

The Canadian Templar



March 2016
Newsletter



News and Report from our Grand Prior

The Holidays are a distant memory, Winter's back is pretty well broken, and now we just await spring. Maybe a bit early, but it is the time of year that we all start to get determined to get active again. St. James Priory just held another successful Templar Ball, with its proceeds going to help Christians at risk in the Middle East. Each day the crisis continues. Each day our Christian values and way of life are being threatened. Everyone is needed to help, and can – in one's own way. Supporting our various meetings, events, and fundraisers is a crucial part of getting involved and helping to make a difference. Get active.

I would like to congratulate LCdr Nicole Lassaline, the Chancellor of the Priory of Simon Peter in Ottawa for her new appointment to the position of Assistant Secretary General of OSMTH. This new international responsibility will have her working closely with Secretary General Dale Starkes to manage the Order's increasing administration and will be in addition to her



position of Aide to the Grand Commander. With OSMTH becoming more of an international leader, more dedicated people are needed. We are grateful for the Grand Commander's insight in choosing Nicole to help build the future of our Order. And thank you Nicole for taking on these new responsibilities in addition to all the other things you do.

An example of our increased recognition, OSMTH has been invited to participate in The World Council of Churches meeting in Norway this June. Although OSMTH is not a church, and as such cannot be a full member, it will be an exceptional opportunity for our Order to promote and carry out our Christian and humanitarian objectives. Rev. Dr. Jean Ford from the United States will be our representative.

The International Communications Committee has put together an excellent TV documentary from our Grand Master's latest trip to Jordan. This Middle East Christian Refugee documentary underscores that OSMTH remains deeply involved and committed to Middle East issues. OSMTH was the co-chair of the Seminar under the leadership of our Chaplain General, His Grace Bishop Younan, and we invited about 40% of the speakers, 100% of the OSMTH delegates, including Duke Alexander and even Jordan Senator Azayzeh. OSMTH leads as well as supports on the world stage.

The link to the documentary is

<http://www.tvrplus.ro/editie-intrebari-si-raspunderi-414287>

Next month is the international meetings in Copenhagen, with a retreat prior to the event. Representatives from Ottawa, Toronto, and Windsor will attend. The next edition of The Canadian Templar will highlight the retreat and meetings.

Warm regards,

Cdr. (ret'd) Peter L. Kelly

Grand Prior

Non Nobis, Domine, Non Nobis, Sed Nomini Tuo Da Gloriam

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It was suggested that we needed a Table of Contents so there you have it.

OSMTH RESOLUTION NR 12 OF 2015 which we detailed in the December 2015 issue of the Canadian Templar called on us all to do more to fight for Christians in the Holy Land. This is why we make a point of covering this area of the world so we can better educate you on the issues and we continue to do this in this current issue. In particular I have covered Turkey in this issue to highlight some of the issues they are having which impacts Christians.

You'll also note that Toronto has made a pitch about Human Trafficking and are doing great work on this. However if you do some research in this field you'll also note that the UN peacekeepers were also complicit in human trafficking and so it's a major area of investigation that needs to be undertaken by all. There are many films on the subject on YouTube.

Our purpose is to educate, inform and entertain and as there is much to tell you this newsletter is of course longer than most. The Brussels Declaration of the Order is my guide to providing articles on a wide front. However it's been suggested that it's too long so feel free to email me and give me your thoughts as at the end of the day this is your newsletter. This means you should have a say on what it covers or for that matter doesn't cover in future issues. My contact details are available at the foot of this newsletter so do get in touch either by email or phone and I hope you enjoy this issue.

And news just in... Our Grand Prior's daughter Emma gave birth to a baby boy and all are well. I'm sure we wish him, his mother and his grandfather and all the family our best wishes.

News from the Priory of Ascension of Our Lord, Windsor

Live a Life That Matters

Prior Roy send in a url to a video he recommends you view and makes you think...

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/89476173>

Some pictures from Donations made by the Priory...



The first is Sir Peter Berry and John Elliot from The Sandwich Teen Action Group (STAG). The second is rev. Mike Rovers from Second Chance Ministry with Sir Walt Pastorius and myself. The third is Mr. Skip Graham fro St. Leonard's House and the final one is Major Scott Rideout from The Salvation Army.

Here are the photos from our 2015 Christmas Social.



Some of the cookie trays prepared by our Dames and ladies, ready for distribution and Our members enjoying the ambience of Beach Grove Golf Club,



Sir Graham Parker and Dames leading the Christmas Carol singsong and Our new piece of artwork donated by Carol Del Col for auction at our February dinner meeting



Overview of the venue and some participants from the balcony

News from St James Priory, Toronto

Message from the Prior

I would like to thank everyone for making 2015 a great year. We have prepared the 2014/2015 Annual report for your review. Our Executive committee is energised and looking forward to keeping our members engaged and informed. One of our mandates is to continue to host events and engage our members in interesting topics that affect us and things we should be aware of in the world. The annual Templar Ball was well attended and successful. We held events and meetings at the Peach Gallery and RCMI as well as supporting the stopping of human trafficking and raising awareness. Please support your Priory and get involved. I have outlined below our vision, commitment and actions this executive committee will be taking in 2016 and the future of our Priory.

I look forward to greeting you all at the Templar Ball on February 27th at Fountainblu. Please support this event as we raise funds to help provide aid and support to our Christian brothers and sisters suffering in the Middle East. I reference an article written by journalist Eliza Griswold featured in the New York Times titled "Is The End of Christianity In The Middle East", where ISIS and other extremists movements are enslaving, killing uprooting Christians with no aid in sight. Militants paint a red Arabic "n", Nasrani, a slur, on Christian homes. Some Christians managed to escape bringing with them tales of summary executions and beheadings. ISIS offered residents a choice, they could either convert or pay the "jizya", and the head tax levied against all "people of the book", Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews. If they refused they would be raped killed or enslaved, their wealth taken as spoils of war. From 1910 to 2010, the percentage of the Middle Eastern population that was Christian — in countries like Egypt, Israel, Palestine and Jordan — continued to decline; once 14 percent of the population, Christians now make up roughly 4 percent. (In Iran and Turkey, they're all but gone.) In Lebanon, the only country in the region where Christians hold significant political power, their numbers have shrunk over the past century, to 34 percent from 78 percent of the population. The future of Christianity in the region of its birth is now uncertain. Therefore this year's Templar Ball is dedicated to raise funds to Aid our Christian brothers and Sisters. So please plan to attend and contribute.

Sincerely
Nick Migliore
Prior St James

AGM
We held our AGM on 11th January 2016 and produced our Annual Report which you can read at:
<http://www.electriccanadian.com/religion/stjamesannualreport2015.pdf>

The St James Priory AGM was well-attended: about 30 out on a miserably cold night.

The Annual Report was presented and approved. The areas in which greatest pride was deservedly taken was in the hundreds of hours of volunteer work in both the financial health of the organization (Sir Eugene) and in bringing the membership data up-to-date (Sir Jerry and Sir George and Dame Samantha). Finally we know who is active, inactive, no longer in the Priory's ambit, et al.

Looking to 2016, we are hoping to once again publish a list of members with their photos, contact information and a mini biography on a secure, members only, portion of our Priory's website. While the few VERY computer savy members felt the current site was accessible without too much trouble, the majority in attendance had never been able to get onto it since it was removed from St James' direct control and input. Sir Nick will be addressing this problem with Sir Stuart and the Grand Prior.

Sir Matthew has been charged with addressing the policy change at the RCMI that has resulted in our no longer having monthly meetings there – now being charged for the use of otherwise unused rooms! Sir Matthew was President of the RCMI when the policy was agreed to and will attempt to have it reinstated.

A presentation was made about the works of Global Resource Epicentre Against Human Trafficking, by Sir Jim and Sir Kim: support for which is one of the two major projects of St James (along with the Jordan Project), and the members were solid in their support..

A lively debate on the approach the Templars ought to be taking regarding Israel and the current Middle East expulsions and killings of Christians elsewhere, ensued and although the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m., the discussions continued over sandwiches and drinks courtesy of the Prior.

Our Prior also alerted us to a BBC article about Iraq's oldest Christian monastery destroyed by Islamic State. He said...

