him, wrong man in the wrong place, a surprise. The last time I'd seen him was in Istanbul, a confident, smart and erudite journalist from a major media outlet analysing trends in Turkey's politics, impressing the assembled academics. Here in London he seemed diminished, bereft.

The process of seeking asylum as a refugee had already taken him eleven months; under British regulations he was barred from getting a job. Although remarkably stoic, the impact of loss was detectable both on him and on the Turkish colleagues who soon joined us for lunch. It was bad enough being a journalist and political analyst, but being also a so-called Gulenist qualified you, with near certainty, for arrest and prison.

According to the Hizmet-linked turkeypurge.com website set up by concerned journalists, by early March 2018, 133,000 people had been detained in Turkey of which 65,000 were subsequently arrested. 319 of these were journalists or media workers of which, according to the Pen International and the Stockholm Centre for Freedom, 170 journalists were languishing in prison, mainly in pre-trial detention. So my unexpected lunch companion had good reason to leave.

Some 3,000 schools, and universities have been shut down and 5,800 academics/teachers sacked. The organisation was set up by Fethullah Gulen in the late 1970s. Together with religious tolerance Hizmet prioritised educational attainment. Not surprisingly, its members achieved considerable upward mobility into the professions – otherwise described by opponents as infiltrating the judiciary, police, banking, construction industry, civil service and media. That would make the UK's public schools the leading entryist organisations in the country.

By the turn of the millennium Hizmet shared with Erdogan's nascent AKP (Freedom and Justice Party) the hope of disempowering the military and secular establishment that had ruled Turkey since Ataturk. It was not unreasonable for them to wish to see their religious values reflected in the life and governance of a predominantly Muslim country. But, while wanting to avoid the pitfalls of a formal political profile, Hizmet formed what amounted to a loose tactical alliance with Erdogan based on a shared vision, or at the very least wished the AKP well.

Implementing an almost Gramscian formula, Hizmet set about changing the conversation about Islam in civil society while Erdogan manoeuvred no less successfully at the state political level. It was a winning combination. But it couldn't last. Fethullah Gulen openly began disagreeing with Erdogan's policies, most notably on his dealing with the Kurds. Prior to the 2011 elections Erdogan was weeding out Hizmet from AKP positions, and those in government were put under pressure. With rival secular elites defeated, in November 2013 Erdogan set about dismantling Hizmet's key recruitment infrastructure: starting with their preparatory schools. This was no Mussolini-Pius XII clash over schools and scouts partially patched up for mutual advantage to preserve a Concordat and Lateran Treaty. Hizmet members hit back with highly damaging corruption charges against the President and his family. Henceforth Hizmet and its educational establishments became the new enemy and experienced mounting attrition.

The military and Turkey's secular protagonists historically have been virulently anti-religious. So the movement was poorly represented in the traditionally secular armed forces. Nonetheless some Hizmet members in the army and air-force, after four years of watching their movement take punishment from government, joined in what now seems to have been a secular-led coup attempt. The

President survived. Presidential palace, Parliament and Police headquarters were attacked by the air-force. Some 300 died. This gave Erdogan ample pretext for accelerating his passage towards a dangerous cult of personality, military sallies, autocratic rule and human rights violations, worthy of the early stages of something worse.

Turkey stands today at the confluence of not only West and East, Russia and NATO, but of several of the big and complex questions confronting liberal democracy: the growth of autocratic regimes with electoral vestiges of democracy and widespread populist support, the future of Islam, the treatment of minorities, and the future of the Middle East. It could go in any direction. Do we really, under Boris Johnson, have an elaborated foreign policy to navigate a way through these questions, or indeed a Foreign Minister competent enough to formulate and implement one? Yet Turkey stands as the bellwether of stability in post-Cold War geopolitics. This worrying reality is not reflected in our mass media or distribution of foreign correspondents.

As I tried on parting to find something positive to say to my journalist friend, I thought sadly about his predicament and that of the Turkey he and I loved and once enjoyed. What a terrible, tragic waste.

2.4 Religious Freedom:from Coffins to Cakes**2/5/2018**

During his recent visit to Poland, Cardinal Vincent Nichols spoke of the Church in a secular and multi-faith world needing “to reach out and construct a dialogue on arguments about society’s Common Good”. Wise counsel. That dialogue is currently not led by bishops, imams, rabbis and priests, religious leadership, but takes place in the adversarial context of the court room. By default it falls to the judiciary to shape these arguments while interpreting law and legislation. A good example is Lord Justice Singh’s recent ruling on the Cab-Rank policy of the Inner North London Senior Coroner for burials.

“What on its face looks like a general policy which applies to everyone equally may in fact have an unequal impact on a minority”, he pointed out. “In other words”, Lord Justice Singh continued, “to treat everyone in the same way is not necessarily to treat them equally. Uniformity is not the same thing as equality”.

His ruling in the High Court was the outcome of a dispute between the coroner, reacting to what she saw as bullying, and Muslim, Orthodox and Haredi Jewish communities. These communities sought burial in the shortest time possible, ideally within 24 hours, out of respect for the dead, k’vod hamet. Stamford Hill, in Hackney where I live is home for some 25,000 Haredi Jews. Muslims share this burial tradition and were delighted at the ruling. A third of the population of Tower Hamlets are Muslims of Bangladeshi origin, numbering some 82,000.

I first encountered the forensic legal style of Rabinder Singh in 2002 when, as a QC in Matrix Chambers, he was acting in the High Court for CND, challenging the legality of going to war with Iraq without a second UN resolution. In a public talk he demonstrated the way in which Chapter One

of the UN Charter, “Purposes and Principles”, provided a key to interpreting the Articles on war and military intervention. It was a master-class in constructing reasoned advocacy. It had a compelling logic. He lost the case.

A week or so ago, he was deploying his insights on an important question of religious freedom and discrimination against religious minorities. His ruling is important, not simply because those grieving were particularly liable to experience additional distress from the Coroner’s insistence that they wait in line, but because it provides a simple, but often ignored, insight into equal rights. A religious identity can require accommodation: tolerance of occasional exceptions to a general rule, and sometimes special provisions, just as one based on sexual orientation (think of the legislation on civil partnerships). The simple fact is that everyone waiting to bury a loved one will be distressed by delay, but Muslims and Jews will also experience delay as a painful frustration of their religious duty.

But not all religious freedom cases can be dispatched so clearly and vigorously. It seems a big jump to move from the solemn context of accommodating different religious interpretations of respect for the dead, and the funeral needs of religious communities, to a bakery in Belfast and a dispute over a cake.

Judges of the Supreme Court are not in the habit of sitting in Northern Ireland. But the bakery dispute has passed up the court system and, because of the importance of the legal principles involved, and the complexity of devolution, demands this level of attention. The case pits a bakery with committed Christian owners against a campaigning gay minority. In 2014 the respondent, Mr. Gareth Lee, ordered a cake with the message “Support Gay Marriage” on it - gay marriage was unlawful in Northern Ire-

land. Mr Lee was at the time associated with QueerSpace, a Northern Ireland LGBT organisation; the cake was for an International Day against Homophobia.

Mr. Lee wanted to buy his cake from Ashers bakery, was refused, and claimed discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation under the 2006 Equality Act. He twice won his case in lower courts. The Supreme Court is now being asked to decide whether the lower courts' decisions that Mr. Lee was discriminated against under the Act is correct. Or whether the appellant, a Christian baker, is within his rights to refuse to put words on a cake which contradict his own conscientiously held religious beliefs, whether his right to religious freedom permits a refusal to sell a cake carrying such a message.

Equality law aims to protect people from discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion and sexual orientation. Its protection would, theoretically, apply to a Christian customer whose order to create a cake with "Reject Gay Marriage" on it was refused by a gay baker because they were Christian. Two of the identity categories protected in the Act have come into conflict. Which prevails? The rights of the gay customer, i.e. sexual orientation, or the rights of the baker, religion? We won't know the answer for many months.

Not being a lawyer, I am susceptible to simple ways of looking at such disputes. Do Lord Justice Singh's words on "unequal impact" help? Is the human dignity of the gay litigant adversely affected by this particular refusal of service? It could be. It depends on whether the man or the message was being denied. But not remotely to the degree a gay couple might feel on being refused a double room in commercial accommodation, a similar recent case. The cake was essentially a campaign

tool and the commercial transaction was to buy it for an event in County Down.

The words requested on the cake, the words of the respondent, are an unusual form of utterance. But the baker was being obliged to utter them, or risk a fine. Is being obliged to utter a slogan you are conscientiously and religiously opposed to on pain of civil liability, compelled speech or expression in legal terms, very distressing? I would have thought so.

Amongst its important functions, the law plays an important role in defining ethical behaviour both by the State and by individuals. By applying the law in actual cases, the judiciary today defines the legal and ethical demands of living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. In this situation there is a danger that campaigning organisations will use the judicial process for gaining publicity rather than clarifying complex legal issues, or, indeed, representing the position of their wider communities and leaders.

This becomes more serious when, beyond presenting generalities, religious leaders seem to have partially vacated the space and provide decreasing guidance in the public domain when ethical issues have a political dimension. Have there been pastoral letters on the application of Christian values to immigration occasioned by the Windrush scandal, in other words taking advantage of a time when the public might be paying attention to an ethical argument? Yet, the Church has an outstanding record on the matter.

Why does it take a thoughtful Judge to offer instructive pointers to thinking about problems arising from claims involving religious freedom. If Faith and Reason are, as Pope Benedict underlined, allies not enemies for Christians, where is the reasoning about the big contested issues of the day, immigration

and religious freedom? And when the argument about gay marriage has been/is conducted largely as a conversation about human rights and human dignity why do bishops not engage on this ground? For example, by making the kind of basic distinctions about equality that Lord Singh makes and applying them.

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2.5 Turkey's Red Notices

4/12/2018

Red Notices, the requests made to governments through Interpol for the location, arrest and extradition of named individuals, were in the news this November. Ukrainian born Alexandr Prokopchuk, a Major-General in the Russian police who had led the Russian National Central Bureau of Interpol (MIA) since 2011, failed to get the top job as President of the international police organisation. During Prokopchuk's time as leader of Interpol's Russian office, Russia was a profligate user of Red Notices, targeting for example Bill Browder and other opponents of President Putin.

Prokopchuk studied Romance and Germanic languages and literature. So the selection committee were not worried about his talents as a linguist when they appointed a South Korean, Kim Jong Yang, Interpol Vice-President for Asia, as the new international chief.

This comforting little news story with a happy ending brought Red Notices into focus for many people, who, like me, had never heard of them. They are generally a good idea for dealing with criminals who flee across borders. But on closer scrutiny these Notices turn out to be popular with dictators who use them to harass dissidents and their political opponents who have fled

abroad. Compared with polonium poisoning and chemical nerve agents, Red Notices seem quaintly legalistic and almost benign. But they can result in individuals innocent of any crimes, save opposition to tyranny, going to jail at home, or worse.

This is not the whole story. Before an arrest can take place, the government receiving a Red Notice, its Interior Ministry, must approve the request – in UK that is the Home Office and the term used is “certify” as in certify there is a case to be heard. Several months of judicial proceedings can follow before the case goes to court to decide whether the Notice complies with internationally agreed Interpol rules, for example, that the Notice should not be politically motivated. It takes two to tango, the host country and the country issuing the Red Notice. And when T stands for Terrorism and Turkey as well as Tango the stakes are high.

As Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State from 1997-2002, once said referring to terrorism “whenever the United States wages war on an abstract noun, it gets into difficulties”. After the 2016 attempted coup in Turkey in which over 300 died, sticking the terrorism label on opponents and dissidents became stock-in-trade for President Erdogan.. None have suffered more than members of Hizmet, the international Islamic Gülen movement, followers of Fetullah Gülen whose modernising writing and teaching is very far from hate-speech, incitement to violence or promotion of terrorism.

Hizmet was branded a Terrorist Organisation, FETO for short, by Erdogan. Massive purges of alleged Gülen followers from all walks of life followed. The movement’s emphasis on education alongside piety had resulted in Gülenists moving into positions of influence in Turkish society, forming an alternative power-base to Erdogan’s ruling AKP Party. Some follow-

ers had joined the coup which seems in retrospect to have been a secular-led. This gave Erdogan the opportunity to wipe out what he saw as a significant organised internal opposition. Tens of thousands of Gülenists have lost their jobs, and/or been imprisoned or forced into exile, their families persecuted. Teachers in Gülen schools outside Turkey have been abducted, others have received death threats. The purges have swept up many people beyond Hizmet. The main groups targeted are lawyers, civil servants and journalists as well as police and military. Association with the Kurdish insurgency in the south-east provides a further charge levelled against journalists.

So Turkey has been seeking the extradition of Hizmet members from the UK. Most recently, and prominently amongst them, are Hamdi Akin Ipek, a media tycoon, owner of Koza Holdings, Talip Büyük who managed the Gülen movement's Fatih Colleges, and Ali Çelik, head of the Gülen-linked Bank Asya. In late November this year, Judge John Zani rejected the case for their extradition from the UK on grounds that the application was politically motivated. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), representing the Turkish government in British courts, are now taking the case to appeal. Even if Turkey's applications fail, the subjects of Red Notices will have endured months of exhausting uncertainty and anxiety.

The point of the story is not simply that Judge Zani is upholding the rule of law over the political advantage the UK might gain by obliging Erdogan, a NATO ally and strategic trading partner. The real issue is this: do the Crown and people of this country really wish the CPS – whose time and staff we pay for - to represent a government which engages in human rights violations to a prodigious extent? The same might be asked of the Home Office which, when it certifies Turkish Red Notices, triggers the arrest of

the named person, causing at the very least six months of legal costs, bail proceedings, anxiety and a life on hold. This is a remarkably effective way of harassing Turkish refugees who are under the supposed protection of the UK government. Some of them will, in addition, be receiving death threats and loss by confiscation of their, and their family members', homes back in Turkey. Britain needs to re-read its international obligations to protect refugees.

I do not assume that all the targets of Turkey's Red Notices are saints. But trumped up criminal charges often form part of the harassment game. And British government is perfectly well aware of these tactics.

Here is a very simple question. If the politically motivated use of Red Notices by Putin and the Russian government was so reprehensible it warranted a well-run campaign against Major General Prokopchuk's appointment to President of Interpol, supported by the UK, then how come the Home Office is certifying politically motivated Notices from Erdogan and the Turkish government?

Answers on one side of A4. Bonus marks for explaining how this treatment of refugees is compatible with British values.

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2.6 Christianophobia

1/1/2019

Five years ago I wrote a review of Rupert Shortt's book *Christianophobia: a Faith under Attack*. "This ought to be a major foreign policy issue for governments", was its conclusion. "That it is not tells us much about a rarely acknowledged hierarchy of victimhood", he added. He must have been pleased

last week when the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, launched an independent global review, led by the new Anglican Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen, into how government is responding and should respond, to the global wide persecution of Christians.

Yes, delivered during the slow news days between Christmas and New Year, the announcement was probably a carefully timed marker in the forthcoming leadership contest in the Tory Party. But the review is a good thing in its own right. The timing was also appropriate on religious grounds, falling two days before the Feast of the Holy Innocents, which commemorates Herod's slaughter of baby boys in his efforts to murder the new born Jesus, an early example of collateral damage.

New Year is as good a time as any to make a confession: I was unnecessarily negative about one or two aspects of Christianophobia. "Where one religious minority is persecuted, so are all to varying degrees", I declared. "Shortt's striking title might seem to encourage us to champion the rights of our own faith communities rather than to work beside other religious leaders to promote religious freedom for all". I did admit that these reservations might seem a little precious. In retrospect I think they were.

True, the clunky title Christianophobia could be seen as a religious me-too response to Islamophobia and the more ancient Antisemitism. But this would be to ignore the point Shortt was trying to make that persecution of Christians was somehow treated as less newsworthy, and less of public concern, than the persecution of other religious minorities around the world.

Yet, when you think about it, this neglect of public outcry about the persecution of Christians is puzzling. Religious art is part of the cultural acquis

of Europe. Try the Anglo-Saxon Exhibition at the British Library. At Christmas, carol services and other religious events, from Nativity plays to midnight masses, are crowded. The season reveals the residual Christian belief and practice in British society. And all year round hundreds of amateur and professional choirs around the country practice and sing sacred music composed by the great classical composers, often performing in churches. The Christian words they sing, the symbols and paintings, are an integral part of British and European culture and identity. They cannot be wished away by sleight of hand of the National Secular Society. Yet, before the Hunt review, nobody except Church leaders seemed officially too bothered about the Filipina housemaid in the Saudi household refused time off to attend the Easter Liturgy. Or the Christians languishing in jail in Pakistan under trumped up blasphemy charges. Or the repression of evangelical Churches in China, Copts in Egypt, and the wider exodus of Christians from the Middle East. And so on. Indeed being bothered about this persecution has often been associated, rightly or wrongly, with Right Wing political positions.

Shortt suggested the number of Christians currently under threat in 2012 as 200 million. UK government last week gave the figure of 250 Christians killed per month around the world because of their religious identity. It is very difficult to determine which killings are parts of general purges of dissidents or in rampages of militias, or the direct targeting of Christians as a defenseless minority. The figures from the FCO are reliable and paint a shocking picture. So what approach can realistically be taken to curtail these particular human rights violations?

I would still point to the promotion, protection and independent monitoring of the right to religious freedom as the starting point for effective action. The

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights originated in reaction to secular totalitarianism but notably in the commitment of people of faith to establish the right to religious freedom. It would be a profound irony if religious freedom became the human right that finally fell by the wayside in the 21st. century.

The Anglican Bishop of Truro has undoubtedly a difficult task. But, an evangelical and former head of the Church Mission society, he is unlikely to pull his punches. The case of Asia Bibi is telling. After being released following eight years on death-row on blasphemy charges, the British government failed to offer her asylum in the UK, apparently on the grounds it might endanger consular staff in Pakistan. These are some of the many hard realities and limitations that the Bishop is going to have to face in his future recommendations.

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2.7 Trump: Is Anything Worse Than Racism? 18/7/2019

Donald Trump is working away at undermining liberal democracy and its values more efficiently than his friend Vladimir Putin. You might think his telling four congresswomen of colour, three born in the USA, a pluralist, multi-racial federation created by immigration, to go back to the “crime-ridden” countries they came from, is as bad as it gets. Well, it’s not. Advocating the use of torture is worse.

In 2016 while campaigning for the Presidency Trump clearly advocated State use of torture. “Torture works, OK folks” he said. “And waterboarding is your minor form, but we should go much stronger than waterboarding”. He received

applause from his audience.

Torture has been used in the past in, or by, the USA to extract information and as punishment: by soldiers in wars, by police, by secretive State agencies, and by criminal militias, in jails, “black sites”, barracks, and, associated with racism by lynch mobs. George W. Bush legitimated its use in his ‘war on terror’.

Like many people, I have always believed torture marks an ethical frontier. Torture is designed to dehumanize the victim, “break them”, take away every last vestige of freedom and human dignity, to inflict a spiritual death as well as physical pain and degradation through “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment”. It is a fundamental denial of our shared humanity, the ultimate inhumanity, in some ways worse than capital punishment and summary execution. That is the damage to the victim. But what of the consequences for the State, and its representatives, that endorse its use against criminals and terrorists?

Extracting information from terrorists and the CIA’s failure to share critical intelligence with the FBI was the theme of BBC Two’s recent drama-doc television series *The Looming Tower*, which examines the antecedents of 9/11. The hero is a real-life Lebanese-American Muslim New York FBI agent, Ali Soufan. I travelled with him in Kosovo a few years ago. The real Ali was not your usual picture of an FBI agent. He suffered from car sickness, spoke fluent Arabic and resigned on moral grounds from the Federal Bureau in 2005. Because of the 1993 Al-Qaida attack on the North Tower of the World Trade Centre, the New York FBI became the first to hold the Al-Qaida (AQ) dossier. This was how Ali came to investigate the 12 October 2000 terrorist attack on the guided missile destroyer USS Cole refueling in Aden, killing 17 US sailors and wounding 39 more, and why he interrogated possible

AQ operatives after 9/11. He tells his story in his much redacted *The Black Banners: Inside the Hunt for Al-Qaida*. Using conventional interrogation techniques, building up a relationship with captured suspect terrorists, and drawing on his knowledge of Islam, Ali Soufan and the FBI obtained much valuable intelligence.

The FBI's more humane approach came abruptly to an end when the CIA took over, employing "enhanced interrogation techniques", the favoured euphemism for torture. The then Attorney-General, Steven G. Bradbury, allowed waterboarding of "high value detainees". The White House legal counsel, Alberto Gonzales, placed AQ detainees in the category of "unlawful combatants", so Guantanamo Bay was outside the legal provisions of the Geneva Convention. Two key AQ operatives, Abu Zubaydah and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed were repeatedly waterboarded. They had been trained to withstand torture - but not kindness.

There was a laudable reaction in Washington. Despite repeated CIA claims to the contrary, the Senate sub-committee on Intelligence concluded that "enhanced interrogation" had yielded no critical information. Waterboarding has since been banned. Under torture the mind becomes confused, suggested events are imagined. The panic and pain produce false stories just to stop the choking and terror. The US Army Field Manual, in a quiet retreat, banned "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" in 2016.

So torture is all in the past then, all down to the trauma of 9/11 and George W. Bush? Maybe. But W. Fitzhugh Brundage in *Civilizing Torture: An American Tradition*, Harvard University, is far less sanguine. He presents water torture as being as American as motherhood and apple pie, practiced before, during and after the Civil War, in US occupied Philip-

pines, in Chicago jails, in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. It is a difficult read. The excuses for torture have been remarkably consistent: a few bad apples, an urgent need to obtain life-saving information, torture defined narrowly as the infliction of extreme pain such as destruction of a major bodily organ, an inevitable retaliatory feature of warfare, and so on. Torture is, of course, inevitable, if no-one gets prosecuted because successful prosecution would be damaging to morale and would lose votes. It is never politic to tangle with the emotions aroused by American casualties in war. Obama backed off prosecuting members of the Bush government who tried to legitimate torture. Britain's complicity in CIA rendition of suspects to "black sites" for torture means we cannot be complacent. As Montaigne wrote in the 16th century "each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice". Despite the constraint of the law, torturers will expect the consistent excuses of the past to provide them with near impunity in the future.

The one redeeming feature of this sorry story is that within liberal democracies there have always been institutions and voices to combat the slide into barbarism, seeking to outlaw the use of torture and to seek prosecutions. Trump so far is being contained by the resilience of US institutions. His deceased arch-enemy Senator John McCain should have the last word on the use of torture – which he experienced while captured in North Vietnam. We are "obliged by history, by our nation's highest ideals and the many terrible sacrifices made to protect them, by our respect for human dignity to make clear we need not risk our national honor to prevail in this or any war". Senate Intelligence Report on CIA Interrogation Methods 9 December 2014.

Sadly Donald Trump seems to have no concept of national honour in his

moral compass. Would that the Republicans had the courage to field someone of McCain's stature to fill the moral vacuum that Trump is occupying.

See TheArticle "By Advocating Torture Trump fundamentally undermines Liberal Democracy" 18 July 2019

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2.8 Surveying Surveillance Capitalism

2/8/2019

We seem to be living through a period of "foreordained doom". We feel we have lost our bearings and are plodding on in ignorance through the dark. Such fatalism is dangerous, but it doesn't have to be like this.

Every decade or so a helpful book, or books, appear which explain the big picture, what is happening and why. I remember being struck by the analysis in Spanish sociologist, Manuel Castell's, trilogy, End of Millennium, The Power of Identity and Rise of the Network Society, published between 1996-1998, where he described the multiple correlates of the information economy that we were then entering. We are leaving the epoch of the industrial economy which, in turn, had emerged from an agricultural economy. Reminiscent of Marx, for Castell's epochs were marked by radical changes in how we make a living, the mode of production, the nature of power and human experience. Each epoch is shaped by human decisions and shapes people making these decisions.

Twenty years later Shoshana Zuboff, a Harvard Business School Professor, picks up the story where Castells left off. Her *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the Frontier of Power*, is a doorstep of a book but essential reading. She describes how the information economy was captured by Google first followed by Facebook and, later by Microsoft. The mass of information “clogging Google’s servers could be combined with its powerful analytic capabilities to produce prediction of user behaviour”, that is your and my behaviour. And this knowledge was destined to be worth tens of billions of dollars in revenue and profit through its commercial - advertising - application and effectiveness.

We all purchase things. And Google knows when, why and how this happens. The goal now is to create behavioural predictions that come closest to guaranteed outcomes in real-life behaviour. Google’s extraction of our personal information as data begins on-line but “the prediction imperative increases the momentum, driving extraction toward new sources in the real world”. Enter the “internet of things” where your fridge will soon be monitoring your preferred foods and passing the information on to what Zuboff calls ‘surveillance capitalists’, collecting this ‘surplus’ data to be sold on for profit.

The momentum behind this growth in technological capacity and its capture by the “puppet masters”, (Zuboff’s phrase), of Silicon Valley was increased by the American State’s interest in identifying potentially subversive behaviour patterns after 9/11. But the tech companies real purpose was cleverly hidden behind a rhetoric of their dominant story: bringing the world together, the promise of a new cyber-belonging and of expanding communications, as well as facilitating life in the consumer society – knowing what you want when you want it. Quite quickly we simply became habituated to our private details

being hoovered up, numbed by the sheer complexity of the means used to invade our privacy. We simply can't deal with change that is so unprecedented; we fall back on inappropriate former models of helplessness - such as living under totalitarianism. In Orwell's bleak words we follow "the instinct to bow down before the conqueror of the moment, to accept the existing trend as irreversible".

Zuboff, who is a psychologist, sees this capture of the information economy as being led by non-state actors (China is an interesting and frightening exception). She conceives the process in terms of lessons drawn from B.F. Skinner's 1970s' Behaviourism, in all its Clockwork Orange awfulness, being applied behind the scenes. She sketches in an "instrumentarian future" in which "the machine world and social world operate in harmony... as humans emulate superior learning processes of the smart machines". In this dystopia individuals are a nuisance causing friction in the smooth running of the market, free will is an illusion. A distinctive State controlled version of this dystopia is to be found in China's Orwellian total surveillance plan for its Uigher citizens. The demand is to "sacrifice our freedom to collective [machine] knowledge imposed by others and for the sake of their guaranteed outcomes [i.e. in this instance social harmony and no bombs in Beijing].

Zuboff does not hide behind an academic research mask or avoid expressing her indignation about the dynamics of our information economy which demean people's human dignity - particularly young people's. She is forthright: "effectiveness without autonomy is not effective, dependence-induced compliance is no social contract, a hive with no exit can never be a home, experience without sanctuary is but a shadow...and freedom from uncertainty is no freedom". Throughout the book she pursues the surveillance cap-

italists with a passion that pulls the reader through the dense text with its special vocabulary and takes you on to her next theme. Zuboff, justifying her own passion, takes Hannah Arendt's engaged writing on totalitarianism as her model. She quotes from her that "the natural reaction to such conditions is one of anger and indignation because these conditions are against the dignity of man. If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, then I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities".

Reading *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is an experience which changes your view of the world. I have to admit to swallowing most of the surveillance capitalists' sweet talk, getting accustomed to my personal details being acquired and used for someone else's profit, thinking communicating with distant family and friends was a huge benefit and that this was all there was to it. Zuboff has stopped me in my tracks. I now share her indignation. After the effort of reading her 535 pages of text, with my jaw sagging, I can no longer plead ignorance and the loss of my bearings any more. Hello Mr. Zuckerberg. We have a problem.

See [The Article](#) "The Age of Surveillance is a must-read and it will leave you with a sagging jaw"

2.9 Bots, Cyborgs & Troll Farms

16/9/2019

In 1944 T.S. Eliot, then director of Faber & Faber, notoriously turned down George Orwell's *Animal Farm* for fear of offending the Soviet Union, our vital ally against Nazi Germany. Faber & Faber did not repeat the howler with Peter Pomerantsev's *This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War against Reality*, a book which also has important things to say about oppression and tyranny. Currently a Senior Fellow at LSE, a Soviet-born Ukrainian, Pomerantsev has written an endearing and stimulating travelogue through the world of fake news and digital political control. Endearing because he runs this travelogue throughout the book in parallel with biographical sketches of his father's life. Igor Pomerantsev's courageous and creative struggle against communist oppression and lies, and their modern equivalent, those of Putin's Russian Federation, make compelling reading. It is heartening to see such respect and admiration for a father from a son, when the bad father has become a biographical cliché.

Pomerantsev demonstrates how the communications revolution and social media have transformed political conflict, the struggle to gain and regain power. A 2013 Pentagon study, for example, described China's theory of modern war as "twenty-first century warfare guided by a new and vital dimension: namely the belief that whose story wins may be more important than whose army wins". We in Britain are now aware that during general elections and referendum campaigns political parties are able to disaggregate voters, into some eighty different group identities each targeted differently, but using unifying keywords which underpin a shared story being transmitted. States never stop projecting the story of them, the "non-people", versus us "the people", manufacturing a consensus around a simple theme such as Trump's make America great again, Putin's get Rus-

sia off its knees, and the Brexiteers' take back control. Many people believe "the people" means themselves and suspend their critical judgement in favour of the reassurance of solidarity that belonging to "the people" brings.

The book contains some fascinating interviews and stories: the penetration by Lyudmilla Savchuk of the prolific Russian Internet Research Agency, a troll farm; the work of Srjda Popović who trains activists in counter-measure against the infrastructure of misinformation, and more generally on "how to overthrow dictators". Then there is Maria Ressa, CEO of the news website Rappeler which reported President Duterte's extra-judicial killings in the Philippines. As might be expected, Pomerantsev adds detail about Russia's coordinated onslaught deploying both misinformation and covert militias, cyber and actual warfare on his country of birth, Ukraine. There is also a concise account of the massive April 2007 Russian cyberattack on Estonia which led temporarily to national paralysis. And you find out that for 348 roubles you can buy online Information and Psychological War operations: A Short Encyclopedia and Reference guide published by Hotline-Telecom, and learn how to disrupt a country.

This is Not Propaganda is stimulating reading, because Pomersantev throughout the book sometimes stops the storytelling to reflect and express his own puzzlement. How has it come to this? We readers share his sense that the Big Story, the full explanation, is beyond our reach. But Pomerantsev has some thoughtful suggestions. He draws a connection between Truth and Hope, a very Catholic linkage. Today's Blitzkrieg on truth and the manufacture of false hopes around keywords create a vicious circle: if there is no hope what is the point of caring too much about whether something is true or not. Let us just reserve judgement, wallow in en-

forced relativism, or simply be entertained by the outrageousness of the falsehoods and claims made in the new “global theatre”. Robert Peston, the political correspondent of ITV News has already observed how Boris Johnson’s press conferences are “100 times more engaging” than Theresa May’s. But if there is no truth we are doomed to be manipulated into pursuing false hopes which lead to even greater disengagement and cynicism.

This is *Not Propaganda* an easy book to read. If you don’t know the difference between a bot, a cyborg and a troll factory – I didn’t – you will soon learn. If you didn’t know of Igor Pomerantsev’s remarkable life story you will be told it elegantly, with a touch of the romance of courageous resistance. Peter Pomerantsev illustrates that he has inherited his father’s creative gift for words – which is why he cares so much about them, though perhaps a ruthless edit on a few metaphors wouldn’t come amiss. Some are uniquely fresh and jump out at you. Others are contrived and clunky. But overall this is a learned book that does not bog you down in technical detail whilst moving from country to country.

So read these 256 pages and you will know who and what is attacking us, the contents of the Trump, Putin and Duterte playbook and how to sow division, discord and the seeds of institutional collapse. And you will meet some of the brave people who are making a good fist of combatting the partly new, often undetectable, and very dangerous form of oppression and manipulation of the public that is currently in operation globally today. Welcome to the 21st. century.

See [TheArticle](#) 04/09/2019

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2.10 Religious Freedom: Bellwether of Human Rights 14/11/2019

November 9th was the anniversary of the day the Berlin Wall began coming down. It was also the anniversary of the beginning of Kristallnacht, the November 1938 Nazi pogroms against Germany's Jews. Not a bad moment for an audit of progress, or lack of it, in protecting human rights around the world. The UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) is our best shot at defining the simple demands of human dignity, with Article 18, the right to freedom of religious belief (FoRB), its bellwether, now violated on a global scale.

British foreign policy has been equivocal in its promotion of rights from a high point under Foreign Minister Robin Cook's much ridiculed "ethical dimension", to the loss under austerity cuts of dedicated human rights staff, to Britain's recent refusal to grant asylum to Asia Bibi, released from imprisonment on false blasphemy charges in Pakistan, and Boris Johnson's cavalier negligence which landed Nazinin Zaghari-Radcliffe with a five year prison sentence in Iran.

In December 2018 Jeremy Hunt, Johnson's successor as Foreign Secretary, asked the newly appointed Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen, formerly head of the Church Mission Society, to review the persecution of Christians in key countries around the world, to analyse the FCO's response to their plight, and to recommend a "cohesive and comprehensive policy" against their persecution. A surprising announcement because freedom of religious belief, let alone Christianity, had not been treated as a priority in the UK's human rights work.

The Foreign Office's neglect of religious persecution springs from at least two

major causes. Firstly, over the last two decades the FCO, reduced under austerity has been struggling with new priorities: climate change and environment, countering religious extremism, sexual trafficking, rape as a weapon of war, not to mention BREXIT, Putin, and Trump, a crowded in-tray. Secondly and more significantly, Britain, especially its ‘Establishment’ has become a more openly secular country suspecting proselytism behind every missionary bore-hole and clinic and putting jobs, trade and arms sales before public criticism of human rights violations.

Britain’s civil servants follow government directives; diplomats paid lip service to promoting FoRB. A minority did value contact with religious leaders over and above their instrumental value in furthering UK policy objectives, and did do their best to help people of faith who were persecuted. The outcomes of policy directives seem to have depended on the belief, or prejudice, of individual diplomats and civil servants. All embassies and High Commissions were supplied with an FCO toolkit on freedom of religion but, when asked, only 63% of the “low-level” of returns from a questionnaire said they had implemented the toolkit’s provisions. Interviews with religious leaders and communities told the equally depressing story of a small minority of embassies and High Commissions, mainly in the Middle East and North Africa, active in providing effective help for persecuted Christians and in advocating FoRB with host governments.

The Bishop of Truro’s Report’s, focussing on the persecution of Christians in the context of the wider FoRB, thus avoiding rebuttal as special pleading, takes us – instructively - back to the years after the Second World War and the origins of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The World Council of Churches’ Commission on International Affairs led by the Lutheran theologian Dr. Frederick Nolde, originally lobbied for the nascent UN to

establish a Commission on Religious Liberty. It soon became clear to the Churches that these rights had to be part of a wider declaration of other human rights. Eleanor Roosevelt was the first chair of a Commission whose drafting committee produced the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). The contribution of the British Council of Churches, the Conference of British Missionary Societies and the Greek Orthodox Lebanese Foreign Minister, Charles Malik, was to add “the right to change belief” to the right to hold beliefs, their public expression and performance. It was another world. The veteran British missiologist, J.H. Oldham, saw the UNDHR with its Article 18 on religious freedom as “a new secular structure for the ‘good society’ that would inherit the fruits of the Christian centuries”. We would not wish to describe a universal declaration that way today.

What then did Bishop Mounstephen come up with? Well, a first rate and comprehensive report published in July 2019 which both details the extent of Christian persecution and places it firmly within a general wider decline in respect for FoRB, a decline affecting all faiths. The Report’s individual country assessments make fascinating if shocking reading.

Most notably the Report advocates an early warning system designed to preempt persecution, the mainstreaming of FoRB within existing programmes of democratisation, development and peace-building, together with further training in religious literacy for FCO staff. It also asks for a standard definition of persecution and a better understanding of the particular character of discrimination and persecution of Christians. It identifies the variety of triggers and drivers of Christian persecution. In the Bishop of Truro’s own words at a recent meeting: “If you lift the stone of persecution and look underneath, what is it that you find? You find gang warfare on an indus-

trial scale driven by drug crime; you find authoritarian, totalitarian regimes that are intolerant both of dissent and of minorities; you find aggressive militant nationalism that insists on uniformity; you find religious zealotry and fundamentalism in many different forms that often manifests itself in violence”.

I hope the FCO doesn't shelve this important work. The situation has been deteriorating with Christians persecuted in 144 countries (up from 125 in 2015 according to the respected Pew Foundation in 2016). Quoting the organisation Open Doors, the Report gives the figure of 245 million Christians in the top 50 offending countries currently experiencing persecution today. Progress in combatting violations of FoRB has been reversed whether in the cultural genocide of the Uighers in China or the decline in the number of Christians surviving in Iraq's Ninevah Plain - alongside the Yazidis - from 1.5 million before 2003 to about 120,000 today. Between 1990-2017, 45 Catholic priests and a Cardinal were murdered by drugs cartels In Mexico. Such human rights violations are now have an alarming a scale, scope and severity scale and have multiple causes.

This Report on the persecution of Christians is a painful, revealing read, a spur to action and easily available*. In a positive step, government circulated it to the Home Office and DfID. Politicians must be pressed about what they intend to do to implement its findings. A General Election provides unique opportunities. As William Wilberforce said presenting a report on the slave trade to the House of Commons in 1791: 'You may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say you did not know'.

www.gov.uk/government/news/review-into-christian-persecution-catalyst-for

action See TheArticle.com 14/11/2019

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2.11 Complicity With Turkey's Police-State 17/12/2019

Britain's future role in the world, not to mention current foreign policy, was virtually absent from national campaigning before the General Election. But once upon a time Britain seemed to care about 'punching above its weight' in foreign affairs, a consoling form of exertion after losing an Empire. Britain still has permanent membership of the UN Security Council even if this modest proximity to power, more often than not means being vetoed by Russia and China.

Apart from the danger of finding neurotoxins "on the knocker", rather than BREXIT Party canvassers, there were a number of foreign policy questions that should have commanded public attention, including our relations with Turkey. Some may have noticed that President Erdogan, a grim presence at the recent NATO meeting, opened an eco-Mosque on 5th December in Cambridge. He told the audience that ISIS, the Gulen movement (an international progressive Muslim organisation some of whose members joined in the 2016 military coup against him) and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) "are all the same poison. They are the same blood-sucking vampires".

Really? Who, in heaven's name accepted his funding of the Mosque and invited him? I hope it was someone who knew nothing about Turkey.

Few people are aware that we, the British taxpayers, are paying for fanciful extradition proceedings in the courts of our own country, proceedings instigated by the Turkish State against Turkish refugees. Courtesy of the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), innocent Turkish refugees can spend anxious and months waiting for court hearings and the opportunity to defend themselves, at great financial and emotional cost, against ludicrous accusations based on ‘information’ from Turkey in support of extradition. Bear in mind this charade is taking place at a time when our judicial system is creaking at the seams with the CPS and courts overloaded and accused waiting up to three years from arrest to trial.

What is going on? Well, Turkey is not just the Bosphorus and beautiful historic Istanbul or booming Bodrum, discos and jolly holidays by an azure sea. After the military coup in 2016, Turkey under the authoritarian rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became a police state.

Within four days of the failed coup Erdoğan sacked 110 generals and admirals. Some 650 of the country’s military officers were dismissed. Such swift and comprehensive action must have been pre-planned, the coup acting as pretext and trigger. To date about 150,000 people, many of them police, judges, university teachers, and businessmen, have been arrested and 78,000 so far charged. Turkey leads the world in imprisoning journalists. The once powerful, national Gulen movement, Hizmet, (Service), and the Kurds, as indicated in Erdoğan’s Cambridge speech, have borne the brunt of repression. Extradition requests to the UK, implemented by the Home Office and CPS, the Red Notices, have turned into long-range forms of punishment and

intimidation.

Britain treads carefully. The Times Turkey correspondent, Hannan Lucinda Smith, in her new book, *Erdoğan Rising: The Battle for the Soul of Turkey*, describes the importance of Turkey for the UK. In March 2016 Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and the EU agreed that six billion Euros would be provided for the three million Syrian refugees now within Turkey. In addition, for each Syrian refugee returned to Turkey from Greece, one refugee would be resettled in an EU country. Turkish citizens were promised visa-free access to the Schengen countries – to which Britain does not belong. That was a deal that might have caught public attention. It was only in May 2016, just prior to the Referendum, that Gove/Johnson authorised a poster saying that a REMAIN vote would open the door to 76 million Turks, this at a time when Erdoğan was on the point of getting rid of Davutoğlu and abandoning negotiations to join the EU. There had never been any chance that the EU would let an unreformed Turkey into the club; accession to the EU required unanimous assent from member states which, of course, included Britain.

Business links with Turkey are important to both economies. Bilateral trade with Turkey amounts to \$20 billion annually. Erdoğan adopted the Blair/Brown public-private partnership model for infrastructural development. PPI contracts now fund major projects such as the newly opened Istanbul airport. British companies stand to earn \$2.5 billion from Erdoğan's plans to build six new hospitals.

Erdoğan is a consummate, populist, leader, religiously a pious moderate in

the Muslim Brotherhood mould, complex and ruthless, hated by secular urban dwellers and adored by the rural poor of Anatolia. Lucinda Smith describes his rise to power and how he skilfully plays contending forces off against each other. He is currently pivoting towards Russia.

While deploying economic strategies derived from the West, Erdoğan's ambitions lie on the Ottoman east side of the Bosphorus, in the Muslim world, where he seeks pre-eminence. Like all populists he has divided his country, in this instance between secular Kemalists (followers of Atatürk, founder of modern Turkey) versus those committed to Islam. He became Prime Minister in 2003 and has been President since 2014. He is well past the critical ten years when power becomes an addiction for national leaders, a kind of political dementia sets in, and bad things happen.

Turkey's borders with Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Iraq, its Black Sea ports providing short sea routes to Ukraine and Russia, make it in geopolitical terms a pivotal country. Istanbul/Constantinople has long been called the bridge between Asia and Europe; until the end of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey's geopolitical direction historically has been, and remains, of geopolitical importance. All this would justify Britain treading carefully. Yet how can any informed person believe that Turkish political refugees extradited from Britain on blatantly political grounds would get a fair trial in a Turkish court. Are decisions taken by our Crown Prosecution Service and Home Office to begin extradition hearings against Turkish refugees, rather than dismiss them, motivated by foreign policy considerations rather than conscientious application of the Law? Or is an overloaded system simply making egregious mistakes?

One thing is sure. If the values motivating our foreign policy are deemed to be of no importance at all in considering and debating the selection and decisions of our Prime Ministers, we risk becoming complicit in Turkey's violation of human rights.

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2.12 Why is the Pope Silent About the Plight of the Uighers? **10/8/2020**

Three weeks ago the President of the Board of Jewish Deputies, Marie van der Zyl, sent an open letter to Liu Xiaoming, the Chinese Ambassador to Britain. She wrote that “nobody could fail to notice the similarities between what is alleged to be happening in the People's Republic of China today and what happened in Nazi Germany 75 years ago”. Foreign Policy, a reputable and informed publication, had previously printed a story about the discovery of 13 tons of Uighur hair. Van der Zyl cited Uighurs loaded forcibly onto trains, men forced to trim their beards, women sterilised and the ‘grim spectre of concentration camps’. The Board of Jewish Deputies letter was courageous challenging stereotypes of Muslim-Jewish relations.

Newspapers and broadcasters, and, of course, Jewish publications, featured the letter together with a strong statement from Cardinal Charles Bo of

Yangon, President of the Asian Bishops' Conferences describing the events in Xinjiang as the "world's worst mass atrocities". Then came the question in Radio Four's 2nd August Sunday programme why had the Pope said nothing? He had the opportunity. Why, according to reports, did he delete from his 5 July Angelus message support for protesters in Hong Kong against the Chinese Government's new Security Law? Francis' worldwide popularity is built on his known sympathy with victims, with the underdog.

The silence of Popes can be more neuralgic than their utterances. Francis will remember how Pius XII's failure to denounce the Holocaust - once he was aware of it - undermined him and the Catholic Church despite the many Catholics, and even the Pope himself, sheltering Jews from Nazi murderers. There is a comparison to be made with the way Pius XII came under pressure from the USA to speak out in September 1942. The egregious human rights violations of the CCP, leaked drone footage from 2019 of blindfolded Uighurs awaiting transportation, and testimonies from Uighurs themselves, are being politicised and instrumentalised by the US government. China has become 'the enemy', a process intensified by Trump's weakness in the polls with the November elections in sight. We are all required to take sides in a new Cold War.

So why no protest against Beijing in Pope Francis' Sunday Angelus talks? Most obviously, because difficult and delicate negotiations are taking place this year between the Holy See and CCP officials from the United Front Work Department (in charge of religious and ethnic minorities such as the Uighurs). The 2018 Holy See-Beijing Provisional Agreement about the appointment of bishops

comes up for renewal in September. From the perspective of Rome this is central to ending a schism. The aim is to bring together the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, bishops selected by the State with, post-agreement, papal approval required, and the former ‘underground’ Church, bishops selected by the Pope but only recognised by the State in the Provisional Agreement. The agreement, full details not disclosed, determines who will lead at least 12 million Catholics formerly split between the two camps roughly equally.

Were the Pope to speak out, negotiations would come to an end. But the CCP has been foot-dragging. Persecution of religious minorities has not abated, many reports suggest it has got worse; persecution of Catholics loyal to Rome could easily intensify. The Holy See holds two cards in its hand: it is the last State entity to still recognise Taiwan and to have an ambassador (nuncio) in Taipei, and it knows the CCP does not want a breakdown of talks with a public Vatican denunciation to follow since that would be grist to the mill for the USA.

The three key players in current negotiations are two Italians, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, and Archbishop Claudio Celli, a key negotiator experienced in communications, and Archbishop Paul Gallagher from Liverpool, secretary for relations with States. None of them would be described as naïve. All of them are skilled diplomats. They have the unenviable task of balancing the Church’s prophetic voice with doing everything they can to protect Catholic communities in China, and to have the opportunity to reach a huge population potentially open to evangelisation. The stakes are high.

On the Chinese side, the Pope is seen as the problem, a foreign leader capable of profoundly influencing a minority group in the Peoples Republic, undermining the creation of a subservient ‘Sinicized’- Christian Church. Hackers, believed to be Chinese, have broken in to Vatican correspondence. Right now Pope Francis would only undermine his own position by attacking Beijing in public on human rights. In his message, released four days after the 22 September 2018 Provisional Agreement was signed, he tellingly addressed “Catholics of China and the Universal Church”, calling for all to work for the Common Good, reconciliation, and for full communion amongst Chinese Catholics. Francis even referred to China’s early experience of Christianity, “the fruits of the Gospel sown in the Middle Kingdom” and its recent travails: “your constancy amid trials, and your firm trust in God’s Providence even when certain situations proved particularly adverse and difficult”.

Silence in this case is not golden. Many Faith leaders signed a strong interfaith protest letter in the 9 August Observer openly branding Chinese action in Xinjiang as genocide. Rome may be very glad that the leader of the Asian Bishops, Cardinal Bo, was one of them raising his prophetic voice on behalf of the universal Church. It is also good to see the British Board of Jewish Deputies and many rabbis deploring the fate of distant persecuted Muslims. And Marie van der Zyl was wise to avoid the word ‘Holocaust’ in her open letter; in China ‘the Holocaust’ refers to the estimated 20 million Chinese civilians who died in the 1937-1945 Sino-Japanese war.

See TheArticle 10/08/2020

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2.13 The Uighurs: Should China's Leaders be on Trial in the Hague?

25/8/2020

In Xinjiang, NW China, reports suggest that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) imposes forced labour, punishes any practice of Islam, loads blindfolded Uighur men onto trains for transportation, and sterilizes women; a million people are estimated to be imprisoned in 're-education/assimilation centres serving as internment camps where they are subject to interrogation and torture. Is the CCP involved in the 'cultural genocide' - or just plain genocide - of the Uighurs? Or should its other crimes provide the substance of indictments in international law?

In an ideal world the perpetrators of China's alleged crimes against the Uighurs would be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague. It won't be the Muslim States which press for this to happen. And neither do passionate public letters, finely judged protests from democracies, Trump's sanctions on complicit Chinese companies, appear to have achieved anything.

The rule of law remains central to the European vision. Does international law offer the Uighurs any hope of remedy? There are several legal possibilities. The charge of genocide is one of them. Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer, introduced the term 'genocide' into legal debate in his 1944 book *Axis Rule*

in Occupied Europe. His original definition of genocide was: “a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves”. Lemkin saw cultural genocide as a key element of physical genocide because it defined the identity of the group to be exterminated. Poland’s post-war trials referred to ‘cultural extermination’ and ‘religious and cultural repression’. Lemkin’s long campaign to get genocide recognised as a crime, his sheer perseverance, resulted in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the international treaty of December 1948.

The 1994 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 also looks applicable to the Uighurs. Article 8 refers to the “right not to be subject to forced assimilation” and, without using the words, spells out almost everything which would be understood as ‘cultural genocide’. Under the pretext of countering terrorism Uighurs in Xinjiang are experiencing violations of every aspect of Article 8 though of the Indigenous Rights Declaration (though the CCP might claim that the Uighurs originated in North-Central Mongolia, aren’t indigenous to China having arrived within the territory of the Han dynasty in the ninth century). With both ancient history and the definition of ‘indigenous’ contested, this particular UN Declaration would not provide the Uighurs assured legal shelter.

The UN 1948 Genocide Convention does leave the CCP vulnerable to claims that by using sterilisation and abortion they are imposing ‘measures intended to prevent births within the group’, an act ‘intended to destroy in whole or

in part... a religious group'. Intention is notoriously difficult to prove. And the CCP already has a record of coerced sterilisation nationally as part of its 'one-child' policy. It might argue the need for national population control measures aimed at an ethnic group with a high fertility rate. Though it does appear that the intention of the CCP's policy towards the Uighurs is to destroy their religious and thus ethnic identity.

Charges of 'crimes against humanity', violations of individual rights, have in the past been used instead of attempting to prove that mass killings were intended to destroy one particular group, and were therefore genocidal. But there was also a more general anxiety that focus on crimes against groups could undermine the foundation of individual human rights. This was one reason why, at the Nuremberg trials, November 1945-1946, Nazi leaders were charged with 'war crimes' - which included, amongst others, the charge of elimination of groups. The explicit use of the term 'genocide' occurred in the Nuremberg indictments under this heading of 'war crimes', but was generally soft-pedalled.

Speculating about the charge against China most likely to succeed if it reached court is one thing; bringing a charge another. Implementing the 1948 Genocide Convention requires international intervention overriding the UN's foundational principle of national sovereignty, and has encountered many obstacles. After US troops had been killed seven months previously during military intervention in Somalia, President Clinton notoriously prevented US diplomats using the word 'genocide' during and immediately after the May 1994 Rwandan genocide because it implied obligation to intervene. The UN Security Council set up a special international criminal

court in Arusha, Tanzania in November 1994 to try key Rwandan genocidaires. It took a long time but there were successful genocide convictions.

The establishment by an international treaty called the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998 was a turning point. The Americans did their level best to block it. I was at a Foreign Office reception when a panicky official rushed up to the senior diplomat I was talking to and, ignoring my presence, indiscreetly told him that Bill Clinton had been ringing, trying to get hold of Tony Blair. It was Clinton's last-ditch attempt to get the UK to withdraw support from the ICC. The blanched senior diplomat made his excuses and rushed off. Clinton failed to budge Blair.

Establishing the ICC finally realised Lemkin's war-time goal. Genocide became explicitly included as a fourth category of indictable crime in international human rights law. Since then the crime of genocide has established itself as part of the legal architecture international law. Radko Mladić followed Radovan Karažić, convicted in 2016, into the dock in 2017, with both found guilty by the ICC of the charge of genocide for the Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Bosniaks, boys and men, and the forcible removal of women, young children and some elderly. In 2018 the Khmer Rouge head of state, Khieu Samphan and his deputy, Nuon Chea, were convicted of genocide. They were tried in a court with international and Cambodian judges, known as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, set up in 2006.

International relations have become coloured by the language of international human rights law even applied to the distant past. The German Development Minister, Gerd Mueller, visiting Namibia in August 2019 admitted “that the crimes and abominations from 1904 to 1907 were what today we describe as genocide”: 65,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama, some 75% of these peoples, were machine-gunned, their wells poisoned, civilians driven into the desert to die, by German colonial military forces. Against this background, King Philippe of Belgium has now spoken of the ‘violence and acts of cruelty’ in the Congo under Leopold II and there is now pressure from Black Lives Matter for reparations.

China today is destroying the culture, religion and identity of over one million Uighurs. Although 123 UN member states have ratified or acceded to the Rome Statute, China and USA, unwilling to cede any national sovereignty, have not. The Russians signed but never ratified and withdrew their signature when the court described the Russian presence in Crimea as an ‘occupation’. Who will dare to bring a charge of cultural genocide? China sits on the Security Council and can, and does, veto referrals of cases to the ICC. Germany and Belgium may be prepared to admit to old crimes, maybe even Britain, but China is not about to put itself in the dock.

See also TheArticle "The Uighurs: who will dare bring charges of cultural genocide?" 17/08/2020

2.14 Migration & European Values**18/10/2020**

“Migrations, more than ever before, will play a pivotal role in the future of our world”. At present, however, migration is affected by the “loss of that sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters on which every civil society is based”. Europe, for example, seriously risks taking this path. Nonetheless, “aided by its great cultural and religious heritage, it has the means to defend the centrality of the human person and to find the right balance between its twofold moral responsibility to protect the rights of its citizens and to assure assistance and acceptance to migrants”.

Pope Francis *Fratelli Tutti* (40)

Until now it is fish and subsidies bedevilling our inglorious EU non-membership. But migrants are coming back in our news. They may soon be back in our ferries if Priti Patel has her way. It seems an age since 2016 when the spurious threat of the EU enabling millions of Turks to move to Britain was used to discredit free movement of people. But the burning of Moria refugee camp holding 12,000 people on the island of Lesbos brought the EU’s own internal crisis to a head. How should responsibility for migrants be shared?

Here in the UK, Government, Brexiteers and their tabloid advocates inhabit the echo chamber they created where asylum seekers and undocumented migrants seeking a better life are framed as a bi-product of criminal traffickers, or as mere numbers and migration itself as an ‘existential’ threat. A good year for the Home Office is when migrant numbers drop. A good story for the media in August this year was when 1,500 people in

dinghies landed on the Kent coast, providing some colourful footage and a ‘crisis’ headline. Similarly pictures of Moria refugee camp at Mytilene in its grey abandonment and charred ruin, probably torched in despair – another Greek island we won’t be holidaying. But the fire also raised the question why responsibilities for migrants are not being shared amongst EU members.

Ending the free movement of people from the EU into the UK was supposed to solve problems not create them. But the need for workers from abroad with a range of skills has not gone away. The UK faces growing problems staffing social care, a persistent shortage of NHS medical staff, not enough brickies, and a lack of seasonal agricultural labour that has left produce rotting in the fields. Meanwhile Priti Patel as Home Secretary is formulating a harsh national policy against unplanned migration with no apparent concern for the wellbeing of future undocumented arrivals.

Unlike Britain which never had a Christian Democrat Party, much of the EU has been somewhat influenced by Catholic - and Lutheran - values. Amongst the EU’s smaller nations, many would point to the influence of the Irish as leaders in the life of the Commission and Parliament. Amongst the large nations Germany and France have dominated. The million, mostly Syrians, let in by Angela Merkel, a Lutheran pastor’s daughter, are now beginning to contribute to life in Germany. Ursula Van der Leyen, a bilingual French-German speaker, veteran of Angela Merkel’s CDU cabinet, now President of the Commission is an exemplary product of this culture. ‘Saving lives at sea is not optional’, she said in her recent State of the Union address. “And”, making clear her other preoccupation, “those countries who fulfil their legal and moral duties or are

more exposed than others must be able to rely on the solidarity of the whole European Union”.

Pope Francis often enters the fray promoting Christian values. Here he is talking to Jesuits about migrants in September 2016: “each of them has a name, a face, and a story, as well as an inalienable right to live in peace and to aspire to a better future for their sons and daughters”. They are “no different”, he said, “than our own family members and friends”. Perhaps it is because Catholics believe the Holy Family left their country as refugees fleeing Herod’s violence that the Church is in a polite stand-off with the fallen angels of governments and their policies towards migrants and refugees. Perhaps it is a simple matter of proclaiming Christian values.

But on migration, the EU Commission is failing to hold the line between concern for the human rights of the individual refugees and migrants against accommodation of the populist concern to keep them out. A concern which seems out of proportion to the actual amount of migration taking place. In 2019 some 4.7% (about 21 million) of the population of the EU were – already - legally resident non-EU nationals. The member states received 2.6 million new arrivals that year. Asylum applications were 698,000, down from their 1.28 million 2015 ‘crisis’ peak. There were only 142,000 illegal border crossings, compared to 1.82 million in 2015-2016. Yet 1,500 arrivals from France to our shores two months ago caused something akin to panic.

Bear in mind that migration retains its corrosive capacity to undermine the Euro-

pean project through arousing nationalist and populist intransigence. Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has just lost a case taken by the Commission to the European Court of Justice on the detention of refugees on the Serbian-Hungarian border. The Czechs, Poles and Hungarians, accustomed historically to people coming into their countries as brutal and destructive invaders, have pulled up the drawbridge and are unlikely to budge. Their bishops, on the whole, have sympathy with their government's reluctance to receive and integrate refugees despite contrary direction from the Pope. A fault-line in the EU is widening.

To deal with it, a couple of weeks ago, the Commission of the European Union produced a German-inspired policy proposal for member states, a New Pact on Migration & Asylum. It is a comprehensive document which deals systematically with migration, asylum, integration and border management. Despite protestations of concern for fundamental rights, and the principle of non-refoulement (the forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are liable to persecution), the goal of the proposal is to restore the crumbling cohesion of the EU by reducing migrant numbers.

The New Pact proposes that 'processing' at borders is to be made more efficient and speeded up with the aid of an expanded FRONTEX, the EU border and coastguard agency. States that don't want to welcome refugees are given the option of taking responsibility for their removal from Europe. Proposing ways to increase the number of 'returns' (read deportations) is clearly a response to populist pressure. Attempts to warehouse people in third countries, on ferries, distant islands, anywhere they can be detained legally in limbo are set

to continue.

The UN declared 2016 the deadliest year for civilian casualties in Afghanistan, 11,418 killed or injured. But deportations from UK, Germany, Greece, Sweden and Norway (with big differences in numbers sent back) rose between 2015 and 2016 from 3,290 to 9,460, many to Afghanistan and conflict zones. The figures do not indicate concern for the plight of returned migrants and failed asylum seekers. In response nine major Europe-wide Christian organisations set out a concise protective set of “Recommendations for Humane Returns Policies in Europe”. No sign of it having made any significant impact on the New Pact document though it must certainly have reached the Commission. Nor any sign in the New Pact’s management model of attention given to increasing opportunities for legal entry except possibly the future creation of a EU agency for asylum. Meanwhile The UK is formulating its own national immigration policy negligent in its provision for the welfare of undocumented arrivals, its inhumanity intermittently breaking cover.

The New Pact now has to pass through the EU structures. It deserves to be mauled in the European Parliament. Scores of reputable international organisations working with refugees have already condemned it. It tries to fulfil one value championed by Popes, that of ‘solidarity’, but solidarity between those privileged to live in the European Union. It ignores the Global Common Good. It is cruel and it won’t work.

See also [TheArticle 02/10/20](#)

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2.15 Covid & Community**15/11/2020**

Britain, an island nation with a population density of 275 people per square kilometre and a population of 67 million, has passed one million COVID infections resulting in over 50,000 deaths. Taiwan, an overcrowded island nation off the coast of China with 671 people per square kilometre and a population of over 23 million, has recorded 553 cases and seven deaths. It hasn't had a 'domestic infection' (locally transmitted) for six months. Why the huge difference?

Three main agencies combat the spread of the virus around the world: the State itself, its health system and its citizens. The State introduces measures to inhibit spread with more than an eye to protecting the economy from collapse. Health systems vary according to the role an insurance provision plays in them. But, without coercion — as in China's authoritarian surveillance state — these measures will only be effective if citizens believe them to be necessary and find it financially feasible to comply. Looked at from another perspective, particularly before a vaccine is found, the intangible qualities of 'social capital' and confidence in government are as important as 'the science' and the capacity of the health care system to respond effectively to the pandemic.

"The big lesson from Asia", Will Hutton wrote in a typically thoughtful piece in *The Observer* (1st November) "is that communitarian, more equal societies have the social capital..." - that allows them to mitigate and curtail the pandemic. He is not comparing authoritarian regimes with democratic

societies and regimes. South Korea, for example, a functioning democracy with a population density of 511 people per square kilometre, with 13 million citizens fewer than UK, has recorded only 25,000 cases and 434 deaths at the time of writing.

True, some of the Asian countries Hutton highlights, such as Singapore, have an authoritarian past with some of its characteristics still remaining, and it's true they derived valuable lessons from the 2002-2004 SARS outbreak. It's also true that they achieved greater economic success than the UK. Is there something in the Asian cultures, perhaps trust in and respect for authority and for the old, perhaps appreciation of the tangible improvements in standards of living, or perhaps that the Enlightenment played a lesser role in their intellectual history, or even that capitalism arrived relatively fast and late compared with Europe which nurtures social cohesion? Hutton's emphasis on equality and a communitarian spirit in civil society is worth serious consideration.

"We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich", Peter Mandelson told executives in Silicon Valley in 1999, adding "provided they pay their taxes". It was the heyday of New Labour. Twelve years later in the midst of Tory austerity measures post-banking crisis, Mandelson began recanting. In 2016 inequality emerged as the parent of BREXIT. But corporate executives are still on the whole filthy rich and aggressively deploy clever tax experts for tax avoidance. Now COVID infections are known to occur disproportionately, and shamefully, amongst the poor, no political party ought to be intensely relaxed about inequality and its impact on deaths from infections.

Governments whether in Asia or Europe play a role in encouraging or undermining social values. Margaret Thatcher's assertion that there was no such thing as society only families and individuals bettering themselves through hard work heralded a distinct rise in elbows-out individualism and shameless greed. The present Prime Minister's chosen mode of greeting since his infection, bumping elbows instead of shaking hands, is strangely appropriate. His repeated, almost plaintive appeals, 'we are all in this together', only highlights the reality that we aren't; it is mainly the poor, the aged and the sick who face sickness and premature death.

'You get the government you deserve' is by definition more true than false in a democracy. A government that is basically reactive to its own buying back-benches and to upsurges of public anger on neuralgic issues, like the recent schools dinner fiasco, loses public trust. Our culture retains a strong sense of social responsibility towards children, especially if they are sick, hungry, abused or disabled. Even a three-year old knows that "one rule for us, one rule for them", is unfair, is wrong. And when coupled with a belief that the private sector will invariably make a better job of things than the public, and after months of ignoring local government, public respect for national government evaporates. The practical steps to control the virus require a communitarian mind-set. But the necessary set of values to control COVID are a bad fit with individualism, let alone Johnson's libertarianism. Thinking that freedom means doing whatever I want when I want becomes disastrous when the health of whole populations is at stake.

Does the communitarian spirit to which Hutton attributes success in the face of COVID, inevitably erode when leadership is weak and vacillating and trust in government is fading? Sadly, it seems to be so. The COVID second wave is evoking less public-spiritedness than the first. Though the faith communities have kept going feeding and helping the poor much as they have always done. The clapping has stopped. Self-assertion is expressed in the rise in speeding offences, increase in alcohol consumption and a cavalier attitude amongst some to social distancing. "We are losing our cherished freedoms", cry the Tory back-benches.

Catholicism and Islam for historical reasons both sit towards the communitarian end of a line that has individualism at the other end. This can have its obvious downsides: conformity through inertia, defensive tribalism, 'it's God's Will' fatalism. But faith communities can also have vital insights into the changes, values and future structure of society and economy that will sustain the communitarian spirit and bring about social justice. These are not eccentric ideas outside the mainstream of political thinking. Will Hutton's secular insights last week tally with Pope Francis' concept of 'social friendship' in his recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. As the Asian examples Hutton provides testify, this is not pie-in-the-sky utopianism, it is a matter of life and death during this pandemic. Do we, though, have the ability and humility to learn from the best in other cultures and ways of living?

See [TheArticle 05/11/2020 "How can we learn from other cultures?"](#)

2.16 Holy Innocents: The Rights of the Child 27/12/2020

“Lullay lullay. Thou little tiny child”, the opening words of the Coventry carol composed in the 16th century and sung by millions over the ages. The carol is as much a lament as a lullaby: a mother’s goodbye to a baby to be killed in the net cast around Bethlehem by King Herod, the Romans’ puppet ruler of Judea, in an attempt to kill the baby predicted to become King of the Jews. Holy Innocents day is commemorated on 28 December by the western Christian Churches. This year it falls during the full rigour of government anti-COVID measures. But it’s also a date when Christians – and others too - might turn their thoughts to the rights of children around the world.

Whether in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Cameroon, Nigeria, Congo, Central African Republic or Myanmar – to name only a few of the worst cases -we have become accustomed to children dying or being maimed in wars or as a result of dictatorial regimes’ State terrorism. And in a few African countries militias routinely recruit child soldiers by force. Sometimes the savagery of the war means civilians are deliberately targeted. More often their deaths are described as ‘collateral damage’. Even more frequently children die because war has reduced their families to starvation, flight from home, freezing temperatures, and the breakdown of anything that might be described as a health or education service, or law and order, putting whole populations at the mercy of disease, hunger, warplanes, landmines and militias.

Civilian deaths, the deaths of children are not just some phenomenon of the Global South. The Nazis and the Japanese militarists were defeated in

the Second World War. But their strategy of total war won. The Allies appropriated the practice of total war, bombing German cities and dropping atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Korea, the blanket bombing of Eastern Cambodia and massacres in Vietnam are only the best known of the conflicts that have perpetuated the civilian death toll in war into the 1960s. The establishment of international courts, scrutiny by human rights organisations and TV coverage raised the political risks in flouting ethical restrictions on the conduct of war. Today in the western world conformity with strict legal and ethical standards is expected in the conduct of targeting, and in the treatment of civilians, even if these expectations are not always fulfilled. Where there is no accountability as in Syria and Yemen such restraints are generally ignored.

The 2015 movie *Eye in the Sky* dramatizes the tension between the expediencies of war and the demands of ethics, international conventions and law. Colonel Katherine Powell, played by Helen Mirren, must decide whether to execute the firing of a Hellfire missile at a house in Kenya where three key terrorists are preparing a suicide bombing. If the missile is fired, a little girl, Alia, who lives next door and sells bread outside her home will almost certainly die in the blast. We the viewers watch the scene on the ground via surveillance footage from a USAF MQ-9 reaper drone. Should Powell, shouldn't she, tell the Nevada air-force base to make the strike? When she does the child dies and so do the parents in a second strike aimed at a surviving terrorist. It is gripping cinema. The dilemma, viewers understand, is real and not without precedent. Over recent decades, in the bombings of civilian areas in war torn countries which we undertake or support, or are carried out with weapons supplied by our armaments industry, are we really

to believe that ‘due diligence’ is scrupulously observed? Or, when it comes to the big spenders such as Saudi Arabia, isn’t ‘due diligence’ an ethical fig-leaf?

Jus in bello, the ethical constraints that should determine conduct of war once begun, is a key part of just war theory, that common pool of mediaeval ideas and debates largely shared by Christians and Muslims and whose principles inform the Geneva Conventions. The first topic in Shari’a law is who has the authority to declare war, the why, when, and how of jihad. In both faiths the protection of innocents and non-combatants is a fundamental principle of military action. Naming the killing of civilians ‘collateral damage’ is too often the thin edge of a wedge of worse human rights violations to come. Vacuous religious extremist arguments justify terrorist atrocities against democracies by denying any category of innocents amongst ‘the enemies of God’, a case of perversity beyond casuistry.

Whether it is courageous war correspondents filming mutilated children brought into bombed hospitals by the White Helmets in Syria, or Da‘esh videos of children bombed in Afghan villages, the emotional charge of children’s suffering is enormous and evokes empathy. Yet, pilots of different nations continue to unload their ordinance from a safe height and drop their barrel bombs on fleeing refugees. In those Middle East conflicts covered by television, every last vestige of acceptable conduct in war seems to have been abandoned. The consequences are brought into our living rooms. We know that worse horrors take place unseen. Worse, we become accustomed to them.

In November last year on the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Holy See had this to say:

“While the importance of the Convention is unquestionable and its thirtieth anniversary should indeed be celebrated, the Holy See also welcomes the fact that this celebration does not shy away from the reality that despite the near universal ratification of the Convention, many children are not respected nor protected around the world. That any child suffers violence, abuse, exploitation and that any child’s rights are violated, rejected or ignored is unacceptable and among the gravest of injustices.”

Sadly the prevalence of sexual abuse of minors over decades in the Catholic Church saps the moral force of these admirable words.

The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child is celebrated on 20 November. Holy Innocents on 28 December is not just a day when we begin to emerge from the fairy lights into the grey winter dawn of reality. Or if we live in London and the South East don’t emerge at all. It is, though, also an opportunity for Christian Churches to intensify their work for peace, just government and the most basic of all the Rights of the Child: the right to life.

See TheArticle 22/12/20

Chapter 3

Terrorism

3.1 Reflections on the Anderson Report

10/1/2018

Last year there were 36 deaths in the UK with many more seriously injured as a result of five terrorist attacks. David Anderson QC, known for his work as Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, undertook a review of MI5 and Police counter- terrorism investigative procedures, begun in July after the Manchester and London atrocities. Meanwhile the Director-General of MI5, Andrew Parker, went on record saying that terrorist plots against Britain had reached the “highest tempo” he had experienced in a long career as an Intelligence officer; they had attained “a scale and pace we’ve not seen before”.

The independent review and its practical recommendations were a healthy sign that things going wrong were being treated as an opportunity to learn and improve procedures. So often, large and powerful institutions go into denial and defensive mode as default position. As in the NHS such a posture costs lives.

Our Intelligence agencies are expected to keep an eye on a number of potentially dangerous people. The numbers have grown dramatically with some 20,000 considered “subjects of interest”. But effective surveillance is very labour intensive. While government is increasing resources for the

Intelligence agencies, in a number of Police Authorities community policing, best placed to receive initial concerns and alerts, is set to bear the brunt of a further 7% government budget cut. Freeing up struggling local councils a little to plug the gap from council tax is a neat trick; it can provide modest relief but discriminates against the poorest Authorities.

The Joint Review exonerates the Intelligence Services of culpability for the five attacks slipping through undetected while proposing down-to-earth improvements in monitoring the enormous case load of potential extremists. Analysts, rather like traffic controllers, cannot get it wrong. On the cards is a computer algorithm to detect patterns of aberrant behaviour suggesting preparation for terrorism and violent radicalisation. Cheaper than a trusted local bobby approached by an anxious father or mother? Perhaps. More reliable and effective? Possibly. But with distant echoes of modern communist China. The trade-offs with civil liberties made for security is one of the most difficult prudential judgements.

Intelligence agencies have difficulty in detecting when “subjects of interest” move from big talk to deadly action. By the time suspects are learning how to make bombs from the Internet, getting military training where they can, renting pick-up trucks and collecting weapons, hell bent on murdering “infidel” fellow citizens, it is too late. Young lives have been deformed and futures destroyed.

Except for those known to be actively planning acts of terrorism – when obtaining evidence that will stand up in court becomes critical – preventive action can never be too early. But after a terrorist attack, mass media play an equivocal role. The news focus is predominantly, and inevitably, on the immediate events and follows the consequences of the attack: the

victims, the reaction to the terrorist incident, the identity of the perpetrators. The aim of the terrorist is to instil terror. The impact of coverage in all forms of media inevitably, inadvertently, serves to some degree, their purpose.

Another possible consequence is to allow those tempted onto the same path to conflate infamy, notoriety and celebrity; the terrorists' usurping of the Islamic concept of witness, shahid, like deadly nightshade flowers into an assertion of glorious martyrdom. The reality of sad lives, easily manipulated by sophisticated recruiting techniques, and readily accepting of gross distortions of social and political reality, rarely features in dispatches.

Many voices enter the discussions that follow in the aftermath. There are those in schools, and elsewhere, who view the government's Prevent programme as inherently Islamophobic, as spying on Muslims, a theme that can be easily manipulated. There are those who have reason to see Prevent as doing a good job, providing a very effective mentoring programme for young people in danger, safeguarding young Muslim children with the same good intentions that are behind their protection from paedophile predators.

Analysis of motivations, the "why" of the attacks, tends to concentrate on links to Al-Qaeda or Da'esh and, at best, some elements of their propaganda, internet recruitment, and the extent of their networks. The distortions of fanciful accounts of the world are then played out in the public domain: the contest between the extreme Right in Europe for whom Islam is the problem and Muslims a fifth column, and the voice of Muslim community leaders who reject the term "Islamic terrorism", or who say "it has nothing to do with Islam". The latter is understandable. But this is like arguing that anti-Semitism has nothing to do with Christianity and Christians. To which the

reply is Agree as far as today is concerned. But if we think back a little, Disagree.

A great deal of important investigative effort goes into monitoring suspects, putting together network connections and analysis of key themes in terrorist publications and videos. The question more rarely addressed is what is happening in someone's head when they are moving from repugnant views towards becoming a violent extremist. This is not a mental pathology in the normal sense of the word. We know, for example, what a narcissistic sociopath sounds like, the general symptoms, even if we don't know how they became one. But no-one sits down and deliberately tries, using a well-honed process of formation, to take someone and turn them into a narcissistic sociopath. Terrorists are not born hating and wishing to kill infidels or religious minorities. They are carefully formed and activated. How? How is their weltbild, picture of the world and how it operates, their perception of social and political reality, changed in a way that demands the indiscriminate killing of innocents in the name of a God who is merciful and compassionate?

The premise behind these questions is that there is such a thing as an extremist mind-set with its unique characteristics and distortions. If so, it is the mind-set that is crucial, perhaps more so than the networks and the content of the ideology itself, be it for example Neo-Nazi or takfiri, jihadi. The other networks that need identifying are those within the brain. Neuronal networks are reinforced by frequent use; thus the key dynamics and interactions needing study are those that drive the emotional, cognitive, bodily, and behavioural aspects of attitudes and actions. There is a large gap between the brains we need today in our complex societies and the brains that were successful for keeping hunter gatherers safe.

Enter the psychologist stage right to only muted public acclaim. Psychology takes a subtle and long term approach. This is not the obvious heroism of the Police Constable who runs towards the knife-wielding fanatic. Nor the Intelligence analyst's agonising dilemmas. The struggle against religious extremism is recognised now as taking many years, a marathon not a sprint. Psychologists are the marathon runners. Intelligence and Security agencies by necessity proceed at a greater pace employing procedures to move faster.

Extremist networks and ideologies will morph – we can be sure of that - but the extremist mind will remain recognisably the same. Its perverse perception of social and political reality comes before the change in behaviour that algorithms and smart parents or friends can detect. Understanding how it functions will likely enable the processes that create it to be reversed or prevented. But we will need the stamina of the long distance runner to make a difference.

Understanding the psychology of the extremist mind should not be a marginal pursuit on the edge of an expanding apparatus for countering violent extremism. When it comes to assigning priorities and allocation of resources, after the return from Syria and Iraq of many damaged young people, it should move more to centre stage. We need the practical improvements that David Anderson QC recommended in his Joint Review but, from prevention to interrogation, we also need to know more about how the extremist mind works.

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3.2 What Can be Done About Religiously Motivated Violence?

30/6/2018

The rise of Da'esh and Al-Qaida came as a surprise to most people. Twenty years ago nobody foresaw that clandestine religious organisations would regularly inflict significant civilian casualties around the world, or that national intelligence services would be redirected to counter this new threat. Who would have imagined that substantial new resources would be needed to catch people planning religiously motivated terrorist acts? Who would have foreseen that new preventative programmes to address the motives, thoughts and feelings of potential terrorists would, in addition, have to be devised and implemented?

The rise of religious terrorism was itself, in part, an answer to a question. To what story do I belong? To an Islam preaching a merciful and compassionate God in the modern world? Or to a beleaguered seventh century Medina community and to a militarised expansionist Caliphate?

Al-Qaida modernised and re-interpreted jihad, abandoning the original concept of a defensive war and a community obligation authorised by a Caliph, *fard kifayah*, in favour of an individual obligation, *fard ayn*. Taking a different line, Da'esh made waging war to revive the Caliphate the touchstone and supreme test of obedience to Allah.

Al-Qaida and Da'esh disagreed about whether to found a Caliphate. From its beginning Al-Qaida decided that the creation of a Caliphate would be premature and that any attempt to found one would bring down the wrath of the 'kafir' superpowers. Al-Qaida was both right and wrong. Da'esh did establish at Raqqa in Syria the capital of a functioning, geographical political

entity. It provided several aspects of a militarised State or Caliphate, and proved attractive to those who sought belonging in something with purported Islamic legitimacy. And as Al-Qaida had predicted, Da'esh did provoke a powerful military response (as did Al-Qaida's attack on the Twin Towers after 9/11).

The difference between Al-Qaida and Da'esh recruiting techniques may seem small but they are significant. The neurosciences are opening up our understanding of cognition, emotions and personality as triggers for action. Insights into the workings of the extremist mind help explain the brief success of Da'esh relative to Al-Qaida, between 2014 and 2018. Al-Qaida's propaganda is wordy, textual and maps on to the logical, linear reasoning processes of the brain's left hemisphere. It proposes a sharply binary world of right and wrong, no grey areas, and the dominance of a single value, jihad, in the face of the clashing values of a multicultural, multi-religious modern world.

Da'esh, on the other hand, is adept at the visual and its appeal has greater reach. Its simple, powerful messages, spread through social media, map onto the right hemisphere and limbic system where the brain's core emotional and motivational centres are located. Da'esh ideology's binary structure also creates an emotional counterpoint between reward and shock. The Caliphate is presented as an end-times utopia. In it recruits find redemption from a sinful past and initial safety from the hostile world of infidels, a place where desires are fulfilled. Da'esh recruits discover identity, solidarity, the camaraderie of a closely knit in-group.

The extreme brutality of Da'esh provides a counterpoint to these warm feelings. Da'esh's violence is shockingly portrayed in video clips alongside films about Western killing of innocents. The Muslim viewer is doubly assaulted: by moral

shock and a sense of victimhood. The brain's emotional centres are directly stimulated arousing the well-known fear, fight, flight, freeze response. The overall effect is to short-circuit moral thought by generating a state of anxiety, fear and anger.

Da'esh conflates an ideal past and a blissful future with their actual brutal militarist, patriarchal rule. The Da'esh recruit is literally living out of time. The concept of the Caliphate provides the cognitive framework for a collapse of linear time which triggers the brain's emergency fast system thinking system in which time stands still. The shock of watching videos of decapitations and torture is countered in a dialectical pattern by the promised rewards of an idealised family life – even fluffy kittens have been shown – and a desired just society. The visual impact of this propaganda is to eliminate and displace moral reflection and thought. The particular horror of this for Muslims is the way elements of Sunni - Salafi – discourse are used and twisted to legitimate a descent into barbarism.

It is no accident that those most affected by this propaganda are 16-25 year olds, the age group in which neural networks are still developing and the group which is most likely to suffer from mental illness. We have to assume that that the violent behaviour of Da'esh jihadis, and their misreading of social and political reality, is linked to something grievously awry in the structure of their thinking and their emotions. If this analysis is not fanciful, then prevention of violent action must include re-establishing, or establishing, a pattern of thoughts and feelings different from the one cultivated by extremist recruiters.

A common feature of young people to whom Da'esh propaganda appeals seems to be their need for simple binary explanations of, and solutions to, problems of identity and belonging. Sometimes, of course, Da'esh merely provides religious

legitimation for violence and anger. This explains the number of petty criminals who become jihadis. The high level of cultural dissonance and social mixing resulting from the last communications-led wave of globalisation, calling identities in question, contributes to radicalisation. Interestingly, recruiters use tricks which manipulate both cognition and the emotions to isolate their converts, to distance them from their own families and to build them into a new ‘purified family’.

Extremist thinking tending towards violence can be changed by sensitive group programmes which respect the individual, acknowledge their deepest values, and engage each person in the process of growing away from violent action. One such programme, called IC, Integrative Complexity, aims to prevent recruitment to terrorist groups by strengthening participants’ ability to handle the complexity of life in multicultural societies. IC’s methodology can measurably reduce a propensity for violence.

Modifying extremist perceptions of social and political reality requires group work together with a trusted facilitator. Acknowledgement of the reality of multiple causality by participants is a key step. IC methods are adapted culturally to each group, with the aim of generating new and spontaneously embodied, emotional and interpersonal knowledge, and to stimulate empathy for others by recognition of different values. Sometimes this will not be possible and recourse is made to stimulating empathy for the participant’s younger self, in other words, bringing time back “on-line”.

Youthful idealism is admirable and can be part of the reasons for a descent into terrorism. Radicalised youth need to discover that their ideals can be lived out without violence and without the tragic loss of family, friends, and life. Everyone needs to have their identity and deepest values respected. Coercion does not work. It is vital that changes in thinking develop spontaneously as

the consequence of a new set of interactions and without invalidating the needs and core values that drew the would-be, or actual, extremist into a Da'esh or Al-Qaida cell.

The approach I have so briefly outlined is not primarily concerned with the ideological content of extremism, rather with the extremist mind itself. It has application to Neo-Nazis and their violence as well as to jihadis. It gets behind all the variable risk factors that pre-dispose people to move into extremist violence and engages with basic motivating structures of thinking and feeling. And it does so while respecting the integrity of the human person, the deepest values of participants and their capacity to find new ways of seeing and living with religious commitment in the world.

For more details see Savage, S, Khan, A & Liht, J (2014). "Preventing Violent Extremism through Value Complexity: Being Kenyan Being Muslim," *Journal of Strategic Security* Vol 7 (3) 2.

<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss4/3/>

See also Roger Trigg *Killing in the Name of God: Addressing Religiously Inspired Violence* to be published by THEOS early July 2018

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3.3 Is Religion Inherently Violent?

16/7/2018

A few years ago, I nearly had an argument down the line with the BBC presenter, Edward Stourton. We were having a pre-broadcast chat about religious

extremism before a slot on the Sunday Programme. He asked me why I thought religion caused so much violence. I replied that secularism had caused an awful lot more. He sounded disapproving; it was the wrong point for this programme slot, and for the BBC.

The gist of what I wanted to say, both on and off-air, was that the 20th century was one of prodigious secular violence. The mass casualties of First World War's national rivalries, Hitler's National Socialism, Stalin's and Mao's Communism, followed by Pol Pot's crazed mass slaughter in Cambodia, caused deaths beyond counting. The 1994 Rwandan genocide showed features of the Jewish Holocaust but its scale was smaller. The Balkans wars from 1992-1995 did have religious elements: Muslims were massacred, Serbian churches burnt, but, as Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and Kosovans killed and were killed, religion played second fiddle to extremist ethnic politics. The wars demonstrated racial and ethnic hatred and showed the 20th century continuing to the end to retain a capacity for secular violence.

I have to concede that the partition of India, though the responsibility of Churchill and Mountbatten, brought about religious violence on an unprecedented scale; even if it broke out under the flag of rival nationalisms, each nationalism had powerful communal religious elements. But so rare in the late 20th century were effective, power-seeking religious movements that the Iranian revolution in 1979 caught the CIA watching the communists not the mullahs. Western admirers of Buddhism were likewise surprised by the Buddhist extremism that informed the barbarous treatment of the Rohingya in Myanmar more recently. Communal outbreaks of religious violence occurred intermittently during the 20th. Century but, compared to the killing involved in rival nationalisms and quests for ethnic superiority, were unusual.

It occurred to me after the Stourton interview that widespread erosion in the ethical conduct and targeting of State violence accompanied the steady decline of religion during the 20th century. States ended the 19th century endorsing the ancient religious restraints of *ius in bello*, the practice of just war). The Hague Convention Laws and Customs of War on Land, was finalised in 1899 and signed by all the major world powers within the next decade. The US Senate ratified it in 1902.

This prohibition of deliberate killing of non-combatants was re-iterated as part of secular international law in the adoption of the document Protection of Civilian Populations against Bombing from the Air by the League of Nations Assembly on 30 September 1938, a response to Guernica, the Japanese bombing of Chinese cities, and the rising importance of air-power in war. As Hitler invaded Poland a year later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt described the bombing of civilians as “a form of barbarism”. It was a barbarism adopted as policy not only by the Nazis but in retaliation by the British, followed by the USA, during the Second World War. The fire-bombing of Dresden and Hamburg, the atomic blasts that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were justified to the Allies’ publics, without any firm evidence, as hastening the end of the war. These attacks were deliberately directed at civilian populations, on the instructions of the leaders of States which some 6-7 years earlier had outlawed them. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 reinforced codes of conduct during war but, these like their predecessors, were soon transgressed without penalty.

Daniel Ellsberg in *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* makes a strong case that this moral collapse in the conduct of war directly contributed to the new barbarism. He defines this as the threat to conduct thermonuclear war, deploying in a first strike devastating nuclear weapons and

destroying all an opponent's major cities. That the nuclear strategy of the USA was designed to create a plausible threat of first strike was kept from the US public. Given what we now know about the Nuclear Winter which would follow general nuclear war, and its attendant crop failures and mass starvation, Ellsberg's use of a new word, *omnicide*, is justified. It expresses a magnitude of violence previously unimaginable which would cause the near extinction of the human race.

Omnicide remains a real possibility. States do not seem able to restrain themselves. Saudi Arabia and Iran appear unbothered by the prospect of devastation and mass starvation in Yemen. Both could yet develop nuclear weapons. Consider the saturation bombing of Cambodia, courtesy of Henry Kissinger, that created the human waste-land in which Pol Pot could take power. Despite claims of careful targeting, look at the remains of retaken Raqqa and Mosul, and the many Syrian cities demolished by Assad with Russian support. No one prosecutes the victors for killing civilian populations with bombs or by starvation.

The violence of sub-State actors in the 21st. century, in asymmetric warfare/terrorism, has resonances with that of some States. Message: air-power is critical. Response: if you lack air-power use trained jihadis to hijack air liners and fly them into symbolic buildings to kill as many civilians as possible. Message: human life, the dignity of the human person, must take second place to fulfilling strategic war aims. Response: if you have no standing army recruit young men, teenagers, children and women and turn them into human bombs that explode in crowded markets. The perverse religious legitimization of violence found here comes in the context of an abject failure of nationalism most notably in the Arab world.

A particular form of Religion makes it easier to get people to do terrible

things (as well as motivating lives of holiness, compassion, great moral courage and altruism). It can divinely mandate mass murder with selective use of sacred texts, simplistic accounts of a complex world, clever psychological manipulation of recruits to the cause and the promise of rewards. You can't negotiate with God's Will. But God's will can equally generate powerful voices denouncing violence and building peace. Traditional Shari'a law schools share with Christianity similar constraints on declaring and the conduct of war, *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. But today's religious extremism repudiates tradition in favour of a direct return to an imagined 7th century.

In the name of democracy and sustaining Western values, and oil, our governments associated with, and supported, tyrants throughout much of the Arab world so that millions of people, beginning with the Iranian revolution, looked to an Islamic discourse on justice for a political remedy. Britain felt the impact of the most malign and perverse, indeed un-Islamic, of these imagined remedies last year with 36 deaths, many more wounded and maimed, in five terrorist attacks. Security services are at present interdicting about one major attack a month.

Perceptions of social and political reality today are shaped by social media. ISIS in particular had a clever grasp of its power. Not surprisingly against the background of State-sponsored religious wars between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, religion now seems to be an increasing source and cause of violence. Religious extremism is here to stay. But we need to retain greater historical depth in judgements about the causes of violence. We neglect the secular violence of the authoritarian and extreme nationalist State and their ideology at our peril.

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3.4 Beyond Identity Politics: In Search of Empathy 14/11/2018

Miraculously they'd arrived. Emerging from the coach were thirty Nigerian sheikhs, imams, pastors, priests and activists from areas affected by Boko Haram's terrorism in Nigeria, men and women, some hardline some open-minded, run off their feet, not knowing what to expect. An attempt to create some interfaith unity against the ISIS-style terrorism in the north-east of Nigeria was underway.

The Conference Centre was tucked away outside a small town in Northamptonshire. That first day was hard going. The body language from the senior Pentecostals said it all. They were boarding with the enemy. Most of the Christians had never been in a mosque. Most of the Muslims had never been in a church. The divisions were immediately visible in who sat with whom. With only the sheep outside the Centre to talk to, everyone was stuck, way beyond their comfort zone.

It was a high risk strategy but the only way to break the tension. Three Christians were placed opposite three Muslims and each asked to tell their story. The Muslim story was about being second class citizens in a Western dominated the Nigerian Federation. The Christian story was - implicitly - that "Muslims were killing Christians". Tension mounted.

Then came the first woman Muslim speaker. She described being in a car ambushed by Boko Haram. Her three female companions shot dead. She was partly hidden by the body of her companion in the back seat. A terrorist looked through the window but decided they were all dead. A few months later Boko Haram came for her brother. Tears began to flow. The body language amongst the Christians changed, arms were unfolded, the tension evaporated. After

that the religious divisions began to break down, doors appeared in cultural walls. By the end of the week they had a shared story “Terrorists are killing Christians and Muslims”.

The divisions in that room were religiously motivated and, on day one, entrenched. Some Pentecostals believe that Muslims worship the Devil, some Salafi Muslim reject Christianity as *kufr*, unbelief and Christians as infidels. The change in narrative was no small thing. But the tears broke through religious identity to a common humanity. Most of the participants had lost kin and loved-ones or experienced suffering caused by their religious affiliation. The empathy at work broke down barriers. Several of the participants, began to work together, and still communicate across religious lines years later. Nigeria remains plagued by religious divisions.

This is not just a lesson for Nigeria. What of our own social and religious neo-tribalism? A plethora of articles and books have appeared diagnosing the roots of contemporary divisions: identity politics, “somewhere” versus “anywhere” people, the differential impact of the 2008 global financial crisis. Such divisions are not just imagined, the projections of a fragmented present against a fanciful harmonious past. We seem to be heading into apocalyptic W.B. Yeats country: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre. The falcon cannot hear the falconer. Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”. Much quoted but presciently descriptive of the political gyrations occurring globally today.

What has gone wrong since the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 and Fukuyama foolishly gloried in the eternal triumph of democracy and liberal capitalism? Whatever it is politically, sociologically and economically, it has had an impact on people’s minds. Or perhaps it would be better to say it has made up many minds that the apparently contradictory mix of an

emotional tribal and a cognitively individualist worldview is in their best interests.

It is a commonplace to suggest that a world in which most people spend a significant part of their life in virtual reality, with identities shaped and intensified by self-selected peer groups, might be an important factor in generating neo-tribalism. Or that social media peddles a fake individualism, nurtured by advertising agencies, based on promoting the purchase of different sorts of goods, my music, my shoes, my clothes, for example. The rapid decline of organized religion means that what is right has become simply what is right for me. And the default position for what is right for me is what most of my peers do. Traditional wisdom and ethics are like the remains of a meal, cold and congealed, to be swept into the garbage. Historical humility, the idea that the past may have some lessons to teach us about how to live, disappears in the immediacy of virtual interactions.

Yes, this me-now generation is a dismal caricature. There is a new Generation Z campaigning for strict gun laws in the USA, voting against Trump. In the UK, a youthful food and alcohol puritanism concerned about climate change and bio-diversity, voting against BREXIT. Both are alert to infringements of the rights of sexual and ethnic minorities.

But caricatures are based on certain features artfully exaggerated, and depend on these features being there in small measure ready to be exaggerated. There are people everywhere who, in the pursuit of profit and power, are ready to manipulate these features to their advantage.

Another way of looking at what has happened since 1991 is to consider not what is new or apparently growing, but what is rare, missing or notable by its absence. What is in people's minds, or missing from them, when they see large numbers of migrants desperate enough to drown in the Mediterranean

– over 2,000 this year - or die crossing the US border in pursuit of a better life, yet campaign against them? Who put jobs in the arms industry above 14 million people facing famine in Yemen. Who rise up baying in huge numbers for the death of a Christian woman on trumped up charges of blasphemy? Who gun down people of different colour, religion or political views, or from different gangs? What are the roots of this, our contemporary neo-tribalism?

My answer is not some brilliant sociological insight. I wish it were. What has been disappearing is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Or the desire, skill and formation to do so.

Can democracies create and sustain a culture of empathy? Even affluent Germany is struggling. Can Empathy be taught? Let's hope so.

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3.5 Nigeria's Terrorist Threat

27/8/2019

Most people if asked which country was placed third last year in the world ranking for terrorist activity would guess Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. It's Nigeria. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) uses a broad definition of terrorism: "threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence" by non-state actors not only for religious or political ends but also for "economic or social goals". Killings by Northern Fulani Muslim cattle herders in conflict over land use with non-Fulani growing crops who may be Christians, and the agriculturalists' violent retaliation, can end up being reported as terrorism, "ethnic violence" or "religious conflict". Such vio-

lent conflicts become lumped together with the very differently motivated killings of Boko Haram (western education forbidden) – incidentally mainly Kanuri and neighbouring groups not Fulani. This is confusing, a symptom of varying degrees of ignorance about Africa’s most populous country.

The BBC World Service website covered in Pidgin English the GBI 2018 Report; it “blame di “increase of ‘terrorist deaths’ (in Nigeria) unto Fulani extremists”. Note the BBC’s cautionary inverted commas and the use of that catch-all ‘extremist’. The Times on 10 August also cited GBI in a book review focussing on Christian persecution and Boko Haram (BH), condemning “ethnic Fulani cattle herders, who are linked to Islamists”. The Fulani had become “the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world”. Inverted commas were notably missing as was detailed knowledge of Nigeria. Newspaper reports on Africa, even about such a potentially important country as Nigeria, rarely dig deep beneath stereotypes and into detail.

Nigeria is such a large country that very different political conditions exist in its different geographical areas. Violence in the disorderly world of Central-North Nigeria is a different story from that in the North-East. Through terror Boko Haram has dominated the life of the states in the north-east. It was so extreme BH split off a breakaway group in 2015-2016 which sought to prioritise recruitment rather than attacks on local Muslims. Both factions pledge allegiance to Daesh, but only the faction led by Umar al-Barnawi, known as ISIS-West Africa, is actually recognised by Daesh. BH’s other faction, led by the infamous Abubakar Shekau, is known for its capture of the Chibok girls, as well as its massacres. Its multiple abductions, mass killings, and house burnings over the last ten years have caused the displacement of some two

million people. The religious motivation for the worst violence in Central Nigeria is negligible.

Another mistake when looking at Nigeria is only to see tensions between the north and south of the country in religious terms. Picturing a “Muslim North” distinct from a “Christian South”, with a mixed and ill defined “Middle Belt” in-between, is simplistic. In reality large Muslim Yoruba-speaking populations live in the south-west and, owing to the great third missionary wave of Pentecostals dating from the 1960s, significant numbers of Christians live in the northern states. In the Middle Belt, religion is not the principal cause of clashes. It is the population movement and age-old conflict between cattle-herders and farmers. So-called indigenous – settled - communities, mixed ethnically, compete with pastoralists and other settler incomers for scarce resources. The “indigenous” often have different religions - mainly Christian – to incoming pastoralists - mainly Muslim - but land-use is the big problem.

Nor do the two dominant religions in Nigeria form simple blocks. There is much intermarriage between Muslims and Christians in the south, where Islamic practice has a distinctly African flavour. The political dimension of Islam is still evident in the reformist North with emirates and important religious leaders, such as the Sultan of Sokoto, in the north-west, and the Shehu of Borno, a rival in the north-east. But BH’s terrorism has undermined such traditional figures’ leadership and sharpened the existing Christian-Muslim divide with growing distrust. The danger is that religious differences might, in some parts of the country, become coterminous with political ones. When this happens conflicts become non-negotiable.

BH is a recognisable relative of Daesh/ISIS but has its own Nigerian character and history. It grew from the bitter observation that both Muslim

and Christian elites' were utterly indifferent to people's poverty. This social perception found explanation in conservative salafi thinking that importantly sees only its own cohorts as true Muslims and a takfiri approach – ('excommunication' and death for apostasy) - to all who do not pledge allegiance, bayat, to increasingly well - equipped war bands and their leaders. An Islamic account of injustice mutated into calls for jihad – though BH violence was in practice more akin to the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, and equally contrary to Muslim precepts for war. Extra-judicial killing of the BH founder, Imam Yusuf, in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri and associated killings of their members by armed police in 2009, accelerated descent into terrorism.

Nigeria's military incompetence and corruption under former President Goodluck Jonathan allowed BH war bands led by Imam Abubakar Shekau to gain in strength and barbarity after 2012. In April 2014, the world woke up to the danger posed by Shekau and his followers after the Chibok abductions in Borno State. But girls and women had been abducted before and, indeed, continue to be captured. What is clear is that for young recruits whose poverty condemns them to a single life - because they cannot afford bride-price - the promise of wives is an important recruitment tool. So are a fighter's pay, one meal a day and the power coming from the barrel of an AK-47.

President Muhammadu Buhari has tried to eradicate BH from the north-east. But the claim that Boko Haram is defeated is false. Christians and Muslims continue to live lives of frightening insecurity in the states bordering Cameroons to the East and Niger in the North-East. BH proclaimed itself as a caliphate and an affiliate of ISIS in March 2015; its spread into Chad, Cameroons and Niger, with raids in Nigeria beyond the north-east, provoked

a more concerted and multi-national military counter-insurgency effort with as yet limited results.

When the high quality of reporting of the Middle East and Russia is considered, a post-colonial condescension at work in the way Africa is generally reported becomes detectable. Nigeria has a population of probably 185 million. Jihadists have taken note of its importance. Perhaps we should.

POSTSCRIPT

Where did these tensions, and array of potential and real conflicts, religious, ethnic, economic and political, all so easily misinterpreted, come from? There are many reasons. My on-line book *Emirs, Evangelicals & Empire* may shed some light. It is about the beginnings of British imperial rule in the North, the emirates, and the origins of the Christian community in Hausaland. Here are two ways of reading it: (1) On this Microsoft website. Go to Home or Blogs and click on online book (top right). Or: (2) You need an Apple laptop or i-phone then google <https://apple.com/us/books/id473753122> It's next to Ian Rankin...

See TheArticle "Terrorists have taken time to understand Nigeria. We should too".

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3.6 What Next For Da'esh & al-Qaida?

30/10/2019

The dust has settled on Barisha in northern Syria where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed on 26 October. Thousands of his followers and their children are today detained in insecure camps. It is a good moment to take stock of

the rise and fall of Da'esh and Al-Qaida, their persistence, and their future heirs. For while the removal of their leadership dealt them a blow, no-one seriously believes this is the last chapter in the history of religious extremism.

