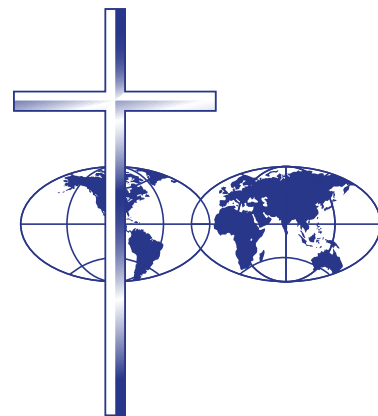


# Vocation for Justice

Summer 2023 Volume 37 No 2



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## Just Freedom



**COLUMBAN MISSION**

Collaborating with the National Justice and Peace Network of England and Wales & Justice and Peace Scotland

Our cover photo shows Columban Sister Kate Midgley and Columban Education Worker James Trewby protesting at Westminster on Ash Wednesday against plans to build a new coal mine in Cumbria. What does this have to do with the theme of this newsletter, 'Just Freedom'? The freedom to have livelihoods and live off the land and oceans are compromised globally by the climate crisis which is linked to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal. Protecting vulnerable countries and communities means challenging the freedom of companies to make greater profits by exploiting coal resources. This is the paradox of freedom. Jonathan Sacks puts it very well: "True freedom requires the rule of law and justice, and a judicial system in which the rights of some are not secured by the denial of rights to others."

In this issue we hear from a Palestinian Christian and climate and peace campaigners reflecting on challenges to freedom and human rights. Teacher Marie Healy, who recently witnessed the hardship of refugees in Calais, says, "I met so many people who have been stripped of their rights and dignity."

I for one would like freedom from fear in our volatile world. Concerns about freedom and democracy are being voiced everywhere. "All the protests, all the people's feeling, meant nothing," said an outraged citizen of Plymouth after more than 100 mature trees were cut down in the city centre late at night on 14 March. This ignored local residents, as well as climate and biodiversity goals. And how can water companies get away with dumping so much raw sewage into our rivers?

The new Genetic Technology Bill has quietly become law in the UK, relaxing regulations around gene editing for plants and animals. The organic sector had complained that no proper assessment had fed into the bill's drafting on the coexistence measures with organic, from seed segregation and crop separation distances to labelling and record keeping. Environment minister

Mark Spencer said, "I think it's an exciting opportunity, and who knows where the science may take us." Where indeed?

And what about Artificial Intelligence? Human-competitive intelligence can pose profound risks to society but it is here without risks being assessed.

Of course, we have just passed the 20th anniversary of the Iraq War and many Columbans were among the one million-strong demonstration against it in Hyde Park on 15 February 2003. We didn't save the hundreds of thousands who were killed, but that legacy of speaking out was not quashed.

As for freedom, what are we for?

Our centrespread is on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the theme of July's Conference of the National Justice and Peace Network of England and Wales. Two landmark documents of 2015 were the SDGs and Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. They represent two different lenses towards the common goals of ending poverty and leaving no one behind. Basic freedoms are identified.

March saw campaigning by church groups on issues of freedom, democracy, justice and human rights.

Church opposition to the so-called Illegal Refugee Bill has been seen in petitions and vigils at parliament. Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark applauded the "incredible work" in Dover by lifeboat personnel, churches and community organisations who are supporting refugees crossing the Channel. He called for humane resolutions, and "not isolating people or transporting them elsewhere."

The same month saw street protests in Farnborough against the Security and Policing

exhibition which included arms companies. A Columban group will join protests at the 12-15 September International Arms Fair at the ExCel Centre in East London.

MPs and peers have warned that legislation going to the Lords designed to curb strike action fails to meet the UK's human rights obligations. Bishop Sarah Mulally of London said in the Lords on 9 March: "The right to strike is crucial as a key way to express to the government when conditions need to change. Today I spoke to support amendments to the Government's strikes bill that would prevent healthcare workers from being sacked for striking." Maria Exall, the Catholic head of the TUC reminded the congregation in her talk at a Romero Service in London on 25 March that Catholic Social Teaching endorses the right for working people to organise themselves into unions.

Because of the action of so many, life-affirming things are happening. The UN has secured an historic Global Ocean Treaty, after lobbying from a 5.5 million-strong movement worldwide. This is a huge win for marine life and for communities who rely on the oceans for food and livelihoods. Also, the European Parliament is now supporting the inclusion of "ecocide" in its revised environmental crime directive.

We applaud the young people who entered our 2023 Schools Competition on the theme: "Building Peaceful Futures". We hope this will help them develop skills and perspectives that are forward-looking and solution finding. ■ **Ellen Teague**



A winning entry in the Columban 2023 Schools Competition.

## Palestinian Christians and Freedom

**John Munayer**

***John is a Lecturer and Coordinator of the Academic Journal of Palestinian Christianity at Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem.***

Palestinian Christians share the same experiences of oppression and violence as their Muslim Palestinian counterparts. Palestinian Christians face restrictions on their movement, land ownership, and access to holy sites, just like other Palestinians living under occupation. They also suffer from the same violence and repression that the Israeli military and settlers inflict on Palestinians, including demolitions of homes and businesses, imprisonment, and extrajudicial killings. The same is true for Palestinian Christians living inside the State of Israel, who face discrimination in most areas of life.