St Elijah's stood on a hill near the northern city of Mosul for 1,400 years. But analysts said the images, obtained by the Associated Press, suggested it had been demolished in late 2014, soon after IS seized the city. A Catholic priest from Mosul warned that its Christian history was "being barbarically levelled". Read the full article through the link below.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35360415?SThisFB>

Templar Ball

A good night was had by all and Sir Kim Derry made a presentation on Human Trafficking for which we've got a pdf file of his screen shorts which you can download at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/kij/TemplarPresentation.pdf>

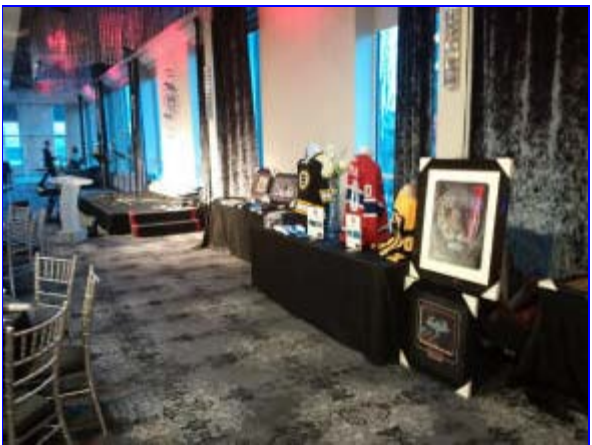
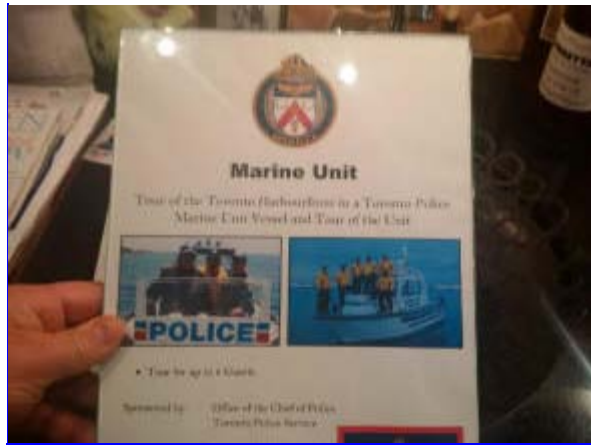
A short video on this topic can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=human+trafficking+united+nations

Here are some pictures from the event sent in by Sir Nick and Dame Samantha...







News from the Priory of Simon Peter, Ottawa

Since the beginning of 2016, the Priory of Simon Peter has continued to pursue its charitable activities. As a result of repeated outbreaks of respiratory illness, we have been unable to visit our veterans residing at the Perley-Rideau Veteran's Health Centre. The Aphasia Centre of Ottawa has had limited activity, their "Walk and Talk" day will be later this spring. Please find attached reports on our "Hockey Knights in Canada" and "Cornerstone" projects.

HOCKEY KNIGHTS IN CANADA

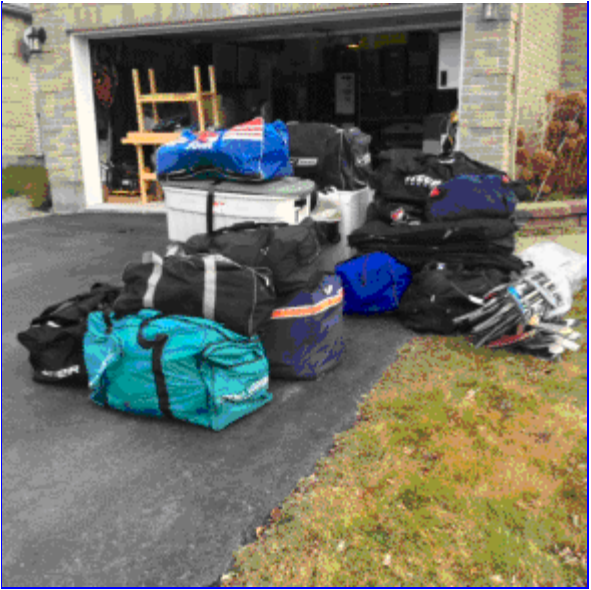
Through contact with Derek Squirrel of "The Aboriginal Sports Circle" in NWT the Priory of Simon Peter learned the town of Fort Liard NWT was setting up its Hockey Association. The knights in the Priory of Simon Peter working in the "Hockey Knights in Canada" program opened a dialogue with Rosalyn Firth, the coordinator of Fort Liard's Hockey Association.

With the outstanding assistance of Jeff Turner of 'Project North, Scott and Christa Huyck of the Napanee Hockey Association, Stuart Ross of the Priory of St. James, and Danielle Grenage of Excel Transport in Mississauga, a shipment of hockey equipment was amassed and shipped to Ft. Liard. The small NWT town already had an arena but no hockey program, teams, nor gear, so the gently used equipment was gratefully received.

Shortly after Christmas, recreational hockey has become a community favourite pastime of the players and the spectators. The once unused arena is now a place where the community gathers. We in Ottawa are looking forward to continuing this project in March 2016 when used hockey equipment is again available in abundance and collected, because cost prohibits its availability in the far north.



Chev. Brock Heilman preparing donations for shipping and Donations waiting to go.



Waiting for the truck and Loading onto truck from Excel Transport



Team Pictures



Practice



One on One Team Practice and friends



Training a "blue line sniper".

CORNERSTONE

The Priory of Simon Peter is continuing with its Cornerstone Meal a Month program. In co-operation with St. Matthew's Anglican Church, homeless women in Ottawa are fed meals on the weekends when government assistance is not available. The ladies look forward to the Knights Templar coming to serve as our lasagna specialty provides a hot meal that has "staying power" to fight off their hunger. Pictured below is the preparation of the lasagna and the finished product ready to be delivered and served. We are not permitted to take photographs at the shelter.



The above reports provided by John F, (Frank) Garbutt KTJ. Secretary, Priory of Simon Peter.

Dame Nicole Lassaline of Ottawa has been appointed as our Assistant Secretary General of our order. We offer her our many congratulations!

Chaplain's Corner

From Archdeacon Ron Matthewman, Vicar General of OSMTH-I

Greetings from the Vicar General

Yesterday's world taught us that we should be self-sufficient, ambitious, capable, know all the tricks of the trade, the in's and out's of life and have a good understanding and estimation of ourselves, who we are and what we hope to be.

But that is all about ourselves and it gets in the way of how we relate to other people, and how we consider their well-being: It even gets in the way of how we relate to God and how we fulfill our

stewardship of life.

Now we find ourselves in a new day. Yesterday we called it tomorrow and we looked forward to it with promises, excitement, opportunity and all the things we kept putting off to do tomorrow, but now our tomorrow is to-day.

It's not different for you Lord, because you have promised, and we believe, that you are the same, yesterday, to-day, tomorrow and forever.

But to-day is scary for us, because we live in difficult times. The world is a dangerous place; there are wars, terrorists, people who are not always nice. Nations are fighting each other and we are expected to take sides and though you have told us many times "Be not afraid, I am with you", we are afraid. Lord, help us to stand upright, fill us with your presence, help us through this day so that we may live to your Glory. Help us to love one another as you have loved us.

Blessings. Ron Matthewman

Grand Chancellors Corner

Editors Note: Prior to providing you with her words in this issue I thought it would be worth while telling you some of her background and so here is her CV for you to read...

Nola-Susan Crewe, MA, JD, MDiv, GCTJ

EDUCATION:

University of Toronto, Innis College 1972 - 1976 Hon. B.A. History & Women's Studies, recipient of the Atkinson Award as Best All Round Student

University of Toronto, Graduate School 1976 - 1977 M.A. History

University of Toronto, Law School 1983 - 1987 LL.B./J.D.

University of Toronto, Wycliffe College 2003 – 2007 M.Div.

EMPLOYMENT:

Having dropped out of high school at the age of 16, I worked in a variety of occupations: bank clerk, receptionist, secretary, model, wedding photographer; lobbyist for Consumers Gas; etc. and in each position I learned more of myself, my talents, abilities, gifts and interests. And in each position I advanced my skills so that I brought more to the table for my employer.

While pregnant with my fourth child, I began university as a mature student at the University of Toronto. In my third year, I had my fifth and final child. I missed one lecture in the four years of my undergraduate work. While attending Law School I was working up to 70 hours a week on the Toronto Board of Education as a school trustee.

I have great resilience, exceptional health and a passion for any challenge that I take on. As a widow, I have no domestic responsibilities that prevent me from following my dreams or my duties.

Mt Sinai Hospital, Chaplain 2007 – Present

As a Multi-Faith Chaplain I work half-time in the Intensive Care Unit and half-time in Women's & Infants (which includes the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Labour & Delivery and high risk pregnancies). I sit on a number of committees including the Adult Critical Care Team; Acute Resuscitation Committee; Women's and Infants' Health Centre of Excellence; Neonatal Team; ICU Family-Centred Care; Perinatal Bereavement; TOPAG; and am part of both the Neonatal and the ICU Teams.