Al-Qaida and Da'esh were both bi-products of war, in Afghanistan and Iraq. Twenty years ago almost nobody foresaw that clandestine organisations manipulating a violent distortion of Islam would regularly inflict significant civilian casualties around the world. Who, twenty years ago, would have imagined that substantial new resources, military, police, intelligence, would be needed to apprehend people planning religiously motivated terrorist acts? And who would have foreseen the need for preventative measures to address the motives, thoughts and feelings of potential terrorists, and the reaction to them? The world was unprepared.

Religious terrorism offers spurious legitimisation for preexisting hatred and violence. Against an Islam preaching a merciful and compassionate God in the modern world, Da'esh posited the resurgence of an – imagined - beleaguered seventh century Medina community mutating by Allah's power into a militarised expansionist political entity, a Caliphate. Al-Qaida re-interpreted the Islamic duty of jihad, abandoning the original concept of a defensive war, a community obligation requiring authorisation by the Caliph, for an individual obligation and decision to take up arms. Al-Qaida's individualism was perversely modern. Following a distinctive approach, Da'esh advocated war to revive the Caliphate, and did so, making it the touchstone and supreme test of obedience to Allah.

Al-Qaida and Da'esh disagreed about when a Caliphate might be re-founded. From its origins Al-Qaida decided that creating a Caliphate would be premature and that any attempt to found one would bring down the wrath of the 'kafir' superpowers. Al-Qaida was both right and wrong. Da'esh made Raqqa in Syria the capital of a functioning, geographical political entity. It performed several functions of a militarised State or Caliphate, and provided both an allegedly legitimate outlet for violence and a supposedly Islamic community for its members. And as Al-Qaida had predicted, Da'esh did provoke a powerful military response (as, of course, did Al-Qaida's attack on the Twin Towers after 9/11).

Al-Qaida's and Da'esh used similar recruiting techniques but with significant differences. Al-Qaida's propaganda was wordy, textual and mapped onto the logical, linear reasoning processes characteristic of the brain's left hemisphere. It shared with Da'esh a sharply binary world of divinely sanctioned right and wrong, no grey areas, and espoused a single value, jihad, in the face of the clashing values of a multicultural, multi-religious modern world.

Da'esh, on the other hand, became adept at visual propaganda so its appeal has greater reach. Its simple, powerful messages, spread through social media, mapped onto the brain's right hemisphere and limbic system where the core emotional and motivational centres are located. The Caliphate was presented visually as an end-times utopia. In it recruits would find redemption from a sinful past withdrawn from the hostile world of infidels, a place where all desires were fulfilled. Da'esh recruits took on a new identity, solidarity, and the camaraderie of a closely knit in-group. Such promise of belonging was a

powerful pull.

The extreme brutality of Da'esh provided an emotional counterpoint to the warm feelings of belonging. Da'esh's own violence was presented alongside films about Western killing of Muslim innocents shockingly portrayed in video clips. Recruits' emotions were doubly assaulted and captivated: by moral shock and by a sense of Muslim victimhood stimulating fear, fight, flight, freeze responses. The effect was to short-circuit moral thought by generating a state of anxiety, anger and fear in which brutality became normative.

Da'esh propaganda made independent thinking highly dangerous. It truncated time, conflating an ideal past and a blissful future with their actual brutal militarist, patriarchal rule. The concept of the Caliphate, in the past but lived now, collapsed linear time. The shock of watching videos of decapitations and torture was countered by the promised rewards of the Caliphate: an idealised family life – even fluffy kittens appeared on their media sites – and the long-desired just society. The visual impact of this emotional and cognitive bombardment was to eliminate and displace moral reflection and rational thought. The violent behaviour of Da'esh jihadis, their misperception of social and political reality, the torture, rape and murder around them, stems from something grievously awry in the structure of their thinking and their emotions. The particular horror of this for Muslims was the way elements of Sunni - Salafi – religious discourse were used and twisted to legitimate a descent into barbarism.

A common feature of the young people to whom extremist propaganda ap-

pealed seems to be their need for simple binary explanations of, and solutions to, problems of mental health, anger, identity and belonging. The number of petty criminals who become jihadis was significant. The high level of cultural dissonance and social mixing resulting from migration, and the recent communications-led wave of globalisation, which called identities into question, contributed to radicalisation of the few in leadership positions. And there were clearly recruits, difficult as it is to imagine, who went to Iraq and Syria out of a misplaced idealism. The key to Da'esh success was its use of social media to change minds and change perceptions of the world.

What difference has the death of Al-Baghdadi made? Killing him and Bin Laden has worked political wonders for American Presidents. But it fails to touch the root of the problem: the recruitment methodology and manipulation of Qur'anic verses that attracts young people and affects their mindset. There are estimated to be 45,000 children detained in the Da'esh family camps many of whom will be at risk of radicalisation. They have to be offered an Islamic alternative. Youth radicalized, for whatever reason, need to discover that their ideals can be lived out without violence and without the tragic loss of family, friends, and life. Everyone needs to have their identity and deepest values respected. Coercion does not work. It is vital to create an environment in which thinking develops spontaneously as the consequence of a new set of social interactions, gainful employment, new friendships, and without invalidating the needs and core values that drew the would-be, or actual, extremist into a Da'esh or Al-Qaida cell.

As things stand this seems an impossible dream. Yet it is vital that the 45,000 young occupants of the Da'esh family camps are given some hope, some future, or in only a few years' time they will follow their fathers, and some of their mothers, into terrorism. Their different nation-states of origin should urgently take responsibility for them before it is too late. This is not simply a matter of international humanitarian and moral concern it is a matter of national security.

See also "What's Next for Al-Qaida and Da'esh" TheArticle.com 30/10/2019

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3.7 There Are no Easy Answers to Lone-Wolf Terrorism 2/12/2019

It was not long before Press reaction to Friday's tragic terrorist attack turned to seeking a culprit other than the perpetrator and his poisonous ideology. Praise for the heroism of those who tackled him, and the courage of the armed police, soon gave way to questions about the length of sentencing, problems in the probation service, and the adequacy of rehabilitation in prison. The irony was that the vile act that left two dead and three injured seems to have been perpetrated by a man who was attending a conference precisely because of his experience of rehabilitation.

It is entirely understandable to want to find out what went wrong, how a convicted terrorist was able to commit an atrocity after years in prison for

terrorist offences. But what if, in such cases, in a civilised society, nothing that could be remedied had gone wrong? What if this type of lone-wolf barbarity is a fact of contemporary life and sometimes cannot be detected in advance, and if such cases suggest no obvious remedy save prevention much further upstream?

Most people will reject the idea as a kind of defeatism. It undermines our sense of security. It is a frightening thought that the State's best efforts over more than eight years – this particular terrorist had been through a course of de-radicalisation – can be to no avail. Such a reaction would be less likely if many people fully grasped the difficulties of dealing with violent religious extremism.

At the most basic level, this recent attack poses the question how should jihadi offenders be handled in prison. Should they be mixed in with others offenders who may be vulnerable to recruitment? To keep safe in many jails you will often need the protection of a gang, and you may naturally be drawn to co-religionists. When it comes to a fight about cooking bacon in the kitchen, you know which side you are on and who is going to watch your back. My experience giving a talk in Wormwood Scrubs was that the front row was solidly Muslim, men who knew something of their faith and stuck together. Among them were one or two impressive men who had kicked a drug habit thanks to their Muslim prison chaplain.

My ANC friends in South Africa, very different prisoners, doing time for political offences in the 1970s, called their prisons "our universities". The question is then whether religiously-motivated terrorists should be quarantined in specialist units,

separated from other kinds of offenders, where a hot-house atmosphere might foment even more fanatical thoughts? No easy answer - though government seems to favour such units.

The path to violent religious extremism is varied. Profiling doesn't work and there is no guaranteed formula for de-radicalisation. Conservative Salafist scholars who reject violence can be effective but they are rarely advocates of liberalism and pluralism. Their effectiveness stems from the very fact that they share, or once shared, ideas that the general public find repugnant. Using people of this kind to influence men convicted of terrorist offences is controversial and open to challenge.

The belief that winning the debate about the significance of certain verses in the Qur'an is all that is needed to change minds is far from the truth. De-radicalisation is highly skilled: a matter of instilling trust, grappling with identity, belonging and passionate emotion, and then maybe hitting the right cognitive buttons. The first question should be along the lines of "can I get you a coffee" and "would you like to phone your wife before we chat". "Do you think Allah might have another purpose for you in life other than jihad" is the last question not the first. It should come as no surprise that de-radicalisation often doesn't work.

As prison authorities and Muslim chaplains will tell you, counter-intuitively, the aggressive man mouthing the tropes of the jihadist creed is in many ways the least dangerous. You know where you are. The quiet one, saying all the right things, apparently repentant, co-operating with the authorities, may be the most dangerous and quietly recruiting in prison, planning his next move

on release. But how can you tell? You can't. As in clever paedophiles who take years manoeuvring into key positions in schools, care homes and social services with access to children, a clever, devious terrorist is going to fool the most attentive of observers or mentors. It was one such individual who carried out the London Bridge attack.

There is no alternative to prevention. Several things need to be done. The big tech companies, Google, Facebook, ought to be spending more of their advertising revenue on blocking jihadist content and removing links to it. We need to expand the sort of community policing that encourages a Muslim parent to ask the advice of a sympathetic police officer after finding his son looking at a Da'esh website in his bedroom. Increasing the budget of the Intelligence Services while cutting the number of police is no solution. Supporting the mentors in the Channel part of the much-criticised Prevent programme is more to the point. Peer group to Peer group education in schools, even earlier, can work well.

Even if we had room in our overcrowded prisons, which we don't, imprisonment of violent extremists for more prolonged periods without the money for intensive efforts to de-radicalise them and monitor risk better, won't eliminate lone-wolf attacks such we have just experienced.

We are in for a long haul. It is time that the sententious attacks on our main counter-terrorism programme, PREVENT, give way to contributions towards improving it. There are many dedicated people trying to keep us safe and many different ways of doing it. Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones were two outstanding examples of them. We have lost two people

who were part of the solution. Political points-scoring is part of the problem.

See TheArticle 02/12/2019

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3.8 Global Jihad: The Forgotten Threat

4/6/2020

“We are all in this together”. Even the global jihadists. Though I doubt they are social distancing and self-isolating. Londoners prone to anxiety on the Tube have different worries these days. Risk levels no longer refer to Daesh or Al-Qaeda activities.

If global jihadists now have extra problems travelling and murdering people, their ideas are far from locked down. Thinking jihadism has been defeated, because Bin-Laden is dead, because the brutal travesty of the territorial Daesh ‘Caliphate’ is no more and many of its leaders dispersed or killed, is a mistake. The spread of the doctrine of global jihad is not out of control, but it would be rash to say it is contained, even if no-one can give a figure for the R rate of transmission.

So where did the idea of global jihad come from? There are few significant references made to it before the 1980s. A sense that all Muslims formed one global community, umma, comparable to a Christian understanding of the Church, was present within Pan-Islamism arising in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s. Muslim internationalists created organisations such as the Muslim World League and the World Association of Muslim Youth. Universities in

Mecca, Medina and Jeddah, with their international student bodies and global links fostered by the annual pilgrimage and trade were natural soil for Pan-Islamism. Later, teachers from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, opposed to Nasser's secular nationalism, imprisoned and then released by President Sadat, along with militants from other Arab secular republics, found a home in the historic Hijaz, the Saudi western coastal province, and employment as lecturers.

Despite military themes seeping into lectures and sermons by late 1970s, Pan-Islamism was essentially a peaceful quest for transnational Muslim solidarity, for observance of Shari'a Law and for promotion of Muslim scholarship and way of life. Around the world, Saudi oil money poured into the promotion of Islamic networks and societies. And in the other direction came jihadists who had opposed their own governments fleeing to Saudi sanctuary. Their political horizon was national, overthrowing governments deemed un-Islamic and corrupt – provided they weren't Saudi Arabia. Only the liberation of Palestine had transnational appeal.

Enter a much revered pious, personable, Palestinian Sheikh, Dr. Abdallah Azzam from the ultra-conservative wing of Islamism, nurtured within the Muslim Brotherhood where his support lay. Thomas Hegghammer's meticulously researched biography *The Caravan: Abdallah Azzam and the rise of Global Jihad* demonstrates how Azzam's writings and peripatetic teaching helped turn Pan-Islamism into the threat that is global jihad. The groups of jihadists, inspired by Azzam, who crossed from Pakistan into Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight the Soviet invader are the caravans of the book's title and the original global jihadists.

The Egyptian ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, chastiser of ‘Western decadence’, imprisoned and executed by Nasser, was the jihadists’ widely proclaimed hero. Azzam himself had fled from Palestine to Jordan, and thence to Saudi Arabia from where he began seeking a training ground for the jihad against Israel. He found it in Afghanistan. There he developed the Services Bureau, a recruitment organisation for Arab foreign-fighters, which was located across the Pakistan border in Peshawar. Its widely distributed house magazine, *al-Jihad* championed the Afghan resistance and attracted foreign fighters. And though Azzam’s primary goal remained training troops for Palestine (Hamas was founded in 1987), soon caravans of Arab fighters were crossing into Afghanistan for jihad against the atheistic Communist invaders. These were global jihad’s small beginnings.

Hegghammer’s research destroys three myths about the origins of global jihad. The first is that the USA sponsored the Arab precursors to Al-Qaida and Da’esh as useful agents against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. In reality the CIA focussed on arming and supporting the Afghan (future Taliban) national resistance, working with the ISI, Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency. Arab foreign fighters were too few in number and too inexperienced to command much attention. The second myth is that Abdullah Azzam, whom Usama Bin Laden revered, was the originator of Al-Qaeda. The truth is that Bin Laden deserted Azzam’s disorganised Services Bureau and training efforts to form his own base (literally al-Qaeda). He viewed Azzam as a religious teacher rather than jihadi warrior. Thirdly there is no evidence that Azzam would have supported 9/11, sexual slavery or routine killing of women and children, which later became features of global jihad after his

death.

In 1984, Azzam pronounced a fatwa which declared that all Muslims around the world had an individual responsibility to support jihad in Afghanistan. It was a turning point. Because of the Sheikh's legal expertise and the widespread respect for him – he put his preaching into practice - this fatwa intensified the internationalisation of the Afghan War. Azzam, a great believer in miracles and martyrdom, sanctified the foreign fighter. Given the background of Pan-Islamism, it was a relatively small step from propounding this well-defined religious duty to an apocalyptic vision of global war against the foreign policy, culture and politics of the West. Gone was the traditional Caliph's call to the Muslim community to defend Islam which traditionally legitimated jihad. Soon gone were the constraints of just war theory – a theory shared with the West that regulated the conduct of combatants.

Azzam himself was assassinated. Global jihad lost its moral compass. He and his two sons were killed by a car bomb while approaching the Peshawar Sab'al-Layal mosque at 12.20pm on Friday 24th November 1989. It was a highly professional operation. Hegghammer rehearses the likely perpetrators settling tentatively on the Pakistan ISI whom he suspects wanted to push Arab fighters out the region once the Soviets had been defeated. Abdallah Azzam instantly became the revered martyr of global jihadism, his many books and speeches standard recruitment texts.

The Caravan is a long book, worth the time and effort, which gives a fascinating insight into the Promethean role of religious ideas. As Hegghammer

writes in his last line: “There is no saying where the Caravan is heading next, but it is a fair bet that it will keep moving well into the twenty first century”.

Let’s hope he is proved wrong.

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3.9 Does French Secularism Hinder Counter-Terrorism? 3/1/2021

Just over five years ago, in Paris on the evening of Friday 15 November 2015, in three simultaneous attacks terrorists claiming to act in the name of Islam killed 130 French citizens. Ninety died and a hundred were injured at a rock concert in the Bataclan theatre, several died outside the Stade de France where France and Germany were playing a friendly football match and others were maimed in attacks on cafés. Only eleven months had passed since another Da’esh-inspired group attacked Charlie Hebdo and a Kosher supermarket taking seventeen lives.

Then came a wave of ‘lone wolf’ atrocities, the worst in 2016 when a 19-tonne truck ploughed through Bastille Day crowds on the Nice seafront killing 86 and injuring 458. Since November 2019 there have been ten such further attacks some at random, others aimed at Christians, priests and a schoolteacher. France feels that it is a nation whose very identity is threatened by these assaults on its way of life. Over seventy mosques and their sources of finance are now under investigation. In November 2020 President Macron re-affirmed in speeches that *laïcité*, a radical form of secularism, is the essence of French identity and that the Muslim community must conform to a ‘Charter of

Republican values'. But what precisely are these values, and when does laïcité begin to erode the right to religious freedom? And is laïcité as the definition of French identity a solution to the problem of terrorism or a provocation? All questions Christians have reasons to be interested in hearing answered.

"All my life I have held a certain idea of France." "Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France", wrote General Charles de Gaulle in the opening sentence of his first volume of war memoirs, (*The Call*) *L'Appel:1940-1942*. The General, reflecting his own heroic martial virtues, was always preoccupied with grandeur. So President Macron's somewhat grandiose deportment and attempts to muster the French people around the Republican flag against terrorism, is not unprecedented. But he can't reinvent himself as De Gaulle any more than Johnson can reinvent himself as Churchill. Macron needs his own idea of France. And what he needed was at hand: 'Republican values' and laïcité as the backbone of French identity.

A few years ago, at a government interfaith conference in Pristina, capital of Kosovo, I gave a well-received talk which gently suggested that banning the head-scarf, hijab, in State schools was a bad idea. Towards the end of lunch I was informed that the French Ambassador wanted to speak to me. I was escorted to her table where she delivered a long harangue on the oppression of Muslim women. According to the Ambassador Muslim women were oppressed by Islam and did not wish to wear the hijab. Laïcité liberated Muslim women and was civilization's answer to backward religious practices. No ifs or buts, no room for dialogue or nuance. I'd just encountered 'une certaine idée de la France'. A rather different emphasis from de Gaulle's but foreshadowing

Macron's.

France's population contains Western Europe's largest Muslim minority. The Pew Research Foundation puts the number of Muslims in France, mainly from the North Africa but also from the Middle East, at c. 6 million which makes them 8.8% of the population (the CIA estimate is between 7-9%). Of these about 100,000 are converts. Some 76 mosques are due for government inspection and 18, some of which should have closed, will be shut down.

In France the hijab is the subject of long running controversy. President Chirac extended an existing government ban on all wearing of 'ostentatious religious symbols' in State schools to every secondary education establishment and this was quickly voted into law in March 2004. In 2010 full length Burqās and face-concealing Niqābs, which barely left wearers' eyes visible, were banned from public places. In August 2016 the Mayor of Cannes opened up a beachhead in the apparel-wars with a ban on burkinis, body-concealing swimsuits, a ban upheld by the French Council of State which presumably viewed them as un-Republican and a symbol of separatism. Criticism of this ruling from non-Muslims has been ineffectual.

In the middle of November this year, the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), under growing pressure from Macron, announced its proposal for a National Council to vet foreign-born imams. Macron plans additional legislation to ban home-schooling, and to initiate training of imams in State controlled colleges requiring signing on to 'The Principles of the Republic'. His

target is 'separatism' and thus taqfiri brands of Salafi and Wahabi thinking and behavior - disavowal and rejection of all who do not share their excluding Puritan ethic - which he seems to see as a precursor to, and breeding ground for, terrorism. All this is *laïcité* in practice. This is not the procedural secularism, the separation of Church and State, of the USA. And it's not secular Britain with its established Church where very few would consider the Jewish kippa or a head-scarf or a cross an 'ostentatious' religious symbol - though occupational restrictions by employers involving wearing of crosses have been upheld in court. The difference is that French secularism, enshrined legally in law separating Church and State in 1905, has become prescriptive and ideological.

But in September the French Minister of Education, Jean-Michel Blanquer, did attempt to formulate an inclusive female standard of dress 'de façon républicaine' (in a republican fashion) for State schools. He condemned both short skirts - *indécence* - and the wearing of hijabs by mothers accompanying school trips. The anti-clericalism of the French Revolution has left its trace in hostility to religion in the public domain with little acknowledgement that culturally the hijab for many Muslims is an expression of modesty just as much as longer skirts.

In France since 9/11 conflict over women's dress seems to be in step with the growth of terror in the name of Allah. And it is an easy jump to the assumption that 'conspicuous' religiously approved clothing is somehow a link in a causal chain leading to violence, as well as being a breach of *laïcité* undermining the foundations of the Fifth Republic. Such a view may indeed coincide with the social perceptions of French governments. But

not with the perceptions of France's disadvantaged and increasingly alienated Muslim communities, who are daily bombarded with extremist recruitment material on-line, and who protest against their government's hardline *laïcité*.

Such a preoccupation with controlling female dress does not easily admit to reasoned distinctions. Seeing the face of a person is a major part of human communication, not just a security concern. In this sense the *niqāb* and *burkā* which seclude and exclude women – unlike the *hijab* – are anti-social and might reasonably be considered a direct challenge to French values, more a form of what Macron calls 'separatism' than an expression of modesty and human dignity. France's adopted Lithuanian Jewish philosopher of ethics, Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), a champion of dialogue, symbolically grounded his idea of ethical human relationships in face-to-face encounters.

The major problem with Macron's approach is that it does not appear to be evidence based. First, 'separatism' is common to all three Abrahamic religions: the Amish, the Jewish Haredi as well as Salafis. It is a response to seeing the world as sinful and a source of potential moral contamination. The vast majority of Salafis are peace-loving and pious. Indeed, because they can talk the talk and walk the walk which has taken a tiny minority into violence and terrorism, some are notably good at deradicalisation. Some of the first assassinations undertaken by Boko Haram in North East Nigeria were Salafi scholars who opposed the movement's violence and were seen as an immediate threat. Second, recruitment to jihadism in France takes place predominantly through relationships within fam-

ilies and between friends often in particular banlieues or small towns. If the UK is anything to go by 40% of those recruited have suffered from some form of mental illness. It is often because they have little of the Qur'anic knowledge that might have accrued from mosque attendance that many can be duped. Violent criminality is given a 'glorious' religious legitimization. This makes recruitment via social media, manipulating emotional reactions to videos and Qur'anic verses out of context, that much easier.

Britain's Muslim communities, unlike France's, trace their roots to the Indian sub-continent and Britain's approach to cultural differences, multiculturalism, has been less doctrinaire than France's. But we have had our own tragedies and agonizing failures, the 2017 Manchester bombing in which 22 died still has the power to shock. So we can readily and deeply empathize with our friends across the Channel. Multi-culturalism is no panacea. There are dangers of social division of tolerating what should not be tolerated. But because, at least in this respect, we aren't deducing counter-terrorism policy from a rigid set of ideological principles, we are able to see what works and what doesn't, and, at best, adjust policy to changing circumstances. France's tragic losses suggest that the answer to the failures of *laïcité* is not more *laïcité*.

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3.10 Religion & Violence

21/5/2021

The latest killings of Palestinian and Israeli civilians in the asymmetric war between Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Israel raises questions about the connection between religion and violence. Hamas emerged from the 1987

intifada as a religiously motivated break-away from Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation. Israel is the Jewish State. How much of what is happening is driven by religious conviction and how much by national self-assertion?

Our own civil war in Northern Ireland was often spoken of as conflict between Catholics and Protestants though most people perceived the competing nationalisms. The Irish Catholic bishops unwavering condemnation of violence limited the IRA's capacity to use Catholicism in its cause. While CEO of a Catholic development agency, I received a letter from a Maze prisoner requesting books on liberation theology. I sent a small booklet about "The Crucified Peoples", theological reflections on the people's suffering in war. On the Unionist side the Rev. Ian Paisley's violent rhetoric did nothing to interdict Protestant paramilitaries.

If people were asked which of the Abrahamic faiths they associated with violence many would say Islam. According to the Pew Foundation in 2017, 63% of White Evangelicals and 41% of Catholics in the USA thought Islam encouraged violence more than other faiths. ISIS and Al-Qaida's perverse glorification of violence in the name of Allah and their Islamic claims obviously contribute to these views. Yet the only people who might gain from the killing of non-combatants both in Gaza and the few in Israel are nationalists: Netanyahu, struggling for his political life, the political leaders of Hamas, and their backers, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Are such public perceptions correct? Is there a thread linking 9/11 and 611, a year after the Prophet began receiving the revelations which are the

content of the Qur'ān, and the beginning of his and his followers' persecution in Mecca? Brian B. Lawrence in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion & Violence* (2013) traces Muhammad's attempts to avoid war and suppress idolatry and social violence - including the practice of female infanticide (Qur'ān 17.31). "He resisted the use of force: neither he nor his followers engaged in war until he was forced to flee his home and become a refugee in Medina in 622".* There, the nascent Muslim community fought for survival though, whenever possible, attempts were made to make peace with rivals rather than eliminate them.

For many today jihad has become synonymous with suicide bombings and beheadings. But Lawrence, like many other scholars, portrays Jihad as originally having a personal meaning of spiritual struggle, alongside a communal meaning, as a quest for a higher religious good. The idea that the sweeping expansion across the Middle East and North Africa after the Prophet's death was a jihad, and the Caliphs who settled in centres such as Damascus and Baghdad made laws exclusively on the basis of Qur'ān, does not hold water. Warfare was described by Muslim writers of the time in terms of conquest and raids, neither holy nor primarily aimed at conversion. Ironically the term jihad began to be used by Saladin in a mimetic military reaction to the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders in 1099. After the Mughal invasions of the 13th century warfare clearly returned to being a State/Caliphate concern while the Caliph himself became the sole legitimate owner and arbiter of the means of coercion. It was in the nineteenth century that Muslim leaders returned to using the term jihad to sanctify violent resistance, this time against colonialism and European culture. In short Muslims, through the centuries, in a variety of contexts, like Christians,

have not been averse to finding religious legitimisation for conquest and warfare.

Both Christian and Islamic writers developed a body of ethical thinking about the conditions under which war, or jihad, could be declared – the emphasis was on legitimate authority for mobilising forces and on defence. There was also an attempt to define rules governing warfare and what ought to be conducted towards combatants and non-combatants. A partly shared just war theory is reflected in protocols about targeting today. On the Muslim side, Shari'a has an extensive treatment of these issues. War like slavery was taken as a given.

Pogroms against Jews and repeated Crusades were the product of a particular interpretation of divine revelation. A collective and inherited responsibility for the death of Christ was attributed to Jews for the first sixteen centuries of European Christianity. All this does not make Christianity an essentially violent religion. But it does show the gulf between the different understandings of Christian faith spanning the centuries.

But as former Supreme Court Judge, Jonathan Sumption, said in a 2012 BBC *Fore Thought* programme, we should not see the past in terms of the present. This “marginalises historical events by treating them as monstrous aberrations from the path of truth chosen by our own generation”.** As a result we fail to learn from the ‘vicarious experience of the past’ the insights that good history grants.

What lessons should we learn then? First, the obvious, that we are in-

variably predisposed to legitimate our own violence and condemn that of our opponents, enemies and victims. Second, we need to have a clear picture of the social and political circumstances in which a small minority successfully promotes violence as an integral or necessary part of their faith. Third, we need to support and draw on the religious resources of each faith community to work for mediation, reconciliation, social justice and human dignity.

There is a fourth: we should not provoke violence. Likud leader, and future Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in September 2000 after peace talks had failed resulted in the second, intensely violent, intifada. Muslims see this contested area as a noble sanctuary, a symbol of their religious identity. The Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque are amongst the holiest buildings in Islamic belief. A sure way to tip a faith community, pushed to its limits and already in conflict, into violence are actions seen as desecrating or threatening their holy places and holy days. Pace Lord Sumption, this is almost as true today as it was in 1099. And it is hard to believe Netanyahu was not just as aware of this as Sharon.

Ali Altaf Mian presenting Lawrence's thinking in *The Bruce B. Lawrence Reader*
Duke University Press 2021

*Published in a series of articles as 'On Apologising for History' in *Law in a Time of Crisis* Profile books 2021

See [TheArticle](#) 20/05/2021

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Chapter 4

Catholicism

4.1 Leo the Pope to Leo the Taoiseach

24/8/2018

You could write the news coverage of the Pope Francis' visit to Ireland in advance. Three stories: the Pope's treatment of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, the Irish abortion referendum and the Pope's attitude to homosexuality. The latter to spice up reporting the Pope's meeting the Taoiseach. You would be lucky to learn more about Catholicism and its social teaching.

Take People before Profits, for example, a current political slogan that happens to be Papal teaching. Not much of that in the Murdoch Press despite his getting a papal decoration. Catholic Social Teaching features very infrequently in any newspaper. It bobs up in the news when someone prominent, and not a Catholic, mentions it. This usually coincides with moments of despair about British politics. The Archbishop of Canterbury tellingly draws on it in his recent book *Re-Imagining Britain: Foundations for Hope*. Lord Maurice Glasman championed it when David Cameron was talking about the Big Society and Britain was still reeling from the 2008 financial crisis.

For a world religion to consciously promote since the 19th century an organic tradition of thought about the desirable shape for society, international relations

and economic structures, is both ambitious and difficult. Yet many, though not all, members of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, would like aspects of their faith to be reflected in how we live in the world together, in their vision of politics. And it helps to have signposts and authoritative guidelines.

The Catholic Church's social teaching is little discussed amongst Catholics and the Church has a poor record for promoting it. For a faith at the communitarian end of the individualism-collectivism spectrum you might think the opposite would be the case. But it is the Church's counter-cultural individual morality, notably about beginning and end of life, and sexuality, which is newsworthy. The social position of bishops, archbishops and cardinals, more so in the past than now, has left Catholic social teaching in the category too difficult to handle, discomfiting the advantaged and comforting the disadvantaged. Today in Europe it is more a question of fearing accusations of meddling in politics and creating divisions in parishes that keeps sermons and pastoral letters on the safe ground of personal spiritual formation and morality.

Catholic Social Teaching developed in response to the condition of the industrial working class, revolutionary threats, the rise of Marxist analysis, and then Communist Parties and States. Early in the 19th century some Catholic social thinkers denounced the treatment of workers, while the hierarchy slowly recognized that it had to engage with the working class or it would lose it. In his 1839 pamphlet *On Modern Slavery*, the remarkable French Abbé, Félicité de Lamennais, later to leave the priesthood under Vatican censure, placed the abject dependence of the proletariat on Capital at the centre of social concern. His use of the term proletariat, and its pivotal significance, was already emerging whilst the young Marx was still studying the history of

philosophy and – successfully - courting an aristocrat, Baroness Jenny von Westphalen.

In June 1869, the Bishop Wilhelm von Ketteler of Mainz preached a famous and resonant sermon to 10,000 workers at the Liebfrauenheide pilgrimage chapel in Hesse denouncing “anti-christian liberalism” and advocating the idea of worker associations along the British trades union model. The sermon was part of his continuous detailed engagement with core social democratic issues and contemporary political debates. Ketteler’s teaching anticipated the key themes of later Vatican social pronouncements: he introduced a Calvinist idea of church order to Catholic Social Teaching, termed ‘subsidiarity’. In his words: “Each lower limb moves freely within its sphere and enjoys the right of self-determination and self-government. Only when the lower limb is no longer able to achieve his aims himself or independently to avert the danger threatening his development does the higher limb enter into force on its behalf”.

There are clear continuities, from the passionate ferment of Lamennais’ social thinking, through Ketteler to Pope Leo XIII who read Lamennais on social justice and who in 1891 published *Rerum Novarum* (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour), the first in a series of papal documents that continue until today with Pope Francis on the threats to the environment. In Britain with its poverty-stricken Irish migrants, Cardinal Henry Manning influenced Pope Leo XIII on the ‘worker question’, openly sympathized with striking workers and mediated between unions and employers in the 1889 Dock Strike. The foundations of a living tradition able to develop in new and different socio-economic contexts were laid.

Why this apparent diversion into the 19th century? Merely to say that that the Catholic Church has been engaged in a long-running conversation

with socialism for over 175 years, and a Vatican level for 150. From engagement has emerged a number of clear positions: firstly a commitment to uphold the value of work, vocational labour, and worker rights sometimes honoured in the breach, at other times, for example in the case of *Solidarność*, in a dramatically interventionist fashion; secondly what Germany calls harmonious co-determination (*Mitbestimmung*) - since 1976 management and workers sharing decision-making with almost equal representation on boards of company directors; thirdly a clear distinction between productive and savage Capitalism. In short the priority of People over Profit so Labour over Capital, are at the heart of this tradition, originating in the thinking of a French former priest, a German bishop, an English cardinal, and an Italian Pope.

The Catholic Right in politics can, and does, live with, and sometimes promote, particular elements of Catholic Social Teaching selecting biblical verses and papal phrases which fit the reader's prejudices (text without context is pretext I was taught) and often ignoring the rest. But generally the tradition is threatening to them. The social conservatism of Catholics on the Right includes both political conservatism and sexual morality. The Church finds unexpected allies in those on the Left who do not usually tick the Vatican approved boxes on individual moral issues, beginning and end of life, and sexual morality, but share a critique of Capitalism.

The vision which Catholic social teaching proposed informed the early days of the European Union whose founding fathers were disproportionately Catholic. British Catholics, whether they like it or not, are a little bit European. Not the best identity for drawing an interested audience in a Britain both officially Protestant, and secular, and historically distrustful of Europe, and with a majority of voters in favour of BREXIT.

In my next blog I will discuss the significance of Catholic Social Thought in this time of political turmoil. Any port in a storm.

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4.2 Reds Under the Altar?

1/9/2018

During an inter-governmental conference on trade and development held in Geneva in 1964, two speakers received a standing ovation. One was Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Argentinian hero of the Cuban revolution, radicalized as a medical student by the poverty of Latin America while touring; the other was Louis-Joseph Lebret, a Dominican priest reared in a small Breton fishing community, radicalized by the poverty of the fishing community in St. Malo.

Planned as a one-off event the conference established a new UN agency, UNCTAD, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Che Guevara went on to be summarily executed by CIA-backed forces in Bolivia and became, for the Left, the political equivalent of Marlon Brando, and finally a wall poster. Jean-Louis Lebret went on to help Pope Paul VI write his most far-sighted encyclical, on trade and development, *Populorum Progressio*, the progress of peoples, which over 50 years later stands the test of time.

So a hundred years after Marx was writing *Das Kapital* and the Bavarian Bishop, Wilhelm Ketteler, was publishing his *The Worker Question and Christianity*, competition between Socialism and Catholicism still saw each converging around a complex of socio-economic questions related to poverty. But for a variety

of reasons, poverty was the dog that didn't bark during the reformist Second Vatican Council. The shift in the context in which thinking about poverty took place was moving to the developing world, notably Latin America where change was supercharged by reaction to the pressures of military dictatorships and oligarchies supported by the CIA.

Out of this revolutionary hotbed came renewed interest in the Bible and the birth of Liberation Theology. The priority of Labour over Capital was widened to 'a preferential option for the poor'. Projected politically by the Right as infiltration of the Church by communism, Liberation Theology was a continuation of social teaching outside Europe, and a tacit admission that the Reformation had much to teach the Catholic Church about the centrality of the Gospel. In Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution and in the rise of Lula's Workers Party in Brazil a new political vision was adopted by the Left; themes in a rooted theology found purchase and were implemented politically beyond vague generalities.

Some of these core themes of Liberation Theology, though critiqued by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, were adopted cautiously by Pope John Paul II, no stranger to bureaucratic communism in Poland. That the poor should 'make their own history', rather than be its collateral damage, that seeking justice was no less the Church's mandate than charity, with solidarity with the poor a central Christian virtue, were ideas that entered the bloodstream of the global Church. The Bible and the life and practice of the early Church in the first centuries offered an endorsement. What remained unacknowledged was the level of conflict that had to be endured to obtain justice. Implementing these ideas in practical action and policies in Europe was more complex.

How to implement Catholic Social Teaching is the wider problem. Higher

level propositions and axioms require down-to-earth detailed policy prescriptions to take on socio-economic life. Post-war Germany had a crack at it: subsidiarity reflected in a federalism with considerable devolution to the *Länder*, and in regional and local banks, non-conflictual industrial structures of co-partnership between employers and Labour, respect for skilled work, and appointment of city integration commissioners for immigrant communities. The political theorist, Lord Maurice Glasman, sings the praises of this German Christian Democrat dispensation as an example of Catholic Social Teaching in action.

He presents the importance of civil society organisations, mediating institutions between State and Market, as a distinctive contribution of Catholic Social Teaching. True for Latin America where civil society had a strong Catholic component that could act as a counter to dictatorship and oligarchy. Less true for the USA and Europe where the fear was that capitalism would fail in post-Soviet Russia through lack of a connecting infrastructure of civil society organisations to buttress a social market. Enter Civil Society stage right to audience applause, soon to be strangled by a kleptocracy of former KGB agents and their cronies.

Civil society was that which the Soviet Union lacked. When I spoke to Gorbachev's religious advisers as rapid change was afoot in 1990, they were acutely aware of the coming vacuum. "Our communist ethics are dead", they bemoaned, "Christianity will have to provide the moral cement for society".

Glasman is right to present virtue ethics as sewn into the fabric of Catholic Social Teaching. This is an understanding of ethics which approaches moral development as the acquisition of special skills that require practice. Since the 13th. century, both ethics and social teaching have been connected through

Aristotelian thinking via Thomas Aquinas. “A symphony and harmony of voices dwindle if everybody sings the same tone”, he wrote. Apposite as a warning to Communism in the Soviet Union and encouragement for multi-culturalism in democracies.

But Catholic Social Teaching is not some holistic how-to-get-yourself-out-of-political-bankruptcy card when playing Monopoly Capitalism. As post-war Germany illustrates it can give a direction to a society and economy. Though, after military defeat in the 1940s, like Japan, Germany had the advantage of starting with an almost clean slate. Britain’s economy, skewed towards finance capital, stuck with the dominance of the City of London as the byproduct of Empire, remains in a more intractable situation. “The denuding of the country and its people of their institutional and productive inheritance by the higher rates of return in the City of London”, Professor Glasman writes, “is the story we confronted in 2008”. Indeed it remains so even though the story most told is about bad, or foolish, bankers behaving badly.

One of the ironies of our time is that our great intermediate institutions - the NHS, the Churches, the international development agencies come to mind - are persistently under fire for the individual moral failings of a few. The damage is amplified institutionally by an inability to understand that reputation, like character, relies on the virtue of prudential judgement: on truth and trust.

The Church needs to focus on teaching its social thought. If we are to have a national curriculum for religious education - and from a Catholic perspective this is a retrograde step towards uniformity, privileging a fear of subsidiarity - it should include virtue ethics. And, without being presumptuous, it should include Catholic Social Teaching.

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4.3 The Archbishop & Economic Justice

5/9/2018

“Welby Wealth Tax Storm”, the Daily Mail headline, indicates that the Archbishop of Canterbury has gained public attention. Justin Welby in a BBC Today interview placed tax firmly within the Christian concept of a moral economy and the pursuit of justice for the poor. He was promoting a Commission report on economic justice from the IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, of which he was a member.

Earlier this year, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope* was published. The reviews were largely descriptive, respectful, positive, but hardly effusive. Most pointed out how Justin Welby had drawn on Catholic Social Teaching. But he had done more: applied it.

In 1942 Archbishop William Temple’s *Christianity and the Social Order* was read with enthusiasm; some 140,000 copies were quickly sold. It has often been seen as a foundational document for the Welfare State. A reprint with a preface from former Prime Minister, Ted Heath, followed in 1976 showing continuing interest. The comparison says a lot about changes in Britain in the last 75 years.

William Temple was writing in a time of social change. Following the fall of Singapore in February 1942, Britain’s pre-war class structure and the assumptions that went with it, were challenged, leading to a post-war Labour government. The war years proved a social as well as an eco-

conomic turning point. William Temple, nurtured in an Anglican Christian Socialist tradition and the Labour Party, academic and first president of the Workers' Educational Association, was in tune politically with popular sentiment.

Archbishop Justin Welby, a former corporate executive with financial experience in the oil industry, leads a Church of England in a very different Britain. Beyond escaping the quicksands of BREXIT, public opinion is only dimly aware of the urgency of social and economic change. As late as 1985, *Faith in the City*, the report of the 1985 Anglican Commission on inequality and poverty, provoked Tory anger and annoyance from the Methodist-reared Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Reimagining Britain in our contemporary social and political context could not be expected to raise a comparable stir. Nor did it. That is a pity.

Britain needs inspiration and a new vision. It is in the midst of the biggest crisis since 1940-1942. And this crisis is far deeper than the danger of the country's future being determined by Tory back benchers, the DUP and Momentum. "When changes are especially dramatic", Archbishop Welby writes, "they call for reimagining on a grand scale, for an interpretation of our ancient meta-narrative that is faithful to the past, that is adapted to the present and that guards the hopes of those to come in the future". Now is a moment that comes rarely, where great national danger meets great opportunity.

The importance of Reimagining Britain lies in this prophetic insight but also in Justin Welby's capacity to infuse insight with evidence based on his considerable experience of how things work. He affirms the humility of a bishop friend from the ill-named Democratic Republic of the Congo: "We do what we can, what God enables us to". What Justin Welby himself has been able to do

was to target Wonga, the pay-day lender which recently went into receivership, and to more than hold his own on the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards where he argued powerfully but unsuccessfully for a review of the costs and benefits of Britain's overweening financial sector since 1945. Experience matters.

In the mid-1980s I took Rev. Frank Chikane, General-Secretary of the South African Council of Churches from 1987-1994, to meet the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie. Frank was on the run, and staying with me in London. He lived in fear. One evening he asked us to close the living room curtains; being visible from the street made him nervous. He later nearly died from poisoning in Madison, Wisconsin, in an apartheid regime assassination. He and Archbishop Runcie bonded immediately. Danger, fear and sin made visible were a shared experience. Runcie had been a tank commander surviving the long road from the Normandy beaches to being one of the first to enter Bergen-Belsen. In contrast when Frank Chikane met Cardinal Basil Hume, the warmth, kindness, and sympathy of the monk were manifest but something was missing: the deep empathy of shared personal experience.

Justin Welby is courageous; he risks moving from values and general principles which most people can endorse to proposing practical applications of Catholic Social Teaching to education, housing, health and finance. He proposes that the State should sustain the Common Good during rapid economic change by withholding contracts to corporations unless they pay for university places and apprenticeships in highly skilled jobs; he floats the idea of contact orders enabling grandparents to spend time with grandchildren of divorced families; Housing Associations with performance indicators committed to building community as much as building houses. A less detailed

suggestion is the creation of Community Transformation Boards with a responsibility for developing social value. From his experience at Coventry Cathedral he underlines the importance of systems and structures for reconciliation in society. His is an eclectic approach not a grand strategy or a political manifesto.

Reimagining Britain reworks other ideas shared with Catholicism. “Values guide practices and practices build virtue” he writes; “virtues also reinforce practices, and guide our understanding of values”. Archbishop Welby would be as one with Cardinal Vincent Nichols in his 2016 Benedict XVI lecture in wanting these elements at the heart of education. These are the prerequisites for achieving Society’s best aspirations and concerns: democracy, the rule of law, tolerance and equality, what are claimed as British values.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols’ lecture was entitled “Living as a creative minority in the UK”. He was talking about the Catholic experience. Despite losses from the pews, it is a little more complex for the Church of England, an established Church, to describe itself in this way even if this is the sense of Reimagining Britain. But Archbishop Welby speaks openly of the “barely acknowledged hypocrisy” of what are claimed as British values, and seeks something better.

British values should draw on Catholic Social Teaching and continue to be a joint conversation between the different faiths as should, whenever possible, advocacy of the type of creative actions Justin Welby suggests. Catholic Social Teaching is not some magic bullet for the UK and world’s ills. But, as the Archbishop of Canterbury demonstrates, as an elaborated set of ethical guidelines it looks increasingly like an essential compass providing direction in a time of crisis and political confusion.

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4.4 Oscar Romero: Long Walk to Sainthood**12/10/2018**

The gunman at the door of the church must have taken aim carefully. The Archbishop, his sermon just ended, must have seen him. Then the sudden deep physical fear; they found salt crystals from copious sweat in his black woollen trousers.

He knew that his sermons might result in his assassination. Broadcast nationally on church radio to a huge audience, they provided the only news of the Salvadorian military's latest barbarous acts, and his appeals to the army to stop the repression. The death squads and the military in 1980s El Salvador were murdering with impunity all they deemed a threat.

The cry "Santo Romero" went up in Latin America, and around the world, soon after the gunshot that killed Archbishop Oscar Romero on 23 March 1980. The army had silenced a resonant prophetic voice speaking of justice and peace. Yet thirty five years passed before Romero's beatification in May 2015, a formal recognition of his holiness attended by a quarter of a million people. It was a first step towards his canonisation this Sunday, 14 October 2018.

Romero's story has been editorialised by those who opposed his beatification, for whatever reason, and those who promoted it, for whatever reason. For example, Romero's words, supposedly in a telephone conversation, "If they

kill me I will rise again in the people of El Salvador”, were invented by a Guatemalan journalist. In catching the Christian essence of what happened that day the “quote” has a lingering quality: not true but not false either. Yet the words he didn’t utter could be exploited as a sign of hubris against him.

Romero was an unexpected hero of radical Catholicism. He was close to Opus Dei members, a Catholic association distrusted by radical, and liberal, Catholics; he enjoyed watching cartoons in his slippers on Sunday afternoons with his friends, the Barraza family. And he innocently loved Rome, praying at the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul between defending his actions, his outspoken sermons, and his support for the poor of El Salvador. For very understandable reasons, he shared with the Pope whom he revered from his younger days, Paul VI, a struggle with anxiety. With the papal nuncio to El Salvador and most of his fellow bishops against him, denouncing him to Rome, with political pressure from all sides and horrific bloodshed around him from the civil war, he had good cause.

There is a revealing entry in Romero’s diary: he recounts how Pope John-Paul II, misapplying his Polish experience of Communist rule, put great weight on the importance of maintaining unity in El Salvador’s Bishops’ Conference. This advice could only have worried him further. Any prophetic witness to truth precluded unity; most of his fellow bishops were solidly opposed to his stance. Such were his dilemmas as a bishop traditionally obedient to the Pope. The response to his death, like to his later life and sermons, reflected the deep conflicts in a Church tragically divided by the Cold War. In El Salvador, with the oligarchy and army supported by the CIA, there was only the unity of the grave.

George Orwell once said that “who controls the past controls the future” but “who controls the present controls the past”. The way different Church leaders spun Romero’s story confirms Orwell. For some Vatican bureaucrats and some important Latin American Cardinals defending their past record, Romero’s cause fell under the category of “sensitive”. The “sensitivity” stemmed from a surfeit of calumny and detraction. Or was just a product of bad theology. His canonisation process was blocked for “prudential reasons”.

It was only in 2012 that Pope Benedict unblocked the process and it was cleared by the Vatican’s Congregation for Bishops and the powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Then a Pope from Argentina with a similar love of the poor could enthusiastically add San Romero of the Americas to the litany of saints.

Whatever the past opposition to Romero, if a theological plumb line is imagined indicating the centre of Catholic thought, “thinking with the mind of the Church” in Catholic-speak, Romero’s words and actions fell plumb along it. He had received a classic - ordinary -seminary formation. He was committed to the vision of the Second Vatican Council, its pastoral theology and the option for the poor endorsed by the Latin American Bishops’ Conferences (CELAM). The strength of this formation, the reality of El Salvador, drew him into sharing to the utmost in the pain and suffering of his people. By thinking, preaching and acting with the mind of the Church in the context of El Salvador in 1980, he qualified for martyrdom. The message of his life and death is almost as simple as that.

Almost as simple. Romero’s sermons suggest that he inhabited a traditional Catholic world of binaries: religious/spiritual versus political, the mind of the Church or liberation theology, ideology or sound doctrine. But re-

jecting the “political”, Romero adopted a deeper understanding of what politics might mean for Christians: he lived it, striving for conformity with the politics of the historical Jesus. Romero’s “no” to violence, whether of the oppressed or oppressor, entailed his “yes” to a deeper liberation than promised by the political and armed struggle against tyranny and the rule of the military and oligarchies in Latin America. Liberation theology was not political enough. His martyrdom at the altar, under the cross in the chapel of the Divine Providence Hospital, San Salvador, bore testimony to this truth.

This Sunday will be a time of joy for those who persevered in promoting the cause of Romero’s canonisation. His story will be celebrated not only by many Catholics round the world. There is a message here for everyone. It is that anxiety and fear can accompany great courage, vision and moral leadership. And the good news is that the ordinary really can become extraordinary.

To read more see Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope* Darton Longman Todd 2015

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4.5 The Vatican & China: Supping With the Devil ? 28/10/2018

China is passing through “a second cultural revolution”, or at least a return to further conflation of State and Communist Party. Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the Party and President of the Peoples Republic embodies the ethos of the regime. This year the National People’s Congress lifted term limits on his

stay in power. Since 2012, repression of dissent and a quest for complete Party control of all major institutions has gained momentum under his autocratic rule. A symptom of this development, relations with religions were transferred in March from the State's Department of Religious Affairs to the Party's United Front Work Department formerly in charge of ethnic minorities, traditionally a peripheral - dangerous - phenomenon.

In China, citizens and Churches are banned from using the internet for anything that might be seen as evangelization. Party/Government employees are not allowed to express a religious faith. There is a general prohibition on young people under eighteen attending churches. In strong Christian centres such as Wenzhou City in Zhejiang Province, medical staff, school and university teachers have a duty to report religious behavior; OFSTED-style inspections ensure compliance. In some schools, students must submit a formal commitment not to "believe in religions". Even family prayers can fall under local oversight. In Luzhou Catholic Diocese, crosses on churches have been pulled down and priests ordered to fly the national flag with a portrait of the President displayed prominently in the building. Overall some 1,500 churches have lost their crosses. How much is zealous local initiative or on direct orders from Beijing is unclear. This level of repression is far from uniform across the country. The large Zion church in Beijing was shut down in February. Non-Party Protestant and house churches suffer more. The Xinjiang Muslim Uighurs suffer most with an estimated million people now dispersed into "re-education camps".

This persecution has three drivers: Sinicization, the Party's demand that religion "serve overall interests of the nation and the Chinese people and support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party"; fear of religions' disruptive power, viewed as irrational and emotional, in contrast to an ordered and harmonious development of Chinese society. Finally, less overtly: China's historical ex-

perience of foreign influences retained and expressed in the mutated form of authoritarian Communist rule with religion feared as an exploitable weapon against Communism and Poland as a warning.

Last month the Vatican signed an historic interim agreement with the Chinese State/Communist Party to resolve the issue of the quasi-schism (relationships are complex) between the government-controlled Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and the Roman Catholic Church whose bishops are appointed by the Pope. The government will now propose candidates' names. The Pope will make the final choice of bishop. The excommunication of seven Patriotic Association bishops has been lifted. To date, details of the agreement have not been made public. But assurances have been given to Taiwan that current diplomatic relations will not change.

The interim accord between China and the Vatican was the fruit of many years of difficult negotiation. Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, has praised it as a significant achievement for Vatican diplomacy. His were not sentiments universally shared. Timing was unfortunate: an anniversary of the ratification of the Vatican's 1933 Reichskonkordat with the nascent Nazi Germany that cut the ground from under the Catholic Centre Party, the major source of parliamentary opposition to the National Socialist juggernaut.

But no-one should fear loopholes in the wording of the Accord. Vatican negotiators leave no comma or semi-colon safe from scrutiny. No hostages to fortune pass muster. This is not why many people - most notably emeritus Cardinal Joseph Zen in Hong Kong - are opposed. They do not trust the regime to honour its promises.

Was it right to do a deal with Beijing whilst the detention of some dozen priests remains unresolved and persecution grows of people of faith? Isn't counting on the good faith of the government negotiators and Xi Jinping risky? And is this

another assault on the Church's moral integrity? The answers hinge on your understanding of the purpose of Vatican diplomacy in the life of the Church. Vatican diplomats mainly aim to do two, sometimes incompatible, things: to promote the implementation of the living tradition of Catholic social teaching around the world, seeking peace and justice, and also to nurture and protect Catholic communities. For example, Vatican diplomacy came in strongly behind the Jubilee Campaign to reduce Third World debt and in support of poverty reduction strategies. But it held back, for example, from public criticism of US bombing of North Vietnam and Cambodia limiting itself to diplomatic initiatives for peace and pauses in the air-strikes. In the first instance priority was given to moral leadership on debt reduction. In the second, criticism of what had become an offensive war with savage bombing of Hanoi/Haiphong, prosecuted by the USA, was much delayed; protection of South Vietnam's then large Catholic population from Communist take-over took precedence.*

What was the Vatican's thinking when it came to dealing with communist China? There was a benign precedent in a recent Accord with Vietnam. There was historically the equivocal experience of Ostpolitik after the second Vatican Council, a diplomatic *démarche* to Communist States that evoked the prolonged resistance of the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty and other eastern bloc bishops. I suspect that Rome thought a divided Church in China would not survive the mounting tide of persecution. The nurture and protection of the country's over 12 million Catholics took precedence over a denunciation of human rights abuses. What in Christian-speak is called "the prophetic voice" was muted. Though this has proved contentious, and some bishops appointed by Rome obliged to resign, or retire early, to make way for new "dual control" bishops, the Accord shores up Catholic defenses by building institutional unity. Experience has taught the Church that a determined and reasonably efficient

State has the power to reduce it to a remnant. A prophetic voice can carry high costs in a world of conflicting national interests. The Accord is arguably the least bad strategic option for the Catholic Church in China today. I hope the difficult prudential judgment of the Pope and the lead Catholic negotiators, Cardinal Parolin and Archbishop Celli, turns out to be wise. The Protestant Churches must feel more exposed to government pressure. It makes me uncomfortable. But that may have more to do with wanting to enjoy the moral high ground than concern for the moral integrity of Vatican diplomacy, and the fate of China's Catholics.

See A. Alexander Stumvoll *A Living Tradition: Catholic Social Doctrine and Holy See Diplomacy* Cascade Books 2018

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4.6 Nuns & Sexual Trafficking

15/11/2018

The illicit proceeds from human trafficking and exploitative labour crimes in 2018 are estimated at \$150 billion (up from \$32 billion in 2011). Sexual trafficking provides a significant part of these proceeds, \$99 billion, going into the hands of criminal gangs. The dark underside of globalisation, the trade has been the subject of both documentaries and thrillers. But what is far less well known is the extraordinary role nuns, Women Religious, have played in caring for its victims and combating it.

I was recently privileged to interview Sister Imelda Poole, about her experience of working with trafficked women. But before watching, you may need a few acronyms and words explained.

CARITAS - the international arm of the Roman Catholic Church for aid and development with branches in different countries. CAFOD - the UK branch of CARITAS. CIIR - the Catholic Institute for International Relations, an independent radical organisation founded during the Second World War. Conference of Religious - the national body for men and women Religious. Congregation - a particular association of men or women Religious (Sister Imelda for example belongs to the English congregation of the IBVM, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also known as Loreto or Mary Ward Sisters, who share Ignatian Spirituality with the better known Jesuits. Currently 23 different congregations in England and Wales have members engaged in anti-trafficking, over half providing properties for safe-houses and shelters).

Here is Sister Imelda explaining what brought her into this work....

This blog is best viewed in an online format.

Sister Imelda was then profoundly influenced by meeting trafficked women awaiting deportation in an Italian detention centre . She describes what sexual trafficking means for its victims. Sister Eugenia Bonnetti, mentioned below, is a founder of the movement to combat trafficking in Italy.

This blog is best viewed in an online format.

Work in Albania gave her considerable experience of the criminal gangs that flourished in post-communist countries. Many of these have found human trafficking safer, so more lucrative, than the drugs trade. The gangs operate

across borders. But this is also true of Women Religious whose congregations are found in many different countries.

This blog is best viewed in an online format.

An important part of the mission of Women Religious involved in combatting sexual trafficking is setting up and maintaining Shelters for women who have escaped their traffickers. This has become an ecumenical effort in the UK involving the Salvation Army as an important partner. Below she describes the formation of the Medaille Trust which cares for trafficked women in a number of Shelters in the UK.

* CLARIFICATION: The founder of the Medaille Trust is Sr. Teresa Ann Herry, a Sister of St. Joseph, living with her community in Newport.

In the video footage, we mistakenly named the Founder of the Medaille Trust as Sr. Teresa Helm, who was in fact a key lay worker in Chigwell, Surrey, UK. Sadly, Teresa is now deceased.

This blog is best viewed in an online format.

After pioneering work combating sexual trafficking in Europe, Women Religious successfully engaged the Catholic hierarchy in their mission. This engagement went up to the level of the Pope and Vatican with meetings in Rome and is now an international movement, (see santamartagroup.com which includes police and www.renate-europe.net which is a network of Religious in Europe). I discuss with her the tension between protecting trafficked girls

suffering from trauma and the police's need for the girls to testify in order to obtain convictions.

This blog is best viewed in an online format.

Finally we discussed what impact this work, which many would not associate with nuns, had on her religious life. In a moving personal testimony, at times struggling to put her experience into words, she places it squarely in a tradition of Christian spirituality.

Thanks to Steve Pierce, Oxford Film Shed, who filmed and edited a long interview, Edmund Ross who embedded the clips in my blogsite, and the Las Casas Institute, Blackfriars, Oxford, (<https://bfriars.ox.ac.uk/study/research/Las-Casas-Institute-for-social-justice> for more of the interview) who invited Sister Imelda Poole to Oxford. And, of course, to Sister Imelda herself.

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4.7 Passiontide & the Tide of Human Trafficking 19/4/2019

In Rome during this Easter's Stations of the Cross on Good Friday evening, one of the most sacred days in the Christian year, the congregation will hear the meditations written by Sister Eugenia Bonetti, an 80-year old Italian nun. This traditional devotion, in which Catholics follow the journey of Christ from Pontius Pilate's court to the Cross and Calvary, will be held in the Coliseum where the early Christians suffered death for their faith. The Pope when he invited Sister Bonetti, a member of the Consolata Order of Women Religious (nuns),

particularly wanted her experience in combatting sexual trafficking to be reflected in the meditations. She is, after all, part of the biggest anti-slavery movement in the world, which includes hundreds of Women Religious who have been trying to stem the tide of human trafficking and who lead the anti-trafficking movement today.

Human trafficking is the dark underside of globalization. It is criminal big business in the same league as the global drugs and arms trade. In 2018 human trafficking and exploitative labour crimes were worth \$150 billion, having grown from \$32 billion in 2011. The illicit proceeds from sexual trafficking alone, amounting to an estimated \$99 billion, end up in the hands of criminal networks. It brings misery and degradation to millions of men as well as women. The work of Women Religious at the consumer end of sexual trafficking is impressive; they also are networked and work across borders and large distances, and with minimal incoming funding, and have spent the last decade refining their methods of countering the trade. In the UK, this has entailed in the last five years making over £16 million in properties available, largely for rescue and safe houses, and over £10 million in donations to support victims and to fund prevention programmes. RENATE, Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking & Exploitation, for example, are celebrating the tenth anniversary of their founding this year. Further details can be found in the Arise Foundation's 2018 Threads of Solidarity report that provides data for the UK.

Impressive as this front-line work is in Europe, covering prevention, rescue, re-habilitation and re-integration, Women Religious are also active on the front-line in source countries that feature notable levels of child and exploitative labour such as India, Philippines and Brazil. The work here is an integral part of the wider anti-slavery movement. India faces similar problems to Sri Lanka and Women Religious have created a network between Religious Orders,

AMRAT, that extends between the two countries (AMRAT means life giving water in Sanskrit). It has over 200 active Sisters and many other committed members. AMRAT uses regional coordinators to plan local strategy. The worst examples of labour exploitation come from the poorest Indian states, Orissa, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkand, with sexual trafficking into Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. Sister Dhanam, for example, recently rescued 300 children, returning them to their parents and schools from slave labour conditions making holiday greetings cards and bhindis. Seasonal workers on tea estates take on highly exploitative jobs in the off-season as domestic servants with only neighboring religious congregations to help them. There are comparable networks in Brazil working in a cell structure, Northern Mindanao in the Philippines which has an anti-trafficking secretariat and, for example, in NGOs in Albania that do pioneering work training the police.

These front-line organisations have experience, skills, personnel and proven effective methods and they are addressing gender-based exploitation. Their problem is funding. Their work does not exactly fit the ideal project for the big international development agencies. The existing human rights organisations can find working with particular religious groups problematic. There is probably the usual unwarranted fear of proselytism. On the other hand religious organisations are not used to selling their work with convincing data illustrating measurable success. The newly formed Arise Foundation, based in London, is committed to getting funding through to those who do the front-line work, documenting their successes, and refining their fundraising.

Kevin Bales, Professor of Contemporary Slavery, and Research Director of the Rights Lab at the University of Nottingham, says “Arise has spotted a gap here. The crucial work of sisters and their frontline networks have been forgotten for too long. They give their lives to this cause. Supporting their vocational

commitment is a no-brainer and a fantastic bargain for those who have the eyes to appreciate its change making power. We in the academic and policy communities have been saying for decades that we can't defeat slavery without strengthening civil society. These sisters are quietly, steadfastly showing the way". This Easter, as the Catholic Church is reeling from abuse scandals and their cover-up, this is a story that is unlikely to be told in the mass media. For those for whom nuns are figures of fun or stereotypes in Hollywood movies, it is a story worth hearing. I do not think Pope Francis asked Sister Bonetti to link meditation on the pain and suffering of human trafficking to that in the story of Holy Week absentmindedly. He has made the poor and excluded the constant focus of his papacy. The work of Sister Bonetti and the many Women Religious around the world are fulfilling that mission.

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4.8 Pope Francis: Antidote to Populism?

24/9/2019

It should not only be Catholics who think the Pope is an important global leader today. In a world where the behaviour of powerful heads of state justifies retrieving the label "moral hazard" from the economists, an international figure who can, and does, speak truth to power, who tries to model the virtuous life, and speaks to 1.25 billion followers, should be listened to and taken seriously.

Yes, sexual abuse has gravely eroded the moral authority of the Catholic Church and changed popular perceptions of it. The failure for many years of episcopal leadership to understand the profound damage caused to children by sexually predatory priests, their overriding concern to "protect the Church" and prioritise forgiveness for perpetrators over safeguarding, is an

abiding scandal. That this kind of response is shared with other large institutions is no excuse. Whilst bishops were in denial or “protecting the Church” in dereliction of their duty to children, secular society was tightening up its protection of children, a special focus of divine love in Christian teaching.

Pope Francis inherited the child abuse scandal. For some time, it seems, he could not believe that prominent colleagues had behaved so wickedly. This was a bad mistake, one which he has admitted and has tried with limited success to rectify. He has not been helped by the continued revelations of bishops’ failure to act rightly when faced by the criminality of members of their clergy, nor by trials of high level clerical perpetrators. Blame clericalism, solidarity of a religious officer class if you like - and clericalism certainly facilitated this conduct - it was a tragic betrayal of the values promoted by Catholicism.

Sexual scandals are not the Pope’s only troubles. He has another Pope, the former Benedict XVI, in his back garden. The title “Emeritus”, as if Benedict had just retired from the University of Tübingen, doesn’t help, though the Church does have some emeritus archbishops. Inevitably Benedict’s emeritus presence, with his refined, academic theological insight, provided the Catholic critics of Pope Francis, not least in the Curia, the Vatican’s central government, with a focus for their opposition to his conduct of the papacy. Unlike Benedict, Francis does not steadfastly promote rigid doctrinal positions. But his critics demand public intellectual assent to the truths of the faith as they see them. The Pope’s idea of leadership is to model the imitation of Christ. His critics snipe away at his openness to change, his emphasis on social justice, and openly attack him in the manner of a political faction. The first to demand loyalty to the former Pope, they have been the first to show disloyalty to the present

one.

Francis would have none of this. In his tweets he refers constantly to God's love and forgiveness. He believes the place of the Christian is living on the periphery, beside the poor and rejected, open to the pain of divorced Catholics unable to receive Communion, and of gay people in Church circles experiencing subtle, and not-so-subtle forms of clerical rejection. For him the human person is the focus of the Church's concern. I watched him shake hands with 300 people after a Vatican conference, dog-tired. People are his priority. His visits to migrant detention centres, his invitations into the Vatican of the homeless, the washing and kissing the feet of prisoners in Rome's Regina Coeli prison, emphasise his preaching of God's love. He is not play-acting.

Pope Francis's message of compassion for the poor and marginalised is meant for the whole world as his recent visits to Mauritius, Madagascar and Mozambique demonstrate. He goes to the periphery following the biblical prophetic tradition. "Listen to this, you who trample on the needy and try to suppress the poor people of the country" (Amos 8:4).

But the Curia sees itself as at the throbbing heart of Rome, is at the Church's authoritarian centre, and had seen off many former Popes who tried to reform it. As the recent BBC programme "Inside the Vatican" captures so well, the Vatican is far too human to neatly fit the stereotype of bureaucracy. But its formal culture, precious, nuanced language and affectations, often belie this humanity.

Pope Francis does not hesitate to speak truth to Curial power, does not mince his words both off-the-cuff and in allocutions, and often forgets that bees come to honey. Clergy in the Vatican City State on the west bank of the Tiber may need to encounter the "smell of the sheep" – Francis' call for

them to act always with pastoral concern - but their work offers them little chance to do so. It is probably no exaggeration to say that some Curial officials hate him. He appears independent of Vatican structures alien to him, as if has spent five years, as one friend put it, riding someone else's bicycle.

So why should the secular world listen to Pope Francis? Simply because, at this time of international crisis, he is an outstanding counter-cultural leader with a steady moral compass and vision. Politically this has meant conflict, nowhere more than in his support for migrants and asylum seekers. Then there is *Laudato Si*, his second encyclical published in June 2015, which puts the Church in support of the scientific evidence for climate change. *Laudato Si* has already mobilised Catholics around the world in pursuit of climate change prevention and provided a distinctive backing for Christian participation in the global movement. Francis has denounced the "blind and destructive mentality" of those burning the Amazon rain forest. The populist President Jair Bolsonaro now has his Agência Brasileira de Intelligência, ABIN, keeping a careful eye on what he calls the "leftist and liberationist" Brazilian bishops involved in the Amazon Synod in Rome. Saving the planet and his option for the poor means conflict with powerful forces.

Pope Francis's recent appointments as Cardinals demonstrate his commitment to improving relations with Muslim communities: Lancashire-born Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, fluent Arabic speaker, member of the missionary Society of Africa, the White Fathers, and former President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID), removed by Pope Benedict, now working in St. Vincent de Paul parish in Liverpool; the Spanish historian of Islam, Bishop Miguel Ayuso, currently President of the PCID,

and Archbishop Cristobal Lopez of Rabat where Catholics make up only 0.1% of the country's predominantly Muslim population. Such appointments represent commitment to eliminate prejudice and bigotry which endanger peace.

For the many who seek in vain an antidote to the rise of populism, with its orchestration and amplification of hatred, suspicion and fear, the Pope's is a voice which speaks from and to the heart, reaching beyond the arcane language of Catholic theology and ethics into "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of the current age. The Pope's is a voice that has not been muted or silenced by the dreadful scandal of sexual abuse, as has the voice of so many bishops. Nor should it be. Pope Francis does not just speak to and belong to Catholics. He intends his message of love and compassion, which is far more than vague exhortation, for the whole of humanity.

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4.9 Religion in 2019: Declining or Reviving?

26/12/2019

A British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey for 2018 gave an increase in respondents saying they had no religion up 21% from 1983 to 52% (a BREXIT-thin majority). We seem, if only as far as box-ticking, to be a secular society so religion is unlikely to feature in an end of year round-up. Least of all after Britain's intensely absorbing political upheavals.

Religious correspondents are the first to go when newspaper journalists are cut - which seems odd when events described as "Islamic terrorism" make the

headlines. The last detail of Manchester City's defensive tactics is required knowledge for an informed public. But the strategy and organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood compared with that of Da'esh?

Sexual abuse by 'people of faith' reaches the front page. Or controversial statements by religious leaders like Chief Rabbi Mirvis' outspoken attack on Jeremy Corbyn. But unlike America where Right-Wing evangelicals helped bring Trump to power, thanks to the solid values of the UK Evangelical Alliance, we are spared stories of Christian support for the political Right. The significance of faiths' social action is missed.

Indifference to, or ignorance of, the work of people of faith to alleviate the suffering of the poor in Britain, and in the developing world, may have bottomed out. There is the work of the Muslim development agencies in war zones, Zakat, Muslim philanthropy during Ramadan, the work of street pastors combatting knife crime, Christian groups and individuals of all denominations helping refugees and economic migrants, care for the homeless and destitute, (33,000 projects run by the C of E and some 8,000 parishes supporting or running food banks). This sometimes provides a sentimental story, around religious festivals. As do the Salvation Army who not only sing carols but quietly co-ordinate, for example, the work on sexual trafficking in this country. The impact is huge if hidden.

The founder of L'Arche, Jean Vanier, died in May. His work with - their words - people with intellectual disabilities, is little known outside religious circles. And one of Vanier's sayings is more than pertinent for Britain 2019: "Many people are good at talking about what they are doing, but in fact do little. Others do a lot but don't talk about it; they are the ones who make a community

live.”

The contribution of religious ideas to the common good should not be underestimated. Pope Francis’ second encyclical, *Laudato Si*, (*On Care for Our Common Home*), published in June 2015, has percolated down throughout the Church and beyond, generating climate change action networks. In April Francis met with Greta Thunberg encouraging her to “go ahead”. In June he held a conference in Rome on climate change for government ministers and scientists. In October a controversial Synod on the pan-Amazon region showed he wanted *Laudato Si* implemented whatever the backlash from the Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro. If 2019 was notable for other than an acceleration of Britain’s descent into a “vortex of decline” (Will Hutton), it is for the gap between government action on climate change and the growing public anxiety about its widening into a scandalous gulf.

2019 was also the year when antisemitism and the two ill-named phobias, Islamophobia and ‘Christianophobia’ – like spiders? - broke into the public domain with a vengeance, and became politically significant. This was not just a phenomenon damaging the Labour Party. The European Right has made a comparable mark on Germany. The causes of hostility were different for each religion. For Christianity, beginning and end of life issues, together with gender and sexuality, remained the war-cry for illiberal liberals and the Left. The message from the Bishops of England and Wales on the General Election, a clear statement of Catholic Social Teaching which many would endorse, made abortion its first bullet point alienating its secular readership. Increasing anti-Muslim sentiment, dividing society was an important goal of ‘Islamic terrorism’ – partially achieved. Half of those re-

ferred to the mentoring programme of PREVENT show signs of neo-Nazi influence.

Hate-speech directed at religious faiths has led to a worldwide rise in persecution and violence. The magnitude and extent of persecution of Christians, 245 million suffering to some degree worldwide, was highlighted by a report by the Anglican bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen in November. While the persecution of Muslims, predominantly by other Muslims, has been intensified by war in the Middle East, this focus on the plight of Christians was a first. That Jeremy Hunt, then Foreign Secretary, commissioned this report on religious freedom is a step forward.

Pope Francis has continued flagging up his priorities, the poor and inter-faith reconciliation, in his visits, speeches and actions. He continued to improve relations with the Muslim world while visiting the UAE and Morocco. He was shunned by the Orthodox in Bulgaria. He cemented his relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who visited Ebola-stricken areas of the Congo in November. In another brave *démarche* they have both indicated their intention to visit war-torn South Sudan. This initiative follows a moving religious retreat to build peace, held by them both for Salva Kiir, South Sudan's Catholic President, and his rebel former Vice-President, Riek Machar, a Presbyterian, in the Casa Santa Marta hotel where Francis lives in the Vatican. The Pope's kissing the feet of the two Congolese leaders, acting out his vision of leadership, was worth many words.

Archbishop Welby, a task-oriented purposeful man, shares the Pope's commitment to reconciliation and has the same gift for the spirituality of symbolism. His

prostration in Amritsar made as an apology for the 1919 massacre during a visit to India in October, was another reminder of the special nature of Christian leadership. “The souls of those who were killed or wounded, of the bereaved, cry out to us from these stones and warn us about power and the misuse of power”, he said.

So the profile of religion in 2019 has been, to say the least, complex. Decline in belief and practice may have levelled out at an all-time low. The British Social Attitudes survey for 2018 found only 1% of young people, 18-24, identified themselves as C of E. Figures for youth in the Roman Catholic Church, more of an identity because of Catholic schools, will be higher. As Pope Francis writes in a March exhortation to young people: “A Church always on the defensive, which loses her humility and stops listening to others, which leaves no room for questions, loses her youth and turns into a museum”.

A new interest may have been sparked, thanks in some measure to Archbishop Welby and Pope Francis. But we will have to wait until the New Year to tell. With apologies to Nietzsche, God is not dead. Though religious journalism may be on its last legs.

See also "God is not Dead" TheArticle.Com 25/12/2019

4.10 Catholicism & British Politics

15/2/2020

Fierce debates about Catholicism's place in public life invariably omit the positive contribution that Catholic social teaching could make to our politics. Discussion gets stuck – understandably but with much sound and fury – on contemporary issues, the beginning and end of life and sexuality, a minefield for politicians. But the Catholic tradition is wider and richer than that. And, after a period when the content of politics was reduced to Leave or Remain, could Catholicism provide ideas about the kind of society we might wish to live in?

Catholic social teaching developed in the 19th century in response to the condition of the European working class, revolutionary threats, the rise of Marxist analysis, and the emergence of Communist Parties and trades unions. In his 1839 pamphlet *On Modern Slavery*, the French Abbé, Félicité de Lamennais highlighted the damaging dependence of what he called 'the proletariat' on Capital. Whilst the young Marx was studying the history of philosophy, a Catholic priest was already placing the 'proletariat' politically centre-stage.

In June 1869, the Bavarian Bishop Wilhelm von Ketteler preaching at a pilgrimage chapel in Hesse to 10,000 workers, denounced "anti-christian liberalism" and advocated worker associations on the model of British trades unions. His sermon was part of his committed engagement with social democracy and contemporary political debates. Ketteler anticipated the key themes of later Vatican social pronouncements: he introduced the term 'subsidiarity' - meaning that central government should only do that which local government was unable to do effectively.

A line can be drawn from Lamennais' passionate tracts, through Ketteler, to Pope Leo XIII. The Pope's *Rerum Novarum* (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour) published in 1891, was the first of a series of papal encyclicals, a self-consciously organic tradition leading to today and Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* on the threat of climate change. In the 1880s Cardinal Henry Manning, concerned about the Irish migrants living rough around the Liverpool docks, was a further influence. Manning openly sympathized with striking dockers and mediated between unions and employers in the 1889 Dock Strike. The foundations of a living teaching tradition, open to development in new and different socio-economic contexts, were laid in the 19th. century.

Fast-forward to the 1960s and an inter-governmental conference on trade and development held in Geneva in 1964. Two speakers received a standing ovation. One was Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Argentinian hero of the Cuban Revolution. The other was Louis-Joseph Lebret, a Dominican priest from St. Malo where he experienced the poverty and struggles of the small Breton fishing community.

The conference established a new UN agency, UNCTAD. Lebret helped Pope Paul VI write his farsighted 1967 encyclical on trade and development, *Populorum Progressio*, the Progress of Peoples. Benefitting from the prestige of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, Catholicism was again engaging authoritatively with contemporary problems and politics. Over 55 years later *Populorum Progressio* stands the test of time.

Ferment in Catholic thinking about poverty jumped from Europe to the developing world, notably Latin America where social movements were reacting to the brutality of military dictatorships and oligarchies supported by the CIA. From this revolutionary crucible came renewed interest in the Bible, with its themes of justice, and the birth of Liberation Theology.

Several core social principles from Latin America were cautiously adopted by Pope John Paul II, always suspicious of the bureaucratic communism he experienced in Poland. That seeking justice was fundamental to the Church's mandate to evangelize just as much as charity, that solidarity with the poor was a central Christian virtue, that the poor should 'make their own history', rather than be its collateral damage, were ideas which entered the bloodstream of the global Church. Implementing these ideas in practical action and policies in Europe proved difficult.

The Catholic Church has been engaged in a long-running political conversation with socialism for over 175 years, at a Vatican level for 150 years. In 1990 when I talked with Gorbachev's religious advisers as the Soviet Union was crumbling, they were acutely aware of the coming vacuum. "Our communist ethics are dead", they bemoaned, "Christianity will have to provide the moral cement for society". They had not foreseen the future role of the - State - Russian Orthodox Church.

Today some Chinese universities are very interested in the political ideas of the 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas, ideas he inherited from Aris-

totle. Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, his teaching manual, devoted many pages to justice. Thomism seemed to map out a possible path to the harmonious society.

Catholic social teaching promotes several priorities: first to uphold the value of work, vocational labour, and worker rights, sometimes honoured in the breach, other times, in dramatic interventions, such as *Solidarność* in Poland; second, a critical distinction between “productive” and “savage” Capitalism. In short, the priority of human dignity, the Common Good, People over Profit. Too bad if Britain finds this politically uncomfortable.

Such general prescriptions and axioms, human dignity, the common good, social justice, require down-to-earth detailed policy implementation to take on socio-economic life. The political theorist, Professor Maurice Glasman, claims post-war Germany took this path: subsidiarity reflected in federalism with considerable devolution to the *Länder*, and in regional and local banks; non-conflictual industrial structures embodying co-partnership between employers and workers (*Mitbestimmung*); more recently, reflecting Catholic concern for migrants, the appointment of city integration commissioners for immigrant communities. Britain went its own way.

One caveat: Catholic Social Teaching is not a holistic get-yourself-out-of-moral-bankruptcy card when playing Monopoly Capitalism. As post-war Germany illustrates, it can give direction to society and economics. General de Gaulle tried to adopt a policy of ‘association’ and then ‘participation’ for workers in industrial management but failed. Britain’s economy, skewed heavily towards finance capital, and stuck after Empire with the dominance of the City of

London, has barely tried.

This socio-economic vision which Catholicism proposes informed the early days of the European Union whose founding fathers were disproportionately Catholic. Whether they like it or not, British Catholics are part of this story. Not an ideal identity for drawing a needy audience to Catholic social thinking in a secular Britain, officially Protestant, having rejected membership of the European Union.

See TheArticle 14/02/2020

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4.11 Imagination: From John Lennon to Pope Francis 27/4/2020

“Remember that the future has a memory. So try to bring the future, to memorize the future, to anticipate the future, with science, of course. Use social sciences, ecology, economy, health, politics, security, projections, but also use your imagination.” This was the advice from Pope Francis to a 50-year old Argentinian priest from Buenos Ares, Father Augusto Zampini Davies, Adjunct (supplementary) Secretary to the Vatican department for promoting issues of social justice and development. Francis had appointed Father Zampini in early April to lead a new Vatican Coronavirus Response Team. One of its roles is drawing on the Catholic tradition to start imagining and planning for the post- Covid-19 world. This team will report directly to the

Pope.

The Prefect of the Vatican department for promoting Integral Human Development, which houses this team, is a Ghanaian Cardinal, Peter Turkson, formerly Archbishop of Cape Coast. I first met him at his home in the city of Cape Coast where, accompanied by the Archbishop of Accra, Charles Palmer-Buckle, they sang a very creditable rendition of John Lennon's 'Imagine' for his visitors. Cardinal Turkson's father was a carpenter and his mother sold vegetables in the local market. He knows what poverty is and holds some controversial views. He has not been wary of ruffling feathers in Rome by promoting the need for economic structural change and reform of the international financial system.

A close colleague who worked with Cardinal Turkson for six years after founding the African Jesuit AIDS network and coordinating Jesuit efforts to combat HIV in sub-Saharan Africa is the Canadian Jesuit Cardinal Michael Czerny. During 1990-1991 he courageously stepped into the shoes of one of the Jesuits murdered by the Salvadorian military at the University of Central America to lead its Institute for Human Rights.

Bureaucracy is not noted for prizing imagination highly. And the Vatican, of course, is nothing if not a bureaucracy. But the members of the Integral Human Development department and of Pope Francis' Response Team do not do fit the stereotype of the Vatican official.

There is also something that feels a little outside-the-box, but comfortably home-grown, about Father Zampini. He served as a priest in a Pimlico parish,

Holy Apostles, not far from Chelsea Bridge in London, strongly influenced by the developmentalist, Amartya Sen, he took his Master's Degree in Economics and Development at the University of Bath in 2010, and later did research at the Margaret Beaufort Theological Institute in Cambridge, a centre for lay theology. He has honorary degrees from Durham, Roehampton and Stellenbosch. I first met him at Roehampton trying gamely to convince his audience that Argentinian 'theology of the people' was based on popular piety and so should not be mixed up with liberation theology which drew on Marxist thought.

Why all this personal detail? Well, stories about the Churches usually provide little insight into the people behind official roles and titles. They are presented as figureheads doing bad things the reader will deplore or good things the reader is expected to applaud. But Church officials do not necessarily fit the stereotypes which shape readers' expectations. Personality matters.

The Pope's sense of the pivotal importance of the current moment is evident here. Zampini reporting on the task of the Response Team given him by Francis said "He (the Pope) also says this has to be an opportunity for something, for the common good, for what we call the common good,"

What can be expected of this Vatican Response Team? CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, the Rome-based global umbrella body for national Catholic agencies serving the poor, will be supporting the initiative. But Zampini's team is only the size of a small department in a medium size NGO. It will need to

work with like-minded bodies such as the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact and with experts in different disciplines in a variety of universities and institutions. But when it comes to imagination, size is not determinative. Indeed creativity sometimes thrives on solitude, or is generated by small teams with vision.

Imagination which is in short supply in normal times sometimes flowers in a crisis. The history of the Catholic Church is a story of innovation and imagination clashing with or at least worrying bureaucracy. A radical Jewish sect becomes a Global Faith, Religious Orders oppose Rome, Worker Priests, Liberation theologians oppose the conservatism of religious leaders, Women Religious escape their confinement and pioneer educational, medical and social services, and so on. The Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez once said that we should “drink from our own wells”, not an advisory to stay at home, but to draw on the wealth of experience, ethical reflection, spirituality and tradition in the Church. And this implies, amongst other things, significant redistribution of wealth, transfers of money from military and armament expenditure, as well as more comprehensive debt relief for poorer countries.

As Father Zampini says, we “can’t go back to repeating mistakes of the past, when crises were exploited to reaffirm the superiority of some at the expense of others. That’s what happened in the 2008 crisis, when we saved the banks instead of the investors.” He has a daunting task ahead of him but a popular Pope behind him. We should wish him well.

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4.12 A May Day MayDay: Catholicism & Workers' Rights 1/5/2020

Traditionally today is May Day, the Workers' Day. Though it has somehow got moved to May 8th. For almost 135 years the Catholic Church has officially been a seemingly improbable advocate of workers' rights. Repudiation of Socialism and socialist thinking, partly explain Pope Leo XIII's famous landmark encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition of the Working Class) published in 1891. But, with genuine concern for the plight of workers in industrial societies, the Pope proposed what today is called "a living wage", and put the Vatican's support behind "workingmen's unions and associations", our trades unions. This kind of advocacy of what amounted to workers' rights was new to Popes.

Until the 1950s, the Vatican saw the 'social problem' as essentially a matter of individual behaviour, the relations between employers and employees, between capitalists and labour. The deployment of Christian virtues by both sides, the fulfilment of their reciprocal duties, would bring just socio-economic relationships and a harmonious society. The Church recognised the class structure of industrial society; Marxism was primarily anathema because it promoted atheism and secondarily because of the way it promoted class conflict whilst the Church's goal was social harmony and order.

The French Revolution's attack on the Church sowed fear of revolution in

general. But in his 1839 pamphlet *On Modern Slavery*, the remarkable French Abbé and philosopher, Félicité de Lamennais, later to leave the priesthood under Vatican censure, placed the abject dependence of the proletariat on Capital at the heart of social concern. The Bolshevik Revolution and Stalin's subsequent ruthless elimination of religion and religious leaders and believers created the further fear of what communism and dialectical materialism meant in practice. For the Church, it confirmed its fear of the proletariat, or at least, the anti-clericalism of revolutionary movements. It became imperative elsewhere not to "lose the working class", or rather to try to regain it. Only genuine, religiously motivated, concern for workers' rights and pastoral concern for their human dignity could achieve that. Communism came to sum up for Rome what the Church must combat in its social teaching and practice.

The Church's rejection of class conflict was in many ways self-defeating. The industrial era had generated a class differentiated society, each class with its different milieu or culture. The Church's pastoral strategy needed to acknowledge and understand how these different milieux functioned, their language, values, demands, and expectations.

A young Belgian priest, Joseph Cardijn, later made a Cardinal, founded the J.O.C. Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique (JOC), Young Christian Workers in 1926. Its see-judge-act methodology introduced to the first JOC organised groups a way of deciding on what action to take respecting their particular milieu. Instead of a paternalist and essentially individualist approach, calling for social justice for workers from virtuous employers, Cardijn sought the immersion of lay activists in the worker milieu and mobilisation of workers to procure their

legitimate goals and rights.

Immersion in the life of industrial workers, or agricultural labourers, revealed to the young participants that class conflict was an undeniable reality. Young Christian Student groups were drawn into supporting workers in their demands. The same experience befell the post-war French worker priest movement of the 1950s, begun by the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, Emmanuel Suhard. His Mission de France – to evangelise the working class – put committed priests into situations where they inevitably became militantly engaged, sometimes in leadership positions, in trades unions. The movement was banned by Rome in 1954, not very successfully and worker priests still exist today. Suhard's worker priests had created an almost irresolvable conflict between parish ministry, contained within the episcopal, hierarchical structures of the Church, and worker ministry which made radical demands on the priests involved tending to place them – uncontrolled - outside parish structures.

Latin America proved fertile ground for Catholic action based on Cardijn's methodology. Here the dynamics were different from Europe. Except for Chile and Argentina, a well -developed industrial working class was only just forming. The Church in the 1950s began to combat communist mobilisation of agricultural labour and peasants. This endeavour was most advanced in rural areas of North-East of Brazil. And at first, it involved educational approaches, through Catholic radio stations. But the pastoral strategy evolved, much aided by Paulo Freire's radical educational methods – described in his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - into mobilisation of peasant groups and creation of Basic Christian Communities. Un-

like Europe, a small but critical mass of bishops were involved and supportive of the progressive theologians, led by the diminutive bishop of Recife, Dom Helder Camara . A similar process was underway in the Philippines.

The Brazilian experiment had emancipated itself by the 1960s from being a reaction to communism and had become a comprehensive pastoral plan of action. Agricultural workers' rights became inextricably linked with questions of land tenure and ownership, the plight of landless peasants, and opposition to imported US ideas about development and modernity rapidly encroaching on Brazil's national politics. Out of this ferment came a key strand in the origins of Liberation Theology which started with the conviction that in the divine plan the poor must 'make their own history' even in the midst of brutal military repression. It was a theology that drew on a distinctly Latin American experience and a variant of Marxism associated with the writings of the Peruvian José Maria Mariátegui. There was a linear path traceable to the creation of the Workers' Party (PT) that took power in Brazil under Ignácio Lula da Silva in 2003.

Despite the savagery of military dictatorships in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Brazil, for example, in which trades unionists and leaders of peasant movements were brutally repressed, the rejection of class conflict, or at least the desire to seek other ways of realising human rights, continued amongst most Latin American bishops and in Rome. Conservative bishops, the Vatican and powerful evangelical Churches lined up to attack the liberation theologians. But on the side of communists and socialists there was a thaw: a growing acceptance of radical Church organisations in Brazil,

with the murder of Church workers and leaders - such as Oscar Romero - threatening to make Marx's 'opium of the people' claim about religion redundant.

Reflection on the development of thinking on workers' rights in the Catholic Church should give pause for thought this May Day. There is a lot more to think about than how St. Joseph the Worker ran his carpentry business. But I doubt if sermons will be preached this weekend about workers' rights in the gig economy and in the post-Covid-19 world. It is time to send out a mayday call: Catholicism is distorted when treated as necessarily the natural ally of capitalism. This assumption must be historically called in question.

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4.13 The Tired, Old Secular-Religious Divide 14/5/2020

"The Church seems to have mobilised no-one". The NHS is our "new national religion". These two repeated refrains in the media from many who should know better, in different ways, disparage the Churches' response to the Coronavirus pandemic. When it comes to Christian institutions and their leaders the gloves seem to come off. Is this a bi-product of pervasive anxiety about the pandemic and anger at our plight? Or is discussion of religion a hallowed exception to the convention that words have meaning while conclusions and criticism should be based on evidence, analysis and study?

The NHS does embody, and embodied, the values of care, compassion and human equality shared with the Churches – in a predominantly secular coun-

try. Some months ago in a blog, I described the NHS as the most important custodian of, what was then, the subject of considerable public debate about ‘British values’ and thus national identity. That does not make the NHS a ‘new national religion’ - unless the word religion is voided of much of its content. We do not call British troops who have died in combat in the Middle East in poorly armoured vehicles martyrs. We call them heroes just as we call NHS staff, and others, who die in the course of putting themselves in danger, doing their job courageously with inadequate protective equipment, heroes.

True, it is remarkable that the NHS still manages to embody and express British values in the eyes of the public given the pressures put on it in the last decade. It is doubtful that the upper reaches of the Conservative Party really share this view of the NHS. Andrew Lansley as Minister of Health, thanks to the lazy, hands-off acquiescence of Prime Minister David Cameron, was allowed to waste some £4 billion making his destructive mark on the NHS. Out of sight of the general public Lansley dismantled health planning structures, causing several years of chaos, in order to hand over hospital commissioning to GPs. Community care and GP services, the key to good health care, were starved of funding; life expectancy, a recognised measure of health services’ effectiveness, particularly amongst the poorest, began to decline.

After 2010, austerity, underfunding and rising demand accompanied culpably inadequate recruitment of additional nurses and doctors to replace those retiring. Then came the massive distraction of BREXIT ushering in an inexperienced, incompetent and unprepared Cabinet. We now know the con-

sequences. The public, had it been given the full picture, would have had reason to doubt that the Conservatives cherished and relied on the NHS as much as they did. But the Labour opposition was too busy opposing itself. The wonder is that the public and, with great heroism, health and care workers, have managed to cling to the values embodied by the beleaguered NHS at this time of crisis and after this battering. A million people offered their help as volunteer responders with others turned away.

One reason for the failure to acknowledge the extensive pastoral work of the Churches undertaken by small active groups of Christians and Christian-inspired organisations, such as Church Action on Poverty, is that it is below the radar, one which detects only weighty ecclesiastical bodies. The absence of religious correspondents from the staff of nearly all newspapers is a contingent contributory reason. Only Popes, Archbishops, and Cardinals, on the move or speaking out, especially when the media consider they have a right to be saying something, for example at Easter and Christmas, gain attention. And they have been accused of not being sufficiently prominent in making comforting pronouncements about the pandemic. Yet this is clearly a time in which “preach the Gospel with all your heart and mind and sometimes use words” applies.

The under-reported reality is a permanent and formidable mobilisation of Christians working in what might be called the informal hospitality sector. Food banks, hot meals from church kitchens and night shelters in parish halls for the homeless, are now so commonplace they have become unnoticed. Another invisible mobilisation is that of the already existing chaplains - from

different faith communities - visiting prisons, hospitals and care homes. Then there are the Christian volunteers making sure the elderly living alone are provided for at the level of material and social needs. The ecumenical YourNeighbour.org, for example, is a support hub linking people to a thousand churches responding to local needs created by Coronavirus. And you can add to this the Churches' continuing work with trafficked people and refugees who are even more vulnerable to levels of exploitation and infection at present.

Thousands of Catholics will be reading the following, or similar words, in parochial newsletters and bulletins this week linking them to the St. Vincent de Paul Society: "SVP - CORONAVIRUS OUTREACH: As this crisis escalates, we want to provide our parishioners with as much support as possible. If you are self-isolating and need assistance with shopping, collecting prescriptions, transport, chores at home or any other tasks, please call our parish SVP phone number and we will organise assistance".

Scorn is easily poured on the Christian preoccupation with creating 'community' but it's difficult to find another word to describe the groupings of people coming together from different walks of life to keep the poor and disadvantaged alive during the pandemic, local Councils, business leaders, faith communities. Try, for example, the Blackpool Network of Churches now producing three meals a day for 80 people in Operation Need to Feed. Multiply by several hundred for similar work in which the Churches deploy their assets and play an important part around the country. What is that if not community action? And why should there be virtue in the Church 'going it alone'.

A notable and positive thing about this terrible pandemic is the bringing together of people with outstanding, and sometimes heroic, secular values with people from faith communities reared in different religious ethical traditions. “I’ve been inspired by how our Christian community has responded to this crisis” London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan, said at Easter. Tendentious, superior jeering at the Church of England, a favourite target, merely perpetuates the tired and facile secular-versus religious divide. When people act for the Common Good, divisions fall away. . . . That is if they aren’t carelessly promoted.

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4.14 Pius XII & The Holocaust: Open & Shut Case? 21/5/2020

Imagine being a historian with the Vatican Archives, 1939-1948, opened by the Pope, shut again a week later? That’s what happened in early March this year as Italy went into COVID lockdown. The tens of thousands of unexamined boxes promised insights into the Vatican’s relationship with Nazi Germany, European Jewish communities and the US intelligence agencies, and above all, the silence of Pope Pius XII on the holocaust. But it will be many months before the archives are opened again.

Meanwhile Tom Heneghan of the Washington Post, the Reverend Professor Hubert Wolf, an enterprising and well-prepared historian from the University of Munster, with a team of seven members of his theology faculty, studied some 120 documents, speed-dating with past Vatican officials. A week’s research produced - unsurprisingly - not a great deal: just enough for an article from Father Hubert in *Die Zeit Weekly*, 22 April , which was first

picked up by the Israeli Haaretz and The Times of Israel, and a piece for the religious press by Heneghan. Neither Wolf nor Heneghan felt that, after waiting 75 years, it might be better to wait a while longer before rushing into print.

But Father Hubert has a track record for spotting a good story when he sees one. His 2015 book *The Nuns of Sant’Ambrogio* delved into an astonishing mid 19th century scandal. Translated as *Le Vice et la Grace*, as the French title suggests it featured sex and mysticism with murder thrown in for good measure. He must be a popular lecturer.

The story that emerged from the archives to date is essentially as follows. On 27 September 1942, Myron Charles Taylor, President Roosevelt’s personal envoy to the Pope, delivered into Pius XII’s hands a report on the mass killing of Jews in Poland, in the Warsaw ghetto and in Lviv (Lemberg). The report had come originally from the Jewish Agency for Palestine in Geneva; the US was seeking confirmation from Vatican sources. The US also hoped the Pope would denounce the deportations, concentration camps and killings. On 10 October the Vatican replied that it had heard of such Polish reports but had no way of verifying the information. But the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Archbishop of Lviv, Andrey Sheptytsky, had brought earlier reports to Rome, and an Italian businessman had brought three photographs and described the terrible slaughter to Monsignor Giovanni Montini, future Pope Paul VI, at that time working in the Secretariat of State. Fr. Hubert unearthed some papal advisers’ reactions indicating that they thought the reports might be exaggerated. Were they in denial? In genuine uncertainty? Or looking for an excuse not to commit? Who

knows.

On December 17th 1942, acting on further information provided by the Polish Government in exile in London in a Report, *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland*, the USA, Britain, Soviet Union, and ten other allied governments, issued a Joint Declaration by Members of the United Nations. They wrote of the ‘bestial policy of extermination’, but Foreign Secretary Antony Eden, informing Parliament, in carefully crafted language cast doubt on whether anything could be done about it.

Then Pius XII, towards the end of an overlong 1942 Christmas Message, cast in customary turgid Vaticanese, spoke about the “hundreds of thousands of persons who, without any fault on their part, sometimes only because of their nationality or race, have been consigned to their deaths or to a slow decline”. He did not mention the Nazis or the Jews by name. But there wasn’t much doubt to whom he was referring. Berlin would have got the message. Hans Frank, a Nazi General hanged at Nuremberg, had as the Governor General of Polish Galicia in August 1942 sent 50,000 Jews from Lviv to the extermination camp at Belzec. Heavy Allied bombing of German industrial plant and civilian areas had begun in 1942 and, safeguarding Vatican neutrality, Pope Pius also voiced concern for the victims of aerial bombardments.

What are we to make of the work of the University of Munster’s team? Was the Haaretz headline “Pius XII deliberately ignored report on the Holocaust” fair comment? The Pope had indeed remained silent about the Polish holocaust until Christmas. But his silence is the longstanding bone of contention, the

conundrum, not breaking news. Remember the furore about John Cornwell's Hitler's Pope? Hubert's recent findings don't add very much to our understanding.

Following Pope Benedict XV who described the First World War, as 'the suicide of civilized Europe' and tried to mediate, Pius XII continued the Vatican policy of neutrality. A key adviser to the Pope, Monsignor Angelo dell Acqua, thought the American demarche was political rather than humanitarian in intent; they had to be careful not to jeopardize Vatican neutrality. A joint Jewish-Catholic team of historians, with no access to key the sealed documents, reported in 2000 that it was not clear if the Vatican realised that the mass killings were the implementation of a planned extermination of the Jews, "the final solution", genocide. Calculations are not exact but some six million Poles died in the Second World War, three million of them Jews. The inter-faith team of historians could only wonder whether in 1942 there was any clear sense in the Vatican that they were watching the planned total extermination of the Jews, rather than Jews bearing the brunt of killings which included the disabled, the mentally incapacitated, homosexuals, opponents of the Nazis, the Roma and 'inferior races/nationalities'. Though it is hard to understand the latter as anything other than a reference to genocide by another name.

Apologists for Pius XII and his unwillingness to unreservedly support the Allied denunciation of the extermination of the Jews still stress his aim of protecting the Church and his fear of making the situation worse. The Pope's caution made little difference on the ground. Over 400 Polish Catholic priests were killed between Dachau opening in 1933 and VE Day. Bishops

in Nazi-occupied countries who denounced the rounding up and deportation of Jews to their deaths fared better. For example, Bishop Pierre-Marie Théas of Montauban, just north of Toulouse, was arrested by the Gestapo for helping French Jewish communities and promulgating a pastoral letter protesting deportations. He was released after ten weeks. He became President of the newly formed Pax Christi in 1945, and was later honoured by Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial to the Holocaust, as Righteous among the Nations.

The poignant stories of ordinary Catholics across Europe, and in Rome itself, who sheltered Jews and helped them escape should not be used as a counterweight to the failings of the Pope or his poor judgement. Nor to excuse those Vatican officials who shared the contemporary, demeaning to damaging, stereotyping of ‘races and nations’, stereotypes that today leave them open to the charge of antisemitism. The heroism and martyrdom of lay Catholics should be allowed to speak for itself. The archives will speak for the Vatican. We will have to wait until the archives are re-opened to find out whether they shed more light or leave us no less perplexed and saddened than today.