Some Palestinian Christians have chosen to engage in nonviolent resistance against the occupation, while others have opted to leave their homeland in search of better opportunities and a safer future for their families. This is especially true for young Palestinian Christians, who are seeking better prospects for their lives. In many ways, the Christian population in the Holy Land is under an enormous threat of disappearing.

The response to these challenges by the Churches has been mixed. Some Churches, or more accurately, some clergy members, have been more active and vocal about the human rights abuses and atrocities committed against the Palestinian population (both Christian and Muslim). Unfortunately, other clergy members and Christian leaders, have been much less concerned with these restrictions and violations. This is often the case because many clergy are not Palestinian themselves, and prefer focusing on other challenges that the Churches face.

As a result, there are often tensions and conflicts between the international clergy, and local Palestinian laity. This relationship is a complicated one that is shaped by a long history of political, social, and religious factors. Not to mention the diversity of Churches in Palestine, including Greek



*John Munayer*

Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, Protestant and more. And all of these Churches have their own hierarchies and leadership structures, which further complicate matters.

In response to the challenges mentioned, many Palestinian Christians, including myself, have embraced and sought to promote Palestinian Liberation Theology. The central aim of Palestinian Liberation Theology is to address the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people in their struggle against oppression and injustice in nonviolent ways. It encourages Christians to be actively involved in the struggle for Palestinian liberation, and to challenge the structures of oppression and suffering in society.

It also attempts to challenge the theological justifications used to legitimise settler-colonialism, occupation and dispossession, emphasising instead principles of justice, love, and solidarity. Moreover, Palestinian Liberation Theology emphasises the experiences of the Palestinian people as a theological source, the importance of contextual interpretation of the Bible, and the need for interfaith solidarity in the struggle for justice. Jesus' confrontation with the Roman Empire is seen by Palestinian theologians as a blueprint for the Palestinian Christian resistance.

In many ways, Palestinian Liberation Theology is part of a more global movement among

Christians and non-Christians to decolonise their land, structures and minds. As such, promoting Palestinian human rights should be seen as a joint struggle with communities who are fighting against white supremacy, capitalism, discrimination and sexism. It seeks to see all people, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, nationality or other identity marker, in freedom and out of captivity. For this reason, Palestinian Christians have sought to form alliances with similar movements of liberation theology from the US, South Africa, India and Latin America.

Palestinian initiatives involving this form of dialogue are Christ at the Checkpoint Conference, Sabeel and Kairos Palestine.

However, when engaging with international Christians, this can be extremely complicated as many Christians have embraced a form of Christian Zionism or tend to be sympathetic towards the State of Israel because of Western bias and/or Holocaust guilt. Therefore, we Palestinian Christians often encourage international Christians and Churches to hold on to the principles preached and lived by Christ. In other words, in Jesus' ministry, he emphasised the need to bless one's neighbour, and neighbours tend to be one's enemy, by praying and blessing them. Thus, as Christians we ought to bless all people living in the land regardless of their identity. A good question to challenge Christians abroad is whether they value the lives of Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Muslims equally. And if so, why do we not advocate for all these populations in the same manner?

Churches must speak up against human rights abuses, especially when their governments are supporting such policies. And in the Palestinian context, this means defending the rights of Palestinians from racist policies and colonial practices of the State of Israel. We all have a biblical mandate to protect the marginalised, oppressed and those suffering most, regardless to their nationality, ethnicity or religion. Finally, I invite Christians and Churches to visit the Holy Land, to view the beautiful ancient stones, but also engage with the living stones as well. ■



## Freedom to Speak Out Melanie Nazareth and Gill Slater

**Two members of the Catholic group within Christian Climate Action urge meaningful political and corporate action in the UK to address the international climate and ecological crises. They feel freedom to speak out is vital.**

**Gill:** I feel that it is my clear Christian duty to live simply, to care for creation, including humanity, and most particularly the vulnerable. I became involved with Extinction Rebellion in November 2018 and the following year I joined CCA. My climate action has taken me from the streets of London, to Cornwall for the G7 and Glasgow for COP 26, protesting polluters and politicians. I'm also a trade unionist and a Unite Green Rep and feel very strongly that we have a responsibility to speak out in defence of workers locally and globally.

**Melanie:** I am a lawyer and my work mostly involves the welfare of children. I want to leave them a world in which they can flourish as God intended. This means that I have to do my faithful best to change the structural drivers of climate change. I have come to realise that whilst individual choices in the way we live are very important, the unavoidable truth is that our choices will never be enough to stop global heating and environmental destruction without government and business taking strong and courageous action. Our faith calls for us to follow the example of the prophets and we have to challenge those with power to do better. I think in a modern context this means engaging in direct action, things like street protest, tree protection, and public prayer vigils. It has never been more important.

**Gill:** There are a number of groups within the Trade Union Movement seeking to advance climate action and a just transition, for example the CACCTU (Campaign against Climate Change Trade Union) group which estimates that a million people in new climate jobs through an integrated National Climate Service could cut CO2 emissions by 86% in 20 years and could create another half a million jobs in the supply line. I'm also part of Extinction Rebellion Trade Unionists – made up of rank and file trade union activists. We are building links between the trade union movement and climate activists,

recognising that we share the common cause of global climate and social justice and that strikes are one of the most effective forms of nonviolent direct action.