St Monica's Anglican Church, Rector May 2011 – Present

I am responsible for a very small flock of parishioners from the fringes of society: poor and suffering from physical and psychological disabilities. I also sit on the Investment Committee for the Diocese.

Crewe & Marks, Law Firm, Lawyer – 1989 – Present. I have not been actively practicing since 2007 but have maintained my status with the LSUC. My practice was primarily in the areas of Family, Child

Protection and Education Law. I have been Chair of the Editorial Board of National, the magazine of the Canadian Bar Association, for the past decade.

Registrar of Imported Vehicles, President – 1994 – 2000. As President of RIV Limited I had a staff of forty; 300 inspection centres and a budget of \$6,000,000 annually. Our law firm had been successful in bidding to set up a system which permitted the importation of vehicles, subject to inspection and certification. I worked with all provincial and US state Registrars, and reported to the Department of Transportation in Ottawa. I traveled extensively throughout this period.

Toronto Board of Education, Trustee – 1980 – 1988 and Chair of the Board, 1987. I was responsible for the 20 schools in my Ward which was the greatest concentration in the city. At the time our budget was in excess of \$600,000,000.

Prism Photo Associates, 1970 – 1972 Manager of a stock photo co-operative for a number of professional Canadian photographers,

Consumers Gas Company, 1967-1970 Lobbyist for their subsidiary Underwater Gas Developers, ensuring that they were able to continue drilling on Lake Erie. My work was primarily in the states surrounding the lake, Washington, Ottawa and Toronto.

Saturday Night Magazine and Monday Morning Magazine, 1966 – 1967. Production Manager for Saturday Night and Staff Photographer for Monday Morning.

Bride's Studio, Photographer, 1965 – 1976 I was the first woman wedding photographer in Toronto.

INTERESTS & MEMBERSHIPS

My passion is the Knights Templar. I am the Grand Chancellor of OSMTH - Canada and the Past-Prior of the St James Priory, in Toronto.

I am the Past Chair of the Scottish Studies Society which (through our Foundation) funds a Chair at Guelph University and promotes an understanding of the contribution of Scots to Canada.

I am a member of the Castle Studies Group, a multi-disciplinary academic body which seeks to promote research and understanding of castles, their architecture, purposes, archeology, history and life within them.

END.

And so good to know that such an accomplished person is our Grand Chancellor. Of course Nola is also a member of the OSMTH-I Medals and Awards committee and received a special award from the Grand Priory of Greece at our last Investiture.

And now onto her words for this issue...

Being a Templar means having opportunities for involvement and enjoyment on so many levels. There is the satisfaction that comes from seeing the challenges your Priory has taken on completed, deadlines met and new opportunities explored. And there is the camaraderie of speakers' nights and pub nights and dinners and garden parties. There are times of service: whether cooking for a shelter or providing shoes and socks for the homeless. And then there are all the opportunities to raise funds: whether in joining a garage sale or a glamorous Ball . . . the projects we support inspire those efforts. The persecuted of the Holy Land, the hockey equipment for the far north or the battle against human trafficking: we are making a difference in our world.

In the past year another initiative has been exploring another aspect of the Templar's life. We have been expanding our mandate to reach out to our spiritual roots. While every candidate is instructed in their responsibility to contemplate and pray each day, based on our monastic heritage. Great satisfaction is found in the knowledge that our Order continues the 900 year old commitment to protect, most particularly Christians, wherever they may be, who are under threat.

But how we live our spiritual commitments as Templars has been largely glossed over. But that is changing. Last year before the GMC meeting in Tomar, Portugal, a number of us met in Retreat under the direction of Vicar General, the Venerable Dr. Ron Matthewman and Provost General of OSMTH, the Reverend Dean Pertti Ruotsalo. We spent three incredibly stimulating and challenging days exploring what it means to be a Templar within the teachings of our faith.

In April we will be at it again, in Copenhagen. For three days before the commencement of the GMC meeting those who want to explore the monastic traditions of the order and how spirituality and our Order mesh, are invited to join us at the Monastery of Saint Bridget in Maribo, Denmark. It is another dimension of what being a Templar can be.

Not everyone wants to chase down items for a silent auction or dig a well or serve a dinner. And not everyone wants to attend a service on the 13th of October to remember the martyrs of our Order. And only a select group will see spending days in prayer and exploration of scripture as a great way to enjoy their holiday.

Being a Templar means using the gifts that God has given us to the full: in our daily lives and in our Order's service. The challenge is to discover where you have the most to offer and how you can really embrace the challenges and the satisfactions being a Templar offers.

Talk to your Prior. Explore the international sites. Discover your own talents . . . after all, that is what Lent is all about: getting to know yourself and what you have to offer and what you can do better. Take on the challenge and explore the spiritual life of the Templar. It is a rewarding search.

I also wanted to share a great honour that I recently received from the Knights Templar in England & Wales. This is the e-mail . . .

Dear Nola,

I have passed your message on to Fr Michael, and duly announced at our Chapter Meeting that you have accepted the invitation to be a guest intercessor.

G.P. George and Chapter expressed their delight and all look forward to the content.

God bless,

John

John Harcourt GCTJ.

Deputy Grand Prior,

Knights Templar in England & Wales.

Here is my first offering: . . .

Knights Templar in England & Wales

From the Office of the
Grand Priory Chaplain General:
Contemplation from the
Rev. Dame Nola Crewe,
Grand Chancellor of Canada.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

11th February 2016.

We are now in LENT. On Tuesday evening we will have feasted on pancakes and the following day (Ash Wednesday) ashes will have been imposed on our foreheads and we enter the contemplative 40 days.

As Templars, we are committed to daily contemplation and Lent is the prime time for Christians to examine their consciences, lives and faith. During Lent, contemplation tends to focus on our sins, our lack of love for our neighbour and how we may have failed our Order.

Traditionally we atone for our sinful ways and seek forgiveness.

This Lent I challenge you to examine the source of your successes and the influences that made you what you are today: the teacher who inspired your love for mathematics; the writer who opened the mysteries of the centuries; the artist who fired your imagination; the person who captured your heart. Or the Templar that invited you to join our ranks.

We learn a great deal about ourselves when we enter into such explorations ... we find new strengths and hone old gifts. The ultimate value of this Lenten Devotion, however, is found in taking your pen and writing to that person or that child or spouse to tell the tale of how their life impacted on ours – how you are a better person because your life was touched by theirs.

Too often we contemplate failures ... but being a Christian means we have the purest example in Christ of touching our lives in love. The impact of such letters on the recipient is truly a blessing: giving back for what you have received. For how often do we remember the hurts and forget the gifts. Complain instead of appreciate.

As Templars we are incredibly blessed. The gauntlet is thrown – take up the challenge to let others know what gifts they have been to you: for that too is part of loving your neighbour as yourself.

We pray that the values of our Order and our commitment to God will ensure that the poor and weak and the displaced are valued and protected and the world is a better place for our having been.

For most of those fleeing from persecution, finding warmth, food and shelter is a daily event, and most rely on the goodness from the rest of the world by donating to the various aid agencies, many of whom are struggling with national governments just to take relief to those most in need.

Give thanks for the worldwide Templar movement supporting all refugees.

Lord, be with those suffering fear, cold and hunger.

In our private prayers remember those in our Templar family who are not well, especially Chevaliers Denys Le Fevre, David Broad, Scott Simon; Reverend Fathers John Hamilton, Andrew White, John Bernardi, Barrie Williams, Peter Dewey; Aiden Taylor, Bernadette Butler, John Culley, Amelia Reilly, Fernanda Pinta; Dames Debbie Simon, Jo Attridge. For A's father; and for J, recovering from extended medical treatment. For those who care for them, whether at home, in hospital or in care homes.

God bless,

Nola Crewe

International News on the work of OSMTH

Dame Nicole Lassaline

Dame Nicole Lassaline of Ottawa has been appointed as our Assistant Secretary General of our order. We offer her our many congratulations!

As our Grand Chancellor said...

I was delighted to see to-day's appointment of you to Assistant Secretary General. The International Grand Commander is most fortunate in gaining the talents of a Templar with your many gifts: from organizing at dawn to socializing into the night, you are the complete package!

I am sure that all Canadian Templars take great pride in this. We will be so well represented.