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4.15 CIIR: A Radical Loss

11/6/2020

An on-line history of Progressio, formerly the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), was published a week or so ago. Do have a look: <https://www.progressio.org.uk/what/legacy-publication-organisations-life-and-work> Open hyperlink and click on A Record of Change in a Changing World.

When Progressio closed two years ago I wrote a valedictory piece - see below. I hope it may encourage you to dip into the online CIIR history put together by Jon Barnes, a former regional manager for Latin America and the Caribbean. It tries to capture a dimension of Catholicism during and after the Cold War.

A Radical Loss

Writing the obituary for an organisation, rather than a person, is a daunting task. That might be because the seventy-six years that span the life of The Sword of the Spirit, from which the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) budded off in the mid-1960s, finally to be renamed Progressio, merit a proper contextual history. Or it might be because I worked there for twenty of those years, fifteen of them as general secretary six on the southern Africa desk; that puts a strain on my objectivity. For both reasons important people, programmes, events may get left out, and other characteristics, perhaps less acknowledged, emphasised.

Last things first: Progressio's demise, sixteen years after I left, is sadly mundane. No great dramas. It ran out of money. Some £2 million of its £5 million plus budget came from a partnership with the UK Ministry of International Development (DfID), and this ended.

It was ever so. I remember trying to widen the donor base, knocking on bishops' and convent doors, seeking those elusive German Benedictine Abbots with gold bars under their chasubles, trying to convince American Catholic millionaires that they didn't really want to endow a chair in Mediaeval Studies, or a chapel, but contribute to Africans having a decent life. But most of the

Sisters had their elderly to care for - some helped - only one or two bishops got out their cheque books as I came in the door - bless them – and I never found those rich Abbots hiding in the Teutonic mists and forests. My “elevator-pitch” with American Catholic millionaires didn’t get me past the first floor. Changing the name to Progressio to widen donor appeal in 2006 didn’t work. I suspect those imagined secular supporters thought Progressio was an Italian football team.

But enough of the petty humiliations of fund-raising in competition with the well-oiled machines of CAFOD and VSO which, in some ways, occupied the same charitable terrain. CIIR was “at the edge” and radical. Under the leadership of the late Mildred Nevile, it built up a substantial reputation for advocacy in southern Africa and Latin America, and for outstanding grass-roots development work in a range of different countries. It was some measure of the times that the most outstanding Catholic woman of her generation, Mildred, never, until her death, received the recognition from the Church that she merited. The State, at least, gave her an MBE which she promptly lost in her car, holding up celebrations as staff scabbled in the front seat to find it.

What made CIIR different was what made Mildred different. CIIR was deeply imbued with the tradition and spirit of Catholicism, but not inward-looking or “churchy”; it looked outward never fretting for long about episcopal support or what bishops were worried about. Yet a high regard for the work of the organisation was often forthcoming. I used to have a private joke with Cardinal Hume, our patron, whom I visited regularly. I’d greet him and then ask: “has anyone been complaining about us”. He’d pause to think then say

“I don’t think so”. I’d reply “then we aren’t doing our job properly, are we?” Then we’d laugh. Though odd Catholic and non-Catholic members of the Tory back benches were occasionally apoplectic at what we did. That was comforting.

Looking outward meant that CIIR was able to see the UK in the context of a global Church and different cultures and ways of thought as diverse as those of Yemen, Zimbabwe, El Salvador, South Korea, Philippines, and Somaliland, to give a sense of the contrasts. Instead of “little England” there was “big global South”, not the cosmopolitanism of the international bankers but of the barrios and favelas of Latin America and Philippines and the black townships of apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia. Being part of a global Church was not an academic idea but a lived reality. The CIIR’s sending of volunteers to share their skills to strengthen civil society around the world, chosen entirely on professional rather than confessional grounds, meant that for many years CIIR had outstanding representatives in eleven different countries feeding their ideas and experience back into the life of the organisation.

This global feedback coupled with close bonds of friendship forged with workers for justice and development in local Churches, from archbishops to lay workers, could not but shape the implicit theology of the organisation. CIIR became a thoughtful promoter of liberation theology, and its contextual variant in South Africa. Sister Pamela Hussey SHCJ, now 96, with whom I was privileged to share my years in CIIR, said in her book *Freedom from Fear* that Christian commitment was “redefined, tested, and purified in the crucible of repression”. She was awarded an MBE for her work for human

rights in Latin America - which shows how little influence the CIA had with the UK honours committee. We hosted –clandestinely - theologians from around the world who wanted to reflect on the nature of this repression, out of which came the 1989 Damascus Document. My sadness in retrospect is that this reflection did not embrace the comparable martyrdoms of the communist world and eastern bloc. The Cold War divided the Church no less than the world; our focus was the military dictatorships and oligarchies. The Sword of the Spirit, had originally had set the trend doing education work to combat the intellectual flirtation of some Catholics with fascism in the 1940s.

For CIIR, being intellectually colonised by the developing world was no bad thing. It meant that keeping theology, politics and development in separate silos was impossible. This was reflected in everything CIIR attempted. It also kept the organisation “on the edge”. Internally it had to negotiate the differences between a volunteer programme that saw itself as “secular” and an advocacy programme that saw itself, more accurately, as religious. But the secular programme could be seen as an expression of “the option for the poor” and the religious programme worked with liberation movements and, for a while, the South African Communist Party. The latter was as secular as it gets even if it often wanted Archbishop Hurley to preside over funerals of leading members of the African National Congress (ANC). He used to complain to me that on these occasions the red flag somehow always appeared behind him as photographs were being taken.

Whether working with the Rhodesian Justice and Peace Commission or get-

ting the general secretary of the Southern African Council of Churches, Frank Chikane, back across the South African border – he had been forced to “skip” for several months to UK - or smuggling in a de-bugging device for the United Democratic Front, CIIR activity was necessarily borderline. Our partners’ lives were at stake. The South African security police poisoned Frank Chikane but he survived. CIIR was borderline only in relation to the less life-threatening world of the UK politics. The organisation also had colleagues there: the late Liberal Peer, Pratap Chitnis, Labour M.P. John Battle, and Lord Chris Patten then a Conservative M.P. was a constructively critical supporter. We even sent Jeremy Corbyn to East Timor to monitor the elections.

CIIR was a feminist organisation. This Catholic feminism was what motivated books such as *Life out of Death: the Feminine Spirit in El Salvador* by Sister Pamela Hussey and Marigold Best, a Quaker, published in 1997. One of the experiences of accompanying friends through struggles for freedom in the closing years of the Cold War was to see how little the liberation struggles of the time resulted in the situation of women changing however much they had engaged in the struggles. But above all, feminism informed much of the skill-share work. Some of the most outstanding country representatives were women. The projects that volunteers worked in came under, in one way or another, the heading of “women’s empowerment”. This covered a range of programmes from masculinity training in Latin America to advocacy training in Zimbabwe. Likewise some of the unseen and unsung heroes in the Church’s opposition to apartheid, and against the illegal occupation of Namibia, were women in the Grail.

Looking outward, forgetting yourself, thinking beyond yourself, learning from

the other, being at ease on the periphery, at border crossings, I would describe as the spirituality of CIIR (though I don't like the word). It could take you further into the thick of things than your emotional resilience was ready for, but I think there was something about this experience that took you in the right direction, moving towards a glimpse into the meaning of discipleship.

There was most poignantly in the last decade, some sharing in the Poor's perennial sense of betrayal. I often think of how the CIIR office was a venue for the leading players in the Zimbabwe Patriotic Front and how betrayed the Zimbabwe people are today by what power did to this political elite. I also remember going off to the EU to negotiate funding to the South African Churches with the great Afrikaaner Dutch Reformed Church opponent of apartheid, Beyers Naude.

There were meetings with Thabo Mbeki, then leader of the ANC in London pubs also creating a sense of hope and common endeavour. There were the friends who were tortured because of their active opposition to the apartheid regime, and how they and the people of South Africa have been betrayed by the political party they sacrificed so much for, and then had to suffer a corrupt thug, Jacob Zuma, as the President of their nation. I am sure colleagues who worked in Latin America and in programmes in Yemen, destroyed by war, or Latin America destroyed by drugs cartels, will have experienced similar thoughts and sadness. These are memories that, with hindsight and without mercy, correct visions of what is possible with our unredeemed humanity, with a politics that is about power and not about compassion and the powerlessness of the Cross; these are memories that humble and should not and cannot be air-brushed

out.

In short CIIR was a Cold War baby, living in the interstices of a divided Church and a divided world, getting its hands dirty. The geopolitical change when the Cold War ended in 1991 nearly upended the organisation. It was a struggle to “redefine, test and purify” its mission in the new context. Nobody was any longer interested in funding work in Namibia or South Africa anymore and Latin America slipped off the map at DfID. We focussed for a while on truth and reconciliation commissions. There was continuing work to be done with returning Namibian, Zimbabwean and South African refugees. We began a new programme on the Church’s role in countering the drugs trade. My successor retained the grossly underfunded advocacy theme by the overseas programmes training our partners in advocacy, and, of course, the CIIR’s gender work continued. Her successor began a new programme with VSO of working exposure trips for young people.

Much of the present work will be handed over to other organisations. Just as CIIR went under, there is a certain irony in having the Latin American Pope we could have done with twenty years ago, clear about the implications of the option to the Poor, and who could answer honestly that, yes, the Curia were complaining about him. I think many radical Catholics feel about Pope Francis a little like Afro-Americans felt about Obama: we made it but not much has changed. The radical vision of Catholicism, rather than its conservative or liberal version, remains a vision - with a few wonderful exceptions.

I would like to think that CIIR will be seen historically in the same category as the Christian Institute in South Africa: radical, at times distinctly “edgy”, ready to take risks for those in the thick of it, stumbling into Grace. But also producing world class analysis of development, political analysis of fast-moving revolutionary change, and good theology. Its Overseas Programme changed innumerable lives. I can hear Mildred Nevile saying without fuss: “It had its day. Something else will take its place”. I really hope so.

See *Doctrine & Life* Dominican Publications, Dublin, November 2016

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4.16 Does the Catholic Right Want to Choose the Next Pope? 29/7/2020

Right-wing and Left-wing, traditionalist and progressive, are terms often used to describe the nature of the fault lines in contemporary Catholicism. Millions of Catholics, of course, don’t fit these categories. Pope-centred Catholicism of Right-wing traditionalists, loyal to a fault, is fast disappearing. Open opposition to Francis has broken out.

Catholics believe that the Petrine Office, as the name suggests, was first given to the apostle Simon Peter whom the Gospel writers present as a man who made mistakes. By getting it wrong the reader is shown how to get it right. But on the vital faith-defining and definitive question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter expresses his faith: “You are the Messiah. The Son of the Living God” and receives the response “Thou art Peter and upon this Rock

I will build My Church”.

Catholics are traditionally loyal to their popes. On 19 April 2005, the day Cardinal Ratzinger was elected Pope Benedict XVI, I was homeward bound waiting on Lille-Europe Eurostar platform. A call came from BBC Radio Ulster. Would I comment live in about forty minutes? Should I say what I thought? That the choice of Cardinal Ratzinger perpetuated Eurocentrism within a global Church, or loyally point to him being a pious, principled and sophisticated theologian? The drum-beat of an Ulster Protestant pipe band beat in my head. Or was it just a stress headache? Eurostar saved the day. The train went into the Tunnel.

From the first moments of his papacy in 2013, Pope Francis, Argentinian of Italian origins, personified a global Church. He brought to Rome a manner and direction derived from Latin America. Its piety, theology and “option for the poor” permeated the Ignatian spirituality of his Jesuit training. It showed in his unostentatious life in Rome, in his inclusive, sympathetic treatment of gay people, and in his open-minded approach to other contested issues in the Church. He was fiercely critical of the clericalism and closed culture he encountered in the Vatican. His first visit was to highlight the plight of refugees on Lampedusa. Within four months of his election, Francis was addressing Brazilian bishops in Rio, highlighting the needs of indigenous people, and praising the pastoral work of the Brazilian Church. Two years later in 2015 came his encyclical *Laudato Si* on care for the planet which established his global standing as a leader of opinion. There was much traditionalist grumbling but no outburst.

Public criticism emerged a year later. Fear of his weakening the ban on divorced and remarried Catholics receiving the Eucharist, an internal matter, surfaced four traditionalist Cardinals who sent Francis a letter with five questions, seeking answers. The Pope had deliberately, and unusually, raised an issue without settling it. On 8 April 2016, Francis published *Amoris Laetitia*, (The Joy of Love), an ‘apostolic exhortation’ developing his thinking in the light of the recent Synod on the Family, encouraging ‘pastoral mercy’, in other words compassion - or laxity - depending where you stood. This time 19 Cardinals wrote to challenge his approach. And the letter was leaked.

Conflict, which had never gone away, intensified in 2018. A former Vatican ambassador to the USA, Archbishop Carlos Viganò, published a 7,000 word document accusing the Pope of blatant lies and calling for his resignation, a call without precedent. Viganò claimed that Francis knew that Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, a prominent US Church leader with access to Presidents, was suspected of sexual abuse of seminarians, and Francis had been culpably slow in forcing him to resign. Viganò went on to blame a homosexual conspiracy which he alleged had taken over the Vatican. An accomplished conspirator himself, he had, whilst the Pope was visiting the USA in September 2015, snared Francis into a meeting with Kim Davis, a Kentucky county clerk who had served five days in jail for refusing a court order to issue a marriage licence to a gay couple. The cultural conflicts of the USA were a communications minefield for the Pope. The meeting, of course, hit the headlines. And Francis sacked Viganò.

In the USA right wing electoral politics chime with right wing Church poli-

tics. Not long after George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis on 25 May, Viganò sent a public letter to President Trump. In it the Archbishop set Black Lives Matter and the Covid Lockdown in an apocalyptic campaign by 'the children of darkness' against 'the children of light'. Dating from the 4th century, this Manichean imagery of spiritual warfare - unconnected to skin colour - illustrated the mental world Viganò inhabits. Trump tweeted in reply that he was "honoured".

Opposition to Francis in the USA moved on from a call for resignation to political organisation. The US Better Church Governance Group began 'political opposition research' scrutinising Cardinals' records for what they termed a 'Red Hat Report'. This year, two books both called *The Next Pope* were published in the USA. One, by the veteran lay conservative, George Weigel, is sub-titled "the office of Peter and the Church in Mission". Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, sent this book to all the world's 222 Cardinals (124 are eligible to elect the next Pope) thanking the publisher. The rejection of Francis' entire approach is not too disguised. The other book, by Edward Pentin, is subtitled "the leading Cardinal Candidates". Pentin is Vatican correspondent for the US National Catholic Register – linked to the Republican religious mouthpiece, Eternal Word Television Network, ETWN. And the leading candidates are 19 Cardinals opposed to Francis. Do none recognise the inappropriateness of this *démarche*?

The right wing of the Catholic Church has learnt lessons on impropriety from US secular politicians. Viganò writes of the "deep Church... that betrays its duties and forswears its proper commitments before God", the

invisible enemy within, modelled on the “deep State”. You would be forgiven for thinking that the Republican/Catholic Right coalition can’t wait for the Pope to die and that their aim is to control the election of the next Pope. The traditionalist view used to be that this was the role of the Holy Spirit in the papal conclave.

The Catholic Left is often charged with ‘meddling in politics’. But they remained loyal over the years despite censure. The American Catholic Right has binned traditional loyalty. It is now introducing the methodology of politics as well as the ideology of the Right into the Church.

Francis will be 84 on 17 December. Ad multos annos.

See TheArticle 28/07/2020

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4.17 Joseph Cardijn: A Man Who Changed the Catholic Church 17/8/2020

A whole generation of Catholics formed in the Young Christian Students and Young Christian Workers movement is receding into history. Guiding their practice was a very simple formula: See, Judge, and Act. It was proposed by a Belgian priest, Joseph Cardijn.

Catholicism is on the communitarian – not collective – end of a spectrum with individualism at the opposite end. Cardijn's formula took seriously the different milieu, social contexts, that people live in and which affects them. People in factories, university libraries, or on sugar plantations have very different experiences of life. The Cardijn approach profoundly influenced the way Catholics - from bishops to landless agricultural labourers - set about analysing and trying to change society for the better.

The See, Judge, and Act, method became a valuable way of life for the lay apostolate, and a simple formula for analysis reflected in many official Church documents following the Second Vatican Council. 'See' meant asking the questions: what is happening, why is it happening, who is affected? 'Judge' posed questions such as what do you think about all this, what are your values, beliefs and faith saying about it? What should be happening? And 'Act': what would you like to change, what action will you take now, and whom can you involve? So Young Christian Student activists had an off-the-shelf method to communicate with Young Christian Workers in social movements.

Cardijn spent his life teaching Catholics how to engage with the problems of the day, how to bring about change, how to implement Catholic social doctrine. This, very briefly, is his story.

Joseph Leo Cardijn was born in November 1882 into a working class family in Schaerbeek, today a suburb of Brussels, and into the midst of a deep recession. His parents were concierges for an apartment block. The new baby was sickly and sent to live with his grandparents in Halle, a Flemish town south of the capital in the process of industrialisation with artificial-silk works, paper

mills, glass works and a mining community. His parents later joined him there and his father, despite being illiterate, started in business as a coal merchant; Joseph remembered reading aloud to him from *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical on capital and labour.

Joseph Cardijn earned his first pocket-money delivering sacks of coal in a hand-cart. He remembered feeling sorry for the young teenage workers he saw setting off to long hours in the mills and mines, and for his schoolmates, for whom debilitating labour awaited. Despite his parents' expectations that he would shortly join his school friends in a Halle factory, he asked if he could stay on at school and then train for the priesthood. In the late eighteen nineties Father Adolphe Daens, who formed the radical *Christlijke Volkspartei* (Christian Peoples Party) - and was defrocked - had been an important influence on Cardijn.

As a seminary student in Malines, Cardijn was profoundly shocked by the hostility of his old friends, now factory workers or miners. They felt he had abandoned them for the clerical life and joined the owners who exploited them. Cardijn felt that his friends had turned away from the Church losing their childhood innocence and choosing vice. The death of his father in 1903, exhausted by a life of toil, deepened his sadness. Perhaps there was a touch of guilt. His choice of the priesthood meant that his father had lost his son's help in the business so had not been spared the drudgery of manual work in old age. At his father's deathbed he vowed to consecrate his priestly life to the evangelisation of the workers.

Rapid developments in Belgian national politics were occurring and the Ma-

lines Major Seminary was feeling the ferment beyond its walls. Christian Democrats were emerging and challenging the existing conservative Catholic Party. Seminary students attended a series of international conferences, 1886, 1887, 1890, on the plight of workers in Europe's economic crisis created by the recession. They heard inspiring talks by the Dominican, Georges-Celas Rutten O.P., later to become general-secretary of the Confederation of Christian Trades Unions which was supported by Archbishop of Mechelen (Malines) Désiré-Joseph Mercier. Workers' rights, they learnt, were of concern to Christians.

Cardijn's thirst for knowledge as a seminarian, his energy and leadership, worried the Seminary Rector. Was he a 'modernist', attracted to the hotch-potch of ideas condemned by the Vatican in the 19th century? Archbishop Mercier sent him to the University of Louvain (Leuven) in August 1906 to study under Professor Victor Brants, a national figure who in 1892 had founded a department of sociology and economics, where he argued that Thomas Aquinas' central theme of justice demanded 'lower class representation' in Parliament and mitigation of the impact on workers of the long depression of the 1880s. A month later, Mercier relented and approved Cardijn's ordination, aged 23, as a priest.

The Christian Democrats saw the nascent Christian worker movement an ally in their opposition to conservative Catholic politics, socialist trades unions, and the Flemish language nationalists, the flamangants. The newly formed Catholic unions dedicated May 15th to *Rerum Novarum*, to rival the May Day celebrations of the Socialist unions. Such an organisation was the ultramontane Arthur Verhaegan's *AntiSocialistische Werkliedbund*, an anti-Socialist working

man's association formed in Ghent in 1891. In 1895 the Belgian bishops officially endorsed these 'autonomous workers' organisations', the Catholic trades unions. This was the complex political world into which Cardijn was decanted as a young priest.

Up until – and beyond - the turn of the century in conservative Catholic circles nostalgic visions of Christian trade guilds and a harmonious corporate society were still powerful. But to keep pace with the Socialist unions, Catholic workers' associations, were increasingly developing beyond mutual insurance schemes and palliative measures towards demands on employers, in the style of British trades unions. For a long while the Catholic unions retained a distinctive Catholic culture rejecting class conflict, emphasising respect for human dignity and the equal human worth of capitalist and labourer. This did not seem to impede their popularity. In Brussels between 1909-1913, Socialist Unions expanded from 8,000 to 18,000 members while membership of Catholic unions increased at a slightly faster rate, from 1,900 to 5,000. This growth was partly attributable to the appointment in Catholic dioceses of directors to new social secretariats. The dream of guilds was receding – but not extinguished.

There are cogent arguments that corporatist thinking and the creation of separate Catholic unions split the worker movement and weakened opposition to fascism. But there are counter arguments that union 'pluralism' encouraged competitive democratic procedures and ways of thinking. Catholic unionism did not encourage proto-fascist views in Cardijn. After a year at Louvain, he spent 1907-1912 as Vice-Rector and teacher at Notre Dame de Basse-Wavre school, an experience he described as 'a providential mis-

fortune' and which drew him further into the realities of working conditions and the significance of the Socialist unions. His leisure time was taken up by visiting mills and co-operatives talking with workers. He had not forgotten his pledge on his father's deathbed, and was not to be diverted.

In August 1911, Cardijn experienced the 'best retreat' of his early priesthood – his term - a visit to Britain's unions towards the end of a violently repressed major transport strike, the first 'bloody Sunday', that had brought 3,500 troops to Liverpool on the orders of Home Secretary, Winston Churchill. The young priest spent a fortnight in London at 425 Mile End Road, HQ of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside & General Labourers Union (DWRGLU), listening and learning, an experience that was to define his thinking and action. Cardijn was deeply impressed by Ben Tillett, founding member of the Independent Labour Party, general-secretary of the DWRGLU, and later Labour MP for Salford North, who spent time with him just after the London Dock strike had ended. "He [Tillett] wants first to create the strongest, the largest, the most united organisation in which he wants the workers of the whole world to feel solidarity of their interests and the unconquerable power of their union", Cardijn noted approvingly. "Moreover he wants for every worker in particular to carry out a work of personal education, a work of moral and intellectual uplift so that each worker may feel the pressing need of more well-being and more justice". In the 1920s there were strong echoes of Tillett within Cardijn's passionate advocacy of the needs of young Christian workers. On his side, Tillett himself had been moved by Cardinal Manning's personal support for him and the cardinal's role as peacemaker in the 1889 dock strike.

In 1912 Cardijn was appointed as a curate in the parish of Laeken, North-West Brussels, containing 13,000 factory workers. Abbé Cardijn set out to know them. He formed clubs for working women where factory conditions were discussed. Three years later he was appointed director of social action for the Brussels area.

In 1914 after the German invasion of Belgium, Cardijn publicly condemned the deportation of Belgian workers to Germany. He was sentenced to six months in prison where he took the opportunity to read Marx's *Das Kapital* alongside the Bible. He had a second spell in prison shortly before the end of the War. Meanwhile, he had diverted one of his women workers' groups, mainly young seamstresses, a section of the League of Christian Women workers, into providing intelligence for the Allied forces.

Abbé Josphe remained throughout committed to youth formation and this would also cause trouble. In 1919 he founded *La Jeunesse Syndicaliste* with three lay colleagues whom he had met in his parish at Laeken, Ferdinand Tonnet, Jacques Meert and Paul Garat. This new youth organisation was the precursor of Young Christian Workers (YCW); the name was changed in 1924 to defend against allegations that this was Socialism in a Chasuble. The period 1924-1925 was critical for the emergence of the YCW; by the mid-1930s it was becoming a worldwide movement. On the one hand there were the Christian Trades Unions, on the other the official Belgian Catholic Youth Association, the ACJB (*Action Catholique Jeunesse Belge*). For the bishops the idea of separating young Catholic workers into a separate organisation from the official national ACJB was

anathema: 'dividing the Body of Christ'. Cardinal Mercier supported this view though he respected Cardijn's commitment to the Christian formation of workers. The ever resourceful Abbé Joseph, tacking between rival priorities, was in a difficult personal dilemma: he must have official approval for his new organisation. A visit to the Pope Pius XI was his last card.

In Rome, the story goes, Abbé Cardijn broke away from the crowd going in to a general audience and managed to be heard the Pope in his private rooms. Pius XI was the son of a silk factory owner. Cardijn knew all about silk factories. And at this meeting the Pope revealed his passion for the evangelisation of the working class and his admiration for JOC/ YCW, almost certainly unaware of the disputes amongst Belgian Catholics that swirled around it. Pius XI later coined the phrase famous in the 1930s: "the Church needs the workers and the workers need the Church" which chimed exactly with Cardijn's conviction. In 1935 the Pope gave his support to the JOC/YCW as an 'authentic model of activism and social action'.

Cardijn had hoped his movement would influence the Socialist trades unions. By the mid-1930s the JOC had reached the Americas, Africa and Asia with, in 1938, an estimated 500,000 members worldwide. But it would be wrong to equate such numbers with influence within the secular trades unions. Gregor Siefer in his brilliant study of the worker priest movement *The Church and Industrial Society* wrote that despite the genuine enthusiasm of the YCW only a small avant-garde of the JOC successfully penetrated the secular worker milieu to any great extent. But the wider Cardijn methodology penetrated

the whole of the Church in a remarkable way, particularly in Latin America, Philippines, and South Africa under authoritarian regimes where trades unionists were targeted by police and the military. The worker priest movement, on the other hand, also hanging loose from traditional parish ministry, ploughed a lonely furrow in Europe before being – ineffectually – banned by the Vatican.

The YCW had 2 million members in 69 countries by 1957 when a World Assembly, the first YCW International Council, brought 32,000 young members together in Rome. The See, Judge, and Act method was endorsed by Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magister* and *Pacem in Terris* in the early 1960s. Its emphasis on analysing the local context in the light of the Gospel became second nature to the progressive bishops of Latin America. And as students linked up with militant workers, things began to change radically led by the bishops of the NE of Brazil. This, was where Cardijn's methodology had its most impressive impact and in no small measure, contributed to the formation of the Partido dos Trabalhadores PT (Workers' Party) which took power under the Presidency of Lula da Silva in 2003.

Joseph Cardijn was made a Cardinal by Pope Paul VI in 1965, two years before his death and burial at Laeken, his first parish. He made a significant contribution to the Second Vatican Council. The bishops and theologians preparing the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, (Joy & Hope), were explicitly instructed to use his See, Judge, and Act method of analysis. The process for his beatification started in 2013. In a time of fear and lack of historical humility, he has much to be

remembered for and to teach the Catholic Church today.

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4.18 Fratelli Tutti: A Pope's Advice to a Catholic President 8/11/2020

“Pope Francis warns us against this phony populism that appeals to the basest and most selfish instinct. He goes on to say politics is more noble than posturing, marketing and media spin. These sow nothing but division, conflict and bleak cynicism. . . .”

President- Elect Jo Biden

A month ago in Assisi Pope Francis launched his third encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. It opens by explaining the significance of the title. “With these words St. Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the Gospel”. The Pope is undertaking the same endeavour for today’s world .

Francis was prompted by discussions in Abu Dhabi with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Ahmed al-Tayyeb, which resulted in a joint document on fraternity in February 2019. Timely? Serendipitous? At a time of global pandemic *Fratelli Tutti* is much more than that.

Most people would agree that 2020 is a major historic turning point. Coronavirus has exposed the failure of contemporary political practice to engage with present reality and the limitations and dangers of how we live in the world with each other (one broad definition of politics). Pope Francis’ let-

ter is long but, compared to most Vatican documents, easy to read though it does take time to digest. Its timing, in the midst of a global crisis, may spur people who are not Catholics to read it and consider what it says.

The world's a stage on which national leaders strut, too often little people facing big problems by creating bigger ones. By coercing or manipulating their own citizens, the worst turn politics into a vehicle for furthering their own interests, power, and wealth. The corollary to this bleak picture is the commonly expressed opinion that politicians are 'all the same', 'all liars', 'all in it for themselves'. It's not true. But even the word 'politics' has become a pejorative term. This has encouraged a fatalistic retreat into private life. *Fratelli Tutti* is a powerful call to hope and public action.

The Pope's begins his letter by focusing on values, communication and relationships. Politics, he writes, "often takes forms that hinder progress towards a different world". "Political life no longer has to do with healthy debates about long-term plans to improve people's lives and to advance the common good, but only with slick marketing techniques primarily aimed at discrediting others". Inspired by the great 13th. century Dominican theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, for whom the purpose of politics is the promotion of justice and the common good.

Francis' aim is to promote the values and virtues that will create a "better kind of politics". But the internal structure of the letter comes from a different no less venerable source, St. Augustine, the North African 4th.

century bishop of Hippo, his reflections on the collapse of the Roman Empire. Augustine describes living in two worlds, what he called the Earthly City and the City of God; two different but interwoven mind-sets and milieux, with all humanity living in tension between them. Pope Francis describes how he sees these two cities today in a trenchant critique of populism and neo-liberalism and, implicitly, communism. In an encyclical that does not lend itself to headlines, the gulf he portrays between the two cities is more shocking than the openness and gentleness of his style at first suggests.

The encyclical rests on the Catholic concept of the Common Good, how to live with and for others to achieve the fulfillment of all people and ‘the whole person’. The ‘universal destination of goods’ is not a slogan for Amazon’s marketing. It’s Catholic code for saying that the ‘goods of creation’ are meant for all humanity not just the rich. In the 1992 edition of the Catholic catechism private property is to be recognized by the State for the purpose of supporting the common good. It is a secondary natural right. St. Ambrose, a 4th century bishop of Milan, put it more bluntly: "You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich”.

In Francis’ usual warm and simple style, and in contrast to the Vaticanese of early social encyclicals, *Fratelli Tutti* sets out a comprehensive and comprehensible account of traditional Catholic social teaching. He also develops some of its fundamental ideas. Damaging, or in Christian terms sinful, systemic economic and social structures that create injustice were dis-

cussed in synods of bishops in the 1970s. Apartheid would be a good example of such a system where individuals are not necessarily fully responsible for the suffering caused by legal, economic or social structures. But, internally, there was anxiety that 'structural sin' might undermine the Church's emphasis on individual sinful acts -for which each person is responsible - and, for Catholics, acts or thoughts that required sacramental confession.

Pope Francis refuses any sharp binary division between the individual and the social as expressed in extreme forms of individualism, libertarianism, or in communism. His vision is communitarian and he emphasizes personality-in-relationship. "Each of us is fully a person when we are part of a people; at the same time, there are no peoples without respect for the individuality of each person". This enables him to talk about solidarity and, uniquely, 'social friendship' his terms for linking change in structures and change of heart, for example towards migrants drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan, the alien outsider pleasing to God, and moving from a 'culture of walls' to 'a culture of encounter'.

In a letter which discusses peace-making, nationalism and war, inter-religious dialogue, and the impact of technology, Francis queries whether just war theory is still applicable in the 21st.century, and re-iterates the Church's condemnation of the death penalty. His references to eleven Bishops' Conferences around the world reflect the reality of a global Church and the beginning of the end for the old Roman Eurocentric model. But he fails to deal adequately with gender equality. As in his second encyclical *Laudato Si* about responsibility for the planet, the Pope is again addressing all people who

‘share our common home’ whom he wants seen and treated as brothers and sisters. But the sisters have cause to question why not one of the nearly 300 citations in the footnotes of *Fratelli Tutti* is from a female authority or theologian.

Fratelli Tutti offers a powerful global vision of a moral map of the world, what life, politics and society should be like. Criticism has tended to focus on lack of practical proposals for implementing its radical teaching. Describing a political vision as utopian is usually a way of closing down the conversation. On the contrary, the reconciliation of the ideal with the real is simply the dynamic of working for justice. As we watch a global pandemic undermine a world of secular certainties, and see societies debilitated by conflicts, the Pope’s message is plainly one to which we should listen. As President-Elect Jo Biden said “Pope Francis asked questions that anyone who seeks to lead this nation should be able to answer”.

See [TheArticle 19/10/2020](#)

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4.19 Biden & the Bishops: Storm in a Baptismal Font? 27/6/2021

During their June General Assembly America’s Catholic bishops blundered into the US culture wars. Holy Mother Church in the USA seemed about to threaten President Jo Biden over his position on abortion. Quarrels broke out. Bishops openly questioned each others’ motives. They finally decided that work should begin on drafting a formal statement which could contain guidance on moral impediments to receiving holy communion. Such a statement could

deny communion to the President, a pious mass-going Catholic who, unlike Trump, shares the Church's position on climate change, immigration and racial justice.

This was transparently a disunited Bishops Conference, something that Pope Francis and all former Popes sought to avoid. Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), failed to find a consensus. Perhaps arguing online didn't help. The critical vote on tasking "the Committee on Doctrine to move forward with the drafting of a formal statement on the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of the Church" was 168 to 55 with 6 abstentions. Such USCCB Action Items would normally pass with fewer than ten against or abstaining.

Rather less momentous than Martin Luther posting his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg you might say. And you'd be right. Though you'd be missing an important point. Cardinal Luis Ladaria, a Jesuit colleague of the Pope and Prefect the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had written in May urging the USCCB to avoid a vote. Pope and Vatican feared the debate would become "a source of discord rather than unity within the episcopate and the larger Church in the United States". Ladaria reminded the Conference of the 'prerogatives of the Vatican' and the rights of individual bishops suggesting they discuss their approach with the bishops of other countries and seek a 'true consensus'. This, in Vaticanese, was explicit guidance meaning "don't go there". That guidance was ignored. Indirectly but surely they were defying the Pope.

The clash between America's bishops and the Pope had been some time coming and is significant for American politics as well as the Church. Catholics make up 22% of the US electorate. Strong and opposing views on abortion and gay rights are held by Christian communities and by the influential secular women's movement throughout the USA. Whilst campaigning Trump made much of Biden's support for a woman's right to choose.

Over his long career in politics Jo Biden's position on abortion has changed. In the last fifteen years he has moved from traditional Catholic opposition to abortion to a more supportive if nuanced position, distinguishing his personal views on abortion from a representative political role where he felt he had 'no right' to overrule the choices made by the majority of American women. He opposes the 1976 Hyde Amendment which bans federal funding of medical programmes that include abortion provision and is committed to defending as constitutional *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court enabling judgement, a hot issue now the court has a conservative majority.

In 2016, Catholic voters, traditionally democrat leaning, voted 52% for Trump and 44% for Hillary Clinton. But in 2020 with a Catholic candidate the Catholic vote was evenly distributed between Republicans and Democrats, though it was racially split with 67% of Hispanics voting for Biden compared to 42% of White Catholics. According to the Pew Foundation, a 2019 survey showed 77% of Democrat or democrat-leaning Catholics thought that abortion should be legal in most or all cases, while 63% of Republican Catholics believed the opposite. In a tight race every vote counts.

Archbishop Gomez, the President of the USCCB, informed the Bishops conference at their November 2020 meeting that he was setting up of a working group on relations with President-elect Biden, singling out abortion as creating a ‘difficult and complex situation’. The group operated in the shadows - nothing unusual ecclesiastically there. But disbanded after two sessions in February 2021, the Biden working group was behind the Conference’s contentious and admonitory response to Biden’s inauguration. Gomez pointed out “our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage, and gender”. Five whole paragraphs presented abortion as the bishops’ ‘pre-eminent priority’ – which incidentally didn’t mean the only priority - all in sharp contrast to the Pope’s warm congratulations.

An even more important and politically significant outcome of the group’s work was their recommendation that the bishops should make a formal statement on the general issue of ‘worthiness for communion’. ‘General issue’ avoided any explicit reference to Catholic politicians’ conduct. Whether their policies or voting record put them in a position of grave sin and ineligible to receive communion would be a ‘particular issue’. The official line is now that the document aims to address the declining understanding of the Eucharist amongst American Catholics. But the claim put about by several bishops that such a formal document had nothing to do with Church relations with Biden was, to say the least, disingenuous.

The Vatican’s position on participation of Catholics in political life, expressed in a 2002 note from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, emphasises

that abortion and euthanasia are not the only “grave matters of Catholic moral and social teaching that demand the fullest level of accountability”. Again climate change, immigration and social justice, as well as capital punishment, come to mind. The Bishops of England and Wales have followed the same principle, for example before the May 2015 general election, advising that Catholics’ voting choice “should seldom, if ever, be based on a single issue”.

In the USA the abortion issue is tangled up with both the constitutional relationship between individual states and the federal government, and funding for health care, limited by the Hyde Amendment. Under Trump, Republican-governed States increasingly attempted to restrict the application of the key enabling Supreme Court judgement of 1973, *Roe v Wade*. Several states sought to limit abortion to rape, incest and danger to mother’s health provoking powerful opposition from the women’s movement. The indirect impact of the Hyde amendment was to discriminate against pregnant women who were poor and relying on federal provisions in MEDICAID, while richer, insured, women could afford safe abortions. Hillary Clinton was the first to call for its repeal in her 2016 election campaign.

Joe Biden is America’s second Catholic president but he is the first to be open about the influence of catholicism on his spiritual, moral and political life. What an astonishing outcome if President Biden, who calls slavery America’s ‘Original Sin’ and dares to use Catholic language, should be at risk of condemnation by his own bishops. The Vatican, though, has a millennium’s worth of experience in dealing with troublesome bishops and already seems to be bringing the situation under control. In Pope Fran-

cis' words, the Eucharist is "not the reward of saints but the bread of sinners".

See TheArticle 27/06/2021

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4.20 Mind the Gap: The Pope's Radical Vision of Politics 24/7/2021

In Britain the gap between our actual political horizons and the need for radical change is deep and wide. It is that gap and not the word radical that ought to inspire fear. 'Radical' means getting to the roots of a problem not twisting, turning and tweaking as things get predictably worse. The fear comes from sloppy use of the word as a synonym for extremism used to shut down all debate.

Compared to secular leaders, religious leaders have the advantage of a traditionally accepted way of highlighting the perils of business as usual and of expounding radical approaches. The religious code word for this form of discourse is 'prophetic'. It is a word that implies not just authority for seeing into the future but more importantly divine approval of the prophet's broad-brush account of what is wrong and ethical prescriptions for changing direction and putting things right.

Pope Francis' book *Let Us Dream*, published last year as a user-friendly and personalised synopsis of his lengthy and more formal encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, is an excellent example of the prophetic mode. But his little book

has proved to be much more than that. The pandemic provided a context in which prophetic words and ideas coming from an admired religious leader, speaking informally and intimately at a time of acute uncertainty and unprecedented upheaval, would be heard and considered. The secular Press carried respectful reviews. Waves of appreciative discussion washed through Catholic social media. There was none of the usual ‘the Church shouldn’t meddle in politics’ though the book described what politics should be about but wasn’t.

The subtitle of *Let us Dream* is *The Path to a Better Future*. Not an entirely accurate description of content. Popes do not prescribe in practical detail how to get from A to B. They provide counsel on where to find and how to read the signposts. The religious code for this is ‘reading the signs of the times’, or ‘discernment’ for short. Choosing pathways, turning principles and plans into practice is the role of politicians, civil servants, policy-oriented academics and experts in various disciplines. It should be achieved in close collaboration with civil society.

The remarkable feature of Francis’ brand of prophetic writing is that it dovetails with others who start off from where he of necessity as a religious leader has to end. For example, the American political scientist Robert Putnam and the social entrepreneur Shaylyn Romney Garrett’s *How We Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do it again* and Jon Cruddas MP’s *The Dignity of Labour* go into the detail of what it will take to make absolutely vital changes. Tellingly the distinctly secular political and cultural weekly, *New Statesman*, asked the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams to review both these books.

The gap between the reality of our politics here in UK and the radical change imagined by Pope Francis seems unbridgeable. Let us Dream promotes change emerging from the margins and led by Popular Movements. “I call them ‘social poets’. In mobilising for change, in their search for dignity”, he wrote, “I see a source of moral energy, a reserve of civic passion, capable of revitalizing our democracy and reorienting the economy”. Not to be confused with populism which “denies the proper participation of those who belong to the people, allowing a particular group to appoint itself the true interpreter of popular feeling”. It is an understandable view given the Pope is Argentinian and the history of Latin America.

We get a glimpse of possibilities from the Black Lives Matter movement. But at present putting together a powerful, sustainable coalition for radical change in a British context is a daunting prospect. Progressive politics traditionally, culturally, aim at incremental changes. Finding an umbrella mobilising theme would be a beginning. Perhaps a Campaign to Defend our Democracy. There is something similar breaking ground in South Africa. In Britain It would require pulling together scattered, legal, human rights, environmental and civic initiatives.

Britain faces a particular difficulty in coming to terms with two overwhelming aspects of present reality. Firstly, we cannot and should not return to the injustice, anger and division of the old normal. But it is an inevitable reaction to the pandemic to want a return to normality. Secondly, we are in denial about our history. We want a brave and glorious past, a compensation for recent decline. “History is what was, not what

we want it to have been”, Pope Francis says in *Let us Dream* “and when we throw an ideological blanket over it, we make it so much harder to see what in our present needs to change in order to move to a better future”.

Afforded a large Parliamentary majority, those who have most control over the past, present and future today, the Johnson government, demonstrate the paradox of a British form of authoritarianism undermining the British structure of governance hard won in the past . Less accountability, more control by the few for the few, more greed and self-interest, appear as the change they have in mind. Governing in this manner requires negligible concern for truth and thus negligible purchase on reality. Its vision of a better future is refracted through the short-term good of the Party. An obvious symptom of this authoritarianism is that serious challenge, within and without the inner circle of the Conservative Party, has been, and will be, punished: by expulsions, resignations/sacking. The old-fashioned alternative to coercion is persuasion.

But at the same time, focussed on a future of devastating Climate Change, a significant and growing consensus is emerging about the urgency of radical economic transformation and the social and political reforms that must accompany it. In Germany the Green Party’s Annalena Baerbock, might even take the Chancellorship. We are seeing a growing consensus that unites religious and secular thinkers. *Laudato Si*, Francis’ 2015 encyclical, grounding the Christian Green movement in the Bible and Revelation and calling for ‘swift and united action’ provides a supportive religious commentary on the report of the UN’s 2009 Sustainable Development Commis-

sion. We need to go back to the 1960s when the Catholic emphasis on human dignity met the human rights movement for such a confluence of thinking.

Two other events give hope that popular movements are able to gain momentum and bring about change. There was the encouraging verdict of a jury in Minneapolis that at least one black life, George Floyd's, mattered enough to convict a police officer of murder. It was not just a matter of video cameras telling the story, the four officers filmed savagely beating Rodney King in 1992 were acquitted by a jury. Something had changed.

Then there was the remarkable response to the Super-League plans of twelve top football clubs. In UK demonstrations outside clubs that this should not stand several core values were voiced by the British football-loving public. Prominent was that despite a history of spectacular commercialisation football as a sport generated local community. A few multi-millionaire owners of the celebrity clubs would not be allowed to destroy this treasured expression of togetherness (it helped that for the six British clubs involved all these individuals were foreigners). Closely linked to this was that lesser, smaller clubs would be cut out from the financial benefits of the status quo in which skill and effort is rewarded with advancement, cups and big money. The giant-killer, Leicester City's spectacular 2016-2017 season, was used as the exemplar of football as the terrain of soccer meritocracy with the status quo providing redistribution of the money flowing through the system to the smaller clubs.

You might not agree with the values deployed to justify the public outrage – see Michael Sandel on meritocracy. But suddenly, community, sharing and the hopes of the less well-endowed were being brought into play in the public domain. Are these the morals of the British heart? If so, the question that comes to mind is why don't these values, held by the majority, or at least some of these explicitly held values, come into play in the run-up to elections?

True, the Pope's dream is as radical as it gets at a personal and social level. Yet he is not a voice crying in the wilderness. But if the fate of Martin Luther King's dream is anything to go by, the virtue of patience recommended by Pope Francis in *Let Us Dream*, will be indispensable. Meanwhile as the disembodied voice warns those waiting expectantly on the London Underground platform: 'Mind the Gap'.

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4.21 St. Dominic's Mission

15/8/2021

Not many democratic organisations without fanfare of trumpets can, and have, celebrated a 800th Jubilee. In August 1221, thirteen Dominicans, a good apostolic number led by the well-connected Gilbert de Fresney, landed in Kent and set off for Oxford. This month four young English Dominican friars have been marking the anniversary by walking the same route from Kent to Oxford back to the priory in St. Giles, to arrive on 15 August 2021.

Groups of 'Black Friars' (after their distinctive black cape worn over a white

habit) were already established in Paris and Bologna when the twelve reached Oxford in 1221. At the time these three great mediaeval universities were attracting the best teachers and students in Europe. The Oxford Dominicans were not just there to satisfy their intellectual curiosity but to promote Catholicism both philosophically and theologically and to grapple with Christian heresies, Judaism and Islam as required by the Order.

Part of the staying power of the Catholic Church is its ability to allow innovative religious communities to flourish in response to different historical needs and sensibilities— provided they acknowledged, or finessed, papal authority when disputes arose. The mission of the newly formed Order of Preachers, the Dominicans, was to marry faith with reason – which Pope Benedict XVI described as having ‘a natural harmony’ - and to respond in the simplicity of their lives to the poverty around them. The great *Summa Theologiae* of the 13th century Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, was intended as a compendium of Christian thought, all that any peripatetic friar might need to win the arguments and convert by reasoning anyone on the wrong path, especially those in the new towns and cities.

All very well, you might say, but what about the Spanish Inquisition, the fanatical Cardinal and friar, Torquemada, and the torture of heretics. Not much to celebrate here apart from their role in Monty Python sketches. Dominic’s own approach to the Cathars (Albigensians) in Languedoc - they believed the body and material world was evil and only the soul good - had been one of example through way of life, preaching and reasoned debate. The Pope charged the Dominicans and Franciscans with the task of inquisition only in 1231, ten years after St. Dominic’s death. By then,

however, the Church was already dealing with deviation from Catholic doctrine by fear and violence, for example in the Albigensian Crusade (1209-29). In the late 15th century the Pope appointed Torquemada as the Grand Inquisitor for a Spain now led, post-Muslim defeat, by its Catholic Kings.

Across the Atlantic one of the next generation of Dominicans, the Spanish priest, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, was pleading for recognition of the humanity and rights of Native Americans before the Spanish King, Charles 1st, and winning the argument. The Dominican Order weren't and aren't monolithic. Nor were they always in the corridors of power. Between the years 1538 and 1540 Henry VIII confiscated every single one of Britain's 57 Dominican houses. **

Fast forward to the 20th century and I will never forget my visits to the Dominicans' radical Johannesburg priory in the - ironically - named Mayfair district. In the 1980s Mayfair was surprisingly multi-racial. Everyone was poor or down-at heel not just the blacks. The local South African Dominicans had set out to find a suitably decrepit property, fitting their voluntary poverty (hence the name mendicant Orders) to their ministry to the poor. A gleeful estate agent was astonished to get the building off his hands.

Albert Nolan OP, a South African born in Cape Town and a former university chaplain, made the priory a sanctuary for Christian and other supporters of the banned African National Congress, dealing with their everyday problems and exploring the spirituality that would sustain them through surveillance

and probable arrest by the apartheid system. His vision of the Dominican vocation of preaching included participation and leadership in the influential and ecumenical Institute for Contextual Theology – influential enough for the apartheid propaganda machine to denounce it as the work of the Devil and the priory to get shot up. He was also the editor of *Challenge*, a popular and radical newspaper for the country's grassroots Catholic communities. His 1972 book *Jesus before Christianity* presented to a secular world a radical historical Jesus in the context of the time. It could be seen as a South African approach to liberation theology and narrowly missed censure from Rome because of its – unsurprising - failure to mention the Church.

In 1983 the global Dominican community showed how much they valued Albert by electing him Master-General of the Order - but only for a few hours. When he asked their permission to decline the honour in order to pursue his ministry in Johannesburg and the struggle against apartheid, they voted on it and agreed. In 2003 he was one of the first to be honoured by Thabo Mbeki's government with the South African Order of Luthuli. And after publishing several ground-breaking books of theology, in his late eighties, he is now retired.

What then of Blackfriars Oxford now home to Timothy Radcliffe, another great exponent of the Dominican tradition in his preaching and writing and former, much-travelled Master-General of the Order. Blackfriars present mission is very much the one envisioned by its 1221 founders. Attached to the priory is a Private Hall of the University owned by the English Province and base for Blackfriars Studium noted for its theology and philosophy but also its diversity

of students, teachers and postgraduate degrees. The Las Casas Institute of ethics, governance and social justice and the Aquinas Institute, part of the work of Blackfriars Hall, reflect the great names of Dominican history as well as promoting contemporary Catholic social and philosophical thinking pioneered most famously in the 20th century by Vincent McNabb (1968-1943) and Herbert McCabe (1926-2001).

There is something very attractive about the mission-oriented democracy of the Order and its commitment to the natural harmony of faith and reason, combatting the drift into the emotion-led catastrophes of our political world. The Dominican motto: *contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* (to contemplate and hand on to others the fruits of contemplation) beautifully summarise their approach. When you come to think of it, quite a good motto for humble bloggers too.

* Richard Finn's history *The Dominicans in the British Isles and Beyond* will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2022.

See TheArticle 15/08/2021

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Part II

Chapter 5

Government & Policy

5.1 Windrush: Ministerial Bungling or Moral Bankruptcy? 21/4/2018

The Windrush scandal signifies more than Ministerial incompetence: it has revealed the shocking inhumanity of our immigration policy. How can we talk about British values when we deliberately design policies that negate the values of hospitality, compassion, solidarity and justice? So far so obvious for some, so contentious for others.

But where are the ethical principles going to come from that might guide us towards putting things right? The Christian tradition might be a good place to look. A helpful start would be to read: *Fortress Britain? Ethical approaches to Immigration for a post-Brexit Britain*, edited by Ben Ryan, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, from the Christian Think Tank, Theos.

Pope Francis believes that the human person and respect for human dignity should be at the centre of policy; that the State's role in controlling immigration for the Common Good is legitimate; that host and immigrant have reciprocal obligations to foster integration within the life of a country. All long standing Catholic social teaching. But making relationship and compassion the priority, rather than keeping numbers down, a theme of *Fortress Britain*, does not harmonise easily with pressures on governments to create orderly and

non-threatening immigration flows.

Public debate about immigration swings between an emphasis on economic and cultural concerns, both contested, and critiques of multi-culturalism or assimilation. Add on recent worries about terrorism. For example, we rely on foreign labour: in the NHS, to look after old people, pick crops, sell meals, dispense our daily coffee, and hamburgers, and so on. We need foreign intellectual labour as students, entrepreneurs and to contribute to research.

Or alternatively, there is evidence at the bottom end of the wage scale, that immigrants depress earnings, however much they contribute in taxes. More than a million Poles and EU migrants arriving in a relatively short space of time are suspected of taking our jobs and our housing. That said, unemployment is at an historic low of 4.3%, and it is our building industry and governments which created the housing scarcity and homelessness by failing to provide adequate accommodation for those on low income.

Our feelings about migrants and their children are contradictory. We hit the “like” button for Indian and Chinese take-aways, Thai and Vietnamese restaurants, reggae bands, Lenny Henry, Sadiq Khan, and the Polish plumber who actually arrived on time and cured the leak. Then there is the Egyptian cardiologist and that very kind Ghanaian nurse who looked after a relative, the Bangladeshi corner shop down the road who always asks after her.

Or alternatively, we resent the noisy immigrant family in the flat above, Muslims wearing funny gear in the streets, cutting animals’ throats, failing the “cricket test”, people speaking languages we don’t understand on the bus, too many of their kids not speaking English in our children’s schools. With nostalgia for

a sometimes imaginary past, we feel that we have lost something and suspect strongly they have taken it away and, for want of a better word, we call it our culture.

Immigration's critics always frame it in terms of threat: loss of identity for the native population and unfair economic advantage for the immigrant. That is how many people think and talk about it. The ridiculous Brexit lie that we would soon be invaded by large numbers of Turks played on these anxieties. The appeal of "take back control" is that it allays anxiety about identity.

The irony is that immigrants, whether migrants or asylum seekers have experienced personal threat even more acutely, and the loss of their identity and culture back home. The migrants' similar wish to make a decent living, have better lives, propels them to leave their countries. They are people who share the ambitions of those who are most hostile to them.

Every year over 32,000 migrants are held in our ten UK detention facilities, often treated as imprisoned criminals, deprived of liberty, and, as research by Theos highlights, experience debilitating loss of hope and psychological damage. This level of criminalisation is not unique to the UK. So unfair are Home Office processes that half of asylum applicants who are denied refugee status have their appeals upheld. Meanwhile they languish for months in a moral limbo, forbidden to work and made virtually destitute. This is not an accident, it is a matter of policy.

The Windrush scandal is not at heart a matter of a Home Office not fit for purpose, a chaotic bureaucracy disposing of Landing Slips. Nor a question of who amongst State officials can make the most abject apology, who knew what and when, a problem susceptible of cure by compensation and by changing the language from "hostile environment" to the more Orwellian "compliant

environment". Those are symptoms. The root problem is policy-making in a moral vacuum.

Given current universal denunciation of the treatment of the children of the Windrush generation, there is an opportunity to step back and engage in a serious reform of immigration policy, to create an environment in which both Ministers and civil servants opt for just and compassionate treatment of immigrants.

Hospitality means, at the very least, stopping forced destitution as a disincentive to migration. Solidarity means sustaining international aid so people are not forced to migrate for a decent life taking their skills with them. Justice means fair processes adjudicating status without rejection as default position, and without unreasonable demand for documents. So it demands sufficient trained and supportive Home Office staff well informed about countries of origin. Compassion demands drastic reduction in indefinite detention and time spent waiting for a decision, as well as action to address anxiety and resentment in poor host communities.

These changes would complement the compassionate work of many in civil society, particularly the faith communities and notably the Christian churches. It would not be easy and it would sadly carry some political cost. But after Windrush many more will see it as essential if Britain is to retain some moral integrity as a modern State.

5.2 Integration: Two-Way Street or Slip-Road? 26/5/2018

“Integration is not a two-way street, but a slip road onto the motorway” Dame Louise Casey at a seminar in Brussels, 16 May 2018

In 2015, David Cameron commissioned a review of “opportunity and integration” in the UK from a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Dame Louise Casey. It was published on 16 December 2016. She had recently completed a report on the role of the Rotherham Council in dealing with sexual abuse. A one-woman antidote to the Sir Humphrey stereotype in *Yes Minister*, she told a disturbing story. The Louise Casey Review provided a powerful mixture of illuminating statistical data giving insights into inequalities and the impact of immigration on host communities. She revealed, as in her Rotherham Report, an official failure to confront acute problems concealed beneath the emollient rhetoric of multiculturalism. The language of her Integration Review shared the same refreshing directness and objectivity.

The Review drew criticism from both Left and Right despite the vast majority of it being an impressive collation of detailed empirical data about different ethnic groups, their demography, opportunities and attainments. Muslim communities expressed concerns at what they saw as an excessive focus on them. But in many instances there was little evidence that critics had read the Review in full. It was as if in a world of fake news public opinion had ceased to be interested in facts and could not countenance straight talking. David Cameron supported her conclusions but was soon to depart after the catastrophe of the Brexit referendum.

In this climate the Review was put in the “too-difficult-to-handle-at-the-moment” file by the government of Theresa May even though Dame Louise was asked

by the Foreign Office to visit France, Spain, Italy and Germany to share her approach with government officials. Finally the Review re-emerged in etiolated form within an Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper in March 2018 with a consultation period ending on 4 June. The Green Paper was on the whole a skilfully drafted mixture of aspiration plus motherhood and apple pie, with one or two of the Casey Review policy recommendations taken up. For example there was a strong emphasis on the integrative role of sport and the importance of English language teaching. Few of these good intentions were backed up by new money. Spending on English language teaching for immigrants, for example, had been cut by half since 2009, so a promised £50 million would only return provision to where it was a decade ago. This was the context in which the Las Casas Institute, Oxford, and St. Mary's University, London, invited Dame Louise Casey to speak at COMECE in Brussels to EU officials, MEPs and NGOs on May 16.

COMECE is the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, 28 countries in all, though Sweden, Denmark and Finland share a representative (the UK sent two, one from Scotland and one from England and Wales). The secretariat monitors issues of interest to the Catholic Church arising in the EU, dialogues with its constituent bodies, and does research to inform the bishops' conferences of contemporary moral issues emerging from EU's political processes.

In her presentation Dame Louise emphasised that immigration and integration should not be conflated. She described how a young Muslim woman had casually introduced herself as 'third-generation Pakistani' and reflected how it would never have occurred to her to introduce herself as third-generation Irish. Her emphasis on gender discrimination came

from solid and startling statistical data. For example 61% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are economically inactive compared with a national average of 26% and are twice as likely as their husbands to speak poor English.

Economic inequalities are revealed by employment figures. People from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black ethnic groups are three times more likely to be unemployed than people from white groups. 35% of young black men growing up in UK are unemployed. Disadvantage is not limited to the UK's ethnic minorities. Only a third of children from poor white British families, indicated by being on free school meals, achieved 5 GCSEs or more compared to two thirds from better off families.

Her second telling phrase about Muslim communities was "first generation in every generation". Traditional marriage patterns mean that there are very few mixed heritage marriages in Muslim communities because young brides are brought from the Asian sub-continent in arranged marriages. Overall British Muslims are younger in profile and much more religious than any other group in society.

Incoming communities during the last half century have settled in a dispersed and segregated way in the sense of discrete clusters in particular cities and parts of them. So some boroughs and wards have experienced considerable changes within a short space of time. For example in one ward in Sheffield there are some 6,000 Roma residents; but only 21% of their children were attending school. Given the age profiles of other immigrant populations, schools are first to experience changing demographic trends with sometimes sudden increases in children entering with negligible English and considerable impact on host communities.

The point Dame Louise emphasised here is that there is nothing new about

immigration, nor, as she didn't say but clearly recognised, anything new about alarm in host communities during the period before new arrivals successfully integrate. Net immigration is not a very helpful figure for gauging the likely impact of immigration as there is a "churn", coming and going, of – in 2015 – a million people, giving a net figure of 333,000. This tells you nothing about how many are arriving, where they come from or where they are settling. To allay alarm in host communities there was an urgent need for creative policies for integration, flexible enough to cater for the diversity of groups and locations involved and their different needs. Or in the words of Pope Francis, policies "that placed the human person at the heart of Europe".

The reciprocal obligation between immigrant and host community that Pope Francis talks about is for the host community to welcome and allow immigrants into the inside lane on the motorway. The obligation on the immigrant community is to join the flow and direction of travel of the traffic. Not a perfect metaphor, not one that all will agree with, but one that clearly defines, for debate about policy making, the nature of the reciprocity at play in what is one of the major ethical and political questions facing Europe.

As I got out of Liverpool Street station in London a few days later, about ten young black men, violinists, were playing classical music, surrounded by a sizeable crowd of appreciative onlookers. I had been talking that day in Peterborough to a young Muslim woman, born in Lahore, wearing a hijab and fasting for Ramadan. She brimmed with self-confidence and the wisdom of someone many years older, and had just applied from St. John Fisher, a Catholic School, to LSE to study philosophy and politics in London. If that isn't entering the motorway in top gear, I don't know what

is.

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5.3 Saving the Planet: Virtue by Association?

24/4/2019

I have looked at two brief videos of Greta Thunberg, the Swedish sixteen year old who sparked off the school strikes against global warming. In one she was addressing the European Parliament and in the other meeting the Pope who gave his support to the next school strike. She had travelled by train. With her pigtails and at one point near tears about the damage to the planet, she looked more like an old-fashioned child than a 21st. century teenager. Her moving and prophetic speech was received with a standing ovation by the European parliamentarians. She spoke with a disarming and fresh moral authority.

It's true the recent school strikes in Britain had been touching a chord but there was always a suspicion that the strikers had found a cool way to get off school for the day. There was nothing cool about Greta Thunberg. She resolutely embodied the concern of a generation that their future was being sacrificed by the inertia, irresponsibility and fatalism of the older generation.

When you think of it, we in the UK have stumbled into a common understanding of childhood and our moral responsibilities towards children. In a world in which actions are often described as neither right nor wrong, only "inappropriate" or "unacceptable", there is an unambiguous moral condemnation of the use and abuse of power over children. A dead migrant child on a beach, an injured child in a bombed hospital, images of sexu-

ally abused children sent round the world, evoke clear condemnation, compassion and disgust. And this is one great step away from the past for mankind. But it is as if we can only be fully at ease and of a settled mind with strong moral judgements that concern vulnerability and adult power over the child.

Perhaps these reactions to the plight of children represent a residue left of the broader Christian teaching in Matthew 5: “I was hungry and you did not give me to eat...” The strong public support for international development agencies like OXFAM, ActionAid, Red Nose Day, would suggest something of the sort. But the powerful impact of Greta Thunberg’s condemnation of adult, corporate and governmental, pusillanimity, self-interest and, yes, greed, illustrates the reality that moral demands are strongest when they express the interests of children. What more uncomfortable when we are destroying the planet to have someone looking mightily like a child telling us in the British and European Parliaments that we require “permanent and unprecedented changes” “because our house is falling apart”?

It is governments who have the capacity to bring about permanent and unprecedented changes on the scale needed to address global warming. Such dramatic changes have been made in the past and not only in wartime: universal education and the Welfare State for example. But where speed has been needed war has been the context and the goal has been destruction of the enemy. The Manhattan Project gave us the atomic bomb. But there could be peace-time equivalents of the Manhattan Project with international experts corralled under pressure to produce results, to invent effective batteries to store wind, wave and solar power, when renewable

sources are not on stream, enable carbon capture, and fulfill all the glamorous promises offered by governments as future solutions to impending destruction.

“I want you to act as if the house is on fire”, Greta Thunberg told the European parliamentarians. Can the movement begun by this Swedish Joan of Arc galvanise middle-aged politicians as well as young people? Will rapid, concerted action follow? Or is this just a series of photo-opportunities for Greta Thunberg’s audiences, virtue by association. There is a major global school strike on 24th May. It is the anniversary of the release of the 2015 papal encyclical on the environment, *Care for Our Common Home, Laudate Si* which joins concern for poverty and the environment, in a new form of solidarity. “The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is amongst the most maltreated of the poor, she ‘groans in travail’.

We had better hope that Greta Thunberg’s impact is permanent. Meanwhile, mea culpa. Will try to do better and stop grumbling about vegetarian food.

See [TheArticle.com](https://www.thearticle.com) "We had better hope Greta Thurnberg’s impact is permanent"

5.4 The Art of Saving the Oceans

1/9/2019

You feel you know the North Sea. Noisy and exhilarating in a full-on easterly, gently lapping and restful with a westerly. Not the aquamarine of Ionian waters, more the camouflage colours of grey-green and sandy waves pounding the pebbles. In Summer, young children toddling down to collect water in their buckets for purposes known only to them scream on cue as waves break near them. Little groups of holiday-makers along the beach, Londoners lily-white, keeping an eye on the youngest, contemplating the beauty; only a few swimming. An impressionist painting come to life.

There's life on the beach but not so much life in the water. Once in a while, the black doggy head of a patrolling solitary seal, checking you out before diving to periscope depth. Men line fishing early in the morning, escaping bored and fractious adolescents at home, are the first contemplatives on the beach, seem never to catch any fish larger than an inch or two. And only the soft, gelatinous bump of a Compass jellyfish by way of a brief encounter while you are swimming. That is the point; beneath the surface, even in the cradling, comforting vastness that is the sea, you sense something isn't quite right.

Roger Hardy's disturbing art installation at Snape Maltings in Suffolk, outside the concert hall, until 11 September, tells you what's wrong. In these lovely surroundings, Hardy's message is shocking. He has built a typical Suffolk fisherman's hut but with little carved figures made from wood found on the beach, lined up inside, looking out like the families who gaze at the sea on a hot day. On and around the hut Hardy has 'chalked up' information about fish and the oceans. Not fish that for sale and is available – fish that soon won't be available.

Some of the stark facts are reproduced below. They have been provided by the Siren Festival in Aldeburgh whose aim is to combine art and science to alert audiences to the perilous future facing our oceans. And they know what they are talking about. Let these alarming facts speak for themselves.

Oceans are home to nearly 95% of all life on earth. They cover 70% of the earth's surface but only 5% of them have been explored.

50% of our oxygen comes from plankton. Every second breath we take is given by the oceans

One third of the world's population lives near and on the coast.

1 in 3 fish caught around the world never makes it to plate. 32 million tonnes of fish caught annually go unreported (more than the weight of the entire US population). 38 million tonnes of sea creatures and 40% of the fish catch annually is unintentionally caught. [A tonne is a metric ton and equals c.2,205 pounds weight]

Over a period of 3 days, 2,466 whales, porpoises and dolphins die due to entanglement in nets and as by-catch.

Fish in the North Sea are moving North.

8 million metric tonnes of plastic are thrown into the oceans annually and 236,000 tonnes of this are the tiny particles of micro-plastics.

Plastic debris causes the death of 100,000 marine mammals and a million sea-birds annually.

Currently we are using more than 25% more natural resources than we can sustain.

Leaders of different religions share the sense of alarm and add another dimension to these facts. Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, pub-

lished in May 2015, quotes a canticle of St. Francis of Assisi which calls the Earth, our common home “a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”. The Pope describes how in “tropical and subtropical seas, we find coral reefs comparable to the great forests on dry land, for they shelter approximately a million species, including fish, crabs, molluscs, sponges and algae. Many of the world’s coral reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline”. “Who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?” the Pope asks, repeating a question posed as long ago as 1988 in a pastoral letter by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. And he adds: “This phenomenon is due largely to pollution which reaches the sea as the result of deforestation, agricultural monocultures, industrial waste and destructive fishing methods, especially those using cyanide and dynamite. It is aggravated by the rise in temperature of the oceans”. You would have thought that turning our oceans into a warm toxic soup, with plastic added, ought to preoccupy our government more than escaping the EU’s regulatory Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

A final inconvenient truth for us in Britain, to quote the MEP, Richard Corbett, is that fish have “the unfortunate habit of swimming from one country’s waters to another”. 20% of fish caught by UK boats comes from outside our territorial waters. International law on fishing in the UN’s Convention on the Law of the Sea, designed to joint manage fishing fleets and conserve fish stocks, predates the EU. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) essentially follows the Law of the Sea provisions. So if we do leave the EU, Britain will remain bound by international regulations. And if we are to continue fishing, Britain will both have to abide by existing conser-

vation rules and collaborate in developing further regulations to preserve fish stocks. We will neither rule the waves nor take back control of the oceans.

Nor has the UK fared unjustly from the EU Common Fisheries policy: for example 84% of the haddock quota permitted in the total allowable catch per species (TAC) goes to the UK, worth 28,576 tonnes annually in 2015, alongside 34,066 tonnes of plaice, 28% of the TAC. We export 80% of the UK catch, mainly to Europe. The argument for BREXIT is, as usual, spurious. Leaving the CFP will change very little, and has the potential to undermine the recent stabilizing effect of the CFP on fish stocks in our European waters.

That is enough facts for one day. But reiterating the facts above and the tragic future they foretell is not enough. What is needed is urgent action to save our oceans.

From 1-27th October Roger Hardy's installation will move to The Red House in Aldeburgh, Benjamin Britten's House.

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5.5 Why is the Home Office so Inhumane?

6/11/2019

What's wrong with the Home Office? Almost two years have elapsed since Amelia Gentleman broke the story in The Guardian of Jamaican-born Paulette Wilson: she had come to Britain aged ten, lived here continuously for fifty years working and bringing up her daughter; she had no passport, never returned to the Caribbean, nor left the UK. In 2015 the Home Office informed her that she would have to leave Britain and must not work. In October

2017 Paulette Wilson was taken to Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, where she was detained for a week awaiting deportation. Naturally she was distraught at being declared an illegal immigrant. Jamaica was a foreign country. Her local MP, Emma Reynolds, and the Refugee and Immigrant Centre in Wolverhampton managed to rescue her from Heathrow just in time. But she was not out of the woods. The threat of deportation still hung over her. This was the beginning of the Windrush Scandal breaking in the Press.

Appalling treatment of British citizens began with David Cameron bulldozing measures through the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government with the aim of reducing the number of immigrants, culminating in the 2014 Immigration Act. Theresa May, Home Secretary since 2010, was determined to create a "really hostile environment" for illegal immigrants. Norman Baker who was Minister in the Home Office at the time described staff responsible for carrying out the policy as "zealots", ever coming up with more inhumane ideas. The touring vans in 2013 with 'Go home or be Arrested' emblazoned on them, immigrants avoiding vital medical assistance for fear of being denounced to the authorities, children in detention, were all products of the Cameron-May policy. As was hundreds of people of Caribbean origin who had worked hard, duly paid their taxes and national insurance, being required to prove that they were legally British, then many being declared illegal by the Home Office. A pernicious set of demands made on Home Office staff took precedence over conscience and whistle-blowing.

The Home Office leadership seemed to glory in meeting government targets

for ‘assisted removals’ (a kind of ‘self-deportation’ when, under government pressure, someone leaves without being deported) with 12,800 set as the target for forced removals in 2017-2018. The aim was a 10% increase in “removals” overall. More than eighty of the Windrush generation arrivals fell foul of the anti-immigrant frenzy and were illegally deported. In April 2018 Theresa May refused a formal diplomatic request for an urgent meeting from Commonwealth countries from the Caribbean attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in London. The Windrush scandal gained international exposure and momentum.

Someone had to take the blame. Inevitably it was the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd who had been in post for nearly two years. She denied her Ministry had removal targets then, when incontrovertible evidence of their existence emerged, claimed in Parliament to have been unaware of them. Even though she was not responsible for creating the policy, her defence was clearly untenable. She resigned on 26 April 2018.

Did the Home Office, as a result of the public outcry at the scandal, then undergo major changes? No. What were the real causes of the Windrush scandal? There were several. But who was really responsible?

I recently went to listen to Amelia Gentleman talk about her new book, *The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment* at the Buxton Festival in Derbyshire. Also on stage, was Colin Grant promoting his own book: *Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush Generation*, a series of moving verbatim reflections on being a British citizen of Caribbean origin. Together they provided a coherent account of how it had taken so long before “the Windrush betrayal” was exposed and ended.

Grant, whose father was Jamaican-born, spoke about the way many victims kept their plight and the cause of their suffering to themselves, as a result becoming even more vulnerable to state bullying. They had grown up with great loyalty and romantic views of Britain. They felt shamed by being singled out, partly a product of defence mechanisms developed over the years - against racism. They did not know to whom to turn or how to complain and seek redress. Gentleman also provided a thorough and balanced account of what went on, providing detailed cases exploring the ways victims were victimised and expected to provide often missing documentary evidence to prove their citizenship. Victims were guilty of illegality until they proved themselves innocent.

But focus on the varied components in the transmission belt of injustice, Cameron-May to Rudd to Home Office staff, risks neglecting its prime mover: the Tory leaders who in order to appease voters hostile to immigration initiated policies which produced debilitating anxiety and, often, physical and mental ill-health for victims destined for detention centres and Heathrow. A reduced Home Office staff, suffering up to 20% cuts, were doing what they were told, obeying orders from above, acting as the promoters of May's hostile environment. At the same time, Cameron moved away from multi-culturalism as a policy towards existing immigrant communities, tacking further into the wind created by hostile public attitudes to immigrants.

The Home Office is perennially accused of being "not fit for purpose". Two years have passed now and three things need underlining.

First, if lessons have been learned from the Windrush scandal, apart from

a special unit set up to deal with the fall-out from the scandal, to date there are no signs of that. Only the economic consequences of May's hostile environment seem to make any impact on policy. The same callous indifference to human suffering persists in the treatment of asylum seekers and migrants, with the judiciary the last resort for maintaining human rights standards.

Second, the Home Office still awaits reform, notably in training staff to understand something of the conditions and realities in the specific countries from which asylum seekers and migrants are drawn.

Third, the Home Office needs an institutional ethos free of hostility in which empathy is not a career hazard. And the ethos of institutions comes from the top.

On the broader question of dealing with inflamed public opinion, the root cause of the Windrush scandal was the failure of government and Parliament to show moral leadership. Government needs to challenge the baser instincts of citizens, as well as dealing with the legitimate grievances of citizens disturbed by rapid social change. Representative democracy does not mean robotic obedience to understandable, but often misinformed, popular demands based on fear. Nor the adoption of immigration policies that grievously undermine what we must continue to hope are British – universal - human values.

See TheArticle.com 02/11/2019

5.6 Trident: The Dog That Didn't Bark**10/12/2019**

The first task of a new Prime Minister is to write the official sealed orders of last resort which immediately go into the safes of Britain's four Vanguard Class submarines. That should make us think before we vote. These missives determine what happens in the event of a nuclear attack on the UK: every submarine carries sixteen Trident missiles each with six nuclear warheads targeted at an aggressor capable of causing millions of casualties and destroying many cities. When asked in a 2015 BBC interview shortly after becoming leader of the Labour Party, Mr. Corbyn said he would not authorise their launch. Or what he did not say, he refused to contribute to the destruction, or near-destruction, of human life on this planet in a thermonuclear war.

The Parties' Manifestos appear to differ on Trident. The Conservatives' says in a single line "we will maintain our Trident nuclear deterrent". It might have said "our independent Trident nuclear deterrent will continue to be maintained by the US Navy at Kings Bay, Georgia", but Mr. Johnson's Party is never one for too much detail. The Labour Party Manifesto says it "supports the renewal of the Trident nuclear deterrent" and will actively lead multilateral efforts to create "a nuclear-free world". The replacement of the four submarines would initially cost c. £35 billion and, over their lifespan of forty years c. £100 billion for maintenance as a viable deterrent, a lot of money for a weapon Mr. Corbyn would never use.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), inevitable nuclear retaliatory strikes, is considered the best way to ensure security and avoid nuclear conflagration in the future. The justification for this perilous belief is that MAD has "kept

the peace” and that, since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, use of nuclear weapons in warfare has been avoided. This conclusion is at best wishful-thinking projected into the past, at worst Mad is mad.

The Cuban Missile confrontation of 1962 showed MAD to be false. We have luck to thank for avoiding nuclear conflagration then, not possession of a nuclear deterrent and threat of its use. Nuclear war has to date been avoided because prudent people were in the right place at the right time, and responded well to the miscalculations and mistakes of fallible people in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In October 1962, in international waters off Cuba, the Soviet and US navies confronted each other as the US imposed a naval blockade. On 27 October 1962, the US Beale destroyer and a formation of eleven US warships which had located a “Foxtrot” class B-59 Soviet Delta patrol submarine and had been shadowing it for hours, dropped signalling depth charges to indicate that the submarine should surface.

The Soviet captain, Valentin Savitsky, hiding at depth, had lost communications with the Soviet Union and had received no order to turn back. The temperature in the submarine soared, peaking at over 50 degrees centigrade. Crew members were fainting. Under great stress, Savitsky concluded that war must have broken out, and gave the order to arm his nuclear-tipped torpedoes ready for firing. The vessel’s deputy political officer who was the second half of the dual authorisation needed to launch the nuclear weapons agreed. From that moment only one man stood between a Soviet nuclear weapon being fired at a US warship. By sheer luck, Commodore Vasili Arkhipov

who commanded the submarine flotilla of which the B-59 was a part was on board. Though not in command of the vessel he outranked the captain and vetoed the decision to launch, almost certainly avoiding a thermonuclear war.

This was not the only incident that could have sparked an escalation to thermonuclear war. That same day, Black Saturday, Fidel Castro gave an order which resulted in the shooting down of an American U-2 spy plane over Cuba killing its pilot. Then a few hours later, another U-2 pilot, unsighted by an intense aurora borealis, strayed into Soviet airspace over the Chukotka peninsula in Siberia. MIG-19s were scrambled. Fortunately, the pilot found his way back to international airspace where two F-102s escorted him to an Alaskan airfield. Everyone involved, from MacMillan in London with nuclear armed Vulcan bombers in the air to Khrushchev in Moscow, desperately recalibrating his not-so-clever plan of putting nuclear facts on the ground in Cuba, Operation Anadyr, and fearful Castro was out of control, were on a knife edge.

In retrospect it was luck that events such as these did not escalate into a nuclear war. By good fortune the Soviet and American leaders were both rational and capable of accurately calibrating the risk of a nuclear conflagration. John.F. Kennedy had the self-confidence, born of an almost aristocratic disposition and the wise support of his brother Bobby Kennedy, to resist pressure from his military chiefs immediately to bomb the Cuban missile bases and invade. Nikita Khrushchev, wily, brash, from peasant stock, had a clever gambler's ability to see when it was time to fold on a bad hand. The US Jupiter missiles in Turkey, proved a crucial bargaining chip. Kennedy secretly

traded the removal of US Jupiter missiles for the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. By one of those quirks of history Kennedy's offer of a swap-deal was made before he knew Khrushchev had already ordered his vessels to withdraw.

Huge questions arise from the Cuban missile crisis. Does deterrence work? Had Trump been in the White House, and Putin in the Kremlin, would there have been a happy ending? If Arkhipov had been in another submarine would Savitsky really have launched? We will never know.

But if the future of humankind and the planet actually depends on happenstance, luck, and having political leaders with common-sense, we should urgently be taking a lead in seeking multi-lateral nuclear disarmament. Only in an ideal world led by rational, prudent statesmen, a world devoid of mistakes and miscalculation where we always get lucky, would humanity be safe. Is that the world we are looking at today. I don't think so.

See TheArticle.com 10/12/2019

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5.7 'Global Britain' in an Age of Impunity

20/2/2020

"Viewers may find some images distressing". Whether Idlib, Yemen, Afghanistan or Libya, journalists will probably have risked their lives to film what follows. Why forewarn us that we may be distressed by reports of terrible human suffering? No such warning that an episode of Love Island may be

depressing. Or a clip of the Johnson Cabinet laughable. Must we always be protected from distress?

Perhaps our patrician TV protectors mean “viewers ought to be distressed by the following images, but we understand you will be getting up to make tea, or may even switch channels”. A foreign correspondent says to camera “this is the worst humanitarian crisis I have ever encountered”, but then we move smoothly on to the next – domestic - news item.

The horror of war is brought into our sitting rooms with stunning immediacy, often via mobile phones in the shaking hands of the victims themselves, unlike newspaper reports of former times - and so should be more influential. Apparently not so. The Battle of Solferino (1859) left 23,000 dying or wounded untended on the battlefield. Henri Dunant, a Swiss businessman and activist, saw the pain and carnage and was duly distressed. Out of his distress came the Red Cross and, in the 1860s, the first Geneva Conventions limiting the barbarity of war. Recent images from Idlib Province in Syria and Yemen result in no such comparable reaction, and these show civilians dying.

Professional foreign correspondents struggle to engage us because you can't imagine refugees fleeing in their millions, nations where most of the population are malnourished or dying of starvation because of war. So they focus on particular families or individuals and their travails. We watch towns bombed to rubble around them while snipers and drones target them as they flee. Yet our fleeting empathy leads nowhere.

The sheer numbers of refugees are unimaginable. There are 3.66 million Syrian refugees now in Turkey, a third in camps near the border. 1.8 million are in Jordan. The 1.5 million Syrians who fled to Lebanon live amongst a Lebanese population of only 5.9 million. Hundreds of thousands of children would be without a future without State and NGO attempts to provide education. CARITAS Lebanon, for example, provides after-school schooling for both Lebanese children at risk of dropping out of the overwhelmed State schools and for Syrian refugees.

Since Assad's December Idlib offensive, some 900,000 people have fled north towards the sealed Turkish border. Besides the external agencies trying to meet this prodigious humanitarian challenge, the resilience and coping mechanisms of local actors are extraordinary. But humanitarian efforts are fast being overwhelmed.

And yet Syria and Yemen remain distant countries with little in common with the UK. Yemen is a semi-desert and desert land, desperately poor before the Saudis and Houthis made it a war zone. Over three quarters of the country's vital food imports pass through one contested port, Hodeidah, alongside arms for the Houthi rebels whom the Saudis, and United Arab Emirates (UAE), hope to interdict and defeat. Over five million children, and 80% of the population, who depend on these food supplies face starvation. UNICEF is struggling to get food aid into the country, despite increasing obstacles erected by both sides, and the UN has warned of "the world's worst humanitarian disaster".

My memory of the people and the land is still vivid. As a visiting CEO of

a development agency, I spent time in a remote village high in the beautiful Raymah mountains where we were training midwives. These mountains may be unique; the higher you climb the noisier it gets. The poverty is as striking as the beauty.

You meet shepherds herding their flocks, climbing at a punishing rate, or skipping downwards irrespective of age, men and donkeys carrying impossible loads and incongruous items, a television set, a Kalashnikov, two big status symbols. You mount via uneven steps, passing narrow terraces where food crops and qat are grown. At the top there is the buzz of human voices: houses, villages, dirt roads, beat-up cars. You don't climb mountains in Yemen seeking solitude.

Has the inaccessibility of the Raymah mountains protected people from the worst ravages of war? I don't know. Idlib in Syria, the final sanctuary for hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing war, certainly hasn't. In Idlib refugees are the targets of the Assad regime's barbarism supported by Russia. The evidence of the deliberate targeting of hospitals, ambulances and schools, innocent civilians or 'white helmets' tending the wounded, is overwhelming. Barrel bombs fall on markets and areas of high population density. As drones pick off individuals, a new high-tech chapter in man's inhumanity has opened up. We have come a long way from Solferino where soldiers bore the brunt of war. Now it is the civilian populations whose agony is reported.

The Geneva Conventions built on a tradition of ethics. Christianity and Islam both developed a theory of just war from a shared set of mediaeval

principles. Many pages in Sharia Law dwell on what is not permissible in jihad, most notably the killing of innocents and non-combatants. Similar constraints on targeting, inherited from the Christian past, are part of an ethical code taught and generally implemented by British Forces. But, lest we claim some inherent sense of superiority, last week was the 75th anniversary of the indiscriminate, and unnecessary, bombing of Dresden, in which an estimated 24,000 Germans died.

A concerted international effort is needed to re-establish the laws of war, rebuild compliance with international conventions, and end complicity with their systematic undermining. It will be no easy matter. Diplomatic or commercial reasons for ignoring the increasing destruction of international order can always be found. It is time we - and complicit heads of state - began to “find some images distressing” and acted decisively upon our distress. As the head of the International Rescue Committee, David Miliband, said in Davos: “Welcome to the Age of Impunity”.

See TheArticle 20/02/20

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5.8 Was the Attack on Development Agencies Justified? 27/3/2020

International development agencies have come in for a hammering recently: repeated denunciations of alleged ‘wasteful funding’ from the Tory back benches - with an eye to plundering DfID’s £13.4 billion budget - ambassadors and High Commissioners given authority over DfID’s country programmes, a prominent Times leader calling for the resignation of the Save the Children CEO for his

handling of staff sexual misdemeanours, and the cry of ‘Charity begins at Home’ ever more resonant. It helps in evaluating this onslaught to understand what development is and isn’t.

Does the public actually have a clear view of what development agencies actually do, where they came from, and the origin of their values? It’s a surprising story. The concept of development took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century within the context of the industrial revolution, and serious economic crises which threatened the social and political fabric of European states. A complex of allied themes, interrelated problems and fears: Progress, Corruption, continuity and change, evolution and revolution coloured thinking.

Engels was writing about the condition of the British working class in Manchester at the same time John Henry Newman was considering the development of Christian doctrine. It was Newman, grappling with the problem of continuity and change in the Christian Church, rather than Marx, grappling with capital accumulation as the dynamo of flawed Progress, who was to arrive at something close to the modern understanding of development and tease out its diverse meanings.

In his 1845 *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* Newman used development of doctrine not merely as an explanation of his joining the Roman Catholic Church but as a positive feature of its commitment to the Truth. Then, surprisingly, ‘development’ broke out its religious frame and became the healer of the depredations of social disorder, unemployment, immorality, old and new corruption, all the destructive aspects of Progress. “Is

it not a remarkable thing”, Rev. Mark Pattison, a clergyman and supporter of the Social Sciences Foundation, wrote to Newman in 1878, “that you should have first started the idea – and the word – development, as the key to the history of Church doctrine, and since then it has gradually become the dominant idea of all history, biology, physics, and in short has metamorphosed our view of every science, and of all knowledge”. This effusive attribution may have been excessive but Newman’s influence in the Victorian world was prodigious. It shows the close link between God-talk and the origins of development talk.

After the Second World War ‘development’ began to mean significant, sustained and organised action by governments and civil society to improve the lot of the poor. In 1945, Christian Aid began providing relief for European refugees. In 1942, OXFAM (Quaker influenced) took shape and began campaigning for food relief to pass through naval blockades to Nazi-occupied Greece. The wartime *Sword of the Spirit* produced the radical Catholic Institute for International Relations.

In the 1960s the newly independent countries were calling for a New International Economic Order based on humanistic values and opposed to the economic dominance of the West. This was accompanied by a further Christian contribution to development, the promotion of the idea of integral human development, a transcendent humanism. In 1967, Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Progress of Peoples* (*Populorum Progressio*) took forward the Church’s reflection on the challenge posed by respect for human dignity in the context of contemporary, Western-directed, international development and an incipient new wave of globalisation. It set out un-

equivocally the responsibility of the Christian community to work for a just form of development. It was to be the charter for Catholic development agencies and the international network of these organisations called CARI-TAS.

Paul VI analysed causes of poverty before proposing solutions. And prominent amongst the causes were socio-economic structures. The Pope demanded radical structural changes, “bold transformations in which the present order of things will be entirely renewed or rebuilt”. His message was “the economy should be at the service of man”. “The universal social bonds of the human family [interdependence] require everyone to commit themselves to the promotion of development”. Ernst Schumacher, a Buddhist and best known for his 1973 book *Small is Beautiful*, reflected this theme of the book’s sub-title “Economics as if People Mattered”.

Development aid inevitably entailed political choices. *Populorum Progressio* was political. It repudiated contemporary approaches that defined development simply as growth in GDP. Colonial and neo-colonial solutions to problems of poverty and injustice were rejected. All peoples and nations should be “artisans of their own destiny”. Pope Paul described life itself a “vocation” to development and fulfilment – but always in particular cultures and societies. In other words, people develop themselves; others cannot do it for them, and for this they needed literacy and education.

Populorum Progressio’s emphasis on unequal power relations and fair trade, are still relevant today, as are an economics of “enough”. It coupled “the material

poverty of those who lack the bare necessities of life, and the moral poverty of those who are deformed by selfishness". It asked "are we ready to pay higher taxes, are we ready to pay more for imported goods which are fairly traded?" We know the answer. The seeds of conflict with the political Right were sown.

Paul VI's successors continued to speak about poverty, its causes and remedies. In response to accelerating globalisation, Pope John Paul II spoke of solidarity, a favourite NGO word, as a virtue. "When interdependence becomes recognised in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a 'virtue', is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are really responsible for all". Whilst echoes of "an economy of enough" re-emerge in Pope Francis' reaction to climate change and the care of the 'global commons'.

God talk and development talk have historically been engaged in a creative dialogue. Its outcome and rejection of unrestrained competition and greed has not been music to the ears of Wall Street. Perhaps those in the Tory Party who want to curb Britain's longstanding substantial contribution to international development might reflect on the values which inspire it. Maybe they have and reject them. The radicalism of developmentalists, both secular and religious, makes it unlikely the current attack on development aid will cease.

See also The Article 18/03/2020

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5.9 Who Follows the Behavioural Science?

7/5/2020

Every day at 5pm it's our national Unhappy Hour. The brave and vigilant watch the Coronavirus Daily Update in fascination, shock, sadness and, for some, scepticism. Next to a government Minister who will be "following the science" we may now find a senior Public Health behavioural scientist. Behavioural science is in the news.

For a variety of reasons, many people want to understand, predict and change human behaviour: military strategists, advertising agencies, and political Parties to name a few. Whether or not the knowledge accumulated from a century of experiments on human behaviour is enough to qualify as a science is a moot point. Were it a science, you might expect behavioural scientists to have become millionaires from buying and selling shares, playing poker, or even being successful at profiling serial killers. They aren't rich and they don't identify killers as portrayed in the movies. In reality the human sciences find it difficult to produce hard metrics that might point to controlling or predicting people's behaviour. They have not achieved, for example, anything equivalent to measuring the length of a Coronavirus' RNA – it's much longer than that of most viruses - or plotting a spacecraft's trajectory to Saturn. Instead many of us are left with the impression that generalities about human behaviour can be generally unhelpful.

Individual human beings are different. We all recognise that. And we also know that individuals behave differently to groups. People share different cultures which may weight different characteristics and values differently influencing how individuals act. And groups of human beings present different characteristics from each other, some of which can be important, not least susceptibility to different maladies, sickle-cell anaemia or diabetes for example, or living in different sized family groups. The differences are shockingly illustrated by the high death rates from Coronavirus amongst British BAME. Disentangling the causes will be complex.

The biggest established group difference in mortality from Coronavirus is that between rich and poor which means that ‘morbidity’, the rate of disease in a particular community or population, has as much to do with political choices as individual behaviour. This fact, well known and acknowledged in Public Health, has become disturbingly clear to more people thanks to quantitative reporting and analysis of deaths and infections during the pandemic.

Predictions about the reaction of the British public when asked to stay at home and socially distance were incorrect: this misreading seems to have resulted initially in an assumption that the period of lock-down had to be minimal or people would revolt - consequently lock-down was disastrously delayed and infection built up. This is not the wisdom of hindsight. In early March when Northern Italy was getting into serious trouble, how could the Prime Minister have stayed unaware of the gravity of the situation and the potential exponential spread of the virus? Was the government fearful of the implications of people

not “following the science” or were they simply choosing from amongst a range of policy responses provided by behavioural scientists? Was the Cabinet too pre-occupied with the economic consequences? The subsequent rules, to stay at home, for weeks, legally enforceable by the police, were hardly an example of “nudging”, using material or social rewards or mild forfeits, to get people to do the right thing. All very mysterious, which is the way government, unchallenged, likes it.

Government’s preventative health policies are not decided in a vacuum. Reducing smoking took years of persuasion, public education, support for quitters, restrictions on marketing and then legislation. All in the face of opposition from the tobacco industry and smokers. Similarly tackling the obesity epidemic, reducing alcohol and sugar consumption, was and is resisted by corporate interests. Up against such odds - and business is already lobbying for an immediate end to lockdown - the smartest of the behavioural scientists faces a daunting task. Meanwhile government can, and does, finesse the problem of the pressure on the NHS by blaming all those who inconveniently live into their 80s and acquire ‘co-morbidities’. And more recently on the scandalous death toll in Care Homes on ‘comings and goings’ – such as the staff.

Now the benighted behavioural scientists are called on to advise about messaging in preparation for the unlock-down. This means finding a way to get the people who are not designated key workers and not in fear of destitution, and who have been encouraged to return to work, to choose to do so. But how to calm public fears and how to differentiate messaging to different groups while at the same time avoiding confusion? How to change behaviour without

compulsion? On this occasion we can expect some nugatory nudging; fear of death has concentrated the mind and the British public will decide for itself.

Understanding, predicting and changing public behaviour in response to the threat of coronavirus infection is now at the centre of the political stage. But behaviour is not hard science; it's often a matter of well or ill-informed opinion. And opinions conflict.

How the public is now going to respond is a matter of contested opinion. The public's response to the forthcoming government messages will not be determined solely by their content and repetition but by trust, or distrust, of the government, the assessment of its competence or incompetence. Knowing how crucial trust is, Sir Keir Starmer's approach as Leader of the Opposition has been cautious, or as he terms it, "responsible". Governments' relative past failure to heed health messages, their neglect of strong regulation of the food and alcohol industry by appropriate legislation, as well as neglect of creating capacity for the mass manufacture of vaccines, is history. And the Leader of the Opposition is unlikely ever to get a straight answer from the Prime Minister to his question "how on earth did it come to this".

See also [TheArticle 06/05/2020](#)

5.10 DFID-FCO Merger: Wrong Time, Wrong Reasons, Wrong Merger 25/6/2020

The Department for International Development's (DFID) budget was a "giant cashpoint in the sky that arrives without any reference to UK interests" our Prime Minister told Parliament last week. DFID's announced merger with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) was confirmation that government intends to make humanitarian aid an instrument of geo-political and security goals. "We believe the aid budget's sole focus should be on helping the world's poorest people, and that is how Britain will get the respect of other countries and their people", CAFOD responded.

The gulf between Boris Johnson's perception of overseas aid, shared with the Conservative Party in thrall to its extremists, and that of the international NGOs, has been growing. Priti Patel, International Development Secretary for eighteen months, 2016-2017, declared DFID's funding priorities to be not in the national interest. Penny Mordant, who followed her, 2017-2019, told Parliament last week that she wanted to spend the aid budget on two new boats to replace the Royal Yacht. If the present incumbent, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and her predecessor, Alok Sharma, are anything to go by, a career in corporate finance is just what you need to understand poverty reduction. The swing doors nature of the appointment – five ministers in less than four years - was most noticeable with Rory Stewart who resigned his position after six months following the purge of the Tory BREXIT dissidents. Sad, as like the National Audit Committee, he showed signs of understanding that DFID was outstanding amongst government departments in doing what it was set up to do, combatting global poverty.

Britain, with an aid budget of £15 billion a year, is the only country in the world to achieve the UN target of 0.7% of Gross National Income spent on international development. We should be proud of that even in adversity. Though only 73% of this funding is spent through DFID itself. The remainder, for example support for tackling climate change internationally, goes through other government departments. This hidden plunder of the DFID budget is likely to grow under the new dispensation. Merged into a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, DfID's mission to end extreme poverty and tackle the global challenges of our time including disease, mass migration, insecurity and conflict, will have to contend with a raft of other priorities.

One of the most pressing FCO priorities in a post-Brexit world remains trade. Theresa May set up the Department of International Trade (DIT) in 2016 to expand Britain's non-EU trade. Every British Ambassador and High Commissioner around the world is charged with promoting trade. If, as Boris Johnson claims, the DFID merger will enhance policy coherence you might have thought the DIT would be the first to fall under the FCO. You would be wrong. You might also have thought the Prime Minister would have discussed his plan with leading British international NGOs such as OXFAM and Save the Children. Wrong again. He didn't. Boris Johnson has simply ignored the conclusion of the excellent International Development Select Committee that retaining the independence of DFID is vital.

Johnson claims that moving DFID into the FCO will give the British tax-

payer better value for money. Only if you ignore, as he does, the existing experts with years of experience vetting, implementing and monitoring programmes and projects, experts already regularly in touch with Foreign Office staff in country, sometimes with offices in the same secure compound. DFID's research unit is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of its work. This efficiency argument is a red herring.

DfID has been merged with the FCO by the Conservatives then demerged by the Labour Party in the past. Their departments' goals are different. No amount of spin can change that.

If policy coherence were Johnson's main purpose, there are other ways to achieve it. JTAC, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, brings together some sixteen government bodies. It has proved its worth in co-ordination of counter-terrorism strategy. Similar bodies could be created, or developed further, for overlapping international issues and interests such as achieving the international sustainable development goals, climate change, gender equality, pandemics, corruption, human rights and human trafficking.

At heart, though, the government justifications reveal the gulf between thinking in the Cabinet and those on the front line of development and humanitarianism. The argument is a moral one. You don't have to be Christian to view it as such. In my experience as a former CEO of the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), the Scandinavian countries have tried more successfully to sustain a moral purpose in their foreign policy. Nordic policy over apartheid and the liberation of Namibia took a different path to the British. Sweden supported the internal movement of the African National

Congress in South Africa. The UK tried to undermine it dividing communist from nationalist members. Tiny Finland is respected globally for its work on conflict resolution. Beyond the religious and ethical dimension of the argument, but as CAFOD's response suggests, lies the political debate about the nature of 'soft power' and our future place in the world at a time of general crisis in Britain's perception of itself.

Do we really wish to present ourselves in macho fashion as 'punching above our weight'? Not if it requires tens of billions spent on nuclear missile-bearing submarines and aircraft carriers. 'Global Britain' needs to find a new and fitting strategic role. We need the moral vision underpinning our international development programme as a prominent part of it. We need to heed the best of our INGOs. It is in the national interest for Britain post-Brexit, post-pandemic, to draw both from our Christian tradition and its understanding of who is 'Global Britain's' neighbour, and from our own history of supporting and contributing to international institutions. And we will not always have a Prime Minister who seems to think jokes are a substitute for principled action.

See The Tablet online 23/06/2020

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5.11 'Collapsology' For Beginners

8/9/2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed alarming things about our geo-politics, government and society including the danger of accepting inequality as capitalism's collateral damage, how incompetent and unaccountable governments

cost lives, and how bad we are at making timely coherent global responses to global problems. A virus has returned us to the original Greek meaning of the word ‘apocalypse’ as the revelation of things hidden rather than the spectre of protected bunkers stocked with water, food, and shot guns in American back gardens.

Abruptly we have become aware that ‘going forward’ we may not be going forward anymore. The message of *How Everything Can Collapse* by Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens* is that we must discuss calmly the possibility that the Anthropocene, the current geological period created by human beings, is currently set to end in collapse, possibly by the 22nd century. And collapse is ‘when water, food, housing, clothes cannot be supplied to majorities by services under legal supervision’. The book piles up the evidence for this assertion.**

How should we respond to such a threat? Survivalist or Denier, the authors insist, should not be the only two positions. Nor, in the midst of a global pandemic can this book be easily dismissed as catastrophist doom-mongering. COVID-19 has taught us what exponential growth in something bad looks like. And so ‘collapsologie’, emerging in France as a discipline with its own insightful experts, gives pause for thought. They can’t all be cranks.

Servigne and Stevens argue that we face worldwide several interlinked ‘systemic instabilities’ notably in bio-diversity, the environment, energy, climate change, economics and geo-politics. They believe that the earth reached the limits of its human ‘carrying-capacity’ in the 1990s and in a number of

instances crossed crucial boundaries destabilising or destroying systems that keep us alive and well. Amongst the examples they cite are the thawing of the Siberian and Canadian permafrost, a possible sixth mass distinction of animal species, and the 20th century's ten-fold increase in energy consumption and its 27 fold increase in industrial metals extraction. How many of today's fishermen - and BREXIT negotiators - realise that for the same time spent at sea they are catching 6% of what their forefathers in sailing boats caught 120 years ago? We seem to be reaching simultaneously several limits and 'tipping points' that precipitate us into dangerous, interacting, irreversible processes.

Our predicament is psychological, political and ideological. Our brains are not geared up to deal effectively with long-term threats. They are protectively designed for immediate fear, fight, flight responses; flight when a sabre-toothed tiger comes into the cave or a terrorist into the shopping mall. Denial is an ingrained defence mechanism but if we can't believe in the possibility of collapse before it happens we can't prevent it. We saw this at the beginning of the pandemic when, despite clear warnings, stocks of protective equipment, PPE, proved to be inadequate.