Climate activists and trade unionists face a common threat from the Public Order Bill making its way through Parliament. The bill seeks to bring back anti-protest proposals previously rejected from the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act and to introduce even more draconian measures. Proposals include the expansion of stop-and-search, the introduction of protest banning orders, and new criminal offences which strike at the heart of protest and threaten to criminalise those who take to the streets for their cause.

Ahead of the Public Order Bill's Report Stage, the Government added definitions of "serious disruption" and created new triggers for the police to impose conditions on, or even ban protests that have a "more than minor" rather than "serious" impact. Such conditions could include preventing a trade union from marching past their employer's building; limiting the number of people who can attend a protest, and requiring a protest to end at a certain time.

The recent PCSC Act has a 'noise trigger', which gives the police power to restrict noisy protests. The Public Order Bill proposes a further three new triggers with low thresholds: physical obstruction hindering daily activities, more than minor delay to delivery of time-sensitive products to consumers, and more than minor delay of access to essential goods or services.

The Government's approach to protest is pushing ordinary trade unionists into a position of potential law-breaking as they seek to exercise their union rights. In the current climate of gross inequality this does not appear to be deterring people from joining trade unions. It may instead result in larger numbers of trade union members

viewing and experiencing the law as unreasonable and unjust.

**Melanie:** A protestor can now face a 51-week prison sentence for breaking conditions imposed on a protest. It is a serious attack on the way we are able to exercise some of our fundamental democratic freedoms. Our human rights legislation means we have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests. This new legislation is undermining these rights. People say that it is having a deterrent effect on their willingness to protest, being more afraid to exercise these rights because they are afraid of being arrested and facing a draconian penalty. Even if this is not going to happen it has created a climate of fear.

I'm not going to stop protesting. I may be a bit more anxious about it now, but I know my rights and I know the limits of the legislation and that gives me confidence. I remind myself that the Old Testament prophets were not always popular with their leaders and the people, but they were faithful to God's way in acting to challenge them when they had gone astray. And the Jesus we know in the Gospels is squarely in the tradition of those prophets, reminding people of uncomfortable truths where necessary, and constantly challenging harmful norms and laws in very public ways. This is a critical time for our world and its crucial that we are not silenced. ■



CCA outside parliament.

## 'Three Steps and One Bow'

**Pat Cunningham SSC**

### ***A Columban priest based in Seoul reports on freedom of assembly, protest and collective bargaining in South Korea.***

Koreans take pride in expressing their views and opinions through peaceful, nonviolent protests. They have developed various methods, such as candlelight vigils and sit-ins, to fight against injustice and oppression in their society.

Among these, the "three steps one bow" method is a powerful and symbolic form of protest used by the Buddhist community. It was seen during the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s when the country was under a military dictatorship that stifled dissent. In response, citizens organised peaceful protests demanding the restoration of democracy. The use of "three steps one bow" cemented its place as a powerful symbol of resistance against injustice and the struggle for freedom.

In recent times I have witnessed a member of the Quaker community engaging in 'three steps one bow' in Gangjeong while protesting the construction of the highly controversial naval base on Jeju Island, completed in 2016. Dressed in traditional funeral attire while bowing deeply to the ground, Mr Oh Cheol Geun was mourning the death of national sovereignty, democracy and human rights, and the destruction of Gureombi Rock and pristine coastline to make way for a naval base utilised by US naval forces in the region. The symbolic act was not only physically demanding but also carried tremendous symbolic importance. It was an act of humility and submission towards local people who are oppressed and marginalised, while lamenting the desecration of the sacred rock where ancestral rites had been conducted by villagers for centuries.

The Jeju Naval Base was implemented by the South Korean government with the intention to strengthen the security of East Asia through naval power and keep China in check. The base was built on a UNESCO-designated peace biosphere reserve that was home to some of the most diverse coral communities in Korea. The South



*'Three steps one bow' at Jeju Island.*

Korean government's response to opposition has been harsh, with authorities arresting protesters and limiting their freedom of speech. In 2013, the South Korean police arrested 62 protestors occupying the construction site of the Jeju Naval Base, including local residents and activists. According to Human Rights Watch, this crackdown, "included the abuse of government power, violations of freedom of expression and association, and the use of excessive force by the police."

The South Korean government has also used various forms of propaganda to discredit and silence opposition groups. One peace NGO had its offices raided due to a so-called violation of the National Security Act, a law often used to stifle free speech and suppress opposition. The South Korean government has long struggled with balancing the need for national security with individual rights and freedoms. The opposition to the Jeju Naval Base is just one example of the government failing to adequately respect and protect these freedoms.

In recent times, Amnesty International has raised concerns about the use of excessive force against protesters and labour unions. Police have used water cannons and tear gas.

Even though the South Korean Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the government limits this right by subjectively applying articles and caveats to this freedom, consequently shrinking space for civil society to operate.