Grand Priory of England, Wales & Scotland

You can read the Beauceant December 2015 issue from the Grand Priory of England, Wales and Scotland at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/religion/ktew/index.htm>

Middle East Christian Refugee Documentary

The link below is to view a documentary drama about Christian refugees from the Middle East. Filming was carried out in Bethany beyond the Jordan which has a strong Christian significance. Romanian TV has shown the documentary and it has been seen in parts of Bulgaria, Moldova, Serbia, Russia. This powerful message has been streamed to all EU national TV. OSMTH co-chaired the Seminar and many follow on events. OSMTH invited about 40% of the speakers, 100% of the OSMTH delegates who included Duke Alexander and Jordan Senator Azayzeh. OSMTH leaders are interviewed in this powerful seminar or conference documentary produced on this Christian, Muslim and world crisis. Producer and filmmaker Monica Ghiurco is a major TV anchor in eastern Europe.

The documentary is in a variety of languages including English and can be viewed at <http://www.tvrplus.ro/editie-intrebari-si-raspunderi-414287>

Canon Andrew White

Read more of his news stories at: <http://frrme.org/news/>

Surviving ISIS – an update from Northern Iraq, by Dr Sarah Ahmed

January

Posted by FRRME STAFF on JANUARY 14, 2016 in Media Summaries, News

Dear Friends,

There have been so many reports this past year about the terrible plight of the Yazidi sex slaves. While it was heartening to see the recent nomination of Nadia Murad Basee Tahan for the Nobel Peace Prize (Nadia was captured by ISIS and used as a sex slave), many Yazidi girls are still in captivity. Their situation has been made worse by the recent news that ISIS has banned the selling of sex slaves back to their families. For those who manage to escape, many face a harsh winter living in IDP camps.

For many Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq, snow-covered tents will be their home this winter. With this in mind, FRRME has set up the Girls who Survived ISIS Empowerment Project. Our primary focus is to help care for girls who have escaped ISIS and are back with their families. We are providing them with much-needed medical care and winter clothes. Many of the girls we are helping are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The project is in its early stages but with your support we aim to help more girls over a longer period of time.

As well as the Yazidi girls, we are also continuing our support for the large number of Christian families who have escaped ISIS. We recently delivered more than 400 mattresses to Christian families living in the Harsham Camp in Erbil. Most of the Christians there have fled Mosul and other cities now under ISIS control.

Despite the harsh weather, our relief work in Northern Iraq continues. The people we are helping have nothing but with your support we are making a positive difference. I am truly thankful to all of those who continue to support FRRME each month. Without your support our work would not be possible.

Thank you and God bless,

Dr Sarah Ahmed

Director of Operations in Iraq

The Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East

A New Year's update from Canon Andrew White

Dear Friends,

I have not long returned from Erbil in Northern Iraq. For the first time I was able to see the real, life-changing work of Dr Sarah Ahmed, FRRME's Director of Operations in Iraq. I thought I had seen problems and difficulties in Iraq but I have never seen anything like what I encountered on my last visit to Erbil.

The Internally Displaced People (IDP) living in camps in Erbil, many of them Christian, have nothing. They have no proper homes. Those who are considered “fortunate” live in disused military trailers, or tents provided by the UNHCR. Food is in short supply and is given out by international NGOs, including FRRME. It is truly a desperate situation.



This past week I have been in Jordan where I was lucky enough to meet with my dear friend, Sheikh Abdul Latif.

Sheikh Abdul Latif is the President of the Sunni Endowment organisation in Iraq, which has been instrumental in building relationships between Islamic and non-Islamic countries, as well as rapprochement between Islamic sects and creeds. To build on FRRME’s internationally recognised reconciliation work, it is vital that we maintain good working relationships with important religious figures such as Sheikh Abdul Latif.

I am also delighted to announce the newest member of FRRME’s Advisory Board, Andrew Stone, Baron of Blackheath. As a member of the House of Lords, Andrew has been very involved in the Third Sector and has a particular interest in conflict resolution. Before being made a peer in 1999, Andrew was the Managing Director of Marks and Spencer.

FEBRUARY 11, 2016

Dear Friends,

I have just got back from Canada where I had a very productive meeting with The Voice of the Martyrs. They are a fantastic inter-denominational organisation dedicated to assisting persecuted Christians worldwide.

We discussed the plight of Christianity in the Middle East and what we can do to help our brothers and sisters. This excellent article in the Washington Times explains the challenges we are facing, while this article in today’s Christian Post highlights a sad new development in the sectarian war in Iraq. While the international community decides whether or not to help, our work on the front line continues.

While I was in Canada, I also had the great privilege of baptising my Iraqi god daughter’s baby boy, Mattie. As with all our Iraqi refugees now living in Canada, I hope he will live a long and happy life free from religious intolerance and persecution.

I am also pleased to announce that Samara’s Winter Aid Appeal, which FRRME has actively supported, has now clothed 100,000 people, many of them internally displaced Iraqis. Thank you to those who have supported Samara in this work.

I am about to embark on a month-long trip to Israel, Jordan and America to oversee our relief work and raise more funds for our Iraqi refugees. I will keep you posted.

God bless.

International News

How Iran's 'election oven' went into meltdown

The results of two important elections in Iran are being announced and they are nothing short of a major surprise.

The picture in Tehran, the capital, is crystal clear. The pro-government parties pulled off a sweeping victory in the parliamentary election, winning all 30 seats of the capital, a humiliating total wipe out for hardliners.

This wasn't all. In the second election, candidates allied to reformist President Hassan Rouhani also prevented some key hardline figures entering the Assembly of Experts, the clerical council that is technically in charge of naming a successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei when he dies.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35683870>

Military strategist David Kilcullen: why the war on terror has failed

David is regarded as one of the world's leading thinkers on counterinsurgency. This is a 50 minute podcast which you can listen to at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2016/02/24/4412574.htm>

Jihadist attacks on Christians and other religious minorities should be classified as genocide

A cross party group of peers have written to UK Prime Minister David Cameron urging him to take advantage of Britain's place on the UN Security Council to initiate war crimes charges against terrorists from Daesh and other jihadist groups in the Middle East.

While ministers have so far refused to be drawn into the debate about whether the attacks on Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidis and other minority groups in the Middle East should be classified as genocide, there is a growing push from MPs and peers to take action through international legal institutions.

Read more: <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20160223/1035221658/daesh-attacks-minorities-christians-genocide.html#ixzz410sETmKC>

Persecution of Christians Becomes Major International Problem

The persecution of Christians is increasing worldwide. An estimated 4,000 were killed in North Nigeria, the numbers killed in the Middle East are difficult to ascertain, but a total of at least 7,000 Christians were killed in 2015 alone.

Tania Corbett, the PR Manager of Open Doors UK & Ireland joins the programme to talk in some depth about the scale and seriousness of this trend. This theme was one of the key points of discussion at the recent meeting of Russia's Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis. Open Doors has been helping repressed Christians throughout the world for the past 60 years. Here are some of the major points that Tania brings up:

Persecution is not only from Muslims or Muslim authorities as prescribers to stereotypes about Islam might predict. Persecution is happening in a vast array of circumstances, countries and cultural environments. Thousands of Christians are suffering as the result of actions of Hindus in India for example, an estimated 70,000 Christians are in prisons in North Korea, and Christianity in places like the Maldives is banned completely. In Syria and Jordan, Christian refugees don't tend to access the main refugee camps because of the high rates of anti-Christian persecution happening in them.

In many countries Christians are not going to churches but meeting in semi-secret locations; in homes, in woods, in private groups. Christianity appears to be going underground in some regions. The Open Doors charity also tries to counter the so called 'squeeze' against Christians, where you may not get a promotion if you are a Christian, you may not get into college, or get planning permission for construction work for the local Church as in India for example. There are many insidious ways that Christians are being persecuted apart from violence.

Open Doors is working towards asking the UK government to make sure that those people are not forgotten about. To learn more of this organisation visit them at:

<https://www.opendoors.org/>

Living and loving on Ukraine's front line

It's a year since an agreement was signed in Minsk that was supposed to end the fighting in eastern Ukraine. But the fighting continues - and civilians continue to suffer. The BBC's Fergal Keane went back to the village of Pisky to talk to a couple determined to stay in their home, come what may.

It seems that the war in Ukraine is not getting much press coverage these days but it's still going on and so this is a reminder that war is still going on. I understand there are some 1.2 million Ukrainians in Canada.

Read his moving account at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35593977>

Part of New Silk Road From China to Iran is Complete

The first freight train from China will arrive in the Iranian capital Monday as part of the New Silk Road infrastructure project being led by Beijing.