Governments' lack of competence and accountability compound the danger. Wealth acts as a buffer from most misfortune. Personally wealthy political elites don't feel collapse early enough to react in a timely fashion. Look at Trump and Bolsonaro's track record on the pandemic and climate change. In authoritarian regimes such as China the reflex is to hide unpalatable truths.

The ideological problem is economism, the politics of economic growth, ‘it’s the economy stupid’. All governments promise rising standards of living. And the developing world needs growth. It’s the big economies that are the concern. 7% annual growth in China – surely less now – should it resume and continue means that economic activity with all the global supply chains, energy use, soil depletion, carbon emissions attendant on it, would double every ten years and increase 32 times in fifty years. We await the first politician in power anywhere to admit publically that economic growth is part of our predicament.

I would like BBC’s Radio 4 ‘More or Less’ to investigate the statistics in *How Everything Can Collapse* but even if they proved only 20% accurate they would be shocking. But however accurate the statistics on which predictions are based the future impact of inter-connections between different factors is unknowable. In 2006 economists simulated the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic to determine what might be its contemporary impact on the global economy. They concluded an overall 12.6% drop in global GDP. The Spanish Flu epidemic lasted a little over two years. The World Bank’s recent estimate for COVID’s impact just in 2020 was 5.2%. Remember the world population was only 1.8 billion in 1918 and perhaps a third was infected by Spanish Flu. Assuming that 3% of those infected would die, the economists’ predicted 142 million pandemic deaths today. In 2008, the head of Exxon Mobil’s global emergency team, John Lay, estimated that in the event of a similar pandemic “if we can make people feel safe about coming to work, we’ll have about 25% staff absences”. Actual current levels of home working make the predicted level of absences look far too low. In short, on past performance, such predictions prove too inac-

curate to justify fear that we are doomed or relief that we will dodge the bullet.

Sevigne and Stevens are clearly right that the school of business-as-usual is now obsolete. COVID has put paid to it. Yet, do world leaders really realise that we face more than a combined health and economic emergency and do they understand the magnitude of the change now necessary? These French authors are also right that the conjuncture of very dangerous interconnected and systemic man-made processes is a threat which we do not want to face. Governments in denial have responded to them inadequately or badly. Remember how successful the ‘Project Fear’ taunt proved.

We none of us know what’s round the corner. The implied inevitability of *How Everything Can Collapse* does not credit the possibility of the emergence of an unexpected remedy, change in governments’ leadership, a drop in population, how one catastrophe can slow the approach of another in the way COVID caused drastic reduction in polluting air-travel. We can’t though rely on muddling through and good luck. Sevigne and Stevens try to open up a conversation that avoids the extremes of apocalypse panic and a blind belief in progress. Please God they succeed.

This is not a book for bedtime reading. Nor is it a requiem for humankind. And, it should carry a warning that readers may need an injection of Dad’s Army or Father Ted after they put it down.

Polity Press Translation from the original *Comment tout peut s’effondrer* Edi-

tions de Seuil, 2015

* But see <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/Stop-catastrophist-discourse> for a criticism of the way the book uses its evidence.

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5.12 Trump & Johnson: Politics as Spectacle & Entertainment **27/10/2020**

“We provide Warrior Care”. That is the motto of the Walter Reed Army Medical Centre which treated Donald Trump for COVID. All the medical care he needed was available in the White House but the Walter Reed must have been irresistible to the Commander-in-Chief, whose ‘bad feet’ plus the good timing of his college years during the Vietnam War allowed him to dodge the Draft. Trump didn’t much like it in hospital though. Let’s be honest, the spectacle he made of his short stay added to the joy of nations.

The little retinue of Walter Reed doctors in white gowns were particularly enjoyable stepping out to present their evasive bulletins on the President’s health, for all the world like the spoof Busby Berkeley routine ‘Springtime for Hitler’ in Mel Brooks’ *The Producers*. The only thing missing was Trump sashaying down the steps under an arch of stethoscopes. He made up for this omission with an outing in his everything-proof Presidential limo, and then by a rather poor Mussolini impersonation on the White House Balcony.

“The spectacle”, wrote the French Marxist philosopher, Guy Debord, in his

1967 Society of the Spectacle, “is the ruling order’s non-stop discourse about itself, it’s never ending monologue of self-praise”. This was uncannily clear and prescient for a practitioner of a school of philosophy that specializes in incomprehensibility.

From 2004, Trump’s narcissism found a perfect outlet modelling tough commercial competitiveness in reality TV. The Apprentice, followed by The Celebrity Apprentice, gave him a distinct national profile. By 2016, he was ready for campaigning by means of spectacular political entertainments, his rallies, with catch-phrases, audience participation, super-charged emotion, sundry villains and, of course, himself as hero. While the rallies have deep roots in popular entertainment, Trump’s use of tweets ensured almost permanent attention in a modern medium. The man who felt shunned by old money in New York, ridiculed by Obama, was able to voice the feelings of the forgotten, angry American white male, modelling his dream of success, living out misogynist sexual fantasies and promoting aggressive xenophobia. Trump is part old fashioned music hall artist, part modern troll, part sociopath. He knows, quite literally, how to make a spectacle of himself.

By the time of Trump’s irruption into Republican politics the scene had already been set by the growing power of infotainment. As Rupert Murdoch once said of his News Corporation: “We are in the entertainment business”, entertainment that smuggled in arbitration of the key social and political issues of the day. The communications revolution, which resulted in social media providing news in ever briefer, un-nuanced form, only accelerated the process. Spectacle in all its manifestations, news, advertis-

ing, entertainment, projected Trump and his rally performances as an iconoclast speaking powerfully to the condition of his political base. He had only to strut onto the campaign set to grab a national audience - and a big international audience. Around the world people turned on their televisions for the frisson of watching the horror film that was American politics.

The merging of politics and entertainment in 2016 was not entirely new and certainly not unique. Ronald Reagan's success in the 1980s was a notable earlier example, an experienced Hollywood movie actor who became Governor of California, then 40th President of the USA playing the nation's elderly uncle. The story has it that Nancy would listen to Ronnie practicing his lines every evening for those impromptu avuncular speeches the next day. Yet Reagan's star career path appears almost routine compared to Volodyar Zelensky's cameo performances on the world stage. Zelensky played President of Ukraine in the Ukrainian TV comedy series *Servant of the People*, and was elected President of Ukraine in real life in 2019 and then unwittingly became a key player in the attempted Trump impeachment. 73% of Ukrainian voters in the second round elected a man with no political experience whatsoever in the hope that as President he might -unusually - turn out to be 'servant of the people'.

Turning to Britain, it is impossible to gauge how much Boris Johnson's jokes and jolly japes entertained voters and contributed to his political ascent. It clearly did him no harm. Neither did his political entertainment column in the *Daily Telegraph*, his seven appearances on *Have I Got News for You* and the platform provided by becoming Mayor of London. He shares Trump's

skill at making a spectacle of himself, and some of his attributes. But he is a very different professional performer, modelling the national stereotype, the wry, humorous amateur, and skillfully playing his English audience. If and when Trump is out-of-office, Johnson's carefully mussed-up hair, rumpled suits, Latin tags and attempt at Churchillian rhetoric will seem even more pathetic than endearing.

The pandemic has revealed both Trump and Johnson's fundamental incapacity to meet the demands of high office. Entertainment and spectacle as politics may have begun to lose their allure. What Ken Livingstone's said to an interviewer, a week before the London mayoral election in 2012, is dawning on the British public. "This isn't a race to elect a chat-show host", he pointed out. The public in the USA and Britain are becoming more aware that governing takes skill and not the skills of a stand-up comic. We may be entering a new era when dull competence, perseverance and fortitude of the Clement Atlee variety are respected again.

A diet of gas-lighting, social media, computer games and data theft risks encouraging fatalism, the citizen as helpless spectator. In the UK, COVID and BREXIT, on top of politics as spectacle, has accelerated withdrawal into private life. But community spirit and social action in reaction to the virus, Black lives Matter, proliferation of groups helping the poor, immigrants and asylum seekers, are signs that civic responsibility and a concern for justice have survived, somewhat battered, the first round of the pandemic.

A Biden victory with Democrats controlling the Senate could surprise ev-

everyone by dramatically changing the political and social landscape of the USA, unleashing a wave of political energy with a domino effect around the world. “Spectacle is the sun that never sets over the Empire of modern passivity”, Debord wrote ex cathedra in 1967. It must have sounded even more portentous in French at the time. Then came the events of 1968. The prodigious outburst of both spectacle and modern activism that 1968 brought suggests Debord is wrong. It is too early to give up and hide under the duvet.

See TheArticle 27/10/2020

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5.13 Brexit: Diary of a Divorce Foretold

2/12/2020

We are running out of time and out of clichés: level playing field, cliff-edge, car crash, last chance saloon. Boris Johnson has less than a month to choose between possible outcomes of the BREXIT negotiations: No-Deal or Bad Deal presented as a triumph of British bull-dog spirit.

There is no point in deploring political leaders’ conflation of national interest and Party interest at times like these - though they are clearly different. But in weighing up the two interests, assuming he considers interests other than his own, the Prime Minister will be thinking about how he can keep his job. Despite variations in estimates of our GDP loss from BREXIT, he will know the government figures: a further 7.6% decline in our GDP over the next fifteen years in the event of No-Deal or in the event of some sort of ‘fair trade deal’ a 4.9% decline. This is on top of the shorter term, and shocking, projections

of a plunge in GDP, and precipitous growth in unemployment, caused by the pandemic.

Some kind of settlement is on the cards. Johnson may well throw enough of 'our' fish into EU nets for the French fishermen. There would seem to be enough wriggle-room with existing EU exemptions to allow state aid to parts of the economy. Though Conservative ideology has always shunned such interventions. Johnson will blather about regaining national sovereignty to obscure the lose-lose reality of his deal. He will hope to blame any subsequent economic collapse on the pandemic. His back-benches who want at all costs to curtail economic damage caused by lock-downs have promoted significantly greater damage than the pandemic through hard-line BREXIT lobbying. No Deal means rolling economic decline continuing until the next election, with Johnson's chances of survival less than Channel cod.

It will be bad enough with an agreed apology for a deal on the table. In addition to economic disaster and burgeoning domestic poverty the UK will have absolutely no say in the workings of the Single Market, the market which geography determines is our principal, largest and most lucrative trading partner. And without the heft of EU membership Britain will be weakened in far more than its economic power.

Would understanding how we got to this position, the history of UK-EU relations, make this act of self-harm less painful and depressing? Not really. But it seems an appropriate moment to look back.

Sir Stephen Wall's *Reluctant European: Britain and the European Union*

from 1945 to BREXIT gives the reader the intellectual pleasure of good readable prose, unparalleled expertise, and an historian's gift for narrative. Wall worked on UK-EU relations in a variety of ways with successive Prime Ministers and was in near constant negotiations with the EU as a civil servant for 35 years. He offers telling glimpses behind the curtains of high office, and a balanced, subtle analysis of how governments and negotiations actually work.

Britain was always the odd one out in Europe. We misjudged the importance of the European Economic Community in its early days and it took us a – lost – decade fighting de Gaulle to get in. And when we were in we contrived to be only half in. There was the Commonwealth to consider. New Zealand butter did not grease the wheels of British membership. We rightly thought the dysfunctional Common Agricultural Policy which swallowed 90% of the EU budget and benefited mainly France was crazy. Ted Heath was our first true Europhile. But then there was our 'special relationship' with the USA which Margaret Thatcher notably enhanced, while infuriating the EU Commission with her strident demands for the return of 'our money', the budget rebate. Tony Blair, much appreciated in Brussels before the Iraq war, imagined himself as 'the bridge' between the EU and the USA, but to all intents and purposes, traffic across the bridge was one way piling up in the Berlaymont Building in Brussels, the EU headquarters.

But behind such policy questions lay the fundamental bone of contention, three words that would never go away: 'ever closer union'. Britain promoted a liberal trading order within a Single/Common Market and consistently pushed

its vision of a EEC/EU as an inter-governmental organisation governed by the deliberations of the State leaders within the EU Council. Our commitment to enlargement by admission of newly freed eastern European countries was aimed at supporting their democratisation and the development of a human rights culture. But enlargement also made a federal EU more difficult to imagine and create.

Nonetheless, Britain reluctantly joined in, or was drawn into, the supranational structures as they developed, the EU Commission and EU Parliament. When Blair was prevented from joining the Eurozone by his Chancellor, Gordon Brown, the dye of British exceptionalism was cast. Britain with its accumulated opt-outs could not lead the EU, or be 'at its heart' as it said it wished. Nor had it ever really been able to break the bond between France and Germany to become member of a leadership triumvirate. Hostility to 'ever closer union' was the perennial stumbling block.

EU Enlargement came back to savage the UK. Blair's imprudent acceptance of unrestricted numbers of eastern European EU migrants – they were an overall plus for the economy – alienated those who resented what they saw as interlopers taking their jobs and housing. So UKIP was able to sew the 'immigrant problem' into existing hostility to the EU. Antipathy to concepts of shared sovereignty grew into outright rejection of EU membership fed by the Murdoch Press. Wall makes the case that before the referendum vote Cameron brought back a better package of concessions from the EU Commission than the British public were allowed by the Murdoch Press to consider.

Throughout the 2016 referendum ‘Take back control’ and ‘Project Fear’ trounced REMAIN’s repeated warnings about the economic dangers of BREXIT. Clever half-truths, sometimes flagrant lies about the alleged financial deficit that we accrued from EU membership, plus risible threats of massive Turkish immigration did the rest. Reluctant European charts these choppy waters with insight and skill.

We never got to hear about the many positive EU achievements and developments, several led by the UK. Nor the social, scientific, artistic and security benefits of membership. Though, of course, some like the Social Chapter – from which Major got an opt-out - with its advancement of workers’ rights, was not necessarily seen as positive.

Negativity prevailed though the latest polling confirms public opinion has swung away from BREXIT since 2016. What has not changed is the perennial uncertainty. But we are where we are and stuck with the cliché “perfect storm”. Or as Isaiah once put it “our sins blew us away like the wind”.

See TheArticle 02/12/20

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5.14 Brexit: What Price British or Scottish Sovereignty 13/12/2020

The meaning of sovereignty has been argued over for centuries from the divine right of kings to the Queen-in-Parliament. Yet to listen to government’s

account of the last ditch EU negotiations, we are about to seriously damage the economy, security, policing, arts, and scientific research of the United Kingdom for an abstract noun. It may be because we long to regain the lonely heroism after Dunkirk of eighty years ago. Or we've lost sight of what the future will look like for our children and grandchildren. Or it may simply be that Boris Johnson, looking over his shoulder at his extremist back benches, thinks he has no choice if he is to continue as Prime Minister for a few more months.

Endless repetition of 'sovereignty' by government ministers, presented as an inviolable principle to explain why they have failed to engage successfully in the normal give-and-take of negotiations, is an aspect of 'truth decay'. The growth of interdependence globally, and the success of regional economic markets, of which the European Single Market is a good example, has been the product of sovereign states pooling sovereignty for the Common Good. The question is not a binary choice sovereignty or loss of sovereignty, control or loss of control, but how much sovereignty it is prudent to pool.

The remaining issues blocking a deal with the EU are not huge matters of principle. According to Dominic Raab they are: 'the most basic democratic principles'. Nor are we "the only country in the world as an independent coastal state without control of our fisheries", as he claims. Malta will be surprised to learn it is not an independent coastal state. We seek continued tariff free access to the Single Market and that requires accepting its rules. The fisheries disagreement is about negotiable quotas and access to the vast European culinary market for fish caught in UK waters. We

can't be a rule-taker on aspects of common standards, interventionist state aid and subsidies we are told. Why not? The EU rules contain several major categories of exemptions such as for environmental aid already. And we presumably believe in regulations to ensure that markets function efficiently. That's the level playing field. Or do we want to model ourselves on China? And finally there is the question of what legal authority will decide market disputes now we have left the EU. Sounds an important problem but we already benefit from the conventions, rules and rulings of a number of different supranational courts and bodies such as the UN and NATO, and most notably the European Court of Human Rights - which underpins human rights culture vital for democracy - established by the 47 members of the European Council (not an EU body). And no deal makes us a rule-taker from the WTO. Why are we behaving as if the EU is asking us to abolish the monarchy before we can have access to the Single Market?

Our increasingly fragile unity as a four-nation country is now in jeopardy. Some 300 years ago in dire economic circumstances Scotland pooled many aspects of its sovereignty with England. The 1998 Scotland Act returned many elements. It turns out that within Britain our government recognises that aspects of national sovereignty are negotiable. As Nicola Sturgeon tweeted on 12 May 2014 in the run-up to the first Independence referendum: "The Scottish Parliament, adjourned on 25 March 1707, is hereby reconvened". Hard to believe its 15 years since Winnie Ewing said this". The intention to 'reconvene' a Scottish nation state has hardened.

Does the Westminster government fully understand how BREXIT has re-

inforced the SNP's position on sovereignty, or more precisely independence, and made the position of Westminster's opposition to a second referendum increasingly difficult to sustain? If the United Kingdom by democratic vote can decide that it no longer wishes to pool some of its sovereignty with a larger political entity, the EU, what grounds does it have for denying Scotland the same opportunity to review its historical decision to pool most of its national sovereignty with the United Kingdom. Yes, it was a long time ago. And yes its loss of self-determination was much greater. But if we are in the land of inviolable principles it's the same principle. The profoundest irony is that the Scottish decision in any future referendum will be much influenced by its wish to renew its pooled sovereignty with European states, overruled by the total UK vote of 2016.

All eyes have rightly been on Northern Ireland and the Good Friday agreement. They will shortly be turning to a growing conflict with Scotland. Is the future of our children and grandchildren really being decided by three score and ten Tory members of Parliament? The right-wing of the Conservative Party has conducted a ruthless campaign holding every Tory Government to ransom for decades. Not the moan of a so-called 'Remoaner', merely a simple question: "who is going to take back control from them?"

See The Article 12/12/20

5.15 For GDP Read Grand Deception About Progress 6/2/2021

“Nature is a blind spot in economics that we ignore at our peril”. Pithy comment from respected Cambridge Professor of Economics, Sir Partha Dasgupta. On 2 February the BBC’s Today programme ran a story about his new report *The Economics of Bio-diversity*. A supportive response from Sir David Attenborough provided a popular touch. It is not reality that has blind spots. They belong to the economists whose tunnel vision of economic growth as the key measure of progress is increasingly irrational. Professor Dasgupta argues convincingly that a narrow and exclusive focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – meaning the total value of economic activity within a state’s borders in goods and services – is a misleading measure of economic success.

The inadequacy of growth as the unique economic measure has been debated for decades. What has made this report a news story? Has there been a major theoretical breakthrough, a rethinking of economics triggered by the pandemic and climate change? There seem to be three principal reasons that made *The Economics of Bio-Diversity* newsworthy. First, it was commissioned by H.M. Treasury. Second, its strong and clear injunction that good economics must respect and manage nature better. And third the UK will be hosting and chairing the UN Climate Change Conference, COP 26, in Glasgow this November.

After the Second World War Mark Twain’s old aphorism, “there are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies and statistics”, took on a whole new dimension: the economic measurement of progress. Success in the competition between nation-states was measured by a single statistic, the value of Gross National

Product (GNP), later recalibrated as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). An annual increase of GDP of several percentage points meant pride and progress; low or negative growth, despondency and decline. As economics, its language, theoreticians, statisticians and beneficiaries, came to dominate political life so for governments economic growth became the overriding proof of political virtue.

But what counted as economic activity? What was excluded from the aggregated calculations that made up GDP? By definition 'externalities', such as women's domestic labour and childrearing and the large 'informal sector' in the developing world. On the debit side, the social, health and environmental costs of material production were ignored. And this despite perennial challenges from sociologists, developmentalists, progressive economists, environmentalists, trades unions, religious leaders and feminists all contesting the adequacy of the prevailing economic growth paradigm.

Progress, critics of GDP argued, could be measured in a completely different way: by improvement in the standard of living, by increase in the well-being and happiness of a population, clean air, bio-diversity, leisure time, increase in human capabilities, decrease in the harms of inequality, and so on. In 1972, Sicco Mansholt, a Dutch former farmer, a founding father of the European Union and the fourth President of the European Commission, coined the term "Gross National Happiness (GNH)". But only tiny Bhutan, which shares borders with India, Nepal and Bangladesh, adopted GNH as a national policy with a strong Buddhist flavour.

Critics of the growth paradigm seem to gain momentum when the stabil-

ity of the global economy is shaken by crises. In the early 1970s, after the events of 1968, limits to growth became a UN conference topic. After the 1973 oil-shock when OAPEC (Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) raised oil prices fourfold. After the 2008 banking meltdown, fantasies of unlimited natural resources and the benefits of unregulated markets were challenged by reality. Stephen Macekura's scholarly *The Mismeasure of Progress: Economic Growth and its Critics* charts in detail the history from the 1940s of such alternative economics and their failure to gain traction once the crisis has passed.

So Dasgupta and his Treasury report are a continuation of a long tradition that even includes popular writers: Rachel Carson published her readable *Silent Spring* in 1962 and Ernst Friedrich Schumacher his *Small is Beautiful* in 1973. During the same period pioneering developmental economists such as Barbara Ward, Mahbub ul Haq and Dudley Seers were grappling with the problems of achieving what they called 'sustainable development' and with environmental issues in the newly independent 'Third World' countries. Macekura shows that despite the best efforts of the growth critics, the dominant economic ideology never lost its self-confidence and power to convince, even though slowly but unsurely big guns such as the World Bank began to support some aspects of alternative economics and its vision of progress. Human development indexes burgeoned with measures of health, literacy, social inclusion and wellbeing to the fore. The intended beneficiaries of development aid were consulted about what they wanted rather than what governmental donors following the latest economic theory prescribed. But economic growth with GDP as its indicator remained the global orthodoxy, the common sense of Economics and Progress, with

a dismissive ‘this-is-the-way-we-measure-things-around-here’ being the last word.

Today we inhabit a deranged world of economic statistics in which, according to the BBC Today programme’s introductory script, Amazon, the company, is valued at \$1.6 trillion and Amazon, the river and forests at nothing - unless and until they are cut down for wood and farm-land. Nothing on the debit side, rivers silting up, extreme weather conditions, global warming. And the pandemic has woken us up to just how poorly equipped we are to evaluate statistics, even those which count ‘excess deaths’.

Dasgupta deploys economic language to get his message across. But it grates. He refers to our demands for nature’s “assets”, its “goods and services” have to be balanced against the earth’s capacity “to supply them”. The concept of the earth’s “natural capital” stretches the meaning of words to the limit. Don’t biodiversity and the environment have an incommensurable value? But ‘talking the economic talk’ is the most likely way to convince economists to ‘walk the walk’, heed their critics’ arguments, and avoid catastrophe. The assumption that a technological fix is going to make unnecessary a major change in how we measure economic success and how we conduct our lives, is a dangerous gamble and verges on magical thinking; as far as containing irreversible climate change is concerned current half-measures are set to fail.

One consequence of an emerging conceptual dissonance at the heart of the dominant economics is that we repeatedly hear politicians placing surviving the pandemic in binary opposition to saving our economy. Only an economy that has the nation’s health not as an ‘externality’ but as one of its key measures

of success is worthy of being described as rational. Mark Twain was right. The statistics that have embedded economic growth in our minds as the only measure of progress hide a particularly insidious lie. So well done the BBC for giving a heads-up to a report about how we might now move on, at last, to a rational economics.

See TheArticle 05/02.2021

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5.16 Delusions of Sovereignty

16/4/2021

Two news stories emerged around the Ides of March this year. The first about a project near Whitehaven in the Borough of Copeland in West Cumbria. The second about developments on the Clyde of special interest to residents of Argyll and Bute. Both in their different ways had implications for the future of the planet. Both also illustrated the delusional quality of current ideas of national sovereignty.

The first, you may have guessed, was about Woodhouse colliery, a project of West Cumbria Mining owned by the Australian Company EMR Capital. In 2019 Cumbria Council granted planning permission for the first deep coal-mine since 1987, to extract from under the Irish Sea an estimated 3.3 million tons of high quality coking coal used in steel manufacture but producing carbon emissions equivalent to that created by a million households per annum not to mention worries about its proximity to Sellafield nuclear power station and pockets of undersea methane. Difficult to square with Britain's commitment to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 and the Paris Treaty to limit global warming

to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, you might say and you would not be alone.

Not surprisingly with the COP26 International Conference on Climate Change in Glasgow chaired by Boris Johnson in the offing, the Woodhouse colliery decision caused considerable controversy. Keep Cumbrian Coal in a Hole, a campaigning NGO, threatened a legal challenge. South Lakes Action on Climate Change (SLACC), a community-based environmental charity, was thinking along the same lines. The local controversy was breaking as a national story.

Then the project bounced up to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick. Not noted for trouble-free decisions, he pushed the decision back to Cumbria County Council. Though hardly an issue on a par with how often the bin men would visit, it would be for the County Council to decide. There were new jobs at stake in Whitehaven, in Teesside - from where 80% of the coal was going to be exported (so the emissions would not count as Britain's) - the need for 6.6 million tons of coking coal imported from Australia and the USA would be reduced.

Enter the US Special Envoy on Climate Issues, 2004 Presidential candidate Mr. John Kerry, on a visit to Europe. Post-Trump, the USA was very much back in the game when it came to limiting Climate Change. Kerry made it abundantly and volubly clear that Woodhouse Colliery was a non-starter. The Conservative mayor of the Borough of Copeland, Mike Starkie, fought back. "I take no lessons from John Kerry", he said "given that

the UK is miles in front of the States in the reduction of the use of coal for fuel". This was a misunderstanding of the situation. Britain was a lesson-taker. On 11 March Mr. Jenrick "called in" the planning application, he would hold a public enquiry, the West Cumbria mine would be kicked into the long grass, or rather the long seaweed. For HMG's principled decision read HMV, His Master's Voice – coming from Washington.

The second such story, all true Scots will have spotted, was the announcement within the Integrated Defence Review released on 16 March 2021 that the slow build-up in the Royal Naval Armaments Depot of nuclear warheads for the submarines at Faslane on the Clyde was deliberate. Britain, we were informed, was changing its self-imposed cap of 225 nuclear warheads to a new cap of 260. Its current target for reduction of nuclear weapons to 180 by the mid-2020s was presumably abandoned, a worrying volte-face for the post-Cold War period. The decision just happened to coincide with the lobbying of Congressional Committee leaders by the UK Secretary of State for Defence, Ben Wallace over funding approval for a new US, W93, warhead programme. The nuclear proliferation team in Royal United Services Institute, (RUSI), not known for leftist rhetoric, described this 'co-incidence' in *Going Ballistic: The UK's Proposed Nuclear Build-Up* as "a clear indication of the degree of UK dependence on that [the USA's] programme". In other words our Independent Nuclear Deterrent was becoming even less independent. And our future nuclear deterrent is viewed, at least in design terms, as a joint project.

The point is that the first task of a State, the security of its citizens, for

Britain supposedly based on nuclear deterrence, is shared with, and is becoming more controlled by, another State. If this doesn't amount to sharing important aspects of sovereignty, what does?

In the mid-2000s Britain led the world in methods of verification of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. To quote RUSI, our volte-face on nuclear weapons was “unequivocally damaging to diplomacy”. It also made the “use of low-yield weapons more possible”, a clear and present danger in the context of conflicts such as in eastern Ukraine. In short we left the EU only to become – inevitably - more dependent on the USA.

Worse, the Prime Minister has a penchant for Trump-lite policies, damaging the soft power of British diplomacy and development aid, breaking international treaties, toying with a British form of culture wars, playing elites against people, sacking top civil servants and arousing the sectarian demons of Northern Ireland. So the current influence of the USA may not be such a bad thing. Importing some of Biden's Climate Change vision, commitment and integrity may be salutary as Kerry demonstrated. But the moral is we must give up the consoling claim to “punch above our weight”. As a declining State we have been losing weight for many years. We must also leave behind the fantasy of “taking back control”. In a globalised world the best, the only, realistic way to control our destiny and “punch above our weight” is within strategic alliances. And that requires some degree of shared sovereignty.

The basic snag with presenting national sovereignty as the exercise of some kind of glorious, autonomous agency is that it flies in the face of reality. National

sovereignty requires ‘sovereign capability’ which for better or for worse we, like most other nations, now lack in several respects, not least we don’t feed ourselves and we certainly don’t rule the waves. It is time we rejected the infantilism of Boris Johnson and developed some historical, corporate self-knowledge and purposive strategy for the future. By the next Ides of March the knives may be out.

See TheArticle 15/04/2021

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5.17 Deep Cuts in International Aid Shame us All 29/5/2021

“They no savvy shame” as the cook used to say in Nigeria. And he wasn’t working for Boris Johnson or Rishi Sunak. In 2005 at Gleneagles the G8’s European members led by Tony Blair decided to sign up to the UN development aid target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI). David Cameron later turned this pledge into a commitment in UK law. Johnson presides at the G7 June meeting this year with a reduced UK aid target of 0.5% of GNI. These cuts are particularly damaging in the midst of a pandemic. And here, having spent 35 years of my life working in international aid, I declare a personal interest.

Three figures give some idea of the magnitude of the global COVID problem. Sierra Leone where I worked with Muslim and Christian leaders in a national malaria education programme that reached five million – with pregnant women and under-fives most at risk – has vaccinated eight out of every thousand people. In oil-rich Nigeria with a population of around

200 million the figure is nine per thousand. In Malawi, which incidentally had the largest Department for International Development (DfID) office I've come across in Africa, it's 17.5 per thousand. These figures almost guarantee new and more dangerous mutations. And they won't stay in Africa.

Despite the government's expressed preference to 'cut once, cut deep' there have been two very deep cuts in our former £14 billion aid budget. According to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (that reports to the All-Party International Development Committee) last year there was an actual cut of £2.94 billion based on - an overestimate of - the amount GNI had fallen. There followed this year a further cut of £4 billion, apparently at the insistence of the Treasury. The very poorest countries are hit hardest by these sudden unprepared for cuts.

Andrew Rawnsley in last Sunday's *The Observer*, quotes a former Cabinet member describing the reduction in funding as nothing to do with economics and 'utterly cynical'. "It's because they think aid cuts go down well in the red wall seats", he said. There may be some truth in that claim but, hamstrung by vast Trident costs and by ring-fenced departmental budgets, there was also fear that not being able to increase the Defence budget would alienate Conservative voters. And on the Tory backbenches there is a strong 'charity begins at home...and ends there' faction, long hostile to DfID, who applauded its absorption into the Foreign Office.

Insufficient time and thought has been given to which beneficiaries, countries and

categories of programmes would face reductions, and their consequences. From March to December 2020, £1.39 billion of British aid was spent on anti-COVID measures around the world. You might have thought that in the midst of a pandemic funding for the rest of the health sector in the poorest countries would be carefully protected. But the cuts hastily introduced this year damage programmes against malaria, polio and HIV and, most importantly, will affect public health systems which prevent and control disease, including COVID.

The Victorians were smart enough to work out that parsimony and indifference to the health of the poor was a bad idea. Cholera and other infectious diseases they realised jumped class barriers and borders. This simple observation applied globally does not seem to have fully penetrated the Johnson government's policy though, characteristically, Gordon Brown has made it crystal clear.

Providing COVID equipment, PPE's, oxygen, ICUs and so on will make only a marginal difference if the recipients in a local health system are badly organised, corruptly managed or even barely functioning. And here is the Achilles heel of government-to-government funding providing good copy for the right-wing press and clearing the consciences of voters who support cuts in aid. If the government clinic is not properly funded, the nurses and doctors poorly trained or doing two jobs, and the clinic has no drugs or equipment that works, it is to little avail. Corruption and poor governance kills. Sensitive interventions in the management of ministries can and do make a difference and must continue.

In an ideal world, the comparative advantage of governmental aid interventions generally is scale. Immunisation for example must reach whole populations as we all know from our recent experience of Covid. There are, of course, large NGOs such as OXFAM which can manage significant humanitarian programmes by providing clean water and similarly Save the Children for education. The British government has pathways to those in need via such relevant NGOs that bypass corrupt governments.

Our government is also more covertly dipping into development aid spending for services provided by other Departments of State. While COVAX spending is appropriately taken from the aid budget spending on peacekeeping should come out of the defence budget and for climate change out of Business and Energy - not out of development aid. And all such assistance in our interconnected world should be considered as a security measure if the term is to have much meaning. FCO/DfID needs to learn from the COVID pandemic and focus on funding for health and education. This year's cut of £4 billion should be reversed immediately.

Health and education are not only pivotal for a country's future they are unifying concerns shared by every parent irrespective of faith, ethnicity or nationality. Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs), local and international, do wonderful work. In Sierra Leone I have watched a Pentecostal pastor and an Imam together teaching parents about bed nets, mosquitoes and standing water, then going back to their communities to bring health education into their sermons. And there are no more influential health visitors than respected elder village women chatting to mothers at bath-time, bringing health messages for the under-fives into the conversation. I have watched illiterate women being trained to recognise symptoms of a score of major diseases in Mali so

they can send those who need to go to the nearest clinic for treatment. These are the sort of small-scale things NGOs do well and they can often be scaled up in support of health Ministries where the potential for national action lies.

As our Government Ministers sit round the Cabinet table or claim improbably to camera that cuts to health programmes are temporary, I wish they could be transported to the places where the cuts fall to meet grass roots workers and explain why our rich country can't help them. The £4 billion cut this year is about 1% of what Mr. Sunak has been spending on dealing with the multiple impacts of COVID in UK. Andrew Mitchell, former Secretary of State for International Development, knows what a shameful, short-sighted and damaging step the Chancellor and the Prime Minister are taking. MPs who think like Mitchell should stand up and, like him, be counted.

See TheArticle 27/05/2021

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Chapter 6

Brexit

6.1 Brexit: From Rule-Taker to Myth-Maker? 11/6/2018

We underestimate the importance of Europe's different political cultures. They shape attitudes to the European Union. For many years I've visited a small Spanish village just below the snow-line in the Sierra Nevada. Opposite the gates of the cemetery is a rock wall with a faded, but visible, cluster of white painted crosses. Everyone knows which are the local Republican, Communist, and pro-Franco families. Despite EU-funded changes, a swimming pool, a new road, a reliable water supply, pick-up trucks instead of mules, historical memory is strong.

Even with O' level Latin, diligent inspection of El Pais detects passion, honour, intransigence and vitriol at the heart of Spanish political speeches. Former Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's response to ETA's goodbye swansong amounted to "we defeated you, stop talking rubbish, good riddance". In the midst of the Catalan crisis not a single reconciliatory word came from the Spanish government, nor from King Felipe, wagging his finger at the separatists.

Likewise Eastern Europe has its own particularities. It is easy to take the high ground on refugee questions, to pour moral opprobrium on the Hungarian, Czech, Polish – (and now the new Frankenstein populist Italian governments). It is merited. But some consideration needs to be given to their historical memories

too. The experience of the foreigner, Ottoman, Russian, or Nazi, has been dismemberment, occupation, fear and resistance. A kind of survivor nationalist trauma has infected the bloodstream emerging in a xenophobic way in the circumstances of the 21st. century.

Historical memory blends imperceptibly into historical myth - and sometimes into historical amnesia. This is well illustrated in the UK. My guess would be that the majority of the British population can trace their ancestry during the last three hundred years to people born outside the UK. Immigration has been constitutive and positive for Britain, varying in intensity and place of origin from Huguenots to Irish Catholics sleeping rough on the Liverpool docks, from Windrush to Poles. Attitudes to immigration have changed. What remained consistent is intolerance and hostility prior to integration, followed by acceptance, except during the heyday of Empire when doors were open and welcome official. If you want to know the exact contemporary state of play look at Dame Louise Casey's carefully researched review of integration published in December 2016.

But what singles Britain out from her European neighbours is not so much the 20 miles of sea from the coast to the Continent, crossed by generations of immigrants, but the failure of invaders to do the same. The UK has not been occupied since 1066. It does not share that profound European historical experience. Britain had its civil war before civil wars could literally destroy a country (Sherman had a good try in the Confederate South of the USA and consider those States political tradition).

Britain's experience of surviving catastrophic defeat at Dunkirk, seven days in May 1940, became the source of a resonant national myth. Resonant because like all prevailing myths it contains a significant kernel of truth. In its own vision Britain became the plucky little island that single handed held out against the

global menace of fascism while countries east and west of the Maginot line fell before the Nazi blitzkrieg. A national weakness for the posh, eccentric celebrity with a clear message and the gift of the gab developed along with a belief that with ball of string and amateur know-how, Britain can go it alone. This popular narrative was immensely reinforced by the clever work of the Ministry of Information during the Second World War. Ball-of-string Britain was fighting Hitler's inhuman mechanised military juggernaut. David versus Goliath. Davis versus Barnier. In the words of Prime Minister John Major in 1993: "Fifty years on from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers". A quarter of a century on and the green suburbs have yet to be conquered. There may be Brexiteers who believe that BREXIT is necessary to destroy dependency on the Welfare State, create an economic crisis and forcibly generate, or restore, the innovative potential contained in our national myth. But it is the myth itself that drives the grey BREXIT vote: We didn't let them in when they came with tanks and doodle-bugs so why should we let them in when they come in the back of lorries and on Eurostar? We can stand proudly alone and anyone who thinks different is a traitor.

Well, we were very lucky that Japan finally brought the USA into the war and that Hitler's military misjudgment opened an eastern front and brought in Soviet military power on the allied side. The world has changed. Britain's undoubted capacity for innovation and research needs the vast EU market and its skill-sets, the bright entrepreneurial immigrants, and the manual labour, to do well just as it has for the past fifty years. Nostalgia is a poor substitute for economic policy. The European Union must also acknowledge reality. It is time to admit that the differences in political cultures, historical experience, economic stability and social cohesion of its 28 different states cannot be managed merely in terms

of “margins of appreciation”, the official term for allowing a small amount of wriggle-room for each national culture while retaining the EU’s core, human rights, values. As the rise of popular and governmental anti-EU sentiment demonstrates, the differences now require something like a two-tier EU to be accommodated. Ironically this requires the innovative, empirical and pragmatic British tradition subverting the principled deductive ways of thinking in the EU Commission.

Short of a further shock to the system, the metastasis of populism into more EU member states for example, such a *crise de conscience* is most unlikely to happen. Both Britain and Europe are indeed in crisis. Meanwhile Mr. Putin is laughing along with his cyber-warriors.

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6.2 Brexit: Who Loses, Where & Why?

28/7/2018

The final days of the last Parliamentary session resembled the end of term in a failing school. A June away-day in the North-East had not improved things. Discipline was collapsing. Students who should have been excluded hadn’t been. Prefects were running amok. The teaching staff appeared increasingly inept and incapable of controlling the class. Two had resigned. Everyone was falling behind on delivering the syllabus.

The Prime Minister responded by beginning the recess with a Grand Tour starting with a visit to Hartlepool. The purpose of this sally had something to do with a hard Brexit. Exactly what was unclear. Were the people of Hartlepool meant to understand that a hard Brexit was a bad idea, that the Prime Minister would carry on bravely producing fudges unacceptable both to the EU and to her barmy back-benches thus making a hard BREXIT more likely,

or did she mean ‘crashing out’ would be better than a bad deal? Don’t ask me. And why Hartlepool? This is a genuine question – not a touch of Londoner north-of-Watford disdain - which yields an interesting possible answer. Hartlepool voted 69.9% for Leave on a 65% turn-out. (The national figure was 52% on a 72% turn-out). Nearby Redcar and Cleveland voted 66% Leave on a 70% turn-out, Middlesborough voted 65.5% Leave on a 64% turn-out, and Stockton-on-Tees 62% on a 71% turn-out. Only Darlington was less enthusiastic for BREXIT with 56% for Leave on a 71% turn-out. Put these towns together and you have the new Tees Valley Combined Authority, created two years ago, a product of north-eastern devolution with a Mayor, innovative and expanding businesses and some big problems. Plus a population of 680,000 significantly more pro-Brexit than most other regions. If Theresa May could convince them of her intentions, whatever they are, she could convince other Leave voters. Sorry to deploy these figures but facts in Brexit discussions are as rare as diamonds in an Arron Banks South African mine. The Tees Valley’s problems are reflected in Hartlepool having, between April 2017 and March 2018, the highest urban unemployment rate in the country. Not a natural Tory Party stronghold you might say, and you would be right. All five towns have Labour Party seats. Peter Mandelson, no longer “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich provided they pay their taxes” used to represent Hartlepool. In 2017, in the face of the Tees Valley’s economic and social plight, the Combined Authority produced an investment plan and economic strategy which aimed to take advantage of its new devolved status and a small pot of money that gave it a modicum of planning power. The 2017 strategy pointed up the interlocking needs of the North-East if sustained economic growth was to become a reality. For the period until 2020/1 the Tees Valley Authority budgeted £464 million of investment. It planned to spend £220 million on Business, Growth, R&D,

Employment and Skills. Of this nearly half, would be coming from European Union Funding. The Authority has also been establishing funding streams extending beyond this period including £173 million from ESIF, the European Structural Investment Fund. All this money will be lost in March 2019 as Britain leaves the European Union.

To sum up, the majority of voters in the Tees Valley region voted in 2016 to eliminate funding that might, with competent planning from the Local Authority and Labour MPs, have boosted the local economy and created decently remunerated employment. Are we really expected to believe that this is what they intended?

Commitments, pledges and guarantees from government abound. Yet further unfortunate facts abound too: nationally most schools are in chronic debt; the NHS is getting future top-ups but not enough to sustain current level of service; our police are understaffed; our transport systems and utilities are in bad shape; our army, navy and air-force are pared back to the minimum for national security, and our energy future is in jeopardy owing to commissioning of French nuclear reactors that are flawed.

So - excuse the sarcasm – the North-East has no need to worry. A Tory government in the inevitable post- Brexit crisis will prioritize stumping up the money from a non-existent Brexit dividend to compensate five Labour Constituencies in the North East for loss of European funding. Really? Multiply this implausibility across hundreds of different contexts, agricultural, cultural, prisons, and so on, add new needs created by a decade of austerity throughout the UK. It is likely the North-East, and to a lesser degree all the UK, is in for a bad shock.

So will Mr. Corbyn cast aside his ideological purity and demonstrate that he is a member of the Labour Party not a socialist sect, and now call for a second

referendum? Two of the Tees Valley Authority Labour MPs, Anna Turley and Dr. Paul Williams, have courageously put their constituents before their own political careers defied the whip and voted to stay in the Common Market. Will the people of the North-East be given the opportunity to change their minds now they know that BREXIT means the economy of the North-East will be damaged. Will Mr. Corbyn speak out for the poor and disadvantaged whom Brexit will make greatly more poor and disadvantaged in the North-East and elsewhere? Or will he just sit and hope that the Tories implode so he can, just possibly, inherit the position of Prime Minister in a ruined Britain?

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6.3 Brexit & Democracy

6/8/2018

It is possibly too late for reasoned argument about BREXIT. But earlier last week BBC Radio 4's Today programme began describing clearly for listeners what one possible option for staying in the single European Market after BREXIT might mean: the path taken by Norway. The BBC is fulfilling its Reithian role to inform and educate a public otherwise badly served by the studied vagueness or strident argument of many politicians and their supporters. The other sources of constructive thinking and good governance are the Bank of England and Parliamentary Select Committees, notably Exiting the EU and Home Affairs. The British public has almost never heard inspiring accounts of the values that the EU tries to embody, nor the benefits that have accrued to the UK from its membership, nor the Security, workplace and human rights protections afforded EU citizens. There has rarely been any thoughtful analysis of the nature of sovereignty in the modern world, nor has immigration been discussed dis-aggregated into asylum seekers, economic migrants, future NHS and social

care staff, seasonal agricultural labour and students. Nor has the way the different European Courts relate to EU member states and our own judicial system been adequately explained. The field has been left to tendentious, generalized and usually inaccurate assertions on issues of great concern for Leave voters.

Indeed even delving into such matters is likely to identify the interlocutor as a member of ‘the elite’ wishing to impose their undemocratic dominance on hard-working British people, and conspiring to thwart the popular will. Any presentation of data or attempt to inform becomes “an affront to democracy”. Yet, in reality, the greatest threat to democracy comes from the relentless push for BREXIT at any cost.

Democratic political systems offer citizens the greatest freedom of expression, personal liberty and responsibility consonant with public order. Democracy is also the least bad way of getting rid of governments that fail to work for the Common Good. There is much more to sustaining a democratic culture than organizing elections and counting votes. Unfortunately for democracy to work for the Common Good, there must be an informed electorate; it’s unfortunate because the forces at play to keep electorates misinformed are now more diverse and powerful than ever. The British print media are probably no better, no worse today than in the past. But they are apparently the most mistrusted in Europe and it is hard to believe newspapers such as the Daily Mail, Sun, and Daily Express do not amplify and contribute to xenophobia and the growing deepening divisions within British society, not least about BREXIT.

Before, during and after the Referendum campaign, politicians have thought nothing of promoting unconscionable propaganda: Turkey was about to become a EU member state and would decant its population into Britain; BREXIT would bring hundreds of millions of pounds into NHS coffers; old ladies were

being denied emergency medical treatment because of the flood of immigrants, and so on. Or, from the other side, there would have to be an immediate emergency BREXIT budget following a Leave victory. This REMAIN contribution to misinformation did not impede George Osborne becoming editor of the Evening Standard. BREXIT has not been the cause of what is now widely described as a crisis of democracy. In this country it has merely revealed and contributed to the crisis.

The deterioration in the tone and language of public discussion is telling. The anonymity of social media has been a contributory factor leaking extremist and violent language into public discourse. Twitter postings from members of the 'Metropolitan Elite' now frequently abusive. Brexiteers call the judiciary traitors and public enemies when their judgements do not meet press barons' approval. Pro-Brexit politicians invoke the Will of the People meaning only the 52% who voted Leave in a referendum debate shaped by outrageous propaganda. Have the 48% who voted Remain ceased to be the People? Aren't these little tricks with words indicative of an indifference to growing social divisions? Lurching into populism, repeating this mantra, is apparently fine with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

Social media allows many good things but it creates silos and echo-chambers of non-communicating prejudices and cleverly targeted misinformation. It is still too early to determine if Russian cyber-interference played any part in the referendum but it is obvious that breaking up the EU – and NATO - is one of Putin's major foreign policy objectives. It is likely that were there a second referendum he would indeed intervene.

If there is a second referendum, a logical and reasonable requirement after the known defects of the first, it should be the last. We have a representative democracy and a parliamentary system that, with all its flaws, works. Referendums

are a recent addition to our electoral system and they do not enrich political life. We were pushed into this most recent referendum, by David Cameron who believed he could defeat the ultra-nationalists on the Tory back-benches, and by British anti-EU feeling dating back two decades. Cameron was wrong and now we are seeing the result.

It is too late and too difficult to back-track. Exploring and negotiating a Norway-type option – with the obvious national differences and potential disadvantages for the UK – may offer a consensual position that might plausibly represent the will of the British people and might minimize damage to our economy. It now seems the least damaging way forward. What we have at the moment is a hopeless fudge that was designed to hold the Tory Party together but will more likely break the country apart.

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6.4 Brexit: The End-Game

22/9/2018

In the game of chess, pawns can be promoted into queens when they reach the other side of the board. That is a lot of squares to cross with a high risk of being taken by the other side on the way. Queening doesn't happen very often: one or other of the players has usually resigned before it gets to the End Game.

In the EU Middle Game, Boris Johnson and David Davis, both knights on the UK side, were lost. A pawn of the DUP and the Tory back benches, Theresa May is lucky to reach the end game. She stands little chance of being transformed into an all-powerful queen. This to my mind is because she has not yet made the speech that she needs to make. Here is a draft ready for the Prime Minister to deliver.

“Good Evening. (Sombre dress, direct to camera)

After much deliberation I have decided to speak to you, fellow citizens, on a matter that deeply troubles us all. On 26 June 2016 those of you eligible to vote chose by a majority to leave the European Union. None of us, and I include myself, a lapsed Remainder (smile), could possibly have known with any assurance what this decision would entail. This is neither shameful nor surprising. The task of disentangling forty years of countless accumulated links, ties, and formal binding arrangements with the European Union was daunting and unprecedented. Yes, I believed the overall effect of those relationships to be mostly beneficial and that inclined me to remain.

I have learnt since I was elected to Parliament in 1997 to be cautious about making policy based on forecasting, even when provided by those who are rightly considered experts in their field (suggestion of a smile). But I am committed to building policy on evidence. The evidence is now overwhelmingly that reaching No Deal is becoming more likely. No Deal means for us and for future generations a dire economic impact, loss of jobs, losses for businesses, losses of businesses moving out of the United Kingdom, losses of tax revenues and therefore further austerity with the poor bearing the burden, and the question of the border between Ireland and the United Kingdom unresolved.

This is not a legacy I wish to leave.

In the past I have often said that No Deal is better than a Bad Deal. As we get closer to the end of this stage of our negotiations with the European Union, the picture is getting clearer: both are unacceptable. As your Prime Minister, I never forget Government works not only for the wellbeing

of the present generation but for future generations. It is important to remember that the younger generation, sons, daughters, grandchildren voted by a large majority (emphasize) to remain. Their views must be taken seriously.

Throughout my premiership I have strived for the unity of my Cabinet, Party and Country. But we must not let unity be the enemy of truth, prosperity and justice. Nor should talking about the likely consequences of leaving the Single Market, the single most important market for our goods and services, and the Customs Union, be dismissed as “fear-mongering”. Hard facts as they emerge should be an integral part of our decision-making directed at the good of the country. We have now reached a point in our negotiations when evidence of the damage which leaving the EU will cause our country cannot be brushed aside.

I have worked tirelessly with civil servants and government ministers in negotiations with the EU. We have made some progress. I realise fully that what I am saying to you tonight will displease a significant number of voters and MPs in my own Party. But I cannot continue to conduct negotiations with a mandate that I believe can only lead to stalemate and impasse. The vote of confidence that matters most to me is that coming from you, the British people. Perhaps you will think I should have spoken earlier. I have waited until it became absolutely clear that the leaders of the EU cannot and will not make concessions that they believe undermine the principles which define membership of the European Union. There is no easy time to tell hard truths (rueful look).

PAUSE

For this reason I have asked the Electoral Commission today to prepare for an opportunity for you to consider the new facts as we now see them and

choose the way forward. You will be asked to make this vital decision in a fresh vote in a few months time. By then you will have a clearer picture of the options before us than now, much clearer I hope than two years ago.

(Short pause)

I have undertaken much reflection and introspection before speaking to you tonight. Saying ‘I have changed my views’ is a very hard decision for a political leader. We must move away from the dangerous idea that leadership is rigidly inflexible. Yes, when the facts change, views on what to do should change. Britain is at a cross roads. Our democracy demands that people when voting have adequate knowledge of the future destination of their society. My pledge to you is to champion truth in the forthcoming debate, both from my lips and those of my colleagues in Parliament. For without truth our democracy is undermined.

(Smile) Thank you and goodnight”.

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6.5 Brexit: Through the Looking Glass

18/10/2018

The game of chess can either end in checkmate or stalemate. With negotiations deadlocked, BREXIT negotiations are now being described as a stalemate. Stalemate means that a player not in check can only move into check. No-one loses. The result is a draw. Checkmate occurs when a player’s King is both in check and will be captured wherever it moves. Someone wins. Someone loses. You can’t be stalemated and checkmated at the same time.

If it is a real stalemate the UK loses the game; “no deal” is a disaster. So the Tories have managed to get the UK stalemated and checkmated at the same time. They have pulled off an impossible feat. No wonder they engage in magical thinking. The UK government has not acquitted itself well nor even understood the rules of the game and the thinking behind their opponents’ moves. Pity the poor civil servants who negotiated and played skillfully but to no avail.

But who cares whether chess terms give a true picture of the mess we are in? Not the Conservative Party, which like the Queen in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, manages to believe “as many as six impossible things before breakfast”. Our Prime Minister, due for a great fall, adopts the worldview of Humpty Dumpty: “a word means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less”. Which is just what the incantation “BREXIT means BREXIT” means – if you see what I mean. “The question is”, said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that’s all”.

The Brexiteers, led by the European Research Group (ERG), disport themselves in this magical Wonderland. For example, when they first got into a corner over a hard border in Ireland, mere mention of the words “latest technology” was supposed, in one mighty bound, to get them out of it. Drones hovering over Crossmaglen would count cows crossing the Republic’s border. Artificially Intelligent customs robots in roadside haystacks in Armagh, or on ferries to Stranraer, would register the country of origin of goods. Or something like that. Then they shifted to producing a weighty tome on less-techy bureaucratic controls with electronic form-filling in factories. And all shall be well, all manner of thing shall be well. Just saying it makes it happen. Because, you see, it’s MAGIC.

In case you hadn’t realized it, CanadaPLusPlus is Brexiteer for Abracadabra. Just

speak the words. They trip nicely off the tongue. If the spell doesn't work, all you need do is a "pivot". This is clever new trick from the National Association of ERG Magicians. It means magically getting the EU and Parliament to accept another unworkable solution to the problems thrown up by BREXIT. The Merlin Award this year should go to the inventor of "The Pivot". Deciding you have made a calamitous mistake and radically taking the situation in hand with firm leadership? Well, we all know no ERG magician would hold their audience for one minute with that kind of performance.

The magicians of the ERG cannot, or will not, recognize that the EU starts off with principles and deductively comes to policy decisions. And then mean what they say. Whereas Little England starts off with the incantation "BREXIT means BREXIT", and ends with touches of World War II nostalgia, standing alone, getting by with only a ball of string, duct tape, flack jacket, and lots of jolly optimism. . . . and, if desperate, some latest technology.

Under pressure, a principle may emerge like a genie out of the bottle of pragmatism; for example there can be no "economic separation of Northern Ireland from the UK" (Prime Minister) or, if you prefer our more colourful Attorney-General, be "torn out of the UK". But some economic difference is an inevitable product of devolution. In addition, the Democratic Unionists (DUP) celebrate having laws different from those of the rest of the UK: notably their own restrictive laws on abortion and gay marriage. These two big issues are apparently less important than the remote – backstop - possibility of being legally consigned to a customs arrangement different from that of post-BREXIT Great Britain.

To jog your memory, the DUP are supposed to be governing Northern Ireland

alongside Sinn Fein rather than taking bungs from Theresa May and threatening the UK government about the direction of BREXIT negotiations. The checkmated player has two possible ways to behave: stomp off in a huff after knocking the board over or politely shake hands. The DUP can expect to forfeit respect when they threaten the former. They could, though, shake hands on the UK remaining in a/the Customs Union and Single Market, the only possible solution, barring a short-term fudge, to a clash of two irreconcilable principles.

How many legions has the DUP? They only won 28 out of the 90 seats in the 2017 Stormont Legislative Assembly elections, just 28.1% of the votes cast. And remember, 56% of the Northern Irish referendum vote was for Remain. Are we really going to let the future of the United Kingdom be determined by ten DUP members in the London Parliament plus the ERG? Perhaps the DUP should pivot to concentrate on doing the job they were elected to do in Northern Ireland: co-governing the province on behalf of all its citizens in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement, an International Treaty. For, as I'm sure all good Ulster men and women would agree, the Devil makes work for idle hands.

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6.6 Brexit: Where to Now?

9/12/2018

Pity the many decent, honest politicians seeking the Common Good, who, because of the BREXIT debacle, will fall under a blanket condemnation of the "political elite". We now know where their colleagues' choice of personal

ambition before national interest has taken us. A combination of magical thinking and lying has produced the most threatening political crisis in living memory: government and opposition hopelessly reduced to warring factions or a calculating inertia. The current conflict and confusion, political irresponsibility and incompetence, are a clear and present danger to democracy.

Once you start lying, falsifying and spinning, it is extremely difficult to stop. The latest lie derives from the previous falsification or spin. Take for example the claim that in our representative democracy, referendums are legally binding rather than advisory. The sovereignty of Parliament is the lynch pin of our form of democracy, so referendums cannot be definitively decisive; we are not a small Swiss canton governed as a direct democracy. One false statement leads to another. You end up hinting there will be riots in the street if there is a second referendum.

David Cameron on losing the 2016 referendum was not legally obliged to introduce legislation to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty leading to the UK's future withdrawal from the European Union. He scuttled away leaving the task to Theresa May. She was temporarily delayed by the Supreme Court ruling that it required an Act of Parliament to empower her to start the process of withdrawal. So it was Parliament which, in March 2017, responding to the majoritarian 17.4 million who voted to leave, and not to the 16.1 million who wanted to remain, authorized the government to trigger Article 50. And it has to be Parliament who revokes their former decision – or, on the other hand, ratifies the lengthy Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on our future relationship with the EU. However in their present state of mind, Parliament is barely up to revoking the menu in the Members Dining Room.

Division plus deadlock is not an ideal context for a - second - referendum. The inflamed language of Tory speeches indicates a further attempt to confuse and misdirect the public. A second referendum, we are repeatedly told, would be a “betrayal” of the public. The people have spoken. Well, 17.4 million have spoken and 16.1 million have also spoken . . . and said the opposite. Thanks to a blizzard of misinformation at the time of the June 2016 referendum nobody had much idea where BREXIT was heading or what the consequences of leaving the European Union might be. Two years went by before the government thought it worthwhile to acknowledge the views of the 48% who voted to remain. Theresa May is now presenting her marathon negotiation with EU principles and house rules, her – preliminary - deal, as an attempt to heal UK divisions, and respond to some of the Remainers’ needs. But the agreement she brought home does not work as a compromise between factions in the Tory Party, the Opposition, the Lib. Dems, SNP, or DUP with whom she has also been negotiating. Hence the current deadlock.

In these dire Vegan times I must watch my language. But our carnivorous British and European ancestors might have described the choice of BREXIT in June 2016 as buying “a pig in a poke” i.e. unseen (a poke according to Mr. Google is a bag, from the old French *poque*). This caveat emptor about not buying big items until you can see the goods has remained common sense for some five hundred years. Having been sold a pig in a poke over two years ago, the British public has the democratic right to evaluate what they have subsequently found in the poke. So who is betraying whom here?

The overwrought reaction of Brexiteers to the simple proposition of a second vote is telling. From the mightily ambitious Jeremy Hunt, looking relatively

good as Foreign Minister after Boris Johnson, we get warnings of civil unrest if there were to be another referendum. Why do they want to frighten the electorate out of an informed democratic choice now that we have a better understanding of what the different options entail?

Just imagine it. A disproportionate number of elderly and old people voted Leave and younger people voted overwhelmingly Remain. So will we see Zimmer frames clashing with police shields, mobility vehicles running down Remainers, pensioners manning barricades in seaside towns, bowls clubs storming Wormwood scrubs? But, as the ERG would be the first to admit, we are not French. Mayhem as the British response to being asked to advise our representatives in Parliament about whether we want them to ratify Theresa May's agreement with Brussels or call it a day and seek to remain in the EU? I don't think so. I would foresee cancelling some police leave in case of Right-Wing extremist violence. Though they don't need No-BREXIT as an excuse.

Theresa May has a way out though she will probably soldier on pursuing Project Fantasy, seeking further EU concessions, and be humiliated. It is high time she delivered the speech I wrote for her, on 22 September 2018, free of charge, still available but sadly neglected, BREXIT: The End Game (www.ianlinden.com/blogs.html). She will now need an extension beyond the end of March 2019 for her next move. Unfortunately, affairs are so disorderly there are no suitable chess metaphors left.

And spare a thought for those MPs who also want to do the right thing for their country and constituents but struggle to understand what that might be. Project Reality would be a start: seeking the people's advice through a people's vote, asking them to choose between the EU-Theresa May Withdrawal Agreement or remaining in the European Union, recognizing we are reduced

to choosing the least bad of the ways forward.

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6.7 Brexit: Bring on the Unicorns

9/1/2019

This is hard to believe. But I'm assured by family members in Canada that the most in-demand present for young children in North America last Christmas was Dookie, the pooping Unicorn. I won't give away manufacturers' scatological details only add that it comes with a "squatty potty". The rest I leave to your imagination or the imagination of the under nines.

My family demographics did not provide me with any equally reliable information on the popularity of pooping Unicorns in Britain. But thoughtful Remainers will instantly see what a wonderful present Dookie would have made for the children and grandchildren of the Tory European Reform Group and their hangers-on. What a great symbol for the Leave campaign as a whole. A large model should go up on a plinth in Parliament Square in time for Tuesday's vote. And who better than Sir Ian 'Dookie' Smith to unveil it?

I should not limit these festive thoughts to the Conservative Party alone. Thanks to Jeremy Corbyn, matters are moving beyond darkly funny to car crash serious. I was disturbed to find that Andrew Rawnsley, a commentator who is usually forensically objective, in his last two Observer columns, was beginning to crack and sounding honest-to-goodness angry. Things must be bad.

What also struck me were the latest figures Rawnsley quoted for the current opinion of Labour members and supporters on Leave, and how they would vote in a second referendum were it to be organised. 88% of Labour members and 71% of Labour supporters would vote Remain, assuming it was on the ballot

paper. 89% of members and 73% of supporters now thought it would be wrong to vote Leave. The last You-Guv sample of 25,000 Labour voters came plum within this range and also found that 75% favoured a second referendum.

Jeremy Corbyn significantly increased Labour Party membership because he appeared as a radical new voice offering a different sort of politics. As Rawnsley pointed out, his core appeal depended on his being a listener promising that Labour Party policy really would be determined democratically in accordance with the views and priorities of its members. This distinguished Jeremy Corbyn from earlier Labour leaders - who looked to a wider public - and got Labour members chanting his name.

Well, it was all, at best, a bit of a disappointment, at worst a con-trick. Mr. Corbyn only agrees with his base when his base agrees with him. He still inhabits the arguments of the 1970s and has always been ideologically – and stubbornly – opposed to the European Union, seeing it as an international capitalist club. The tortuous presentation, ambiguities and obfuscations of Labour Party policy on BREXIT have served to obscure the simple fact. Pity Sir Keir Starmer. There is a massive THREE QUARTERS majority in his Party for Remain, but Corbyn persists in renegeing on his contract with the members and ignoring them on this vital issue.

At least so far. Because there is growing evidence that parts of Labour's membership have emerged from denial and moved into anger about what they are coming to see as Corbyn's betrayal of their future. The number of Labour held constituencies with predominantly Leave populations may offer more pragmatic explanations for his behaviour. But there are many courageous Labour MPs who are behaving as leaders of their Leave communities and putting the national interest, and that of their constituents, before their political careers, and calling for a second referendum in the light of the future economic consequences of

Brexit in their impoverished regions.

If, in the face of his many young members, Mr. Corbyn pursues his Brexit politics to date, a performance smacking of abject hypocrisy, he will pay the price. And so will the Labour Party. Momentum is not the young ones Corbyn Fan Club of commentators' myth. It has a more diverse membership. But it has enough youthful followers, with youth's sensitivity to hypocrisy, for the movement that has kept him in place to fade away as quickly as it coalesced. Those who come up fast usually go down fast.

The irony of the Brexit car crash is that it may be Theresa May who survives to fight another day. But Corbyn's days are numbered unless he gives up the ideas about the EU he swallowed in the 1970s. He needs to honour his pledge to his membership, and consider the national interest, instead of ineptly finessing his own misguided version of ideological purity.

I am sure, if he tries, Jeremy Corbyn could find a Pink Dookie on e-Bay the better to fulfil grandparental duties to which the hand of history calls him. Meanwhile he should heed a radical who has ideas that might genuinely reinvigorate the Labour Party: Amartya Sen. "While purity is an uncomplicated virtue for olive oil, sea air, and heroines in folk tales," he wrote, "it is not so for systems of collective choice"*.

Amartya Sen *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* San Francisco 1970, 200

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6.8 Brexit: Inglorious Revolution?

17/1/2019

Either Parliament, after a second Glorious Revolution, or the public, after a second referendum, will now have to decide about BREXIT. The meaningful vote was meaningful. The Labour confidence motion was duly

tabled and lost. There is talk about negotiating a permanent customs union. And there are indications behind the scenes of a Parliamentary revolution against the Executive, cross-Party moves to take control of the BREXIT process. Due consideration of a second referendum option has drawn closer.

Hyperbole about the negative consequences of a second referendum has consequently been cranked up in the last week, and will doubtless be cranked up some more. “Catastrophic”, “Unforgiveable”, “Betrayal” “Damaging our Democracy”, “Divisive and Disappointing”, “Stimulating violent right-wing extremism”, and “Opening the doors to Populism”. Can Dominic Grieve, asking the British public in his QC’s-crystal voice to confirm their June 2016 decision in the light of new information, be talking about the same thing?

In this Orwellian world, every criticism of a future People’s Vote should be applied to the first 2016 referendum. It was unforgiveable of David Cameron to land us in this situation then walk away leaving Theresa May to mop up. BREXIT has tipped the country into a catastrophic constitutional crisis. What has been divisive and disappointing is the inept and inflexible conduct of negotiations, stymied by being a dual negotiation between the Tory back benches and the EU. The tone of the BREXIT debate not only fed into right wing extremism, it created a climate in which the tragic death of a Member of Parliament at extremist hands took place. Phrases such as “red, white and blue BREXIT” and repetition of “the will of the People”, referring to 52% of them, opened the doors to populism. Government felt obliged to adopt, over a long thirty months, a series of sanitized populist appeals to the electorate.

The first referendum was indeed damaging to our democracy. The Leave

campaign involved an unprecedented level of calculated deception followed by a litany of mistakes, lies and half-truths that undermined trust. Channel 4's drama-documentary BREXIT: The Uncivil War confirmed how the Leave Campaign's new techniques and technology, deployed by Dominic Cummings, directed marginalized voters' anger towards the EU. 'Take back control' was a brilliant appeal to the emotions. I had forgotten 'Turkey', the incredible lie that Turkey was going to join the EU so that Izmir and Istanbul were about to decant their Muslim populations into Britain.

Looking back, it was a bad mistake to have a simple majority plebiscite on an immensely complex issue, a betrayal of parliamentary responsibility, to rescue a divided Tory Party. It was a mistake to tell the public that in our representative democracy they should do more than advise their representatives in Parliament. Instructing their elected representatives on an uncharted course of action - which a majority of parliamentarians believed ill-advised - challenged the principle of Parliamentary sovereignty. And, it was after all Parliamentary sovereignty which Leave proponents were keen to retrieve from the pooled sovereignty of the European Union.

The subsequent Brexiteer campaign against permitting the British public a genuine democratic choice in a second public vote has been relatively successful. It amounts to saying that the public should not be permitted to act on accumulated information about the salient features of the choice that they were asked to make. The Prime Minister and sundry Brexiteers pretend to know in telepathic detail what 17.4 million voters meant, and intended, when they voted Leave.

It is impossible to have a constructive conversation about a second referendum if you think an informed electorate is irrelevant to the conduct of democracy. Dominic Grieve's reasoned argument is immediately, and successfully, twisted

into “telling the people they got it wrong, making them vote again until they get it right.” In other words, playing one hundred percent into the story of the arrogant elite that doesn’t listen to the people. From another part of the same elite, we are daily given a dog-whistle reminding us that the public must not be allowed second thoughts on BREXIT lest it triggers right-wing violence. This amounts to Project Fear Mark Two: summoning a very dangerous genie out of the bottle. Are we really going to allow the contours of a future Britain to be determined by the blackmail threat of right-wing violence?

A second referendum is understandably presented as a betrayal by those strongly invested in Leave. But in reality Ireland, Denmark and France have adopted the expedient of a second referendum to resolve an EU choice, and in Britain we have done the same for issues involving devolution and the Welsh and Scottish assemblies. None of these second votes have resulted in civil war or fascist tyranny.

So what is Parliament going to do with its sovereignty if the second Glorious Revolution occurs? To wrest the driving wheel from the Tory Executive, Parliament in its present disarray is going to face a dangerous struggle; it may end up ingloriously in a ditch. As for the Executive, doing the same thing over and over again, hoping for a different outcome is usually taken as a sign of madness. Theresa May’s stubbornly held conviction that she can dictate her red lines to all and sundry while negotiating terms with the EU that go counter to the EU’s foundational principles fits that description.

It may also fit the description of a second referendum as a last resort to confirm democratic legitimacy of the first. But I doubt it. Second referendums statistically have a habit of reversing the outcome of the first. We won’t ever

know unless we give it a try. Or unless we are obliged to go to the Electoral Commission as the only way of climbing out of the ditch. Which would mean that attempts to take control and direct events by Parliament had proved more inglorious than glorious.

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6.9 Brexit: Consensus on Self-Harm?

10/2/2019

The statistics that suggest young people in this country are amongst the most anxious and miserable in Europe are particularly depressing for a grandparent. By commission or omission, the world our children and grandchildren are inheriting is the world we have collectively made. The current struggle to get social media platforms to eliminate addictive portrayals of self-harm is a worrying symptom of a wider malaise. I do not understand the psychology of self-harm but it must have something to do with rejection, isolation, frustration and pain. But it clearly leads to human tragedies. For a long time those with immense social media power have pretended that their cyber-platforms do not entail the responsibilities of a publisher towards the vulnerable, particularly the young.

Once this very human pain, rejection and frustration come into focus, the question follows: Is a whole country capable of collective self-harm? Fintan O'Toole presents some whacky ideas in his *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain*. But he convincingly answers yes to that question. He describes the pathology of England's identity crisis as a nation. "Self-harm is surely not the only logic in England's experience", he asks hopefully, after vividly describing the dynamics of what he calls 'sadopopulism' in recent years. The consequences

of this national turn to predictable self-harm are legion.

Unless a wide range of British institutions, most notably the Bank of England, have mutated into a conspiracy of REMAIN propagandists – and by this I mean alumni of the Boris-Davis-Farage school of casual liars – they are, responsibly and urgently, giving a warning to both government and people. There is now a wide-ranging consensus from those in a position to know, a virtually unanimous conclusion, that a No-Deal exit from the EU is catastrophic and any viable future May-fudge would have damaging consequences for the economy and particularly for the poor. So why is it foolish and undemocratic to heed this warning and to give the British public their right to respond to it in a People's Vote?

Trying to avert economic disaster is, of course, instantly dismissed as Project Fear. Yet after a decade of austerity shouldn't we fear a decline in GDP, productivity, investment and employment? Especially when those who have suffered most in the last decade will be the worst affected. Some fear is salutary. Is a doctor's warning "if you continue to gain weight you risk getting diabetes, heart problems and possibly cancer" Project Fear? Self-harm, reinforced by images and feelings of intense frustration, is compulsive. Its distorted perception of social, political and economic reality means it tragically ignores warnings, seen as conspiracies to block a resolution of the problem. Project Fear is anything you don't want to hear.

The Corbyn faction of the Labour Party, despite Labour's membership being overwhelmingly in favour of Remain and a Peoples' Vote, is now toying with joining Theresa May, apparently in a quest for a kinder variety of self-harm,. It is a shabby tactical game. Every time I hear the Shadow Trade secretary's, Barry Gardiner's, dulcet tones on the radio, he sounds to me like a clever scammer selling a Ponzi scheme to the unsuspecting. Labour Party policy on BREXIT is crystal clear. Everything is still on the table we are told. Except

the truth.

These are strange political times. Members of the Labour front bench abstain from a whipped vote, betray their fellow MP, Yvette Cooper, and do so with impunity. McDonnell and Corbyn have a calculated difference of emphasis in public. Keir Starmer has the impossible job of shepherding a herd of cats into following a coherent policy. It all feels like a phoney war, the lull before the storm. Under fifty days and counting. Which reminds me to cancel my direct debit to the Labour Party, and get an international driver's licence. The Labour Party leadership has now become more than a walk-on part in the BREXIT debacle.

I don't know about you, but I draw the line at paying a membership fee to the Labour Party to promote a policy whose results will be a less catastrophic version of national self-harm: banking on more food banks to feed the poor, further cuts in public services, even more understaffed NHS, increasing numbers of homeless on our streets, and giving the waiting paramilitaries in Ireland a new *casus belli*. That is not why for the last fifty years I have voted Labour. As you get older you get more risk-averse. And that, I confess, on behalf of my grandchildren, is one reason I am not willing to go along with such dangerous risks.

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6.10 Brexit: Forward to the Past?

13/3/2019

No-one can complain that the Britain of the Brexiteers is oppressed by the "tyranny of facts". When it comes to convincing people, Brexiteer emotion wins every time. And when it comes to emotion there is none more insidious than nostalgia for a world that never existed. Back to the imagined past has worked

a charm both here and in the USA. You would think we were re-fighting the Second World War not negotiating with fellow Europeans sympathetic to our plight and bemused by a respected nation reduced to ridiculousness.

I have to confess that, as a Londoner, I am much attracted to an imagined bygone world: the sight of cricket on the village green, Anglican ladies cycling to church, noble oaks dotting the landscape, acorns and shiny conkers on the ground. I'll pass on the warm beer. I have always believed that this world is to be discovered somewhere in between South London's ever expanding suburbia and the coastal area around the South Downs before the Channel. It all flies by too quickly on Eurostar. Not so when you travel by car to visit West Sussex and Hampshire.

I was with two Wodehouse lovers on a Wodehouse heritage hunt last weekend. If anyone conjures up a delightful world that never was it is P.G. Wodehouse. He gave us Bertie Wooster, Jeeves, the Drones' Club, Blandings, the Earl of Emswoth, Galahad Threepwood, Gussie Fink-Nottle, together making British ineptitude and fecklessness, mainly of the upper class, something to laugh at, enjoy and relish. David Croft and Jimmy Perry who scripted *Dad's Army* also created an imaginary world that we recognize as comforting and distinctly British. The comedy may be more historically situated and with a sharper edge; as Captain Mainwaring likes to say: "There's a war on you know". But no-one dies, no homes are destroyed, and the platoon survives for next week's fun. An imaginary Britain at imaginary war muddling through.

Inventive and imaginative as he was, Wodehouse didn't go far for some of the names of his characters. Emswoth is a pretty little town just into Hampshire on the edge of one of three fingers that the sea pushes inland along this part of the coast. On another finger of the sea lies Bosham which lent its name to Viscount Bosham, the Earl of Emswoth's heir. Wodehouse in his twenties lived

in one of Emsworth's prettier suburban roads in a house called Threepwood Cottage. We peered at the frontage with its small, faded blue plaque. The reality was a long way, and a lot different, from the Earl of Emsworth's literary abode, Blandings Castle, set in Shropshire.

Wodehouse moved to France in 1934 and seems to have been startled out of his imaginary world by the arrival of the Nazis in 1940 who promptly detained him for a year. Whilst in detention he stupidly did some jolly broadcasts for the Nazis. On his release he went into permanent exile in the USA. So any posthumous pride in Emsworth at their great comic writer was diminished. And, of course, following Wodehouse in 1940, the coming reality of the post-BREXIT world will startle many Brexiteers out of their imaginary world and much diminish the influence of its political leadership.

But other opportunities open up for Brexiteer MPs. They could, though, audition for roles in the next televised Wodehouse stories – Jacob Rees-Mogg should try out Jeeves, he's smooth and confident enough with a solution to every problem -Theresa May might make a scary Aunt Agatha. Forlorn-and-Failing Grayling brings a natural ineptitude to the small screen so perhaps Gussie Fink-Nottle though his relationship to newts is unknown.

Boris Johnson ought not to be given the chance, as he's already a self-made fiction. To a large section of the public he plays the role of insouciant posh-boy whose antics and scrapes we laugh at, and wonder how on earth he managed to become our Foreign Secretary. Whoops, he's succeeded in increasing the sentence on an innocent British subject in jail in Iran. And he's survived it. How does he manage it? It's the rake's progress. The fact is the rakes progress quite fast if they can open the door to a comforting imagined world. Boris Johnson's shambling chauvinism particularly appeals to the Tory grassroots and so he presents a nasty threat. Bertie was always afraid of Spode,

the leader of the Black Shorts, and quite right too. Don't ring us, we'll ring you. But back to actual Wodehouse-land. I wondered if in the 1920s there were so many pleasant cafes in these, Wodehouse's, stomping grounds? A cold, howling wind was coming in off the sea and we were grateful to find a warm and snug eating place. The conversation drifted to BREXIT despite our best intentions; like the Earl of Emsworth drawn to his pig you might say.

Britain seems now to be divided into those who think facts are real and that policies should be evidence-based, and those who shoe-horn reality into an emotional dream world based on a fanciful past. They inhabit a world in which BREXIT will return us to an era as imaginary as the one crafted by Wodehouse. As Orwell wrote: "he who controls the past controls the future, he who controls the present controls the past".

We asked the friendly waitress if she knew anything about P.G. Wodehouse. "No", she said. "He doesn't come in here".

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6.11 Brexit Agreement: May is Out?

22/3/2019

Almost three years after the Referendum there is no mystery about the Prime Minister's goals. First she aims to keep her Party together, and second she aims to achieve a satisfactory exit from the European Union honouring the 2016 Referendum result. The second aim is impossible because of the first.

Drawing clear red lines at the beginning of the negotiations and sticking to them was Theresa May's way of keeping the European Research Group (ERG) and other Brexiteers on board. This early decision and subsequent intransigence vitiated any possibility of a satisfactory agreement which a majority in

Parliament might approve. She had no intention of allowing a meaningful vote until recently. And it was forced on her. After her abysmal performance in the June 2017 General Election that she had called, the Prime Minister was reduced to dependence on the DUP, and became trapped by the Irish issue and the ‘backstop’, an impediment of her own making. The way forward was blocked.

Theresa May has now been caught between the EU’s principled positions, and, latterly, their practical and legal difficulties over the May EU elections, on one hand, and the DUP + ERG + other Brexiteer lobby on the other. And she has repeatedly been forced to eat her own words, going back on entrenched positions. As a result her authority has declined to vanishing point. The Prime Minister’s early statement that ‘no deal is better than a bad deal’ has come back to haunt her, and us. Her negotiating partners, the EU Commission and the 26 EU states, reacting to this abject performance, have been reduced to incredulity. Britain has lost its reputation for sound governance. It has become, at best, an object of pity around the world, at worst a laughing stock.

The Brexiteers endlessly repeat that they are merely carrying out the democratic will of the British people, and this is echoed by a captive Prime Minister. It is a simple powerful argument. Though the claim to know exactly what Leave voters want, and wanted, is more than implausible. At an emotional level Leave for many may have meant a protest against the state of the nation.

The counter argument is not so simple: the referendum was deeply flawed by lies, fake-news and manipulation of social media and, possibly, secret foreign involvement. BREXIT was not the will of 48% of the British people who voted, and they have been ignored for three years. The argument essentially

pits democracy and social stability against the probability of severe economic damage, and other grave negative impacts.

We now have much more knowledge of what is at stake in following different options. The Brexiteers' emphasis on democracy makes the government refusal to countenance a people's vote, which affords the democratic recognition that the British people have the right to choose from the different options now available, all the more telling. For it is obvious that those trying to block this democratic choice – and Theresa May is still trying to do so through her short extension request which aims to make it impossible – are fearful that a majority of the British public have understandably changed their mind.

Democracy is on the side of the Remainers. It is not too late to ask for a long extension, notify the Electoral Commission, and to demonstrate that democracy is not about one vote, one time, based on misinformation. The Prime Minister has three weeks in which to reverse her priorities and act in the genuine national interest. She inherited an intractable situation from her predecessor and should be accorded some sympathy. But if she is psychologically incapable of rising to the occasion and charting a new course she should go and give way to someone who can.

The People's Vote march on Saturday 23 March will provide some indication of how the public is thinking. It also provides Theresa May with the opportunity for a change of heart and a belated act of bold leadership. She should take it.

6.12 The EU: Obituary or Elegy?**12/4/2019**

Thinking about what might happen to us post-BREXIT has become obsessive. But do we care what effect Britain's departure would have on the European Union in the future? What is, and will be, the impact of BREXIT on the EU?

There are significant Eurosceptic, populist minorities in most member states so the EU has every reason to make BREXIT as unenticing as possible. Yet the EU Commission has waived firm deadlines and negotiated in good faith. Under the circumstances, the EU's negotiators to date have shown remarkable forbearance. Cast in the British press and portrayed by Brexiteers as the wily or intransigent enemy, threatened with disruption by the ERG, they have handled parliamentary chaos and delusional policies in the UK with patience and civility.

British negotiators took nearly three years to grasp that freedom of movement, goods and capital, are fundamental values underpinning the Single European Market, so non-negotiable in the withdrawal negotiations. The EU's cumbersome structures need this scaffolding of shared values. Flows of migrants create divisions and tensions putting unbearable pressures on Schengen's open internal borders. As Greece illustrated, the Eurozone's fiscal rigidities remain a pressing problem in the face of approaching recession and debt crises. Current conflict and uncertainty intensifies the EU's need to assert and support its values, a fact British negotiators were slow to grasp.

David Cameron discovered the significance of the EU's basic principles in 2016. He came away from Brussels with humiliatingly small concessions with which to satisfy British public opinion. Worse, he arrogantly believed that he could win a Remain vote in the face of an aroused British public. The EU

Commission swallowed the myth that Remain would win. The Prime Minister's efforts to appease her Right wing through erosion of the EU's core principles would have appeared then, and appear now to the Commission, as a potential existential threat.

Financial services represent 45% of UK exports. To continue benefitting from growing access to the EU 27's markets, Britain had to stay open to the free movement of labour as well as capital. Ditto if the UK wanted frictionless trade in goods. But from day one Theresa May's idea of British pragmatism and democratic accountability was to make ending free movement one of her non-negotiable red lines. Simon Fraser underlined in *The Times* of 4 April the lack of any serious debate about the future of financial services and the part played by the EU in their steady growth.

Perhaps during negotiations the EU's repeated emphasis on co-operation with the UK contained elements of regret that they had not conceded more to Cameron. The EU leaders' general failure to connect with Europe's 500 million people and share an appealing vision of the future pre-determined far more the result of the referendum. Who in Britain ever heard a balanced presentation of the importance of the EU and its achievements? The first time I heard stirring and inspiring speeches about EU values and vision was at the Vatican in October 2017 during a meeting of European bishops, politicians and political scientists led by Pope Francis. A case of literally preaching to the converted though an antidote to John Rowley Gillingham's book, *The EU: an Obituary* - nicely timed for publication in 2016 - which dwelt at length on the EU's failings.

Containing some jargon, some futurism and several non-sequiturs, Gillingham's book is an neo-liberal academic rant. A big step up from the daily stories of straight bananas and Boris Johnson's casual lies, the book primarily blames the

EU for over-restrictive regulatory measures and for not effectively promoting a European copy of the Pre-Trump neo-liberal US economy. It also chronicles egregious sums of money going missing in the past. The critics of the EU, like the devil, have all the best tunes.

Gillingham is thin on EU politics. But he highlights the line from Jean Monnet to Jacques Delors, the two promoters of European integration and advocates of a European army, a federal constitution and high levels of sectoral and political consolidation. But, with the exception of President Macron in his more Napoleonic moments, this is no longer the dream of the governments of most of the 27 member states.

Eastern European enlargement after the re-unification of Germany has been, by far, the most important structural change in the EU. Britain's role in pushing for an extensive rather than an intensive Europe, a 'widening' rather than a 'deepening', illustrates its former importance in influencing EU policy and frustrating integration. The access of eleven Eastern Europe countries during the last fifteen years brought both diversity and problems. Not least immigration.

It is easy to take the high ground on refugee questions, to pour moral opprobrium on the Hungarian, Czech, Polish – (and now the new Frankenstein populist Italian governments). It is merited. But some consideration needs to be given to their painful historical memories too. Their experience of the foreigner, Ottoman, Russian, or Nazi, has been dismemberment, occupation, fear and resistance. A survivor nationalist trauma has infected the bloodstream emerging in a xenophobic way in the circumstances of the 21st. century. Such nationalism does not sit easily with EU values.

The Monnet/Delors quest for European political integration is surely doomed to

failure. Maintaining a single market and currency is hard enough with this level of East-West diversity, not to mention North-South Europe economic differences. From the beginning Britain rejected Monnet's vision and Britain's voice was an important brake on an unrealistic political project, most of all during a time of rising nationalisms. The much denigrated two-track Europe seems an obvious answer to this unmanageable diversity. Both Britain and Denmark chalked up major opt-outs in the past and could find their place in a second tier.

After BREXIT it will certainly not be business as usual for the UK. Nor will the accumulated problems of the EU's structure and diversity be solved by business as usual. The solidarity amongst the 27, induced by Britain's antics, will be short-lived. Fissures caused by history, economics, and politics will reappear. If an EU first tier develops, it needs to reduce its democratic deficit and to reform in order to achieve a modest and workable political dispensation. And even this would create its own divisions.

Britain has had an important voice in Europe but after the current political collapse, it will be temporarily discounted. The patience of Tusk, Barnier and Juncker reveals their awareness that Britain's departure will diminish the EU. At a time of overlapping crises for the European Union, BREXIT will be more than an economic loss. Though for Presidents Putin and Trump it will be a significant gain.

Posted in TheArticle.com 9/4/19 as "Post Brexit, the EU won't be going back to business as usual"

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6.13 Ireland's Neighbours From Hell**13/8/2019**

Does Boris Johnson give a damn about the impact of No Deal on anything other than his ability to stay in power? There is scant evidence that the Prime Minister and his Cabinet genuinely care about its damaging impact on our closest neighbours. Any concern about what current UK policy will do to the 21-year old Good Friday peace agreement appears purely rhetorical. A No Deal means a hard border overnight and an immediate impact on the Republic of Ireland and on Northern Ireland. Nothing could be further from the UK government's mind than the damage No Deal would do to the economy of the Irish Republic; instead the Tory back benches now blame the absence of, failure of, BREXIT negotiations on the Irish government.

Here I had better declare an interest: a soft spot for the Republic of Ireland, particularly Connemara. One of my children is Irish. My first job was lecturing at University College, Galway. Our oldest daughter was born in the Calvary Hospital under the supervision of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. It doesn't get more Catholic than that – short of a prior visit from the Archangel Gabriel. The big obstetric issue was whether you wanted labour induced, “brought on”, in time for the Galway races. We lived opposite Galway Cathedral known locally as the Taj Mícheál (pronounced Mee-Hawl) after its autocratic Bishop Michael. Heavenly days.

To return to our hellish present dilemma. The Good Friday agreement contains two parts: one, an agreement between the Northern Ireland political parties, the other, between the governments of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Because they had been the main negotiators so knew the dynamics and detail, during the 2016 referendum campaign, Tony Blair, John Major and Bertie Ahern were the first to focus on the dangers posed by BREXIT to the Peace Agreement.

Most people would admit that the Irish and UK membership of the EU with its four fundamental freedoms, the movement of goods, people, services and capital across national borders, provided an essential context for the Good Friday agreement and its subsequent successful implementation. As Jonathan Powell, a key adviser to the UK negotiators recalled, the central issue of national identity was *de facto* “removed from the table by the soft border” which became a point of contact rather than a point of division. Take away the single market and the customs union, this EU scaffolding falls down and the border returns to being a critical identity issue, a dividing line rather than a point of contact. After a No Deal BREXIT, citizens of Northern Ireland claiming an Irish identity - guaranteed by the Good Friday agreement - would find themselves with different rights from citizens of the Republic of Ireland. These are the main reasons why Nancy Pelosi, Democrat Speaker of the US House of Representatives, told senior members of the Conservative Party earlier this year that the House would not endorse any trade deal if post-BREXIT Ireland was left with a hard border.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with a land border abutting the EU. A winding border, 499 kilometres long with 250 transport crossing points, it poses obvious, intractable difficulties at the basic material level

of customs infrastructure. The (ERG) Economic Research Group's magic technological fix might be implemented by the Irish hero, the Giant Finn McCool, but not by anyone else. Let's imagine that say, in five years time, technology can transform physical border control to being electronic, invisible and immaterial, with regulation moving from checkpoints to company and farmers' laptops. Still the new border would be problematic. The significance of a hard border is not only its visibility or material manifestation. It is symbolic and psychological. And, because of the new divisions between the two countries, five years hence we could well need real-world infrastructure to deal with the resurgence of extremist Republican violence. There are already threatening signs. Hence the need for an insurance policy, the contentious backstop, introduced by Theresa May and agreed by the EU.

BREXIT will hit the economy of the Republic of Ireland hard. The recurrent cost of a No Deal to the Republic's citizens per capita per year has been calculated by the respected Bertelsheim Foundation as at least 720 Euros. This is not much below their calculation of the cost to the UK, 873 Euros per capita, (which makes an aggregate annual cost nationally to the UK of 57 Billion Euros). This cost will fall differentially on different regions and income groups with the poor suffering most. The USA is Ireland's largest export partner but, including trade with Northern Ireland, the UK comes second just ahead Belgium. Calculations of No deal's impact suggest a 5% drop in Irish GDP and the loss of 100,000 jobs (2.19 million were employed in 2018).

The Irish government rightly sees No Deal as a threat. The Taoiseach, Prime Minister Leo Varadkar has said as much and concludes this will trigger new pressures for a United Ireland. Simon Coveney, the Tánaiste, deputy Prime

Minister, has said that the British Government's BREXIT tactics are putting the UK on "a collision course" with Ireland and the EU. In reaction to Johnson's do-or-die sloganizing, on a recent BBC World Service Hardtalk, Neale Richmond, chair of the Irish Senate's BREXIT Committee, repeatedly called for Britain to "meet the responsibilities they have as a departing member" of the EU: in other words to honour international commitments and the agreement on a backstop, pay their bills, and avoid disruption. Instead Ireland has the future economic damage, forced upon it by the UK government, used as leverage in negotiations.

The Good Friday agreement was achieved not just by subtle negotiation and mediation between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland but by a spirit of co-operation between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The British government is now in the process of undermining this co-operation, and with it the future of our closest neighbour. Such tactics are entirely in keeping with Johnson's politics of division which he has learnt from Trump: expand the definition of them, shrink the definition of us. Shrink the idea of us enough and the United Kingdom is no more.

We are accustomed in the UK to dealing with politicians who are ineffective, mistaken or lacking in judgement, but not with the clever and power-hungry who, without real convictions, will say anything that is convenient. We find our own judgement rendered uncertain by their false claims to patriotism and their lies. It's called gaslighting. It's calculated. So who is going to stop Alexander Boris De Pfeffel Johnson - and his side-kick Dominic Cummings? The Taoiseach will need "St. Patrick's Breastplate". And we, the British, need to say *mea culpa* again.

See also [TheArticle 12/08/2019](#)

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6.14 Brexit: The Theatre of Self-Delusion & Mendacity 3/9/2019

The language of politics is now so exaggerated it misleads. It is not true that those who denounce prorogation are “hysterical”; they are shocked, worried and angry. That would describe Tory grandee, Chris Patten, who wondered recently if many Leavers in the country might be “willing victims” of self-delusion and mendacity. Boris Johnson and those who dreamt up the proroguing strategy to thwart Parliament ruling out No Deal have not staged a “coup”, they have unacceptably, but skilfully, manipulated parliamentary procedure.

We in Britain are now being ruled by a coterie of clever rogues. Above the fray, the Queen was nonetheless bound by constitutional convention to take her Prime Minister’s advice and prorogue. The outcome, as a Daily Mirror headline told it, was clearly Pro-Rogue. Anti-Brexiteers are left with very few procedural devices to wrest control from a trickster Prime Minister and his advisers before the 31 October deadline.

Some say we are reliving the Weimar Republic. We are not, though, we are experiencing considerable erosion in the conduct of our political life. Were classes on curtailing parliamentary democracy taught at Eton, you wonder, in the late 1970s?

In Christian thinking the word used for a moment such as this is the Greek Kairos, a time when opportunity and danger are significantly intensified by contemporary events. A democratic culture thrives on civility and creative, participatory modes of decision-making, an informed electorate, not on a diet of misinformation and rule by an unaccountable clique. The Archbishop of Canterbury has reacted and taken the opportunity to chair a Citizens’ Assembly at the request of senior members of Parliament, a national consultation involving a hundred

people with diverse viewpoints. He wishes to do something about the divisions and discord which have come to the surface and intensified during BREXIT negotiations. The hope is that some positive, consensual recommendations for a way forward will emerge. It is late in the day and a Citizen's Assembly will struggle to make any impact.

25 Anglican diocesan bishops came together last week and defined the danger we are in. They spoke of the "ease with which lies can be told and misrepresentation encouraged" and asked that "leaders must be honest about the costs of political choices, especially for those most vulnerable". They will doubtless be castigated in social media. All evidence indicates that the poor will disproportionately suffer from No Deal's economic consequences. The British Churches have formerly been reluctant to enter a highly contested political arena in which the tired refrain of "meddling in politics" would rapidly become the dominant story. The legacy of Tory leadership to date has been to further split the country, describing one side in highly emotive language as "the people", 17.4 million voters who wanted some form of BREXIT, thereby turning the other side who voted REMAIN, just 3% fewer, into "non-people". The will of the 12 million who didn't use their vote in the Referendum, and the 18 million not on the electoral rolls is unknown. Thus it turns out "the people" are a remarkably small proportion of the people.

The public was misled and misinformed about the consequences of BREXIT prior to the referendum. Those primarily responsible for this misinformation are now in power, claiming that Parliament consented to a No Deal arrangement when they passed the Withdrawal Bill in early 2017 invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, and pretending that "the people" did the same in 2016. They did no such thing. Nor did government ever suggest No Deal was the likely result of BREXIT negotiations with the EU. Deception again, lack of accountability

and untruth.

Throughout negotiations government has insisted that “keeping No Deal on the table” was/is a vital negotiating ploy. If the EU thought we would crash out, come the hour, they would abandon the fixed positions demanded by the European Union’s basic principles, the four freedoms, notably ensuring the protection of free movement across the British border in Ireland, and protecting an International Treaty lodged with the UN, the Good Friday Agreement.

The hour is not far off. The EU is showing no signs of blinking first. Why would they? Quite apart from wishing to discourage other member States from leaving the EU, the negotiators were/are not about to abandon the Republic of Ireland’s interests, a fellow member State, nor threaten the interests of whole island of Ireland. They have repeatedly said so. It is, and has been, implausible that they would, or will, blink at the last moment.

Do those clever tacticians in 10 Downing Street really believe that at the last minute, through fear of a No Deal, the EU will suddenly go back on three years of holding firm on its “red lines”, unanimously supported by 26 European countries? Do they believe that, like themselves, the EU and its negotiators are deceivers, playing games. Isn’t this like the proverbial threat to “shoot yourself in the foot” if the EU doesn’t back off, then accusing those who try to wrest control of the gun of being undemocratic, treachery and betraying their country? There can be no doubt that the damage to the UK of pulling the trigger is far, far greater than the consequences for the EU, though those are not negligible.

Finally, in the last few weeks, we have entered further into fantasy land with more fantastic claims. All this supposedly clever negotiating strategy is sold to the public through slogans, “let’s get it done”, “let’s get on with the people’s agenda”, by circumventing the parliamentary log-jam which, of course, they in large measure created. Clever because the focus groups and private polling will

have shown just how sick people are of the issue. Farage is selling No Deal as “a clean break BREXIT”. But, in reality, No Deal will merely open up a lengthy new chapter of negotiations in trade and other talks with the EU, conducted in a far more negative environment. The Chancellor, Sajid Javid, has suffered the humiliation, of having a close adviser sacked without even being informed, by Boris Johnson’s de facto chief of staff, Dominic Cummings. The Chancellor described his relationship with the Prime Minister as “fantastic”. It is certainly based on the founding fantasy of this government: that the EU will give way at the last minute and, if it doesn’t, adequate preparations have been made and all will be well, in other words every reputable economic commentator and practitioner is wrong.

We are now in election mode. But what future for our politics if you can’t believe a word government says, ministers won’t appear on radio and television, and if they do, avoid answering questions while the rogues prorogue our established institutions of government accountability, the two Houses of Parliament, at a critical moment?

Words fail. Hysteria? No. Just a dull foreboding and anxiety about the future of children and grand-children as mendacity and self-delusion seem to be winning the day.

See also [TheArticle 02/09/2019](#)

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6.15 Brexit Day: Remain Lost But Who Won? 30/1/2020

“Contingency is the characteristic of what might not have been or could have been different” Emile Boutroux*

The biggest constitutional change in recent British history is upon us on 31 January, but the question “Cui Bono?” remains unanswered. Who actually gains from BREXIT? In the wealth of commentary and advocacy since 2016, there has never been a clear answer.

The consensus amongst reputable economists is that removing ourselves from the huge market provided by the EU has a multitude of negative consequences for our manufacturing, agricultural, fishing and financial sectors meaning significant GDP losses over the next few years measured in ten of billions Sterling. Already the big corporates and banks are opening up or looking at office space in Frankfurt, Dublin and Paris. Farmers are being offered compensatory payments, assured only for five years. Severed supply chains mean intense pressures on future production, most obviously in the car and chemical industries. Sajid Javid’s announcement that Britain has every intention of diverging from EU regulations and standards should come as no surprise. What would be the point of leaving the Customs Union were this not the case? Whatever our Little England Chancellor says, car makers and other manufacturers must now plough their own furrow, and comply with European regulations if they wish to sell without losses into the European market.

A trade deal with the USA is dangled as the great prize from BREXIT. But trade experts, and common sense, indicate that any UK trade deal with the USA, given the gross disparity of power between the negotiating partners, will be predominantly in the US interests. We may have to accept future higher rates of food poisoning or drug prices, or other negative consequences, if any deal is to emerge in the short time available before our proclaimed –

idiotic – deadline. And do we expect that other economically powerful countries such as India and China are going to agree terms with an isolated Britain better than those we already enjoyed as a member of a 27 country trading bloc?

Will Hutton, a notable and eloquent economist, described BREXIT in *The Observer* as taking Britain further into a “vortex of decline”. The decline is not only economic but also in our capacity to “punch above our weight” in international affairs. Torn between kowtowing to Mr. Trump and sharing an effective, peaceful policy towards Iran with our European allies, we adopt a fanciful role - as mediator - a pattern set to persist during UK-USA trade negotiations. Given the likelihood of a second term for Trump now the Democrats have cornered themselves in impeachment proceedings, so easily flipped by a Republican Senate into a Trump triumph appealing to his political base, do we really want to tie our wagon to this meandering US wagon-train? And we will have lost all influence over the future policy directions of the EU.

Meanwhile back home BREXIT will, and already has, opened up a Pandora’s box of destabilising rival nationalisms within our four nation-state. The SNP push for a second referendum on independence mishandled could result in Catalan levels of disruption. Ulster Unionism and Irish nationalism retain considerable potential for renewed violence generated by both material issues of border checks and their psychological impact on the different communities. Years of uncertainty lie ahead with little sign of future benefit.

So no winners so far except perhaps Mr. Putin who at little cost to Rus-

sia damaged both the UK and a EU. And certainly not the EU itself which openly laments Britain's departure.