The right to join a labour union and engage in collective bargaining is guaranteed by the Korean Constitution and the Labour Standards Act. However, the government is reluctant to enforce labour laws and regulations. This has created an environment in which employers feel safe to violate the law, including denying workers the right to form a union or engage in collective bargaining.

Another challenge is the hostile attitude of many employers towards trade unions. Many companies view labour unions as a threat to their profitability and are quick to take legal action against workers who attempt to join or lead a union. This has created a culture of fear among workers, preventing some from exercising their constitutional right to join a union.

One of the most pressing challenges facing labour unions in South Korea is the precarious nature of employment in the country. As of 2021, over 20% of workers in South Korea are classified as non-regular workers, meaning that they are not entitled to the same benefits or protections as regular workers. Non-regular workers are often excluded from the collective bargaining process and are subject to low wages and poor working conditions. This challenges labour unions to find ways to adequately represent the interests of these workers.

There have been numerous heartbreaking cases of non-regular workers and migrant workers who have lost their lives on jobs due to the precarious nature of their labour status and poor safety standards in the small/medium enterprise sector.

One of the big issues for migrants' rights activists is the struggle to ensure a proper Worker Permit System for migrants as opposed to the existing Employment Permit System. This denies the freedom of workers to change their workplaces and be paid properly for their labour. All power is in the hands of unscrupulous employers. True freedom remains elusive for many despite years of ongoing struggle in the workplace. The call for all workers to unite remains as strong as ever. ■

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*“Our world faces many grave challenges: Widening conflicts and inequality. Extreme weather and deadly intolerance. Security threats - including nuclear weapons. We have the tools and wealth to overcome these challenges. All we need is the will.”*

*António Guterres, UN Secretary General*





# THE 2030 AGENDA

## **End poverty in all its forms everywhere**

More than 700 million people still live in extreme poverty on less than US\$1.90 a day. They struggle to fulfill the most basic needs (health, education, access to water and sanitation). Most of them – more than 400 million – live in sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty affects developed countries as well. Around 30 million children are growing up poor in the world's richest countries. Eradicating poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. More than 750 million people suffer from hunger worldwide, the vast majority in developing countries.

## **Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene is a human right. Yet water scarcity affects more than 40% of the world population and is projected to increase with the rise of global temperatures as a result of climate change. Globally, 3 in 10 people lack access to safely managed drinking water services. And 6 in 10 people lack access to safely managed sanitation facilities. Investments in infrastructure and sanitation facilities; protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems; and hygiene education are among the steps necessary to ensure universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030.

## **Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**

The world's ecological footprint should be reduced by changing the way goods and resources are produced and consumed. Shared natural resources should be managed efficiently and toxic waste and pollutants disposed of carefully. Support should be provided to developing countries to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption by 2030.

## **Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss**

Plant life provides 80% of the human diet, and agriculture is an important economic resource and means of development. Forests cover more than 30% of the Earth's surface, but 7 million hectares of forests are being lost every year and we see persistent degradation of drylands and desertification. Of the 8,300 animal breeds known, 8% are extinct and 22% are at risk of extinction. Halting deforestation and restoring the use of terrestrial ecosystems is necessary to reduce the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity which are part of our common heritage.

## **Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

Gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnates social progress. On average, women in the labour market still earn 23% less than men globally. Women spend about three times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, and discrimination in public office, all remain huge barriers. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.



## **Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts**

Climate change affects every country on every continent. It is caused by human activities and threatens the future of our planet. Impacts include changing weather patterns, rising sea level, and more extreme weather events. If left unchecked, climate change will undo a lot of the progress made over the past years in development. It will also provoke mass migrations that will lead to instability and wars. Affordable, scalable solutions are now available to enable countries to leapfrog to cleaner, more resilient, and low-carbon economies. Climate change is a global challenge that requires coordinated international cooperation.

## Freedom to Seek Sanctuary

**Marie Healy**

**Marie Healy is a secondary teacher from Bishop Challoner Catholic College in Birmingham. She recently joined a visit to Calais organised by the Columbans and Hallam Diocese Youth Ministry.**

How easy it was to watch the scenes from Calais on the news and from the safety of my living room. This trip gave me the chance to meet and be humbled by some of the most inspiring people I am ever likely to encounter.

Our first stop in Calais was Secours Catholique day centre. A lot of thought and effort had gone into making the centre a welcoming space where visitors could escape the grey, cold reality of February on Calais streets. Pastel portraits covered every wall and told a story of all who had passed through the centre; all ages and nationalities. I could only imagine where they were now, hoping they had beaten the odds to find safety. Practical, legal and mental health advice leaflets were printed in different languages and illustrated information posters on what happens once a boat has been rescued were on display. Washing facilities were at capacity, phones getting charged and the last games of chequers and table football were being played. These young men would soon be back on the streets or into a camp.