The arrival of the train shows that the 10,400-km route from the city of Yiwu in China's Zhejiang province to Tehran, known as the "Economic Belt of the Silk Road," is complete and soon will be ready for use.

It took the train exactly two weeks to reach its destination. On its way from China, the train passed through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan before finally reaching the Iranian capital.

The train signifies an important day for the developers of the New Silk Road project: the new route is the first logistical solution offering the delivery of cargo from the Asia Pacific region to the coast of the Persian Gulf.

Read more: <http://sputniknews.com/business/20160216/1034868058/iran-china-silk-road.html#ixzz40N1xr2vN>

Volunteers driven to help Syrian refugees

Scottish television producer Uzma Mir-Young spent yet another evening watching the refugee crisis unfold and decided she had to try and help rather than be a passive observer.

Listen to the Podcast at: <http://newsnet.scot/?p=116391>

Turkey threatens fragile Syria peace accord

Turkish military attacks on US-aligned Syrian Kurdish groups and the possibility of Turkish and Saudi ground troops entering Syria could upend the fragile peace accord worked out by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) last week. The introduction of Turkish and Saudi ground forces would further risk a major escalation in the war and a whole new round of misery for the Syrian people.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Feb. 13 that Saudi Arabia was sending fighter jets to Incirlik Air Base and that both countries would consider potential ground operations in Syria. "This is something that could be desired but there is no plan. Saudi Arabia is sending planes and they said, 'If the necessary time comes for a ground operation, then we could send soldiers,'" Cavusoglu said. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, perhaps in response to a US request, clarified Feb. 14, "The kingdom's readiness to provide special forces to any ground operations in Syria is linked to a decision to have a ground component to this coalition against Daesh [Islamic State] in Syria — this US-led

coalition — so the timing is not up to us."

US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has expressed frustration at the disappointing contributions of some of the US regional allies, including Turkey, to the US-led anti-IS coalition. Carter reportedly secured a commitment from Saudi Arabia on Feb. 11 to step up its contributions to the air campaign against IS, in addition to discussions of possible training and ground forces.

This column would support more substantial contributions of Saudi Arabia and Turkey to the air campaign against IS, but Turkish and Saudi intentions in Syria are not so neatly aligned with those of the United States in defeating the terrorist group, which US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper characterized in a Feb. 9 testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence as "the pre-eminent terrorist threat because of its self-described caliphate in Syria and Iraq, its branches and emerging branches in other countries, and its increasing ability to direct and inspire attacks against a wide range of targets around the world,"

Turkey's priority in Syria is not the defeat of IS, however, but rather that of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan considers the PYD and YPG to be extensions of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), with which his government is fighting a bloody civil war in southeastern Turkey. The United States does not share Erdogan's assessment of the PYD and YPG as terrorists and instead considers the Syrian Kurdish forces as among the most effective of the Syrian armed groups battling IS and not connected with al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra; as this column described last week, some of the anti-Assad groups backed by Turkey and Saudi Arabia do have ties with Jabhat al-Nusra.

Metin Gurcan describes how pro-government Turkish media have been hyping a possible military intervention in Syria to prevent Syrian Kurdish forces from moving west of the Euphrates. This is the true intent of Turkey's threats of intervention in Syria. Turkey has over the past few days been shelling Syrian Kurdish strongholds in northern Syria and demanding the YPG withdraw from the areas it has taken as a result of the intensified fighting around Aleppo.

Gurcan describes the Turkish government public relations campaign as a "surreal journey in trying to persuade the public that Turkey is winning, not losing, in Syria." Despite the jingoism of the Turkish media hawks, the consequences of a Turkish intervention could best be described as both desperate and potentially catastrophic for Turkey, Syria and the region. Russia has already made clear that it would enforce a no-fly zone, so Turkey could face a confrontation with Russia. Other risks include the consequences of any intervention in Turkey's own civil war with the PKK; the likelihood of taking on both the Syrian government and Syrian Kurdish forces; and potential clashes with the United States, which, along with Russia, coordinates military operations with the PYD and YPG.

Kadri Gursel explains that despite the bravado of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, the Turkish military may resist sending forces into Syria. Erdogan has implied that a military intervention might be the means to redress the free fall in Turkey's Syria policy, saying, "We don't want to repeat the Iraq mistake in Syria," referring to the Turkish parliament's rejection of a government authorization to send military forces into Iraq in 2003.

Gursel explained, "Having cornered himself in Syria, Erdogan again wants to use force to break free. And the only force he has at his disposal is the TSK [Turkish Armed Forces], which seems reluctant to be exploited for that purpose. In short, the resistance the TSK puts up to Erdogan is the only mainstay that Turkey presently has to avoid an adventure doomed to drag it into a catastrophe."

One can only commend the restraint of US diplomats in managing Turkey's increasingly disruptive approach to Syria policy, although the time may be coming when US policymakers may have to recognize Turkey's role as an outlier in the efforts to end the war in Syria. Erdogan taunted the United States on Feb. 10, saying Washington was responsible for a "sea of blood" by backing the PYD and asking, "Are you with us or with this terrorist organization?" Erdogan then criticized the visit of Brett McGurk, the US envoy to the anti-IS coalition, with PYD officials in Kobani. "How can we trust you [the United States]? Who is your partner — the terrorists in Kobani or me?" This prompted what Cengiz Candar characterized as "one of the most powerful rebuffs American authorities have ever unleashed at a Turkish president" when State Department spokesman John Kirby said, "We do

not see them as a terrorist organization and will continue supporting them.”

With regard to Saudi Arabia, its stepped-up commitment to the defeat of IS comes with a catch. Jubeir, speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 12, reaffirmed that Saudi Arabia believes defeating IS is directly connected to removing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Jubeir said that Assad is the “single most effective magnet for extremists and terrorists” in the Middle East and overthrowing him is “our objective and we will achieve it.”

Jubeir’s statement should be a warning about the caveats and consequences of a possible Saudi military intervention in Syria. His assertion about the connection between Assad and IS seems, to put it politely, strained, and out of step with the assessment of the US intelligence community that IS is the “pre-eminent terrorist threat” in the world. Is Assad the “single most effective magnet” for IS’ occupation of Iraqi territory? Is Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite, also a “magnet” for IS fighters? Is Assad the “magnet” for IS’ expansion into Libya, or the group’s threats of further terrorist operations in the West? Why would a secular, nonsectarian post-Assad government be any less a “magnet” for IS?

On Feb. 12, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called out “Jaish al-Islam,” which is backed by Saudi Arabia, in defense of Russian support for Syrian military operations in Aleppo: “The leader of Jaish al-Islam who has been eliminated, [Zahran] Alloush, made quite clear statements about the ideology of this movement. ... He said that all the Levant should be cleared of dirt — meaning Alawites directly, who, as he said, are even more disloyal than Christians and Jews. And he said that his brothers are Jabhat al-Nusra fighters who he’s fighting with against common enemies. So these are the guys who are now around Aleppo, at least on the western part. On the eastern part, with our help, the government forces have already unblocked this city and according to our data those who are fleeing this area are fighters who are just trying to escape. And let us not forget that all those who are now around Aleppo — that is, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam and other more moderate groups — are being supplied using the same route from one place in the territory of Turkey. So this factor should also be reckoned with, since the UN Security Council resolution that was adopted before Resolution 2254 prohibits any supplies that support terrorist groups.”

Ali Mamouri provided probably the most complete assessment of Alloush’s hate-filled ideology in Al-Monitor last month.

The increased focus of the threat from Jabhat al-Nusra was a positive outcome of the ISSG deliberations last week. In addition, the assessment of the US intelligence community that “al-Qaeda’s affiliates have proven resilient and are positioned to make gains in 2016” should be a catalyst for more intensive military coordination with Russia against Jabhat al-Nusra. Asaad Hanna reports on the establishment of Sharia courts in Idlib and other areas outside of Syrian government control. This column has warned for more than two years of the mainstreaming of radical jihadist groups in Syria. It should be increasingly indefensible to engage in any form of relationship with al-Qaeda, even one or two steps removed.

Vitaly Naumkin writes, “The Kremlin does not believe that a successful campaign against IS — or any other terrorist group in Syria — or a cease-fire are possible without closing the Syrian-Turkish border. A river of foreign jihadis, arms and merchandise is flowing into Syria, with contraband oil traveling in the opposite direction. ... Russia sees no reason why it should not target the positions of Jabhat al-Nusra, which is part of al-Qaeda and is using as a front an alliance with those whose ideological views can be considered moderate. Jabhat al-Nusra, just like IS, is among the main targets of the Russian air force. At the same time, Moscow confirms that it stands ready to reach an agreement with moderate opposition groups, but still has differences with the Western and regional ISSG partners over who can or cannot be categorized as terrorists.”

