

Anticipating a new birth, a new year and a new world

CATHOLIC COMMENT

Lord Alton of Liverpool



The cradle of Bethlehem is the cradle of our civilisation. It is the fragile resting place of the little child whose birth gives us infinite new life.

It is hard not to contrast the innocence contained in that cradle in Bethlehem with the desperate deeds of men. His birth is followed in short order by the slaughter of innocents and by a desperate journey of a refugee family seeking safety; while in the Church's liturgical calendar we move seamlessly from the celebration of this new life to the slaughter of its first martyr.

In the secular world the celebrations continue until New Year – but even that is ushered in by Father Time, who derives from the Greek God Chronos, more commonly known as the Grim Reaper.

The Irish have a saying that in the face of such experiences it is always better to light a candle than to curse in the dark; to do something positive rather than simply bewailing our faults and failures.

It was in that spirit that a group of lay people decided to create a resource for Christian encouragement and renewal and 2018 proved to be a momentous year for the Christian Heritage Centre's flagship project, Theodore House at Stonyhurst College.

2018 saw the completion of the exterior building works – leading to the restoration of a ruined Victorian water mill – which has stood derelict for years.

Although funds are still needed to complete the fitting out of Theodore House, the charity's Trustees were able to raise the £4.3 million needed to complete the building.

A generous benefactor has provided funds to complete the family accommodation – to be named in honour of St. Augustine, the favourite saint of the donor's late father.

Even without the use of its unfurnished bedrooms, Theodore House was able to host its first conference on Christian Leadership, organised by Trustee, Deacon Sam Burke OP. The first Pilgrims' group came from America and included young staffers working on Capitol Hill along with young American lawyers keen to deepen their faith. Like Archimedes, there are plenty in this rising generation who would say "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world." It is part of the mission of Theodore House to do just that

But it will also be a place for retreat – and an open day was held for visitors from northern parishes. This

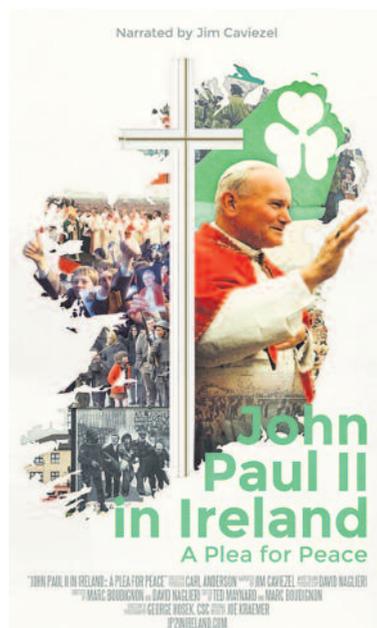


The first group of students using Theodore House on a Christian Leadership conference

coincided with the opening of an exhibition on the life and work of St. Teresa of Calcutta – and her work among the poorest of the poor.

Trustees also want the charity to ask deep and searching questions about faith and action.

Giving expression to this, they recently gave the use of Theodore House in support of a fundraising event for the Hummingbird Project.



Formed in 2015 to provide aid to refugees in the 'Jungle' camp in Calais, it assists refugees and unaccompanied minors as they flee from conflict and settle in new countries. As the Christmas story reminds us, this is not a new challenge, but is on a scale not experienced in seventy years.

Donations to Theodore House have come in many shapes and sizes – including a donation of Cardinal Basil Hume's walking stick!

A beautiful altar for the Theodore House Oratory – dedicated to two great 20th century saints – Mother Teresa and John Paul II – was commissioned and donated by trustee, Graham Hutton, national Chairman

of Aid to the Church in Need.

Some stunning stained glass – backlit against stone walls – has been donated by Liverpool Archdiocese. One depicts the Baptism of the Lord and another depicts St. Clare. Throughout 2018 the CHC and Theodore House have enjoyed the prayerful support of the Poor Clares of York. Another piece of stained glass, commemorating St. Margaret Clitherow, martyred in York with the child in her womb, was beautifully made in Lancashire by Pendle Glass, a gift of the Kennedy family.

In addition to their work on Theodore House, the charity has been active on several other fronts. In London, with the Knights of Columbus, they hosted the launch of a wonderful new movie, *St. John Paul II – a plea for peace* – which tells the story of Pope John Paul's historic role in promoting an end to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. It is now available on DVD. At the conclusion of the film's premiere a discussion took place which included the Polish ambassador and trustee Ryan Day.