Care4calais works out of a massive warehouse on an industrial estate. The sheer volume of donations was quite overwhelming. Endless boxes filled shelves and racks but the donations go out almost as quickly as they come in. We were put on 'tent task'; assemble a tent, check it is in a clean and good state, and then label it up as checked. One of the students pointed out how hard it had been for us to put up one tent in a calm, dry warehouse and what a contrast it would be to put it up in the wind, rain and mud. Tents are not allowed in Calais and are regularly hosed down or confiscated. Checking them seemed like a redundant task but if any of the tents could offer shelter from the elements for even one night, it would be worth it. How varied the condition of donations were. Some of the tents seemed barely used but others were in tatters; muddy, stained and torn. It was sad to see that there is still a mindset of 'beggars can't be choosers' when it comes to charity donations.

The afternoon saw us go out to a disused patch of land for 'distribution and services'. We were joined by Spreading Kindness Together, an Islamic charity from Yorkshire with a strong desire to help the most vulnerable. They had brought with them over 800 pairs of new boots, walking socks, hats and gloves. Stations were set up: a hot drinks station, bike repair, tables with games such as Connect 4, dominoes and chess, extension leads screwed into wooden pallets and plugged into a generator to charge mobile phones. There was also a 'hair station'; five camping chairs set up in a circle with combs, brushes and two pairs of clippers on the ground in the middle. It was heart-warming to see young lads styling each other's hair.

Men of all ages and nationalities soon appeared from all directions. Lots went straight to queue for new boots; they had heard what was on offer that day and walked miles to get there. Every person I walked past said hello and smiled. It was clear from the reaction of all the refugees was that this couple of hours was a rare time during the day where they were treated with kindness and dignity. Despite being tired, traumatised, cold and hungry, the refugees still managed to give out positivity. One of our group leaders made a comment about looking for the face of Christ in those we would encounter. I saw Him in the faces of those who were persecuted, and in those who showed love and kindness. The people we met were not of the

same religion but all had the belief that a greater being was at work.

The next afternoon we set up in a car park in central Calais. Again, men came from all directions. A few police cars went past and we were told they might stop and question us. A young man, Frankie, from the Ivory Coast, came to use the clippers and asked a volunteer to shave him. Without hesitation, the volunteer sat him down and started. I wondered how long it had been since Frankie had been touched with such tenderness. We did not know how long he had been in Calais, how long it had been since he had washed or the last time he had any physical contact with someone. I felt ashamed knowing that if he did make it across the Channel he would not be welcomed by the authorities.

We spoke with three men; one had a gash on his forehead and another wore a hospital band. Their dinghy had overturned and the police picked them up and beat them with batons. Their silver lining, they said, was an overnight hospital stay, out of the cold. The men joined a queue to be offered a jumper.

I met so many people who have been stripped of their rights and dignity and yet they still have hope that things will get better. This keeps them alive. My faith has been strengthened by seeing love and faith in others; in the refugees that continue to trust and have faith that they will find safety; in seeing good people reaching out with great compassion to those in need. In witnessing people, especially those I travelled with, advocate for refugees and speak out in support. ■

### Campaigns:

<https://www.safepassage.org.uk/>

<https://care4calais.org/tps://>

[www.safepassage.org.uk/](https://www.safepassage.org.uk/)



Volunteers' briefing in Calais.



# Freedom to live in peace, without fear

**Patricia and Michael Pulham**

**From two members of the Executive of Christian CND.**

“Peace be with you.”  
“Do not be afraid.”

These are two of the most frequent utterances of Jesus. In spite of His being born into a violent world and being aware of how He was going to be dealt with, He never refrained from saying these things. There is an infinitely superior eternal reality where God, the angels and the saints dwell. Presently being in time and space, all manner of difficulties can confront us, but standing fast against them preserves us. Joy can take the place of fear and we can be at peace simply by observing God’s wonderful creation.

It all started for us one Remembrance Sunday. After a coffee morning with Women for Peace, I went home and asked Michael, “What can we do?” Together we thought of getting a peace message out onto the streets of Chester, without hurting those who were grieving, but showing there was a better way. We would hold an all-night vigil by the War Memorial. Michael made a board on which was written, “We mourn the dead. We respect their sacrifice and in their memory let us all work for peace.” so we contacted the Dean of the Cathedral and the Lord Mayor. They were quite happy provided we did not block the parade. We also told the police.

This was when we realised that things were not as simple as that. The first response of the police was to ban our vigil although we would be on Cathedral grounds and had permission - then the press got hold of the story. “Riots on the Streets of Chester” blared one headline locally. The national press started asking questions and then I got a phone call from the Chief Superintendent. “We have decided to allow your little vigil.” So we went ahead - no riots - no problems, but we realised just how important work for peace was - and how strong were the forces against us.

How do ordinary law-abiding people stand up against these forces?

Some are called to martyrdom, some to social ostracism. We were not. The Lord never tests you beyond your capabilities.

## Patricia continues:

I walked home after a talk on nonviolence, sure that this would never be a problem for me. As I reached my gate I looked back and saw a woman standing at the end of the road. A man was hitting her. What could I do? If I interfered he’d probably turn on me, but what had I just been listening to? I turned and walked back. “Stop it”, I shouted. “Leave her alone!” - and he did, and went away. I took the woman home with me for a cup of tea, [gratefully accepted,] and an offer to call the police, [refused].

War and violence in the world is almost impossible to counteract as individuals, so we joined Pax Christi and Christian CND.