A trend to watch may be the increasing isolation of Saudi Arabia and Turkey in US and Russian efforts to end the war in Syria. The Wall Street Journal’s Jay Solomon reported this week that Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan are in regular contact with Russia about its military operations in Syria. This is not to say that these countries are “on board” with all of Russia’s aims and objectives, but is yet another sign that Saudi Arabia and Turkey may be shifting to being outliers in a fragile and tentative effort to bringing the war to a close.

Is Turkey doing enough to protect its Protestants?

For Turkey's tiny Protestant community, 2015 was a year marked by threats and attacks against their churches and leaders. A report by the Protestant Churches Association on human rights violations documents a series of attacks and obstacles that Protestants faced over the course of last year, including physical attacks and verbal harassment. Judicial authorities showed no compunction to respond to their complaints about such offenses. In addition, the government excluded the community from its meetings with religious minorities. In the words of community leader Ihsan Ozbek, Turkey's Protestants are today an "anxious and distressed" community.

Read more: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/turkey-protestants-threats-right-violations.html#ixzz404Bj0mUZ>

Pope Francis and Russian Orthodox Patriarch begin historic talks in Cuba

Pope Francis has begun a historic first meeting with Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, in Cuba.

The meeting is the first between a Pope and a Russian Church head since the Western and Eastern branches of Christianity split in the 11th Century.

The Russian Orthodox Church said the "persecution of Christians" in the Middle East and North Africa would be the central theme of the talks.

The two leaders are also expected to sign a joint declaration.

They embraced and kissed each other when they met at Havana airport.

The talks are being held during Pope Francis's stop-over on his way to Mexico. Meanwhile, Patriarch Kirill is visiting Cuba, Brazil and Paraguay.

However, the encounter is not expected to lead to any immediate rapprochement between the Eastern and Western Churches.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35565085>

Is Russia helping the US win in Syria?

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Feb. 4 that a recent US intelligence assessment showed a drop in numbers of those fighting on behalf of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq from 31,500 to 25,000, a sign that the Obama administration's strategy is working, as many of these foreign fighters seek a new base in Libya and elsewhere.

The second Week in Review column in December 2012 identified the role of Russia as one of the trends to watch regarding an endgame in Syria. The Russian trend is shaping a new phase in the Syrian war. As this column wrote last month, that endgame could begin with Aleppo, which is nearly encircled by Russian- and Iranian-backed Syrian government forces.

It might be fair to ask how much credit Russia should get in setting back not only IS, but al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and its allies. Getting an answer might be difficult, however, for two reasons.

First, the Russian air campaign has been ruthless and often indiscriminate. The civilian costs of the war can understandably and rightly overshadow what we might call "strategic" gains. Mohammed al-Khatieb provides a firsthand account for Al-Monitor of a Russian airstrike on a school and the toll of the bombardment on civilians in towns surrounding Aleppo. US Secretary of State John Kerry has appealed to Russia to adhere to UN Security Council resolutions regarding the conduct of the war in Syria. We could not agree more.

Second, and more puzzling and problematic, is that many press accounts have referred to those armed groups on the receiving end of the Russian-backed Syrian offensive simply as "rebels," implying these are all opposition groups backed by the United States and its Western allies.

Sam Dagher of The Wall Street Journal offered a more complete assessment Feb. 5, writing, "About

a half-dozen cities and towns targeted in the new regime offensives have one thing in common: All were held by a mix of Islamist and moderate rebel groups funded and armed by Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Complicating the picture is that some, but not all, of these groups collaborate with the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front. That gives the regime and its allies fodder for their claim that they are fighting terrorism.”

This is a start, but there is more. A Feb. 5 report by the Institute for the Study of War shows the extent of the substantial Syrian military advances since Russia’s expanded military intervention. It also reveals that the Syrian government and its allies have battled IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and the radical Salafi group Ahrar al-Sham, which is often allied with Jabhat al-Nusra, in southern Aleppo province; battled IS in re-establishing a ground line of communication with the Quweires air base and in the Bab region; and battled Jabhat al-Nusra in the Latakia region.

Mustafa al-Haj explains that among the reasons that the Syrian military was able to retake Sheikh Miskin, north of Daraa, after relentless Russian bombing, was “internal differences among opposition factions.” Haj reports from Damascus, “The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has been at odds with the Muthanna Movement (which had secretly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015), as well as Jabhat al-Nusra, following attempts by the FSA to isolate radical Islamist forces, according to the pro-regime Al-Mayadeen news website. These factors weakened the factions’ resistance to the army’s attacks and hampered the entry of FSA fighters from other areas to assist in defending the city.” In other words, the FSA, IS-linked Muthanna and Jabhat al-Nusra were all targets of the Russian-backed regime offensive in Daraa.

Fehim Tastekin writes this week that Syrian Turkmen groups, which have been the target of Russian bombardment, “have developed close links with Salafi jihadi organizations such as al-Qaeda franchise Jabhat al-Nusra.”

So this is a more complex picture of what many in the mainstream media may be reporting about Russia’s intervention in Syria. It is worth recalling that “entities associated” with IS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra are also the target of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), and that a ceasefire “will not apply” to actions against these “entities.” Resolution 2254 reiterates that member states should “prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da’esh), Al-Nusra Front (ANF), and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda or ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the ISSG and determined by the Security Council, pursuant to the Statement of the ISSG of 14 November 2015, and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Syria, and notes that the aforementioned ceasefire will not apply to offensive or defensive actions against these individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, as set forth in the 14 November 2015 ISSG Statement.”

Turkey’s outrageous offer

Turkey’s policies in Syria continue to border on the reckless, so excuse our skepticism on how the introduction of Turkish troops could play a constructive role, especially as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan risks escalation with Russia over alleged airspace violations. Ankara claimed that a Russian plane had violated its airspace Jan. 29. Metin Gurcan explains that the alleged Russian violation took place on “the Turkish border region that faces the Azaz-Munbij front, which is currently controlled by the Islamic State. If this is accurate, Russia is telling Turkey openly that it seriously intends to maintain the de facto no-fly zone it has established over the Jarablus-Munbij areas, which are also of major concern for Turkey.”

Semih Idiz reports that “developments in northern Syria are aggravating tensions between Ankara and Moscow. Following the downing of its jet, Russia intensified its air campaign, particularly against the Turkmen, but also against radical Islamic groups supported by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that are fighting the Syrian army. Russia has a particular ax to grind with the Turkmen because it was their fighters who killed the Russian pilot in his parachute after he ejected from the Su-24. Turkmen refugees have started entering Turkey as the Syrian army gradually takes control of the region with Russian air support. ... Russia has an added incentive now to support the PYD [Democratic Union Party] and hit Turkey in its most sensitive spot, namely the Kurdish issue. Russia says it is unthinkable that the PYD can be kept out of the Geneva talks and insists the group will be part in

these talks in the future. Meanwhile, the Turkish media is reporting that Russia had started to provide air support to the PYD's military wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), west of the Euphrates River."

Fehim Tastekin writes that Turkish ultranationalists have rallied to the Syrian Turkmen camp, whose armed groups have links to Jabhat al-Nusra. Tastekin concludes, "Many opposition groups labeled the Free Syrian Army have in time shifted to a Salafi mindset. How the war will transform Turkey's ultranationalists is an important question. ... This will inevitably leave a residue."

Knowing all we know, the United States should therefore be adamant in rejecting any Saudi or Turkish offer to send its forces to Syria, if there is any seriousness to these offers.

On whose side, for example, would Saudi and Turkish forces be fighting? Radical Salafi groups Jabhat al-Nusra and the Army of Islam, which are often and intimately linked to Jabhat al-Nusra? Would such an intervention give a second wind to Jabhat al-Nusra itself? Our answer is yes.

And who would they be fighting against — IS? The Syrian Kurds who are allied with Russia and the United States? Or Russia itself, risking a NATO intervention?

We recognize the burden Turkey has assumed by providing relief to over 2.2 million Syrians, with tens of thousands more seeking entry. Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon deserve our thanks and assistance in managing this overwhelming humanitarian crisis, which received a commitment of over \$10 billion from international donors last week. But if Turkey wants to further step up in Syria, it should stand down in its confrontation with Russia, and take unambiguous steps targeting IS, Jabhat al-Nusra and affiliated forces, as called for in UN Security Council resolutions.