The year has also seen some notable new appointments. Fran Ahearn has been appointed as guest manager of Theodore House. Fran has worked at Stonyhurst College for many years and will bring great expertise to the role. Stefan Kaminski has been appointed the charity's first director. Stefan studied theology and philosophy in Rome and he is experienced in both chaplaincy work and religious education. He will take up his post in the new year, beginning in earnest the important work of the centre.

Three new trustees have joined the charity's board. They are:

- Dr Michael D. Hurley, a Cambridge Don who lectures in the English department, drawing on philosophy and theology. Among other subjects he has published significantly on Chesterton and Newman.

- Sister Emanuela Edwards is from the Missionaries of Divine Revela-

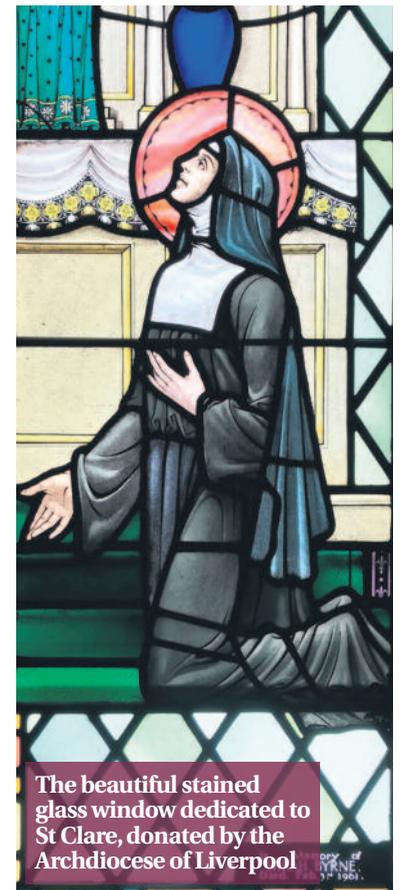
tion. Sr Emanuela was born in Lancashire but is based in Rome and is a world authority on the way sacred art can inform catechesis and evangelisation – a theme central to the CHC mission to tell the story of our rich and deep Christian history both as a means of evangelising and in order to help understand how the Christian faith has shaped society and should continue to do so.

- Ryan Day, who has taken on particular responsibility for Christian Leadership and Formation Programmes of the centre, works for a human rights organisation that advocates for the right of people to freely live out their faith.

Notwithstanding our individual and collective failings, we must face every passing year with the desire to renew ourselves and society.

The Victorian poet laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson, in his poem *Ulysses*, urges every generation to seek a newer world – and that, whatever calamities may befall us, we should not allow them to incapacitate us; that we should be ready to take on impossible odds

"Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world...
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength
which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that
which we are, we are—



The beautiful stained glass window dedicated to St Clare, donated by the Archdiocese of Liverpool

One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but
strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not
to yield."

Tennyson's contemporary, Blessed John Henry, Cardinal Newman, whose memory is recalled in the naming of one of the rooms in Theodore House had a similar sense of hopefulness. In his famous *Second Spring* sermon he began with words from *The Song of Solomon*: "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For the winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land."

He described an "uncertain, anxious time of hope and fear, of joy and suffering – of bright promise and budding hopes, yet withal, of keen blasts, and cold showers, and sudden storms."

Newman understood better than most that this new birth, and the renewal of the Christian faith, would not be without pain.

It's also central to the Christmas message and to the mission of the Christian Heritage Centre, which the charity's Trustees hope will prove to be a gift to this and many generations to come.

Finally, the trustees extend their thanks to *The Universe* for its wonderful support for the project over the year, and their greetings to readers for a happy and holy Christmas.

How to support the Christian Heritage Centre

The Christian Heritage Centre is a registered charity, established to increase access by the Catholic community to the Stonyhurst Collections. Images are kindly reproduced by permission of the Society of Jesus and Stonyhurst College.

The CHC has built Theodore House – to be followed by a Visitors' Centre – to enable scholars, parishes, schools and retreatants to deepen their Christian faith.

Further details of how to support the project or to book Theodore House are available at www.christianheritagecentre.com or from info@christianheritagecentre.com