It was the time of the arrival of the first Cruise Missiles at Greenham Common and calls went out for women to go and demonstrate there. Although this was a women’s protest, it was a decision we had to make together. We prayed that we would make the right decision, particularly as it might involve arrest {a totally new experience} and we had children to care for and my husband had to keep his job - but early one morning I joined a group to take a coach to Berkshire.

This was also the time when the Peace Movement was referred to as “The Enemy Within”. Television and radio programmes were censored and newspapers very limited in their coverage of political debate so taking your message physically and visually on to the streets was, and still remains important. Together we devised visual and sometimes amusing events to interest the local press. We talked to anyone and everyone about the threat of nuclear weapons, wrote letters and contacted politicians - and how we valued the support of each other and the groups we belonged to.

We all value freedom, but freedom



Patricia and Michael Pulham.

itself can be a frightening thing. Some prisoners experience “Gate Fever” when they are to move on from the regulation of prison life to rejoining the world outside and find this so terrifying that they deliberately commit acts of indiscipline to stay inside longer.

I remember, when at the end of my first short prison sentence, feeling that fear and reluctance to walk alone through the gates into the ‘freedom’ of North London.

Not many of us have the freedom, due to family responsibilities, to choose this way to bring the message of peace to the world. I had this privilege .

There is no hierarchy of work for Peace. It can be as positive a step {and even as difficult} to wear a badge, or a Crucifix - or to raise the topic in conversation. We are all called to bring Christ’s message of Peace in different ways.

As I said in Court once: “I stand here time after time and you all listen politely but you never hear a single word that I say. I am talking about the end of the world - the end of the lives of my children and your children - the end of all that makes our world so beautiful. No more birds or trees or flowers and all you want to know is whether or not I cut one single strand of wire at Capenhurst. Of course I did. You know I did. How else can I get you to listen to me?” ■

<https://christiancnd.org.uk/>

## Building Peaceful Futures

**Thea Smith**

**The writer is a 15-year-old pupil at Loreto Grammar School, Altrincham, Cheshire. She was a winner in the 2023 Columban Schools Competition.**

I stand amongst the ruins of a broken world. I look between the North and the South. I see violent divisions, racism, exploitation, raging inequality. Some live with silk clothes and others die from thirst. Some have the world at their fingertips; others are on their knees.

I look to the East - I see political turmoil, controlled media, a war that threatens to tear everything apart. The discussion of nuclear weapons sits at the forefront, in between stories reporting numbers of the dead. Hope is crushed as millions of refugees flee their homes.

I look to the West - I see how it has used the rest of the world - the people and the environment - for its own benefit. I watch as it blames other countries for not being able to afford greener ways to develop - hypocrisy which is surely too apparent to be ignored.

I look to the past. I see countless battles fought by countless leaders, countless soldiers marching countless steps, often for no gain. Years lost to despair and futility, memories scarred with the horrors of international global conflict. People persecuted and imprisoned, their names and voices marked in history's eyes as irrelevant.

I look to the future - I see nothing but the darkness of settled pollution, of ideas trialled and failed, of our planet crumbling, temperatures rising, biodiversity gone. People fighting against nature to bring a level of comfort that can no longer be achieved, and could never be sustained in the first place, because of our selfishness.

Humanity has been a victim of itself. Never able to accept being wrong, never wanting to give up material prizes, always searching to ensure longevity. And it's gone about that in a way that instead ensured destruction; destruction of peace, of unity, of other species that would have surely fared better without it.

So, it can seem hopeless. When you look at the news and are confronted with perpetual negativity, it can

seem there's no way, no time, for us to recover. But what if there is? Can we look past the problems and see a world of peace?

I think we can. Because amidst all the suffering, and uncertainty, and disruption, I see people who have faith in their God, faith in themselves, faith in there being enough people who see that it's not too late. We are responsible for driving the changes that lead to the end of conflict, and as I look around the Earth I see people standing up for what is right.

I look between the North and the South. I see people bringing aid and awareness, spreading messages of love. And if one person cares, that one person can start a chain of events that only brings positivity.

I look to the East - I see many places that are progressing rapidly, developing their economies, and raising standards of living. This leads to more countries being on an equal footing, which opens doors to trade and mutually beneficial agreements, with which comes increased political stability and less exploitation.

I look to the West - I see people taking responsibility for the past and paving the way to a better future, adding compensation for countries impacted by things out of