Sweden vs Russia - A new Cold War front?

Sweden has re-militarised an old Cold War frontier base to combat what it believes to be a rising threat from Russia.

Learn more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35489753>

Turkey's urban war leaves thousands of Kurds without homes

In his 1853 travelogue about Diyarbakir, German orientalist Julius Heinrich Petermann described how he reached the city after sunset to find the fortress gates locked and had to wait for the morning to enter the city. More than 160 years later, those waiting at the gates of the old walled city — now Diyarbakir's district of Sur — are its own Kurdish residents, forced out from their homes amid clashes between the Turkish security forces and armed militants entrenched in residential areas.

On a cold winter day last week, dozens of people — refugees in their own city — waited at the checkpoint at the entrance of Sur, desperate to be let in to take a few belongings from their homes, since they had fled with only the clothes on their backs. The police would not budge, leading one resident to exclaim, "We've sheltered the Syrians, but who is going to shelter us?"

Five neighborhoods in Sur have been sealed off under a round-the-clock curfew for almost two months as the police and the army battle militants of the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), the youth wing of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The rebels have been holding out behind trenches and barricades in narrow residential streets, often planted with explosives and booby traps.

On Jan. 27, the scope of the curfew was extended to six other neighborhoods, where YDG-H militants were found to be holed up. Residents were ordered to evacuate their homes — some by the police, others by the YDG-H — but the sound of gunfire rang out before they were able to leave. The civilians' flight from the area was a run for their lives.

Ramazan Mutlu, a 65-year-old who waited at the checkpoint on Jan. 29, recounted how the rattle of spades startled him one night around midnight last week. When he went out to check, he saw masked men digging a ditch. He admonished them, but they would not stop. Shortly, the police arrived and the diggers ran away. The police ordered Mutlu's building evacuated. Some 40 people, all from the same clan, left the three-story building in haste, taking refuge with relatives in other

neighborhoods or nearby villages.

“Because they dug trenches, vehicles could not enter the neighborhood. The police told us to leave and come back in the morning to collect our stuff,” Mutlu told Al-Monitor as he waited in vain for the promised permission to go back and collect belongings.

“We are now left homeless. Some of us went to the village; others were scattered around [the city]. ... Different people have sheltered me in their homes during the nights. If we can't take our belongings tomorrow as well, we'll probably go to the village and become shepherds,” Mutlu said.

Read more: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/turkey-expanding-clashes-leave-thousands-without-home.html#ixzz3z2Yoz2OD>

Biden calls for change of attitude by Turkish government

US Vice President Joe Biden called for a “change of attitude” by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan toward critics of Turkey's increasingly destructive military campaign against Kurdish rebels and cities in southeast Turkey.

Speaking in Istanbul on Jan. 22, Biden said, “If you don't have an ability to express your opinion, to criticize a policy, to offer competing ideas without fear of intimidation or retribution, the country is robbed of opportunity and the country is being robbed of possibilities.” He added, “When Internet freedom is curtailed and social media sites like YouTube or Twitter are shut down and more than 1,000 academics are accused of treason simply by signing a petition, that's not the kind of example that needs to be set in the region.” Biden said that Turkey's commitment to free expression and democracy matter “not only to Turks but to America.”

Cengiz Candar writes of a “witch hunt” conducted by the Turkish government against academics and intellectuals who signed a petition protesting the Turkish military campaign against Kurdish towns in southeast Turkey. Erdogan slammed the signatories as “so-called intellectuals” committing “treachery” by engaging in propaganda on behalf of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which Turkey considers a terrorist group.

Biden told Turkish lawmakers that the United States backed Turkey's campaign against the PKK, but that its heavy use of force in southeastern villages is unsustainable.

Mahmut Bozarslan reports this week on the effect of the Turkish military campaign in Silopi, a predominantly Kurdish town of 121,000 on the Iraqi border. Silopi has been the scene of some of the worst fighting between the Turkish military and the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), the PKK's radical armed youth wing, which many residents also blame for the carnage.

“A flurry of military activity was the first thing that greeted the eye in town, with dozens of armored vehicles roaming the streets. The Habur crossing road, which cuts through the city, had become a demarcation line. The neighborhoods on its right side were easily recognizable as the theater of the clashes. One could barely walk through the area, let alone drive. The streets were dotted with craters — the result of explosions employed as a combat tactic by both sides. The security forces blew up barricades to advance, while the militants detonated trenches full of explosives to keep them away. The buildings along the streets were riddled with bullets, now the hallmark of neighborhoods where the clashes take place,” Bozarslan writes.

Biden met Jan. 23 with Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. On the agenda was what more Turkey can be doing to battle the Islamic State (IS). Biden has been a kind of truth teller on these matters, providing candor not always possible by US diplomats who have engaged in agonizing diplomacy for what would seem to be the most basic coordination, such as allowing the United States to use Incirlik Air Base to bomb IS. Biden bucked diplomatic niceties on Oct. 3, 2014, when he let slip that the “biggest problem is our allies” in cracking down on foreign fighters in Syria, and that Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates “were so determined to take down [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-[Shiite] war. ... They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad — except that the people who were being supplied were [Jabhat] al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.”

Fehim Tastekin explains the reasons for the many, well-justified questions in Turkey and elsewhere about their commitment to fighting IS. While there is no question that Turkey has been a target and victim of IS terrorism, Ankara can hardly be considered a leader in taking the fight to the jihadi group. What Turkey has done to combat IS has often followed months if not years of US pressure, or has occurred in the aftermath of IS-linked terrorist attacks, such as the deadly suicide bombing on Jan. 12 in Istanbul. Turkey has dealt with IS and the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra with a kind of strategic relativism in the broader context of its more pressing priorities in Syria, which are degrading the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), and toppling Assad.

"For years, Turkey has been criticized for its porous borders that allow fighters and weapons to pass unhindered. When it is pointed out that jihadis control border terrain and Turkey is becoming another Pakistan, Turkish officials merely respond that such allegations are exaggerated. When Jabhat al-Nusra and then IS became well-established and prominent, Turkey's argument was, 'Assad has sponsored these organizations. Their source is the regime. If the regime goes, then this question will go away too.' But when the United States added Jabhat al-Nusra to its terrorist list in 2012, Turkey covertly continued to support that group," Tastekin writes.

Tastekin adds that "despite constant warnings from the United States, Turkey did not try to block the transfer of IS oil through its border until March 2014. Although some measures were taken to cut the pipelines across the Assi River at Hatay, oil trade continued via traditional smuggling routes," Tastekin's article asks why the Turkish security services were able to move so quickly to round up IS cells after Jan. 12. "This naturally justified the question, if Turkey had the security intelligence to detain so many people in one night, why didn't it take action before the bombing? Then came reports that the national intelligence service MIT had warned security agencies on Dec. 17 and Jan. 4 that tourist sites and foreigners could be targeted. The only court action against IS operations in Turkey followed the complaints of families of the young people who had joined the organization. Of 67 suspects listed in the charge sheet submitted to the court, 23 were named by their own families; 29 were released. This and similar cases give the impression that legal action against IS is not taken very seriously. Government officials say such allegations are baseless. According to them, in the first 11 months of 2015, 1,200 people were detained on suspicion of links to IS and at least 350 were arrested."

Iran nuclear deal: International sanctions lifted

International sanctions on Iran have been lifted after a watchdog confirmed it had complied with a deal designed to prevent it developing nuclear weapons.

The EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, said the deal would contribute to improved regional and international peace and security.

The landmark deal between Iran and world powers was agreed last July.

Lifting the sanctions will unfreeze billions of dollars of assets and allow Iran's oil to be sold internationally.

The international nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, said its inspectors had verified that Tehran had taken the required steps.

The US has imposed fresh sanctions on Iranian companies and individuals over a recent ballistic missile test.

The new sanctions prevent 11 entities and individuals linked to the missile programme from using the US banking system.

The move came after international nuclear sanctions on Iran were lifted as part of a deal hailed by President Barack Obama on Sunday as "smart".

Lifting Iran's sanctions can negatively impact Canadian Economy

The lifting of sanctions against Iran could have a negative trickle-down effect on the Canadian economy.

University of Calgary Assistant Professor of Law and Business, James Coleman tells 660 NEWS, oil prices will likely fall further because Iran will be ramping up production.

“And that will probably have a similar effect on the loonie, obviously some of this has been priced in already because we’ve seen this deal coming for months now. But there will be a continuing pressure, and some of that will depend on how quickly Iran is able ramp back up its production,” explained Coleman.