But couldn't it be argued that democracy is the winner? Don't "the people", or at least the 52% of them who voted Leave, handed responsibility for the UK's future in 2016, finally win? If you believe that a divided and damaged country is worth the price of honouring a narrow popular vote, partly influenced by systematic misinformation, thus weakening representative parliamentary democracy, yes.

There are some notable beneficiaries from Britain leaving the EU. A number of small to tiny blocs of elected parliamentarians and individuals, the ERG and the DUP, Farage, Rees-Mogg and Johnson drove the country to this point in the absence of an effective Opposition. The latter have in common that they represent the emergent global phenomenon of the Entertainer-Trickster politician. While we are laughing they are – Bolshevik fashion – riding the accidents of history and directing rising public anger and hatred of the Establishment - which they magically manage to dissociate themselves from - for their own personal advantage. The ERG and DUP simply got lucky on the electoral arithmetic and were able to swing government in their direction and lever advantage with a handful of votes, at least for a while. This does not correspond to any palatable idea of what a democratic culture looks like. A gain for democracy? I don't think so.

Are the Entertainer-Trickster politicians witting and unwitting agents of transnational capital as Will Hutton suggests? So the only winner becomes transna-

tional capital? Well maybe. But we should be suspicious of proposing abstract nouns as historical causes particularly of something as bizarre as national self-harm. It seems much more, as Harold Macmillan probably didn't say, a matter of "events, dear boy, events". In other words accidents and contingency: an arrogant Etonian believing he had the 2016 referendum in the bag, coinciding with the other Party leader, a hangover from the 1970s, who believed in belonging to a Socialist States of Europe rather than the EU, as a pamphlet at that time proclaimed. Then his Etonian nemesis, Mr. Johnson, at the 11th hour gambling correctly on Leave winning, espousing the cause that furthered his leadership ambitions. Alexander Hamilton's question is pertinent: whether human societies can establish "good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force."

Does anyone win from BREXIT? Except for a few, for example, currency speculators, investors in the tax-avoiding, data-hoarding IT companies, in other transnational enterprises, and in arms sales, nobody wins. So there we are. We just have to get on with it and take the self-inflicted punishment. No requiem for REMAIN. But fortunately, thanks to Harry and Megan, we have more important things to worry about.

Quoted in Charles de Gaulle's personal notebooks, taken from Julian Jackson *A Certain Idea of France* Penguin 2018

See also "Remain Lost but who Won? [TheArticle 30/101/20](#)

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Chapter 7

Conservative Party

7.1 Brexit: Tories & European Courts

1/10/2018

Tory Brexiters should be careful what they wish for. They seem to have regard for neither the Conservative past nor the country's future. Several aspects of the UK government's positions on BREXIT are either quixotic or dishonest. First amongst them is the quest to leave the jurisdiction of the European court.

Actually there is more than one European court. But for political effect they are frequently conflated or confused. Which one is supposed to be most objectionable to a true patriot is unclear. Is it the Court of Justice in Luxembourg which adjudicates on the correct reading and implementation of EU laws and treaties by national governments, or is it the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg overseen by the Council of Europe, not the EU, that rules on alleged infringements of the human rights of citizens in member states?

The Court of Justice gives judgments on disputes about the EU regulation of a wide range of matters reflecting the wide areas regulated by EU member States: customs duties, fisheries and so on. The idea that Britain can leave the EU to emerge into a strong and beneficial relationship with its European partners outside the existing regulatory system and the supranational juris-

diction of the EU, its standards and its Courts, is frankly nonsense. Even after the BREXIT referendum the UK expressed its intention of joining a new Unified Patent Court being set up under the jurisdiction of the EU Court of Justice. Transnational space in Europe has too many vital things going on in it not to require transnational legal bodies enabling common standards and practices to prevail. In the real world, Britain cannot vacate this space and prosper.

The origins of the European courts hold surprises. The Court of Justice and the Strasbourg ECHR were set up in the early 1950s at a time of profound distrust of totalitarian regimes and their disregard for civil liberties. Winston Churchill broadcast a call for European unity in a speech at the University of Zurich on 19 September 1946: “If Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance” he declared in a romantic vision, “there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity, and glory which its three or four hundred million people would enjoy”. Churchill’s fear that the Atlee government would impose its state-heavy socialism on the citizens of Britain lay beneath his promotion of a noble inheritance like an unwanted ice cube in his whisky. Churchill saw a European supranational juridical body as a necessary protection of civil liberties because it would defend “fundamental personal rights” as the lynchpin of “European democratic civilization”.

Marco Duranti sheds much light on this post-war period in his *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution* Oxford University Press, 2017. He analyses the European ideological mix, both NGO and governmental, that led to the creation of the Council of Europe, the writing and adoption of European Convention on Human Rights and the establishing of the ECHR that enforced it. Calling this process a revolution is no exaggeration. It was the first time

individuals and groups could petition for their human rights in a supranational court. The rights in the European Code were individual rights or civil liberties. There was no mention of social rights beyond the right of parental choice in education – thanks to a strong Catholic lobby. In comparison, the UN’s – more extensive and global - rights regime had no such body to legally ensure compliance. The establishment of the ECHR was an extraordinary achievement. Here was a firewall against the state over-reaching itself, creating an imagined Europe defining itself in distinction to the Soviet Union and its satellites. Socialist Parties worried it would impede the state’s economic planning and their domestic agendas. To understand what people see as desirable transnationally, always factor in domestic circumstance and historical experience

So why are a clique of right-wing conservatives so desperate to turn the clock back demanding that we “take back control of our laws”? Clearly not back to 1950s and Churchill. Could it be that the European Research Group simply wish for elites to have greater freedom to accumulate wealth and privilege? I cannot believe that Mr. Gove enjoys being referred, with five other European states, to the Court of Justice by the European Commission for the UK government’s dilatory approach to air pollution. Effective action would reduce company profits. The Court of Justice fined Google \$2.4 billion for abuse of its position as the world’s dominant search-engine. It has the power to do so. Alone, we don’t.

The mass media’s refrain is “unaccountable bureaucrats” reveling in petty regulation. But who was being petty when UK prisoners got back the vote? I recently bought a new freezer. It was the same overall size but much smaller inside; stuff had to be chucked out or defrosted and eaten. The helpful installer told me this was “all down to the EU”. It sounded petty. But he explained

why: they had ruled that insulation had to be much thicker to preserve energy and a shield was required at the back to stop fires.

Will control taken back by an extreme right-wing government increase national investment in curbing air pollution, or deter the great cyber-corporations behaving more or less as they like, or come to that , result in better insulated freezers to save energy and avoid fires? Yes, we have a distinguished Supreme Court but, observing the USA, will ours always remain as un-politicised as today? Is upholding what the French Catholic Europeanists in the 1950s called “the rights of persons and communities”, not least those of workers, safe in the hands of BREXIT extremists?

Many rashly assume so. But, like Churchill, however unfairly distrustful of political opponents, I think it is wise to hedge our bets. We need the safety valve of the European courts and the values that they try to reflect in their judgements. Yes, Conservatism has come a long way since the Eurocentric 1950s. But where is it going?

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7.2 Our Next - Trickster - Prime Minister

11/7/2019

“What the British and American working class have in common is that they both vote against their own interests”. I can’t remember who said that but the popularity ratings of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson – notably with their own Parties – gives it credence. In the British case an odd coalition of the elderly, many comfortably off, and the working class and poor, those on or below the poverty line, pushed us into BREXIT by a narrow major-

ity.

What have these two groups got in common? What motivates their voting behaviour? The startling resonance of the Leave campaign's "Take Back Control" gives the clue. Both groups feel a lack of control over their own lives. It's easy to see why the poor may feel like this. The decline in the trades unions, the new digital economy, decades of decline and stagnation in workers' wages, and the zero-hours economy have left manual and unskilled workers insecure. They feel forgotten and left out of the prosperity they see in advertisements and in affluent parts of the country.

Old people, well off or poor, weaken and become sick as they age, and feel a loss of control over their lives. They see the past through rose-tinted spectacles and fear the fast pace of change. They depend on their local GP and hospital consultants, and on social care, in a similar way to the unemployed and intermittently employed who have to deal with Job Centre officials and the benefits system. Remember the Leave video of the helpless old lady waiting tearfully as foreign-looking men were treated before her in a hospital A & E department? It was a brilliant but sinister piece of propaganda which incorporated the two big interlinked themes which brought together the two large groups attracted to BREXIT: immigration and loss of control.

There is also another factor: education. When I went to university with a scholarship in the 1960s, it was to join a privileged 5% of the population. The elderly, the poor, and manual workers on the whole lack higher education and the self-confidence it brings. In a transformed world where half of young people become university students, hoping for access to better jobs with better terms of employment, those with no degree, if they are still of working age, fear

unemployment, temporary employment, the food banks and debt. They are not wrong. Higher education facilitates the skills of good decision-making. Britain's urban elite did not get where they are today without figuring out how to find fulfilling jobs, how to make money and what professions to make it in.

BREXIT, Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are part of a wider global phenomenon in which insecurity, anger, resentment at being ignored accompany rejection of expertise and experience, and generate votes for leaders who appear to subvert the hated, but vaguely defined, Establishment. Trickster leaders entertain and manipulate minds skillfully, with the single aim of gaining and retaining power through the politics of feeling. William Davies' book, *Nervous States: How Feeling Took Over the World* makes the point that democracy is now acutely vulnerable to this kind of emotional subversion. He cites the worrying statistic from the last US presidential elections that "86% of those who voted for Hillary Clinton expressed trust in the economic data produced by the federal government, compared to just 13% of those who voted for Trump". Translated to the UK this means that the overwhelming economic arguments against a 'No Deal' BREXIT will carry negligible weight with Brexiteers. The success of the politics of feeling should, and is beginning to, set alarm bells ringing about the future of democracy. Political discourse has for millennia included emotion and rhetoric. But we now seem to be witnessing a jump-shift into spectacular public irrationality. A majority of members of the Conservative and Unionist Party, if opinion polls are to be believed, consider retention of the Union less important than completing BREXIT. This cannot simply be placed at the door of social media. It indicates a deeper swing from rational choice to emotion preference.

The tricksters, with the coming appointment of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister by 160,000 or so Tory members, will have triumphed. Emotion will have defeated reason in British politics. Our antiquated political machinery will have failed to uphold democracy.

Is there a remedy? None is obvious in the short term. But we must return to a reasoned vision of what we want our society to be, to a concept of politics with social justice as its principal goal, and to creating systems which have a chance of producing governments with a respect for moral integrity. Faith and Reason sound like a Catholic formula. But retaining faith in democracy through the current turbulence and insisting that our politics temper emotion with reason are essential if we are to emerge from the current crisis. We need to retrieve the idea that there is something called truth.

This flight from expertise and fact to emotion and fantasy in democracies is happening against the background of the economic success and global ascendancy of the anti-democratic People's Republic of China with its pervasive censorship. With autocracies such as Russia stirring the pot through cyber-interventions, we have entered the new ideological conflict of the 21st. century. Our political culture has to change if we are to win it.

See All over the world Rational Choice is being rejected. What should we do about it? TheArticle 10 July 2019

7.3 Brexit Chess: Queen's Gambit Opening Move? 2/10/2019

For an hour of two last Sunday night, like a murmur of starlings, a cluster of tweets appeared on-line; they were voicing interest in the news that the Queen had allegedly asked legal advice about sacking Mr. Johnson. Context is everything. It turned out that this prodigious and unprecedented happening, if indeed it happened, dated from before the Supreme Court's ruling on the lawfulness of Mr. Johnson's prorogation. A little more damaging than a hand-on-thigh allegation, you might think (though not say).

This on-line murmur had been caused by a finely crafted article about to appear in the My View section of Monday's *I*, written by its star journalist, Ian Birrell. "One well-placed source", Birrell wrote, "told me the Queen had, for the first time in her reign, sought advice on sacking a prime minister before the Supreme Court verdict", and Birrell is a highly respected journalists' journalist. It shows in the quality of his writing. "I have no idea if this is true – it would be denied by all concerned –" he said "but the fact it was suggested by such a figure underscores the scale of Johnson's difficulties". It certainly does. Again context is everything, the opening of the Conservative Party Conference.

In the absence of any other "well-placed source" the rest of the Press and BBC kept away from the story. Nor did the tweets continue. Despite Birrell's prudent, professional caveats, you could easily imagine the concern in Balmoral: Mr. Johnson had projected the Queen into the public domain as a woman without agency, almost subordinate to the Prime Minister from whom alone she took advice, advice which she must follow even if it might turn out to be unlawful and wrong. The Queen, though meshed in the web of conventions surrounding constitutional monarchy, is not without agency, even if this agency has to be conducted in an oblique, sensitive and sophisticated manner. Wouldn't you, in this position, be thinking ahead and wanting to know your legal position as

a monarch in the light of a range of possible eventualities? Would you be that displeased if the country learnt you weren't sitting on your hands while the unity of the kingdom was in peril? Parliament was prorogued from 9 September and the Royal Assent was given that same day to the Benn Bill requiring Mr. Johnson to write a letter to the European Union asking for an extension beyond the 31 October date set for leaving. What if Mr. Johnson simply refused to do so? Dominic Grieve, the Attorney-General who preceded Geoffrey Cox, the present one, a man who seems to be auditioning for the part of the wicked uncle in this Christmas' panto, provided an answer in the Daily Mail. The Supreme Court, Grieve explained, would issue a mandamus - Latin has recently become contagious amongst parliamentarians - a mandatory order compelling the Prime Minister to comply. And if he doesn't, says Mr. Grieve, he "will be out in five minutes. He will be dismissed". And, yes, the Queen would step in - effectively sacking him - though this was a "hypothetical position".

I wonder just how hypothetical. Perhaps the Queen was not being unduly anxious if, indeed, she had sought legal advice. There are two scenarios: the first is that Mr. Johnson whispers in the ear of key European leaders, not that quietly, that they shouldn't grant another extension, that there would be no point because Parliament would be unable to get its act together and put everyone out of their misery, one way or another, by decisive action. The Prime Minister would then write the required extension letter and hope Mr. Macron dug in his heels and refused to waive the 31 October deadline. The second would be that Mr. Johnson became a BREXIT martyr, refusing on grounds of conscience - italics necessary - to sign the letter, and thus be duly sacked, be cast very low only to be born aloft and back into power in a future election victory. Mr. Cummings, your choice.

One thing is clear: whatever happens next, Mr. Johnson will make sure "the

people” are convinced it is not his fault if on 1 November we still remain in the European Union. There are dark warnings from Tory sources of mob violence, read threats, if we do. Eton mess flung across the Mace in the Chamber and so on. The Prime Minister shall be blameless, “the people’s champion”. Many, though, will share the blame: Larry the Downing Street cat, all the Remain “traitors”, the Irish Taoiseach, Brussels diplomats, Gina Miller, Joanna Cherry, Lady Hale and, if as was murmured briefly in the twitter-sphere and things carry on the way they are going, Mrs. Windsor herself. Then it will be Mr. Johnson and “the People” versus Parliament, the Supreme Court, more than 16 million voters, and possibly the Queen. No wonder Mr. Johnson has a problem with women.

See Also TheArticle.com 02/10/2109

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7.4 English Nationalism; the Genie in the Brexit Bottle? 21/11/2019

Why are we surprised to discover that our political culture is dysfunctional, British society divided, perhaps dangerously so? Political leaders have bombarded the public with a stream of stark binary choices: a yes or no referendum on leaving the European Union, ‘the people’ versus the ‘elite’, a vigorous can-do Executive versus a “zombie” Parliament, the poor versus the Establishment and the Rich, a suffering North versus a complacent South, young voters anti-BREXIT, old voters pro-BREXIT.

A better answer would be that globalisation plus Coalition and Conservative government policies have increased inequality of opportunity between, and within, regions; a decade of austerity has depressed the incomes of the less well-off. This experience has created a genuine conflict of interests, feelings and

power between so-called overbearing cosmopolitan ‘nowheres’, upwardly and geographically mobile, and the ‘somewheres’, those left-behind, stuck locally with low incomes and few prospects, ignored. It is not that simple. But there is something in the distinction.

The perception of social reality as an irresolvable conflict between ‘them and us’ is the great mainstay of extremism. I can vouch for that after eight years of working on preventing religious extremism. The death of Jo Cox MP was tragic evidence that politicians’ irresponsible language in a dysfunctional society has become lethally dangerous. We see a threatening increase in the percentage of Neo-Nazis joining potential jihadists in the Channel mentoring programme of the Government’s Prevent policy.

And yet, there is something else going on. I was struck by John Le Carré’s recent observation that “Nationalism needs an enemy, Patriotism needs a commitment”. Identifying the enemy is the step after ‘them and us’ into hate-speech with the conviction that ‘them’ are evil. Then comes violence.

There are also ideological reasons for our present predicament. BREXIT is a bi-product of the rise of English nationalism. It takes an Irishman like Fintan O’Toole to name, analyse and ridicule the genie inside the BREXIT bottle. Now that the Farage/Johnson nationalist genie has been released, we will soon face significant pressures for an independent Scotland and a much more Irish Northern Ireland, possibly short of a United Ireland, possibly not.

First a confession: I have a soft spot for John Major’s English myth: Anglican ladies riding their bicycles to church, cricket on the village green, warm beer, cosy pubs. No satanic mills here. Nor rust-belts and boarded up shops. But then I also have a soft-spot for Connemara: the rugged coast and cold churches, horizontal rain, Guinness and oysters round a turf fire, good craic, the Arran Isles,

Ireland's own offshore dream of the past. But fantasy pasts are inherently weak as narratives of nationalism. Society changes leaving them behind. Nationalism finds an enemy.

In a General Election the dark arts of 'setting the agenda' come clamouring to the fore. Wrapping themselves in the flag of English nationalism, the new Conservative Party tries to hide its roots in what Will Hutton describes as transnational finance capital: a "regulation-light land fit for hedge funds and private equity capitalism" made for "billionaires of whatever nationality". Yet, for an era of identity politics, neither Tories nor the statist Corbyn coterie are performing well. Corbyn is acutely vulnerable on political judgement, foreign policy, and Security. Johnson on his past performance as Foreign Minister, his personal values, mendacity, and chameleon politics.

Try applying the Le Carré distinction between nationalism and patriotism to the General Election campaigns. For the Conservative/ Brexit axis, the European Union is the enemy: virile English nationalism stifled by 'massive', and effete, EU bureaucracy (in reality the EU employs 32,000 'bureaucrats' with responsibilities for 512 million people, the UK employs 430,000 civil servants for a population of 67 million). As new Leave slogan, 'Get BREXIT Done' is a doubly mendacious successor to 'Take Back Control'; BREXIT will not be done for several years and what Johnson most wants 'done' is a big election victory for an English Nationalist Party led by Tory extremists. Many expelled, now former, MPs are patriotic in the Le Carré sense, committed enough to the values of 'one nation' Toryism to end their careers. They were unfortunate. Johnson is fickle enough to lead a straightforward 'one nation' campaign were it in his interests. On the scale of malignant populist nationalism, a future Johnson government might merit a three, Orban's FIDESZ in Hungary

an eight.

Why only a three? Because the new Conservative Party knows it must pretend to embrace one-nation Toryism and reflect some of the values of the majority of the British people. Not the majoritarian BREXIT values surfaced in the 2016 Referendum, but those of the overwhelming majority of British citizens who share the values and experience of the NHS and are committed to it as a precious national institution.

Founded by the 1945 Atlee Government, the NHS with its egalitarian, free-at-the-point-of-delivery, cradle-to-the-grave services, its multi-racial and multi-cultural staffing, and its strong popular support, expresses a cohesive national identity, the kind of identity presented to an admiring world by Danny Boyle at the opening of the 2012 London Olympics. Here was a national institution we were proud to show off to the world. The sense of national pride and healthy patriotism was palpable. That is why, in the current financial bidding war for votes, the Labour Party could not allow another Party to outbid them on commitment to NHS funding.

Viewed from the angle of an individualistic competitive society, and the new Toryism that purports to promote this kind of society, Conservative support for the NHS is an anomaly. “A free health service”, Aneurin Bevan wrote, “is pure Socialism and as such it is opposed to the hedonism of capitalist society”. I await John McDonnell quoting that.

In today’s divisive political culture the NHS remains the touchstone of a cohesive Society with strong human values. And somewhere in our lie-saturated and divisive political culture, the political leaders of the two main Parties glimpse the truth of this proposition. . . . even during this desultory time of binary identity politics. There is still a glimmer of hope.

See also TheArticle.com 21/11/2019

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7.5 Winds of Change: Learning From the 1960s 1/1/2020

A New Decade. The Labour Party in special measures. The Conservative Party donning a cloth-cap. Times are a-changing. Or so it seems.

The un-electable Mr. Corbyn and his un-believable pledges, unprecedented mistrust, and overwhelming national frustration, combined to give Boris Johnson his big majority. It took over three and a half years, from the June 2016 Referendum to formal withdrawal, now certain this January. Yet from our application for EEC membership to formally joining in January 1973 took much longer.

Peter Hennessy tells the story in his *Winds of Change: Britain in the Early Sixties*. General de Gaulle firmly blocked our entry in 1962, with a tearful Prime Minister Harold Macmillan privately denouncing him as the new “Napoleon”. For Macmillan failure to gain entry to the EEC was a tragedy. For us achieving withdrawal from the EU was a farce.

The two parties’ rhetoric was reversed in the early 1960s. The Labour Party under Hugh Gaitskell’s leadership opposed entry. “It means the end of a thousand years of history”, he declared at Party Conference. The UK would become “a province of Europe”. Not “a vassal state” - near enough though. The impact of joining the EEC on the Commonwealth loomed large. But the strategic argument has remained constant: fear of a polit-

ically federalist Europe versus benefits of economic membership. Plus Ça Change. . . .

Peter Hennessy is Britain's most sophisticated and entertaining political historian, both a respected academic, broadcaster, and active crossbench peer. *Winds of Change* is his third book in a chronological trilogy, the first starting with the Atlee government in 1945. Some background social history is sprinkled into most chapters. But his passion is for the history of government, political process and personalities, employing a range of sources: a fly on the wall during Cabinet meetings, international negotiations and the inner workings of the political parties. Armed with Macmillan's diary and newly opened national archives, we have an insider's view of the great transformative events of the early 1960s: the Berlin blockade; Cuban Missile Crisis; Decolonisation; Britain's struggle for EEC entry; Trident and CND; Wilson and the "white heat of the scientific revolution".

There is something endearing about Macmillan and Hennessy's portrayal of him. The reader discovers a different, healthier, British political culture. Decent men admire each other's oratory, disagree about how to move forward but, on the whole, agree about fundamental values and the society they want. Hennessy loves this Britain with a romantic intensity, even with its dissenters and mavericks like Enoch Powell.

There is a sharper edge when it comes to describing the Labour leader, Harold Wilson, just as there is to the man himself, amiable demeanour and pipe notwithstanding. Here is the 1964 Labour Party/Wilson's Manifesto on Polaris - our nuclear deterrent at the time: "It will not be independent,

and it will not be British and it will not deter". Nonetheless, Wilson as Prime Minister kept Polaris renegeing on his pledge to renegotiate the Nassau agreement with the USA which 'shared' Polaris - manufactured in the US - with the UK. Two recurrent themes emerge in the book: the inextricable link, mainly but far from exclusively in Conservative thinking, between Britain's image as a global power and its ownership of nuclear weapons, and its corollary, the almost secondary importance of these weapons for defence.

Despite holding up the Commonwealth as a fig-leaf covering the loss of Empire, it was the Bomb that kept us at the top table. Macmillan, though, obsessed by the danger of nuclear war, had internalised the picture of the mushroom cloud that hung over the 60s. As Hennessy points out, apart from his steady-as-she-goes steering of the ship of state, Macmillan's greatest achievement was the negotiation of a Partial Test Ban Treaty between the UK, USA and the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis. We have foolishly lost his salutary anxiety about nuclear war to-day.

What we haven't lost is the taste for a good sex-scandal. Like any red-blooded male who lived through the Profumo affair, Hennessy enjoys telling the tale: a Minister of Defence sharing a "call-girl" with a Soviet agent posing as a diplomat, and their joint contribution to Macmillan's decline and downfall, an inglorious story of sex, spies and toffs. Who could not enjoy?

Hennessy is too famous a writer for severe editing; some joyous but diver-

sionary, anecdotes survive publication. Here is a Hennessy BTW holding up the flow in a passage dealing with Lord Denning's report investigating whether there had been security leaks during the Profumo scandal. "Denning, by the way, spoke in what was usually called a rich Hampshire burr, a sound rarely heard on the early post-war bench (though it was made famous in the cricket commentary box by that poet amongst journalists, John Arlott)". In an instant, you are back in the 1960s, watching TV, or tuning in to a sotto voce conversation in the Athenaeum; De Gaulle, Hennessy confides, declared that the Profumo scandal "taught the British a lesson for trying to imitate the French".

Why is Lord Hennessy so important? Because he provides a political plumb-line. To the left of him you're on the Left, to the right, you're on the Right. The trouble with this simple test is that the ground shifts. And we are in the midst of an earthquake at the moment. But for those who were discovering politics in the early sixties, *Winds of Change* is an enriching journey down memory lane with an erudite, entertaining guide. Readers below the age of seventy will re-learn that the past is another country, though with many recognisable landmarks.

In 1962 both President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan read Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* detailing the miscalculations that lead to the First World War. Hennessy implies that the book influenced them during the Cuban Missile Crisis, if only as a warning. His *Winds of Change* may help future generations in crises to come. At the very least, Hennessy's gentle judgements and search for the truth will become a poignant and, I hope, influential memory.

See TheArticle 17/12/2019

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7.6 Johnson's Conservatism: Pragmatism Beats Ideology 18/3/2020

The Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak's bumper budget raised some interesting questions about political Parties and ideology. Political Parties stand for particular clusters of ideas which they wish to turn into policies: sound fiscal policy based on the thrifty family finances of a Grantham grocer, or, at the other end of the spectrum, Keynesian pump priming with billions allocated to infrastructure. For a decade in Britain, austerity, like the old tincture of J. Collis Browne (it disappeared because of the morphine content which took Kitchener's fighting scouts through the trenches), was prescribed as a cure for the general debility of the British economy. The cure now looks highly suspect.

As for the dreaded accusation of a doing a U-turn even when the vehicle was heading towards a precipice - anathema sit. Last week's accolades from the Conservative benches for the young incumbent of No. 11 Downing Street were genuine and heart-felt. The new boy had put up a jolly good show. Disaffection expressed in some sectors of the Party was muted. As Mrs. Thatcher didn't say: "You may turn, but the young millionaire will turn a lot more". Or as Mao didn't say: "Let a thousand magic money-trees bloom".

The question is did the Conservative cabinet of yesteryear really believe in fiscal rectitude and a consistent endeavour to balance the books? Or didn't they? Some did. And what exactly was the magic ingredient in austerity? Not morphine. Austerity hurt and people got very angry not anaesthetised. The approval and support of those wealthy enough not to suffer from a drastic decline in public services was what counted.

The ease with which this U-turn was made might be because the British, apart from those represented by small factions in the two main political Parties, don't do ideology. Boris Johnson notoriously had two statements ready, one pro-BREXIT, the other anti-BREXIT, before deciding to desert Prime Minister Cameron. This did not appear to discredit him in his Party.

It is often said of the primates (furry ones not those with croziers) that they survived thanks to their adaptability: come down from the trees, it's a doddle, get your thumbs to work more, no problem, fancy cooked dinners, well how about rubbing sticks together and inventing fire? You can just hear the rival Neanderthals grunting "But that was our policy". You adapt to survive and the Tories are good at that.

Mr. Johnson's Cabinet are not the only clever, adaptable, politicians to have strutted the global stage. I would give top marks to the South African Communist Party (SACP). In the early 1980s, I acted as a liaison between the Swedish government and the internal movement of the African National Congress (ANC). Sweden was supporting the ANC inside South Africa financially to end their exclusive reliance on the Soviet and GDR (East German) Communist money and muscle and to demonstrate Nordic good-

will.

Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela's successor as President, straddled leadership roles in the SACP and leadership in the ANC, and was a most thoughtful and helpful adviser on matters strategic and political. He ended up adopting an economic policy that would not have embarrassed the Chicago neo-liberals. Indeed they helped shape it. When it came to U-turns, President Mbeki was an advanced driver.

There was, of course, a strongly doctrinaire core to the SACP. And Marxist ideology had great influence over its members. I remember Oscar Mpheta, a veteran Cape Town trades unionist leader - he joined the SACP in 1954 - slipping surreptitiously into the back seat of my car and talking into my left ear. A reader of the ANC Marxist magazine *Sechaba*, he once asked me in genuine wonderment: "Why don't the workers and peasants of the United States rise up against their oppressors?" I have pondered that question long since.

In November 1989 the Berlin Wall fell and with it the ANC's main backers. As the Soviet Union crumbled around Gorbachev, its Communist Party abandoned the ANC overnight. Gorbachev's Africa advisers were ruthless. The ANC would not get a penny more. It had to rethink its strategy.

Almost overnight Joe Slovo, the SACP theoretician and head of its military wing, MK, produced a complex argument for a new charter for the future entitled "Has Socialism Failed?" Critical of Stalinism within the SACP, the pamphlet circulated widely in early 1990. It proposed: a multi-party democratic

socialism, freedom of speech and association, of thought and movement – end of pass laws – and of residence, of conscience and religion. There would be a free press and trades union rights would include the right to strike. All South Africans would have a vote in free and democratic elections. It was not so much a U-turn as a radical transformation of a political Party – and, incidentally, in the direction of Scandinavian social democracy. Slovo’s comprehensive pamphlet went far further than Gorbachev was intending to move at the time. So much for the common portrayal of communist ideology as always rigid and intractable.

No-one in the Conservative Party has emerged with the political creativity and adaptability of Joe Slovo. A Jewish, Lithuanian immigrant who arrived in South Africa as a boy speaking only Yiddish, he was a remarkable man and a brilliant theoretician. But, when all is said and done, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites had left the SACP penniless. And money talks. The ANC’s future support would have to come from different quarters. It was the U-turn of the century achieved with great panache.

The leadership of Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party does not ‘do ideology’, but it does do pragmatism, power and money. Its recent U-turn was essential, during a time of national crisis and uncertainty, to win and retain votes won in the December 2019 election. Johnson is smart, but comparisons being odious, he is put in the shade by Joe Slovo. Ideology can provide elegant curtains but, when the house is falling down, watch the money and the dynamics of power.

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7.7 The Road to Corruption

10/1/2021

People recognise corruption when they see it though they would find it hard to define. The abuse of entrusted power for private gain is a concise definition used by the Berlin-based Transparency International, a not-for-profit authority whose Corruption Perception Index scores and ranks corruption by country across the globe. Transparency International points to poorly regulated financing of political parties as the source of the trouble. Political bribery, bungs, ‘buying influence’ to use Tony Blair’s words, are all part of a wider story. In societies ranked as the worst at the bottom of the table, corruption is endemic reaching beyond the political into business and into access to public services bringing misery to those too poor to bribe. In many countries like Nigeria it is a longstanding feature of the political and economic culture. You wonder when and how it started and became so pervasive.

Forty-five years ago in Nigeria I received my first - and last - bribe, more of a sweetener really, on the campus of Ahmadu Bello University, situated in the North. One evening just before the final exams there was an unexpected knock on the door. It was Mr. Chukwuma Onyeme (name changed) a mature Ibo student of mine from the South who had once whispered to me ‘we foreigners must stick together’ - it was not long after the Biafran war of secession. Mr. Onyeme, father of seven children, was bearing a six-pack of Nigerian Guinness as a gift. I graciously accepted.

This transaction could be construed as a bribe. Mr. Onyeme had struggled with the course and I expected him, at best, to get a borderline pass. He probably expected the same. But the six-pack was a bad choice. Nigerian Guinness tasted sweetish to me and looked like brown Windsor soup. I would go to considerable lengths to avoid it. In the event the examination board awarded Mr. Onyeme his degree without my help. His school-teacher salary would rise. The school fees of his children would be paid. In the round a good result but giving a sight of the tip of an iceberg that sank a country's development despite, or possibly because of, its oil wealth.

Several years' experience of corruption in Nigeria now prompts the question whether Britain, twelfth from the virtuous top in the Transparency Corruption Index, but dropping points in the last three years, might be too complacent about risking its reputation for probity. In a predominantly service economy respected for its diplomatic, legal, educational and financial services, probity matters. The behaviour of government has consequences and can destroy a country's international reputation remarkably quickly.

Take as an example our Housing, Communities and Local Government Minister, Robert Jenrick, and the recent saga of Richard Desmond's £1 billion property development at Westferry Printworks challenged by the Council in London's Tower Hamlets. To avoid the Council's £45 million community benefit levy - for health and education - the Minister, lobbied by Desmond at a Conservative Party fundraising dinner, needed to approve the project before 15 January

2020. On 14th. January, overruling his own civil servants and inspectorate, Mr. Jenrick granted this permission. Two weeks later Mr. Desmond donated the very modest sum of £12,000 to the Conservative Party, in proportion to his reward the equivalent of a six-pack of Guinness. The lobbied Minister should have recused himself. When the story broke in June, Jenrick was obliged to reverse his approval because, in his own words, it looked ‘unlawful by reason of apparent bias’. He was not sacked nor does he shun the glare of publicity. On the contrary he comes in third or fourth in the batting, read obfuscating, order of ministers led by Mr. Gove on the BBC4 flagship Today programme.

The question whether such behaviour, and tolerance of such behaviour, heralds a general onset of corruption in government became particularly pressing in March and April when, during the first wave of the COVID pandemic, there were shortages of PPE for frontline medical staff. While several European countries began to initiate PPE procurement procedures in late January 2020, it was a month before the British government, in panic mode, set to. Tendering, following the normal rules for getting good value for public money, went out the window and, according to the Treasury, £15 billion was – wastefully - spent on supplying PPE to retrieve the situation. A special pathway was set up for Cabinet Office and VIP contacts – read friends and associates of Tory peers, MPs and councillors - to submit proposals for multimillion contracts. The Good Law Project, a not-for profit membership organisation that uses the law to protect the interests of the public, is seeking a judicial review and litigation in the absence of any official enquiry into negligence or corruption. They cite remarkably that three of the biggest PPE contracts awarded were to a pest-control company,

wholesale confectionary company and a private fund operating out of a tax haven.

Prodigious public spending provides governments with enhanced opportunities to benefit their friends and supporters. Alongside the pressures created by government indecision, the ideological drive to outsource responses to the COVID crisis when there were already competent local public authorities available, opened up another door to the Tory ‘chumocracy’. Isn’t it problematic that an individual can move seamlessly via the Department of Justice from a key position in a company such as SERCO, awarded a whopping Track and Trace contract, to become a Minister of State for Health? Aren’t the perennial Tory fundraisers, private dinners, sustaining a host of questionable relationships and creating potential conflicts of interest, the intricate foreplay to potential corruption? And what does it say about our society when consultants to SERCO’s Track and Trace, drawn from the corporates, are paid up to £7,000 of public money a day, while newly qualified nurses start risking their lives in the NHS on £23,000 a year. How long can our public services survive such dystopian priorities?

From his days as Mayor of London, Mr. Johnson’s approach to conflict of interest has been shown to be, shall we say, casual. Impunity is the handmaid of corruption. But when it comes to his supine coterie Johnson doesn’t do resignations or sackings, and unlike Mrs. Thatcher, doesn’t do God. “Freedom will destroy itself if it is not exercised within some sort of moral framework, some body of shared beliefs, some spiritual heritage”, she told the congregation of St. Lawrence Jewry in March 1978. That’s a warning the

libertarian Tory back benches might heed. When breaching international law and treaty becomes part of our negotiating toolkit, you wonder in what sense the Prime Minister is still leading a Conservative Party defending conservative values.

We have too long been watching the misuse of public power with its predictable reputational consequences. It is misplaced complacency to believe we are not wandering down the road to corrupt government.

See TheArticle 4/01/2021

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7.8 Two-Nation Toryism

10/3/2021

Rishi Sunak's performance last week was dazzling. But a week is a long time in the assessment of a Budget. Not all stay dazzled. Accolades one day after are risky. On the whole the public agreed with commentators' praise. One opinion poll gave the Conservative Party a 13 point lead, a budget boost on top of the vaccination bounce.

Rishi Sunak speaks well, reminiscent of Tony Blair in full flow: verb-less sentences to accentuate his achievements, repeated use of the well-known triple formula from classical rhetoric. Mr. Google says it's called epizeuxis. Scrabble players please note. Our video star Chancellor's carefully crafted speech illustrated, if any further illustration were needed, that he intends to be his Party's choice as leader when Boris Johnson has ceased to be of use to the Conservative Party.

Those of sound mind and lesser aspirations do not delve into Budgets' small print. The headlines sounded balanced, the tone honest, the measures necessary and, in one instance, incentivising investment, cleverly innovative. On a heavy news day, competing with bloodletting in the SNP, Sir Keir Starmer's gainsaying got minimal coverage. But when we were allowed to hear from the Leader of the Opposition, he showed that the much admired balance of the Sunak speech was only achieved within a very narrow vision of society and economic recovery.

The great theme of Margaret Thatcher's premiership, now hallowed as immutable tradition, was choice. As we are so often told political leadership means making difficult choices. But you begin to ask 'difficult for whom' when the choices made by a particular Party, on close inspection, most often turn out to the detriment of those on low incomes. Particularly after a decade of austerity and static wages with rising numbers of food-banks and shortage of decent housing. The answer to 'difficult to whom' should be obvious.

When the difficult choices mean withholding a £20-a-week supplement to Universal Credit benefit just as other pandemic benefits cease in September, when government is offering nurses a 1% 'pay increase' knowing next year's inflation will make it a wage-cut, or proposing savage cuts to aid for countries in desperate need, starving Yemen amongst several examples, you get a clue to the Conservative Party's vision of economic recovery. When after a pandemic which has shone a spotlight on inequality, the public are told anti-poverty policy is about getting people into work at a time when BREXIT and lock-

downs guarantee rising unemployment, you begin to get the picture. And when young people, writing countless job applications are left high and dry, a consistent pattern emerges. Let's call it 'a preferential option against the Poor'.

The kind of society found in no political Party's manifesto is being stealthily created by the triumphant Tory Right. Their preferred option even defeats the purpose of measures designed to stop the economy imploding during the pandemic. Why? Because for months an important reason for infection rates staying dangerously high, and requiring lockdowns, has been that people on low incomes simply cannot afford to quarantine. Infected or not, workers in poorly paid jobs and in the gig economy live with permanent anxiety about making ends meet, and can feel they have no alternative but to go to work. Thanks to the decline in trades union membership there are many unprotected people working under these conditions. Not that quarantine in cramped accommodation housing three generations is likely to be very effective. And not to mention the disgraceful conditions imposed on some asylum seekers, the virus' soft targets, off the government's keep-safe radar. Another option taken against the most vulnerable.

The trouble with the 'we-can't-afford-it' defence is that it sounds like common-sense. The retort should be 'look at the hundreds of billions you could afford? And weren't billions of it misspent?' Why is it common sense to declare expenditure unaffordable for public goods supporting the most vulnerable when government can afford to squander £10 billion – and counting – of taxpayers' money on one tranche of outsourcing to the private sector,

on the notorious centralised Track & Trace scheme? It failed. (Without acknowledging such waste bypassing existing local public health networks, responsibility for vaccination services has thank heavens been placed in the hands of the NHS). We are dealing with an ideological problem; the overall aim is to shrink the state. Government will return to this once the pandemic is over.

Current strategy is to keep public scrutiny to a minimum, pursuing policy by stealth, conveniently forgetting, or treating as invisible, for example, social care and the wages of care workers including home care. Vital low paid cleaners and hospital porters also put their lives on the line. Government's intention to shape or distract public perceptions is demonstrated by spending £2.5 million on a new Press room in Downing Street. This comes with a new White House style Press Secretary who brought us "Eat Out to Help Out" when she worked for the Chancellor.

The BBC has begun timorously questioning 'government priorities' - as if, once the North-Eastern Conservative constituencies have had their bungs, it might be time to consider the needs of the many who don't live in, say, Richmond, Yorkshire the Chancellor's seat. But when priorities are, as they say, 'hard-baked' in ideology and self-interest, those priorities are not going to change - though government may be forced to do something for the nurses because of the public outcry.

The British public now have a fundamental choice to make. The problem is much bigger than the wages of one profession. It is to decide what sort of society we wish our children to live in after the pandemic. If the choice is

business as usual, two-nation Toryism, more of the option against the poor, we will get the country we deserve. Save us the shame. It is the responsibility of HM Opposition to offer an alternative.

See TheArticle 09/03/2021

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7.9 Open Letter to my Constituency M.P.

9/5/2021

Dear Thérèse Coffey,

As you will remember, it takes 15% of the Parliamentary Conservative Party to write to the backbench 1922 Committee for a vote of no-confidence in the Prime Minister to be called. Only 55 Conservative MPs would be enough. You might say that the future of this country for the next three years rests on 55 people.

You will think this is a strange time to raise such a possibility after the Conservative Party did so well in the 6 May elections. And it might seem misguided for a dyed-in-the-wool Labour supporter to even discuss it with you, a Cabinet member. Again you would be right. For Mr. Rishi Sunak would be a more formidable rival for Sir Keir Starmer than the current incumbent, and Mrs. Sunak would not need a loan from a Tory donor to buy her wallpaper.

But in crisis times like these we all realise that Liam Byrne's jokey note after the 2010 elections 'I'm afraid there's no money' is now actually true. Britain

is economically damaged today reminiscent of our indebtedness on “VE” day 1945 – which fell this year on Saturday 8 May. Even the most curmudgeonly of cosmopolitans has patriotic thoughts. I would like to suggest, and such thoughts are perhaps shared by some Conservative MPs even if pushed to the back of their minds, that it is not in the national interest for Mr. Boris Johnson to go on much longer. He has been, and is, damaging this country’s standing in the world. If the aim is for a ‘Global Britain’ of good repute then cutting Aid budgets and breaking international agreements we have just signed is no way to achieve it.

Even the most thick-skinned of your Cabinet colleagues must be increasingly embarrassed by Wednesday PMQs watching Sir Keir Starmer’s disbelieving, controlled and dignified countenance while he systematically demolishes a ranting Prime Minister. The Speaker would do well to point out that Parliamentary Questions were intended to be answered. Last Wednesday Mr. Johnson had a tantrum, shouting, red-in-the-face and poking his finger at the Leader of the Opposition across the dispatch box. Yes, a tantrum. Like a baggily dressed tousled toddler who has been reprimanded. You’ll perhaps say the public don’t watch or seem to care. And you may be right. Maybe the toddler look and behaviour bring out the public’s maternal/paternal instincts. When Johnson’s indecision last year was condemned for resulting in multiple unnecessary COVID deaths ‘he’s doing his best’ was a common public response. The sort of defence an adult might make of a young child.

There is also something childish about Johnson’s repeated lying. I remember seeing a weasel crossing the road as I was driving a car full of grand-

children in your own Suffolk constituency, a long black streak, tail continuous with body. ‘Did you see the weasel?’ Some had. ‘Aren’t they amazing, so fast and vicious’ ‘Yes, and he had a chicken in his mouth’ came back a voice from the back seat. It didn’t matter that it was untrue. The vicious weasel ought to have caught a poor chicken - so it had. For this little boy the border between truth and childish imagination was still fluid. The story was much better with a chicken and the toddler who made the claim got admiring looks. Mr. Johnson has a toddler’s imagination for a better story together with the more calculated kind of adult lying.

The Prime Minister’s lies prompted both Peter Osborne’s meticulously researched *The Assault on Truth* and Peter Stefanovic’s on-line fact-checking video seen by over 15 million viewers. The lies are not unnoticed occasional mistakes. Lying, rule-breaking and a lack of interest in factual accuracy and truth on this scale have debilitating consequences. The most notable is that trust evaporates. You don’t believe what the man is saying even when he’s telling the truth. Breaking international law and treaties means that Britain as a State becomes doubly disliked and distrusted at any negotiating table. It also means in tribal politics that colleagues have to stay on message and talk nonsense, ‘a farrago of nonsense’ as Johnson likes to say, to distract from what is happening. Sometimes his distance for the actualité simply means he can’t be bothered to learn his brief - as the Foreign Office and Nazanin Zaghari-Radcliffe discovered to their cost while Mr. Johnson was Foreign Secretary.

For some the Prime Minister’s repeated lying is a national joke. But laughing

about it simply plays into his self-confected image as the jolly-joker. So does the use of the first name, or Bojo, both creating a national brand, conferring a sort of fake intimacy. Mr. Johnson inhabits a social class accustomed to getting away with things, his sense of privilege honed at Eton. Most of us are as warmly intimate with this class as is the chicken with the weasel.

It is for Johnson's own good, not only the national interest, that he should go. The falsity and hypocrisy, their sheer daily burden, must leave a terrible emptiness. He can't do the job competently. He doesn't even look as if he likes the job. He is heading for deep trouble as the costs of the pandemic and BREXIT become more visible. If he were to resign after Hartlepool in the bag, his big victory, he would be leaving on a relative high. With his libertarian tendencies and shortage of cash he would be much happier at liberty making a fortune performing on the lecture circuits with perhaps a touch of lobbying.

Britain is a divided, damaged country but President Biden in the USA is showing that healing is possible. Patriotism is a term often abused. But I imagine all your fellow 363 Conservative MPs would wish to be seen and considered as patriots. The patriotic thing to do would be to return Boris Johnson to the back benches and install a Prime Minister who could restore Britain's standing and influence in the world and set about the task of healing the country's divisions. Or must Party always come before Country?

See TheArticle 08/05/2021

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7.10 Corruption in Government: How Bad Will it Get? 3/7/2021

Are we sufficiently concerned about the anger, division, and outbreaks of thuggish and violent behaviour we see right across the country? Are our contemporary divisions destroying trust, cohesion and civic values everywhere and not just in post-BREXIT Northern Ireland?

The temptation is to highlight contemporary bad news and imagine trends, signs of a dystopian present giving rise to a more dystopian future despite our residual nineteenth century belief in Progress and Development. Taking things to their logical conclusion as a way of reasoning has obvious pitfalls; things, thankfully, rarely get to any firm conclusion least of all logically.

On the one hand, we might be experiencing what the German philosopher Walter Benjamin called *Jetztzeit*, a here and now marked by a major upheaval, an explosion in the dismal continuum of recent British history. On the other, we may be looking at more of the same. We forget too easily past crises, riots and social division, and eventually all may calm down and society return to as normal as we can manage.

An allied question: is there a relationship between the current stresses on civil society and the weakening of proper governance of public affairs, compliance with laws and rules and the accountability of those holding political power? Or expressed more simply, what kind of corrosive damage does a corrupt government cause civil society and civility? Or is a corrupt government

just propped up by an un-civil society? COVID has opened up numerous opportunities for gaming the system. British people are in the habit of using public services whilst avoiding paying for them through taxation. Requests for and payments of cash-in-hand are common, and at the better off end there is sophisticated tax evasion by the rich. Maybe, as the Anglo-Irish political scientist, Benedict Anderson says: “We have met the enemy and it is us”.

A lot hangs on what we mean by corruption. In the 1970s, I lived and worked in Nigeria. Embezzlement, kick-backs, fraud and bribery in government office were normal. What of Nigerian civil society? Expatriate academics from communist Poland found those little financial inducements quite natural and handled the university bureaucracy with practised skills. Taking them as her example my wife got the university to install an air-conditioner but without paying off anyone. And she got a round of applause from senior administrative staff who had been following her antics with great amusement. Nigeria encouraged you to believe in a trickle-down theory of corruption. Enormously stoical, resilient and humorous, Nigerian civil society aspired to clean governance but was resigned to the opposite.

In Britain using public office for private gain, or personal gain in political careers, is less common, less acknowledged and less recognised as harmful. It takes place on the poorly patrolled border between the unlawful and the criminal, rank cronyism and ‘chumocracy’. Note how choice of words can soften the impact of much the same conduct. Accusations of conflict of interest don’t get the public onto the streets, though avoiding such conflicts

is a fundamental principle of good decision-making and therefore the conduct of public life. The public condemned Matt Hancock and his adviser Gina Coladangelo for their videoed clinch for ignoring COVID rules, and this was the reason he gave for his resignation. No mention of any conflict of interest in his adviser's appointment as a Non-Executive Director in the Department of Health and Social Care. Ministers still 'forget' to disclose relationships pertinent to lucrative government contracts. And donors to the governing Party found their way onto the 2020 government VIP procurement list. Much of this is illuminated by the work of civil society organisations such as the Good Law Project.

In developing countries where a single breadwinner may be supporting many poor relations, the pressures at every level on those with any access to money and power are enormous and the temptations to corrupt practice great. They are much amplified if you can count on not getting caught. Whether the corrupt are likely to be exposed and punished is the touchstone of how bad things will get. It has little to do with inherent differences in moral sentiments between nationalities. Corruption gets a lot worse when a government is accustomed to 'getting away with it' and avoiding scrutiny. Nigerians in my experience hate the prevailing corruption but, given the behaviour of their own politicians, are at a loss how to curtail it.

Do we disapprove of the corruption of the Johnson clique enough to do something about it? And if we don't—taking things to their logical conclusion - are we heading for a dysfunctional polity like Nigeria? Good heavens 'No', you will say 'nothing logical about that and indeed preposterous'. We have Parliament. We have the Common Law. We have

an effective and learned judiciary able to subject government's conduct to judicial review and we have the European Commission and Convention on Human Rights. We have parliamentary select committees. We have the BBC and a free Press. And we should treasure them all. But the long term resilience and effectiveness of all these depend on voters too many of whom seem to feel this is not their concern or even that 'politicians are all the same'.

It would be good to think Matt Hancock's resignation is a turning point. But it isn't. Adultery is neither unlawful nor criminal nor as disapproved of as it once was. Public wrath, transmitted via Tory MPs' fears into Tory Whips' political muscle, was directed at the flagrant demonstration that "there's one rule for them and another rule for us". The suspected Minister of Health's cronyism was not the raw meat the tiger Press fed on. And its readers seem yet to make the connection between dishonest government cronyism and their own wellbeing.

Corruption could get a lot worse. Government under Boris Johnson remains determined to get away with it and avoid scrutiny. "I think he honestly believes it is churlish of us not to regard him as an exception", his Eton teacher wrote in Johnson's April 1982 school report, "one who should be free of the network of obligations which bind everyone else". A Prime Minister who does not understand how a rule-based society works or the distinction between private and public interest is a threat to the whole of society. As the old proverb says: "A fish rots from the head down".

See TheArticle 02/07/2021

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7.11 Freedom Day: A Celebration of Chaos

16/7/2021

Sadly there have been many avoidable deaths in this pandemic. Now we hear that Freedom is coming. While retaining his signature incompetence, Boris Johnson's contribution to the COVID crisis has shifted from lethally misguided to incomprehensible. Some airport manual on leadership appears to have convinced him that he must keep national spirits up with heady optimism and the sort of slogans that defeated the Remainers. His remarkable ability to assert the exact opposite of how he actually proceeds, 'data not dates', has given us Freedom Day.

Who can be against Freedom in these dark days of authoritarian governments? Perhaps Johnson cribbed it from Freedom Day, April 27th, the annual South African public holiday to celebrate their first non-racial elections, but I doubt it. On 19 July it won't be freedom for the hundreds of thousands of immune-suppressed people who have much reduced protection from vaccines and will have to restrict their movements if others go mask-free. It won't be freedom for unvaccinated young people who find they have long-COVID after a relatively mild initial attack of the virus. And it won't be freedom for the many, afraid to challenge cavalier unmasked travellers on crowded buses and trains, who would be driven off public transport but for the intervention of devolved governments in Scotland and Wales and London's Mayor, Sadiq Khan and other Labour mayors. Nor for those fearful to enter badly ventilated stores and restaurants. It will be freedom for repeated arguments, drunken brawls

and unnecessary conflict.

Johnson's grandiose language, evoking struggles for liberty, as he promises to end compulsory mask-wearing in England does not match the public's views. They have accepted some compulsion in matters of public health since the 2006 Health Act which "makes it illegal to smoke in all public enclosed or substantially enclosed area and workplaces. The ban includes smoking on vehicles which serve the public and / or are used for work purposes". Provisions were subsequently tightened and expanded to protect children's health. Local Councils were made responsible for enforcement but compliance was high without direct compulsion. They public agreed that protecting the health of others was both sensible and right.

The divergence between public opinion and libertarian rhetoric has become so obvious we are into the familiar Johnson phase of backtracking and mixed messaging accompanied by a barrage of cautionary advice from Ministers. After all, one function of law is to settle conflicts and especially to avoid violent forms of dispute settlement such as might be caused by disagreements in public about wearing masks. Mr. Rees-Mogg would perhaps like to return to dueling, maybe in Wetherspoons, but the hope is we will move forward to a less-divided society as the pandemic comes under control.

For the government right now its first problem is that it has repeatedly trumpeted 19 July as the day when any and all restrictions will be lifted. Anything less could prove to be the Johnson betrayal that finally alerted the public to the disaster for the UK that he is. The second problem is that, perhaps not

inadvertently, the masks issue has become part of the culture wars fostered by Johnson and is now arousing strong feelings of personal identity. Particularly, it seems, among young men who are notoriously reluctant to wear masks on London's Underground. Coming from Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, the explanation that the purpose of removing legal restrictions is so we can 'exercise a degree of personality responsibility and judgement' beggars belief.

No-one in government, though, seems to want to take masks out of the sacred Tory domain of choice. The very word "choice" is bandied about as if it were a transcendental value in itself irrespective of the true value of what you choose. It has entered the core of Western ideological extremism. It is difficult to say what libertarianism actually is in the minds of the Tory back benches but their current political position puts liberty front and centre. Let's just say that for them it could mean one or all of the following: free markets, an unbalanced individualism, a belief in seriously reducing State intervention in society, and a blind spot when it comes to social ethics, those obligations we have towards others. We hear little about the ethical decisions and values consonant with a decent society when talking about the mask issue.

Quite simply, wearing a mask in this pandemic is an action which protects the health and wellbeing of others who will be wearing a mask to protect yours. It is not, as government persists in talking about it, primarily a choice between individual protection and 'getting back to normal'. Nor has the requirement to wear a mask any direct impact on economic success as the Asian countries have demonstrated despite government implications to the contrary. No one

in their right mind believes that moral considerations, concern for others, will be a priority for everyone and that is why the public believes there should be some compulsion until the virus is brought under control. Public Health is primarily a matter for the State's attention. Challenging the 'mask-free' (those not exempt for health reasons) in COVID-friendly environments is not the job of tired workers who have no option but to travel to their jobs on public transport.

True freedom requires that we acknowledge that we are essentially social beings formed in dependent communitarian relationships, reliant on each other, not individualist monads with limitless choices. This insight, increasingly missing from modern Britain, is retained in the world religions. The libertarian view of freedom, like Boris Johnson himself, is a seductive counterfeit. Its consequences will soon be appearing as the government's refusal to take responsibility for a key preventative measure to limit the spread of COVID become apparent.

In all this current blather about Freedom the question that should be asked, and discussed, but won't be, is "What is Freedom for?" It happens to be a chapter heading in *The Unbroken Thread: Discovering the Wisdom of tradition in an Age of Chaos*, a much acclaimed book by Sohrab Ahmani, an Iranian-born journalist and convert to Catholicism who confesses to being 'a public Catholic' and 'interrogator of modern certainties'. He adopts this role by asking twelve questions, one per chapter, each linked in an eclectic selection to different thinkers from around the world. "The past", he writes, "can lend us a hand amid our modern misery, and we can retrace a path out of the current chaos and confusion". It is an exercise in historical humility. I

recommend one chapter a day on the beach – that is if you can manage to get to one.

See TheArticle 16/07/2021

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Part III

Chapter 8

USA

8.1 Doomsday & Donald

2/6/2018

It was early on a Saturday evening, 27th October 1962, and I was out in London with my future wife, going to the theatre. We wondered if we would be alive the next day, if any Londoners would be alive the next day. US warships were tracking Soviet submarines and blockading ships carrying missiles to Cuba. For the first – and only - time during the Cold War the US Strategic Air Command was on DEFCON 2, one level below full readiness for a first strike nuclear attack. This meant that at any one time almost 200 of the US 1,500 nuclear bombers were airborne.

Khrushchev and the Kennedy brothers' willingness to face down their military establishments, and pure luck, got the world through the next 24 hours and into what Donald Trump in his coarse business language would call a deal. But would Trump have pulled it off? I doubt it very much.

Are there lessons to be drawn from the Cuban missile crisis as we approach a critical period in discussions with Kim Jong-un, led by a man who is trying to scrap an effective agreement with Iran that halts their development of nuclear weapons? Daniel Ellsberg's insider account of just how near the world came to a nuclear holocaust in October 1962 in *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* paints a deeply disturbing

picture.

The first lesson is the danger of ignorance. It is terrifying how little the potential belligerents knew about their opponents. On the American side, the Kennedys had no idea that the Soviets had already placed over 100 tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba to use against the invasion for which the US military chiefs were seeking a pretext. Nor did President Kennedy know that in the event of communications with Moscow being severed local Soviet commanders were authorised to fire their nuclear weapons. (Khrushchev withdrew the authorisation on 22 October). Military estimates of Soviet troops in Cuba were wildly wrong: there were 42,000 Soviet troops on the island not the 7,000 assumed by the US.

On the Russian side, it later turned out, Khrushchev had given strict orders to hold fire on all US reconnaissance flights. He had not imagined that under threat of imminent invasion, on 27 October, Castro would direct anti-aircraft fire on US reconnaissance planes nor that a Soviet commander would follow suit and shoot down a U-2 reconnaissance plane with a SAM. This, in turn, was seen in Washington as a major escalation and resulted in an ultimatum that any further attacks - which Khrushchev now realised he could not control - would result immediately in US counter-attacks on all missile sites followed by the feared invasion of Cuba. The same would occur if, within 48 hours, the Soviets did not start removing the missiles.

The second lesson is the danger of poor internal and external communication. Within each belligerent state, communications between politicians, military and scientists, were persistently unreliable due to secrecy and systems failures. The US President and Defence Secretary were kept in the dark by scientists and the military about vital details of nuclear procedures. The public

were never allowed to know to what degree Execute orders were delegated. There were multiple fingers on the nuclear button precisely because for a variety of reasons communications from above could fail. We can guess that similar conditions prevailed within the secretive Soviet State.

The communications failure that could have resulted in Doomsday took place at 5pm on the afternoon of 27 October. The night before, Defence Secretary McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed their Soviet counterparts that US vessels would use small explosive charges, hand-grenades rather than regular depth-charges, to indicate that a tracked Soviet submarine should surface. The message never got through to the submarine commanders.

Captain Valentin Griegorievich Savitsky, not far from Cuba in Caribbean waters and out of contact with Moscow, was commanding a B-29 hunter-killer submarine, intended for use in colder climates. Its ventilator system was broken and crew were passing out with heat with carbon dioxide levels well over safe limits. Hemmed in by US vessels, under stress, Savitsky interpreted a series of small explosions on the hull as the beginning of an attack. His deputy political officer agreed with his order to retaliate against the vessels of the US fleet. A nuclear torpedo which had the power of a Hiroshima blast was readied. Together Captain Savitsky supported by Ivan Maslennikov, the political officer aboard the submarine, had the authority to launch. But, by chance, an equally senior officer, Vasili Arkhipov, chief of staff of the brigade, was on board. Acting as second captain, he cited the lack of authorisation from Moscow to countermand the captain. They surfaced.

The danger of poor communications and ignorance in the 1960s persisted and persists. I have always found it odd that our survival during the Cold

War and peace in Europe is attributed to the doctrine of mutually assured destruction. Subsequent detailed analysis of the Cuban missile crisis reveals the reality as a reckless gamble with the future of humanity. For many years no-one realised that the use of hydrogen fusion H-bombs in a general nuclear war, a thousand times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb, would create a nuclear Winter that would most likely starve all higher life on the planet to death. Secret calculations of the death toll from the explosions went as high as the low billions but the aftermath was spectacularly miscalculated. Despite satellite intelligence, such dangers persist today and will be aggravated by the possibilities of cyber-disruption of communications at critical moments.

At the last count, the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has been signed by 122 member states, including the Holy See. It declared both possession and use of nuclear weapons immoral and illegal. Or as former President of Iran, Ayatollah Mohammad Khatami once said very forcefully to me at Lambeth Palace: “haram for both”. The USA, UK and France have dismissed the Treaty out of hand on the grounds that deterrence ensures global security and the treaty did not recognise reality.

In a speech to the new body in Rome for Promoting Integral Development, Pope Francis, by way of reply, described deterrence as providing “a false sense of security”. Nuclear weapons, he said “cannot constitute the basis for peaceful co-existence between members of the human family”. History, we can see from Ellsberg’s book, is on the Pope’s side. And on the side of CND who for years advocated unilateral implementation of this teaching. President Trump should apply this teaching, by reducing his own, vast, planet-destroying arsenal of nuclear weapons. Denuclearisation is not only an imperative for Iran and North Korea.

There are worse negotiating strategies.

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8.2 Donald And/or Jesus?

16/6/2018

The Christian Churches in the USA are no less divided about President Trump than the rest of the country. His return from Singapore was like a surreal re-enactment of Chamberlain's landing after Munich. There was a paper with two signatures on it. He wisely didn't wave it at the cameras. The paper promised peace in our time but lacked substance. Peace-loving Christians were hopeful. But many commentators thought what little it did promise would prove to be a snare and a delusion.

It is always high season for hyperbole with Mr. Trump. His Singapore performance as the great deal-maker was rewarded. His popularity rating within his own Republican Party rose to 87%, ten points more than that other actor-President, Ronald Reagan at the same stage in a Republican presidency. When considering the 'his' in 'his Party', think of the poor host bird giving the large cuckoo in its nest a huge vote of confidence.

White evangelical Christians will have significantly contributed to the rise in Trump's ratings. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount calls peacemakers 'children of God'. So, after the alleged agreement with North Korea a rise in popularity is understandable in religious terms. But 17 months ago the votes of white evangelical Christians – 80% of them voted for him - played a major, possibly determinative, role in Trump's election, and they now sustain his position, despite his known character and policies. How, you wonder, do they accept his unashamed admiration for power, money, and what St. Paul calls fornication,

in direct contradiction to the teachings of Jesus?

Michael Gerson in *The Last Temptation*, the cover story of the April edition of *The Atlantic* magazine, provides a detailed historical account of how and why 80% of a large white Christian community have come to support a President whose personal conduct and national policies are antithetical to the Christian tradition. An evangelical Christian himself, and a former speechwriter for George W. Bush, Gerson has written a poignant and passionate denunciation of the views of fellow white evangelicals “whose political narrative is adversarial, an angry tale about aggression and evangelicalism’s cultural rivals”. And who see “their rights as fragile, their institutions as threatened, their dignity as assailed... a besieged and disrespected minority”. Today the doors of the White House are open to such white evangelical leaders. Being pro-Trump is to be protected from being marginalized by the rival, socially liberal culture of the Democrats. What an illusion.

This is not the only face of the American evangelical Churches; they have not always been, and still are not, all defensive and Right-wing. The story goes back to the 19th century to the confidence and moral concern for social justice of the New England Northern evangelicals and their opposition to slavery, and also to the growth of a radically different Southern black evangelical world which re-emerged powerfully in the 1960s civil rights movement. Obama understood the black evangelical world but related to it with caution.

The best known representative of the white tradition is Billy Graham and his Southern Baptist Crusades. But the best of progressive evangelicalism is seen today in a variety of forms: most strikingly in the progressive mega-church, “purpose-driven life”, led by Pastor Rick Warren and Kaye Warren, and in Jim Wallis’ Sojourners movement. These are forms of evangelical religion, recognizable from a British evangelical perspective which dates back to the anti-slavery movement, Wilberforce and the religious revivals of the 19th Century.

Gerson does not talk much about racism in evangelical circles from the 1960s nor how the electoral victory of a Trump relied on it. But the great racial divide in the USA today is reflected in the congregations of the American evangelical Churches. Thanks to the Evangelical Church Alliance, British mainstream Churches with their different history and early mission outreach, though far from immune to racism, have been spared such a profound division. From the 1840s the Evangelical Alliance has sustained its own tradition of social concern, from anti-slavery campaigning to the work of its former general-director, Pastor Joel Edwards, on poverty, debt and globalization. When the Archbishop of Canterbury was happy with the invitation to an evangelical black American bishop to preach at a royal wedding in Windsor, he was expressing and recognizing the strength of this tradition and demonstrating how evangelical religion remains close to the heart of British Protestantism.

The question raised by Trump for Christians is not just one for evangelicals in the USA. About 56% of Catholics and other Protestants also voted for him. Obama and Hillary Clinton's hardline on abortion certainly helped Trump, right across the theological board, but there was far more to the Christian vote than sexual ethics and beginning and end of life issues. Views about them had been changing rapidly. The Episcopal Church for example had spearheaded advocacy for gay rights before it gained momentum. Since the days of the 'Moral Majority' white evangelical positions have remained reactive, as have those of many other Christians.

The Trump presidency can be funny. Does he really want people to treat him like Kim Jong-un? Doesn't Republican applause for him on Capitol Hill go on long enough already? But what he is doing isn't funny. Trump poses particularly urgent questions to all the Churches, about truth, about American values, about describing the poor with contempt as 'losers', about the absolutely

clear instruction in the Bible concerning love and compassion, on how to treat strangers and foreigners. In the recent words of Jim Wallis, evangelical writer, activist and theologian, at stake now in the USA is “the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith”.

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8.3 Donald: Ancient or Modern?

25/6/2018

I confess. I thought the appeal of Donald Trump was a worrying new political phenomenon akin to the wave of right-wing populism in Europe. But it has a long American pedigree, there is little new about it. What is new is the sheer scale of his success.

My excuse for a skewed perspective is that I lived in New York in the mid-1960s. Nearest the political surface was the civil rights movement: Selma, sirens up the east side after Martin Luther King was murdered, the ashen-face of the TV news presenter, and relief at the muted reaction in Haarlem. The huge, internationalist peace marches against the Vietnam war, different immigrant nationalities streaming to rallies through long caverns of skyscrapers, were full of hope and purpose. We expected radical change never anticipating America First, clamp-down on immigrants, and beggar your neighbour, contempt for the poor, white supremacy.

Naïve you may say. Yet the original American Dream was still alive. It had seen the light of day in *The Epic of America* written by the historian, James Truslow Adams in 1931: liberty, equality and justice ‘for all our citizens of every rank’ (my italics). Sarah Churchwell’s recent study *Behold America: a History of America First and the American Dream* charts how the content of this dream mutated over time to become a dream of opportunity, and finally

to become the ultra-individualist pursuit of wealth through free-market capitalism.

Churchwell also chronicles use of America First as a mobilizing political slogan from its emergence in 1884, during trade wars with Britain, to its role as a presidential campaign slogan in 1916 by both candidates, and then to becoming the expression of the isolationism in the 1930s. For Woodrow Wilson America First did not mean beggar your neighbor, but indicated that the USA should take the lead internationally, which he attempted in founding the League of Nations - never ratified by Congress. The meaning of America First and the American Dream were transformed almost into the opposites of their original content.

The appeal and success of the slogans America First and its allied theme of Americanism was that their meaning could encompass traditional patriotism and racial bigotry as well as an assertion of white supremacy that overlapped with the extreme views of the Klu Klux Klan. Also in the mix during the 1930s were the Friends of New Germany. On 17 May 1934, 20,000 people attended a rally in Madison Square Gardens beneath a prominent swastika banner. This was the overt face of an American fascism. Though admittedly the mid-1930s lacked today's hindsight of the full horrors of fascism to come. But fascism's true American expression was, and remains, the promotion of fascist values under the cover of super-patriotic American slogans.

How much of this dark side of American politics was Trump aware of when he set out on the campaign trail? Perhaps some of his advisers such as Steve Bannon knew their history. It doesn't really matter. Extreme right-wing ideas have a way of sticking around for a long time like chewing gum under furniture. There are striking parallels with former national figures

such as Huey Long and Charles Lindberg. The ideology behind America First and Americanism was there to be discovered or re-invented. Just as America First Inc. emerged in 1934 as a reaction to Roosevelt's New Deal, so the economic context of Trump's America First is Obama's presidency confronting an economic crisis comparable to the Great Crash of 1929.

There is a great danger that Trump will be underestimated and the supposition that disillusioned supporters will eventually see sense. Until our political systems have answers to the human consequences of Rust Belts, the problems of inequality and the challenge of integrating immigrant communities, the ideas found in extreme right-wing thinking will gain traction in the echo-chambers of the mass media and voting patterns. Does this make Trump smarter than we think? Perhaps. More important, it makes him more dangerous.

Before his visit to UK in July, it helps to set Donald Trump's policies in an historical context, rather than simply dismissing him as some kind of a narcissistic sociopath who accidentally got into power. America, Britain and the world have encountered this cluster of ideas before, resisted them, and lived to see another day. Sarah Churchwell has provided the evidence that the current President of the United States is a throwback to a dark past. This doesn't solve the problem but it is an important insight.

But that is not enough. Trump promised to hold the dominant elites to account. That was an important part of his appeal. The elites must now examine themselves and recognize how much they have contributed to the shaming of America. The Republican Party knows full well that, as Mitt Romney said during the Trump campaign in 2016: "He has nei-

ther the temperament nor the judgement to be President and his personal qualities would mean that America would cease to be a shining city on a hill". How right he was. The American Dream has become a nightmare.

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8.4 Vice: How to Accumulate Power

25/2/2019

'Vice' is a biographical film about President G.W. Bush's powerful, secretive Vice-President, Dick Cheney (Christian Bale after many large dinners). It is a clever movie. At times the director, Adam Mackay, is too clever and the cleverness disrupts the narrative by its prominence. But, through sharp editing, you are kept critically on your toes, sorting out the factual from the imaginary, the drama from the documentary. The rolling story through four decades of US political history is interspersed with flashbacks, while a mystery John Doe narrator does a chatty voice-over. The film feels like a series of moving snapshots.

There are times the audience might wonder if Mackay is patronizing them: there are far too many sharp cuts from bombs and mayhem to domestic bliss. Cuts to Cheney's fly fishing as a metaphor for cleverly outwitting your opponent by camouflaging your moves, are repeated too often. Yes, we get it: Cheney, like a Mafia capo di tutti, presides over dreadful things but is a devoted family man who goes fishing. Cheney shows love and understanding for his lesbian daughter who, from a political point of view, was a liability. That is about the only time in the film he shows anything other than a cold calculating lust for power.

'Vice' is a movie about bad men doing bad things. Amy Adams, playing his wife Lynne, (she doesn't age enough over the forty years) is obliged rather one dimensionally, to play a Wyoming Lady Macbeth. Cheney began his career as Donald Rumsfeld's intern (played with Olympian cynicism by Steve Carell) and Rumsfeld is the key to Cheney's rise to power. The two share a ruthless camaraderie through three presidencies. But by December 2006 Cheney is powerful enough to sit back and watch him sacked as Secretary of Defence. The film suggests Cheney is behind it, but a number of generals had lined up to get rid of him.

'Vice' is in some ways an invasion of Michael Moore's fun space, without his scruffy presence lolloping around sundry perpetrators of badness, so there have to be some jokes. Most of these revolve around Cheney nonchalantly having heart attacks at key moments. Though I could have done without close ups of a human heart on a dish and a surgeon pawing around in a bloody chest cavity, by way of showing that the heart-attack joke was for real. Likewise Lynne and Dick in bed in their pajamas speaking Shakespeare to each other was both clever and funny. The audience could reflect on the timeless quality of the pursuit of power and the making of kings.

The film portrays George W. Bush as a clean living, gullible, dummy. Realising how much Bush needs him, before accepting the role of Vice-President, Cheney extracts a promise that it is the Vice-President who will actually run the administration and have unparalleled access to information. It was disconcerting that George W. (Sam Rockwell) looked nothing like, and sounded not much like, the real George W. This stood out because LisaGay Hamilton as Condoleezza Rice was uncannily like the real 'Condy'. Though she only had a few lines to deliver while looking worried.

'Vice' brings the Iraq weapons of mass destruction myth into sharp focus. Focus groups had shown that the public were confused about a war against terrorism but understood the idea of a war against another country. Enter Iraq with plenty of oil and a suitable villain in charge. I wish the film had said more about Halliburton, the vast global oil services company of which Cheney had been chief executive, but I guess the lawyers were out in droves. The cynical manipulation of public opinion and sentiment, and the conscious misuse of expertise, notably in public relations, was a legacy that we are living with now. It is the new normal.

Sometimes the deliberate distortions boomeranged back. The Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was a thug lurking somewhere in N.E. Iraq until he was pumped up by the CIA as a key link to Al-Qaida. Henceforth, with this enhanced status, he began to adopt a leadership role with devastating consequences. What is striking is how pathetically weak were these attempts to link Saddam Hussein and Iraq with Al-Qaida. General Colin Powell is portrayed as knowingly presenting at the UN, as an act of military obedience to the Commander in Chief, a farrago of nonsense to make the case for invasion. Why didn't he resign? How Tony Blair, and most of the Labour and Conservative Party, were induced to believe this spectacular bundle of fake-news, crafted by a handful of US Neo-cons and the CIA, is hard to fathom.

Director Mackay presents Cheney as being the main proponent of the doctrine of unlimited Presidential executive power, leading to torture being legalised, not to mention misleading the public over Iraq. Historians will baulk at the great – and wicked – leader theory of change implied in the screenplay. In the film Cheney was no Stalin though he shared some of his characteristics, secretive, ruthless, grasping every opportunity to manoeuvre himself into positions of

power. And without the subtleties of Hilary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell. One of the best shots, held for a long while in the movie, is Cheney in silhouette at the door of the Oval Office. He'd made it. And that was what he cared about.

You come away from 'Vice' wondering whether wry amusement at a movie in which the deaths of over 600,000 Iraqis and over 4,000 US military dead, appear as the bi-products of Rumsfeld's and Cheney's actions, is the right response. Was this a lefty's, sorry liberal's, night out with everyone feeling as clever and superior as the screenplay? Good jokes to distance you from the awfulness of it all. Perhaps. At least it reminded you that the Trump White House and its hangers-on isn't the first political horror show produced in the USA. Nor, I fear, the last.

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8.5 Trump Visit: Guilt by Association?

1/5/2019

President Trump's visit to London in early June is going to cause a lot of trouble, cost a lot of money and generate acres of newsprint. But the State visit does raise interesting questions about what are our legitimate expectations of people in public office, in the professions and in the arts. What behaviour ought we tolerate before shunning an individual, and who should do the shunning? These questions, important though they are, are now being raised merely as weapons in current partisan political battles.

To attend or not to attend the State Banquet in honour of President Trump has become a signal of personal and political virtue. The Speaker of the House of Commons and leaders of opposition parties have hastened to de-

clare that they won't be there, a decision which as private individuals they might make without exciting comment. But they are not private individuals. And one at least aspires to be considered prime minister in waiting.

Most of us believe that a moral line should be drawn somewhere, but where it should be drawn is a tougher question – especially when we're talking about those in public office. The President of China leads a State which has crushed Tibet and now interns millions of Uighur Muslims, determined to obliterate their identity. Only a minority protested during his visit to Britain. Public opinion seemed reluctantly to accept that British interests demanded that Xi should be received with honour. Perhaps Jeremy Corbyn, Vincent Cable and others believe that the expression of racism and misogyny trumps – excuse the pun – all other moral dereliction. Or maybe they all, except Corbyn, think they will never have to take responsibility for British foreign policy.

The unpalatable fact is that one of the duties of public office is to put national interest, or international peace, first – and to accept the unpleasantness of associating with the loathsome characters who strut on the global stage. The latter comes with the job description. Winston Churchill in wartime, all cigars and bonhomie, did a good job of working with Stalin. Tony Blair spent some unpleasant but successful hours with Gadaffi to eliminate what was believed to be his nuclear programme. Heads of state and prime ministers, as their name tags at international conferences suggest, represent their states not themselves (someone should tell this to Mr. Trump). International relations, particularly in a complex multi-polar world, require that we relate to, and sustain good relationships with other states. Ergo, our national representatives have to work with some very unpleasant characters. It is almost as simple as

that.

But does the general public have the same responsibility? Obviously not. As private individuals we have every right to protest at the personal and public conduct of a visiting head of state. But we ought to think about the reason for our protest and its likely effectiveness, especially as the cost of policing and security will be heavy. And we as private citizens should also think about the national interest. Do we seriously think that protest on our small island, however large the demonstration, will dent Mr. Trump's vote next year? Or are protesters still living with the illusion of a continuing "special relationship" with the USA, 75 years after D-day; a relationship that would mean having an effect on the USA's foreign policy or even ours? Probably not. It looks very much as if anti-Trump protesters will be expressing their own powerful ethical identities, as they have every right to do, precisely because they are private individuals and believe, as private individuals, that they ought to make a visible moral stand.

Turning now to members of the professions. They are held to quite stringent moral standards in addition to the expectation that they will always act legally. While we accept that holders of public office may be forced to tolerate violations of ethical norms, the same does not apply to members of the professions. For doctors, barristers, teachers, accountants and social workers, misconduct which is not criminal (such as breaches of confidence or sexual misdemeanours) still result in heavy penalties and possible expulsion. Professional relationships are deemed to be governed by much the same standards as those of private life. The difference being that the standards are enforceable and are enforced. Impeachment of a president, for example, is deliberately and constitutionally quite another story.

The work of creative artists also throws up interesting moral questions, es-

pecially as much of the work we so much admire is centuries old. Lovely Roman temples were built by slave labour. The innocent sounding circus was a festival of cruelty. Caravaggio was a violent man and a murderer. Wagner was an anti-semite. Writers, like Charlotte Bronte, whom we still much enjoy were bigots. Picasso was a sexual predator. So was Eric Gill. Yet their work is part of our heritage and even when we fear it is tainted we continue to admire it. Despite the occasional outbursts of protest, we decide not to boycott because the work has taken on a life of its own. We view these objects of beauty separately from the conduct of their creators.

Back to the dilemma which faced Mr Corbyn. He decided to refuse to take part in the official hospitality offered to the American head of state. When further ethical dilemmas present themselves, as they will, he must reflect and decide whether he is a future prime minister who will be responsible for safety and prosperity of the state or something more akin to a private citizen. Then he must act accordingly. Perhaps he knows already.

TheArticle.com “Private citizens have every right to protest Trump’s visit. But what about those in public office?”

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8.6 Trump, the Mayor & Fascism

4/6/2019

In last Sunday’s Observer the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, placed President Trump into the same category as the European populists who are “using the

same divisive tropes of the fascists of the 20th century to garner support”. Was he right to do so? Well, yes. But Donald Trump is also part of the story of American fascism and the American Dream.

Not the American Dream as originally set forth: liberty, equality and justice ‘for all our citizens of every rank’ (my italics). Sarah Churchwell’s recent study *Behold America: a History of America First and the American Dream*, describes how this dream mutated over time firstly being reduced to a dream of opportunity, and finally to becoming a dream of the individualist pursuit of wealth.

Donald Trump’s slogan ‘America First’ has deep roots in American history. Sarah Churchwell traces its use from when it emerged in 1884 during trade wars with Britain – that certainly rings a bell - to the time when it mobilized voters in the 1916 Presidential campaign. It was thought so effective it was used by both candidates. According to Woodrow Wilson when he said America First, he did not mean beggar your neighbor but that the USA should taking the lead internationally. Wilson attempted to put his ideal into practice in the founding of the League of Nations. The League, intended by Wilson as a global body headed by the USA, was never ratified by Congress, and in the 1930s “America First”, acquiring some of its present meaning, became the popular expression of isolationism.

The deep and broad appeal of the words America First and the allied theme of Americanism was that their meaning for the public could encompass traditional and honourable themes of patriotism as well as those of racial bigotry and the assertion of white supremacy. America First was more than compatible with the views and racial violence of the Klu Klux Klan. Donald Trump inherits and promotes this ambiguity.

Sadiq Khan is right in making the link between the USA and Europe. Toxic ideologies are no respecter of geographical distances especially in the internet era. In the US mix of the 1930s the Friends of New Germany were active. On 17 May 1934, beneath a swastika banner, 20,000 people attended a rally in Madison Square Gardens. This was the overt face of American fascism. But fascism's true and abiding American expression was, and remains, the promotion of fascist values under the cover of super-patriotic American slogans. Today's European populist Parties finesse their own politics in a comparable way with varying degrees of sophistication.

Was Trump aware of this dark heritage of American politics when he set out on the campaign trail? Perhaps some of his advisers such as Steve Bannon knew their Right-wing political history. It doesn't really matter. Extreme right-wing ideas have a way of sticking around for ages like chewing gum under furniture. There are striking parallels with former US political figures such as Huey Long and Charles Lindberg who gained national prominence in the 1930s. The ideas behind America First and Americanism were there to be discovered or re-invented. Just as America First Inc. emerged in 1934 as a reaction to Roosevelt's New Deal, so today's Trump's version of America First is a response to the Obama presidency reacting to the 2008 financial crash, an economic crisis comparable in gravity to the Great Crash of 1929. Trump could win a second term on the slogan.

There is a great danger that the effectiveness in electoral terms of Trump's first term will be underestimated and liberals' hopes of his disillusioned supporters seeing sense will turn out to be a form of denial. Until our political systems have answers to the human consequences of Rust Belts, the problems of inequality

and to the challenge of integrating immigrant communities, and until they can also respond to those part of the mass media that provide echo-chambers for extreme right-wing thinking, fascist tropes will have traction. Does this make Trump smarter than we like to think? Perhaps. More important, it makes him more dangerous.

The Mayor of London is not being deliberately contentious. We have our own values in London and they need asserting in the face of a foreign visitor who apparently likes straight talk. It helps to set Donald Trump's policies in an historical context, rather than simply dismissing him as some kind of a narcissistic sociopath who by some aberration accidentally got into power. America, Britain and the world have encountered this cluster of ideas before, resisted them, and lived to see another day. The current President of the United States is indeed a throwback to a dark past. This doesn't solve the problem but it is an important insight.

But insights are not enough. Trump promises to hold the dominant elites to account. That, in a divided society, is the source of his appeal both in the US and in Britain. The same elites must now examine themselves and recognize how much they have contributed to an outcome with which they so strongly disapprove.

See [TheArticle 04/06/2019](#) "Donald Trump is flirting with fascism. The Mayor of London is right to stand up to him"

8.7 A Little Moonshine in July**27/7/2019**

What a fortunate distraction the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11's moon landing has been. Instead of contemplating the imminent crash-landing of Britain's economy we could watch again the two first men walking on the moon, successfully ascending to the docking bay, and heroically returning to our wondrous blue planet.

In his first poem as poet laureate, Simon Armitage revives the spectacular festival of hubris that followed.

“But as Tricky Dicky clears his throat
to claim God's estate
as man's backyard
from the Oval Office,
and the gap narrows
to feet from inches,
suddenly stars recoil
to the next dimension
and heaven flinches”.

Less than five years later impeachment hearings against Richard Nixon began. The Furies had done their job.

The anniversary of the landings recalled a profound human experience that might have provided a new vision of human destiny and our place in the universe. Celebrating crowds across the world seemed to convey this hope. But, of course, the whole epic endeavor was not just a Columbus-like voyage of discovery, a moving display of human courage and technological prowess, launching humanity into the cosmos; NASA's superhuman effort was also a bi-product of the Cold

War.

President Kennedy, who committed the USA to a moon landing within a decade was spurred on by Russia's launch of the Sputnik satellite. Immediately the US had achieved a manned moon landing the vast NASA budget was halved. There was a sense of "seen that, done that". With the Russians eclipsed, impetus dissipated. Wernher Von Braun, NASA's chief engineer, recruited in 1946, former member of Hitler's Allgemeine (General) SS and designer of Nazi Germany's V-2 Rocket, was the brains behind the Apollo launches from Cape Kennedy. In his mind the moon was to be the launching pad for future Mars missions. Nothing came of his vision for another fifty years.

Hoping that a major strand of Cold War rivalry would "bring humanity together" was inherently implausible, and that implausibility was made visible as the American flag was planted in the Sea of Tranquility. Competition between the two astronauts who would be the first men ever to put foot on the moon was no less visible. Buzz Aldrin's father, a General, lobbied for his son to be ahead of Neil Armstrong. Aldrin himself followed up Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon's desolate surface by attention grabbing, skipping and hopping in front of the camera in the moon's meagre gravity.

The cost of this achievement was not negligible in either human or financial respects. Kennedy's demand for a programme to land US astronauts on the moon within the decade had involved hundreds of thousands of people with an array of skills focused on one goal. Several lives were lost. The Soviet Union also lost lives but managed to keep their deaths quiet.

The extensive and excellent TV coverage during this July was largely new to

me. In 1969 I was in Malawi reliant on the BBC World Service for news. As with Kennedy's death, I remember exactly where I was when Neil Armstrong took his great step for mankind: in the middle of Malawi, Central Africa lying in a maize field looking up at the sky. I also remember thinking how can it be that we can put men on the moon but not manage to enable millions of Africans to feed themselves, to buy shoes, have running water and electricity, and somewhere decent to live. Better understanding the collective intellectual feat that was the successful voyage of Apollo only makes the question more insistent.

Fifty years later that thought remains pertinent. I went back to Malawi a few years ago. Just as the empty rhetoric about expanding humanity's home to other planets has proved just that, rhetoric, so little had happened in Malawi to better the lot of the majority of its inhabitants. More people had shoes. Children possibly looked better fed but a difficult judgement call. There were more portable radios. In the middle of the capital Lilongwe there was a new, big, shiny bank, the modern equivalent of a mediaeval cathedral though more quickly built and ugly. But housing in rural areas was much the same. A roadside stall selling hub caps on one of the worst roads was still there, supply from the potholes exceeding demand. Coffin production was an expanding business thanks to the new tragedy of Malawi's AIDS epidemic. And the country had a government whose major intention was to compete for power and enrich its leading Party's members and clients.

By one of those mental jumps – nadir is after all an astronomical term - the timely distraction of those heart-lifting times on the moon was quickly gone. Back to our new Prime Minister and his Cabinet. No escape. "Heaven flinches" as Armitage has it. And so do half the population of these islands as we learn

what the nadir of our political culture means.

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8.8 Trump, Guns & Nationalism

7/8/2019

What does nationalism mean to Americans and for the United States? Does the State and the Constitution embody different values from a large number of its citizens? Are there two forms of nationalism in the USA destined for perennial conflict? Are there deeper reasons for an obsession with owning guns than the National Rifle Association (NRA)?

After the killings in El Paso White House advisers spotted that Trump had become vulnerable. The murders in an 80% Hispanic town after his “send them back” speech at a North Carolina rally suggested an obvious conclusion: Trump’s racist rhetoric and white supremacist ideology were condoning, encouraging, possibly inspiring, violence. The President’s own initial inclination was to attribute the mass murder to “gruesome video games” and “mentally ill monsters”, the latter a sub-set of the NRA’s refrain “the gun’s not the problem; it’s the person holding it”. Such was Trump’s close attention to the killings in Dayton, Ohio, which occurred a few hours after those in El Paso, he confused the town with Toledo. But he later delivered a well-crafted and presidential speech against hate-crime. Only Trump supporters were deceived. The Washington Post said his robotic delivery, eyes riveted on the autocue, was reminiscent of a “hostage video”.

Trump’s dissociation of the killings from any mind-set or motivating ideas rang a bell with me. When Martin Luther King was shot on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis in April 1968, I’d been living two years in the

USA. The white-faced television's announcer's expression was unforgettable: deep shock and fear.

The next day my boss at the Rockefeller University called me into his office. The late Paul Weiss was a world famous scientist who had left Vienna in the 1920s, very much the old fashioned Professor. He wanted me to know that the killing of Reverend King was a matter of statistics. In a large population it was inevitable that someone prominent and contentious in public life would be at risk of assassination. America was not a racist society, he assured me, a breath-taking denial of evidence to the contrary. Looking back, I see his denial as an interesting variant on Trump's blaming mental illness. In reality, only a small fraction of the prodigious number of gun-killings involving more than four persons, excluding the perpetrator, (nearly one a day during 2017 according to the Gun Violence Archive as reported by CBS) did the perpetrator have a recognisable or definable mental illness. When Martin Luther King told his wife after JFK's assassination that America was "a sick society", and that he too was at risk, he did not mean that its members were mentally ill or that the statistics were against him.

There are at least two reasons such extraordinary peacetime slaughter continues in the USA. The obvious, proximate cause is widespread gun ownership that the NRA has spent billions of dollars defending. Greg Abbott, the Republican Governor of Texas, financially supported by the NRA, has repeatedly used his veto against restrictive legislation. The last occasion was two months before the 22 El Paso killings and the wounding of many more.

The NRA itself was careful to deflect blame. It responded to the shocking death toll in El Paso and Dayton with a call to seek the "root causes" and control "those who have been adjudicated as a danger to themselves or others", though they were too smart to use the words "mental illness".

The second reason why mass slaughter continues is Americans' belief that the Second Amendment of the Constitution which guarantees "the right of the people to keep and bear arms" based on the need for "a well regulated militia" necessary for a "free State", ratifies all gun ownership. The context of a necessary militia is ignored. Neither James Earl Ray, who alone, shot Martin Luther King – a questionable assumption - nor Patrick Crusius suspected of the mass murder in El Paso, were part of a "militia", least of all a well-regulated one.

The gun-loving NRA which opposes even the banning of semi-automatic and military-style assault rifles have never explained how their literalist reading of the constitution would permit more than a right to keep and bear a musket, sword and cannon. The Second Amendment is a red herring as well as an anachronism, its invocation a convenient distraction which paralyses debate about public safety.

Harvard Professor Jill Lepore, who writes for *The New Yorker*, digs much deeper for causes in her book *This America: The Case for the Nation*. She makes two illuminating distinctions between the "nation-state", implying a State with some sort of ethnic and/or homogeneous culture and what she calls the "State-nation", and between "Americans" and "citizens of the United States". In the few State-nations, such as the multi-ethnic USA, nationality is detached from ethnicity and resides in sharing the values inherent in a constitution and in supporting the State's adherence to the values of liberal democracy: notably to human dignity and equality. Tellingly, nowhere in the Constitution of the United States does the word nation appear. But as Joseph O'Neill puts it in his reflections on Lepore's work (in the excellent 15 August 2019 edition of *The New York Review of Books*), the myth of a "Primordial America" lingers in the American imagination, a place where Americans are "white, Christian and English-speaking", the contours of an alternative nationalism.

The distinction between Americans and citizens of the United States sounds like an academic affectation. But it is insightful. The Texan owner of the AK-47, with his Stetson for high days and holidays, is an American. He goes off each morning to his office, works hard, probably goes to church, and sees himself defending his wife and daughter with his gun/s from “the invader”, those other citizens of the USA that don’t look or sound like him. His sense of nationality, his fear of “the invader”, is nurtured by Trump; he knows that those whom he calls the “swamp dwellers” of Washington, a cosmopolitan elite, call his ideas “white supremacy”. Unfortunately, Lepore asserts, the swamp-dwellers are too bogged down to compellingly articulate their alternative form of nationalism. As we watch and listen to the Democrat contenders jockeying for nomination as Presidential candidate, who’s to disagree?

Americans don’t live in 1791 with muskets and marauding “Indians”, they are not political escapees from an overbearing State across the Atlantic. They do not need semi-automatic and automatic rifles, more guns in the hands of civilians than any other country in the world. They do not need the NRA. Security is the responsibility of the State. But above all they do not need Trump and his brand of nationalism, hostage to clever advisers, or free-range and his true racist self. Americans do need to reclaim the values of their state-nation, and to do so fast before it is too late. And so do we British.

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8.9 Yes Mr. President There is a Conspiracy

18/6/2020

Outside City Hall in Buffalo, USA, on 4th June at a Black Lives Matter demonstration a police officer deliberately shoved an approaching solitary, tall, 75 year-old man. Martin Gugino fell backwards to the ground, where he

lay bleeding from his right ear. The cohort of police surged on leaving him prostrate. He had a fractured skull and was later put in intensive care before spending time in rehabilitation in the Erie County Medical Center. A video of the incident went worldwide.

Deploying a typically crazed Right-Wing conspiracy, the One America News network (OANN) put out a fake-news story that Martin Gugino was from Antifa, an umbrella body of anti-fascist organisations which deems violence in self-defence permissible. President Trump, a ground-feeder off such media, repeated it, tweeting that the man “could be [a standard Trump ploy] an Antifa provocateur” scanning police communications in order to block them.

In the real world, Martin Gugino was active in a number of different campaigns for human rights, social justice, non-violence and peace. Most likely he was approaching the police to talk to them. Martin Gugino was a member of the Catholic Worker movement, a radical international organisation many younger Catholics may not have heard of. President Trump certainly hadn't.

Dorothy Day, the woman who invented ‘taking the knee’ - but as a protester's substitute for standing during the Star-Spangled Banner, founded the Catholic Worker newspaper in New York in 1933. Her inspiration was the larger than life French ‘classic autodidact’, Peter Maurin, a man obsessed with the need for a ‘green revolution’, with the poor's suffering during the Great Depression, who opposed capitalism and who challenged the complacency of middle-class Catholics. Dorothy Day had escaped via university from a conventional family

lacking any religious interests into the bohemian world of Greenwich Village, lower Manhattan, where journalists, writers, artists and radical thinkers, some of them communists, drank and talked the nights away. Today we might say she had a 'chaotic lifestyle' including feckless male admirers, heavy drinking, an abortion, an atheist husband who left her, and a long-suffering daughter Tamar born in 1927. She later denied having an affair with Eugene O'Neill but they were close.

Dorothy Day was an avid reader. Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, full of moral and political purpose, were her sacred texts. But so was Thomas á Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. Throughout these free-wheeling years there was something about Catholic liturgy that spoke to her. John Loughery and Blythe Randolph in their excellent biography, *Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century*, believe Dorothy Day wanted above all to protect Tamar from repeating her own painful quest for identity and purpose. A kindly nun instructed her in what was required of a parent so her daughter could be baptised. Then she followed Tamar into the Church in December 1927.

During 1934, Dorothy's part mentor, part friend, Peter Maurin, began taking in rough sleepers. That winter the idea of a 'house of hospitality' took shape, a dilapidated four story building in Greenwich Village, close by the Hudson river. Caring for the weakest and poorest members of society became for Day and Maurin a 'sacrament of duty'. It did not matter how drunk or drug addicted and impossibly aggressive the guests might be, however racist, lice-ridden and unwashed. There was nothing romantic about their involuntary poverty. Nor about the voluntary poverty that drew idealistic young Catholics to share the

lives of the guests, accepting the bedbugs, the chaos and the noise. For Dorothy Day a needy person was the image of Christ and could never be the 'undeserving poor'. It was a theological position. She shared it in indefatigable travels and talks.

At the house of hospitality in the evenings there were lectures and debate rather threateningly known as 'clarification of thought'. The discussions connected with the radical content of the Catholic Worker newspaper and attracted a wide range of people, not only radical journalists who over the years wrote for the paper. From the beginning racial justice, workers' rights, opposition to war and nuclear weapons, and the Gospel values, were strong, repeated themes alongside the realities of poverty in the USA. Whilst committed to the worker struggle, Dorothy Day was wary of the leaders of the US unions. Demonstrations and civil disobedience, which qualified Catholic Workers for arrest and prison sentences, rarely prolonged, were rites of passage for Catholic Worker volunteers. The paper's readership peaked at about 120,000 before the USA entered the Second World War but subscriptions halved when the paper continued to support conscientious objection.

During the 1950s McCarthyism increased the vulnerability of the movement. No support from the US bishops could be expected, least of all from the sixth Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Francis Spellman. The Vietnam War and the civil rights movement were another story. The growing peace movement with its draft card burnings brought in the two Berrigan brothers, Jesuit and Josephite priests, who both served long prison sentences. I remember in the 1960s listening to Daniel Berrigan SJ, charis-

matic and compelling in his clerical black drainpipe jeans. When Dorothy Day was asked if Berrigan was a Catholic Worker, she replied:” No, Dan isn’t a Catholic Worker. He came to us and stole our young men away into the peace movement”. But the young men and women kept coming. And the houses of hospitality proliferated around America and the world, 175 communities in the USA and 29 more internationally, including one in north London. The Catholic Worker, described in 1971 in the New York Review of Books, as ‘the Methuselah of little mags’, still survives.

So, in a way, President Trump was right. There was a conspiracy. He recently held the source of that conspiracy aloft for a photo-op outside St. John’s church right opposite the White House. As Pope Francis said in front of a joint session of Congress in September 2015, referring to Dorothy Day whom he selected with Thomas Merton, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King as illustrating the best of US values and culture: “Her social activism, her passion for justice and the cause of the oppressed were inspired by the Gospel, her faith and the example of the saints”.

See TheArticle 17/06/2020 "Trump was right - there was a conspiracy. But not the one he thought"

8.10 Will Christians Give Trump a Second Term? 2/7/2020

One in Four American adults identify as a born-again or evangelical Christian. At 22% of the population Roman Catholics are almost as numerous. An insidious US Christian nationalism is abroad. Religious influences amongst almost half the voting population in November 2020 will matter.

Exit polls at the 2016 Presidential election, commissioned by the respected Pew Foundation, showed 81% of evangelical Christians voted for Donald Trump; for White Catholics it was 60% and Hispanic Catholics 26%. Compared with Obama in 2012, Hillary Clinton lost between 3-8% of such voters. Overall, Trump's White Christian vote was older, poorer and less educated. His support increased with reported frequency of church attendance. Piety can be plausibly linked to voter behaviour.

How, you might ask, can this be? Does the Christianity of White America make no difference to the kind of person sought as President? Not entirely. Two thirds of White Catholics in a March 2020 Brookings survey thought that the statement Trump 'fights for what I believe in' corresponded well, or fairly well, with their beliefs, notably about abortion and gay marriage. They also believed they were winning the 'culture wars', but unsurprisingly had mixed feelings about Trump's personal conduct. But evangelicals tended to discount his conduct on grounds that God often chose flawed people for his purposes. Some, echoing Israel's Netanyahu, compared Trump to Cyrus the Great who liberated the Jews from their Babylonian captivity some 2,500 years ago.

In America's swing States the percentage of evangelicals becomes important: 29% in Florida and Rust Belt Ohio and 25% in Michigan. In 2016 Trump won Michigan by less than 50,000 votes. A recent poll in North Carolina where 35% of the population are evangelicals showed voter intentions are complex. Participants were asked about a range of issues, including healthcare, environment, immigration and gun control. On abortion 63% of evangelicals preferred the Republican Party compared with 36% of non-evangelicals, but this did not necessarily translate into Party registration. A significant number of evangelicals who voted Democrat preferred the Republican position on abortion. And this creates vulnerability for Catholic Joe Biden who performed a U-turn to support 'reproductive rights' to win the Democratic Party nomination.