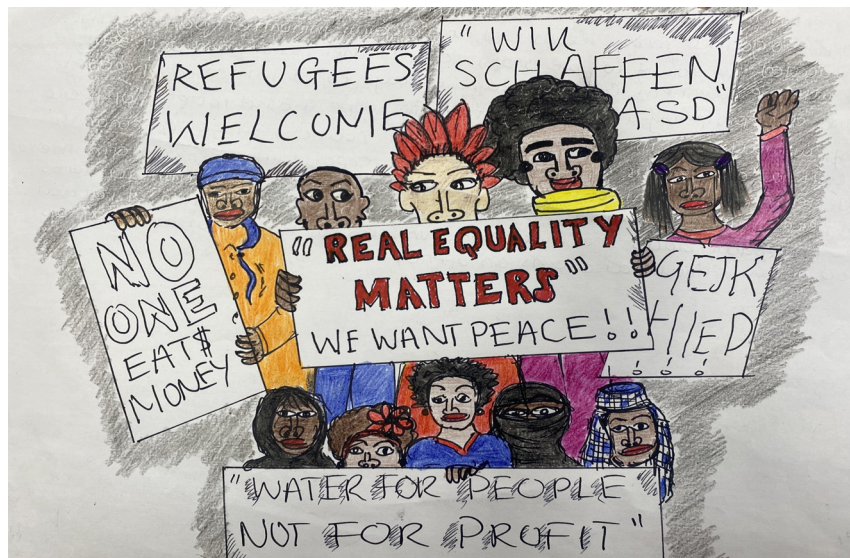
their control, supporting clean industrialisation. There is a growing movement amongst the very rich who are recognising that even a small increase in their taxation could bring billions out of poverty.

I look to the past - I see the people who made a difference. Some have their names engraved in gold, some are a footnote on a memorial. But they all had an impact. Humans tend to preserve the 'bad', which in turn makes us forget the 'good'. We study the dictators and the damage, the threats and the terrors. But interwoven in the threads, that is the vast tapestry of history, there's a constant path of positivity, one which maybe isn't studied as much as it should be.

I look to the future - I see a world of equality, of safety, of comfort. Where people can live without fear of lethal opposition, and don't have to worry about the bare essentials that are human rights. Where everyone gets a chance and can make their own decisions, unburdened by things that we, as a species and society, need to work hard to eliminate.

Peace must start somewhere though, and where better than yourself? Not everyone is going to be a globally powerful individual. But individuals make up the power that is required for a harmonious future. If we strive for a world we know can be peaceful, every little thing we do will build the foundations for what we need to achieve it. I stand amongst the beginnings of the future, and that future belongs to peace.

[www.columbancompetition.com/](http://www.columbancompetition.com/)



Winning Image by Cara Mashumba of St. Mary's School, Bishop's Stortford.



## Columbans focus on Migration and Climate

Columban missionaries internationally are prioritising "migrant and refugee issues, climate change and the coexistence of various cultures" according to Society Leader Fr Timothy Mulroy. He was speaking at the Society's 'International Leadership Conference' in South Korea, being held 19-31 March and attended by heads and representatives of Columban missionaries from 16 countries.

## Well done Operation Noah

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has made it clear that we can have no new fossil fuel developments if we hope to limit global heating to safe levels. And we cannot even burn all the fossil fuels from existing developments. Operation Noah, for its Lent campaign '40 Days, 40 Dioceses', highlighted each day one of the 40 CofE and Catholic dioceses in England and Wales that had yet to make a divestment commitment. By Easter, nearly half of Catholic dioceses in England and Wales had divested.

## JRS UK decries inhumane detention

As the Illegal Migration Bill was going through Parliament, Jesuit Refugee Service UK reported that Napier Barracks, a former army base in Kent, was holding asylum seekers in overcrowded, noisy, insanitary conditions for months. Sarah Teather, JRS UK Director, said: "Conditions at Napier are reminiscent of conditions they fled.... It must not be the new normal for asylum accommodation in the UK." Report at: <https://www.jrsuk.net/napier-report/>

## Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence

Pope Francis has warned against using AI unethically or irresponsibly. Speaking on 27 March, he said that AI raises serious questions and must be used to promote human dignity and the common good.

## Doctrine of Discovery discarded

Responding to a request from Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, the Vatican has released a document repudiating the so-called "Doctrine of Discovery," which allowed Christian colonisers to claim the land of non-Christian Indigenous people.

**EXTRACTS FROM TALKS DURING ROMERO WEEK by Peggy Healy and Maria Exall. Peggy knew St Oscar Romero, and the four US women martyrs – Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan - all martyred in 1980. Maria is President of the TUC.**

**Peggy Healy:** I was so fortunate to be given the opportunity, early on in my life, in Central America, to experience the extraordinary joy of living with and learning from some of the most forgotten and dispossessed communities on the planet. It had its share of heartbreak and pain and fear. We lost a sainted archbishop and four extraordinary women and so many more saints and martyrs. But I have carried their inspiration with me since then ..... This kind of inspiration is truly infectious and it is our task now to infect our world with our energy, love and commitment. Together we need to bring about a new pandemic of kindness, service, mercy and justice. This requires courage and persistence and grit and grace.... We are everywhere! We have heard the cry of the poor and we have not turned away. And why would we, when we have found so much joy and beauty in responding to that cry. The cry of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* rings in our ears and hearts: "Let us be renewed by God's mercy and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the Earth, protect all creation, and make justice and peace flourish."

**Maria Exall:** We need to be as honest as Romero who said: "The Church does not have a monopoly on the Kingdom of God... Outside the Church, anyone who struggles for justice, anyone who makes demands in an unjust atmosphere, is working for the Kingdom of God. This person may not be a Christian." If this makes us Church goers feel uncomfortable, if our complacency is challenged by this, that too is in the spirit of Romero: "This is what the Church wants - to bother your conscience to provoke a crisis in the times we live in. A Church that doesn't stir up a crisis, a gospel that doesn't make us uncomfortable... a word of God that doesn't touch on the specific sins of the society in which it is spoken, what kind of gospel is that?"