Benefiting from voter preferences may be behind the nine Republican States - seven of them in the South - pushing through restrictive abortion laws in 2019. Some, the 'heart-beat bills' aimed at ending abortions after 6-8 weeks. But photo-ops of Mr. Trump brandishing a Bible and eyes shut as pastors prayed with him may not be entirely cynical. Trump watches a lot of television and in 2002 learned about the Prosperity Gospel from the televangelist Paula White. At the time, he was buying prime real estate with the multi-million inheritance from his father. The Prosperity Gospel with its promise of faith bringing rich financial rewards rang a bell. A firm believer in spiritual warfare, with demons later manifesting in anti-Trump activists, Paula White undertook Bible readings with him. In 2017 she delivered the invocation at Trump's inauguration then, in October 2019, he appointed her to lead his White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

Evangelical voters also explain why Trump's public support for Netanyahu, the symbolic move of the US embassy to Jerusalem, and his partisan 'peace plan', all aimed at Jewish voters, appealed to a further audience. Christians United for Israel (CUFI), an umbrella body founded in 2006 by John Hagee, pastor of the Cornerstone church in San Antonio, Texas, claims some seven million members. In *Jerusalem Countdown* published in 2007, Hagee plays on the Christian Zionist theme of Armageddon, the final battle being fought out in Jerusalem with, according to him, the head of EU as the anti-Christ. Hagee also calls for a pre-emptive strike on Iran as a precondition for the desired Second Coming of Christ. Though CUFI has since tried to move away from such eschatology. Here is Vice-President Pence's speaking to CUFI about Trump: "a president who is fighting every single day to defend faith, restore freedom, and strengthen America's unbreakable bond with our most cherished ally, Israel". Not so much a dog-whistle, more a clarion call.

US evangelicals cut across denominations and are far from homogenous in their beliefs and political attitudes. Many are traditionally compassionate in their social attitudes. There are also rising numbers of politically engaged groups of 'progressive' US evangelicals who point to work for social justice and peace as central to the Gospel message: for example Jim Wallis' *Sojourners*, magazine and community, whose mission since 1971 is "to articulate the biblical call to social justice", Dr. Rick Warren pastor of the 30,000-strong Saddleback megachurch in California whose global peace plan to promote social justice was launched in 2005, and *Vote Common Good* started in 2018. Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice represent

another strand. Each wing of the evangelical movement has its advocacy groups, pastoral action, think-tanks and publications. But there is no denying that the evangelical infrastructure supporting Trump, with its thousands of radio stations and televangelists, is part of the biggest religious ecosystem in the USA today, and represents the highest level of political organisation and ambition, promoting a Christian nationalism sometimes synonymous with White Nationalism.

How will the Trump campaign play these final six months? He's in trouble with Coronavirus and his reaction to Black Lives Matter, trailing Biden. His evangelical vote dropped 15% from March to May and Catholic support by a hefty 23%. He has been hitting the conservative evangelical Christian Broadcasting network and the Catholic EWTN (Eternal Word Broadcasting network) last week. Will Trump star in TV ads as saviour of America's soul, a – flawed – Emperor Constantine? Too risky. But there will surely be a Cambridge Analytica- style deployment of extensive mined data targeted on evangelical voters. Evangelical and Catholic Democrats who show the strongest signs of approval of Republican positions on abortion and gay marriage will be digitally singled out for attention. Older black and Hispanic Christians, possibly detachable from Biden, will be wooed.

It's dangerous. The evangelicals in Trump's court erode the separation of Church and State. Appeals to religious ideals and emotions are powerful and rarely yield to fact and argument. In a concerted, powerfully appealing ecumenical response, US Church leaders must clearly, passionately and theologically counter the Christian nationalist power seekers who support Trump. He fights not for evangelicals, not for Christian values, but for himself, bringing shame on

America.

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8.11 Letter From America: How to Rig an Election 15/9/2020

Citizen journalism gained respect through its reporting from war –zones. Portland, Oregon, with its liberal democratic ethos, is no war zone however much President Trump, posing as the upholder of law and order, makes it out to be one. Nor is this State about to conduct a fraudulent Presidential election. Others may be. Here is a recent letter from a woman friend living in Portland.

“I have become used to all those old white men surrounding Trump, but what irritates me is the blonde bimbos, all with the same figure and long blonde hair who are put up there as Press Secretaries, to answer questions, which of course is totally pointless because they just repeat the same old official lies from the White House. The misinformation about postal votes and the United State Postal Service (USPS) is a case in point.

At the moment, there is much justified outrage about what is happening with the postal service (USPS), which has trundled along well enough for many decades. About four months ago (May), the Board of the USPS, all put there by Trump, appointed a new Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy, a businessman best known for being a very large Republican donor to Trump’s campaign with alleged conflict of interests from shares in a postal transport

contractor. DeJoy promptly set about degrading the service by doing the following: banning overtime so mail carriers could no longer go out to deal with mail that was not able to be taken on the first round, and removing some of the large sorting machines in post offices. And he started to remove some of the blue mail boxes on the street where people drop their outgoing mail, which soon got noticed in rural States such as Montana and Maine. The reasons for all this destructive action are not mysterious; Trump hates vote by mail and almost every day spouts about how it creates voter fraud. It is predicted that many more voters in many States will want to vote by mail in November and of course if you can screw it up in any way possible, he will do so. Chuck Schumer, the Democratic Senate Minority Leader, remarked that "Trump is trying to kneecap the USPS". I think it's true.

Three weeks ago there was such an outcry that DeJoy has now backed down and stated in writing that no more changes will be made until after the election. On the other hand a lot of damage has already been done, both in processing capability and in the mind of the public. There is no commitment to put any of the sorting machines back in place. The House Democrats have now begun an investigation into DeJoy's financial and fundraising dealings.

The big concern at the moment is best expressed by the title of an opinion piece in the New York Times, written by David Brooks. David Brooks used to be the paper's conservative commentator and is now usually referred to as a RINO - Republican in Name Only. Anyway his op-ed piece has the heading "What Will You Do if Trump Doesn't Leave ?" This is not just some

wild left wing fantasy, but based upon the facts observed in other elections this year and previously. I will do my best to explain, though it is quite complicated.

This year, because of Covid-19, many, many States will have a large percentage of mail-in voters who do not want to go to the polls in person. Some states (Oregon, Washington and Colorado, and others) have been doing this for years, have a well-developed process and essentially deal with mail-in ballots quite rapidly, so that results can be declared the same night after the polls close or soon thereafter. In Oregon, which I know best, ballots are sent out to all registered voters with a quite large voter information brochure filled with candidate statements, several weeks before the election date. The voter fills in the ballot like a multiple choice test and sends it back. The election office routinely checks the voter rolls, the signature on the ballot and doubtless other items; this routine processing and checking can all be completed before election day and after the polls close, ballots are put through a scanner and votes are counted, but not until after polls close.

This is all very well but we have fifty different States, many with a track record of voter suppression, and each one has different rules, not to mention the fact that many of them have very little experience in handling mail-in ballots. In Oregon the ballot must be received by the election office before polls close at 8 pm. on election day. In some States, it is the postmark on the ballot envelope that counts, not the date received; others require a voter to specifically request an absentee ballot and by a certain date. In some states the election office is not even permitted to check ballots received

versus voter rolls until after polls close on election day, so in those States the process has not even started. Obviously, this problem could be solved very simply by instructing the 'novice' states to follow a process used by the expert ones, but that is not about to happen. To me, it seems crazy that we have a federal election without federal rules, but that is the way things are.

Why does all this matter? The implication is that some States may take days, if not weeks, to finish processing mail-in ballots. And that might not matter except for the fact that Trump has been ranting about non-existent voter fraud to the extent that Republican voters are more likely to vote in person than Democrats. Hence, the mail-in ballots according to estimates might contain 75% Democrat votes and 25% Republican. So, if you think through what might happen in swing states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and North Carolina, the initial vote tallies based on numbers at the polling stations might show Trump with a significant lead, which diminishes day by day as the mail-in votes are counted. This so-called blue lag has actually been documented in some previous elections this year. You can imagine for yourself the type of things that Trump might say on Twitter if the initial poll counts show that he has won certain States, but in reality those States are just slow or incompetent in counting. So that is why David Brooks and a lot of other rational people in this country are concerned about election-day totals.

But time to get back to my laundry”.

See also TheArticle 11/09/2020

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8.12 Trump Stole the 2016 Elections. Can he do it Again? 1/10/2020

‘We shall be as a shining city on a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us.’ Words of the Puritan lawyer, John Winthrop, in 1630 as he sailed to America in the Arbella on his way to becoming Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The city on a hill is not shining brightly today. Both political parties in the USA have been hitting the dimmer-switch on democracy. The level of voter suppression practised by the Republicans has recently amounted to a war on the young, the poor and, especially the non-white, voter. This has included, quite apart from gerrymandering, making registration as difficult as possible, selective cancelling of voter registration, making black citizens access to the polls intimidating and time-consuming and finding creative ways to invalidate likely opponents’ votes. Add to this in 2016 a bombardment of advertisements, influenced by personal data, targeted at African-American votes to deter them from voting. Doubtless to be repeated. Trump is now deploying the full repertoire of voter suppression, and more, to stay in power.

Since 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution was passed, denial of the right to vote based on ‘race, colour or conditions of

servitude' has been prohibited. But in many states the Fifteenth Amendment was honoured in an 'unremitting and ingenious defiance of the constitution'. President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 Voting Rights Acts which came at the price of much African-American blood-shed and sacrifice during the civil rights movement allowed the Federal Government to regulate electoral practices in 16 states. These were mostly in the Deep South, where fewer than half of the state's 'minority voters' were registered to vote. Any future Jim Crow voter measures would have to pass 'pre-clearance', scrutiny by the Federal Government's Ministry of Justice. Voting rights seemed more secure.

In 2013 and partly by way of reaction to Obama's Presidency, the case of *Shelby* (a county in Alabama) v *Holder* (the Federal Attorney- General) reached the Supreme Court. The court found 5-4 that the protective pre-clearance clause in the 1965 Act did not apply in contemporary circumstances, opening a Pandora's box of Republican tricks to reduce the number of African-American, young and poor voters, and finding procedural ways not to count their votes when they did vote.

The magnitude of the voter suppression that the Republicans have been trying to perpetrate is not immediately apparent. A kind of noble patriotic omerta reigns. Defeated US politicians do not shout about the illegality or injustice of their opponents' electoral practices. After he lost his challenge to George W. Bush, out of respect for the Supreme Court, poor Al Gore slipped into the ozone layer of public life without a peep. Condemning unlawful electoral practice is simply not done at least not by Democrat leaders. Trump has no such scruples.

No omerta, though, for Greg Palast, a zany, trilby-hatted ferret of an investigative journalist who has been down several holes and come out with a rabbit the size of Wallace & Gromit's Were-Rabbit. Palast's *How Trump Stole 2020*, a popular-press collage of outrageous cases of electoral malpractice illustrated by Ted Rall's cartoons, is a treasure trove of hard won data on voter suppression from several states including the key swing states of Ohio, North Carolina and Wisconsin. The Republican enemies of democracy featured are the former Governor of Ohio, Jon Husted, and Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, along with the then Secretary of State for Kansas Kris Kobach.

There are two major ways of removing large numbers of voters from electoral lists. First to claim they have moved out of state or county and the second that they are double-registered. One of the biggest scams was invented by Kobach. He produced a list, spread across states, of 7.2 million potential alleged 'double-voters' - people with names common amongst ethnic groups such as Jackson, Brown, Mohamed and Rodriguez. Hence Trump's repeated tweets about electoral fraud. The list was used for cross-checking names, allegedly recurring in different states, and then purging them on the grounds they had moved out of county or state while remaining on their original register. And this linked further to listing 'inactive voters'. This was taken as evidence to show that those claimed to have not voted in two previous elections had moved house out of state or county. This contravenes the 1993 National Voting Registration Act which says failure to vote is not a reason to cancel a registered voter.

The list simply ignored differences in middle names, and those purging them

failed to follow the recommended procedure of checking against social security numbers. Purges of this kind took place in swing states such as North Carolina.

Palast ferreted out the voter lists used by the Governors and Secretaries of State controlling elections and then had the names and addresses individually checked using accurate and current data held by Amazon and Ebay for deliveries. He discovered that Kobach was disseminating a list that was inaccurate on an epic scale. Following an earlier purge of half a million voters, Ohio's Husted, during the lead up to the 2016 election, purged a further 426,781 voters. In the case of Georgia 340,134 of these 'absentee voters' still lived at their home address in the state or country they were alleged to have left. Those who moved house within their own neighbourhood or country were also struck off (the poor were over four times more likely to move locally compared with the average American). Overall, this eliminated 1 in 7 African-American voters. In early 2020, Georgia purged another 120,000 voters. Wisconsin trying the same game is fortunately running into legal problems. Its Supreme Court is hearing arguments in a lawsuit that would see 129,000 removed from the voter rolls on grounds they'd moved from their registration addresses. The nation's top experts in address verification, including the official licensee of the US Postal Service, says that a minimum of 39,722 "movers", mostly African-Americans, had not moved. Trump won Wisconsin last time by 23,000 votes.

The 2002 Federal Help America Vote Act created a 'provisional ballot' available to voters whose eligibility to vote is challenged. For example in some states a

gun licence is a valid ID while a student's university ID is not. Under the Help America Act a direct-mail form has to be sent them; the different boxes have to be filled in carefully and returned. This is exactly the sort of communication that's likely to be binned, mislaid or accidentally spoiled. If the document actually reaches the correct recipient and is sent back correctly, there is no guarantee the provisional ballot will be counted, and you can guess in which states they aren't.

Now COVID has increased the electoral importance of postal ballots; it means voting according to instructions avoiding the many possible technical errors that can cause a vote to be rejected, and getting your vote counted – (eight states require double verification).^{*} You can guess who will negotiate the electoral chicane most easily and who won't. Given that Trump won 2016 by 74 Electoral College votes while Clinton won the popular vote by 2.9 million, and given Trump's narrow victory in swing states still subject to voter suppression, Biden has a much higher hill to climb than the opinion polls indicate. And he won't find a shining light at the top. Rather a President claiming massive voter fraud and determined to cling onto power at any cost.

As for the scale of voter fraud throughout the United States, the total number of documented cases of double voting in 2016 was four.

For state control of postal balloting see “Letter from America: How to Rig an Election” 15/09/2020

See “The Scandal of US Voter Suppression” TheArticle 25/09/2020

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8.13 Mike Pence's Date With Destiny?**8/10/2020**

On 7 October 2016 the Washington Post printed the story of Presidential candidate, Donald Trump, recorded boasting to a TV host about his lewd behaviour with women. The leading lights of the Republican Party went into damage limitation discussions that included the possible dumping of Mr. Trump. According to super-star journalist Bob Woodward, Vice-Presidential candidate Mike Pence let the Republican National Committee know that he would be willing to take Trump's place. He was up for it. But Trump brazened it out. Four years later America's Evangelical Christian Vice-President must be wondering if God is having another try at making him President.

Would it be so bad if Pence became the Republican candidate? It depends where you stand in the USA's culture wars - but there will certainly have been many viewers who will have watched his performance against Kamala Harris last night, and who would have liked what they saw. Pence is in many ways a personification of Middle America, a good Catholic lad, altar boy at St. Columbus Catholic Church in Columbus, Indiana where he attended the parochial school, and one of six children in an Irish-American Democrat-voting family. They weren't poor but by Washington standards not rich either.

In 1978 aged nineteen, following a not uncommon religious trajectory, Pence was called at a Kentucky evangelical music festival to 'give his life to Jesus'. During the 1990s he described himself as an evangelical Catholic but began attending

the Indianapolis Grace Evangelical Church, one of the mega-churches, with his wife. There is nothing phony about his faith. His support for the full raft of social conservative positions on sexuality is sincere. He follows Billy Graham's advice, not attending events serving alcohol without his wife and not travelling alone with another woman (an old rule incidentally for Catholic priests).

Folksy Reagan and responsible Bush senior at that time did not seem so vastly different from the Democratic Party. He began his political career in 1988 as a Republican by losing the election for a Congressional seat to the Democrat contender. In 1992 Pence began trying to reach a wide audience in Indiana by anchoring a local radio Conservative talk-show. Like Trump a media profile did the trick. In 2001 he was elected to the Congress to represent Indiana's 2nd congressional district and moved on to become Governor in 2013.

After 2009 when the Tea Party Republicans emerged as a force, his earlier religious conversion became a more important political asset. He happily hitched his waggon to the Tea Party movement and described himself as "a Christian, conservative and Republican in that order". During 2015-2016 he backed Texas Senator Ted Cruz, a Southern Baptist with a similar evangelical school background and views, for Presidential candidate and then talked Trump into selecting him as his running mate, quite an achievement.

During Obama's two terms as President the evangelical caucus within the Republican Party felt themselves discriminated against by 'anti-religious' Democrats

and the Washington elite. When Pence tried to enact legislation in Indiana enabling businesses to refuse services to gay customers, pressure from several quarters forced him to amend it. Pence's argument that this was a matter of religious freedom did him no harm amongst conservative evangelical and catholic voters. Neither did his support for school prayers, his attempts to curtail sex education and his advocacy of censorship of pornography. In the words of Richard Land, President of the Southern Evangelical Seminary, Pence was 'the 24-carat-gold model of what we want in an evangelical politician'.

But what could be expected from a 24-carat gold evangelical politician? The grim expression on his face while Trump rambled on behind podium after podium gave some indication that he has not found the role of abject, loyal Trump defender pleasant. But in public he espouses the full litany of right-wing Republican or Trump positions, from Climate Change denial and support for the gun lobby to opposition to immigration and 'Obama-care'. He has voted accordingly. Far from dealing with his personal faith in the manner of John F. Kennedy, dissociating public position and policy from private religious belief, the evangelicals around Trump see the White House as the engine room of the United States' salvation in a permanent conflict between the children of light and the children of darkness.

The religious contribution to the Trump team's ideological armoury is not negligible. In 1996 Pastor Ralph Drollinger and his wife Danielle founded Capitol Ministries "to create disciples of Jesus Christ in the political arena throughout the world" at the same time insisting: "we stay away from politics and concentrate on the hearts of leaders". The pastor leads a weekly Bible

study in the White House for the President's entourage. This is the religious world Pence inhabits. Dollinger believes that the USA is in dire straits and doesn't think it can be turned around 'if we don't have almost a benevolent dictator'. Who can he be talking about?

The other deeply worrying aspect of the evangelical influence in the White House is how much Pence – and Pompeo as Secretary of State – conflate their faith assumptions with foreign policy. Israel features both in the Bible and within the critical geo-political problems besetting the Middle East. Christian Zionism brings the two together with Israel at its heart. But relying on biblical verses on Israel such as 'those who bless her bless us' as the rationale of US policy shows scant regard both for how to read the Old Testament and how to frame a Middle East policy. Even worse, the role of Israel in the Book of the Apocalypse and in the final war before the Second Coming of Christ it describes encourages potentially catastrophic belligerence towards Iran.

It is surprising that during the radical papacy of Francis Pence may now be signalling a return to the Catholic fold. He had a long, one hour, and apparently warm meeting with the Pope in January this year. Were the ballot box and the 'Chinese virus' to bring him to the Presidency, let's hope that, if a nuclear war between Israel and Iran threatens, he doesn't believe it's the end of the world and he will be beamed up to heaven in The Rapture.

And let's pray that he goes back to the boring-old Catholicism he learnt at St. Columbus Church School where faith and reason go together.

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8.14 Letter From America: Biden's Two Big Obstacles 2/11/2020

A second perceptive letter from a friend in Oregon:

“Well, here’s hoping it’ll be all over soon. Biden has been doing his best to steer a delicate path between Progressives who would like ‘Medicare for All’ and moderates/independents who have no desire to lose their existing insurance, rotten and expensive though it might be. The real issue is will the Democrats be able, come the time, to implement any of their policies?

The first obstacle is that the Democrats need to win four additional Senate seats to take control - not so easy when you realize how skewed is Senate representation. Wyoming, with a population of less than one million, and other rural small states, is given two Senators to elect as does California with a population of just under 40 million, so the more urbanized States which typically support federal government programs are grossly under-represented. And not all Senate seats are up for election this year; senators serve for six years. If Republicans retain control of the Senate, under majority leader Mitch McConnell, then we are looking at another four years of gridlock and blocked legislation. So watch the states of Arizona, Colorado, Maine and North Carolina for election results.

The second obstacle is far worse, though slow acting. It’s called the Supreme Court. In what I call a normal country, parliament debates and passes legislation which then becomes the law of the land; if you, the voter, do not like

this legislation then, when the time comes, throw out the representatives and elect a different set. It is often said the ability to do just that gives democracy the edge over any other political system.

Unfortunately, in the U.S. it does not work that way because of the Constitution. An excellent example is the precarious fate of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), otherwise known as Obama Care. This health care insurance legislation was originally passed by the Democrats, after a huge struggle (won by one vote in the Senate). It benefits at least 20 million people by enabling them to have subsidized insurance and get medical care. After the Senate passed into Republican hands there were many efforts (about 50 attempts) made to repeal the law. John McCain, dying from a brain tumor a couple of years ago, once saved the ACA by voting against his Republican colleagues.

The ACA survived, although somewhat modified by the removal of something known as the individual mandate. Everyone lacking health insurance (any kind, private, public, whatever) had to pay a small fee to help support the costs of this provision. Congress cancelled this unpopular mandate.

Then certain Republican states which did not want to expand Medicaid, the program for the really poor, took the informal mandate to the courts claiming it was unconstitutional and won. How can that be? Article 1 of the Constitution, section 8, defines federal powers at some length: Congress can collect taxes, coin money, build roads, and establish rules for naturalization and so on, lots of good stuff. However, you will not be surprised to learn

that this venerable document does not mention the regulation of health care insurance. The power to do this if you are a constitutional Originalist (a judge who holds that all statements in the constitution must be interpreted based on the original understanding "at the time it was adopted") therefore devolves to the States. Chief Justice John Roberts saved the ACA a few years ago by declaring that the mandate is the same as a tax so falls under Article 1. But with the mandate eliminated, that argument is no longer valid.

All Democrats and fair thinking people are outraged by Trump's recent nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court since Mitch McConnell refused to even consider Merrick Garland nominated by Obama nine months before the 2016 elections. Now a Republican Senate have used Trump's last days to push Barrett onto the Supreme Court, replacing the progressive Ruth Bader Ginsberg, because they had the votes to do it.

Why do we care? Because Barrett is a dedicated conservative and, like her mentor Judge Scalia, an Originalist and a Textualist (someone who ignores the intention of the law, the problem it was intended to remedy, or significant questions regarding former legal judgements), so if the original document of 1787 does not mention a particular power of the federal government, then it doesn't exist, does it? The Senate held four days of hearings with Barrett but it was pretty pointless because she refused to give her views on anything, including previously decided cases. This got tedious: all the non-answers were along the lines of "I can't say because somebody might predict how I would rule". And, of course, she refused to express

any views on climate change, which she described as a controversial political question.

I think you get the general picture: her conservative views will also be expressed in opposition to LBGTQ rights, environmental legislation etc. Her appointment to the Court will solidify a conservative majority of 6-3. The situation for Biden and the Democrats (if they win both houses) might be compared to that of Roosevelt in the 1930s when he was struggling to enact progressive legislation such as social security.

How did we end up in this situation? Congress has become very dysfunctional and has hardly passed any legislation in the past four years, apart from Trump's big tax cut. The Constitution (Article 1, section 8) states quite clearly that Congress shall "make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers". Yet it seems increasingly that Congress prefers not to make any laws and wait for the courts to decide critical issues such as gay marriage or immigration laws. There always exists a large minority of people or organizations who prefer to file a court case when they are unhappy with some outcome. This is not a happy way to run a country.

Personally, I think the social networks such as Facebook and Twitter share much of the blame. It used to be that opposing political sides got together informally, breakfast meetings, and hammered out some compromise about pending legislation. That useful activity does not occur anymore, because the mere fact that somebody was talking to the other side would get out and there would be cries of rage from the extremists on both sides.

Is anything fixable? It would take very radical action and a willingness to enact another couple of Amendments to the Constitution. State's Electors in the Electoral College matter more than the popular vote for President in the election. They should be abolished as an anachronistic relic from the 18th century. Can you imagine, presidential candidates hardly visit, or care about, the issues of California's nearly 40 million people while they go to Ohio twice a week? The Senate composition should be changed to more closely represent the size and population of each state. For example, each state gets one Senator plus an additional number of Senators based on the size of the state.

P.S. I may send you a print copy of the Constitution, courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society”.

See also TheArticle 'Biden's Two Big Obstacles' 02/11/2020

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8.15 US Democrats Need Two Terms & New Ideas 9/12/2020

After Trump, the natural hope is that America's second Catholic Presidency may attract some of the Camelot talent of Kennedy's first. That looks as imaginary as the Arthurian legend. Jo Biden will be surrounded by bright, successful lawyers like Anthony Blinken, an experienced diplomat in the role of new US Secretary of State. Only in television dramas are lawyers noted for thinking outside the box.

Kamala Harris as Vice-President also brings a sharp legal mind to the White House and Linda Thomas Greenfield, an African-American from Louisiana, brings her considerable diplomatic experience in Africa to the role of ambassador to the United Nations. With Alejandro Mayorkas, a Cuban-American, as head of Homeland Security, retired- General Lloyd Austin as first black Secretary of Defence at the Pentagon, John Kerry dealing with Climate Change, and Janet Yellen (Polish Jewish) as treasury secretary, Biden has been awarded an alpha plus for diversity.

Not merited though if this diversity is cosmetic or an end in itself. Nasrine Malik in *The Guardian* (7 December) makes the point. “When people are hired to make a government ‘look’ a certain way, by governing parties with conservative politics it’s usually a way of making changes so everything stays the same – or gets worse”. How probable is it that some sharp black minds in the Biden Cabinet will link up with Black Lives Matter to initiate deep systemic change in US policing? I wouldn’t bet on it given Republican manipulation of law and order issues.

But the value of diversity is not the only message from Biden’s appointments. The other is that fellow Americans are in safe, predictable, experienced hands, the damage and social wounds visited on the homeland by Trump will be repaired and healed, the trajectory of domestic and foreign policy pursued by Obama will be resumed. America’s time of shame has passed. And all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well.

Well not quite. Both Anthony Blinken and Kamala Harris supported the invasion of Iraq. Neither is on the radical wing of the Democratic Party. No

big thinker such as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. - who opposed the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 - will be sitting in the Oval Office. Not that anyone heeded Schlesinger at the time. President Kennedy authorised a CIA plot to overthrow Castro with a small rag-tag Cuban exile force which was shot up, mopped up and defeated. We can be confident that Jo Biden will treat US enemies more rationally than Trump and try to get the nuclear deal with Iran, reneged on by the USA, back up and running. That's hardly radical. He won't risk easing the damaging sanctions that are crippling Iran and playing into the hands of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. It will be back to traditional US Middle East policy.

For there to be more substantial change, the Democrats will require two terms in office. The first to restore the status quo ante of 2016. The second to reach forwards with vision to 2028. The USA has got rid of Trump. It has not got rid of the causes of Trump.

What is the underlying problem, usually dubbed populism, which the USA has experienced in its direst form? Deep seated inequality, 'truth decay' and easily manipulated citizens, fears caused by globalisation, a flawed political culture? We are encountering the same phenomena in the UK where thankfully there aren't more guns than people, nor a Republican Party demonstrating a prodigious level of cynicism and irresponsibility - though some might fear the right wing of the Conservative Party is fast heading that way.

In a period of overlapping crises business as usual is folly. Crises call for a prophetic pragmatism described in Michael J. Brown's *Hope & Scorn*:

Eggheads, Experts & Elites in American Politics. Cornel West, the philosopher, American activist, Southern Baptist, black intellectual, used the term in 1989 for an intellectual leader, acting as a ‘critical organic catalyst’ in his community. Anyone called an intellectual instantly falls into the popular category of patronising elites. In the UK as in the USA, there is a perennial tension between academics, experts, Booker Prize winners, public intellectuals imagining different worlds, and the premise on which democracy rests: the people - who should have ‘voice’ - as the source of political authority. When the tension becomes acute and a divisive populism degrades public discourse – Trump at one point bizarrely described the American people as the ‘super-elite’ – anti-intellectualism becomes the common sense of the day, a mark of popular authenticity. The trouble is someone has to think outside the box when the box is increasingly liable to flooding, forest fires, tornadoes, demagogues, religious extremism and malign viruses.

The influential Marxist philosopher, Antonio Gramsci - who took the time to talk to Lancia and Fiat workers in Turin where he studied - introduced the concept of the ‘organic intellectual’ (Prison Notebooks 1926-1937). Such a person as part of an organisation of the people, for example trades unions and women’s organisations, was able to overcome the detached intellectual’s democratic deficit, to guide and represent workers, opening up new horizons. Brazil’s Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, for example, advocated adult education through literacy, drawing out the knowledge that came from poor people’s own experience of oppression, allowing them to decide for themselves what action to take.

But in the UK our days of ‘worker education’ are past. Our popular mass media don’t help and haven’t helped. I remember during the apartheid era taking a group of black South African trades unionists up to the Liverpool docks to meet dockworkers. You could spot those who read the *Daily Worker* (now the *Morning Star*), they knew a lot about what was going on, asked insightful questions, while those who read ‘*The Sun*’ knew almost nothing, hung back and looked sheepish. The Press hasn’t changed much. But today’s social media creates many more silos and walled gardens of the soul while the *Mail* and the *Sun* still cultivate resentment. Movements such as Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street and Extinction Rebellion have rejected ‘elitist’ leadership structures and rely on social media or ‘assembly spaces’ for generating dialogue, ideas and a fresh view of history. No Martin Luther Kings or Cornel Wests here yet.

Where then should we seek Britain’s organic intellectuals? If the USA is anything to go by, in the Churches, particularly amongst theologians who are women and in the black community. In Latin America the liberation theologians took that role and the Argentinian Pope Francis carried their option for the poor, and popular piety, with him to Rome. In UK, Evangelicals such as Reverend Joel Edwards, director-general of the Evangelical Alliance from 1997-2009, led the way into engagement with key social and geo-political issues. David Lammy, now a forthright Labour Shadow Minister for Justice, carried his formation in the Anglican Church into politics. In the future the black Pentecostal Churches, now so distant from secular culture, may produce some surprises. When it comes to thinking outside the box, black lives matter but so do black minds.

See TheArticle 08/12/20

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8.16 Many Rivers to Cross For President Biden 16/1/2021

An American would be forgiven for feeling as lost in Washington today as the Jamaican singer Jimmy Cliff in his song Many Rivers to Cross. The United States may be on the verge of serious civil violence.

There are different contending stories about the 2020 US Presidential election. The comforting one is that Joseph Biden, with his black running mate Kamala Harris, won a popular mandate by seven million votes. The disturbing one is that Donald Trump increased his popular vote by over eleven million. It is estimated that 93% of those who voted Republican in 2016 renewed their support undeterred by the evidence of four years of misrule by a manipulative demagogue consciously cultivating resentful, violent, and what Yale History Professor Timothy Snyder calls pre-fascist movements promoting the politics of white supremacy. Besides the pandemic, four rivers stand out for President Biden to cross.

The first is 74 million voters who chose Trump. What got into almost a quarter of the country's population? The short answer is fear. There is nothing novel about that. McCarthy knew how to tap into it in the 1950s. But from the beginning US political culture, born in the lonely conquest of an expanding frontier and a violent confrontation with Native Americans was imbued with fear. In the South, slave owners' own violence was projected

onto its black victims. An abiding anxiety that only brutal punishment stood in the way of insurrection and retaliation, was the result. What other country has a powerful and successful lobby persuading families of the need to own guns for protection? And in what other country do gun sales soar when protests take to the streets against unlawful police killings of black people?

A substantial number of angry Americans seem to see, or countenance, white supremacy as a defence against black, or non-white, advancement. Demographic changes in the USA are felt as a zero-sum game. Non-Hispanic Whites make up 60% of America's population but to many the Obama Presidency, despite his best efforts, looked like a period when the White majority lost control. Trump's attempt to undo everything Obama had achieved spoke reams to his constituency: he understood their fears and resentments, he was their champion. The Biden team must now promote the traditional promise of the 'City upon a Hill', and destroy the lie that equality of opportunity and fairness is an evil un-American force called Socialism. Failing that, Biden may have to fall back on his Catholicism for a coherent counter-narrative.

The second swirling river to cross is the Republican Party itself. Trump drew in a rag-bag of small extremist movements addicted to racism, wild conspiracy stories and hatred of 'elites'. They now both support and threaten the hundred or so Republican congressmen and perhaps ten senators, shaped by the former Tea Party movement and fearful of their voter base, who went along even after 6 January with what they knew to be Trump's blatant lies, and particularly his Big Lie of having won the election. Professor Timothy

Snyder divides these elected representatives into two categories: the ‘gamers’ who cynically surf the wave of popular feeling rather than lose office and the ‘breakers’, quasi-anarchists bent on destroying ‘the system’. Were the Republican Party to split, the ‘breakers’ would form the core of a Trumpist Party. The Republican Party as it now stands is a huge obstacle in the path of national reconciliation and, while the Senate is so evenly balanced, will make it very difficult for Biden to produce economic gains for his black supporters and the disaffected workers who once would have voted Democrat. Already a daunting task after the pandemic’s damage to the economy.

Democrats will also have to tackle Republican power at a state level. Where Republicans control state legislatures and governorships gerrymandering and voter suppression on a large scale will persist. Frightened people are gullible. In key states voters behaved differently from expectations. For example 18% of the black vote in electorally all-important Florida, voted Republican in addition to the state’s Cubans and Venezuelans, taken in by the portrayal of Biden as a Socialist Front candidate propped up by a female Vice-President who as a public prosecutor had sent a lot of black Americans to jail. In South Texas (along the Mexican border) the Biden Democrats took the Latino and farmworker vote for granted but they fared worse than Hillary Clinton.

A third river to get over for Biden, and crucial to Trump’s success, is the endless flow of misinformation from radio and TV stations which act as echo chambers for his lies presenting him as the leader of victimised white Americans. Equally, until the shock of the storming of the Capitol pushed the

great social media platforms to ban Trump, they'd given almost free play to various pre-fascist and conspiracy groups of different kinds. The internet giants then tried to put the genie back in the bottle. Their regulation by government will be a complex task. Curbing the impact of pernicious radio and TV shock-jocks and their popular angry and emotional presentation of politics will be equally difficult. Biden will have to establish some kind of consensus about a regulatory programme consonant with the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Fourthly and finally, reversing the flow of foreign policy directed by Trump won't be simple. Multilateralism has a price tag in domestic approval and dollars. Isolationism is popular. Given domestic pressures, Biden will be disinclined to cut the Gordian knot that is Israel, a knot tightened by Trump. The difficulties of re-opening a peace process based on a serious two-state solution are great. The US needs to support Lebanon in danger of disintegration. Attempts to reinstate the nuclear deal with Iran will not be welcomed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards nor by concessions from the Supreme Leader, nor by those pre-occupied by Iran's proxy militias in the region. The Iranians have already increased uranium enrichment to 20% in retaliation for Trump's renegeing on the international nuclear treaty. China is the key to effective action on climate change, said to be Biden's priority, and is crucial in blocking North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. But, post-Trump, how can there be any Nixonesque diplomatic demarche towards China given its appalling human rights record which the incoming administration cannot ignore?

Electoral defeat for Trump doesn't mean that the pursuit of white supremacy

and Trumpism will disappear. At last, after the debacle of 6 January, the focus of national security has swung towards the internal threat of armed militias and white supremacist terrorism. Biden has to decide how to clamp down hard on the leadership of such extremist groups without creating martyrs. The currency of white domination is fear and violence. Biden's greatest immediate task is to stop its circulation. To do so he must make America less angry and less fearful. Many rivers to cross and they run deep and wide and flow fast.

See TheArticle 15/01/2021

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8.17 Trump's 2nd Impeachment: Acquitted & Dangerous 14/2/2021

The United States Senate impeachment proceedings against former President Trump have been many things: a contested Truth Commission, a national political reckoning for the history books, a *nunca mas* (never again).

I was lamenting seeing so little of the Democrats presenting a coherent, detailed case for finding former President Trump guilty of 'high crimes and misdemeanors' when I received an email from my friend in Oregon.

Here's one perspective from a Democrat voter in a progressive State:

"I have been sitting glued to the TV for about two days watching the House Democrats present the case against Trump and I must say that I was very impressed by the nine House managers, most of them previously prosecutors

I suspect, especially Maryland Congressman Jamie Raskin the manager. It was an extremely well organized and well-argued case and all in less than two days. Not that anybody used the word 'coup', they did not except that the word slipped out of Jamie Raskin's mouth once. I think the Democrats learned from the previous failed impeachment to keep it short and sweet and forceful. Trump learned from that experience also; unfortunately the lesson he learned was that he could do anything he wanted.

The case made did not rest solely upon the rally and subsequent assault on the Capitol on Jan. 6th. Rather and logically to my mind, the prosecutors returned to the six months prior to the election. You'll remember before the election actually took place, Trump, supported by Fox News and his followers, kept pushing the idea in hundreds of tweets that the election was 'rigged'. Mark you, this was before anyone actually voted. On election night itself, while votes were still being counted, Trump tweeted at 2:30 am that he had won the election by millions of votes. After the election there were many lawsuits (someone mentioned 62 today) filed by Trump concerning counting of ballots, dead people, boxes of ballots for Biden smuggled in at dead of night and various other nonsense, and they all failed. In some cases a judge just threw the lawsuit out before even hearing it because of the lack of any supporting evidence whatsoever. After a few weeks, in early December, all the states had certified their ballot counts, so then Trump started harassing election officials in states such as Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and the like. The family of Raffensberger, the Georgia official who refused to change the election totals to suit Trump, was threatened by armed Trump supporters who turned up at the family house.

So it went on for weeks and weeks with Trump holding more rallies on the theme of 'Stop the Steal', which became the favorite slogan of the Trumpies. There were many threats of violence, not just the ones made and very nearly implemented at the Jan. 6th rally. The irony of all this is that this was not some hidden conspiracy, where all the evidence has to be searched for and assembled, but all took place in plain public view, so it was not difficult for Democrats to collect evidence about Trump's intentions. My personal comment on why nobody was alarmed enough to do anything effective about it: I think by this time everybody was just looking forward to Joe Biden taking over, so most of the mainstream media just ignored what was taking place in Trump-world, suffering from a general Trump fatigue with fresh outrage every day becomes tiring.

So we arrive at the fatal day of Jan.6th, where Trump and his supporters invited any 'patriot' to come to Washington and stop the steal. And in fact people took flights, booked hotels, drove and made their way to Washington by any means they could, often subsidized by a Trump related fund of some kind. I'm sure you have seen videos of the riot in the Capitol, in fact everyone is much too focused on that single event, horrible though it was. An interesting thought is that many Senators had not previously seen the video footage of the riot in full gory detail for the very simple reason that they were part of the event and being hastily hurried off to a safe place. A bit like personally being in an accident, when one is not usually paying much attention to the surroundings. There was a gallows set up outside with signs that said "Hang Mike Pence" (he had told Trump that he could not change the state election results) and a rioter talked about shooting Nancy Pelosi in the head if she could be found. So, as many of the prosecutors have repeated, it

is hard to imagine anything worse: if this is not an impeachable offence, what is??

And, if more were needed, the prosecutors detailed the fact that Trump sat in the White House (delighted they say), refused to tell the rioters to stop and did not call in reinforcements for a couple of hours - all a matter of public record.

Yes, Trump has a defence team of lawyers - but definitely a couple from the B team as opposed to the A team who declined to represent Trump and bailed out a few days earlier. On first viewing, one of them got very bad reviews, rambling, disorganized etc. Perhaps it makes no difference and the Senate will not vote to find Trump guilty. This is what most people predict. As the Democrat team points out: "If you do not find Trump guilty, then another future President will feel free to do the same thing again." Which is true of course and one can only hope that the very convincing case presented by the Democrats might change some minds in the Senate".

Despite defeat the Democrats have achieved important aims. They have told the nation the true story. It's indelibly on the record. The Republican senators were demonstrably complicit in Trump's offences. They continue to be so. Seven only voted for conviction. The wily Republican former Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell denounced Trump but voted for acquittal. The majority were never going to admit his guilt because they shared in it. It is more than notable that to avoid the Party splitting and/or a Kamala Harris Presidency they haven't concluded

Trump must be made ineligible to stand again, unable to contest the next Presidential election. Many would have faced deselection at the next Primaries had they done so. They look over their shoulders at the Republican voters for whom belief in and loyalty to Trump was, and remains, paramount. So Trump, diminished, remains a menace to American democracy.

See TheArticle 13/02.2021

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8.18 Irish-Americans & Politics: From JFK to Biden 4/3/2021

It was a large room, dimly lit, more a shrine than a small museum. You couldn't help but notice that one or two visitors were crying gently. Your eyes went automatically to the window in the corner. Once a book depository window overlooking a non-descript Dallas highway, now a window onto the lost dreams and hopes of many Americans.

It's remarkable how the Camelot myth has persisted. Yes, it all happened in the 1960s when celebrities and heroes weren't ten a penny, the result of many thousands of clicks on a short video, or a hundred circuits of an old soldier's garden. But today we know so much more about John F. Kennedy. He was no knight in shining armour and the White House no Arthurian castle. But he still retains his fascination.

Believing in your own myth is at the heart of political charisma. And people so

seek myths and charisma when it comes to political leadership. Jack Kennedy had that gift.

In Autumn last year, nicely timed for Christmas presents and for lockdown reading, Harvard Professor and Pulitzer Prize winner Fredrik Logevall published Volume One of his JFK to rave reviews. At almost 800 pages, this Kennedy biography covers his life from 1917 to 1956. It tells the story of the Kennedy family's influence on JFK's precocious rise to political fame knitted elegantly into the wider context of internal US history and the external global events of the period. This volume ends with JFK's decision to run for the Presidency. The book deserves its plaudits.

That JFK was a scion of a supercharged, go-getter Boston-Irish Catholic family - with a clever, pious and politically adept Catholic mother and with a larger than life philandering, very rich and well-connected father, the isolationist wartime US ambassador to London – provides Logevall with his leitmotif. The family mattered a great deal politically. It supplied JFK's core staff for both mission control and as launch pad into politics: naval war-hero turned bored congressman, widely travelled successful author, sparkling young Senator, failed Vice-Presidential candidate, all oiled by his own charm, astute political judgement, prodigious appeal to women, father Joe's money, contacts, and burning ambition for his oldest two sons, Ted Sorensen's draft speeches. And great courage in the face of pain and peril.

Apart from cultivating an Irish-American vote and suffering tragic deaths in the family, how very different from Jo Biden, America's second Catholic

President. Kennedy made it very clear in his pursuit of the Presidency that his Catholicism, like his ethnic background, would be entirely marginal to his conduct as President. You could not say that of Joe Biden. Yet the same universal dilemma in climbing the greasy pole, how to balance a strong sense of right and wrong with the moral compromises necessary for power at a state and national level, faced them both.

JFK had an advantage that Biden missed. Catholicism in the 1950s was strongly and positively associated in the public mind with a major political theme, not the divisive culture wars but the Cold War and anti-communism. This was not unalloyed good luck. Kennedy faced the problem of handling another Irish Catholic politician, Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Republican who weaponised anti-communism. The Wisconsin senator was a close friend of JFK's father, much liked by brother Bobby and dated two of the Kennedy daughters. He was an early version of Trump able to make big lies stick and manipulate popular fears and hatreds destroying lives and careers. JFK, while privately deploring McCarthy's tactics, never clearly denounced him even when Eisenhower, a much loved Republican President, openly criticised his methods and conduct.

JFK's shabby compromise obviously bothered him. During his worst of many illnesses, he gathered together the stories of eight senators who had taken a lonely stand on principle or conscience and isolated themselves politically, precisely what JFK himself had declined to do. The result was a 266 page book *Profiles of Courage*. Though hurriedly researched, it did Kennedy no harm in the Senate. "Politics is a jungle, torn between doing the right thing and staying in office", he wrote in his notes "– between the local interest & the national interest – between the private good of the politician and the public

good”.

How will Biden react if and when his McCarthy moment comes? Perhaps it already has in the abortion issue. That said it would be preferable if Biden’s Catholic episcopal detractors understood that such moral dilemmas went with the job, and did not encourage single issue voting.

Logevall who is generally non-judgemental allows his overriding respect for JFK to show through here. “Profiles in Courage”, he tells us, “is an ode to the art of politics, to the hard and vital work of governing in a system of conflicting pressures and visions”. And so it is, an antidote to the dismissive clichés ‘all politicians are the same’ and ‘in it for themselves’. But in Profiles JFK tries to make amends for putting his family’s friendship with McCarthy and his Irish Catholic vote in Boston before his conscience. The book is also an ode to a different sort of courage and, in this sense, is a self-affirmation. JFK suffered from acute back pain and Addison’s disease. He nearly died twice, once as a result of a surgical procedure on his back that he was warned would be dangerous. It was. In a coma in 1954 he was given the last sacraments but pulled through and was nursed back to health by Jackie. He compiled and topped and tailed Profiles while convalescing.

Times were different back then. Kennedy could and did use crutches without a telephoto lens capturing his condition and calling in question his health and career. His phenomenal philandering, which he seems to have inherited from his father, was discreetly ignored and kept out of the public eye. Impossible to imagine this happening today.

JFK is a great read. Not salacious, not Camelot with condoms, not an apologia, but a deeply researched and sensitive portrayal of a very complex and courageous man, a book that is itself an 'ode to the art of politics' and a profile of courage.

See TheArticle 03/03/2021

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Chapter 9

Africa

9.1 Goodbye Mr. Zuma

5/2/2018

He came out suddenly from behind a bush. We were in a garden in Harare, then Salisbury, in the mid-1980s. I was with Frank Chikane, the new general-secretary of the South African Council of Churches. We had just met Frank's younger brother who was in the Intelligence Department of the ANC in exile. Frank had come at his request. Hugs all round.

There was something threatening about the way the man appeared and about the man himself. I did not like the cut of his jib, made my excuses and left. I learnt later that it was Jacob Zuma and that his Zulu second name was appropriately *gedleyihlekisa*, "the one who laughs while he endangers you". He had just become head of ANC Intelligence at the time. He is now about to be the former President of South Africa.

Harare wasn't safe then though it was significantly safer than South Africa when the apartheid system's security apparatus had you on their books. ANC leaders were assassinated in Rhodesia as they were in all the surrounding countries. Some like the Anglican priest Rev. Michael Lapsley survived the letter and parcel bombs courtesy of the Orwellian-named Civil Cooperation Bureau but

lost an arm and an eye. Frank was also to become another survivor, victim of organophosphate poisoning while he was in Namibia, ordered by Adriaan Vlok, South African Minister of – ill-named - Law and Order. He survived thanks to being taken into a US hospital and getting intensive treatment after a later attack.

The South African security state conducted an extensive programme of infiltration of the ANC and anti-apartheid movement. The head of the London ANC turned out to be in the pay of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS). You could be forgiven for believing most of the pay went on drink. The ANC military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was a prime target that generated, unsurprisingly, a high level of paranoia in ANC cadres in Angola and Zambia. As witch-finder general Zuma presided over the deaths of young South Africans who fell under suspicion in the exile camps.

Frank Chikane went on to become chef de cabinet for President Thabo Mbeki, a remarkable transformation for a Church leader, and wrote a fascinating insider account of how Zuma became the 4th. President of South Africa which presented the process as both unconstitutional and a de facto coup d'état. Mbeki, urbane, a subtle political strategist, fond of his Black Label whisky, often in English tweeds when I met him in the back of London pubs, was in personality the antithesis of Zuma. As President he quickly dropped an economic prospectus that was radical and pro-poor under pressure from the monetarist Chicago boys and the US. He refused to put pressure on Robert Mugabe, and to everyone's surprise was discovered to hold bizarre views of the causes of the AIDS pandemic that swept South Africa, with the tragic result that effective

national responses to HIV were delayed. This all left wide open a gaping populist, left flank, for Zuma to occupy. Backed by the powerful trades union movement, COSATU, and an electorate loyal to the ANC yet disappointed that the black economic mountains left to climb after apartheid had barely been tackled, skillful in the internal politics of the ANC, he had a strong political base.

The rest, charges of corruption, rampant cronyism, a repellent lifestyle, is history. Cyril Ramaphosa who cut his political teeth in the mineworkers' union, went on to become a multi-millionaire businessman displaced him as President of the ANC on 18 December 2017. The men in grey suits have been visiting Zuma in ever increasing numbers. A particularly damaging decade in South Africa's political history is coming to an end. Like Mugabe's retirement, loyalty to the leaders of the generation that risked their lives in the liberation struggle will mean Zuma gets away with it.

You wonder why all the sacrifice and idealism of the struggle against apartheid, within a lifetime, threw up someone like Zuma. More so after the extraordinary example of Mandela. I suspect it is the same answer to the question of how the USA got a Trump after an Obama.

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9.2 Two Lives: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela**13/4/2018**

Popular perceptions of political leaders are rarely subtle; leaders are either the embodiment of virtue or of evil. In the last three days Winnie Mandela has joined the pantheon of African nationalism. The celebrations of her political life in Orlando stadium, Johannesburg, sealed a chapter in South Africa's history and brought a unique female presence into a line of male heroes who date back to Nkrumah and Lumumba.

The word iconic is worn-out. An icon is not the familiar – and pretentious – way of describing a significant example. An icon is a pictorial representation of a powerful inner – spiritual – reality. Winnie Mandela was an icon of the struggle against apartheid. The inner reality of the struggle against apartheid was the heroism it evoked and the damage it did to so many.

The white South African regime with stunning cynicism described apartheid as “Christian nationalism”. A priest friend of mine once described it as “sin made visible”. To understand the meaning of structural violence, just study the apartheid system and its aftermath, the persistence of its inherent violence within civil society.

Nelson and Winnie Mandela achieved their status as heroes in very different ways. He believed and lived his own heroic myth in prison, as an absent, eloquent silence for 27 years. It fell to his wife to embody that reflected myth, to be the public presence, a symbol and a voice. And to suffer. For two debilitating decades, this she did with fortitude and bravery in the face of a brutal regime. She did not ask to play Penelope to Nelson Mandela's Odysseus.

By the 1980s, though, the price of resistance had begun to show. Her inner strength and political judgement had become coarsened and hardened by alcohol and the pervasive violence around her in the townships where she lived. She was not alone in that.

Winnie's association with the Mandela United Football Club, a group of violent and anarchic Soweto youth, was to begin the darkest chapter in her life. And one of the biggest sufferings Nelson Mandela experienced in prison may have been the very human one of being unable to fulfil the traditional role of husband and father. He could not look after his wife, or get her out of the country to recover. There were communications channels in and out of his prison and during the time of his house-arrest. He tried. But to no avail.

By the early 1980s, the situation in the townships had deteriorated. The regime had boosted its infiltration of the ANC and fear of informers was rife. Young people made accusations and alleged informers were necklaced with a burning tyre, a particularly horrible execution. The internal ANC youth movement, COSAS, had lost its leadership, arrested, imprisoned, sometimes killed by the regime. The ANC outside the country was stepping up its armed struggle. More and more township youth were engaging in anarchic resistance and killings. I saw one group at a funeral break away with the ferocity of a hunting pack and chase a boy. There was nothing to stop them.

The group of Church leaders with whom I worked, influential within the internal resistance, were extremely concerned and made strengthening COSAS with leadership training a top priority to bring the situation under control. But the only interpretation of one, often quoted, speech by Winnie Mandela was that she was blessing necklacing. The external ANC in Lusaka called for an

insurrection. If it had taken place black youth, eager for combat, would have been massacred.

One of the illusions of both popular journalism and popular perceptions is that the world is made up of bad people and good people. No shades of grey here. You build them up and you knock them down. So two stories can be run about the same person. Demonology follows hagiography as night follows day. Brave new dawn Blair of 1997, deceitful, militarist Blair of 2007. Dangerous, rebellious Winnie to Winnie, Mother of the Nation. Saint or Sinner?

Winnie Mandela, a lonely female figure in the pantheon of African heroes, in death as in life, escapes such polarised treatment in the British Press. The memorial services in Orlando stadium are not a time for reflection on flawed humanity. But they could be a time to begin leaving the violent legacy of apartheid behind, as Nelson Mandela, freed at last, worked for until his death.

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9.3 Zimbabwe: Look Back in Sorrow

26/1/2019

Savage attacks on peaceful demonstrators have put Zimbabwe in the news again. Hopes of change have been dashed. For the army and police, extreme violence remains the sole recourse for dealing with grave social and economic problems inherited from One Party rule under President Robert Mugabe.

I became acquainted with the Zimbabwe story forty years ago just before Mugabe came to power. In 1978, I went to Salisbury, now Harare, to

discover who was killing missionaries from the progressive Bethlehem Mission in Immensee, Switzerland. Of course Bethlehem Fathers were not the only people being killed at that time. Rhodesia was almost at the end of a brutal civil/liberation war. Ian Smith's security forces had budded off a counter-insurgency unit, the Selous Scouts, which sometimes dressed up as vakomana, Mugabe's ZANLA (Zimbabwe National Liberation Army) guerrilla forces, in order to catch ZANLA sympathisers. They called it "dragging". A significant number of the Bethlehem priests supported the liberation struggle. But it was unclear which side in this bitter struggle was responsible for their killings.

Working with the courageous Rhodesian Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, we were led a merry chase: we finally discovered that the private detective 'helping' us was taking his instructions from Smith's security forces, so not surprisingly bodies disappeared from wells, and we always seemed to arrive a day or so too late. But you learnt fast. In such wars it is often impossible to know who is on which side. The old man with a bicycle stubbornly standing on your side of the road, refusing to get out of the way, was most likely stopping a mission vehicle going over a mine. The missionaries always put me in the second vehicle on mined roads. Years later it became evident that the missionaries' deaths were caused by ZANLA commanders many of whom had personal grudges, like being expelled from school, against individual clergy.

The war was terrible with atrocities on both sides; the insurgents should neither be romanticized nor demonised. Elderly women were denounced as witches to the vakomana and summarily executed. Sadistic area commanders could wreak havoc. Even if they were reported to ZANLA headquarters in Mozambique, it could take a long time to get rid of them. Yet support for ZANLA and

Mugabe was overwhelming. Bishop Abel Muzorewa, part of the Executive Council of Smith's short-lived Interim Government 1978-1979, would never be able to win an election or capture the dominant Shona-speaking vote. I told the Foreign Secretary, Dr. David Owen, as much after my visit. He listened.

The offices where I worked in London were a drop-in for exiled Zimbabweans struggling for independence, seemingly idealistic young men and women. I did a television programme with one, Simbi Mubako, a law lecturer at Southampton University, to highlight the human rights abuses in his country and the need for the British government to act. After Independence in 1980, Simbi was appointed Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. In January 1983, Mugabe's North-Korean trained 5th brigade began to eliminate members of ZIPRA, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, the armed wing of the largely Ndebele-speaking rival ZAPU, (the Zimbabwe African People's Union) under the leadership of the old nationalist Joshua Nkomo. This was followed by the killing of suspected ZAPU members. In the Bulawayo area more than 20,000 people were killed and many more detained during a purge lasting from 1983-1987, called Gukurahundi, (the early rain that washes away the chaff).

I wrote to Simbi asking him to speak out against these human rights abuses as he had done in Britain against those committed by the Smith regime. His reply was saddening. I must return to Zimbabwe and he and I would go round Matabeleland together and I would see that all the allegations were either false or exaggerated. I replied that he must know that if we travelled around, as we would, in a government vehicle with an escort, nobody would dare say a word. With the now President Emmerson Mnangagwa as Minister of State Security in charge of the CIO (Central Intelligence Organisation),

widely believed to be complicit in the massacres, it was probably more than Simbi's life was worth to respond otherwise. He later became a High Court Judge.

The Mugabe regime illustrated with terrible clarity what political life meant in a one-Party state: the accumulation of wealth. And wealth in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe meant amongst other things extensive land-holding. Politics had very little to do with justice, the wellbeing of citizens, or the electoral promises made at independence. In 1978 I imagined it had. Democracy and elections are supposed to enable citizens to get rid of governments that destroy their economy, society and political life. But Zimbabwe's birth in violence meant that democracy did not have a chance; with most other institutions, except the Churches, eroded and struggling, the Zimbabwe Defence Forces were, and remain, the country's unelected rulers wedded to extreme violence.

The words of a pastoral letter from the Zimbabwean Catholic Bishops distributed on 17 January 2019 show that they, at least, have not abandoned hope. "While for many, hope for a better Zimbabwe might appear lost, we reaffirm St. Paul's message that when all else fails, there are three pillars that remain to hold on to: Faith, Hope and Love. We believe in a God of second chances..." Many also believe that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". But Lord Acton's is not necessarily the last word. He was, incidentally, writing about Popes as well as Kings.

So, on the one side, there's Acton's unromantic "certainty of corruption by authority", on the other the Bishops' virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. Zimbabwe has to play for its future with this loaded dice. Africa has so often been the graveyard of idealism. And the God of second chances has so often seen them

squandered.

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9.4 Nigeria's Elections: Does Religion Matter? 15/2/2019

I worked in Northern Nigeria during the early 1970s. The army managed to pack in three military coups during that time. One, the Dimka coup in 1976, was plotted in a polo club and supercharged by champagne. During military coups, we used to wait for the reaction of the regional, divisional commanders. Would they come on the radio in support? If only half of them bobbed up, pledging support, it could mean they were divided and, possibly, we were looking at the beginnings of a civil war. When the men with the guns disagreed with each other, it was time to decamp.

So national and state elections, which reinstated since 1999, are a step forward. Not a very big one given that the rival presidential candidates lack detectable policies other than winning. Access to power still continues to follow the money and name recognition. With some two hundred very rich ruling families still running the show through two big Party machines, only old political warhorses in their 70s need apply to be Presidential candidates. But for this weekend's elections there are also new young faces, mostly products of US universities with distinguished careers, standing on real policies and in their 30s. But without the huge Party machines of the PDP, Peoples Democratic Party and the APC, All Progressives Congress, with their extensive national clientship networks, these new contenders can't possibly win.

To win the Presidency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's electoral rules require

more than 25% of the popular vote in at least 27 of the 36 states as well as an overall majority of the national vote. This has resulted in complex coalitions and agreements across the different regions, plus a ‘zoning’ principle that Muslim and Christians occupy the Presidency by turn. Nigeria has a little over 84 million registered voters, but since national censuses are rigged it is very hard to allocate any percentage of the vote to any particular region. It is generally assumed that there are more people in ‘the North’ but not necessarily a critical difference in overall numbers of voters from the South. The electoral system is designed to minimise the regionalism, ethnicity and religious differences that blighted Nigeria in the past and led to dreadful bloodshed.

Both the Presidential candidates this year are Muslim Northerners with Muhammad Buhari, who is seeking re-election relying on solid support in the North-West, and Atiku Abubakar, estimated to be worth \$1.4 billion, with much support in the North East where he has been Governor in his home state of Adamawa. Buhari is vulnerable on a number of counts: his health and his failure to stop Boko Haram’s terrorism in the North-East which has created 1.8 million displaced people. Buhari disappointed expectations about his ability to curb corruption, his promise in his successful 2015 campaign for the Presidency. But he is the incumbent and the incumbent always won in the past (except for his own victory in 2015).

Boko Haram’s sensational kidnapping of the Chibok school girls made international headlines. The continued terrorism needs explanation. Corruption under Buhari is, and was, a causal factor in the failure to end the Boko Haram’s (BH) insurgency - spectacularly so under his Christian predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan. Troops avoided contact with the enemy because they were outgunned: someone in the Federal Capital, Abuja,

probably trousered the money allocated for up-to-date weaponry and vehicles. Officers in the air-force stationed in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital in the North-East with a population of over a million, depended on loans from friends in town because they weren't paid. Recent Boko Haram attacks suggest that the proclaimed victory over them is premature. Urgent reform is needed to create an adequate counter-insurgency force to quell them. There have been some improvements. A few years ago only one of the four main roads into Maiduguri was not controlled by BH. And that was unsafe. Lack of security in the North-East will count against the incumbent.

With two Northern contenders, the 'zoned' Christian Vice-Presidential candidates have more importance. Yemi Osinbajo, Buhari's running mate, should pull in a big Christian Pentecostal vote from the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a huge international mega-Church. Peter Obi, a Catholic and Papal Knight of the Order of St. Sylvester, is Atiku's running mate as Vice-Presidential candidate, a former Governor of Anambra State in the South-East. Meanwhile former President and king-maker Olusegun Obasanjo has endorsed Atiku.

Northern Nigeria should not simply be described as Muslim. Since the 1960s there has been an ever growing presence of the Pentecostal Churches. Will the Pentecostals outvote the Catholics? This may be a question both the Presidential candidates are asking even though Presidential races do not offer a simple Muslim/Christian choice.

My guess would be that Buhari as incumbent with a good residue of loyalty from the seven Northern States, plus a solid Pentecostal vote pulled in behind Yemi Osinbajo will still have trouble warding off Atiku's challenge. The PDP apparatus is still strong and Atiku can throw millions of Naira at his campaign

whilst hoping for a national Catholic vote through his running mate. The question is, all things ethnic and regional being equal, does religion play a significant part? No-one knows. There are just too many variables to predict.

The problem is, if the Presidential election is closely run, the possibility of violence increases. One thing is sure, the time for the new, young, challengers, who might set Nigeria on a path to recovery, has not yet come. And another sure thing is that Nigeria, with its 200 million citizens, will somehow muddle through in the state of astonishing chaotic vigour to which they are accustomed.

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9.5 The Rwandan Genocide 6 April 1994: Lest We Forget 5/4/2019

Twenty-five years ago, at 8.25 pm on 6 April, a Dassault Falcon 50 business-jet was making its approach to Kanombe International Airport in Kigali, Rwanda. On board were six Rwandans, three Burundians, and a French crew of three. The passengers included the President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana with his Army chief of staff and the President of Burundi. They were returning from high-level talks in Dar-es-Salaam aimed at ending a four year-old war between Rwanda's Hutu government and a Tutsi military force, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) assembled, equipped and trained in Uganda.

Two SAM-16 ground-to-air missiles were fired at the incoming flight. One missed. The second hit the fuel-tank on the left hand side of the plane which exploded. Witnesses reported a fire-ball. There were no survivors. The assassinations were the trigger for the Rwandan genocide. There followed 100 days of slaughter in which some 800,000 Rwandans, mainly Tutsi, the rest opponents of the Government, were killed by a savage militia known as the interahamwe (those who fight together) alongside the Rwandan army and ordinary civilians.

Kigali airport housed a military base for the Presidential Guard and an anti-aircraft battalion under the command of a colonel later convicted of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. But despite prolonged French investigations, where the SAM-16s were launched from, who launched them, and under whose orders, remains unclear and politically murky. France, which had troops embedded with Rwanda's military, had a stake in finding evidence that implicated the Tutsi RPF which had entered Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, and gained control of much of the north by 1993. Hutu extremists also had reason to kill President Habyarimana. He had finally agreed to implement the peace agreement of 4 August 1993, the Arusha Accords, by forming a transitional government incorporating five RPF Ministers, an equal number to the ruling Party. Fear was also aroused by looking south to Burundi where tens of thousands of Hutu had been killed, or sought sanctuary in Rwanda, after a military coup on 21 October 1993.

Most people place the Rwandan genocide under the heading tribalism and its consequences. And they aren't entirely wrong. But the social identities of Tutsi (12% of the Rwandan population) and Hutu (85%) originally distinguished a cattle owning aristocracy from an agricultural peasantry, bound together in

something akin to a feudal relationship. In 1959, a Hutu jacquerie, involving pogroms and killing of Tutsi, ushered in a Hutu government under Grégoire Kayibanda with Belgian support. Many Hutu intellectuals saw the French Revolution as the model.

I interviewed Grégoire Kayibanda, Rwanda's first, Hutu President after Independence in the capital Kigali on 3 July 1973 for research on a book *Church and Revolution in Rwanda*. He seemed tense, worried and pre-occupied. Two days later he was deposed in a military coup which brought the Hutu General Juvenal Habyarimana to power. The General's excuse for the coup was to end attacks on Tutsi Rwandans. By then, during Belgian Trusteeship, a fluid socio-economic distinction, Hutu-Tutsi, had mutated into a hard-edged tribal identity based on physical differences.

Other socio-economic factors lay behind the genocide. Rwanda was a nation of farmers. Coffee was Rwanda's one major export and its value dropped drastically on the world market after 1987. A World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme aggravated problems of rising unemployment and rural poverty in the early 1990s. Two devaluations halved the value of the Rwandan currency and put essentials such as cooking oil out of reach of many. Rwanda was densely populated with 293 people per square kilometre; in the past they had been free to emigrate. But in the early 1990s neighbouring states became inhospitable to Rwandan migrants. Economic and demographic stresses created a pressure cooker for a divided society accustomed to violence.

There was organization and preparation for the genocide. It was not an eruption of spontaneous racial hatred and tribal violence. Parish priests were asked to hand over their baptismal registers; lists of names of those who were to be found and killed were circulated. The interahamwe were trained and armed.

They recruited bystanders, often on a kill or be killed basis. Others came voluntarily. Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines (Free Radio/TV station of the thousand hills), taken over by the Hutu extremists, poured out racist broadcasts with echoes of Nazi propaganda, building up fear of the consequences of an RPF victory; the Tutsi were described as *inyenzi*, cockroaches. Fear and racial stereotypes generated violence. Churches assumed to be sanctuaries turned into death-traps.

The killing could have been stopped. Because the General Assembly's Genocide Convention of December 1948, genocide required international intervention, every effort was made by the Clinton government to avoid describing the systematic killing of over three-quarters of the Tutsis as genocide. The killing of ten Belgian troops in the UN Assistance Mission, UNAMIR, there to oversee the implementation of the Arusha Accords, reminded the Americans of the fiasco of US intervention in Somalia when eighteen US combat troops, tasked to protect aid workers, had died. After two weeks of relentless slaughter by the army and militia, the Security Council reduced the UNAMIR presence in Rwanda from 1,700 to 270 with a mandate to oversee a ceasefire between the RPF and the Rwandan army, neglecting the obvious reality that only the RPF could stop the genocide. As in Srebrenica, the UN stood aside as preventable mass killing continued.

There is a glimmer of light at the end of this profoundly dark chapter in human history. An International Criminal Tribunal tried *génocidaires*. And we can thank the African Union and the Canadian Government for an historic international response to these dreadful crimes and failings. On 15 September 2005, the UN General Assembly unanimously endorsed a "Responsibility to Protect (R2p)": "to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner,

through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity". Military intervention is the last resort.

Appeals to a Responsibility to Protect can be misjudged and misused. The obligation was soon contested. Nonetheless, twenty-five years on, R2p makes slaughter on the scale of the Rwandan systematic genocide less likely in the future.

First posted 2/04.19 <https://www.thearticle.com/rwandas-genocide-lest-we-forget>

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9.6 South Africa's Elections: Modest Hopes

7/5/2019

South Africa goes to the polls on 8 May to elect a National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures for the fifth time since the April 1994 elections that ended apartheid. This was one of the best monitored elections in Africa drawing monitors from around the world. Black voters swept the African National Congress (ANC) to power. The Party still retains some of its glory as the movement that brought freedom, though it is waning. The hope, excitement and enthusiasm of 1994 are long gone.

The advantage of monitoring the 1994 elections in one of the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme for South Africa (EMPSA) teams in KwaZulu Natal alongside President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia was that he was our canary

down the mine. If the crowd shrank away, that was an area dominated by Inkatha, the Zulu Party. If people were beaming and rushed forward to greet him, then we were in territory dominated by the non-racial ANC. You always knew where you stood and the likely dangers.

There were three in our monitoring team. Kaunda himself, a former leader of a nationalist struggle, signature white hankie in top pocket, with his immaculate Zambian bodyguard in perfectly pressed military uniform, plus me as adviser, general factotum and bag-carrier. We were very lucky. Until only a day or two before the elections began on 26 April, and our arrival in Durban, it had looked as if civil war between Inkatha and the ANC might break out in KwaZulu-Natal. Hence the presence of an influential and admired mediator and election monitor such as President Kaunda. Inkatha leader Chief Gatsha Buthelezi pulled back from the brink.

Our itinerary took us to small towns and townships north of Durban. We attended a night prayer vigil for peace in Pietermaritzburg Anglican cathedral. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was at the back of the church. The Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley, delivered a short address. Shortly after he spoke, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a stocky white man rushing up the aisle towards us looking disturbed. Sure enough, he blundered along our line of pews towards Kaunda. To my amazement the bodyguard moved aside to let the man past him and sit next to Kaunda.

I feared an assassination. But no. The man broke into wracking sobs. Kaunda held his hand and took out his handkerchief. Between sobs the man explained that as a member of the South African Special Forces he had raided the ANC HQ in Lusaka, the Zambian capital. He had come to ask forgiveness for the killings. He and Kaunda talked quietly. I asked the bodyguard later how he knew it had been safe but he just smiled. This election time seemed

filled with some kind of enchantment. The wonder of the 1994 elections was that they were conducted peacefully, and were in themselves part of a process of reconciliation, and, looking at the faces of the black voters in winding queues, waiting to cast their first vote, a moving expression of hope and human dignity.

25 years later the contrast is striking. This time some 50 different parties are contesting the 400 seats in the National Assembly. The atmosphere of euphoria and expectation of major change has gone. Half the population remains below the poverty line in a country with one of the world's most unequal societies and spectacular income inequality. Over a quarter of the labour force are unemployed. Youth unemployment is running at around 50%. Judging by the very low electoral registration levels for young people, hope that the political Parties will improve their lives has disappeared. The fiery populist, Julius Malema, former leader of the ANC Youth League who appeals to angry youth, is likely to see his Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), currently at 6.25% of the popular vote, make gains.

In 1994 Nelson Mandela led the ANC to a resounding victory in the country's first national democratic election. But for people born since then the heroic past is just that, the past; the ANC has gradually become for them just another political Party. Since Thabo Mbeki's time as President 1999-2008, the ANC's share of the national vote has been declining, though only by a few percentage points, (the 2004 elections, when the economy was growing at 4.5% annually, gave the ANC a record 69% of the vote). After Jacob Zuma's de facto coup in 2008 and the rampant corruption he brought, steady decline set in. This year some commentators are predicting the ANC will only get between 50-60% of the popular vote.

President Cyril Ramaphosa is, in comparison with his predecessor, good news. A lawyer who rose up the ranks of the ANC to become its secretary-general, starting from his base as leader of the powerful National Union of Mineworkers, he is credited with deploying his negotiating skills, playing an important part in reaching a settlement with the apartheid regime. Worth \$550 million through his former business acumen: franchises in McDonalds, chair of the Board of the telecoms giant MTN, and time on the Board of Lonmin (platinum mines), he is well placed to know what is going on and to reflect on endemic corruption in the Party and the country's inequality.

The question is not so much will voters continue to walk away from the ANC, but will they support it enough to give Ramaphosa the mandate and the authority he needs to pursue his proclaimed reformist programme, break out of the corruption/stagnation syndrome, and reverse South Africa's inevitable decline. He faces considerable difficulties, not least the vexed and politically explosive issue of land reform. During his fourteen months in office, the Rand has dropped in value by 19% . Ramaphosa has tried to get rid of the most corrupt brakes on economic progress represented by ANC place-men. But protests and riots about corruption, housing, water, electricity and other failures of service delivery have been increasing.

A white Cape Town social worker, dismissing my support for the ANC in the early 1980s, said to me: "They will simply displace a corrupt and greedy white elite with a black one". Jacob Zuma and his clique certainly proved her right. Let's hope President Cyril Ramaphosa, who has some genuine achievements under his belt, proves her wrong. And that on 8 May South African voters will prove the commentators wrong, and give him the votes for members of the National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures that provide him with a

mandate to do so.

See TheArticle.com “In 1994, the ANC swept to power on a wave of hope. 25 years on, the mood in South Africa couldn’t be more different”

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9.7 Cameroon: Watch Your Language

13/3/2020

President Paul Biya of Cameroon is in many ways your bog standard African “authoritarian ruler”, or, as diplomats don’t say, “dictator”. He has held onto power for almost forty years and is now in his seventh term as head of State, the oldest and longest-standing ruler in Africa. In 1983 as sole candidate, he won 99.98% of the votes. He followed the example of other one-party States in the 1990s allowing opposition parties to emerge and simply rigging subsequent elections. What should stifle yawns at his record is that his troops are committing atrocities against an embattled English speaking minority, rampaging through English-speaking villages in a French speaking country whose economy is de facto controlled by French companies (over a hundred and in almost all sectors including off-shore oil).

You may have read about Cameroon in the sports pages, it’s right next to Nigeria on the West Coast of Africa. It’s good at soccer. But now Cameroon has a civil war on its hands, rarely reported. Anglophone grievances came to a head in 2016 when the Francophone-dominated regime imposed French-speaking judges on Anglophone courts, and Francophone teachers in Anglophone schools. The

Swiss and Commonwealth representatives have tried to mediate but President Biya thinks he can solve his problem militarily and has told both in no uncertain terms to go away.

Until 1960, there were two Cameroons. The larger territory was governed by France using the French legal and education systems and language. But in the smaller south and west, there were English common law with English judges and English school exams. The present conflict dates back to ‘decolonisation’ in 1961 when a UN-backed independence referendum offered the Anglophones the choice between joining Nigeria or joining French Cameroon. Thus 20% of the population were not even offered the option of self-determination.

Under President Biya, the Francophone-dominated government, based in the capital of Yaoundé, has marginalized the mainly Anglophone North West and South West regions. Only one of 36 cabinet posts is held by an Anglophone. Since 2017, despite the constitution guaranteeing human rights, reputable human rights organisations have been recording repeated use of disproportionate force against Anglophone demonstrations. Journalists are arrested and tortured. Government troops, notably the RIB, Rapid Intervention Force, have been burning down English-speaking villages, with the result 656,000 people (UN estimate) have fled, between 35-50,000 of them into Nigerian refugee camps. Meanwhile, secessionist militias have become increasingly violent. Banditry is rampant. Civilians—including Catholic priests—have been kidnapped, some tortured, and Catholic-run schools and clinics, a major provider, forced to close with 800,000 children deprived of schooling. Casualties on both sides have mounted up: some 2-5,000 killed in

the violence.

By October 2019 Biya conceded a ‘Major National Dialogue’, but the Anglophone leadership were by now flying under the flag of a “Government Council of Ambazonia’, their name for the two secessionist regions. A paper promise of ‘special status’ on the Quebec model for the two Anglophone regions not surprisingly was refused; few Anglophone leaders were willing to attend the talks whilst the repression continued, and ‘special status left real power centred on the largely Francophone capital, Yaoundé. Biya is France’s man. He is housing 350,000 refugees from the Central African Republic and Nigeria, while deploying Cameroonian troops to fight Boko Haram. He is useful.

In this depressing story what has been the role of France? France never really left Cameroon. It has never shed a certain chauvinistic pride in the merits of its language, so Cameroon with a majority speaking French is an asset. The French Foreign Legion is dotted around the region. I remember a high-level exercise in ‘entente cordiale’ on Africa in the early 1990s when John Major was Prime Minister. It was held in one of the grand reception rooms of the Quai d’Orsay, resplendent with the decorative arts of the Second Empire, the ornate home of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The British delegation comprised FCO, Dfid and international developmental NGOs. We were duly impressed. The French fielded staff from quite different government directorates, notably their Intelligence services and Military plus a lonely anthropologist. That also spoke reams.

An international group of Catholic bishops, brought together by the Toronto-based - non-partisan - Global Campaign for Peace and Justice in Cameroon, have recently signed an open letter to President Biya. They call on the President to join inclusive Swiss-led negotiations to address the long-standing Anglophone concerns and claims. Increased international pressure is necessary if this is ever to happen. But Biya rejects what he claims is foreign interference in a domestic issue, insisting on a “home-grown peace initiative only”.

As the bishops wrote: “When the international community ignores escalating atrocities of the kind happening in Cameroon, it often ends up paying a massive bill. Sooner or later, we must fund refugee camps and peacekeepers, host negotiations, accommodate thousands of migrants seeking asylum, and then help rebuild shattered nations. It makes more sense to use diplomacy to stop the violence at an early stage, finding a political solution to a political problem through inclusive peace negotiations”.

Europe, including Britain, remains distracted by BREXIT, but the USA has begun to apply pressure, distancing itself from the Biya regime by reducing military aid and removing favourable trade status. It is time for another visit to the Quai d’Orsay and a little more entente cordiale.

See The Article "Cameroon: the Language War"

9.8 Covid-19: Africa's Pending Catastrophe**30/3/2020**

A few years ago, I was being driven south to the coast from a hospital in the town of Makeni in Sierra Leone, when I suddenly noticed a brand-new railway line paralleling the road. I asked the driver where it was going. "Beijing" he replied. It is a puzzle why Africa, dotted with Chinese construction sites and Chinese investors of one sort or another, was late in catching COVID-19. More likely that China shut down travel early so that Africa's relatively few diagnosed infections came first from Europe.

Some optimists suggested that COVID-19 doesn't like a temperature of 31C. But what about Philippines, Australia, India? In Africa the rainy season ushers in the onset of malaria and its high fevers. More likely the onset wasn't that late - weak health services have been poor at identifying the presence of the disease in amongst other respiratory infections. Senegal has 1 doctor for 10,000 people, Italy 41.

It is right to fear for Africa during the coronavirus pandemic though Sierra Leone has some advantages over other countries. When I visited Freetown's main medical centre, the Connaught Hospital, I was impressed by its cleanliness and clinical professionalism compared to many African hospitals, but also by the relative absence of medical equipment. On the plus side Sierra Leone has some outstanding doctors, nurses and a battle-hardened Ministry of Health.

Sierra Leone's government health record is good. It has managed to bring in free maternal and child health care, and to reduce malaria deaths, working with religious leaders to educate people on the causes of malaria and how to

prevent it. Of course, it also experienced an Ebola outbreak, another even more terrifying invisible killer, and during the civil war, the visible lethal armed variety. So the people of Sierra Leone have already faced the agony of being deprived of the normal way of caring for the sick and burying their dead. They may be better prepared culturally for responding to the pandemic than some Londoners.

Malaria may seem to be an irrelevance in the face of an Ebola or COVID-19 assault on a population. Not so. Researchers have found that levels of HIV rise in patients suffering from malaria. It is as if the immune system has been diverted or weakened by centuries of combating the malaria parasite. This finding matters particularly in pregnant women because the presence of malaria increases placental transmission of HIV to the baby in the womb.

A further danger of malaria emerged in the Ebola crisis. Until rapid diagnostic kits were more widely distributed by the WHO, patients with malaria were sometimes sent off to Ebola centres for triage and dying as result of the initial misdiagnosis. Widely available and rapid testing for COVID-19 is going to be vital. Although deaths from malaria worldwide have reduced from a million in the last two decades to an estimated 425,000, 92% of malaria infections still occur in Africa.

On Africa's side is its youth. The median age is 19.4 years. Resilient youth may not be badly affected. But malnutrition and overcrowding in the poorest countries will reduce the effectiveness of even young people's immune system. Some African countries have been quick to take preventa-

tive measures against COVID-19 while infections were still low: the better developed such as Rwanda, Kenya and Ghana. South Africa quickly tried to move into shut-down. Measures have included school closures, checking for raised temperature, restrictions on travel and social gatherings. But once infection enters crowded and poor townships and ‘informal settlements’, spread will be very difficult to contain and treat. Some 400,000 young children die annually of ‘ordinary’ pneumonia in Africa already. Oxygen for medical use is in chronic short supply. Will poor African children with the coronavirus induced variety get off as lightly as young children in Europe?

Coronavirus has shed an extraordinary spotlight on the importance of good governance, and the impact of inequality and poverty on people, both around the world and within nations. Governments that can, and energetically strive to turn well-formulated health policies into reality within their health systems, provide the gold standard. Governments that sustain endemic corruption sacrifice the lives of their citizens. Ways of putting pressure on governments depend on democracy. We in Britain count the number of ventilators in thousands and lament how few. But African doctors treasure the medical equipment sent by a parish in Europe, an x-ray machine donated by Rotary, HAZMAT clothing brought by WHO and international medical charities.

Inequality and poverty cause poor health outcomes wherever you live. Pandemics accentuate dramatically pre-existing inequalities and poverty. Poor Africa has not yet suffered the most from the current outbreak. But this is just a matter of timing. The continent faces a catastrophe once the virus takes

hold. Immediate international assistance is needed.

There can be no better target for DfID's £14.3 billion budget than strengthening Africa's health systems and helping its population get rid of corrupt leaders. Their commitment to an international response to this global crisis should be championed around the world by wealthier countries and their NGOs.

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9.9 Zimbabwe's Courageous Bishops

19/8/2020

"It feels as though the poor has no one to defend them. They don't seem to feature in the national agenda. Their cries for an improved health system go unheeded... It is not clear to your bishops that the national leadership we have has the knowledge, social skills, emotional stability and social orientation to handle the issues that we face as a nation. All we hear from them is blame for our woes on foreigners, colonialism, white settlers and so called internal detractors".

This is taken from a powerful pastoral letter from Zimbabwe's bishops that has hit the Catholic headlines this week. Though talk of 'the Church's prophetic voice' is commonplace, we are unaccustomed to such forthright documents from Church leaders. It is easy to talk vaguely about peace, justice and reconciliation. Nobody takes much notice. Nothing much happens. But for African bishops living under corrupt regimes, their countries plundered, their freedoms lost, the choice is stark: to speak out or, by their silence, become

complicit.

The Zimbabwean Bishops' Conference have made their choice and, on 14 August published, "The March is not Ended", a pastoral letter about the current situation in Zimbabwe. Drawing on Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah and Micah, and on Catholic Social Teaching *The March is not Ended* points to the gulf between a small elite which has benefitted from Independence, who think they have 'arrived', 'ended their march for freedom', and the suffering majority of Zimbabweans faced with a multi-layered crisis. This metaphor of 'the march' and biblical references, if properly understood, might not have created a Church-State crisis. But the forthright, detailed, factual description of human rights violations, apparent implicit support for public protest, and their description of the political, economic and social situation in Zimbabwe, did create just such a crisis.

The next day, 15 August, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, the Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Monica Mutsvangwa, responded by accusing the President of the Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Robert Nhlovu, of leading the country towards a Rwandan-type conflict, describing him as an 'evil bishop', and deliberately trying to isolate him by ignoring the fact that all the members of the Bishops Conference had signed the pastoral. Archbishop Nhlovu, who before being appointed to Harare was formerly Bishop of Hwange, comes from an Ndebele-speaking region where from 1983-1987 massacres had occurred, led by Robert Mugabe's North Korean trained 5th. Brigade troops who killed some 20,000 Ndebele-speakers. The brief mention in the pastoral of these former human rights violations added to the government's fury. The man who is widely thought to have masterminded

the Ndebele pogroms, Minister of State Security at the time, was Emmerson Mnangagwa now President of Zimbabwe. He was the favoured candidate of the UK for the Presidency after the coup in 2017 which toppled Robert Mugabe.

Catholics and other Christians have found the courage to defy the government and support their leaders. The Catholic Professionals Network of Zimbabwe in an open letter emphasise that the bishops acted “collectively not individually and that the reference to Archbishop Nhlovu’s ethnicity – it was not the first tribalist attack on him from ZANU-PF – was “needlessly brought to the fore and is singled out for a venomous attack as if the pastoral letter was his own initiative or creation”. The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations Sabbath Call message in October 2019 had appealed for unity in the face of Zimbabwe’s spiraling crises. In 7 August this year The Platform of Concerned Citizens (PCC) deplored the insulting responses to the African Union’s concern about human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and to a similar expression of concern by the ANC from South Africa. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches are now urging the government to retract its insulting response to Archbishop Nhlovu. The Catholic Bishops are not a lone voice but their message to Zimbabwean Catholics, read at Sunday mass, is by far the strongest and clearest.

How can anyone help? It is clear that Britain’s track record in the country means any protests will be dismissed by the Zimbabwe government. But the Church in Zimbabwe urgently needs tangible international signs of solidarity. This means more than statements of support from Churches around the world however much they are appreciated. The Archbishop clearly needs

attention to his security. The Bishops' Conference premises will need competent guards. This should not be seen as an inappropriate form of funding from, say, Aid to the Church in Need, or Catholic development agencies. I was in Rhodesia when the Bethlehem Fathers Moto Press was burned by Ian Smith's thugs and in South Africa when the Bishops Secretariat was burned out by apartheid agents. It happens.

South Africa is geographically in a position to intervene – it has a refugee problem from destitute Zimbabwean migrants - but there is little support for strong action elsewhere in the region. Zimbabwean opposition parties, however disorganized, need support from their sister Parties in the international community and particularly from the Commonwealth, or the last possibilities of democratic change will disappear. And instead of anger, abuse and calumny the Zimbabwean government needs to listen to those who love their country and cannot bear any longer to see it destroyed and its people impoverished.

See also *The Tablet On-Line* 17/08/2020

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9.10 What Britain Did & Didn't do to Nigeria 25/3/2021

Nigeria is full of energy, enterprise and dynamism. Like most big states it struggles to create national unity from a plethora of cultures and languages. With a total population of 206 million – rising fast - it will soon have the third largest population of English speakers and Christians in the world. At 100

million, roughly the same number as Nigerian Christians, it already has the third largest Muslim population. If Muslims and Christians can't live together in amity in Nigeria Africa is in even deeper trouble than the troubled Middle East.

When Nigeria became independent in 1960 the population of the British Empire was reduced by more than 50%. Under British rule none of its weaknesses as a political entity had been resolved. Arguably some of the worst had been intensified or created by the British. Nigeria today is fixed in British minds as the land of scams, corruption, and, for my generation, military coups and starving Biafran children. Kidnapping is one the few features to gain international attention, a dark market economy with ransom tariffs set according to the profession of the victims. A professor is worth more than a priest. Big gangs raid schools and charge bulk prices for returns. Banditry and armed robberies afflict several areas. Pastoralists, fighting over land-use, kill agriculturalists and vice-versa. Da'esh-linked terrorists still cause havoc in the North-East and around the northern borders. Inter-ethnic killings are increasing. Nigeria is a fragile state.

You might imagine that the recent amalgamation of Britain's Foreign Office and Department for International Development would be justified by a coordinated response to Nigeria's mix of security and developmental problems. You'd be wrong. Discounting its own expertise in humanitarian aid and the training of police and security forces, the British government plans to cut development aid to Nigeria by 58%. This despite thousands of displaced people fleeing violence in Borno State, a Federal army too under-equipped and unmotivated to fight terrorism successfully, as well as a

police force that needs intensive training. But British support is receding.

Max Siollun, in his recent *What Britain did to Nigeria*, traces the origin of Nigeria's ills to the early colonial period, the century of British engagement from the 1820s to the 1920s. Siollun's treatment is balanced and illuminating but his book will provide fodder for fashionable arguments between academics of the colonialism-bad and the colonialism-good schools - though lack of relevant statues will limit conflict to the seminar room.

Siollun shatters the comfortable assumption that the transition from pre-colonial to colonial government in what became Nigeria avoided the monstrous bloodshed in, say, the Congo under Leopold II of Belgium. In my own online *Emirs, Evangelicals & Empire* I underestimated the violence of the British takeover. Siollun tells of the racism, brutality and arrogance of many local British 'Residents', colonial officers - both civil and military - from the early Royal Niger Company to Lord Lugard's West African Frontier Force. But because most of the fighting fell on mercenary troops, mainly Hausa, with longstanding inter-ethnic and local animosities, the burnt villages and piles of corpses, after crushed uprisings and punitive raids, belonged to Africans.

The culturally very different North and South of Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914, not in some grand imperial vision, but, as Siollun suggests, to save on administrative costs. Indirect Rule was not a British strategic plan - though it divided and ruled with near impunity. Britain just could not afford enough colonial officers. The Colonial Office budget determined governance. And there was the bonus that someone else did dirty work like tax collection and

recruitment of forced labour. Punishment of those who saw little difference between this and former enslavement was severe.

Unsurprisingly there was considerable resistance to British rule, much of it caused by repression and extortion but used to justify severe and often disproportionate military response. The Fulani of Sokoto Caliphate in the North-West suffered the most because their structured military force and cavalry encouraged set-piece battles against the British 'square' and the unforgiving Maxim gun. The South-East lacked regular fighting forces and local guerrilla warfare was far more effective against British-led troops, especially along its narrow densely forested paths.

'Dash' given to chiefs who provided the Royal Niger Company with exclusive rights of trade in palm oil was the prototype of today's endemic bribery. Treaties that few chiefs could read and understand gave coercion and fraud a veneer of lawfulness. The earliest colonial era scam was to imitate messengers from British-appointed 'warrant chiefs' imposed on, for example, Igbo societies. The scammer donned a red fez and insisted on payments of different kinds with the spurious threat that failure to pay would involve heavy punishments from the chief with British support.

There were also mitigating development and reforms. Slavery, twin infanticide, and the burial of servants/slaves with their chief in some South-Eastern societies were gradually eliminated. Colonial provision of roads, railways and education was transformative. Christian missions followed by government schools brought educational change to the South. Today most southern states have high rates of adult literacy. The contrast with some Northern states

is striking. According to EduCeleb, a Nigerian educational news agency, in Sokoto 80% of women aged 18-24 are illiterate but only 1.8% in the South East's Imo state. Nationally the adult literacy rate was 22% at Independence in 1960.

Sixty years on, years when Nigeria stumbled from one disaster to another somehow surviving, somehow holding together, that heritage wears thin as an excuse. The latest crisis looks particularly dangerous. Nigeria's Catholic Bishops informed by detailed information from their parishes around the country published a formal statement this February. They are not in the habit of crying wolf.

"The very survival of the nation is at stake. The nation is pulling apart. Widespread serious insecurity for long unaddressed has left the sad and dangerous impression that those who have assumed the duty and authority to secure the nation are either unable – or worse still unwilling – to take up the responsibilities of their office. Patience is running out.

The call for self-defense is fast gaining ground. Many ethnic champions are beating loudly the drums of war, calling not only for greater autonomy but even for outright opting out of a nation in which they have lost all trust and sense of belonging. The calls for secession on an ethnic basis from many quarters should not be ignored or taken lightly. Many have given up on the viability and even on the desirability of the Nigeria project as one united country. No wonder many non-state actors are filling the vacuum created by an apparent absence of government. The Federal Government under President Muhammadu Buhari can no longer delay rising to its obligation

to govern the nation; not according to ethnic and religious biases but along the lines of objective and positive principles of fairness, equity and, above all, justice. It is not too much for Nigerians to demand from Mr. President sincerity both in the public and private domain. There are no more excuses”.

Sadly the British Government has plenty of excuses for finding something better to do than worry about the future of what is arguably the most important country on the African continent.

See TheArticle 21/03/2021

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9.11 South Africa at the Crossroads

8/7/2021

Now is a critical time for South Africa, a major test of its institutions and leaders. Former President Jacob Zuma (79) is finally behind bars. The Constitutional Court, the country’s Supreme Court, will hear his appeal against a sentence of 15 months imprisonment for contempt of court. By refusing to testify Zuma, the very stereotype of leaders in Africa, defied a Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (systemic corruption in which private interests significantly influence a state’s decision-making processes for financial gain). Then, at the end of next week, it is Mandela Day when South Africa celebrates its exemplary and heroic first leader. The contrast between the two men couldn’t be greater.

Leaders operate within political and social contexts not necessarily of their own

making. No-one doubts multi-millionaire President Cyril Ramaphosa's skills as negotiator. He is an outstanding former trades union leader whose role was pivotal in negotiations with the apartheid regime. But he has inherited a daunting level of corruption in his Party, the African National Congress (ANC).

South Africa's constitution includes important institutions intended as protections for democracy and guarantor of citizens' rights. The office of Public Protector, reporting to Parliament, is an independent body designed to monitor government maladministration and corruption. In March 2016, the Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, set in motion an investigation into allegations against Zuma. It was widely believed that three businessmen brothers, the Gupta family, in cahoots with Zuma had been selling top ministerial appointments in exchange for highly favorable business deals and contracts. The investigation itself was the result of a civil complaints procedure initiated by Father Stanislaus Muyebe, the vicar-general of the Dominican Order in southern Africa, and a second complaint by the main Opposition Party, the Democratic Alliance. The final lengthy report of the investigation was worrying enough for the Constitutional Court to implement Madonsela's recommendation to set up a Judicial Commission of Inquiry. Zuma was finally forced to resign in 2018 after nine years in office.

I only met Zuma once some forty years go. He suddenly appeared from behind a bush in the then Salisbury capital of Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe. I was with Rev. Frank Chikane, the future secretary-general of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), then and now a prominent and courageous advocate

of human rights and democracy. Frank was meeting his brother, an active member of the external ANC. At the time, the ANC camps in Angola and Zambia had been infiltrated by apartheid agents and in an atmosphere of paranoia scores of alleged 'sell-outs' had been executed. Zuma was head of ANC Intelligence. Even in that fleeting encounter he struck me as a frightening and dangerous man.

In 1994, not long after he stepped down as President of Zambia I accompanied the late Kenneth Kaunda (KK) monitoring South Africa's first fully free elections. His recent death reminded me of so many unanswered questions about the leaders of the African liberation movements. How had they managed the transition from political activist or guerilla fighter to holder of high office in an independent State? Why in the case of Kaunda, a pious Christian and a thoroughly decent man, was the one-party State a natural default position? In the case of Zimbabwe, did its first President, Robert Mugabe, impart a sense of entitlement to wealth through power the result of suffering, persecution and prolonged imprisonment under collapsing colonial or settler rule? A kind of reward?

The heady atmosphere of optimism and idealism, the euphoric crowds voting during the 1994 elections, are long gone. Even then there were serious threats. KK was assigned to KwaZulu-Natal where Inkatha, the Zulu tribal movement, was shaping up for a war with the ANC. Violence that could derail the process of the elections. KK had a retinue of two: a Zambian bodyguard impeccably turned out in military uniform and myself as bag-carrier and general factotum. We were lucky. The Zulu leader Gatsha Buthelezi backed off after intensive lobbying. Instead of carrying machetes

and guns the young men we met in our first small town were having a wonderful time talking into walkie-talkies and acting as if they were a Presidential protection unit. Sadly intercommunal violence was to pick up after the elections.

KK stopped at Pietermaritzburg for a night-time vigil in an Anglican church. We had a row of pews to ourselves with the bodyguard seated two places away on the left of Kaunda and myself on his right. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Denis Hurley, the Catholic Archbishop of Durban, were to give short homilies. During a silent period for prayer out of the corner of my eye I saw a stocky white man barreling down the left aisle. He stopped at the end of our row. He looked disturbed. It didn't look good. As he pushed along the row towards us it looked bad. To my amazement the bodyguard let him pass, sit down next to KK and start sobbing. KK handed over his signature handkerchief and held the weeping man's hand. The man blurted out that he had come to ask forgiveness. He had been on a South African commando raid into Zambia which had killed several people. Kaunda said a few gentle words. Somehow both the bodyguard and Kaunda had known this white intruder was intent on confession, truth and reconciliation, not assassination. It was a mysterious moment but in retrospect caught something significant both about South Africa in 1994 and Kaunda's personality and leadership.

KK and my friend, the SACC's Rev. Frank Chikane, owed much to a Christian humanism that allowed them to move seamlessly between the political and the religious. Chikane survived neurotoxin poisoning by the apartheid security police and became in 1999 Director-General in Thabo Mbeki's presidential

office. In July 2010, Frank courageously publicised his insider blow-by-blow account of the de facto coup by which Zuma forced Mbeki's resignation and came to power as President. Chikane now has a leading role in the nationwide Defend Our Democracy Movement, a coalition of NGOs, religious bodies and lawyers.

Chikane is both consistent and persistent. His position is simple. South Africa's future had fallen into the hands of politicians who looted the country and enriched themselves at the expense of the people. Now is the time for the people to mobilize 'as the last line of defense', Chikane's words, to protect South Africa's democracy. Against this background of a popular movement, and Zuma in prison despite support in the ANC, the role of the judiciary takes on a particular significance. Meanwhile Mandela's spirit of reconciliation and enormous self-sacrifice for his country remains a political ideal.

Younger readers may think of distant South Africa and the 1990s themselves as 'another country'. But there are lessons for Britain's contemporary political problems. We need some of that early post-apartheid political creativity, the infectious hope that things can change. We need a concerted movement that draws different parts of society together to support our institutions and defend our democracy. And we need Church leaders with the courage and confidence to recognize our problems as both ethical and political who will speak truth to power and act accordingly.

See [TheArticle 08/07/2021](#)

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Chapter 10

Middle East & North Africa

10.1 Trump's Thirty Years War

13/9/2018

“The first time it was reported that our friends were being butchered there was a cry of horror. Then a hundred were butchered. But when a thousand were butchered and there was no end to the butchery, a blanket of silence spread.

When evil-doing comes like falling rain, nobody calls out "stop!"

When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible.

When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in summer.”

Bertolt Brecht, Selected Poems

This year is the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the Thirty Years war in Europe, the setting for Brecht's *Mother Courage*. A savage and complex war, it pitted Catholics against Protestants and drew in five large national and imperial armies. Some eight million people died, some in battle, or in civilian massacres, most from famine and disease. Europe's cities were devastated. Some of the German States lost 40% of their population. The horror of religious war is being repeated today, this time within

Islam.

The Assad, distantly Shi'a Alawite led regime with its Russian and Iranian (Shi'a Muslim) allies have begun the final systematic destruction of resistance in the Idlib Province of Syria. Villages and towns with their additional refugee population, together making up some three million mainly Sunni inhabitants, will be bombed and the number of civilian casualties will soar. The assault has started. The slaughter of civilians in Syria continues, whether by barrel bombs dropped from Syrian air-force helicopters or the modern rocket technology of Putin's air-force backed up by Iranian Revolutionary Guards ground-forces. And nobody, it seems, can do anything about it.

Saudi bombing in Yemen, accelerating during August, is similarly indifferent to civilian casualties: children on buses, weddings, funerals, markets and medical centres have been attacked from the air. The Saudi-led largely Sunni Coalition ground forces have also perpetrated war crimes in three years of war against the Houthis, Zaidi Shi'ite Muslims. Naval blockades and attacks on the key port of Houdaydah suggest the aim is to use famine as a weapon of war, a tactic employed in Syria. Meanwhile Houthi forces retaliate and commit their own human rights violations. And nobody, it seems, can do anything about it.

At the same time, within Sunni Saudi Arabia an internal sectarian conflict is in progress. Israa-al-Ghamgham, a 29 year old Shi'a woman, imprisoned since 2015, was tried in the notorious Special Criminal Court in Riyadh for giving support to rioters. (She documented human rights violations and attended funerals of protesters against discrimination). The public prosecutor is seeking the death penalty under Royal Decree 44/A for her and four other human rights activists - including her husband. They

are all from the Shi'a majority Qatif governorate in Saudi Arabia's Eastern province. Sheikh Nimr-al-Nimr, a prominent Shi'a cleric - and forty-seven others - were executed in 2016. He was charged for allegedly leading protests and encouraging sectarian strife. The Qatif Five's fate will be decided in October. And nobody, it seems, can do anything about it.

We would know next to nothing about these events and crimes were it not for a handful of courageous journalists and humanitarian and human rights organisations. Governments know only too well. They try to hide the level of their complicity and do nothing. Spain has just cancelled an arms deal but is a very minor player compared with the USA, \$8 billion, and UK, \$2.6 billion, in arms and military sales to Saudi Arabia since 2014. Weapons pour in from Russia, and to a lesser degree from Iran, into Syria. This is a more than generous contribution to the militarization of the region, the entrenchment of sectarian conflict and a state of perpetual warfare.

The sponsorship of this ethnic/religious/national conflict in a strategically vital arena pits five national and "imperial" armies against each other: US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey as key belligerents, with the UK and others playing a supporting role. Despite much publicised efforts to mediate truces, more clandestine efforts are made which pour gasoline on the fire by promoting fear and exporting planes, weapons, communications and military transport. President Trump - and Israel - have now clearly taken sides with Sunni forces against Iran and Russia which is backing the Iranian brand of revolutionary Shi'ism. The most powerful military power, and thus potentially diplomatic power in the world, has abdicated any role of peace-maker and mediator to become a proxy or direct belligerent in sectarian

wars.

The late UK Foreign Minister, Robin Cook MP, the lonely figure who resigned rather than support the war in Iraq in March 2003, promoted the idea of a foreign policy with an ethical dimension (note not an ethical foreign policy but even so a contentious proposal). It was, at least in intention, a significant adjustment to British foreign policy. He was jeered in Parliament. I doubt if President Trump would even know what Cook was talking about. Prime Minister May is far too busy trying to glue together a fractured Tory Party to conduct any coherent foreign policy. She demonstrated early contempt for the Foreign Office by appointing Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary. So nobody is doing anything about the coming decades of war in the Middle East except wringing their hands.

The consequences of this burgeoning sectarian conflict will reverberate around the world. The expulsion from the Middle East of Christians and other minority faiths will continue. The flight of refugees will remain a pressing humanitarian concern. Devastated cities will remain havens for extremists. Trump, but not just Trump, is fashioning our very own Thirty Years War. And as the evil doers in Brecht's poem take centre stage Mother Courage returns as the unheroic heroine of our time.

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10.2 The World's Worst -Avoidable- Disaster

20/9/2018

It was a small paragraph buried in the newspaper this week. The Saudi-led coalition was again, despite international pleas, pushing on with Operation Golden

Victory, their attempt to take the Yemeni port city of Hodeidah. Yemen is a semi-desert and desert land. Over three quarters of the country's imported food passes through Hodeidah, as well as arms for the Houthi rebels whom the Saudis and United Arab Emirates (UAE) hope to interdict and defeat. Over five million children depend on these food supplies and already face starvation. UNICEF is struggling to get food aid into the country and the UN has warned of "the world's worst humanitarian disaster". This is what serious damage to, and complete closure of the port will achieve.

Yemen is desperately poor. From the 1960s, the international aid organization for which I worked had a development programme in Yemen. My memory of the people and the land is still vivid. As visiting CEO of the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), I stayed in Ja'fariyah, in a remote village high in the beautiful Raymah mountains. You had to walk to smaller settlements. These mountains may be unique; the higher you climb the noisier it gets. The poverty is as striking as the beauty.

In this terrain your fellow climbers are trying to make a living, mostly climbing up and down rather than along the ridge roads. You meet shepherds herding their flocks in front of them, men and donkeys carrying impossible loads and improbable items, a television set, a Kalashnikov, all moving at a punishing rate upwards, or skipping downwards like fleeing goats. You mount uneven steps, some cut into the basalt, some natural, passing small terraces where food crops and qat are grown. On the mountain top there is a buzz of human occupation: houses, villages, dirt ridge roads. You don't climb mountains in Yemen to seek solitude. The CIIR Yemen programme tried to reduce maternal and child mortality. It was called International Cooperation for Development and employed mostly Muslim volunteer development workers. They trained traditional birth attendants building on their experience and knowledge and introducing them to modern

midwifery skills and better practice. The time around birth was a privileged period for imparting health – and sometimes feminist – messages. Unable to understand instructions on medical items, the women trainees asked to learn to read and a special course was developed. Women who completed the training and implemented it were the first women to appear on Yemeni television and soon played leadership roles in their villages, and nationally, promoting preventative health care. Fewer women and babies died in childbirth.

But as Yemeni women these trained birth attendants had to struggle. The distinctive Yemeni house, in the shape of a tower, reflects the relationships between men and women. Upstairs in the mafrage, enjoying magnificent views, the men converse and chew qat declining in Roman fashion in a large airy room. The television sets and Kalashnikovs laboriously brought up the mountains adorn these upstairs rooms. Food is placed before the men on floor mats and everyone dips in to common dishes. Downstairs the women cook and live with the children in gloomy rooms lit by windows set in high walls. The trained, literate birth attendants faced the daily challenges of an entrenched social conservatism. Yet this is only a partial picture of life in rural Yemen.

Uthman, one of the volunteers, a former Sudanese Trades Unionist, now a nurse, was something of a Muslim Saint in his dedication to the patients at the local health clinic. Mid-surgery, he once rescued a fellow development worker being operated on for appendicitis and, with a companion, stretchered her some 15 kilometres down the mountain to the regional hospital. He had spotted in time that the incompetent doctor operating on her couldn't find the infected appendix.

One of CIIR's development workers had a bad car accident: a well-known Sheikh accompanying her was killed. We feared the worst. Traditional rates of compensation could be considerable for such a locally notable figure.

The development worker who had been driving risked a spell in prison until compensation was paid. But news came back from the Sheikh's wife. "We loved her" she said of our staff member, "we ask only a small token to honour our customs and to show respect".

Does Ja'fariyah's inaccessibility still protect it from the worst ravages of war? I don't know. But when you remember real people, live and loving human beings, reports of the numbers dying catch the eye and catch the heart. Few non-Muslims in UK give to the main Islamic development agencies which, on a much smaller scale, do courageous humanitarian work in these war zones. They need support but they cannot cope with the magnitude of the destruction.

The big international NGOs with the capacity to respond to this pending humanitarian disaster, OXFAM and Save the Children, have seen their funding from the public falling whilst the Tory back benches have succeeded in getting government to punish these Agencies by cutting their funds. A tiny number of male staff grievously abused their position of power and wealth for sexual favours, and this is the outcome. The public rightly expects higher standards of humanitarian agencies whose work is based on idealism. But does this justify walking away?

The question I want to ask when I remember the Yemen of the 1990s and the overseas development workers there is: Which is more important punishing the humanitarian agencies for poor governance and ignoring whistle-blowers, hardly a unique crime, or continuing to donate to enable these big Agencies to save the lives of thousands of children in a country no-one really knows or cares much about? Now the media interest has subsided the question can be, and should be, asked.

Save the Children estimate that up to 50,000 Yemeni children died of war-related hunger and disease in 2017 and some 400,000 were in need of treatment for

malnutrition. This is no time to let transient outrage get the better of solidarity and compassion.

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10.3 We Need to Talk About Mohammed Bin Salman 31/10/2018

Thirteen million people are facing starvation due to the war in Yemen. Today's call by the US State Department and Pentagon for Saudi Arabia to end the bombing of urban areas in Yemen within the next thirty days is an important policy change. The tireless advocacy of ceasefire and peace by international human rights and humanitarian organisations together with a number of smaller NGOs has played its part.

The UK is blessed by a large number of such voluntary groups, associations and formal organisations in civil society, one of its great strengths. They represent the country's values more faithfully than successive governments, and put them into practice both in the fields of international relations and domestic poverty. They are often invisible, persevering on non-existent budgets.

Below is a letter to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office sent on 26 October from one such group. The authors await a reply. The US policy change will likely make the reply more than a routine acknowledgement of concern.

Yemen Safe Passage Group

“Dear Foreign Secretary,

Yemen: the famine of this century is rapidly becoming the crime of this century

The Yemen Safe Passage Group (YSPG) is writing to you as a group of former ambassadors and other diplomats, military officers, academics and aid professionals with a shared experience of working in Yemen. Yemen is back in the news following the renewal of fighting around Hodeidah and the UN's revised estimate that half the population now faces starvation. There is still time to respond effectively to this crisis. The United Kingdom is in a position of exceptional influence. Working jointly with key allies and involving the regional powerbrokers, we can work for a ceasefire to avert complete disaster in Yemen and start to plan the country's long road to recovery. Under your leadership, the Foreign Office has the opportunity for a fundamental rethink of the UK's role.

Fundamental UK policy reset on the Yemen conflict

With the Khashoggi debacle, the veil has been lifted on Saudi Arabia's lack of respect for international law. We have been arguing since our inception about the illegality of economic blockades and the military targeting of civilians. Those implicated in the Khashoggi affair have both initiated and continue to supervise Saudi involvement in Yemen's war with all the breaches of international principles and laws that are so evident. The opportunity now presents itself for a strategic change of UK policy. To regain public confidence there needs to be a thorough review of UK interests, both upsides and downsides, which must be transparent and public. We continue to support the ever-growing calls for the suspension of British arms sales to Saudi Arabia until HMG is satisfied a sustainable peace in Yemen has been achieved.

Our analysis developed through extensive consultation with actors on every side of the conflict, indicates that the Coalition led by Saudi Arabia deploys two strategies in its attempt to prevail in Yemen – to escalate its military operations

or to squeeze economically the areas outside its control in the hope that the population will then rise in its favour. However, a military victory is wholly unrealistic, as has been recognised in a succession of HMG statements, and its pursuit is unacceptable given the inevitable level of civilian casualties and wanton destruction. Economic warfare is banned by international law as is the targeting of schools and hospitals, which nevertheless continues. Such tactics leave a toxic legacy of bitterness and hatred towards those inflicting such suffering.

The UK has played a leading role in several positive initiatives in Yemen, including increasing humanitarian aid and supporting the efforts of the UN's Special Envoy. However, HMG has allowed itself to be unduly influenced by the Saudis, and the benefits of our bilateral relationship have been greatly overstated. Rather than giving the UK 'leverage' over Saudi actions, the opposite has been the case. Recent academic research points convincingly in this direction. Specifically, the relationship has been deeply damaging to precisely what you yourself have been highlighting: British values and the rule of law. HMG succumbed to pressure in failing to halt the Coalition's military action on Hodeidah in the full knowledge of its massive humanitarian implications. It has sought to defend licences for arms exports when their use against civilians has been well documented and is placing itself increasingly at risk of being implicated in war crimes. You have stressed that Saudi Arabia has helped keep terrorism off British streets, but at the same time we must recognise that, by creating such instability and resentment, the continuing war is feeding the underlying threat to the UK from terrorism.

In addition, HMG is not helping the long-term interests of our primary ally in the region. The bitter truth is that the Yemen war has been a disaster

for the Saudis. It has increased rather than curtailed the influence of Iran on their southern border, has provided the Houthis with an excuse for their cross-border attacks on Saudi cities, and due to repeated and well publicised attacks on civilian targets has played a major role in destroying Saudi Arabia's international reputation.

Need to decisively avert Yemen's downward spiral to mass famine

We support the call from the UK's Ambassador to the UN3 for unhindered access for commercial food supplies, especially on the main transport routes being threatened by current military operations, and for an end to Houthi interference with the humanitarian response. On the latter, we urge HMG to use its backchannel contacts with the Houthis to bring this to an end.

We urge HMG to focus on what lies ahead, and to consider where Yemen's calamity is leading – a crippled economy, destitution, political instability and terrorism in a highly strategic location. The lack of governance and rampant corruption that have bedevilled Yemen have contributed to the paucity of basic services, have been major drivers of the resentments fuelling this war and have contributed to the rise of extreme Islamism. The war in turn is leading to a massive loss of human potential, so vital for the rebuilding of the country, with a generation out of school, the de-skilling of youth, and war forcing early marriage of Yemeni girls.

HMG needs to recognise the ever-growing opportunity cost of reconstruction from an ever-lower base and start to plan with others how Yemen will finance a balanced reconstruction reaching all areas, whatever political control they are under. This will allow for a future less dominated by outside interests and could dramatically contribute towards peace efforts.

The UK's role in achieving a sustainable peace

Of the P5, the UK is uniquely placed to sponsor and prioritise an urgent ceasefire on all fronts especially Hodeidah. The recent joint statements made with major European powers are a welcome development and need to be maintained and extended to exert the necessary leverage. Only a ceasefire will allow the proper resumption of the UN Special Envoy's diplomacy, which needs continuing and robust support, but additionally a more vocal and visible commitment from Western leaders, and a readiness to match words with action.

Immediate action to address the threatened famine

Decisive international action is needed to support the Yemeni riyal and address the reasons for its collapse, which include irresponsible currency printing, uncertainties over trade, and major hard currency revenues failing to be deposited at either of the components of the split Central Bank. Credible banking measures need to be put in place to allow unimpeded trading operations, including letters of credit for importers and the urgent reversal of Government of Yemen's 'Decree 75' which in practice restricts the movement of goods. Credible sanctions are needed to thwart individuals, on all sides, who are making massive financial gains from their positions.

We urge the UK to play a leadership role by calling for Saudi Arabia and other parties to the conflict to agree a ceasefire and decisively move to bring the war in Yemen to an end. The UK can draw on its key role on Yemen within the UN, while working with European allies and the US to support such a change in Saudi strategy. Given the UK's historical links with Yemen, our alliance with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and our continuing dialogue with Iran, the UK is best placed to bring the international community towards a working consensus to achieve a lasting and meaningful peace. This will start the process of rebuilding Yemen as a functioning

State.

Yours sincerely

Yemen Safe Passage Coordinating Group, after extensive consultation within the wider group. See <https://yemensafepassage.org/yspg-membership/> for the full listing.

James Firebrace (YSPG Coordinator). Please address replies to james@yemensafepassage.org.

Frances Guy (former UK Ambassador to Yemen) Captain Philip Holihead (former Head of Western Indian Ocean Counter-Piracy)".

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10.4 Under the Wire: To Assad's Slaughterhouse 6/11/2018

Under the Wire is a documentary film you will not forget. It brings together the story of war correspondent Marie Colvin's last assignment for the Sunday Times in 2012, reporting the harrowing destruction of Baba Amra in Homs, the slaughter of its residents and the gripping escape of her wounded camera man, Paul Conroy. Paul Conroy and Lindsay Hilsum of Channel 4 News discussed the film at the Aldeburgh Documentary Film Festival on November 4th. The audience emerged stunned.

The Director, Christopher Martin, could have made a film culminating in the deaths of Marie Colvin and the French photojournalist, Rémi Ochlik, trapped in the Baba Amr press centre – a wrecked house – and systematically targeted by the Syrian armed forces. This deliberate killing of journalists was in itself an important story.

But Under the Wire is far more. Assad's bombing destroyed most of Conroy's footage and photographs but only about 15 minutes of an 80 minute film is reconstruction. Martin searched far and wide for material and found a wealth

of amateur video of Homs under siege and of a make-shift health centre where a doctor struggled to keep life in the mutilated bodies brought to its door. But intense bombing coupled with lack of medical equipment and drugs could leave Dr. Mohammed trapped and helpless. The death of a single baby, watched by the mother and doctor, both unable to help, brought the daily slaughter by Assad's regime into heartbreaking focus.

Conroy, a former soldier, raises this documentary from exceptionally good to almost epic. He acts throughout the film as story-teller/commentator, Liverpudlian voice struggling for the right words, his face in close up, intercut with the live footage of mayhem, terror and suffering. Conroy struggles to express the horror of the situation, trying to suppress emotion, the story first given to camera in one long, almost unbroken, filmed session, features etched like a mappa mundi of the pain, suffering and fear around him. You are irresistibly drawn in. Here he was some six years later, getting a standing ovation in a seaside town in East Anglia, wearing a cheeky Scouser persona like a warm protective coat. Though you wonder what the trauma of his escape from Baba Amr is doing to him inside it.

Conroy's escape retold as the Syrian tanks roll in has the desperate quality of the common fear and flight nightmare. The Red Crescent arrives when all seems lost. But the doctor in charge, summoned into the press centre, explains sotto voce to Conroy that he and his companions, including another seriously wounded journalist, should under no circumstances, despite the urgency of their physical condition, get into the ambulance. They are left helpless, in pain from bad leg wounds and in the dark, hope fast disappearing, with no apparent means of escape. Christopher Martin, *Under the Wire's* Director explained to the audience that they would all have been killed and thrown into a ditch at the outskirts of Homs. Had this brave doctor not died six months before the film was

screened, in order to protect him none of these details could have been included. Were it not for Conroy, *Under the Wire* could have become another document of outstanding courage in a standard survival/escape movie format, with the journo as tough hero. But he infuses the film with his and Marie Colvin's passionate conviction that they must "tell the story". On Marie Colvin's insistence that they must go back to Baba Amr - having left after being inaccurately informed a Syrian army invasion was imminent - Conroy, smothering his instinct and foreboding, accompanies her and goes back. Phoning the story out, of course, gave the Syrian air force their co-ordinates for bombing. The ethical backbone of the film is Colvin and Conroy's sacrificial commitment and to the core principles of journalism, and touchingly to each other.

Getting the story out is rarely enough to bring about any substantive change in war zones. A safe passage, local ceasefire, is sometimes the reward. A Nuremberg trial for the Syrian regime with the film as prosecution evidence is not going to happen. But the truth is a value in itself and the cost of it in journalists' lives is growing increasingly high. And I would include in the cost the unhealed invisible wounds caused by living through such experiences of civilian slaughter in war.

So don't expect a comfortable tear-jerker. This is raw immersion in Assad's destruction of life. You will never come closer to feeling what it is like to be bombed or wounded unless you are actually caught up in a war. I came out of the Aldeburgh Cinema feeling someone had surfaced several of my emotions at once, yet had not been manipulated by the film-maker. This is a "must see", but more importantly a demanding "ought to see". And if you have children, definitely worth a babysitter.

10.5 Libya: The Danger of Anarchy**18/4/2019**

Things can only get worse in Libya. The Italian government is doing deals that deliver African migrants back into the hands of their brutal people traffickers. A major civil war seems to be in the offing. Or perhaps “Field-Marshal” Khalifa Haftar is ‘just’ making facts on the ground prior to pending UN negotiations between the different factions. Haftar’s gang of pick-up truck warriors are now at the gates of Tripoli. He has been bombing Tripoli suburbs. Libya suffers grievously from militia-ruled anarchy. And you begin to wonder if on balance another dictator would offer a less fearsome future.

Studying a huge portrait of Colonel Gadaffi in the foyer of a Tripoli hotel in 2007, I almost laughed. That seemed a bad idea in front of the sinister figures lounging around in armchairs simulating relaxation. How thoughtful of tyrants to look the part: brutal, dangerous and barking mad. Yet Muammar Gadaffi’s brand of tyranny during his reign of 42 years kept the lid on Libya, gluing together with fear or adulation three historic regions, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. Gadaffi was killed on the 11 October during the Arab Spring uprising. The lid came off.

I went to Libya with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the Vatican’s official body for relations with other faiths. We were there to dialogue with the World Islamic Call Society (WICS) whose headquarters were tucked away in a middle-class suburb in south Tripoli. Dawa Islamiyya was Gadaffi’s answer to Saudi Arabia’s World Islamic League which exported ultra-conservative Wahabism and large amounts of money to be spent on training Muslim scholars and building mosques around the world. WICS’ major focus was Africa.

Dialogue, allegedly, was not the only thing WICS did. It had an annual budget of

\$45 Million, and, as I recently discovered, is now believed to have been laundering money to Gadaffi's latest international political projects including destabilizing – Christian-led - African governments which he disliked. According to Reuters and the Quilliam Foundation, a London based anti-extremism think-tank, a clandestine unit within WICS, known as the World Islamic Popular Leadership, allegedly contained and worked with Gadaffi's Intelligence Services. I wonder who knew then? I didn't. Nor, I'm pretty sure, did the Vatican even if they might have had suspicions.

Once through the non-descript gates of WICS, our group which included a savvy Archbishop and Catholic scholars were on a sizeable campus. We were told that WICS was an international Muslim University and were shown huge rooms with wall-to-wall desk top computers and ranks of African students. The WICS Director was amiability itself. Uncertain polite applause followed my paper about Muslim-Christian relations in the UK. It looked like being a dull couple of days. Had we discovered that we were in the hub of one of Gadaffi's many interesting covert operations, it might have proved more interesting.

I soon escaped and found a shop where I could buy some Attar of Roses. Behind the counter was a Brummie immigrant, perfume pipette at the ready. He had done well in Tripoli; delighted to speak English, he sang the praises of the city. It was hard to get away. A sadder experience was to see in a park near the Cathedral a considerable number of the people sleeping rough, mainly sub-saharan African migrants. The Cathedral was a migrant centre with masses in their different languages and lay workers trying to help. The bishop an Italian, Giovanni Martinelli, through sustained diplomacy had managed to keep the Catholic community safe. But the church in Benghazi had been attacked the day previously. The staff hid or would have been killed. I

was told that Gadaffi had no real control over Benghazi. But elsewhere he afforded a degree of fragile religious tolerance that we had come to encourage.

Looking back, I wonder about the plight of the voluble Brummie from the perfume shop, and the dedicated Cathedral workers caring for overwhelming numbers of migrants. Despite the perseverance of the UN and the mediation of a number of different countries, including the UK's contribution of experience gained from negotiating the Good Friday agreement, chaos reigns. And chaos is never kind to the poor. What you wonder after Iraq and Libya is worse? Living under tyranny or the consequences of a successful uprising and military intervention against it? Intervention or inaction?

Without any civil society associations, public space is occupied by rival political factions and their militias. Without law there is only the authority of the gun and money. Only Tunisia validated the description "Arab Spring" though it is not without its problems, not least the hundreds of Tunisians that joined Da'esh. And Tunisia escaped any military intervention.

Like boiling water poured into a cup with old cracks, countries in violent transition and turmoil fall apart along their historical fault lines. The question is will the contents of the broken cup that is Libya come to include extremists that cross the Mediterranean. Italy was the major colonial player in the region and remains a negotiating partner with Libya as far as refugees and trafficked migrants are concerned. Cyrenaica with its capital Benghazi has always looked east to Egypt in times of trouble, and it is mainly President Sisi and Egypt along with the UAE and recently the Saudis, who are bankrolling and arming Haftar with support from Russia and France. Tripolitania in the north-west

declared itself a Republic independent of Italy for four years after the end of the First World War. Fezzan in the south-west, under French military control 1943-1951, was and remains a wild region of desert transit, home to exiles, bandits and Bedouin and latterly oil wells. A fractured Libya contains a toxic mixture of militias and weapons unhelpfully supplied by parts of the Arab world.

After the Rwandan genocide, Canada promoted the Responsibility to Protect in the UN General Assembly. But Western intervention in Iraq and Libya, military might, bombing and Special Forces, without adequate plans and manpower to fill the vacuum left by a departing tyrant, show how virtuous intentions can have catastrophic consequences. Putting the lid back on the cauldron that is Libya will take many more years. And Da'esh has already had one try at settling in. The peace-making perseverance that the UN manages to sustain in the face of failure is the only way forward.

See "Putting the lid back on the cauldron that is Libya will take a very long time indeed" in TheArticle.com 15/04/19

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10.6 How to Start a War in the Middle East

4/7/2019

A few years ago I had an interesting conversation with Iran's former President, Seyyed Khatami, during lunch at Lambeth Palace. I asked him through his interpreter what Shi'a Islam had to say about nuclear weapons. "They are forbidden, haram", was the answer through the interpreter. "Banned for use?" I queried. "Forbidden for both possession and use" came back the answer

from Khatami in perfect English.

Of course, with a little casuistry, you could have the components of a nuclear bomb available and ready for assembly and still “not possess nuclear weapons”. This was probably the aim of the Iranian nuclear programme pre-JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action): the international agreement on limiting and monitoring Iran’s nuclear capacity, signed in 2015 by Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, USA, China, Russia, France and UK plus Germany and the EU.

Iranian national pride is widely shared inside the country. You do not have to be a fanatical Revolutionary Guard commander to believe in national sovereignty. It is after all one of the basic principles of the UN. Nor from an Iranian perspective do you necessarily think possession of a nuclear weapon is perversely irrational. A number of States with a military presence near or around Iran’s borders have nuclear weapons: Russia, USA, UK, Pakistan and Israel. JCPOA took a lot of selling to Shi’a hardliners. To give the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) thorough monitoring access to Iran’s nuclear facilities was a big ask . But, according to the IAEA, Iran complied with the treaty and kept its uranium enrichment below the required 3.67%. Any preparations for a nuclear weapon were thus in abeyance, or discontinued, until the USA reneged on the JCPOA agreement enraging and humiliating President Hourani’s government and the Iranian public.

If we are to believe White House sources, we were 10 minutes away from a US attack on Iran two weeks ago with, probably, the Strait of Hormuz being blocked in retaliation. Iran had shot down a US surveillance i.e. spy drone. Re-

markably the Stock Exchange barely blinked. So was it all playground bravado and will it remain only a war of words?

In the Trump era, sanctions are imposed on foreign countries as if they were a routine part of foreign policy. But oil sanctions on a country almost totally dependent on revenue from its oil exports devastate its economy and are close to being an act of war. Oil sanctions on Iran are estimated to have resulted in \$50 billion in lost revenue. Iran had strong reasons to threaten retaliation by making warning attacks on shipping transporting oil through the Strait. As the cliché goes, one thing leads to another.

This dangerous state of affairs in the Gulf must primarily be laid at the door of the Trump administration and its unilateral withdrawal of the USA from JCPOA. The agreement was a triumph of diplomacy. Due to deep distrust between Iran and the rest of the signatories, detailed verification provisions were put in place. Iran has honoured these provisions and limited its stockpile of enriched uranium to the required 660 pounds. The US withdrawal was both a major blow to the ordered conduct of international relations, an insult to the co-signatories, and an economic blow to Iran; the Iranian rial lost three-quarters of its value. It undermined President Rouhani, by Iranian standards a pragmatic moderate, and illustrated that the Revolutionary Guards who opposed the treaty had been right all along. So strong are feelings about national sovereignty in Iran, there were, and are, only two ways of stopping the movement towards the possession of nuclear weapons: the JCPOA treaty or military attack.

So far the US has held back from military attack. It has followed up the oil sanctions it imposed, by bullying the rest of the world through threats to banks and trade into complying, with an almost total boycott of Iran. Further sanctions are now being piled on in the hope of bringing Iran to heel. One measure, banning the sale of enriched uranium to Russia, has resulted in Iran

now being in breach of its stockpile limits.

Having told his core constituency that he will end US military intervention and “bring home our boys”, Trump is no warmonger even if his National Security Adviser, John Bolton, is. But a fundamental misunderstanding of the Iran’s complex political system and public opinion makes the chance of war by mistake a growing danger. Any loss of American lives, attributable to the Revolutionary Guards, would be a trigger.

It is understandable that the US and Israel are particularly unhappy about Iran’s support for Hezbollah, and to a lesser degree the Houthis in Yemen, along with a threatening Revolutionary Guard presence in Syria. Both the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, key Sunni protagonists, see Iran’s defiance of the West and Israel in a sectarian context as their rival in the struggle for hegemony in the Middle East. But the way forward is indicated by the successful negotiations over JCPOA: perseverance in diplomatic initiatives and recognition of Iran as inheritor of an ancient Persian culture and the Shi’a Safavid Empire, a legitimate claim to leadership of the Shi’a world.

This religious element in the geopolitics should not be neglected. Westerners sometimes find this difficult to grasp. Iran is absolutely serious about seeking religious recognition in the Muslim world. Hence its support for Hezbollah and the Houthis and the foul anti-Zionism of its crazed former President, Mamoud Ahmadinejad, who took over from President Khatami in 2005.

So now thanks to President Trump and his coterie we have Iran’s centrifuges spinning again and building up enriched uranium suitable for Iran to build a nuclear weapon. The routine disavowal, “the United States is not seeking war with Iran” is unconvincing. War is, and has been, the default position of both Israel and the USA. And at the moment, on the trajectory set by President Trump, the USA or Israel will eventually undertake a military strike on Iran’s

nuclear facilities with dire consequences.

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10.7 Islam & Democracy in Sisi's Egypt

20/1/2020

President General Abdul Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt arrives in Britain today for the UK-Africa Investment Summit. In 2019 Egyptians voted in a referendum for an amendment to the 2014 new constitution enabling him to stay in power until 2030. Safeguards for religious minorities, notably Coptic Christians (10% of the population, the largest Christian community in the Middle East) remain, but discrimination against them continues while sectarian attacks go unpunished.

The Egyptian Arab Spring deposed the dictator, Hosni Mubarak. Then there was a brief period, 2012-2013, when Muhammad Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, became President after winning Egypt's first free and fair democratic elections as leader of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), formed on 21 February 2011. It was an important moment for Islamic democracy with which Christians with a tradition of Christian Democracy might find some sympathy.

For a brief while a *modus vivendi* prevailed between Morsi and key elements in the military. Then the military detained and charged him with terrorism. He later died of a heart attack in court during his trial. The Muslim Brotherhood which formed his Party was declared a terrorist organisation. Most of its first tier leadership were imprisoned, others went into exile. Many members have been killed or arrested and charged in Military and State Security

Courts. In protests against the military take-over in August 2013 Human Rights Watch believe up to 1,000 protesters in two of Cairo's main squares were killed in one day by Egyptian security forces and innumerable others wounded.

To all intents and purposes, for the last decade military power has prevailed whether overtly, or covertly. Or put in another way the elected Muslim Brotherhood never achieved full control of the state.

Beneath the stereotype of a conflict between a monolithic, unchanging "political Islam" and Western secular democracy lies a variety of different dynamics. The complexity of this Islamic story has been quickly lost as different interlocutors shoe-horn it into their narratives.

Religious experience is interpreted in different kinds of narrative. The experience of pious Muslim Brothers in Egypt is no exception. But there are some general lessons to be drawn. Fruitful, positive, development within religious traditions comes from an experience of encounter and dialogue. Most of the key leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood never experienced genuine dialogue; they were locked up long before they tried to form a functioning government.

Without agreeing with them, the religious ideas in play within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood deserve a measure of respect and understanding. People of all faiths want to see their values inform, and transform, the societies in which they live. Wars and political upheavals have in the past accompanied this quest or, at least, generated it. Christian democracy in Europe,

for example, came as a reaction to the dual totalitarianisms of Communism and National Socialism. It proved remarkably successful in Germany, significantly flawed in Italy. The nature and implementation of democratic politics has determined the contours and dynamics of the European Union, and Christian social and political thought has played a significant part in its origins.

Hope that the Arab Spring might also be a historic turning point, acting as mid-wife to political reforms and new forms of engagement with politics within Islam was dashed. For a time, a dialogue between a secular vision and a commitment to Islamic values in society seemed possible, as once Christian democrats imagined a future in a democratic post-war Europe. This neglected the different contexts in the Middle East and North Africa, out of which progressive change was expected to happen: polarised societies, social turmoil, revolutionary mobilisation and upheavals, sectarianism, military interventions, and the allure of religious extremism.

As a terrain of political activity, the state and civil society need to be considered together. Much of the discussion today amongst Muslims, as amongst Christians, works within this dual framework, considering appropriate ways of introducing a religiously motivated agenda about family life, social and economic justice, both nationally and internationally. People of faith behaving in – what might be deemed – a political way in civil society look different to a secular world from religious people seeking governance based on religious principles. Christian Democracy in Germany was religion-lite compared with the religious engagement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Though both were attempts to bring a religious heritage and values into governance by democratic

means.

Context and history matter. The Muslim Brotherhood inherited an authoritarian structure, and a leadership with closed ranks, after repeated periods of repression. Its social conservatives, inveterately cautious to ensure survival after periods in prison, had very limited experience of national government.

Authoritarian decision-making alienated most of its reformist leaders who found themselves marginalised. But, in terms of narrow electoral democracy, or at least the formation of a government representing majority opinion, the politics of the Muslim Brotherhood reflected popular views. Urban and rural poor were, in the main, comfortable with a patriarchal, socially conservative agenda in the name of Islam. According to an authoritative Pew Foundation survey, 85% of the population saw Islam as a positive force in politics. Within a year of Morsi's winning 13.2 million votes, 51.7%, of the total, he was overthrown by the military with widespread popular support .

The gradualist politics of the Muslim Brotherhood proved to be neither a monolithic bloc forcing conservative Islamic values on an unwilling majority, nor an effective carrier of a new Islamic democracy modelled on Christian democracy. Unlike Tunisia's Ennahda Party, it failed to confront a binary opposition between secular and religious worldviews by dialogue. It was several years from evolving into a modern political party with timely compromises and careful crafting of its public statements.

The abiding question was gradualism towards what? Above all it was impossible to know whether the commitment of individual leaders to democracy was merely tactical — or represented a serious evolution in Islamic political thought. Most likely, irrespective of intentions, the former was planting the seeds of the latter. Lumping the Muslim Brotherhood in a catch-all category “political Islam” that includes Da-esh and Al-Qaida – as often occurs - does not help analysis of its significance. Though internationally connected the Brotherhood differs from country to country. Its cruel fate in Egypt does not make General El-Sisi a welcome visitor.

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10.8 Iraq: Pope Francis’ Perilous Journey

25/2/2021

“Either we are brothers and sisters or we will destroy each other” said Pope Francis just a year ago. Next week the Pope will visit Iraq where the stark logic of his warning is tragically visible.

Popes began making visits outside Italy only in the 1960s. Such journeys are meticulously planned and tightly organised. But this journey must rate as the most dangerous. Last month in Baghdad where the visit begins two Da’esh suicide bombers attacked a market killing 32 and injuring scores of others. The military base in the airport of the Kurdish regional capital Erbil, also on Francis’ itinerary, recently came under rocket attack from an obscure Shi’a militia group, the Guardians of Blood, killing a contractor and wounding several American coalition forces. The Iraq government has negligible control over sectarian conflict.

Iraq has long been blighted by Sunni-Shi'a violence dating from disputes about leadership in the 7th century. Sunnis make up at least 85% of the world's Muslim population. The majority of Iraqis, 65% of its 39 million people, are Shi'a. As in Iran, their allegiance is to the family and descendants of the Prophet, Imam Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and Husayn, his martyred grandson. Sunni leadership, though, dates back to Abu Bakr, a close companion of the Prophet considered the first to convert to Islam and the first of the 'rightly guided Caliphs', the Rashidun. Over the centuries, further differences in beliefs, law and pious practice developed. Today religious identity still fuels sectarian political conflict throughout the Middle East. It intensified after the 2003 invasion.

For some time, the Middle East, with Iranian, Saudi and Trump's help, has been shaping up for its own Thirty Years War. Within Iraq the remnants of ISIS have used the pandemic to regroup even calling on adherents to catch the virus and infect the West. They hate Shi'a as much as they hate Yazidis, Jews and Christians. Not surprisingly Iraq's Christian population, formerly 1.5 million, has been reduced by emigration to possibly as low as 400,000. Those remaining feel like second-class citizens. This is the political and religious minefield into which Pope Francis will shortly be stepping.

What has impelled the Pope to undertake this hazardous journey? First, solidarity with Iraq's many displaced people and with its dwindling Christian communities. As well as Latin rite Roman Catholics, Iraq is home to ancient Christian Churches in communion with Rome, the Chaldean Catholic, Syriac Catholic and Maronites – who retained the original Aramaic spoken

by Christ himself as their liturgical language. In the Bible the Nineveh plain is the location of Abraham's home in Ur. Ninevah is the Babylon of Jewish exile. Francis is visiting the geography and roots of Christian faith.

Second, the Pope is committed to following the example of his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi in working for Muslim-Christian dialogue and reconciliation. A quarter of his foreign visits have been to Muslim majority countries. In Cairo in February 2019 he met with the Sunni Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam and former President of Al-Azhar University. From this meeting, and after much preparation, emerged the joint document Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, a manifesto for ending global conflicts. Given the dangers of sectarian wars, Shi'a leadership is an important element in the process.

So this time the Pope is scheduled to meet with Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani in Najaf, the Shi'a equivalent of Rome, a town of some million people south of Baghdad, the site of 'founding father' Imam Ali's tomb. Born in the Iranian town of Mashad, Al-Sistani studied jurisprudence in Iran's theological centre of Qom and, in 1952, moved to the pilgrimage site of Najaf in Iraq where he taught in the seminary. In 1993 he was formally recognised as a Grand Ayatollah, Marja, one of a tiny number of the most senior and respected clerics in Shi'a Islam. The rank of Marja means 'emulation of Islam'. Title holders are authoritative guides to understanding the Qu'rān and the Prophet's sayings, Hadith, and thus to living a fully Muslim life. Al-Sistani could bring many Shi'a Muslims to engage with the vision of Human Fraternity.

The Americans had reason to be grateful to Grand Ayatollah in 2005 when he mediated between them and the Shi'a militia led by the fiery cleric Muqtada al-Sadr besieging Najaf's Imam Ali Mosque. Al-Sistani had the personal qualities needed to lower the temperature: he was and is courteous and respectful of other people's opinions, he leads a simple life in an ordinary house shunning ostentation - not unlike Pope Francis himself. He also rejects violence, does not approve of the *velayat-e faqih*, the theocratic rule of the jurists in Iran, though he supports state promotion of Shi'a teaching. His interpretation of Qur'an takes into account, to some degree, the need to understand its historical context and Arab culture. But this does not make Al-Sistani a modern progressive liberal. He shares strict views about the relationships between young men and women with the Shi'a clerical class in general. No dancing outside marriage, modest dress code, plenty of prohibitions. Yet, his 2015 Advice to Believing Youth has more touching, tender and paternal wisdom in it than prohibitions. He is a jurist with deep pastoral concerns. There is clear water between him and the bellicose Iranian Supreme Leader.

Even amongst the Iranian clerics there is, of course, a spectrum of opinion though not a wide one. I remember listening through a translator in Tehran to Ayatollah Emami Kashani, head of Shahid Motahari University, denouncing Iranian youth for lack of piety and thinking this could be my parish priest in Galway in the 1960s. Ayatollah Kashani had initially impressed me, not to say puzzled me, when his translator described how he had talked with a 'rock-singer' during his visit to Rome. How very open-minded. The translator had misheard: the meeting had been

with Ratzinger, a Cardinal at the time but of course later Pope Benedict XVI.

When Al-Sistani and Pope Francis meet and talk with accurate translation, there could be a profound meeting of minds. Whether Human Fraternity can generate tolerance for and between the many religions of Iraq, including the cruelly persecuted Bahai's and Yazidis, remains to be seen. But it is clearly Francis' intention to create an opportunity for the healing of Iraq's wounds.

The Pope's schedule – worryingly – has been published well in advance. One of the stops is Mosul, formerly an ISIS stronghold retaken in a bloodbath by US and Iraqi troops but with ISIS remnants, sleeper cells, still lingering. No political leader would risk releasing such a detailed itinerary in Iraq so far in advance. This is a brave Pope. His safety during this journey should feature in bidding prayers in all parishes this Sunday.

See TheArticle 24/02/2021

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10.9 The Importance of Caring For Lebanon's Lost Generation **9/4/2021**

Parents in Britain are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their children's education and future. But at the back of our minds we know that the human damage of COVID is global, far more severe beyond wealthy

countries like ours. Our anxieties are as nothing compared with the fears of refugees living in poverty-stricken limbo who see no future for their children.

Lebanon with a population of 6.8 million shelters at least 1.5 million Syrian refugees, not counting the Palestinians who arrived much earlier. Transposed to the UK these figures would amount to a doubling in the populations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland plus a 50% increase in that of Greater London. Britain meanwhile sees taking in 20,000 Syrians through the UK Vulnerable Persons Settlement Scheme as a source of pride.

When we think of refugees' plight, or are reminded of it by TV coverage and the appeals of development agencies, usually shelter, clean water, nutrition and medical supplies come to mind, the vital immediate necessities to keep people alive. But we all know that in today's global economy, if we take education away from their children, refugees may live to see another day, may even one day be able to return to their homeland, but the future without an educated younger generation will be one of unremitting poverty, despair and possible conflict. For international donors humanitarian aid or provision of education should not be an either-or decision. Yet how often do we hear about the collapse of the educational systems in conflict countries such as Yemen, Somalia, and Syria and its inevitable results?

In 2019 and 2020, the economic situation in Lebanon went from bad to worse. The situation continues to deteriorate. Unemployment now is sky-high. The

Lebanese pound has dropped in value by more than 90 percent since 2019, bringing angry protesters no longer able to afford basic necessities back on the streets. Recent surveys put more than 50 per cent of the population below the poverty line. For Syrian refugees, the figure is even higher, with 83% living below the extreme poverty line. The Covid-19 pandemic and Beirut port explosion which killed more than 200 people - wounded more than 6,000 and displaced around 300,000 - added to an already disastrous economic and political situation. Large-scale popular protests led to the Prime Minister's and government's resignation.

Save the Children's recent report Spotlight on Lebanon puts the number of Lebanese school-age children at 660,000. Before COVID when schools were open only 21% of 15-17 teenagers attended school, 69% of the 6-14 age group. Among Syrian refugee children the numbers are worse; fewer than half of the 631,000 in the country have had access to formal, adequate education; unofficial figures indicate that some 180,000 children are working to support their families. The impact on what was formerly a modern private school system with high levels of attainment in science and mathematics, alongside a comprehensive state provision, has been catastrophic.

Before the pandemic, state schools dealt with overwhelming numbers by organizing morning and afternoon shifts with refugee children mainly attending in the afternoons. Since March 2020 schools, with short breaks, have been shut. And since then, at its best, Lebanese children have received eleven weeks of education, refugee children much fewer. Refugee families with very few exceptions can neither pay for Internet access nor laptops so absence from formal schooling, apart from NGO interventions, has meant no education at all. The first three

months of 2021 have perpetuated and deepened the continuing educational crisis.

Leaks of Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office budgetary plans suggest that an 88% cut to aid for Lebanon is being considered – with the vague possibility of some extra money possible from other UK government budgets. Given Lebanon’s strategic importance in the Middle East, such cuts would at best be remarkably short-sighted.

It was once true that the thriving private sector, dominated by Church-run schools, eased the pressure on the public sector. But no more. The impoverishment of Lebanon’s middle-class has drawn large numbers of children into already oversubscribed state schools. The strain on the system has in its turn pushed up the drop-out rate amongst vulnerable Lebanese children. So they join the children of Syrian refugees in whatever the charitable sector can provide by way of ‘after-school schooling’.

What is to become of the two past UK funding interventions in Lebanese education, started 2016-2017, the Reaching all Children with Education programme and the No Lost Generation Initiative? The former provided a grant of £106 million to the Ministry of Education & Higher Education. The latter a more innovative £93 million grant “to support the delivery of non-formal education and child protection for the most vulnerable out of school refugee children and children from host communities aged 3-18”. The kind of project that was, and is, desperately needed but now under threat from drastic cuts.

Public skepticism about overseas aid - and this is often forgotten by donor governments - springs partly from the public perception that aid is essentially Ministry to Ministry, government to government support. When a recipient government is in crisis, known to be failing, understandably pressures to cut aid ratchet up. But the non-governmental sector, NGOs and international NGOs, as in Lebanon often play a major role in education as well as humanitarian aid. Caritas Lebanon, for example, working through its Church network plays a vital role in the country. Smaller bodies offering a range of expertise, sometimes dismissed as 'sticking plaster' to highlight the higher profile strategic plans of government, can, and do play an important role. Better funding would enable this sector to increase their capacity. And despite last year's scandals, confidence in the probity of NGOs remains relatively high.

Strategic plans for the educational system are not the only part of the country's institutions that begin to fall apart in economic crisis. Banking comes to mind. But banking can be regulated and can soon be back in business. After a certain time, the blighted futures of a lost generation cannot be restored.

Lebanon now has an urgent need for the world to step up and help a country that has taken the greatest responsibility for helping refugees driven across their border by a terrible war. Countries whose youth are without hope for the future are prone to instability and conflict. The Middle-East and North Africa cannot afford another country with a lost generation.

See TheArticle 09/04/2021

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10.10 Afghanistan: The Enduring War

6/8/2021

As British and American forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan, many people would have been thinking of the families of troops who died there: 454 British deaths between 2001 and 2015 - when troops withdrew from combat operations - and 2,372 American deaths overall. Sorrow at the terrible death toll caused by the war amongst the Afghan civilian population during the last twenty years, (48,000 at least but this is only an estimate), is less often expressed.

The Taliban - the name means students – (of the Qur’ān), are closing in fast. People may remember in better times BBC reporting from Herat in Western Afghanistan now under siege and about the south western province of Helmand, a former hell-hole for British troops, facing the imminent fall of Lashkar-Gah its provincial capital. Future Afghan or US air-force bombing of civilian areas occupied by the Taliban means that more civilians as well as combatants will die.

Britain and America completed the withdrawal of their few remaining ground troops and contractors a month ago, leaving residual technical support only. Air support, operating long-distance now from the Gulf, is much reduced. The speed with which the Taliban moved into major cities, or emerged within them, was unexpected. There are reports of many displaced people moving into the capital Kabul. Journalists are risking their lives reporting from receding

front-lines. Accounts contradict each other. On the one hand there is the morale-boosting optimism of General Sami Sadat, former Afghan National Army Commander in Helmand, trained in both Germany and UK, claiming the insurgents will be beaten back by special forces. On the other there is the pessimism of Afghans themselves in threatened cities giving often contradictory accounts of the Taliban's rapid assumption of control and their brutal behaviour.

Hopes that the Taliban's ideology had mellowed since 2001 are over. There are reports of the savagery of Taliban assaults and the aftermath of their occupation of the first major urban areas – forced marriages to their fighters and executions of anyone associated with withdrawn foreign forces. If anything the Taliban's perverse interpretation of Islam has hardened since the beginning of the US/UK's Operation Enduring Freedom and the invasion of NATO coalition troops from 2001-2002.

It is difficult to remember that foreign intervention in Afghanistan was originally intended to destroy Al-Qaeda's safe havens there. This war aim required defeating and chasing the Taliban out of the cities. But this in turn led to a near impossible goal: a commitment to the long haul of building democracy, stability and a modicum of security in an alien, and poorly understood, social, ethnic, religious and political culture. The combination of cultural solidarity amongst ethnic Pashtuns who compose nearly half the population and predominate amongst the Taliban, anti-foreigner nationalism, and the quest for an imagined 7th century religious Caliphate, have for two decades sustained the Taliban as a guerrilla force which could not be dislodged. And in addition covert cross-border support from the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence

Directorate meant that the coalition faced into a very strong headwind. Iraq took up time, troops and resources that might have bolstered coalition efforts in Afghanistan. Trying to conjure a modern liberal democratic State into existence in one country was hubristic, in two at the same time was cruelly punished.

Surprise at the effectiveness of the current Taliban offensive is not the only misplaced reaction. Given the disappearance of active NATO military power in-country and the prospect of a victory for a powerful Islamic extremist organisation it was predictable that foreign extremists seeking a new caliphate would be drawn to Afghanistan. And likewise that these opportunist incomers would somehow believe that ‘Allah the merciful, the compassionate’ demanded first and foremost jihad and the subjugation of women. There was an obvious precedent. Al-Qaeda itself had been created from similar ‘martyrdom migrants’, mostly Arabs led by Abdallah Azzam and Osama bin Laden, sucked into Afghanistan to fight the occupying Soviets. In the 1990s it even had US support.

Afghanistan is a failed State, insecure, unstable and with little hope of democracy prevailing. It is marauding rival militias who should now be expected to emerge. It might seem that not a single coalition political objective has been achieved. But there have been successes. There are indications that the nearly 30% of the population who are urban-based, in the main, have different expectations of their government. Amongst them there is strong support expressed for the hoped-for democracy and stability promised by the USA. In rural areas under Taliban control hopes for cultural change, modernisation, are evidently weaker and seem far-fetched.

But it is important to remember the many Afghans who actively supported the allied cause. For them, on 29 July, President Biden got a bipartisan billion dollar support and assistance bill through Congress aimed at protecting those whose lives were in danger because of their work for NATO forces and the elected Afghan government. Already 8,000 US visas have been issued and the application process is being streamlined. The response of the British government to the danger threatening our own loyal ‘collaborators’ recently elicited expressions of ‘grave concern’ from 40 military chiefs, including six former heads of our armed forces. They questioned the rejection in the past three months of 500 asylum applications from interpreters, drivers, cooks and others who had worked for British military forces and pointed to the danger that such mean spiritedness would ‘dishonour’ the British armed forces. Their pleas, and those of their military advocates, ought not to go unheard in Whitehall and Westminster.

Was it worth it? The bitter judgement of bereaved relatives of soldiers, “no it wasn’t”, must be respected. But for almost twenty years some 14 million Afghani women and girls had the doors of education and participation in public life wedged open for them. Even as the doors are shutting we need to remember the many Afghan parents who want their daughters educated, they have not changed their minds and nothing can take the experience of education away from the young people who received it. Those who died fighting the Taliban gave their own futures so that girls and women through education could hope for and aspire to a better future. That is not a wasted life.

See TheArticle 05/08/2021

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Chapter 11

Israel-Palestine-Iran

11.1 Is Trump Promoting an Israel-Iran War? 18/4/2018

The dinner was formal but friendly; the hojjat-al-Islam sitting next to me in Tehran was explaining how the CIA planned 9/11. He was an educated man, one rank below ayatollah. It was 2003. Away to the West in Iraq bombs were dropping.

My diplomatic skills had been tested to the limits over a long day of discussions with Shi'a scholars. Before I could stop, I heard myself say "Nonsense". My companion's response was a long fit of coughing. "I'm sorry", he replied after a harrowing few minutes, "I was gassed during the war".

The hojjat-al-Islam was referring to the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. Saddam Hussein repeatedly used mustard gas, tabu, and later, another and newer organophosphate poison, sarin, on Iranian troops. At Halabja, he used it on his own citizens. By then Saddam Hussein was acting with impunity because Washington feared an Iranian victory.

In the early 1980s German firms supplied Iraq with an estimated thousand tons of precursor chemicals. As chance would have it, President Reagan's Special Envoy to the Middle East, Donald Rumsfeld, met Saddam Hussein on 24 March 1984. The same day the UN issued a damning report

on Iraq's use of chemical weapons. The US restored diplomatic relations with Iraq a few days later alongside support: notably satellite intelligence and War Credits. When the "righteous power" of the US was marshalled against Syria's chemical weapons, my dinner companion of 2003 came to mind.

I do not intend this reminder of unrighteous power past as a Putinesque jibe. After seven years of conflict the Syrian moral high ground is vacant. The governments of the USA, France and UK have just planted their flags on the moral summit. The dust has settled on three heavily bombed sites and the picture seems clearer. Such a circumscribed projection of power/symbolic intervention – presumably the storage facilities were empty, the research laboratories long since evacuated – represents progress. We want to limit the horror of war. To that end we deploy signals and understand symbols in its midst.

Recollections of Mr. Rumsfeld's past diplomacy are only to give historical depth to an explanation why Iran was the dog that didn't bark during the Allied attacks on Syria. Nor did it bark, at least not loudly, during the Trump Tweet-fest. A significant number of its citizens had suffered from chemical attacks themselves. The vast cemetery of the martyrs along the road to Ayatollah Khomeini's mausoleum keep the memory of the Iran/Iraq War alive. More contemporary, Iran's leaders have bigger fish to fry: the final Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 Geneva nuclear agreement, was, and is, under threat. And then there was the matter of the Israeli attack on 9 April on one of their Syrian drone bases with seven Iranian dead.

The Supreme Leader, Khamenei, true to character, called the Allied attack on Syria a crime and the USA, UK and French governments, criminals. Otherwise

the Iranian government's response was measured compared to the pantomime of Russian sabre-rattling and accusations. Though, as might be predicted, conspiracy theory ruled; many Iranians did not believe Assad was responsible for Douma. But the surprising official Iranian line that such acts would not benefit the USA in the region was the nearest Iran gets to constructive criticism.

It is now urgent that we build on the mutual advantage afforded by the Geneva nuclear agreement. The JCPOA is an outstanding multilateral diplomatic achievement. Iran, in its own view, has made risky and major concessions. I met secular-leaning university teachers who felt Iran had a national sovereign right to develop its own nuclear deterrent. It was a matter of pride and of fear. Iran has several unfriendly States with access to nuclear weapons as neighbours. There are only two ways of avoiding a nuclear armed Iran: either military strikes on nuclear facilities resulting in a major war, or the existing nuclear deal. And only US Secretary for Defense "Mad Dog" Jim Mattis seems to acknowledge this. The right-wing cabal that Trump is assembling around himself share his desire to wreck the agreement. On Iran Trump has strong Republican backing. Israel gets this message and Netanyahu will be tempted to authorise more major air strikes with incalculable consequences.

It is not easy to share Iran's perspective on the world. Its judiciary and human rights record are deplorable. But, as everyone knows, the USA associates with other countries whose record is no better, saying it hopes that their human rights record will improve over time.

Iran exerts considerable influence over Iraq. It has several Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps bases in Syria. Its pariah status, apart from vying for prominence in the Muslim world in opposition to Israel by supporting Hamas and Hezbollah,

is caused by expanding this defensive perimeter - creating supportive proxy forces. Yet Saudi Arabia has the same intentions in Yemen at no less humanitarian cost.

Iran today is a conflicted and politically divided society, more conflicted and divided than the USA. But it also has the potential for change. US policy currently undermines the Iranian progressives who need to see returns from the 2015 Geneva agreement, both economically and in terms of international acknowledgment of Iran's diplomatic potential in the Middle East.

The people who gain most from the current US policy are Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Major-General Qassem Soleimani, head of the special Quds forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and their supporters. They see the Middle East as a site of struggle between the Sunni majority and Shi'a minority with the old enemy, the USA, on the Sunni side, Syria as key to national security. Along with undermining President Rouhani, Trump plays into this narrative. We are in trouble when it is a died-in-the-wool militarist, General Jim "Mad Dog" Mattis who plays a moderating role in the White House.

To date, internationally, Iran's bark has been worse than its bite. The Trump Presidency risks reversing this order of things with catastrophic results.

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11.2 Will 14 May be Israel's Sharpeville?

21/5/2018

On 21 March 1960, a crowd of about 3,000 black South Africans gathered outside a police station in the township of Sharpeville, south of Soweto. They had come to protest against the pass laws and pass book which severely, and humiliatingly, restricted their freedom of movement. After a scuffle broke out and stones were thrown, the police opened fire, killing 69 people and wounding

some 180 others. Amongst the dead were children and people shot in the back.

Sharpeville was a turning point in international reaction to apartheid and led to South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth a year later. But now try this: Sharpeville was a deliberate provocation by the Pan African Congress (PAC) who organised the demonstration and who cared nothing for the possible bloodshed. The 300 or so police were defending the fence around the police station and had every right to uphold law and order and protect themselves. They did their best to minimise civilian casualties in self-defence. The South African State had every right to defend its citizens and its integrity against unruly threatening demonstrators.

I've elaborated somewhat to capture the key themes of the oft-repeated refrain. But, yes, if you find it convincing, you'd believe anything. And the apartheid regime was not believed.

There are reasons not to compare Sharpeville with the killing of some 58 Palestinians and the wounding of over one thousand protesting at the border fence separating Gaza from Israel on Monday 14 May. The circumstances were different: a conscript army did the killing not the police; the soldiers were on the receiving end of Molotov cocktails and other incendiary devices; the fence was a protective border and not a police perimeter, and, probably, a handful of armed men were using the mayhem as cover. But, like Sharpeville, the vast majority of protesters were unarmed civilians brought to their emotional limits by restriction of their freedom, humiliation, deprivation, and lack of control over their lives. Yet the killings in Gaza will not be a turning point in international relations with Israel.

And there are other differences between the Sharpeville and Gaza massacres: the PAC bore little resemblance to Hamas, and the Gaza protests had been

ongoing since the end of March involving tens of thousands of people. But this does not make the Israeli State's explanation for the 14 May killings more credible. The bombastic response, appeals to self-defence, protecting sovereignty and citizens, seems like the last gasps of a quest for legitimacy in a body politic where the oxygen of moral concern has run out.

This should not frame Israel as a solitary moral pariah from the rest of the international community. The refrain is far too common for that. The USA has just appointed a "penitent" exponent of torture as the head of the CIA. Its political leadership cannot really be said to lie because, like Netanyahu, Sisi, Putin, and Erdogan it seems to have lost any firm grasp on the concept of truth. Does anybody care anymore when accounts of the causes of events occupy the realm of fantasy?

Another strong reason for not talking about Sharpeville in the same breath as Gaza is that accusations of antisemitism will not be long in coming. Yet who benefits from such conflation of condemnation of the actions of the Israeli State with antisemitism? Not the thousands of Jews in Israel and around the world who deplore how the moral core of the Zionist vision is being hollowed out by Israel's contemporary politicians. Not those who care about the rich spirituality of Judaism bequeathed to Christianity and Islam, and see it being overlain by a preoccupation with the Israel-Palestine conflict in the public life of Boards of Jewish Deputies and comparable bodies in Europe.

To continue the comparison – which is admittedly anathema to the Israeli government: did young black radicals under apartheid also fail to distinguish between government and people? Yes, sometimes. There was some excuse. During the worst years of the 1980s, apartheid South Africa relied on a conscript army and on retaining the popular vote. So does the Israeli government. When bad

things happened you would hear people telling for example how “the Boers had killed a child in Soweto”, but you would also hear in more reflective moments “the System” being blamed.

Sharpeville galvanised international reaction to apartheid, and led to South Africa’s expulsion from the Commonwealth a year later. The Gaza massacre has resulted merely in widespread “concern”, a call by the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (IOC) for a protection force for the Palestinian territories, and a UN Human Rights Council investigation already discounted by the Israeli government. Sound and fury signifying not a great deal.

This will not be a turning point in resolving the conflict. There will be no new exclusion, no sanctions imposed, no initiative by the Israeli government to calm the situation, no attempt to negotiate seriously. On the contrary, with the opposite of restraint being modelled by the White House, the situation will get worse.

The Jesuit liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino, called El Salvador in the 1980s “a Crucified People”. The description fits the Palestinian people in their homeland today. Avraham Shalom, who was head of the Israeli secret service, Shin Bet, in the 1980s, ended an interview in the remarkable 2012 film, *The Gatekeepers*, by saying sadly that he had warned occupation “would make us cruel”. The now routine authorisation for live ammunition fire on protesters by the Israeli Defence Forces starkly bears out his warning.

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11.3 Letter to Benjamin Netanyahu**6/6/2018**

Prime Minister Netanyahu,

It's a shame you will never spend time in Iran. Isfahan is lovely; the Sheikh Loftollah Mosque and Nagsh-e-Jahan square exquisite. There used to be a McDonald's style motorway café just outside Qom you might enjoy.

When you look north from Tehran you see the beautiful Alborz mountain range. On the other side you dip down to the Caspian Sea. Good skiing for the wealthy elite. Good courting for young people wanting to avoid the eyes of the Islamic puritan State. Sad to see couples spring apart when they spot you then laugh when they realise you are not Iranian. Don't get me wrong, it is indeed a nasty and cruel regime, but with significant progressive countervailing forces that could still bring about change. A divided State that could go either way. Which way do you want it to go?

Iran, you may have noticed, has American troops across its border with Afghanistan, American access to airfields just across the border with Turkmenistan, nuclear Sunni Pakistan in the south-east, Russia with nuclear weapons in the north, Israel with nuclear weapons in the west. Have you ever wondered why they wanted the protection of a nuclear weapon?

But, of course, we learnt from you recently the existence of a nuclear weapons programme in Iran up until 2015. Big news. MOSSAD bagged a stack of old nuclear archives from a warehouse in Iran a little while ago, and there you were presenting on television your definitive case against Iran. What an amazing revelation! Before 2015, the Iranians were developing a bomb, not

telling anyone, not talking about it, threatening further proliferation. How can you trust a State that behaves like that?

Just a minute though, isn't that how Israel behaved when it developed its own nuclear weapons? And helped apartheid South Africa to do the same.

By the way, if the captured nuclear archives are such a deal-breaking revelation, why did Russia, China, France, UK, USA, Germany and the European Union (P5+1) spend so much time getting a closely monitored nuclear deal in 2015 (JCPOA) that halted uranium enrichment and development of a viable atomic bomb? What other reason did the P5 + 1 have for their long and tortuous negotiations than that Iran was creating the capacity for the development of a nuclear weapon. Come to that why are you clocking up air-miles trying to drum up support for the maverick American position of wrecking the agreement?

Iran is proudly nationalist and, amongst predominantly the less well off, devoutly Shi'a. It suffered terribly in the 1980-1988 war against Western-supported Iraq and, like Israel, has genuine defence concerns. Presumably MOSSAD has told you that that bullying Iran will strengthen the hardliners and Revolutionary Guards. And that the only alternative to the nuclear deal is, probably sooner rather than later, to risk a major military confrontation that could drag in super-powers.

Do you really want to take this risk? I know you are having a little bother with allegations of corruption and things are not looking too good for you. But I can't believe you are doing all this just to divert Israeli public attention. As a former soldier you will not have a romantic picture of war. You will know that war with Iran will cost many Jewish lives as well as Iranian, many more than the Yom Kippur war you served in. As a father and grandfather I hope

this weighs heavily on you.

I think our Prime Minister this afternoon will share some of your concerns about Iran's role in the Middle East, but I hope you listen to her about JCPOA. Try talking to your enemies as well as your friends. There are more ways of influencing people than killing them. One is diplomacy. I recommend it.

Yours sincerely,

A British Grandfather

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11.4 Framing Hamas

20/12/2018

Joseph Brickey(C) 2016 Doctors of the World Charity Christmas Card. Donate £10: text DOCTOR to 70660 Israel's conflictual relationship with Israeli Arabs, the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza lies at the heart of this year's prolonged and passionate argument about anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. More precisely it frames Jewish identity in the UK today and shapes the debate whether anti-Zionism is anti-Semitic. This contentious British domestic question relates to the foreign reality of life in the Gaza strip and Southern Israel and to Israel's role in major violent outbreaks in 2009, 2012, 2014, and during this year's border fence protests in which 170 demonstrators were killed. Most observers see Israel's reaction to the danger from Gaza as disproportionate. What then is known about the orchestrator of this threat to Israel's security, Hamas?

Tareq Baconi in his *Hamas Contained*, Stanford University Press, 2018, provides insights into Hamas' history, thinking and strategy. Hamas emerged

from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1987 as a radical Islamist movement in competition with the PLO. In the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas, deemed a terrorist organization by the USA with links to Iran, took 76 out of 132 seats, clearly beating Fatah with its 43 seats. This democratic victory threw an ill-prepared Hamas into government of Gaza (it lost control of the West Bank to Fatah) and triggered a debilitating blockade of the Strip by Israel. The USA under President G.W. Bush gave Israel the opportunity to place Hamas in the post- 9/11 frame by talk of a global war against terrorism. Bush used diplomatic, financial and military means to help Israel isolate the two million Palestinians living in the coastal territory, often described as the largest open-air prison in the world with its 70% youth unemployment, poverty and despair fostering attacks on Israel.

Since 2006, Hamas related groups have intermittently attacked southern Israel with rockets, and constructed tunnels to move vital goods in and out, as well as infiltrating fighters and suicide bombers to kill Israeli soldiers and civilians. Over time Israeli military retaliation aimed at curtailing Hamas' capacity to strike targets in Israel, dubbed "mowing the lawn", has become increasingly severe. In the course of 51 days, ending in late August 2014, Netanyahu unleashed Operation Protective Edge: aerial attacks on Gaza using F-16s, Apache Helicopters, dropping one ton bombs, followed by a ground assault into Gaza. Tareq Baconi writes that bombs struck housing, schools, hospitals, mosques and power generators, killing 2,200 Palestinians, 1,492 of them civilians and 551 of these children. "Within Gaza, eighteen thousand housing units had been rendered uninhabitable and 108,000 people were left homeless". During this same period there were sixty-six Israeli combat deaths and six civilians killed.

Baconi tells the complex, and evolving, story of Hamas' rise to power, its struggle with Fatah and the PLO, to its current containment within Gaza, whilst clearly explaining different strands of Palestinian thinking and ideology. He describes Hamas as defining its role, in contrast to Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, as a religiously motivated resistance to "Zionist" settlements inside the territory occupied by Israel after the 1967 war, and until recently, more generally to the wider Israeli occupation since 1948. Against the PLO, the internationally approved negotiator of the Oslo accords, derided by Hamas for achieving nothing, Hamas presents itself as the movement for liberation of the occupied territories.

Hamas frames itself as the - last - anticolonial movement comparable to the ANC's apartheid-era analysis of itself as fighting against Afrikaner "internal colonialism". In its own eyes and those of many Gaza residents, Hamas is conducting an armed struggle, or asymmetric warfare, for the land and soul of the Palestinian people against an overwhelmingly powerful military enemy, for the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

Because of his efforts to explain objectively, Baconi risks being accused of providing Hamas with historical legitimacy. That is clearly not his intention. Nor mine. But Hamas' interpreting the conflict in a frame of settler colonialism has as much, or as little, sense as the ANC's old analysis. Both conflicts could be described as resistance movements facing an opponent with a dramatically different level of coercive military power and different history of occupancy of the contested land. The Palestine-Israel conflict has the additional complexity of each side's ethnic identities and strong religious claims to a divinely mandated terrain. It is not called the Holy Land for nothing. Establishing new States did not work for "Christian nationalism" in South Africa. Baconi finds scant evidence of any ongoing commitment to the Oslo Accords or to peace-making

initiatives on either side. Pursuit of a Two State solution has come to nothing.

Hamas statements from its internal and external leaders, Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Meshal, quoted in the book, refer repeatedly to the enemy as “Zionists”. There is no mystery how some of the Labour Left have been accused of anti-Semitism. For them, rather than framing Zionism as one protagonist in a clash of nationalisms, the interpretation motivating the Oslo Accords, Zionism is the powerful last remnant of settler colonialism. This account of the singularity of the conflict is not necessarily anti-Semitic though it easily drifts into anti-Semitism. Most politicized South African young blacks whom I met in the 1980s referred to the “Boers” when they meant the South African security forces. A few were unsurprisingly anti-white. Some Labour Party members surprisingly, disgracefully, have crossed the boundary into anti-Semitism.

Baconi charts how Hamas’ strategy and tactics changed as facts on the ground changed, notably in the shifting sands of the Arab Spring in Egypt, and the leadership changes it brought, from Mubarak to Morsi, from Morsi to Sisi. But Hamas has retained its character as a nationalist Islamist movement despite persistent efforts to lump it with Da’esh and Al-Qaida – both of which it actively opposes. And the leadership has tacitly put aside a major ideological prop: the refusal to recognize the state of Israel. Given future flexibility, Hamas could move from ceasefire to meaningful negotiations given the right conditions.

Otherwise there are no grounds for optimism. Lives in southern Israel are insecure. Lives in Gaza verge on the insupportable. A humanitarian crisis beckons. Israel’s military power has entrenched rather than defeated resistance. Whether the Israeli government retains any vestigial desire for negotiation,

now the USA has de facto finally abandoned its role as peace mediator, remains to be seen. Baconi has written a courageous, if depressing, book. Future peacemakers would do well to read it.

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11.5 Iran's Revolution: 40 Years on

3/2/2019

Every revolution is different. But some, like the Iranian Revolution whose 40th anniversary falls this year, are more different than others. From a popular uprising against the pro-Western Shah and his secret police, SAVAK, there emerged an Islamic Republic led by Khomeini, an intransigent and brutal Ayatollah.

Forty years ago, the CIA was monitoring the Iranian Left but missed the significance of the Mullahs. They recognized its importance after the American Embassy had been sacked and hostages taken. Meanwhile Grand Ayatollah Khomeini returned from France to eliminate his secular compatriots in the revolution, as well as his religious opponents. Suddenly Shi'a Islam, or at least Khomeini's idiosyncratic confection of French revolutionary popular sovereignty and Islamic dictatorship, burst onto the international scene as a new threat.

Khomeini's rule by Shi'a jurists, *velayat-al-faqih*, was presented as a divine dispensation. Shari'a Law ordered society. Any evolution of the revolutionary process towards a more open society was slow, fragmented, subject to major challenges and reverses. Over the years, alongside the power of the Supreme Leader, backed by his Revolutionary Guards, grew a 'liberal' wing of Mullahs and lay politicians and civil servants. Ayatollah Hassan Rouhani, the current

President, is that wing's most recent leader. President Khatami, before him, followed much the same path.

In the midst of these internal conflicts, at the turn of the century, I participated for several years in - what I privately called "Six a side with the Ayatollahs" - formal dialogue and discussions with the Iranian Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue, part of the government-controlled Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation. The numbers on the Iranian side were sometimes more than six. The team was usually a mix of Muslim lay scholars and a Hojjat-al-Islam, a clerical grade one below Ayatollah. During one visit to Iran by a delegation from the Church of England, a key meeting was attended by a laid-back character wearing blue-jeans. He clearly outranked the Hojjat in the chair and turned out to speak fluent English. Intelligence service A further strand in the tangled national skein of power.

For us western visitors, what went on in Evin prison, the persecution of the Bahais, the severe consequences of conversion to Christianity, and all the other pervasive human rights violations, were difficult to square with the warm hospitality and the friendliness of our hosts. Our interlocutors seemed like academics anywhere else: keen to discuss the new French philosophers, particularly Foucault. I remember the hacking cough of a cleric next to me at dinner, who told me he had been gassed in the Iraq-Iran war. More touching were the young couples walking in the mountains which cradle North Tehran who, when they saw you approaching, sprang apart. All smiles, and hands held again, when they realized you were not Iranian.

There were funny incidents. The austere Ayatollah Emami-Kashani, who was leader of the Friday prayer in Tehran at that time, lamenting at length the fact that youth were falling away from religion. He fluffed his an-

swer when I asked if he ever talked to any youth. Maybe it was left untranslated. I didn't tell him how much like a Catholic bishop I knew in Galway he sounded. He told our bemused delegation through the translator with some pride that he had gone to Rome and met a "Rock Singer". It was some time later before I realized this was Ratzinger, the Cardinal, soon to be Pope.

Perhaps the most revealing incident of a further visit took place in late January 2006 after news of the Danish Jyllands-Posten cartoons of the Prophet, spun for maximum political effect, had just landed in Tehran. Our hosts had a prepared a statement for us to sign condemning the offence to Islam while praising Iran as the epicentre of interfaith dialogue and toleration. We were even told that the cartoons were now a compulsory item on the Danish schools' curriculum. We did not sign.

After this tense day my wife and I went out for a chilly evening stroll. There was almost no-one about. This was posh Tehran where women wore their headscarves so as to reveal the maximum amount of hair while escaping prosecution. And unlike poorer, industrial south Tehran, few women dressed all in black. But the streets were empty and dark. A car screeched to a halt. There were two youngish men in it. We felt nervous. The window came down. We braced ourselves. A growling bass voice said: "You are Welcome". For a moment the curtain which concealed the feelings of ordinary citizens had lifted.

I recommend that anyone formulating policy towards the Islamic Republic tries to tune in to each of the major contending forces within Iran. None of them have reason to trust Britain after British involvement in the CIA instigated coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. And, after the Iraq-Iran war, Iranians do not need to be told they have comprehensible national

security and foreign policy concerns. But Iran is capable of change and of conciliatory negotiation.

Despite the US withdrawal and sanctions, Iran continues to comply with the 2015 nuclear deal to forestall its development of a nuclear weapon, signed by the permanent members of the UN Security Council: UK, France, Russia, China plus Germany. The deal, made against the grain by Iran, is some measure of its potential for negotiation. Trump's and Israel's attempt to scupper this agreement is an act of culpable irresponsibility at a time of nuclear proliferation. It is a rejection of Iranian progressives and vindication of its militarist hard-liners.

President Rouhani took a great risk by settling for a nuclear deal and permitting intrusive monitoring. He has complied with the agreement's provisions. But he is undermined by Trump's policy which is frankly imperial in character as well as crass, and which vindicates the adventurism of the Revolutionary Guards. The question which arises, urgently now, is whether the USA can recognize and act upon the complexity of contemporary Iran. The choice is between fostering and rewarding those Iranians seeking evolutionary change, with due concern for national security, or encouraging those wedded to militarism and expansion of Shi'a influence through proxy wars in the Middle East.

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11.6 A US-Iran War? Don't Ask the "Moustache" 18/5/2019

"The American role in post-war Iraq actually will be fairly minimal": that was John Bolton, then US Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and

International Security Affairs, in late 2002. “Iran will not negotiate away its nuclear programme”: John Bolton a few weeks before the international nuclear deal signed in 2015. (He believed a military strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities was needed).

Bolton is a firm supporter of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), listed officially by the USA from 1997-2012 as a terrorist organization. He apparently sees this bizarre authoritarian “Muslim” cult as the future government of Iran once the ayatollahs are overthrown. Such were the views that lead to his appointment as National Security Adviser in April 1918 following the much decorated Lieutenant-General Herbert McMaster who opposed pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and lasted 13 months in the job.

In the Trumpian universe disdain for facts and poor judgement are qualifications for office. And since the future US Secretary of Defence, Patrick Shanahan, is at present only Acting Secretary until Senate confirmation, Bolton ‘the moustache’ has led on US policy towards Iran. An aircraft-carrier battle group and four nuclear-capable B 52s are on their way to the Gulf on Bolton’s advice, and an Iran battle-plan updated with provision for 120,000 US troops sent to the region.

John Bolton who has been pushing for a military strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities for over a decade, himself has avoided any experience of war – in Vietnam - by opting for a few months service in the national guard. He has no in-depth experience outside the USA let alone in the Middle East. If he had seen the acres of graves along the road from Tehran to Ayatollah Khomeini’s large mausoleum, he might have reflected that after the Iran-Iraq war the senior ranks of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps would be experienced and tenacious in battle. He might also have perceived the sig-

nificance for US diplomacy of the deep divisions over the velayat-e-faqih, the rule of the Shi'a clerics. If Bolton had put aside for a moment his belligerence, and contempt for the United Nations, he might have understood that tearing up the Iran nuclear deal, JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed 15 July 2015), a hard-won international treaty, thus punishing President Rouhani for his compliance, played into the hands of Iran's own extremists. Rouhani has complied with the world's most comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency verification regime to date. The IAEA reported on Iran's nuclear facilities and production of enriched uranium on ten occasions since 2015 and verified that Iran is compliant. Rouhani took a considerable risk in signing JCPOA. He was rewarded by the US ruining the Iranian economy by ever more effective sanctions. His position has been undermined.

What is the risk now of a major war breaking out between Israel/USA and Iran? Firstly, the two key military leaders, US General Kenneth McKenzie, CENTCOM (Central Command) Commander for the Middle East region and Major-General Hossein Salami, head of the Revolutionary Guards, are both new to their jobs, appointed only a few weeks ago; both need to prove themselves in their new roles. Salami says that Iran stands "on the cusp of a full-scale confrontation". McKenzie threatens Iran with "an experienced, ready, battle hard force with the best equipment and training in the world". Each side has branded the armed forces of the other as a terrorist organization. Rhetoric from both sides, at the moment, but dangerous rhetoric.

On the plus side, neither the US military nor Israeli Intelligence services are keen on plunging the Middle East into a further war which might close the Strait of Hormuz to vital oil supplies. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, has

made it clear the US does not want war. General David Petraeus, former head of the CIA and CENTCOM, and Meir Dagan, former MOSSAD chief, neither insignificant voices, have made it clear that they think a military strike on Iran would lead to a regional conflagration. President Trump has on a number of occasions broadcast his intention to bring home US troops from the Middle East, to avoid another Iraq-type war, and has recently asked President Rouhani to give him a call.

Trump believes that increasing sanctions pressure on the Iranian regime by finally blocking its oil exports, together with his miraculous deal-making skills, will solve the Iran problem. But the problem has become of his own making: rejection of an international treaty signed by the USA and five permanent members of the UN Security Council: Russia, China, France, UK plus Germany and the EU. The pressure this put on President Rouhani, who is beset by supporters of the Supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has pushed him into threatening minor violations of the treaty. For the moment we are in a classic smoke-and-mirrors game.

John Bolton as Under-Secretary for Arms Control was adept during the prelude to the Iraq War at politicizing and manipulating intelligence on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion. Recent news feels like an action replay: vague reports of new Iranian threats to the US in Iraq, denied by Major-General Chris Ghika, the British deputy head of Operation Inherent Resolve (US-led against Da'esh in Syria and Iraq); a background of Revolutionary Guard activity in Syria and Iraq together with Iranian support for Hamas in Gaza and Hizbollah in Lebanon. And what should we make of those "sabotaged ships" in UAE waters, reminiscent of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 – the supposed attacks by North Vietnam on the USS Maddox - used to justify the deployment of US conventional forces in

a war against North Vietnam? Or was Iran sending a “message” about oil sanction? A surfeit of rhetoric and politicized intelligence can lead to war by accident.

A senior adviser to President Rouhani, Hesameddin Ashena, recently tweeted President Trump: “You wanted a better deal with Iran. Looks like you’re going to get a war instead. That’s what happens when you listen to the moustache”. All part of the game. But with someone as erratic and unfocussed as Donald Trump, who most commentators believe is genuinely no warmonger, it is a game in which miscalculation can happen.

Bolton has stayed true to form: he has now overreached himself. Trump is de-escalating. But the likelihood, expressed in an earlier blog, that the USA’s ever closer relationship with Israel may encourage an Israeli military strike on Iran, alongside its current bombing in Syria, remains a danger.

See also "Thanks to John Bolton Iran could be standing on the cusp of full scale confrontation" [The Article.com](#)

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11.7 For Anti-Zionism Read Anti-Semitism?

4/12/2019

Secular States like religion to be a private matter. Religious leaders are perennially warned “not to meddle in politics”. So how come the Chief Rabbi writing in *The Times* last week, widely described as ‘unprecedented’ in his attack on the leader of a political party campaigning in a general election, didn’t receive the customary treatment? The simple answer is the intervention came from the leader of Britain’s Orthodox Jews, and, however outspoken the attack on

the Corbyn Labour Party by Ephraim Mirvis, it expressed genuine concern that was widely considered legitimate.

More can be said. The charge of anti-Semitism that has bedevilled the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn, emerged in the context of denunciations of Israel felt as a threat by British Jews. For many, the land, Eretz Israel and the State of Israel, are at the same time both a cherished theological and political reality. Many view their future looking back over the rim of an historic abyss, the Holocaust. This is not a place for measured conversation. Least of all when the other interlocutors denounce the human rights violations of the State of Israel. These have been shocking: for example when live fire from Israeli troops at the Gaza border killed over fifty Palestinian demonstrators with 1,000 hurt on 14 May 2018, many with life changing injuries. Events such as these are known to increase incidents of anti-Semitism.

The term “Zionism” lies at the intersection of radical disagreement and profoundly conflictual positions centred on the right to self-determination. Neither side in the war of words bothers to define what is meant by Zionism nor notice there have historically been several brands. So the word itself has become an empty container to be filled positively, indicating the State of Israel and Jewish redemption, or pejoratively, indicating State Terrorism and Jewish culpability. By elision with – one kind of - Zionism, anti-Semitism rears its ugly head. And ‘Zionism’ then moves to the centre of highly charged debate and becomes a word so tainted by accusations that it is a disguised anti-Semitic term wise speakers avoid using it.

I have had some experience of how such a process happens. During the last decade of apartheid regime in South Africa, the young black ANC supporters with whom I was acquainted would often report killings by the South African military, a conscript army like Israel's, as "the Boers have killed ...". I may have done the same myself. Were we being racist when we spoke of the Boers? Shorthand? Sometimes perhaps. In more reflective moments the words used were "the system" was blamed. Is all British anti-Semitism the result of elision of this kind? No. But quite a lot of it is on the Left and in today's Labour Party, I suspect. That does not make it any the less insensitive or troubling. And just to be clear I'm not claiming that Israel is a facsimile of the 1980s apartheid State, just saying that words can become freighted with racial significance while having a purely descriptive political-historical meaning.

Full-frontal Anti-Semitism has not gone away. Think of the Nazi-style cartoon put up in Tower Hamlets, which the Council had removed. Jeremy Corbyn supported the artist, without bothering to look at the cartoon properly, so he claimed in a later apology. Jewish MPs have been 'hounded out' of the Party. Is it any surprise the Jewish community is worried? Anti-Semitism remains a persistent theme of the extreme Right. There have been repellent versions of it from the Left in social media.

What exactly has been going on in the Labour Party will emerge but after the Election. We have to wait for the report from the independent Equality and Human Rights Commission enquiry. A variety of anti-Semitism has clearly manifested itself within the Labour Party: often in the form

of sometimes passionate, sometimes sententious, support for the Palestinians, or in careless use of social media. And with an uncontrolled influx of some 400,000 members to the Party, the number of such cases has mounted up. Here the weakness of Corbyn's leadership becomes obvious. Weeding out offenders started too slowly and took too long. The buck stops at the top. Mr. Corbyn was never going to be given the benefit of the doubt.

Given all this, does it make Mr. Corbyn himself anti-Semitic? The Chief Rabbi justifiably worries about the soul of Britain, but the warning about looking into men's souls, Mr. Corbyn's soul anyway, should apply. Better to focus on what he has, and hasn't done. He has clearly shown a lack of political and prudential judgement, with little empathy for Jewish feelings and sensitivity to the impact of their historical experience.

Fellow religious leaders, sensitive to the growing persecution of religious minorities around the world, have shown Rabbi Mirvis great solidarity. The Archbishop of Canterbury underlined the "deep sense of insecurity and fear" in the Jewish community. But the Chief Rabbi risks being seen, inappropriately for a religious leader, as overly politically partisan.

It might be wise for him now to give an equally timely warning to Mr. Johnson. The following wisdom from the Talmud recommends itself as good counsel: "The liar's punishment is that even when he speaks the truth, no-one believes him".

See The Article 03/12/2019

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11.8 Trump & Iran: What Next?**17/1/2020**

The shock of Qasem Soleimani's assassination has passed. The commentators have chewed it over in measured or apocalyptic tones. The remnants of his body have been buried. Even his death cost lives, those of the mourners crushed at his funeral. Iran duly fired missiles into two large American air-force bases in Iraq to honour the deceased; in the aftermath 176 lives were lost as Revolutionary Guards shot down a Ukrainian plane by mistake. What have we learned? What comes next?

On the American side, a diagnosis of the US President's mental state, sociopathic narcissism, has gained in credibility. Nothing inconsistent with that in the last few weeks. Mr. Trump has a need to draw attention and adulation to himself from his adoring Republican base. Hence the drone-strike outside Baghdad. Hence the promise of war crimes avenging a litany of Iranian-backed killing, and those hostages taken by Iranian revolutionaries some forty years ago. Behold the great timeless Warrior-Defender fierce in anger. But, at the drop of a few Iranian missiles, the Great Defender turns into the Great Deal-Maker, the peace-seeking statesman flanked by rows of grim generals weighed down with medals and the need to look fierce and peaceable at the same time. And hence the bullying of an ally to comply with his misguided policy towards Iran and tear up international agreements. The wonders of the consistency of inconsistency as strategy. Can we expect a future call to Rouhani for a Geneva meeting?

On the Iranian side we have Ayatollah Khamenei's variations on 'Death to America' alongside a diplomatic attempt by the Iranian Foreign Minister to draw a line under tit-for-tat acts of aggression. Despite the cruelty, theocracy and the theology of martyrdom of the Shi'a clerics who are in power, Iran's policies have a cold rationality. The overwhelming military advantage of the USA was reflected in the calibrated and limited nature of Iranian military retaliation.

It would be a mistake to imagine that this limited response indicated cowardice or that Iran's "stepping down", as Mr. Trump called it, indicated defeat and abandonment of Soleimani's foreign policy of defence by proxy-aggression. The vast acreage of war cemetery along the road from Tehran to Ayatollah Khomeini's mausoleum, with their poignant photographs of the deceased, the terrible death toll of the Iran-Iraq war, tell a different story: a nationalism hardened by a history of foreign control and invasion into a dreadful level of human sacrifice. A Hujjat-ul-Islam sitting next to me at dinner in Tehran, breaking into a harsh, hacking cough, reminded me of how apt the comparison was between Northern Europe 1914-1918 and Iran 1980-1988. "I was gassed in the war", he said in an offhand explanation. And the gas chemicals had come from Europe while support for Saddam Hussein had come from the USA.

Many Iranians will place Soleimani's death within the Shi'a worldview in the religious context of martyrdom. Others wanting to see an end to the velayat-al-faqih, clerical rule (by legal experts), will place his assassination in the context of Iran's history, a proud Persian culture and now a fervent, secular nationalism. For Soleimani was, after all, a hero of the Iran-Iraq war. Trump

can speak of the American hostages taken in 1979. Iranians can speak of the UK and US-instigated 1953 coup that deprived Iran of democracy under Mossadegh, and the Shah's torture chambers. History and Religion matter. Neither Trump's strong points.

The country has effectively two – interacting - parallel governments with President Rouhani seeking negotiation and reform and the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards opposing any compromise. There are Iranian clerics, even in the throbbing heart of clerical Qom, who have come to see the adoption of political office as the poisonous root of corruption and want out of politics. The streets of Iran fill up intermittently with citizens who want freedom from the Puritanism, cruelty, human rights violations and foreign adventures of the clerical regime, only to be gunned down and imprisoned.

The path to reform is long and hard. US intervention under Trump, giving the Revolutionary Guards a martyr and national hero, thwarting the considerable achievements of the JPCOA nuclear negotiators and making Rouhani look like a naïve fool, undermining his government with devastating sanctions, have blocked this path for a long time to come. The great strategic thinker is gone. The strategy survives.

There are three ways things can go. Business as usual: continuing chaos in the Middle East with growing Iranian desperation at sanctions and a grim determination not to be one of the only military powers in its region that lack nuclear weapons. JPCOA was a deal reneged on by the US, not by Iran; it was essentially a matter of 'we'll end sanctions if you end the uranium enrichment required for nuclear warheads'. Trump was determined on personal

vengeance to reverse anything Obama had achieved. Or there is preferred path of the Washington hawks, Netanyahu, and the US military-industrial interests who seek more and more pressure and provocations that risk triggering full-scale war. Or there is what Trump pledged and Iran wants: to get troops out of the Middle East's wars, and Iran's reformers to gain in prestige. Lets hope Trump's narcissism is best served by being the Great-Deal Maker.

See TheArticle.com "Iran: What Next? 07/01/2020

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11.9 The Trump-Netanyahu Plan: Recipe For Violence? 5/2/2020

Explaining the Trump-Netanyahu 'Peace-to-Prosperty' plan last week, the White House made a revealing point: past failure to recognise political reality distorts contemporary perceptions. Hence the call for everyone to wake up and acknowledge the real state of affairs in Israel-Palestine. Or, more succinctly, to agree Might is Right. What seemed surreal in this travesty of a peace plan was simply 'the new real' of Realpolitik.

We inhabit a global landscape in which considerations of morality or international order are being discarded as utopian visions. The flagrant disregard of the rights of Palestinians to genuine self-determination, to anything resembling normal statehood, the legalising and entrenchment of Israeli contempt for UN Resolutions and international law, are today barely considered worthy of comment by Western governments, let alone robustly denounced. Have we become inured to injustice, terrified of the charge of anti-Semitism, guilty bystanders,

watching the values shoring up the infrastructure of our international order daily eroded?

Not so the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, a body including the region's Roman Catholic bishops and patriarchs of the ancient Christian Rites in communion with Rome. Their reaction to the plan was straightforward. "It does not give dignity and rights to the Palestinians. It is to be considered a unilateral initiative, since it endorses almost all the demands of one side, the Israeli one, and its political agenda. On the other hand, this plan does not really take into considerations the just demands of the Palestinian people for their homeland, their rights and dignified life". They foresaw the consequences no less clearly: "The plan will bring no solution but rather will create more tensions and probably more violence and bloodshed". That is the truth of *Might is Right*.

Trump doubtless learnt at his father's feet that *Might*, understood as money plus power, is *Right*. And when it comes to the Palestinians, "losers" in his vocabulary, Trump the Peacemaker presents it as "the deal of the century". Of course the mature political Trump would also be hearing the voice of a core element of his voter base: 81% of US Evangelicals who support him, many of whom espouse Christian Zionism, the belief that the State of Israel is the fulfilment of biblical prophecies, and, for some, the sign of the End Times. A much smaller percentage of American Jewish voters support Trump's current policy and are uncritical of Israel's human rights record.

Trump's motivations are complex. But he thinks like a politician who knows

from experience how important big blocs of ethnic and religious votes can be in winning the next Presidential election. He may even have hopes of a Nobel Peace Prize. That Obama got there first will rankle with him.

The Trump-Netanyahu double-act in Washington on 28 January was a chilling performance. Netanyahu gloating and thundering that the USA not only rejected the illegality of Israeli settlements in contravention of UN resolutions, but that the legality of his “facts on the ground” were now recognised in a formal peace plan.

The Arab League meeting in Cairo on Saturday rejected the plan; it did “not meet the minimum rights and aspirations of Palestinian people”. In the words of B’Tselem, the Jerusalem and Washington-based Human Rights Group, Palestine was to be reduced to the structure of a Swiss cheese: “the cheese being offered to the Israelis and the holes to the Palestinians”. The annexations would become permanent features enabling the total encirclement of 15 Palestinian enclaves by the exclusive Jewish Religious/Ethnic State and its military. Job done for Netanyahu.

Peace, it is often said, is in everyone’s interests. But peace in this ‘peace plan’ means that the Palestinians, in exchange for a promise of a large cash injection, would have to accept greater fragmentation of their territory than the Bantustans of former apartheid South Africa. It is well known to most peace negotiators that offering money, \$50 billion apparently on the table, in exchange for compromising core religious values, in this case the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome on the Rock, and Jerusalem itself – not some

grubby suburb - as the Palestinian capital, will be regarded as a profound insult. People's religious values are not for sale. Far from this being a peace plan, it is a knock-out blow to future dialogue, and most likely the beginning of a prolonged insurgency in the fashion of South Africa from the 1960s to 1990s, resulting in a single rather than a two-state 'solution' as the outcome.

Sometimes an event sharpens our perception of a whole period. It is a truism that domestic politics are always a dimension of foreign policy decisions. Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement in the 1930s was a direct response to British public opinion as much as an expression of British government concern for international order. But it is rare for a major piece of foreign/international policy to be entirely for domestic consumption in the manner of this Trumpian 'peace-to-prosperity plan'. This does not stop it doing irreparable damage to future peace processes in the region. As the Catholic bishops wrote, to ignore the human dignity and the rights of the Palestinian people is not a peace plan but a recipe for growing violence.

See also [TheArticle 05/02/20](#)

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11.10 Art as Identity: What Iran Teaches Britain 10/7/2020

Persia figures strongly in Western Europe's imagination. We know it as an ancient great Middle Eastern Empire, the liberator of the Israelites, the enemy of the Greeks. And a coup planned and executed by Britain and the USA

against its Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, ensuring enmity for decades.

My own first experience of Iran's political culture was as a member of a delegation. The meeting was to negotiate the restoration of some property confiscated after the 1979 revolution. It took place in Tehran. A senior Hujjatu-l-Islam, one rank below Ayatollah, was presiding. We sat in a half-circle. Respectfully we focussed our well-rehearsed brief on him, though he wasn't forthcoming. The occasion was stiff and formal. All were smartly dressed. Except that is for a man in his thirties in jeans lounging opposite me.

Translation slowed discussions. We were getting nowhere when suddenly, the lounge straightened up and in near perfect English explained how we needed to understand that this was a difficult and sensitive subject. And so on. I assumed he was from the intelligence services. We'd been addressing the wrong part of the Iranian governmental system.

The second was when the Iranian embassy in London invited me to visit them. I'd published an article on Iran. I thought it had been balanced: human rights violations mentioned alongside the Iranian casualties in their fight against the drugs trade. To lighten the story I'd ended with my failure to find two newly announced traditionally dressed Iranian dolls, male and female, in the Tehran bazaar. There were only Barbies whom these new, official, dolls were meant to replace.

I was ushered into a very large hall furnished only with a table and a pot of

flowers where I assumed the microphone was placed - and two chairs. Here I was gently upbraided for my article's 'typical' anti-Iranian attitude, with sighs at how Iran suffered from such misunderstandings. I awaited my 'entry-refused' papers. Instead my host reached under the table, produced Sara and Dara, the two official Iranian dolls wearing traditional Persian dress and presented them to me. Wrong again.

I remembered the traditional dolls when I watched Samira Ahmed's wonderful recent three part series, *Art of Persia* on BBC4. Remarkably she had got permission to film in Iran and had criss-crossed the country in pursuit of its pre-Islamic as well as Islamic cultural heritage. I felt resentful that on our officially guided visits we had only seen Isfahan's beautiful central square with the exquisite early 17th century Shah (Abbas) Mosque (renamed Imam Mosque). We had to insist on visiting the Armenian Christian community in Isfahan's Jolfa quarter. Official visits and delegations were tightly controlled by the Iranian government.

Art of Persia revealed an Iran that I'd missed by talking just to Shi'ite scholars, especially the poetry. Poetry above all has sustained Iranians' sense of themselves as a nation with their own moral and cultural priorities. Ferdowsi's national epic poem *Shahnameh*, written between 977-1010 is Persia's founding epic and intended to be so. Its mythical and semi-historical stories of Persia's heroic kings and princes like Rostam and Sohrab, their failings and successes, the epic battles before the arrival of Islam, are both reading for generations of children and performed in public for adults. Wonderful new editions of the *Shahnameh* illustrated by miniaturists in stunning detail and colour followed. They established minia-

ture painting as one of Persia's artistic jewels, a tradition that lives on today.

As seen through the eyes of Samira Ahmed, Persia produced at least one outstanding poet per century. Omar Khayyam, who died in 1131, came from a major centre of Zoroastrian religion, Nishapur. His *Rubiyat*, well known in the West after Edward Fitzgerald's translation in 1859, touched much of human experience, fear, regret, doubt, and the need to escape from the quest for material pleasures. Saadi, 1210-1291, born in Shiraz, wrote in the same national tradition. His *Bustan*, *The Orchard*, illustrates virtues such as justice, modesty, magnanimity, and contentment, and has been compared to La Fontaine's fables. *Golestan*, *The Rose Garden*, has chapters on love and youth, on weakness and old age and on the advantages of silence. In the 14th. Century comes Hafez who lauded the joys of love and wine and targeted religious hypocrisy.

President Obama quoted Saadi in a video message on Iran's national day, Nowuz, in 2009: "The Children of Adam are members of a whole, since in their creation they are one essence" (there are numerous translations). President Rouhani tweeted the same message at Nowuz in 2014. Was there mutual understanding of this cultural signalling. Who knows?

Art of Persia highlights the staying power of Persian identity derived from its culture. Rulers might change, Mongol hordes from the steppes might conquer, but all at some point had to come to terms, to assimilate themselves to some degree, to become Persian. The last Shah, Mohammad Reza Palavi, both mistrusted and tried to use this cultural heritage. In 1967,

he staged a lavish party to celebrate his crowning as Shahanshah, King of Kings, Cyrus the Great's title 2,500 years ago, liberator of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. Iranians were not amused. Punished by opposition from a pious Shi'a community to his social reforms, and hated because of the torturers in his intelligence service, SAVAK, he paid the price twelve years later. The austere, avenging puritan Ayatollah Khomeini returned.

Iran today is a divided country, divided by the required strictness of religious adherence, most notably between rich and poor, with young and old rejecting puritanism and the repression of the velayat-e-faqih, the rule of the clerics. If you think you understand the complex interactions within government and civil society between Iran's powerful nationalism, religion, poetry and culture, you are almost certainly wrong.

And do we really understand our own society and cultures? Art of Persia carries some lessons here. Poetry and the Arts configure the soul of a nation. The BBC produces outstanding cultural programmes with two types of presenter, the Mary Beard expert and the Samira Ahmed journalist both bringing a passionate engagement to their task. The BBC is a great promoter of our own Arts. Rishi Sunak's £1.57 billion life support for our Arts, large and small, national and local, is timely. It will play an important part in our nation's recovery.

See TheArticle 10/07/20

11.11 Iran: New President, Bleak Future**20/6/2021**

Iran's elections and their result – a decisive victory for Ebrahim Raisi - open a worrying new chapter in the country's history. They demonstrate the failure of US sanctions policy. Failure, that is, if the intention was to force Iran to become a more amenable member of the international community. Trump ended all hopes of that by renegeing of the nuclear treaty and imposing devastating sanctions. The window of opportunity for Iranians to loosen theocratic repression, the promise of outgoing President Hassan Rouhani's two terms, has closed.

The political legacy of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1979 revolution is a strange, indeed unique, hybrid of clerical rule under a Supreme Leader operating through his Guardian Council, and the institutions of popular sovereignty with an elected Parliament and President. Iran developed parallel political systems, two sets of hands on the tiller, two political elites. But it is the clerics within the religious system, elbowing their way to economic and political power, eliminating their rivals in a fashion reminiscent of the French revolution, vetting access to key public office, who have retained ultimate control. Distinguished service in the revolution, in the terrible Iraq-Iran war from 1980-1988 and within the Supreme Leader's Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), or links to the new State's founder and Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, open the way to membership of this clerical power club.

But the USA and the UK underestimate the influence of history on their relations with Iran. The Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in August 1941, forcing the German-leaning Prime Minister, Reza Shah Palavi to resign, set a

precedent. The UK/CIA coup of 1953 got rid of Prime Minister Muhammad Mosaddegh, a reformist offering hopes of a democratic future who had the audacity to nationalise the Anglo-Persian Oil Company – later BP. The coup brought to power the last Shah. The West supported him and his SAVAK torturers against Iranians seeking change. And lastly, as a reaction to the hostage crisis during the revolution, the West backed Saddam Hussein and Iraq against Iran, a war which cost an estimated one million Iranian lives.

When you travel from Tehran to the great mausoleum for Ayatollah Khomeini you pass acres of war cemeteries filled with the graves of young men, the ‘martyrs’ of the Iran-Iraq war, poignant photographs on their head-stones. When you meet anyone over-sixty a persistent cough is not a symptom of COVID but a long-lasting effect of Saddam Hussein’s mustard gas whose chemical precursors came from European factories. Yet ordinary Iranians well able to distinguish between governments and their citizens show visitors the customary warmth and hospitality of the Middle East.