**Texts at [www.romerotrue.org.uk](http://www.romerotrue.org.uk)**

**'Fix the Food System'**  
**CAFOD argues that small farmers' seed rights are under threat. Campaigns Officer Stuart Neaverson explains.**

Seeds are life. They are the very foundation for farmers to produce the food that feeds us all. At the heart of the global food crisis is a struggle for control over the world's seeds. For generations, small-scale farmers have freely swapped and shared a wide variety of seeds to produce food and maintain biodiversity. And farmers have developed seeds that ensure crops are resilient to climate change.

However, their right to choose what seeds they use is increasingly under threat as new laws are introduced across the world that limit what small farmers can do with their seeds. Protecting the freedom of farmers to choose seeds is a right we must all stand up for if we are to tackle global hunger while responding to the cry of Earth and the poor.



Seed sovereignty is the right for farmers to save, use, exchange and sell their own seeds. It is about farmers having the power to choose the seeds they plant, rather than that power belonging to corporations or international institutions.

**CAFOD's Campaign** urges the UK government to protect the right of farmers around the world to use their seeds. Laws, which are being brought in with the support of global financial institutions such as the World Bank, overwhelmingly favour large agri-businesses. The organic system can flourish on a far grander scale, but it needs the UK government to use its voice at the World Bank to create a more sustainable and supportive environment for farmers that trusts their knowledge.

**Details at: <https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Fix-the-food-system>**



## Columban Campaigning

### Home Office Vigil for refugees

In March, Columban missionaries were represented at the monthly prayer vigil for refugees outside the Home Office in London. James Trewby, the Columban Education Worker, said, "I pray especially for all the many young people I've met in Catholic schools across Britain, that they may not be disappointed in their dreams of seeing Britain be better at welcoming people in need." The group called on the UK government to create **safe passage** for refugees.



James Trewby at the Home Office Vigil

### Celebrating Biological Diversity

On the UN's International Day for Biological Diversity on Monday 22 May, which also falls within *Laudato Si'* Week, the Columbans are organising a visit to Kew Gardens in West London. If you are interested in joining us contact *James Trewby* at [education@columbans.co.uk](mailto:education@columbans.co.uk).

### Cornwall Columban Way

During *Laudato Si'* Week in May, a Columban group will be walking the Columban Way in Cornwall, a route travelled by St Columban 1,400 years ago. The pilgrimage will take place from 24-27 May and the route is from Padstow to Fowey (about 30 miles). The pilgrimage will also be available as a virtual experience. Contact *James Trewby* at [education@columbans.co.uk](mailto:education@columbans.co.uk).

### Arms Fair Protest

If you wish to join Columbans lobbying outside the 12-15 September international Arms Fair at the ExCel Exhibition Centre in East London, contact James Trewby. There will be a meeting online beforehand.

### Bringing Down Goliath *Jolyon Maugham KC*

The founder of the Good Law Project, which believes in the use of the law for a better world, has produced a practical tool for positive change.  
ISBN-10: 0753559781

### Monopoly Capitalism: What it is and how do we fight it? *Global Justice Now*

Looks at the concentration of wealth and power in our economy and the growth of civil society movements to tackle it.  
Download at: <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/resource/monopoly-capitalism-what-is-it-and-how-do-we-fight-it/>

### Love the Stranger *Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*

A new teaching document, underlining the right to migrate, as well as the right to flourish in one's own homeland. It suggests looking beyond 'labels and seeing the person who seeks a better life'.  
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger/>

### Peace Be With You *Christian CND*

A new resource helping young people to be peacemakers. Contains varied activities which are rooted in scripture with real-world applications. Youth and children's workers and volunteers can request a free copy using the form on this link: <http://christiancnd.org.uk/youth-resource/>

### Sustainable Development Goals and the Catholic Church *Routledge*

Subtitled, 'Catholic Social Teaching and the UN's Agenda 2030'.  
ISBN: 9780367513849

### Building a Caring Community Activity Pack, *Journey to 2030*

Uses integral ecology as a lens for assessing and strengthening parish/school mission.  
<https://journeyto2030.org/poster-activity/>

### Laudato Si' Week

21-28 May

### The Letter: *Laudato Si'* Film

The full movie can be watched for free online: <https://theletterfilm.org/watch/> and <https://laudatosiweek.org/>

### Big Green Week

10-18 June

The UK's biggest annual call for action on climate change and nature, organised by the Climate Coalition, of which Columban Missionaries are members.  
<https://greatbiggreenweek.com/>

### Season of Creation

1 Sept - 4 October

The theme is: 'Let Justice and Peace Flow.' Urges campaigning for climate and ecological justice, and to speak out with and for communities impacted by climate injustice and biodiversity loss.  
<https://seasonofcreation.org/>

## SIGN UP TO OUR FREE E-NEWSLETTER

Receive updates, news, stories and reflections by Columban Missionaries direct to your email, including special focus on a Justice, Peace or Ecology theme six times a year. Scan the QR code or visit:  
[www.columbans.co.uk/enewsletter](http://www.columbans.co.uk/enewsletter)



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