Iranians today are living, and have been living, under a sanctions regime so severe it amounts to a form of war on the civilian population. An attack less damaging only than outright warfare itself. Soraya Lennie in her recent book *Crooked Alleys Deliverance and Despair in Iran* tells the stories of individual lives interwoven with the changes in the revolutionary regime. Her account of the daily pressures of sanctions, desperate relatives travelling to the United Arab Emirates to buy vital medication, Iran’s civil aviation falling apart for want of spare-parts and new airplanes, targeted assassinations by Israel and the USA, spiralling inflation, unemployment, protest and harsh repression,

illuminates daily life and brings us close to the experience of ordinary Iranians.

Sanctions are a double-edged sword. They generate economic crisis which heightens popular resistance to government in Iran just as it would anywhere. The Arab-Spring-like ‘Green Movement’ of dissent, suppressed in 2009, brought two to three million onto the streets. Its leaders remain under house arrest. But the impact of sanctions also strengthen the hand of the hardliners looking for any stick with which to beat political leaders promising even the mildest of reforms. The volume of chants ‘death to America’ increase and contact with US diplomats and the West become almost treasonable. In the delicate balance between the two political systems, theocrats and reformist pragmatists, the reformists lose out. Before the elections, the Monitoring Agency of the Supreme Leader’s Guardian Council was able to disqualify all but seven of the 592 proposed names. Theocracy selects then democracy elects the selected. For this reason many, despairing of change, have shunned the polls or spoiled their ballots.

It is widely assumed that the victorious Sayeed Ebrahim Raisi has his sights set on becoming Supreme Leader when 82 year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with whom he is close, dies. At the moment he is only a Hojjat-al-Islam, a rank below Ayatollah. In the 1980s and 1990s he was Tehran’s deputy-prosecutor. A junior member of the ‘Death Commission’ he was complicit in mass executions that went on for five months in 1988. Thousands of imprisoned Mujahedin-al-Khalq (Iranian revolutionaries who supported Iraq in the war), members of the communist Party, Tudeh, and other political prisoners were shot or hanged. For this reason he is amongst

those personally sanctioned by the USA, complicating further future relationships.

The new President was born in the holy city of Mashhad, site of the important shrine of Imam Reza, the seventh Imam of Shi'a Islam and descendant of the Prophet. In 2016 Raisi gained control of its bountiful bonyad, a Shi'a charitable foundation, a 'sprawling for-profit conglomerate' worth at least \$15 billion, controlling thousands of businesses, thus advancing his religious and networking credentials. Since his defeat in the 2017 elections, Raisi has used his Mashhad base in the Ravasi-Khorasan Province of North East Iran to stir up opposition to Rouhani. Significantly, the Supreme Leader, who also controls the judiciary, made him Chief Prosecutor in 2019.

Negotiations on the nuclear treaty (JPCOA) opposed by the US Republicans, Netanyahu's Israel and the Iranian hard-liners, will not get easier. The five European signatory States to the treaty gamely tried to tread water, but their banks and big businesses were too frightened of repercussions from Trump's America to risk continued trading with Iran. Raisi described the 2015 treaty positively as 'a national document' while campaigning in 2017 and supports its re-establishment. On the one hand, he badly needs sanctions lifted. A collapsing economy undermined Rouhani. On the other hand, Raisi's hardliner support base treated Rouhani's dealing with the USA as akin to treachery. Even moderates will not easily forgive the drone killing of the national hero, General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad, Trump's master-stroke destroying any residual trust in the USA and bringing the two countries further down the path to conventional war. Con-

servative voters on Friday were turning up at polling booths with his picture.

The Revolutionary Guard will continue promoting pro-Iranian militias where it can and the Supreme National Security Council will stick to its policy of destabilising Iran's enemies in order to protect its borders. It will take all of Jo Biden's experience to reverse the weakening of nuclear containment and American influence wrought by his predecessor. Given Biden's commitment to Israel, Iran cannot expect much sympathy. Biden's 'America is back' is a great sound-bite but, on their side, Iranians will wonder 'for how long?'

See TheArticle 19/06/2021

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Part IV

Chapter 12

Observations

12.1 The Great Colonialism Controversy

7/2/2018

And all month long the noise of battle rolled in Oxford, don against don, laptops to the left, laptops to the right. Calumny and detraction stalked the quads. An international brigade of scholars joined the fray. The Great Colonialism Controversy had been started by, of all people, not a Rees-Mogg grade eccentric, but an unassuming and thoughtful Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology, Nigel Biggar. He had expressed some thoughts about the history of colonialism and pointed out that it had some positive aspects. The proximate cause of this modest proposal was the five year study of Ethics and Empire that he had been conducting.

I had better admit to some skin in this game. Nigel Biggar gave some lectures on Truth and Reconciliation at my invitation some years back. I've written books about the colonial history of Africa. I do not feel personally guilty about British colonialism – I learnt about the pink bits on my geography atlas as a child and was too young to be attacked for being uncritical. Nor would I today want to deny that colonial rule brought about some positive changes as well as perpetrating dreadful atrocities on some subject populations who

showed the remotest sign of not enjoying being colonised, and even when they didn't, sometimes criminally culpable indifference to their welfare. It is just that I am allergic to simplistic binary oppositions, all good versus all bad.

I started studying African history in the late 1960s shortly after it had taken off academically as the new nations began to retrieve their past. In those days you could get books called *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland* [Malawi] published with old photographs, an index and a publisher who seemed to want to market it. The student body of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London was just beginning to switch its top career choice from colonial service to spooks, linguists and anthropologists. In no time some African academics were describing the pre-colonial past as a patchwork of Gardens of Eden, with colonialism as the snake and European ways the apple. But when you discover the number of different Chewa words for jealousy, and you encounter the pervasive fear of witchcraft, you begin to wonder if village life was all that idyllic. And, frankly, it would not have been much fun being a Hutu in pre-colonial Rwanda under the dynastic rule of the dominant Tutsi clans, or being a woman much anywhere.

It is a given of historiography that the perspective of the writer is strongly influenced by the present, by political pressures, and individual bias and interest. Romantic African historians were not bucking a trend. But what is going on when someone cannot express analytically any view without unqualified condemnation or approval? This not simply a question of asking what is wrong with expressing a complex account of motivations,

behaviours and their consequences. Nor is it always idle to contemplate counterfactual history, what would have happened if such-and-such hadn't happened. It is a deeper problem of what makes so attractive turning the past into a binary moral story and "asking the wrong questions, using the wrong terms, and for the wrong purposes" a definition of "bad history".

The more important question is what is it in the present conjuncture that requires something akin to what psychologists call splitting, the need to present the expression of complexity as "bad history" and oneself, the custodian presumably of "good history" understood as a story about good versus evil; or a balance sheet of good acts versus bad acts, minus ten for some brutal torture or massacre, plus ten for ending the slave trade, five for divorce laws that liberate women. Or plus five for the manner of pulling out of Bechuanaland and the Gold Coast, minus 10 for the massive tragedy of the partition of India. Yes, this calibration is repugnant.

Put in another way why should the expression of complexity in the makings of the past turn the perpetrator into an apologist for one side of the argument or another? After the Rwandan genocide for example it has become impossible to write about its antecedents without readers striving to find "what side are you on?"

Orwell said in 1984: "He who controls the past controls the future, he who controls the present controls the past". But we are not living in a Stalinist tyranny and the Great Colonialism Controversy does not look like a struggle between the dispossessed and wretched of the earth against the rich and

powerful. Rather it seems to be an expression of the contemporary powerlessness to control the future felt by almost everyone in a semi-moribund European political culture of populism and failing democracies. The one thing available is to re-moralise the past as a conflict between good and evil and, because nothing else seems under control, to attempt to control language and discourse. Perhaps there is also a touch of guilt at work but guilt without a firm intention of amendment is not a constructive emotion.

Language, of course, matters. It is our way of being human. It is the texture of civility. But this does not mean that right language can be substituted for meaningful action in moral endeavour. It is an academic conceit to forget that the pen is only mightier than the sword if it inspires and mobilises people around a vision of the future, has an ability to contextualise the errors and horrors of the past, and can integrate both into a meaningful present.

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12.2 The EU Hedgehog Directive

27/4/2018

Just before the Brexit referendum I tried to adopt a hedgehog. My last sighting of a living hedgehog occurred a long time ago. It walked nonchalantly past my feet as I sat reading in the garden. Hedgehogs are cute but fast disappearing. I thought it would be good to have one around, and I owned an empty hedgehog house, a Christmas gift.

Ipswich Council prompted me to action by appointing a Hedgehog Rescue Officer. “No hedgehogs on the Rates”, you may protest. But even as government takes away their money, Councils have a duty to have regard to conserving

biodiversity under the National Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) section 40 of 2006.

Googling Hedgehog Rescue affords fascinating reading. You are warned that not all hedgehogs want to be rescued. “Every rescue must be appropriate”. Some hedgehog rescues can be life-changing. Read for example the feel-good story, *A Handful of Happiness: Ninna, the tiny hedgehog with a big heart*. It sold 30,000 copies in its first month here in the UK, according to *The Times*, and has been translated into ten languages. ‘Inappropriate’ rescuing of hedgehogs will be increasing.

Concern about hedgehogs turns out to be widespread and popular. Rescuers abound. The British Hedgehog Preservation Society was founded in 1982. You can become one of its Hedgehog Heroes if you put a warning on your machinery about the danger of Strimmers. Their Hedgehog Heroes Roll of Honour is long and includes the Mole Valley District Council, possible clash of interests here surely, and Township Response Ltd. (Shropshire), possibly ex-SAS, plus several Golf Clubs.

In the midst of this happy googling, a google drop box popped up asking for my location. I hit the “block” button. Perhaps it was to get me on to the Township Response radar. Perhaps it was more sinister.

Undeterred, I applied to a rescue centre; a form arrived and I filled it in. Its preamble warned me that hedgehogs are free spirits. They roam widely and might never return. My hedgehog house might have only a temporary resident. Who could tell?

Humiliation was to follow my laborious and truthful application. I turned out not to be a suitable hedgehog adopter. I ticked the box for having hedges with holes in them and a large garden opening onto fields. I had never inappropriately rescued a hedgehog. But my house was within a mile of a major road

and hedgehogs' road safety record, though better than suicidal pheasants, is poor. And I had used a nasty toxic spray on ground elder in the garden once or twice. Despite a firm purpose of amendment, my environmental profile was for ever tarnished.

In these days of Cambridge Analytica, Google and Facebook hoovering up our data, I began wondering, if we had a second Referendum, what the Masters of the Internet might make of all this pro-hedgehog activity. Was I now in a special Hedgehog Lover (HL) category linked to being a) old and b) living in the countryside, therefore being a voter floating between Leave and Remain? Would they construct special Brexit messages for HLs?

You can imagine the early 2019 headlines in the Tory tabloids. David Davis will be quoted saying: "We're taking control of our hedgehog population which is what the British people voted for." "Liam Fox: Customs Union would stop Commonwealth Initiative on hedgehogs". "Boris stands by extra £350 million for hedgehog rescue" appears on campaign buses and billboards.

The fear factor will likely raise its ugly head again. Item on TV news: "PM says EU behind Invasion of Russian Northern White Breasted Hedgehog". Followed by a package with a Jacob Rees-Mogg voice-over denouncing Russian *Erinaceus roumanus*, at the front of the queue for emergency treatment in veterinary surgeries – (Latin makes them sound more threatening). Camera pans to sad, elderly British hedgehogs waiting hours for treatment, curled up in miserable balls.

We won't have seen the last of foreign-planted fake news: RT radio will lead with "British PM ditching EU Hedgehog Directive". Soon trending on social media will be "Porton Down poisoned Shropshire hedgehogs", launched from

the covens of Russian hackers, Trolls and Bots. Sergei Lavrov is filmed giving an orphaned hedgehog milk.

We may never know. Only the Lib-Dems believe British people should be asked again, once they know what Brexit means and its likely consequences. Meanwhile I'll go on wearing my HL and proud of it badge and hope it shows what a really nice person I am.

Sorry to be prickly about our Masters of the Internet but that's where they're taking democracy and freedom of speech. Hedgehog Awareness week runs from 6-12 May. Yes, really. Hot on the tail of Amber Rudd's Removals Targets Awareness week. And yes, there is no EU Hedgehog Directive. Though there is a commitment to biodiversity: two directives, one for birds and one for preserving habitats.

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12.3 From Russia With Malice

28/11/2018

Source: www.kremlin.ru

We are entering a Second Cold War with Russia. This November's Remembrance ceremonies, on the centenary of Armistice Day, did nothing to resolve a recurrent problem. We celebrate, analyse and reflect on victory in war yet fail to learn that its aftermath is crucial for future peace. The Second World War is commonly viewed as the long term consequence of punishing Prussian militarism in 1919 through beggaring Germany. The tragic disintegration of Iraq opening the way for Iran's Revolutionary Guards to project their power, the rise of Da'esh, and the massive toll of civilian casualties,

were a result of misguided policies during the early stages of the US occupation.

The aftermath of the West's victory in the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, brought its own foreign policy mistakes. At first Clinton got on well with Yeltsin. Then in the late 1990s, Blair and Clinton established a good working relationship with Yeltsin's surprise choice as successor, Vladimir Putin, a man initially ill at ease with great political power. But this transient bonhomie left Russia prey to the financial experts from Chicago who rushed in with economic policies that soon left Russia more impoverished and chaotic. Most Russians understandably put their impoverishment down to intervention from the West.

Russian oligarchs hoovered up underpriced State companies to become billionaires. The Anglo-American financier Bill Browder in his book, *Red Notice*, explains how in 21st century Russia you could get very rich, and very dead, very quickly. Russia became a kleptocracy.

The victorious West never quite grasped the depth of Russian fears during much of the Cold War though it became apparent that the Soviet regime had dreaded a US nuclear first strike. Hardly surprisingly since the USA consistently lied about its nuclear strategy.

Russia lost its empire, transformed into a fraying and fractious Russian Federation of States. Most of these States experienced the period 1993-1997 as liberating: national sovereignty regained along with their identity as European, under the protection of the NATO umbrella. The latter was unacceptable to the Russian military. NATO's bombing of Serbia, and Blair's support for Kosovo against Putin's Slav soulmates, left Russia's military and intelligence services worried, humiliated, and determined to re-assert Russia's importance on the global stage.

The presence of Russian-speaking minorities in Russia's "near abroad", *blizhneye zarubezhye*, echoed that of the German populations beyond the Nazi Fatherland in the 1930s. Russia and Putin could live with the Baltic States, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia going their own way – they were relatively recent acquisitions. Chechnya, brought into the Tsarist Empire by force in the 1850s, was a different matter. Georgia and Ukraine were an ectopic growth of Russia's political soul, both geographically and psychologically comparable in some ways in potential for conflict to Northern Ireland for the UK. US foreign policy provoked reaction by showing scant concern for these sensitivities.

By 2008, Putin was looking across the border to Georgia with growing concern at flamboyant Mikheil Saakashvili and his nationalist government. Saakashvili was enamored of all things EU and NATO. Top US State Department officials were in and out of Tbilisi dispensing the political equivalent of wet kisses. Two regions of Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, were in breakaway mode. The Russians put in their tanks. The US restrained Saakashvili. A major war was averted.

Russia's historic memory matters. Ukraine's history was complex. Catherine the Great had annexed Crimea in the 1780s. Nikita Khrushchev handed over the Crimean peninsula to Ukraine in February 1954 – to get Ukrainian Communist Party support for re-election. In March 2014, Putin returned Crimea to Russia using minimal military force but, notably, with the welcoming acquiescence of most of its Russian speaking inhabitants. Intervention in eastern Ukraine, poorly disguised Russian troops supporting local militias, reduced it to civil war under *de facto* Russian control. Some 10,000 have been killed. Between these two flash points Russian naval power is being exerted to control access to the Sea of Azov.

US past treatment of its own blizhneyhe zarubezhnye , the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the Contra War in Nicaragua, might have provided clues about Putin's mind-set. There were intermittent attempts at improving relations with Russia, but the interests of the two countries in Europe were, and are, incompatible. Countries in Russia's near abroad have a right to choose their political system and alliances. But the USA pushed its advantage, taking NATO up to the borders of a resentful, vanquished Empire. We are where we are today.

Several leaders have observed that Putin often adopts the body language and manner of a surly and violent teenager. Intervention in Syria and the slaughter of large numbers of Syrians demonstrated Russia's military capability. Putin got away, relatively, with murdering Litvinenko and spreading polonium across London. But international reaction to the bungled GRU Novichok killings in Salisbury almost certainly surprised him, despite his public insouciance, malice, and brazen contempt for the UK government. Putin now faces severe sanctions, an economy operating far below its potential, falling oil prices, and mounting opposition. But he retains the overwhelming support of a sentimental nationalist majority who share with the USA a passionate desire to make their country "great again". And, if they care, are willing to discount the more loathsome features of an authoritarian leader.

Russia has understood the potential of the communications revolution, successfully making soft power the necessary adjunct to hard power (new weapons, nuclear first strike capacity). Skill in disseminating fake-news, hacking and manipulation of divisive sentiment, have caught democracies on the back foot. These tactics are much more effective than the clunky propaganda of the former Soviet Union. They did not evoke an adequate policy re-

sponse.

So what is to be done now? Containment, both geographical and cyber, flexible sanctions, better analysis of Putin's insecurities and thinking, certainly. But there is an instructive voice from a post-war era that needs heeding. Peter Conradi in his highly readable *Who Lost Russia?* OneWorld, 2018, quotes George Kennan from 1946:

"Of one thing we may be sure: no great and enduring change in the spirit and practice of government in Russia will ever come about primarily through foreign inspiration or advice. . . such a change would have to flow from the initiatives and efforts of the Russians themselves".

And that will not happen painlessly.

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12.4 Food

29/3/2019

"Eat! Recipes from a Model Chef", The Times magazine tells us. The pages of colour supplements and newspapers' weekend magazines are dotted with sections, pull-outs and articles about food. The photographs are exquisite still lifes, the food cleverly arranged, too perfect to be true. You can stare in wonder at Harissa Chicken legs with Quinoa and Avocado or Sesame Beef, Kimchi and Cabbage Salad. A certain sort of restaurant – and not just in London – tries to have at least one word in each item on the menu you've never heard of before. I do know what Kimchi is as I

suffered from culture shock in South Korea after being served raw octopus and kimchi, fermented greenery, while eating sitting on the floor in mild discomfort. It may not be long before Harissa and Quinoa become children's names.

The first time I ever marshalled an analytical thought about food, rather than just feeling hungry, was in Malawi in the late 1960s. We were eating institutional cooking. Every day much the same: nsima, maize porridge, with ndiwo, some vegetables and some meat added if you were lucky. It was a nutritious but monotonous diet. With our pampered European tastes we lost weight. For the vast majority of the population of Malawi food was what you needed - and often did not have so you went hungry. In rural areas the idea of being vegetarian was greeted with laughter or irritation. Meat was a huge treat. A child who liked meat too much was a naughty child. I've never seen beautiful photographs of nsima and ndiwo, though you never know. Nsima, maize, chimanga, milled and cooked, and Ndiwo are fresh food locally grown. But I don't think anyone is going to photograph them for a colour magazine.

Our own food world, the celebration of food as a perfect object, is a staggering contrast to those of most people alive today. Media-led, it is an indicator of class differences and status, as well as a feature of the profound divisions in our own society. As we gaze at luscious pictures of food we stand as successors to the people who gazed in awe at the vast, staged banquets of the Tudor court and aristocracy. And even the context is comparable: hunger, or as we prefer, 'food insecurity' for the over a million people in Britain who now need to visit food banks.

The celebrity chefs on television seem a long way from the reality of messy kitchens, washing up waiting to be done, and tired women coming home to

“what’s for tea?” from hungry children. Yes, celebrity chefs purport to be all about helping people to cook good food and eat a balanced diet. Some, like Delia, do just that. But the problem is that most of the ingredients in food featured in newspapers cost more than junk food. And, like betting shops you are much more likely to find a McDonalds in a poor area of town than a rich one.

We really do need to absorb the scale of hunger in Britain. The Trussel Trust, which in the UK is the main provider of free food, runs 1,200 food banks and has 40,000 volunteers. Between April and September 2018 they gave out 658,000 emergency food parcels. A third of this went to feeding children. This was a 13% increase on the previous year. Tins of soup, baked beans and packets of cereal aren’t very photogenic however neatly you arrange them. Nor do you find Tory MPs wanting to be photographed visiting food banks.

We also need to absorb the fact that Trussel Trust’s clients are the working poor; they have jobs. Insecure jobs which don’t pay a living wage. And we need to correct the idea that anyone can apply. To be eligible people must receive food bank vouchers from social services, teachers and doctors. Add to these figures the other organisations, religious and secular, that regularly provide free cooked meals to get a sense of the magnitude of the problem.

Universal Credit has now been universally credited with causing much of this assault on human dignity. It took years of voluntary action and evidence before anyone in the Conservative Party seemed to recognise that the problems created by Universal Credit, the proximate cause of much of the domestic distress, must be addressed. Amber Rudd, the Work and Pensions Secretary, at last seems to recognise this inconvenient fact.

As with the plight of asylum seekers, and the Windrush generation, callous indifference prevailed. Government not volunteers should be making sure citizens get enough to eat. Meanwhile, perhaps the Great Celebrity Bake-Off on forthcoming Tuesday evenings should promote the Trussel Trust's End Hunger Campaign.

People with food bank vouchers will not be eating the recipes of a 'model chef'. Nor will they be choosing what they eat as a 'life-style choice'. And if and when they catch a glimpse of professional food photography in the colour supplements, they must wonder what kind of society they are living in.

See <https://www.thearticle.com/glossy-photos-of-quinoa-strike-the-wrong-note-thousands-in-britain-are-going-hungry> 24/03/2019

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12.5 Ramadan Mubarak

15/5/2019

A large photograph of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Da'esh leader, appeared in The Times on 30 April. He looked distinctly alive and well fed, compared to his murderous followers, and was starring in a video designed to reinforce his leadership of Da'esh and to celebrate its atrocities. Then we have news of Asia Bibi's release at last and escape to Canada reminding us of the innocent Christians suffering under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

So this may not be the best time to declare my admiration for Muslims in their practice of Ramadan. No matter. The Islamic annual fast began on Sunday night, 5 May and will last till 4 June. It is a strenuous expression of Muslims' aim to lead a life of self-discipline, prayer and

charity completely at odds with the orgy of cruelty and hatred which is Da'esh.

Britain is far from free of prejudice against Muslims. It extends far further than the defunct UKIP, the Brexit Party and Farage, and, if Baroness Warsi is to be believed, has seeped into parts of the Conservative Party. The Mayor of London needs police protection because he is Muslim. Steve Bannon is now promoting Islamophobia in Europe. The positive aspects of Muslim faith are simply ignored. We have to fear the direction in which our society is going.

During Ramadan observant Muslims neither eat nor drink between dawn and sunset. Sunnis time sunset to be when the sun disappears over the horizon, like a coin in a slot; Shi'a when the red glow has left the sky. The fast lasts four weeks from the beginning of the ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar until the end. It is tough going in the Nordic countries when it can last over 15 hours. In the intense heat of the Middle East fasting is shorter but punishing. Young children, the elderly, nursing, pregnant or menstruating women and travelers are traditionally dispensed.

I was in the Yemen in 1989 watching families gathered around plates of food waiting for sunset; the firing of a cannon signaled that the fast was over. In Nigeria expatriate advice was not to have your car repaired during Ramadan as mechanics were not on top form. When I broke my leg in Connemara during Ramadan, most of the surgical team in Galway Hospital came from the Middle East. With the inheritance of my expatriate prejudices, I was hoping that the consultant orthopedic surgeon in charge of repairing my multiple fractured limb, whom I learnt was Jordanian, would not be practicing even if Muslim. He appeared at my bedside in a bomber jacket and I guessed he would be the

least pious of the team. If there were going to be prayers of supplication, dua, said that evening, it seemed more likely that they were going to be mine than his.

The last ten days of Ramadan recall and celebrate the foundation of Islam, the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad receiving the verses of the Qu'ran. The spiritual purpose of this abstinence, and the recommended religious practices associated with it, such as special prayers and alms-giving, is taqwa, to gain in piety, strengthening that part of human nature that seeks the good and weakens the propensity for evil, nafs (Qu'ran 2:183-185). Fasting is one of the five 'pillars' of Islam, some would say the strongest.

The Muslim daily fast ends with a communal meal. The fasting month ends with a big family get together like Easter or Christmas. Ramadan shares its basic rhythms and purpose with the other two monotheistic religions, though today Christian and Jewish fasting occurs in a far less robust and demanding form. Lent in the Churches of the Syriac tradition gets closest to the rigour of Ramadan. But does the Islamic fast have any significance for a secular Britain? Well, it is as counter-cultural as you can get to both individualism and hedonism, and brings concern for self-discipline and self-control into sharp focus.

Apart from a willingness to experience hunger, Muslims have also built into their religious practice a normative attempt to reduce poverty by the requirement to give an annual tithe, zakat, and practice sadaqa, charitable giving. Ramadan is a time to do both.

Thirst is a different matter. I have an African memory of coming back from the Chad border, being rescued hitch-hiking in a temperature of over 110 degrees Fahrenheit outside Maroua in northern Cameroons by a pick-up with

Muslim workers in the back. It was so hot out of the shadow of buildings or trees, it hurt. The driver offered me some murky water in a dirty plastic container. I declined. It required little imagination to see the consequences of accepting. We stopped, mats out, for the sunset, maghrib, prayer. We were skirting the border with Nigeria now frequented by Boko Haram. I could feel my tongue swelling up in my mouth. I don't recommend experiencing real thirst.

I am looking forward to going for iftar, the meal breaking the fast after sunset, with Turkish friends, several of them refugees from Erdogan's police state. They are from the modernizing and progressive Muslim Gulen movement persecuted by the Turkish government. Some of the Gulen movement participated in the failed military coup against Erdogan who promptly designated and banned the movement as terrorists. Turkish asylum seekers, many Gulen followers, are now being sent back by Greece from the Turkish-Greek border. So this will be for several around the table an iftar and Ramadan separated from their relatives, a worrying time. And I won't be taking up Turkish Airlines advertised invitation to visit the historic and scenic beauties of Turkey in the near future.

Ramadan Mubarak.

12.6 That's London For You**3/6/2019**

It was one of those humid days when you didn't want to be in London on a train, even an over-ground from Stoke Newington to Liverpool Street station. The Bank holiday was over. It had not been particularly warm over the weekend and now cruelly the weather had turned hot just when you would be stuck in the office.

The train was pulling out of Cambridge Heath when a young man appeared, pale, thin and exhausted, and began moving down the carriage. The atmosphere in the carriage congealed with guilt and embarrassment. But you had to hand it to the beggar, he had a strong story. He was a "released prisoner", "let down by the probation services". He needed "£7 for a bed for the night" or he'd have to sleep "under the arches". Who could tell if this was true?

A black Londoner sitting across the aisle, and in his early thirties, got out his wallet and gave the beggar a gleaming five-pound note. My wife, white haired and travelling on her Freedom Pass, said to the charitable giver – who turned out to have Nigerian origins and a 100% ordinary London accent: "How very kind and generous of you". "Well", he replied, "I've never forgotten being a child on Baker Street station with no money. I asked a lady for my fare and she gave me more than I asked for. You can't tell about beggars, what they'll do with the money. You just have to take the risk and give". My wife answered: "When I came to live in London, I was so upset by the homeless people on the streets, as it's often not helpful to give direct to the people who ask, I took out a standing order to a homeless charity".

The solemn, frozen and embarrassed silence of the compartment had broken down. A middle-aged white man sitting opposite joined the conversation. He

worked on Liverpool Street station. “A bit ago a man came to the girls on the information desk and asked for £3.75 to make up his train fare. One of them got out her hand-bag and gave him the money.” Two days later the man came back and re-paid her.” “You really don’t know, you can’t tell”, said the black Londoner in a reflective tone.

The train pulled into Liverpool Street station. Everyone stepped onto the concourse and went their different ways. “I do it for God”, said the black Londoner before he went through the barrier.

That’s London for you.

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12.7 Never Give up

22/6/2019

The sign said La Farga de Reynes, the Reynes Forge. It was a small Catalan village on the French side of the border. We had just left two friends in the Musée d’Art Moderne in Cerêt, with its seventy odd pieces contributed by Picasso, and half of the exhibition rooms closed for repairs. Nothing much had changed since we visited four years previously and found half the museum shut. Now we were driving into the mountains, heading towards Amélie-les-Bains for a brief R & R from Culture. We planned to return and pick them up.

Rounding a bend, I saw the bridge ahead of us was hung with yellow bunting. Then I spotted them. “Look”, I said, “Gilets Jaunes”. We felt like those bird-watchers who spot a migrant yellow-hammer in a Suffolk field. There they were, as seen on TV, by the roadside in their high-viz yellow jackets just before the bridge, clustered around an old Citroen 2 CV sporting Catalan and French flags. And

like any avid bird-watcher my mind immediately turned to getting a photograph to prove it.

We shouldn't have been surprised. The Pyrénées-Orientales and industrialised areas of the coast going north towards Montpellier are the happy hunting grounds of Marine le Pen and her National Rally (the mutated National Front) Party. In the 2017 Presidential elections, she won 41% of the vote in Hérault, 45% in Aude and, moving to the mountains, 47% of the vote in Pyrénées-Orientales - which had the highest unemployment rate in France, 12.7%. The Mediterranean rim has a poor track record for year-round employment. These protesters were *Gilets Jaunes* 66 from the Perpignan sector who, on this beautiful morning, had left the coastal plain for higher things.

My mind quickly moved from getting a good photograph to a more travel-focused anxiety. What if they were preparing to block the road? We would be cut off from our friends. They would be stuck in Cerêt all day while we would be trapped in Amélie. Here was a new and creative holiday anxiety: easily a match for fear of striking French air traffic controllers grounding us, or railway workers shutting down the railways. I did a U-turn, tentatively approached the group of *Gilets Jaunes*, and stopped, causing a minor traffic jam. They directed us in a friendly fashion into a yard just off the road so we could talk. "No", they were not going to block the road. They seemed a little shocked that I thought they might. Would they mind us taking a photograph? They would be positively delighted if we took a photograph - several photographs. And so we have the whole group, a group with us in the middle, and another in front of the heroic Citroen CV which, it was proudly announced, had been to the Paris demonstrations. The CV had been signed by Parisian *Gilets Jaunes* just like on a football after the big match. It was a powerful symbol of French identity as well as Catalan protest.

The protesters' slogans and the bunting were on the vague side. "On lâche rien" – Never give up. "Macron Démission" – Macron Resign. And "SOS Santé Publique, Urgence - SOS Public Health, Crisis/Urgent; Macron's public health reform began in 2016. We got talking. I asked about their current "revendications", demands, but the answers were on the short side. "Augmentation" seemed to be all that needed repeating, a code word for an increase in the hourly minimum wage for over 18s, the SMIC, (Salaire minime interprofessionnel de croissance).

All the men and women in the group were in their late 50s, early 60s, working class, and having a jolly time waving to cars that honked as they passed. The Citroen formed a material and symbolic bond with past, more riotous shenanigans in Paris, like a giant papal medal linking a rural Catholic to the panting heart of Rome. They were having far too good a time to give up easily and, if an increase in the minimum wage was top of their personal list amongst the forty or so demands coming from the Movement, more power to their arms. I have come to the conclusion that with the storming of the Bastille as the great seminal moment in French Republican history, protest, demos, and disruption, jolly or confrontational, went into the French bloodstream. Much of the French public seem to be comparatively at ease with them - even if they block the road for a while. Participants obviously enjoy them as a day out. Unlike the British middle class who march dutifully causing minimal damage, though often with witty banners, and climate change protesters with creative and daring forms of disruption.

With hopes for social justice in Britain draining away by the day as Boris Johnson climbs to the top of the greasy pole to become Prime Minister, and the country falls apart, we will need to borrow the Gilets Jaunes slogan: "On lâche rien" "Never give up".

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12.8 The Blind Hedgehog: Almost a Drama-Doc? 21/8/2019

Just when you thought things couldn't get worse, the news broke that Stephen, a blind hedgehog, had been abducted. He was stolen in a White Vauxhall-Combo Van. The van and Stephen belonged to Frank Tett, 80, who runs Andrew's Hedgehog Hospital (named after a prominent hedgehog in-patient called Andrew) at Appleby near Scunthorpe. Mr. Tett had left Stephen in the van, in a cat-carrier, for just a few minutes in Albion Place, Leeds, whilst he loaded goods from his market stall into his Vauxhall parked outside a Barclays bank. The thief got away with the van, the goods and Stephen into the bargain.

Frank was more worried about the fate of his blind hedgehog than anything else. "If he is dumped he could be in real trouble", Mr. Tett said, adding, "he won't have a clue what to do". Mrs. Veronica Tett, 77, told *The Independent* "I don't mind about the van, vans are replaceable, hedgehogs aren't". She has offered a reward for Stephen's return. Time has passed and hopes are fading.

Stealing and not returning even a sighted hedgehog is a low crime, a blow against an already much-squidged treasure of our countryside. And all over Britain there has been concern for Stephen. For the record, blind hedgehogs are rare; they rely on smell to get around, so tend to walk with their noses in the air. The West Yorkshire police in pursuit should not interpret this as snootiness but redouble their efforts.

I retell this sad story in order to make a modest proposal to readers. I've never written an animated movie script, nor have the skill to do so, but I hope Mr. & Mrs. Tett will forgive me if I say Frank and Stephen's story, much

tweaked and in the right hands, may perhaps have the makings of another Wallace and Gromit. Nick Park and Aardman Animations please note. So I am sketching in below a possible “treatment”, a story line, so a reader might supplement their income by writing a script that is accepted. Given my choice of voices for the characters it will need to be sent to an animation company with deep pockets to turn this treatment into an animated movie.

Characters’ Voices:

We need to change Stephen to Stephanie: Judi Dench, originally from Yorkshire: The Thief, Ray Winstone: The Smart Policeman: Brendan Gleason. Frank Tett: Perhaps himself TBC

Plot Based on the True Story above:

BEGINS. Film starts in the Hedgehog Hospital. Frank has selected Stephanie for a cataract operation and, after his stall closes, is going to the Vet’s for this critical procedure. He hopes that is all that will be needed for Stephanie to regain her sight. But Frank is short of money and may have to close the hospital for lack of resources.

Meanwhile, The Thief, about to rob Barclays Bank – see true story above - recognises The Smart Policeman, an old adversary, going into the bank. He panics, steals the van and drives off.

THE ADVENTURE

Stephanie is a Strong Hedgehog and is outraged, indignant and insists that she must have her operation to restore her sight. “Who do you think I am, Mrs. Tiggy-winkle. . . etc”. The Thief threatens to throw her out.

Stephanie begs the thief to drive slower and behave responsibly but he accuses

her of being spineless. A huge row ensues in which the thief meets his match. But after this, on the road, a Hedgehogian version of Stockholm Syndrome develops and Stephanie starts to like the thief. The thief in turn starts to like Stephanie, lets her out of a cat-carrier incarceration, feeds her, and begins to feel guilty.

All this takes place c. 20 minutes in a Road Movie format with The Smart Detective in hot pursuit until The Thief gives him the slip. The Thief sneaks home where he lives with his brother, a hard man. Against his brother's wishes, The Thief decides to pay for Stephanie's cataract operation.

RUN UP TO THE FINALE

Meanwhile The Smart Policeman tracks down The Thief, finds a big stash of cash in his home, rescues Stephanie, and takes her back to the hedgehog hospital. Big reunion scene with Frank. Stephanie picks out The Thief from a police identity line-up by smell, heading towards him and rolling up in a ball at his feet. To reward her for providing this decisive evidence, The Smart Detective removes a wad of cash from The Thief's stash to give to Frank so he can keep the hospital open.

FINAL SCENES.

Stephanie has her cataract operation and can see again. The Thief, watched in court by Stephanie, gets 100 hours of community service in the Hedgehog Hospital, his care of Stephanie having been taken into account in the sentence. Freeze frame on Stephanie, nose up, as a smiling Thief walks by her out of court. END

Well, there you go. Improve this outline in any way you like. Before submitting it to an animation company the writer, I think, should first share the script

with the Royal Institute for Blind People and seek any advice they might have. The last thing anyone would want in an animated movie is to cause offence inadvertently.

Who knows, the movie may become the avant-garde sensation of 2020. And with luck a film critic will declare that Stephanie is a metaphor for a global public becoming aware of the Climate Crisis, acting to bring about radical change. You couldn't make it up. Or could you?

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12.9 Guilt, Shame & the Blame Game

9/10/2019

Do Johnson, Corbyn and Trump feel guilt? Or, come to that, shame? If they do it is undetectable. But the Conservative and Labour leaderships are demonstrably great practitioners of blame. And these three, guilt, shame and blame, are surely alternatives, one arising in default of the other. How bad is that?

Guilt has had a bad press since Freud but most people's instinct would be to say that guilt is somehow morally better than shame. After all it is a private, individual feeling and ours is an age of individualism. I'm not so sure. Why should a social emotion like shame, fear of the consequences of being found out and exposed, be less good than individual pangs of self-disgust? Or is it that an internal, private feeling of guilt – nobody need know about it - holds the promise of remorse, doing better next time, being "delivered from temptation?" to paraphrase the Lord's Prayer. Guilt at least implies you have hit the ignition button of your conscience; and hav-

ing a functioning conscience is usually considered a good thing. Whereas shame suggests you had better try harder not to get found out next time, and the skill of deceit is not widely applauded – unless you are a spy. Of course, acts that result in public opprobrium may shame you, with many people knowing, but being ashamed without anyone knowing borders on guilt.

If guilt and shame are denied or missing, the default position is blame. And why is blaming someone, something else, such an effective get-out-of-jail card - let's be generous to Mr. Johnson - for the guilty heart, the joker in the pack of cards dealt by a Joker Prime Minister?

Instead of failing miserably to answer these questions, I will tell what I hope is an instructive as well as a true story. During the anti-apartheid struggle I got to know a young Catholic married couple who were ANC activists in Johannesburg. Repression had cranked up and was intense. Many were being arrested and jailed. The risk of detention was high. The couple faced difficult moral dilemmas. They wanted a child but would it be right to bring one into the world when there was a real risk of them being jailed and separated from their baby? They were afraid. ANC activists were being assassinated by a special unit of the security police, prisoners were brutalised, and jail sentences long. There didn't seem to be much light at the end of the tunnel. They later came to London, by chance at the same time as Jon Sobrino S.J. a liberation theologian from war-torn El Salvador. Of six Jesuit colleagues, their housekeeper and her daughter, only he had survived a bloody massacre at the hands of El Salvador's military dictatorship in November 1979. When he got news of the murders Sobrino went straight back to his Jesuit residence on the campus of the Central American University in San Salvador where they had

died.

Things had reached a violent head in South Africa. Nelson Mandela was shortly to be released. The two young South Africans, like Sobrino, had experienced fear of violence from unaccountable State agents themselves. They wanted to ask a famous liberation theologian why he had returned to danger and how he had dealt with his fear. We all were expecting a theologian's answer, Christological and lyrical, in the style of Sobrino's books. There was a pause after the question. Then he said: "Oh, I would have been too ashamed to have stayed away. What would my brethren have said?" I am still not sure whether he was referring to the Jesuit martyrs who had died or the living members of the Society of Jesus to which he belonged (as does the present Pope). I wondered if Sobrino wanted to present and encourage shame as a virtue, or was he simply in the habit of telling the truth. I think the latter. It was a lovely moment. Our weighty earnestness was punctured like a balloon. I almost laughed. We all felt there should be no shame in admitting human weakness and human pride. We all felt we had permission to be human.

So how does someone such as Boris Johnson or Jeremy Corbyn handle shame? I have never seen two political leaders so shamed in public, derided and ridiculed for their pretensions. Perhaps the hope-filled, idealistic or feckless adulation of their followers is for them wrap-around mental body-armour. Donald Trump is another story. He shows most characteristics of narcissism and sociopathic disorder. He warns Turkey that he will devastate their economy if in "my great and unmatched wisdom" they appear to take advantage of his abandonment of a loyal US ally, the Syrian Kurds, whom he has left to the tender mercies of Erdogan's armed forces. Estimates suggest that the Kurds lost over 10,000 troops fighting ISIS. And we also know how Trump

handles being shamed. The brash, crude, nouveau riche boy on the New York block, shunned by the elite, rubbished and shamed by an upstart black President in front of his peers, seems to crave the comfort of cheering crowds, his tweet followers, and campaign banners. Obama's ridicule probably resulted in Trump attempt's to reverse every single one of the former US President's achievements. Beyond Obama, Trump doesn't go in much for blaming. He abuses and punishes.

Dealing with shame and guilt is not a matter of personality only, of inadequacies, of things missing from character and leadership. The absence or denial of guilt and shame is a growing element within our political culture, the medium in which such individuals now thrive, a medium which encourages the idea that lack of guilt and shame, apparently missing from political leadership, is of no consequence, that the blame game, part entertainment, part outlet for anger and resentment, is what matters. It does matter but because it removes responsibility from the executive. We are in trouble if we get used to this state of affairs. From the Left the blame falls on Blairites and international capitalists, from the Right it has fallen on Remainers and then the judiciary, it fell on EU negotiators, on Parliament, and then on the Irish, and then, eventually. . . . it will fall on you and me.

See also [TheArticle 09/10/2019](#)

12.10 Guns & Britain's Industrial Revolution**6/3/2020**

The Spinning Jenny, the power loom, the steam engine, and Mr. Henry Bessemer turning Pig-Iron into fine Steel were the driving forces behind the industrial revolution. This is what history in British schools taught us. British bellicosity and violence, though not mentioned in these terms, appeared as discordant episodes, an unfortunate diversion from the main story. Textile production, the clothes we wore, not how we killed, led the way in this version of industrialisation. Thanks to Charles Dickens, the big picture, and Britain's self-image, will always remain mixed.

But Stanford History Professor, Priya Satia, in her *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution* adds another question mark. She makes a convincing case that guns, along with banks, jump-started the industrial revolution.

Professor Satia's central theme is that wars, and slavery, obliged the State to intervene so frequently in the 'civil' economy that private and public sector became almost co-joined. To win a war the State required large quantities of superior weapons made of better steel with improved firing mechanisms. Manufacturers met the demand. From 1854, Henry Bessemer, applied his considerable skills to meet the State's need for artillery. In the 1880s, Hiram Maxim's Gun Company, which was eventually financed and absorbed by the Vickers Steel family, started as a subsidiary of the Barrow-in-Furness Shipyard. So we had got the Maxim gun and they had not. One prerequisite for efficient guns was high quality steel. Public spending on war boosted the domestic economy of the 19th century as it had been doing since mediaeval monarchs set sail for France.

Priya Satia argues that the production of what are now called ‘small arms’ – actually a range of weapons from a shoulder-held surface-to-air missile to the handbag-sized Beretta - drove the international arms trade and the industrial revolution. She sets out an interesting anthropology of gun use. For many years, from highwaymen to African tribal chiefs, guns enhanced their owners’ power with the promise of lethal force, but they were used more to threaten than to kill. There was something impersonal, even a little *louche* about shooting people, compared to manly close encounters with Sheffield stainless steel, a knife-thrust to the body.

For emerging industrialists the risk of depending on gun production as the dynamo of industrialisation, and guarantor of public spending, was that wars were intermittent – though there were plenty of small to medium scale conflicts in the nineteenth century. Diversification was the answer. Eliphat Remington, who learnt the blacksmith’s trade from his father in Connecticut, started a gun company making rifle barrels. But when the American Civil War ended, the Remington Gun Company fell on difficult times. The Gatling, predecessor of the Maxim gun, spring loaded, but needing cranking - so not quite a machine-gun - had just come on the market and been used in the last stages of the Civil War. The Remington Company, falling on harder times, did a deal in 1868 with Christopher Sholes, inventor of the modern QWERTY keyboard, to create the sit-up-and-beg typewriter with a self-rotating head, aptly described in 1874 as ‘a discursive machine-gun’.

The other problem was oversupply. But Africa provided an ideal market

for yesterday's weapons or for the surplus left after European wars were concluded. From the 1860s to the 1890s between 100,000 to 150,000 trade muskets, made in Birmingham, supplemented Britain's civilising mission, and kept profits coming.

Old history? Unfortunately not. The passage of years has not made the arms trade, small or big, less important to the global economy. It's 150,000 drones for sale now rather than trade muskets. A UN review in 2006 estimated 200,000 deaths were caused annually by small arms worldwide. 60-90% of direct conflict deaths were caused by small arms – a figure that must need lowering since the recent Russian and Syrian use of indiscriminate bombing and shelling of its civilian population. The Stockholm International Peace Institute put the value of sales from the top 100 arms companies worldwide in 2017 at \$398 billion. National statistics for gun ownership show that for every 100 Yemenis 53 own guns, 39 in Serbia and Montenegro, 35 in Canada and 21 in the USA. Encouraging figures for gun manufacturers.

Nor when considering who benefits have we left behind the blurring of private and public. A 2012 Jobs for Generals Press scandal revealed the revolving door between the military and the armaments industry. In the preceding sixteen years 3,500 senior military officers had accepted remunerative positions in private sector armaments companies. In December 2014, after many tries, a – partial - implementation of a UN Arms Trade Treaty began, signed by over one hundred member states, aimed at blocking the flow of weapons to areas suffering war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. It had met with determined opposition from the US gun-lobbies, notably the

NRA.

Priya Satia has written a fascinating book. There are chapters which seem to have come from a doctoral dissertation: these are about individual ‘pacifist’ Quaker gun manufacturers and their spiritual struggles. If you like tortured theology and tortured consciences these are for you. Others readers may find them hard-going. But everyone reading the brilliantly researched *Empire of Guns* will be struck by the continuity of the inglorious story of Britain’s and the USA’s relationship to the global arms trade, Eisenhower’s “Military - Industrial Complex”.

Will the arms trade be discussed in Britain’s forthcoming trade talks with the EU and USA? We heard nothing about trade in weapons before BREXIT and, most likely, we’ll hear nothing after. Perhaps we fear being seen as a nation of gun-runners. It’s difficult to be a nation of shopkeepers with shops boarded up in dying high-streets. Or perhaps we are simply ashamed to admit how much money we make from providing the means to kill people.

See TheArticle 16/02/2020

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12.11 Time to Put Global Conflicts on Lock-Down 11/4/2020

“It is time to put global conflict on lock-down and focus together on the true fight of our lives”. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, live-streamed this appeal to the world as Britain was going into lock-down. The Coronavirus pandemic could “open precious windows to diplomacy” and help create “corridors for life-saving aid”. The two-week cease-fire in Yemen declared by Saudi Arabia is a promising sign. A former Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth office, the Rt. Hon. Alistair Burt in a paper to the Defence and Security Forum has recently elaborated on the possibilities inherent in the Guterres appeal.

Alistair Burt’s thinking derives from his experience of the Middle East with its intractable conflicts, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, US-Iran, Israel-Palestine-Iran. No-one can make concessions or they will ‘lose face’ or appear to be weaker than their opponent. No-one trusts their adversary as a negotiating partner. A bitter stalemate prevails. “A ladder to climb down” would be a game-changer. Covid-19 offers one to the warring parties, Burt suggests. The belligerents with whole populations trapped between them face the uncontrolled spread of the virus. The combatants can cease fire and co-operate or many more will die. ‘All win or all lose’.

Years ago I travelled from Jordan into Israel by – what was then called – the Allenby Bridge. There was a hold up. I watched ambulances pull up on each side of the bridge. A patient from the Jordanian ambulance was carried out on a stretcher and handed over to the Israeli ambulance crew. The two ambulances moved off. It somehow summed up the divisions in the Holy Land but also how the medical world in its basic humanity and solidarity can

overcome them. But Guterres' appeal, Burt's diplomatic vision, though, go wider than this.

Alistair Burt's short Defence Forum paper joins a contemporary plethora of reflections about the world as it might be post-Coronavirus. The pandemic is what in biblical Greek would be called a Kairos moment, a time of great danger but also of great opportunity and possibility for fresh vision. The combination of authoritarian rule and advanced cyber-technology, AI, combine to create the danger of China using its strategy against the pandemic to further entrench the surveillance of its population to near 1984 proportions. But the sharing that has taken place offers of its COVID-19 expertise with other countries also provides the opportunity to open up a new chapter of international co-operation.

"These days of pain are bringing many hidden problems to the surface", Pope Francis tweeted today. Coronavirus has revealed and cast an extraordinary spotlight both on the importance of good governance, and on the impact of inequality and poverty on people around the world and within nations. Governments which can, and do, energetically strive to turn well-formulated health policies into reality within their health systems, provide the gold standard. Governments which cannot or will not, sacrifice the lives of their citizens. Only in democracies can citizens hold their governments to account and know with some certainty what is happening. Inequality and poverty cause poor health outcomes wherever you live. Pandemics accentuate dramatically pre-existing inequalities and poverty.

Whilst we in Britain count the number of ventilators in thousands and lament

how few, African doctors, for example, treasure the medical equipment sent by a parish in Europe, an x-ray machine donated by Rotary, HAZMAT clothing brought by WHO and international medical charities. The world's refugee settlements are even more in need of international support. Like the Victorians, in UK the realisation is dawning that "we are all in this together" when it comes to health, and that this need not be only a defensive government mantra during war and pestilence but the basis for policies promoting social justice and equity.

The longed-for time when Coronavirus is controlled will offer a moment for renewed vision, an opportunity for changing direction. The choices are obvious. Either persist in an economics that disadvantage the poor, or an economics "as if people mattered", promote a nationalist 'beggar your neighbour' foreign policy, or foster international co-operation, might is right or promotion of human rights, walls to keep desperate refugees out, or all take a consistent fair annual quota, accept a silent creeping genocide of the poor around the world in the next decade, or wealthy nations aid the reconstruction of the poorest economies.

Government emphasis on being 'in this together' must apply a fortiori to climate change. Before Coronavirus the idea that lifestyles must become simpler, radical changes had to be made to the economy, with coordinated efforts made globally to reduce carbon emissions and bring about effective carbon capture, whilst acknowledging that we are running against the clock, seemed either utopian or were criminally ignored by governments - according to your viewpoint. Now nearly all these changes are imposed on us to control the pandemic. We didn't choose clean air - or clean waterways in Venice, nor to

drastically reduce damaging air travel; both are the bi-product of economic collapse. Is it utopian to believe that having been forced to cut our carbon-based energy use we might in future choose to do so with a new determination and efficacy? Will Alistair Burt's ladder also provide a way down for Trump, and the less obvious foot-draggers, from blocking action against climate change? Time will tell.

The choices that will have to be made are becoming more obvious. It does not mean we will necessarily make the right ones. Now is the time for all people of goodwill, leaders of the faith communities, International NGOs, campaigning organisations and governments that treasure social democracy and a just international order, to create the kind of coalition that can ensure that the right choices are made. "Beggar my neighbour" or a genuine "Politics of Solidarity"? The G20 Riyadh meeting hosted by Saudi Arabia this November could be the first place for such a coalition to make a major impact on a post-Coronavirus world.

See The Article 10/04/2020

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12.12 A Time For Hope Not Optimism

28/5/2020

We are all worried about the future and how to stay optimistic, or should it be hopeful? We have plenty to worry about. Currently top of the league for recorded Coronavirus infections is the USA followed by Russia. Brazil has jumped to third place. Astute observers may notice similarities be-

tween Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin and Jair Bolsonaro, though finding exactly the right word to describe what their leadership has in common is difficult. Shall we just say they are not noted for their overwhelming concern for the welfare of their citizens, nor for their moral scruples. So it is disturbing to find the UK in fourth place. If we use a different measure, Coronavirus deaths per 100,000, only Belgium and Spain, comparable democracies with a slightly higher median age than UK, are ahead of us. Germany, with a higher median age is way below. Anxiety is justified.

Of course, recorded infections depend on population size, demography and the amount of testing done. But the overall picture puts Britain in a bad light; according to the Financial Times today, in the most reliable measure Britain is the worst in Europe and second only to the USA globally for excess deaths (the increased mortality - above the usual for the period - during the pandemic to date). If we think about our future it is hard to be optimistic. Yet, perhaps a comforting ritual for some, at the end of television interviews with the scientific experts comes the standard question: "So are you optimistic?" and what seems to be the required answer "Yes". By this they do not mean, as did the 17th century German Enlightenment philosopher, Gottfried Leibnitz, that we live in the best of all God-created worlds, or that imperfections in it are designed to draw us towards what is truly good. They mean that the belief in human ingenuity and scientific wisdom, in short, the diffuse idea of 'progress', now interrupted, will resume its onward course.

The problem with faith in progress is that scientific knowledge does not bring

about change in a vacuum. Things, events, people get in the way. Chinese bureaucrats in Wuhan terrified of being the bearers of bad news to the top ranks of the Chinese Communist Party initially suppressed and punished the scientific expertise that identified a potential pandemic. British government ministers became so immersed in the task of leaving the European Union that they neglected the necessary measures set out by ‘the science’ for preparing for a pandemic. We are not automatically drawn towards what is truly good or rational but towards immediate competition for scarce resources (PPEs, vaccines), in a narrow nationalism in which there is one rule for the rich and the governing elite and another for the people, and yet another for foreigners. We know it doesn’t have to be like this. We hope for something better.

In this national and global crisis, we want to talk about our present predicament and our future, to hope, but we have lost the language for such a discussion. An important missing ingredient for the discussion is our formerly Christian understanding of what it means to be human. We no longer speak of bad actions, of evil or sin. Instead we make do with ‘mis-speaking’ rather than lies, ‘inappropriate behaviour’ and ‘mistakes’ rather than intentional acts of deceit or criminality. If actions are really bad we resort to semi-therapeutic words such as ‘sociopathic’. We hardly speak of what a good person or a good society is like. We end up with political leadership being the art of appearing to care about society’s wellbeing.

Being optimistic while equipped only with our etiolated repertoire of moral language and with unchecked governments realising their propensity to use

power for bad purposes, is not rational. We need more than scientific rigour. We need to talk about the cultivation of virtue and the purification of desire and we need these habits of mind to be qualifiers for public office. If you balk at Christian discourse on the nature of true leadership call it integrity if you like, but it is a prerequisite for sustaining genuine hope. The absence of these qualities, or the absence of majority public concern about them, must not be taken as a political given within a secular culture.

Hope, in its realism and refusal to despair but act, not knee-jerk optimism, is the ‘appropriate’ virtue for these times. Hope contains an element of desire for the good, or Common Good, and a – theological – sense of expectation (understanding that the hoped-for future is not going to come by human agency and human desire and expectation alone). For hope to be rational it will inevitably be a hoping against hope, for example, to imagine after Coronavirus a more just and peaceful world with leaders who care effectively for the planet. And who could disagree with that in a world which automatically dismisses the political implementation of such an idea as utopian, a world dominated by two superpowers and one wannabe-again superpower led by Donald Trump, Xi Jinping, and Vladimir Putin. Those who have got into the habit of hoping also have reason to agree with another kind of leader, Nelson Mandela. “It always seems impossible until it is done”, he once said, most reasonably. He was speaking not abstractly but from his own experience of leadership and of hope.

See The Article 28/05/20 "How to be Hopeful"

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12.13 The Poisonous States**20/7/2020**

The surreal poisoning of the Skripals in March 2018 shocked Britain. I became aware of the threat of nerve agents in 1989 after apartheid police, using Paraoxon (made from the lethal insecticide Parathion), attempted to assassinate a friend of mine, Reverend Frank Chikane, then general-secretary of the South African Council of Churches. It later emerged his murder was signed off by the Police Minister, Adriaan Vlok.

Frank was a victim of Project Coast the regime's secret biological and chemical warfare unit led by a sinister cardiologist, Dr. Wouter Basson. During a visit to Namibia, to ensure maximal absorption through the skin, a set of his underwear was impregnated with lethal organophosphate nerve agent. After recovering in South Africa, Frank paid an official visit to the USA and went to Madison to see his wife at University of Wisconsin. Here he suffered again from outbreaks of vomiting, loss of muscle control and acute respiratory problems. He would have died had he not been admitted to St. Mary's, the University Hospital. The FBI analysed his clothes and found Paraoxon. Swift treatment saved him.

Frank played a leading part in the story of Christian participation in the struggle against apartheid. He was close to Nelson Mandela and later became Director-General in the Presidency, Thabo Mbeki's chef de cabinet. But he was also part of another story, that of States manufacturing nerve agents, a class of poisons known as 'cholinergic': inhibitors of the enzyme acetylcholinesterase, which destroys the neurotransmitter acetyl-

choline, and cause disruption of the entire nervous system with dire consequences. Parathion, an early cholinergic poison, was first made as an insecticide in Nazi Germany during the Second World War by Dr. Gerhard Schrader.

In 1938, Schrader inserted cyanide into an organophosphate creating a new compound. In his recently published and authoritative *Toxic: A History of Nerve Agents , From Nazi Germany to Putin's Russia* Dan Kaszeta writes that “a quantity as small as one thirtieth of a grain of rice could kill a (experimental) Barbary macaque”. The Nazis had other targets than monkeys in mind. With the help of Otto Ambros, an executive of the chemical conglomerate IG Farben, and the Wehrmacht's chemical warfare unit, ‘Tabun’ (taboo), as it was nicknamed, joined Mustard Gas and Phosgene in the armoury of the Third Reich.

By inserting a fluorine atom instead, Schrader hit the Nazi jackpot. The new compound created was highly toxic, odourless and more easily volatilised. It killed rapidly by inhalation rather than contaminating ground like the ‘persistent’ Tabun. In the right conditions a kilogramme could kill many thousands of enemy troops. And your own troops were able to advance. Enter ‘Sarin’ - still in use today.

It was one thing to make a small quantity of nerve agent in the laboratory, quite another to mass produce it. Manufacture demanded complex fabrication of precursors, sequentially creating new contaminants. Nerve agents proved deeply corrosive, due to impurities or reactivity and so difficult to deliver whether in a bomb, a rocket or from aerial spray tanks. Millions of deutschmarks were

spent on building different production sites.

Finally the Nazis had a stockpile of Tabun. But Hitler was afraid that the Allied had the capacity to retaliate with even more sophisticated chemical weapons. Otto Ambros, production kingpin, informed him that the Allied programme was probably advanced. He was wrong. And Hitler was deterred.

During the Cold War both sides made similar miscalculations about the enemy's capacity. The Allies had seized most of the Nazi chemical scientists but encountered the same problems of mass production and delivery. Nuclear weapons dominated the strategic landscape. In 1969, President Nixon shut down US production of a potent new British-developed agent, VX.

After the Cold War ended, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) of 29 April 1997 prohibiting production – including precursors – stockpiling and use was one of its first fruits. 193 countries have signed and ratified the Convention. Israel signed but has not ratified. North Korea, Egypt - with a longstanding production programme - and South Sudan have not signed. After 1997, about 96% of chemical weapons were subsequently destroyed. The threat of nerve agents seemed to recede.

Saddam Hussein possessed Tabun, Sarin and VX. During the war with Iran he had used nerve agents in March 1988 against Iraq's Kurdish population at Halabja, killing between 3,200-5,000 people with 7,000-10,000 injured, mainly civilians. He also used Mustard Gas on Iranian troops. The slaughter of

Kurdish civilians in Halabja, an act of State terrorism, became the model later adopted by Syria's Bashar al-Assad in massacres in Khan Shaykun and al-Lataminah and at Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus. Nothing sophisticated: bomb civilians into underground cellars, drop bombs containing Sarin, heavier than air to seep into their shelters, bomb them again when they emerge confused, gasping for air, and dying.

In *Toxic*, *Kaszeta* attempts to explain Russia's flagrant use in the UK of A232, a Novichok (literally 'newcomer') from their Foliant Programme. It returns us to apartheid's Dr. Wouter Basson, and National Security States' belief that they can do anything they like. As in Frank Chikane's case, absorption of the poison was through the skin and onset of symptoms took time. Early administration of Atropine reverses the action of the nerve agent. The Skripals survived. Dawn Sturgess who found the perfume bottle used by the two Russian GRU assassins was sadly not so lucky.

However difficult the manufacture of nerve agents they are not guaranteed to remain in the hands of State actors. In March 1995, an apocalyptic cult, the Japanese Aum Shinrikyô, made a crude but deadly Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo Underground. The movement actually had 'ministries', behaved as if it were a state within a state, and employed skilled members. It managed to make a small amount of impure Sarin, enough to kill twelve people and severely injure fifty more, with 1,000 others showing symptoms.

One final disturbing thought. International order is weakening. North Korea has not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention. Kim Jong-il has

already used VX to murder his brother Kim Jong-nam in Malaysia. And there are a number of terrorist organisations which would only be too happy to buy some. We should be grateful for the advanced research on treatment and counter-measures that Porton Down provides.

See also The Article 20/07/20

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12.14 The COVID Generation Gap

1/9/2020

“What tale shall serve me here
among
Mine angry and defrauded young.”

Rudyard Kipling: “A Dead Statesman” 1919

For the next twelve months controlling the spread of COVID-19 will depend on sustaining major changes in people’s behaviour. The level of necessary compliance can only come from widespread trust and respect for the judgement and integrity of government ministers.

In my part of coastal Suffolk COVID-19 etiquette is impeccable. Everyone is well-behaved. This is not just because the population is retired and elderly with good reason to keep to the two - metres rule. Younger holidaymakers, laden with wind-breaks, picnics, mini-surf boards, buckets and spades, step into the road or the fields, to keep their distance. A polite ‘thank-you’ is the norm

for the first to take avoiding action.

All accommodation close to the coast has been booked here. Camp-sites filled. Camper- vans spilling overnight into car parks. I estimate that there are three times more people enjoying Suffolk North Sea beaches than in former years. The demography is interesting. Couples with two children, one dog are the most common. The vast majority of visitors are in family groups, some bubbled or extended, like the large Muslim group from Walthamstow I met three weeks ago, first time out of London for five months, and a breakfasting group from West Sussex who had arrived at 5am to watch the sunrise.

The Suffolk coast is a different world from the South Coast with its Costa Brava-style occupancy, packed burnt-nose to nose, a few under sun-shades. If TV news shots illustrating how no-one is paying attention to government Covid advice tell the full story, the crowds on beaches like Bournemouth, Poole and westward consist mostly of 18-25 year olds with fewer vulnerable elderly. Mind you, Frith's painting *Life at the Seaside* shows Ramsgate sands in the nineteenth century only a little less congested and with mixed ages, though considerably more clothed.

Dunwich, the mediaeval town 'hidden beneath the sea', inundated as currents and river changed course, has a special charm; its beach at 10 am on a sunny Summer's day has, surprisingly, a touch of Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* about it. The picture couldn't be more different, the Seine not the sea, trees not pebbles, with a few huts for winding-gear, no-one elegantly dressed, but there is something similar about the light, the spaced placing of groups of people,

the sense of leisure and time slowed, away from the urban bustle. Dunwich beach also has its fishermen, spaced according to fishing etiquette, further than COVID-distances, sitting meditatively in small encampments, rods pointing skywards, line just visible above your head. And plenty of toddlers captivated by hard-wired beach rituals: run down to the water's edge, waves crash, spray, screams compulsory, scuttle back up the beach, repeat with bucket, collect water, pour into hole, repeat. Did Neanderthals do the same? Probably.

North of Southwold, this region's best known beach, is Covehithe within weekend range of journalists from north London who, some time ago, began writing articles calling Covehithe something like "Suffolk's Best Kept Secret" - which means it no longer is. The once quiet, little-known and secluded shore, reached by a path through high bracken and fields, then along crumbling cliffs, now is busy. All along the narrow path passing recesses have been cut into the surrounding vegetation for those who are 'shielding' and for well-behaved visitors. In the past, you could imagine the beach as the location for the final scene in Planet of the Apes when Charlton Heston spots the charred head and torch of the Statue of Liberty emerging from the sand. Now it's dotted with picnickers, sunbathers and swimmers.

At Covehithe you can still see marsh harriers cruising ready to grab baby sand martins sticking their heads out of their cliff holes, watching for their parents coming back with food. Or over the sea but close to the shore on quiet stretches, hovering terns hunting, dropping like stones, beaks first, to snatch out fish. A lone, anti-social, seal patrols this beach, black doggy head appearing

as it surfaces to take a look at *Homo Sapiens*. In the early Autumn, long skeins of Canada geese practise slipstreaming low above the waves. Covehithe blissfully banishes Covid from the mind. Welcome back to the comforting old normal.

I am not working for Suffolk Coastal Tourist Information, or auditioning for a Nature Notes column, nor is my purpose to attract visitors, but simply to emphasise that advice on preventing the spread of COVID must take age and location into account. The contrast between the behaviour of visitors to this stretch of the Suffolk coast and behaviour in London, Birmingham and on the South Coast is striking. A short while ago, over one weekend, West Midland police had to shut down over eighty illegal gatherings (many of them 'raves') and I'm told by Londoners holidaying in Scotland that they were struck by how many people wore face-masks. Why these differences?

On the face of it, the main rule-breakers are young adults who are now recognised as major carriers of infection. They voted overwhelmingly against BREXIT, only to be ignored, were more activist about climate change, only to be patronised, and, in big cities and towns, see no chance of ever moving in to their own homes. COVID has brutally disrupted their lives and, along with BREXIT, will curtail their job opportunities. On the whole in the early weeks of lockdown they complied. The turning point came when Boris Johnson failed to sack Dominic Cummings for breaching government guidelines. Many young people decided 'to hell with it'. If they are to be persuaded to keep the rules once more, they will need to trust government. In Scotland Nicola Sturgeon has retained that vital trust; infection

rates, similar to Northern Ireland's, are 377 per 100,000 against England's 518.

The generation gap, reflected in national voting behaviour, is becoming a serious issue. At the last election fewer than 25% of 18-25 year olds voted Conservative against 56% of the over 55s. Voluntary compliance with COVID prevention from the young remains critical. If the Johnson government fails to retrieve respect and public trust it will cost more lives. There are no signs Johnson and Cummings understand this.

See TheArticle 27/08/2020

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12.15 Big Philanthropy: Dangerous or Generous? 22/11/2020

It was in 2004 during a Commission for Africa consultation set up by Tony Blair to identify the continent's problems and recommend remedies. I'd been asked to prepare a paper on religion and development. On my left was the then Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman, Vince Cable, and across from me, Bob Geldof. I think he had his feet up on the table though that may be a false memory. I put what I thought would be an uncontentious proposition that secular Britain's development aid wouldn't work if it failed to take into account the importance of religion in Africa. Immediately, and to my surprise, this was contemptuously dismissed by Vince Cable. Geldof, of Live Aid fame and Dublin atheist, no less to my surprise, sat up and vigorously defended me: "he's absolutely right" or a more expletive-laden version of the

same.

I didn't realise it at the time but I was in the midst of two pivotal changes in development aid. First this involved collaboration between four worlds to tackle global poverty: business, the State, universities, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) representing the world of philanthropy. Second the growing recognition that whoever was involved the State, academia, business or philanthropy, it paid to listen to the people whom you thought you were helping and to find out their priorities. These are two of the many insights in Paul Valley's important new book *Philanthropy: from Aristotle to Zuckerberg*, a monumental but highly readable study of 18 chapters and 743 pages. It took him six years to research and write.

Philanthropy's scope is vast. Each chapter ends with an extended interview related to its particular topic (disclaimer: one is with me). Another unusual feature, Valley diverts online the tidal wave of his academic references. It's a pity that 'magisterial' is a cliché of book blurbs because his comprehensive blending of scholarly historical research, insights from his own and other's experience, and the challenging questions of a diligent journalist make 'magisterial' a tempting description. There are two books here for the price of one: a history of philanthropy and an exploration of the ethics of philanthropy.

Mega-Philanthropy took off after 2004. A year after the Commission for Africa consultations, Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan pledged 99% of their Facebook shares, then worth \$45 billion, to 'preventing, curing or managing' the world's main diseases. Bill Gates' Foundation which he

founded in 2000, spends each year more than Germany on global health. His total annual budget is greater than each of 70% of the world's nations. One result has been 2.5 billion children vaccinated against polio and the disease is almost eliminated. When Gates turned to malaria prevention the money available for anti-malaria work globally almost doubled. In 2006 Warren Buffet, one of world's most successful investors, pledged \$30 billion of his shares in Berkshire Hathaway to the Gates Foundation. Wealth of this kind inevitably carries great power and has been called philanthrocapitalism.

According to the 2018 Harvard Philanthropy report, three-quarters of the world's 260,000 philanthropic Foundations, usually endowed by a single private benefactor or business, were started in the last 25 years. Together they give annually \$150 billion from their overall holding of \$1.5 trillion though only 10% of the very rich give sums even remotely commensurate with their wealth. While nations agonise about their GDP, this neglected economic reality is worth more than a cursory glance.

Vallely, like a judge clarifying the defence and prosecution cases for a jury, takes the reader through the ethical challenges and strategic issues raised by philanthrocapitalism and the utilitarian calculations of the school of 'effective altruism' concerned with what is the most efficient way of responding to poverty. Throughout the book Vallely is concerned to maintain a balance between the charitable giving of time and modest amounts of money by the 'little platoons', the response from below, the philanthropy of the heart, and the contribution from the commanding heights of philanthropy, the billionaire captains who prioritise value for money, technological fixes and massive mobilisation,

the philanthropy of the head. Wisely he uses this binary opposition sparingly since the distinction between these two kinds of philanthropy is becoming less clear.

Influencing the role of governments in poverty alleviation, for example retaining our 0.7% of GDP commitment to development aid, NGO advocacy, is also a philanthropic endeavour. Valley probes the merits of trying to get any government to meet their responsibilities to provide adequate health and educational systems for their citizens, and to reduce inequality. Should philanthropy help people to exert effective pressure on governments to defeat national or global poverty and for other worthy aims which may concern them? Does such lobbying provide a longer term solution than simple financial support from the different kinds of civil society organisations? No simple answers. Effective advocacy can promote the transmission of innovative measures to Ministries where political decisions are taken. But the Koch brothers one of the 'big platoons' poured millions into think-tanks and pressure groups blocking effective action against climate change and promoting measures which protected their profits from the oil industry.

Context is everything. Training Ugandans to promote social justice during the reign of Idi Amin, for example, would have been training for an early death. In Hungary where democracy is eroding, Prime Minister Viktor Orban rewarded Warren Buffet's promotion of the 'Open Society' by shutting down his European University. NGO support for Gordon Brown to reduce child poverty in the UK and for Tony Blair to make the G8 meeting in Gleneagles in July 2005 a Summit on poverty in Africa, and to lever-

age debt relief, worked a treat. Though the impact of Bono and Geldof's Live 8 concerts around the world and their face-to-face lobbying was critical, a prime example of 'celebrity philanthropy'. The question is what sort of government is it before deciding on what to do to make things better.

Finally Valley builds on his early chronological chapters about charity in the Middle Ages and does a little advocacy himself; he champions the tradition of religious giving. He puts it in the category 'reciprocal philanthropy': at its best "rooted in relationship, mutuality and partnership... focussed on people rather than product... process-driven rather than results oriented". This approach reappeared in the Victorian charitable benevolence of public benefactors such as Angela Burdett-Coutts, so revered by the London poor that her name became Cockney rhyming slang for 'boots'. The 'little platoons' retain the tradition today. The bigger ones can learn from it.

The relevant moral attitude for reciprocal philanthropy is solidarity, a term much used on the Left and by NGOs, what Pope John Paul II described as "not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of others" but "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good... because we are all really responsible for all". Catholic, humanist, socialist or not, that's the best description of what philanthropy should be all about.

See TheArticle "Faith, Ethics & the Meaning of Philanthropy" 16/11/20

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12.16 Morse, Lewis & Brexit**20/12/2020**

How widespread is addiction to TV crime series? I suffer from it mildly. Fingers hover on the record button. Not box-sets for Christmas though. Outbreaks of repeats step up the temptation in the pandemic.

You might view crime stories as modern morality tales. Good for you, exploring values. The ‘police procedural’ has certain conventions. You know what to expect: the corpse, the cars with flashing lights, much ducking under police tape, the morgue, the pathologist with the body under the sheet, the red-herring suspect, the fretting Chief Superintendent, the briefing, photos of suspects stuck on the white-board, the rule-breaker detective ‘taken off the case’, and the denouement in which he or she reveals the murderer. With permutations and side-plots, perseverance in adversity has its reward. Emperors are shown to have no clothes. Accolades are given for moral purpose and quality sleuthing. Wickedness is punished. Justice – usually – done. And for the viewer there’s the competition to spot the villain, to demonstrate judgement.

At one end of the dramatic spectrum are Agatha Christie’s immaculate Poirot and Captain Hastings putting the formula into formulaic: all gentility, faux Belgian accent, nice dresses, lovely old cars, posh houses, and the seaside hotels you didn’t go to as a child. At the other is bleak Nordic noir, dress casual, plenty of gore and gloom, wan faces, beards, stubble and angst, super-nasty serial killers, and everyone going about their business in appalling weather conditions. Noir must be written by authors with a grudge against Scandi-

navian Tourist Boards. In the middle of the spectrum is Morse, well-dressed, owner of a red 24-litre Jaguar Mark 2, one old flame but with currently unsatisfactory, tentative relationships with women, rude and grumpy, working in comfortable Oxford with an ever expanding list of grudges headed by dons, but adept at crossword puzzles, cussedness, complex plots and never buying his round.

In branding a drama series, the detective's location has become increasingly important. Colin Dexter's Morse is to Oxford as Donna Leon's Commissario Guido Brunetti is to Venice: both above the fray, yet good citizens fighting corruption in high places, and for Morse at high table. You need to watch German television, to meet Brunetti's happy family and devoted wife, Paola (an English literature lecturer as was Donna Leon) and excellent cook – all a marked departure from the usual unhappy, hard-drinking, take-away-snatching, by death, choice or divorce, single detective. And Morse of the liquid lunches does occasionally go free-range to Australia and Italy with 'Robby' Lewis his long-suffering dogsbody sergeant, the nearest Morse gets to a buddy. But what really sets Morse apart, and to a lesser extent Brunetti, is Culture. Morse is a cultured cop. The series starring John Thaw ran from 1987 to 2000, a time when there were few graduates in the police force. Brunetti simply soaks up the Venetian culture around him by osmosis, and revels in its food culture courtesy of Paola.

The relationship between Lewis and Morse carries the series. Lewis, played by Kevin Whately, methodical, even tempered, cricket-lover, respectful of the law and police regulations is a foil to Morse's brilliant, intuitive and ag-

gressive character. The dynamics of their relationship, hints of the UK's North-South class divide, reflect cultural and educational difference, the key component of social difference. Whately's Hexham accent nicely conveys Lewis' lower-middle class origins in Newcastle. Morse jeers at him for reading the Daily Mirror. But we believe in them; they aren't just class stereotypes.

Like George Orwell, Morse doesn't feel comfortable fitting into the social rankings of the – changing – times. On the one hand, he has the Oxford College Masters and some dons who have weaponised their erudition – and are usually up to no good. On the other he has Lewis who is able and thorough but doesn't know his Donazetti from his Dolcetto, enjoys fish and chips, and is forever needing to absent himself from police duties to look after 'my lad'. His boss, Freemason Chief Superintendent Strange is socially insecure, uses 'matey' a lot, approves of Lewis, and is somewhat in awe of the Oxford upper classes.

But this is ITV so in case the viewer hadn't noticed these cultural differences, Morse is frequently seen playing classical music at home, or in ecstasy at concerts and operas. You can read a lot of emotions into John Thaw's expressive face and the director doesn't spare the close-ups. If a woman appears who combines singing talent with good looks we know Morse will fall in love, often failing to follow up kisses or notice that the latest Prima Donna has been lying to him. But he also detects fake landscape paintings, quotes from classical literature and fires back Bible references at sinister clergymen.

What makes Morse much more than the run-of-the-mill police procedural is precisely his lack of procedures. He seems to spend a lot of time at home thinking or drinking to get his brain fired up. And he drinks real ales in a pint mug rather than martinis shaken not stirred - even if he rarely pays for them. Nor does he, unlike Poirot, solve the mystery or reveal the criminal before a wealthy and dull audience of suspects in the inevitable set-piece ending. Part of the success of the series is that Morse encounters a wide array of interesting and plausible characters from a variety of backgrounds during his investigations. This is an England we recognise.

Morse reflects the changes in society underway a quarter century ago: Anglican women priests, progressive prison reforms, the sexual revolution. Like Orwell he is inconsistent, telling off a police cadet who is the Chief Superintendent's pet for an illegal phone tap but letting Lewis walk away from one of his own dodgy searches of premises without a warrant. And like Orwell he responds to a certain type of social integrity and sides with the underdog. Morse displays a wider range of emotion than Orwell's fictional characters. Anger, search for and fear of intimacy, cynicism and fervent truth-telling, loneliness, genuine compassion, meanness, admiration, and sadness. And throughout how you talk, what you read, what you drink, Culture and culture are the great signifiers of class.

Before you ask, Morse today would be ferociously Remain, Lewis tempted by Leave, and socially insecure Strange, an uncertain Brexiteer justifiably fearful of losing access to EU's store of criminal data.

See TheArticle 17/12/20

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12.17 Today's UN Ban on Nuclear Weapons: Is it Moral Grand-standing? 22/1/2021

My generation lived through the Cuban missile crisis. Our lives were threatened not by an invisible, spikey, round virus but a nuclear mushroom cloud. Today, 22 January, after many years of campaigning and debate the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, ('The Ban Treaty' for short) with 86 signatories, including 51 'states-parties', came into force. It had taken over three years to collect more than the 50 state signatures that were required for implementation of an agreement reached in 2017.

In the summer of 2017, a rolling conference convened by the UN General Assembly produced a legally binding prohibition of nuclear weapons in the hope of their ultimate elimination. Developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory, were all banned. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the Treaty's principal non-governmental mover and shaker, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, later that year. The Vatican celebrated the Treaty with a conference for the forty or so campaigning organisations that had contributed to its creation. But I would guess worldwide few people know of this treaty or its significance.

The existing nuclear powers were and are determined not to sign. So another piece of paper on the shelf of the UN Secretary-General, not even to be honoured in the breach, just ignored? No, far more significant than that, both opponents and supporters would agree. The Treaty represents a growing global legal consensus concerning international humanitarian norms. An international regulatory body for its implementation will be set up – the Austrian government is preparing for a first meeting of states parties in late 2021 - and there is a legally time-limited opportunity for the nine existing nuclear powers to start what they have notably failed to do: negotiate the elimination of their stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Or, as former President Khatami of Iran replied to my question on the status of nuclear weapons in Shi'a Islam: “Haram, haram (prohibited) for both possession and use”.

Because of their immense destructive power and long term consequences nuclear weapons along with chemical and biological weapons are clearly a unique threat to humanity. But it has to be said that as the Syrian and Iraq governments have demonstrated by using chemical weapons this is no guarantee of future compliance with international law. And here is the rub. While it is just conceivable that public pressure and actual cost might persuade Britain to abandon Trident, neither of these pressures would make North Korea, China or Russia sign up to and become compliant with the Treaty. We have to acknowledge and accept the potentially asymmetric impact of pressure for total elimination of nuclear weapons. It's a big ask. South Africa did not have any enemy on its doorstep in 1991 when it led the way and dismantled its nuclear warheads the apartheid regime developed with – suspected - Israeli help.

The renunciation of nuclear weapons by any country or countries requires prolonged diplomatic engagement and peace building. The conflict between India and Pakistan, both nuclear powers and embroiled in a bitter dispute over Kashmir dating from Britain's withdrawal, is only one example. For all the BREXIT talk about sovereignty, Britain's own options are constrained by our membership of a defensive nuclear alliance, NATO. What would be the strategic implications of Britain's adherence to the UN Treaty? Again decisions about nuclear weapons can only be made in the context of a national discussion about what we want Britain's role in the world to be, and what we think security and responsible geo-politics should look like in the future. Apart from these questions NATO's total rejection of the Treaty should stimulate a much wider national discussion than the one intermittently taking place within the peace movements and the military about Trident.

NATO has been deploying powerful arguments. Michael Rühle, the main interlocutor for NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division does not pull his punches. He writes that advocates of the Treaty 'ignore the international security situation', engage in 'moral grandstanding' and that it 'pulls the rug from under' the 1970 Non- Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Ban Treaty reflects the frustration of many states in the Global South at the failure of the NPT to change the nuclear weapons landscape. It challenges the strategy of mutually-assured destruction. But the Ban Treaty is consistent with Article VI of the NPT which commits states-parties to 'pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a

treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.’ That more or less covers the process which led to the Treaty.

Religious opinion is increasingly vocal and united. The Pope, the Vatican and the British bishops, both Catholic and Anglican, have clearly called on the British Government to “forsake its nuclear arsenal”. This month the British Catholic bishops stated:

“On Friday 22 January 2021 the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons comes into force. This is an historic milestone on the path to nuclear disarmament and an opportunity to refocus on genuine peacebuilding rooted in dialogue, justice, respect for human dignity, and care for our planet.

In setting out the ‘moral and humanitarian imperative’ for complete elimination of nuclear weapons, Pope Francis reminded us that ‘international peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation.

We urge support for the Treaty and repeat our call for the UK to forsake its nuclear arsenal. The resources spent on manufacturing, maintaining and upgrading these weapons of mass destruction, should be reinvested to alleviate the suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society, for the Common Good of all peoples”.

But nuclear disarmament remains the dog that doesn’t bark in British politics.

If the Treaty does its job of making people once more aware of the terrible consequences of nuclear warfare, and if it initiates a national and in-

ternational debate about a responsible geo-politics, what we mean by security, what sort of alliances we must make in the face of ruthless authoritarian regimes, it will have accomplished a great deal. The nuclear issue has disappeared from the manifestoes of our political Parties. The gulf between the settled opinion of the securocrats and politicians and the clear message coming from the faith communities, peace movements and what used to be called the non-aligned states of the Global South, is daunting.

On 5 February this year the US-Russian Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty New Start which caps each country's nuclear weapons at 1,550 comes up for renewal or extension. China refuses to engage. Looking back on the near-nuclear disasters of the 1960s, the eventual outcome of an entrenched belief in a strategy of mutually assured destruction will probably be accidental . . . mutually assured destruction.

See TheArticle 23/10/2021

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12.18 Sacred Spaces - Sacred Places

19/2/2021

"Desecration, violation, sacrosanct", words used to denounce the Trump-inspired invasion of the Capitol in Washington, terms more usually expressing religious sentiment. The Council Chamber where America's elected representatives covered as security officers drew their weapons was described in language suited to a secular Holy of Holies. The Capitol was the Temple of Democracy, "hallowed ground" where a civic religion was practised. This was not the capture

of the radio station in a tin-pot dictatorship. It was something approaching blasphemy.

Tom Holland in his much praised 2019 *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* charts the persistence of Christian ways of thinking up to and beyond the Enlightenment's rejection of religion and the triumph of secular scientific certainties. People still respect sacred national spaces, - or perhaps it would be better to say sacred places - buildings, land, monuments set apart. Think of the outrage when in 2010 a pop star's son swung on the Cenotaph. Just as the chancel of a church is separated from the nave, or in the Catholic Church before the second Vatican Council, altar rails divided the sanctuary from the body of the church, or in an Orthodox church the iconostasis divides priest-celebrants from the congregation, so are some secular buildings and monuments set apart. The idea of sacred space persists.

If a space is sacred the corollary is that only people of a certain standing or condition can enter it and only for specific purposes - prayer and worship, national remembrance, governance. Congregations feel the sacredness of space set apart in churches as if it diffuses outwards into the rest of the building demanding the special kinds of behaviour, and clothing, appropriate to religious buildings. Similarly for national monuments, sombre black in proximity to the Cenotaph marks ceremonial occasions. When a Republican senator shouted "You lie" at President Obama speaking in 2009 to a joint session of Congress in the Capitol Council chamber, though his backers enjoyed it the assembly's reaction was "not in this setting".

In secular Britain quite passionate debates are sparked when churches or cathedrals are used for secular purposes. Classical music with its sung masses by famous composers are acceptable. I remember a deeply moving art-work depicting the Holocaust in Chichester cathedral; it would have been hard to find a better place to display it. But what should we make of cathedrals sporting a helter skelter, like Norwich, or an adventure mini-golf course, like Rochester? Defended as an innovative way to draw people in – and most visitors were willing to stop and say, or listen to, the Lord’s Prayer - but greeted with derision by many, these experiments got a bad press. Vaccinating in Lichfield cathedral, an ancient pilgrimage centre for the sick, feels right. Healing and care for the vulnerable is part of the Christian story continuing in a modern secular form. And no one has laughed at the organ music accompanying the vaccinations in Salisbury cathedral. This use of church space as a hub for vaccinations seems to be entirely appropriate to the public.

The sanctity of sacred space in Catholic churches is intensified by the presence of the Eucharist in the tabernacle. In the Septuagint, an early translation of Hebrew Scriptures, the word for ‘tent’ - translated via 3rd century BC koine Greek - becomes in Latin *tabernaculum*. So sacredness is directly linked to the presence of divinity as the place where God pitches a tent amongst us. A space to which only certain dedicated individuals, priests and their assistants, should have access, by tradition all were men, a tradition enshrined in law. Section 230 of the Church’s legal code, Canon Law, allows laymen called ‘acolytes’ to assist the – male - priest during mass, read the scriptures except the Gospel and to distribute communion. In the absence of any mention of laywomen female presence was deemed to be officially precluded by

law. After the Second Vatican Council, a law honoured in the breach. That is until 11 January when Pope Francis amended the legal text to 'lay persons'.

As in all matters involving changes in Catholic worship this amendment evoked a variety of responses. For some, it was another promising sign that the Pope was cautiously edging the Vatican onto the nursery slopes of gender equality. For others, it was an underwhelming piece of catch-up. Women had for years been present in the sanctuary, happily unaware of canon 230, assisting the priest - who was supposed to have heard of it - by reading the lesson and, as Eucharistic ministers, distributing communion to those in church and to the sick in their homes. The 'mind of the Church' was way out in front of the mind of the Vatican. And contrariwise some traditionalists saw the Pope's intervention as yet another sign of the damage done by the Second Vatican Council to the calm uniformity of the Catholic liturgy.

Sacred spaces with their charge of solemnity can unexpectedly produce the exact opposite. A few years ago a North London parish with a large congregation of African origin was delighted at news of a visit from a conservative African Cardinal. At this church women regularly did all that Canon Law 230 implied they shouldn't. The Cardinal let it be known that there were to be no women on the sanctuary when he said mass or the visit would have to be cancelled. The priest in charge pleaded for some tolerance of local practice and a negotiation followed. From it came the remarkable compromise that women could be on the sanctuary but they must not move, for example to present the cardinal with the Gospel, if he was able to see

them. You might say an ecclesiastical variation on Nelson raising the telescope to his blind eye. But as I said to the priest in charge, there was also an unfortunate similarity to the law controlling nudity in strip-clubs in the 1950s. But all concerned were appeased and the visit was successful.

The sense of the sacred is common to all cultures and goes back to the beginnings of human society. Secular scientific society has not killed it off. It is constitutive of religion. The feeling for the sacred has carried over in varying degrees into contemporary western societies. In others, for example Hindu societies the religious-secular distinction makes little sense, the concept of ‘religions’ being an imperial import. So is any of this of more than passing anthropological interest? Well, yes. In a world in which sacred trust in government is badly eroded and the pandemic has caused widespread anxiety and fear, we need to treasure our places of stillness, calm and symbolic meaning. The crypt of the Basilica of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine in Vézelay comes to mind, almost dark, full of young people silently praying, a dampness and cool humidity coming from walls saturated with prayer. Whether it is around a national monument, the Capitol in Washington, or in an Anglican cathedral, sacred spaces, secular or religious, should be respected and cherished for the wonder is that we create them.

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12.19 Ten COVID Lessons

5/6/2021

Much Cummings but no goings last week. Resignations are so yesterday - reserved for traditionalist civil servants. Sound and fury signifying nothing? No, signifying that suspicions are likely well placed. What more have we learned?

What must we do? Here are few suggestions.

Poverty, bad housing and poor nutrition are health issues. The pandemic has highlighted long recognised social causes of ill-health, now linked to ethnicity. Sir Michael Marmot's seminal work on health inequalities is dramatically affirmed by the skewed social distribution of COVID deaths. Our increasing inequalities are not just deplorable, they are positively dangerous.

First: While the economy is being fixed post-pandemic, social justice must not be an afterthought.

Prevention is not just better than cure, it is a lot less demanding on the public purse. The medical consequences of obesity cost the NHS a fortune and now include the results of enhanced vulnerability to COVID. The cost of another major COVID surge would be ruinous. Changing people's behaviour is not easy. But smoking has been significantly reduced, people wear seat-belts, and drink-driving brings social censure.

Second: MPs must stop talking about hospitals as if a health service is synonymous with hospital care, and they must back public health.

It was reckless to underfund and overload the NHS leaving no slack in the system to deal with major shocks. Government policy as a result failed to 'protect the NHS' in a meaningful sense. It was overwhelmed. The crisis of acute COVID hospital admissions was dealt with by cancelling non-urgent surgery, building up a gigantic backlog, and transferring frail patients into care homes. Without adequate support, under-protected NHS and care-home staff shouldered an intolerable burden. Over 850 NHS staff

died from COVID during 2020. There was no ‘protective ring’ around care homes.

Third: Learning from mistakes in our current pandemic, there must be effective pre-planning and resourcing for all types of emergencies.

Changing public behaviour in response to a major pandemic requires trust in those in authority. Lying to people to hide mistakes, coupled with misplaced morale-boosting optimism, destroys trust. This is not Britain in 1940 when sustaining morale was essential for survival. Trust depends on transparency, and competent, timely decision-making, based on government’s willingness to heed expert advice. Experts must not be pressured to give the advice government wants to hear. They are not special beings immune to human failings such as ill-judged deference to authority.

Fourth: To be trusted and gain public compliance in a crisis government policy must be evidence-based and led by expert advice.

A binary opposition between the good of the economy and protection for the public from COVID infection makes little sense. It is, though, relevant for infected low income workers who should have been given government support to quarantine. The Prime Minister and Chancellor opposed lockdowns on economic grounds. It is now commonly accepted that delays in imposing, and over-hasty release from preventive measures, caused thousands of unnecessary deaths. Owing to exponential growth in infection, a two weeks delay can result in two months of far more economically damaging consequences further down the line.

Fifth: Health messages must be clear, evidence-based and err on the side of caution if economic consequences are to be minimised.

Find, test, trace, isolate and support are important ways to reduce transmission of the virus. Local health authorities responsible for public health have the experience, the knowledge and the necessary relationships in their communities to be effective. The farming out of this vital set of responses to SERCO and other private companies was not just a mistake, it was a mistake motivated by ideology. ‘Private Good, Public Bad’ is a belief dear to the Tory back-benches. £37 billion of taxpayers’ money was poured away as a result.

Sixth: The government must adopt a policy of subsidiarity, acknowledging that the most effective level for action is the level nearest to the problem. Action at a higher level should not be taken unless action at a lower level is ineffective.

The UK’s rate of COVID deaths per 100,000 compared to other similar countries is inexcusable. Perhaps a residue of imperial arrogance, there were no signs that those grappling with the COVID unknowns in the early days paid any attention to the experience of Asian countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam and Singapore. Consultation with them might have quickly knocked ‘herd immunity’ theories on the head.

Seventh: When dealing with an unfamiliar global problem, in this case a pandemic, consult and learn from those who have successfully dealt with one.

Britain has the advantage of being an island and the disadvantage of being a transport hub. Having left the European Union and talked a great deal of nonsense about ‘taking back control of our borders’, the present Government

failed to do precisely that. Variants rampant in countries whose governance is even worse than our own are spreading. The Indian variant may be 60% more transmissible. India was put on the 'red list' two weeks after Pakistan and Bangladesh. Some believe because the Prime Minister wished to visit India in pursuit of a trade deal.

Eighth: Effective border controls and properly monitored isolation of incoming visitors or returnees must be imposed early.

Co-ordination of medical research, promoted by Professor Dame Sally Davies when Chief Medical Officer, 2011-2019, notably by building up a body of expertise on viruses and vaccines, has given the UK a head-start in genome analysis and vaccine production. This was far-sighted thinking within the NHS, a tangible success for public health in Britain. Ministers ought to acknowledge our debt to this preparatory work on vaccine response to COVID, rather than trying to take all the credit for rapid vaccine roll-out in order to deflect attention from their multiple mistakes.

Ninth: Co-ordinated research bringing together the best brains internationally in the field of immunology and vaccines must be encouraged, well-funded and facilitated by government.

The World Health Organisation has never been more needed than today. It has its faults. Like the UN it is only as good as its members and Syria (still led by the brutal Assad regime) is now on its executive board. But the impoverishment and weakness of health systems in the Global South can only be alleviated by international action. This has become dramatically apparent during the pandemic.

Tenth: Starting with the coming G7 meeting, Britain must play a much big-

ger role in the WHO, especially leading on the dissemination of research findings and supporting centres dedicated to vaccine development and immunology.

The Independent Inquiry announced by the Prime Minister starts in Spring 2022. Dame Deidre Hine who undertook the swine-flu report estimates that it will take at least 2-3 years to complete. Well after the next general election.

See TheArticle 01/06/2021

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12.20 Vaccines: 300 Years of Anti-Vaxx Disruption 30/7/2021

In his recent book, *How To Make a Vaccine: An essential guide for COVID-19 & Beyond*, Dr. John Rhodes celebrates the 300th anniversary of the first well-recorded inoculation against smallpox in Britain in August 1721. At the time smallpox was killing up to 400,000 people in Europe every year including a grandchild of King George I.

The science of vaccination has made extraordinary strides. Our thinking about ethics only some modest positive developments. Vaccination opened up a set of important questions about the common good, choice and individual responsibility, misinformation, and latterly, moral indifference.

The story begins in Constantinople with the wife of the British Amba-

sador to the court of the Ottoman Sultan. Once a beauty, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was disfigured by smallpox but survived to become an advocate of inoculation, or as she called it ‘ingrafting’, a practice performed on the Sultan’s wives. Lady Montagu’s son was successfully inoculated against smallpox in 1718. On her return to London a grand promotional event for the inoculation of her daughter was organised with royal court physicians including the King’s physician, Sir Hans Sloane, in attendance.

The Princess of Wales, Caroline of Ansbach, well read in the science of the day, (later Queen as wife of George II), instigated an experiment with the aim of protecting her own children. Six prisoners due to be hanged in Newgate, were offered their lives and freedom if they volunteered as guinea-pigs to test the safety and effectiveness of inoculation, also called variolation. With celebrity endorsement from London’s good and great this became a high profile event which Fellows of the Royal Society and some 25 members of the College of Physicians came to observe. In charge was the Scottish physician, Charles Maitland, a former embassy physician in Constantinople where he had learned the technique.

What followed was not for the faint-hearted.

Maitland made an incision into an arm and a leg of each convict and then inserted material from the pustules of an infected person. He had to repeat the procedure as not enough local reaction could be detected. One of the volunteers received the material up the nose. A 19-year old girl who had been inoculated was later exposed to a child smallpox victim and

proved to be immune. All six were given a royal pardon and walked free a month later. Public opinion about inoculation was divided and, as it is today, politicised: the Whigs at court justifying the experiment on utilitarian grounds and the Tories opposing it on grounds that physicians should not play God. The anti-vaxx movement in Britain had begun.

Doctors in Asia had been playing God and evoking opposition for many years. Rhodes quotes the Chinese emperor, K'ang-hsi in the late 1600s. "The method of inoculation having been brought to light during my reign, I had it used upon you, my sons and daughters...In the beginning when I had it tested on one or two people, some older person taxed me with extravagance, and spoke very strongly against inoculation. The courage which I summoned up to insist on its practice has saved the lives and health of millions of men".

The next big step, from inoculation to vaccination, came courtesy of a Gloucestershire milkmaid, Sarah Nelmes, who caught cowpox from a cow called Blossom. It's the better known story of two rural physicians, Edward Jenner and John Fewster, proving that pathogens administered in a weakened form could protect against a more virulent form. Result: millions of lives saved. Blossom's hide hangs on the library wall of St. George's Medical School a bovine equivalent of Jeremy Bentham's stuffed hide displayed in University College London.

But there is a lot more to Rhodes informative book than some captivating medical history. He is at his most instructive teasing out the complex-

ities of the human immune system, a little army of interactive defenders against foreign intrusion each with its own task: surveillance cells patrolling, helper T-cells, killer T-cells, B-cells which have daughter cells that produce the antibodies we've all heard about, regulatory T-cells that shut down the immune response once the pathogen is defeated, memory B-cells that, I imagine, must trigger the amplified response from a booster dose of vaccine, and memory T-cells. I wish the word awesome hadn't been voided of all meaning. The immune system is simply awesome. Though it can and does make mistakes.

How To Make a Vaccine is an important genre of science popularisation. It is clearly written but asks a lot of a reader without any biological or scientific background. Not because it is aimed primarily at a scientific audience but because it is narrating and explaining the intricate complexity of the immune system. There were well over two hundred different COVID vaccines at different stages of development as Rhodes was writing. They fall into eight distinctive categories depending on what part of the virus biochemistry is targeted and how: inactivated or attenuated forms of the virus, its DNA or messenger RNA or protein configuration for example. This is good news as variant mutations are unlikely to counter the effectiveness of all available vaccine categories.

Opposition to protective measures against viruses and bacteria has a long history. Andrew Wakefield's spurious claim in 1998 that the combined vaccination against measles, mumps and rubella, MMR, was linked to autism was the direct antecedent to current resistance. The history indicates that a minority of the public will always be prone to making bad decisions about how best to look

after their – and others’ - children or their own health. And this will inevitably create public health problems.

The Pope has made it unequivocally clear being vaccinated is a moral obligation. But Vatican guidance for Catholics in 2020 was pre-occupied by the question of the origin of cell lines that have contributed to vaccine production – human foetal tissue from two sources in the 1960s - despite vaccination being of paramount concern for the common good in this pandemic. This was at the expense of common good arguments for getting jabbed. The guidance concludes that the remoteness of the original ‘evil act’, abortion, removes any complicity from those seeking protection for themselves, family and others today. Indeed vaccination ‘may be a moral obligation’ if there are no other effective ways of stopping infection. Those who refuse in conscience must scrupulously find other ways of avoiding transmission of the virus. Scientists should obtain their cell lines without ending the development of a human life. Something tells me this is not going to sway militant anti-vaxxers.

How to Make a Vaccine is well worth the effort. The scientific progress it presents is in many ways comforting. It puts flesh on the dry bones of ‘following the science’. Anti-vaxxers, especially those addicted to conspiracy theories, should ask themselves how the medical profession, with their Hippocratic Oath, have conspired to fool the world for the last three hundred years – and yet managed to save so many lives. And then dip into this paperback. They won’t even open it, of course. The persistence of opposition to vaccination based on nothing to do with conscience is sad, obstinate and dangerous.

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