Right now Iran is pumping about a million barrels a day below what it was before the sanctions were imposed.

Coleman doesn’t think the loonie will drop much further, unless there’s a major new development on the world economic front.

Anglican Church leaders suspend US Church over gay marriage

Less than a year after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriages, a firm push-back within Anglican Church's international leadership has formally put North America in its bad books for breaking with marriage tradition.

Church officials insist the decision to temporarily suspend the U.S. Episcopal Church, and effectively put Canada's Anglican Church on notice, was among the best of several worst-case scenarios they feared from the gathering of global Anglican leaders, which ends today in Canterbury, England.

The directive does, after all, simply acknowledge the fact that the more liberal North American Anglican churches and the more traditionalist ones, largely in Africa and Asia, have had an uneasy relationship over sexuality — “to use a marriage analogy, living practically separate lives,” said one official.

Yet, with one exception, African church leaders, some of whom have painted North American churches as unorthodox, even heretics, refrained this week from a threatened walkout over the controversy.

Still, the language of the statement from the global leaders, leaked a day early, indicates a headstrong resolve to oppose same-sex marriages in the long term.

It also suggests that the so-called North-South schism over the matter is actually deepening, and may well be irreparable.

A 'deep pain'

The statement said the move by the U.S. branch to change the definition of marriage caused “deep pain,” and a “deeper mistrust between us” that represents “a fundamental departure from the faith.”

In an apparent reference to Canada, it added that “possible developments in other provinces could further exacerbate this situation.”

The Anglican Church of Canada currently allows blessings for same-sex unions, and its leaders are to vote on whether to allow same-sex marriages when they meet in Toronto in July.

Should they take that step, it could mean a suspension for Canada too.

“The implied message is: If you move in that direction, you too will be required to limit your involvement in the life of the worldwide Anglican Communion,” one church insider told CBC News.

The gathering of 38 Anglican primates — representing some 80 million people worldwide — ultimately does not have the power to expel any member churches.

But a majority at the meeting supported upholding marriage as "between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union," said their statement.

A long history

The rift in the Anglican body over sexuality started when the U.S. Episcopal Church (the Anglican church in the U.S.) ordained its first openly gay bishop in 2003.

It came to a head with the U.S. church's decision to redefine marriage last July as that of a "couple," instead of a man and a woman.

The primates, meeting this week, agreed to impose a three-year suspension on the U.S. Episcopal Church from global decision-making on core issues, and on representing the church on interfaith bodies or internal committees.

Not a penalty, but a "consequence," said a Church of England official.

"What it means therefore is they have a limited role in the governance of the Anglican communion," said the official. "But nowhere does it say they've been expelled from the communion itself."

From Vancouver, the Very Reverend Peter Elliott, speaking only for himself, said he "deeply regretted" the decision to distance the U.S. Episcopal Church.

"The loss of their voice at international meetings diminishes our common life," he wrote in an email.

Leading the charge against North America in the closed-door meeting was Gafcon, a grouping of mostly African and Asian churches.

The group said Canada, too, should have been penalized.

"There is much that causes us concern, especially the failure to recognize the fact that the Anglican Church of Canada has also rejected the collegial mind of the communion by unilaterally permitting the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of those in active homosexual relationships," said the statement.

"We fear that other provinces will do the same."

In contrast, Canada's third largest church believes that blessing of committed relationships/marriages of same-sex couples is "a matter of doctrine, but it is not core doctrine: there is room for disagreement," says Elliott.

"We are a church in a country where gay rights are protected by law," he explained. "The church in a society like that needs to respect the values that have emerged after many years of struggle."

There is still a debate on marriage within the church, but it long ago affirmed "the civil rights of the homosexual community," he added.

"In other countries, there has not been this affirmation. In many countries on the Asian and African continent, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by imprisonment, in some cases by execution. Theirs is a very different context."

British churches

Rev. Dr. Samuel Wells, vicar of St. Martin in the Fields church in London, agrees that context is important.

His church at Trafalgar Square has many gay members in the congregation, and the debate on same-sex marriage or blessings is still ongoing in the English church.

In some places in Africa, he said, especially in places where Islam is prevalent, a liberal stance on

sexuality could actually be "a life and death issue, literally... people's lives would be in danger," he said.

Further, the differences over human sexuality are interwoven with longstanding differences on deeper matters.

"When the Anglican communion was formed around the 19th century it was made up of 100 or 200 bishops from around the world, and they had pretty much all gone to school together," he said in an interview.

"Now you take a picture of the Anglican primates and it's a very different picture. I think that's a very good thing.

"But of course it makes communication, understanding, cultural difference significantly different."

While England is the Anglican heartland, a quarter of worldwide Anglicans are now Nigerians.

"Church membership in places like North America and Europe continue to decline, while it seems to grow exponentially in Africa, as Christianity's 'centre of gravity' steadily moves south," said a church insider.

"This tension is also tied up with Anglicanism's legacy of colonialism, as the younger churches planted by missionaries in the United Kingdom and North America come into their own."

It is a shift that might someday cause a rupture. Though not today, its leaders insist.

Is it possible to draw a new map of the Middle East?

By Alan McIntyre

Living in America you get used to seeing straight lines on maps. Head west from New York and the rivers and natural features that defined the original colonies give way to lines of latitude and longitude that corral the land into perfectly rectangular states like Colorado and Wyoming.

Exactly a century ago, two European diplomats sat across a table from each other and drew straight lines on a map of the Middle East. In doing so they made an enduring contribution to the mess of interlocking religious, ethnic and political conflicts that now define the region. Negotiated nearly three years before the end of the first world war, the Sykes-Picot agreement between the UK and France dismembered the Ottoman empire – a colonial carve up that was then ratified in the early 1920s by the League of Nations. South-east Turkey, northern Iraq, Syria and Lebanon would come under either direct or indirect French control. Britain would take Transjordan, Kuwait and southern Iraq. Palestine would come under shared international control, while the assumed worthless desert of the Arabian Peninsula (oil wouldn't be discovered there until the late 1930s) would be a sop to the Arab nationalists.

The original intent of the process was to create a post-war map of the Middle East that would reflect historical and ethnic boundaries, but in the end the straight lines won. When Sykes was asked by his boss Lord Balfour: 'What do you mean to give the French exactly?'. He pointed to the map in front of them and said: 'I should like to draw a line from the "e" in Acre to the last "k" in Kirkuk'. I'm sure Picot never imagined when he signed that map in May 1916 that a century later Islamic Jihadists would be killing his fellow countrymen and women in the cafes and concert halls of Paris motivated – at least in part – by their zeal to redraw those lines.

Then as now, Russian interference wasn't helpful. Promised Istanbul and naval access to the Mediterranean, tsarist Russia happily assented to the Sykes-Picot agreement. Unfortunately, the new Bolshevik government had no desire to either claim their share of the spoils or honour their promise to keep the deal a secret. When the Russians published the details of the deal in 1917, the Arabs discovered that they had been taken for a ride by the British and French.

In 1915 T E Lawrence (acting in good faith) had delivered a letter promising that, in return for Arab military support, the allies would support an independent Arab state to include most of what is now

Syria. Unbeknownst to Lawrence, the parallel Sykes-Picot discussions were drawing up a very different map. When King Faisal tried to force the issue by establishing an independent Arab state with its capital in Damascus, he was forcibly removed by the French and replaced with a puppet Emir. As if that wasn't enough to undermine Arab trust, the surprise 'Balfour Declaration' in November 1917 promised the Jews a 'homeland' in Palestine. Balfour was keen to point out that there was a difference between a 'homeland' and a 'country', but that linguistic subtlety never got traction beyond Whitehall.

At the root of the current Middle East mess is the fact that the made-up countries that emerged from this spasm of colonial diplomacy bore little relation to the complex reality on the ground. Lebanon was originally intended as a Christian safe haven, but ended up a combustible mix of Sunni, Shia, Christian and Druze enclaves shoe-horned into a single political entity. The religiously diverse but ethnically homogenous Kurds found themselves a stateless and scattered minority in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, while Iraq (named by Sykes) was a brand new Shia, Sunni and Kurdish layer cake. Despite these arbitrary boundaries, the Sykes-Picot map survived relatively unchanged for a century, sustained first by the colonial powers who authored it and then by a series of regional strongmen, each of whom had a vested interest in the status quo. When underlying demographic and sectarian forces did bubble to the surface, they were brutally crushed. In the early 1980s when the Sunnis sought to assert their rights in Syria, Assad the Elder earned his 'vicious dictator' stripes by literally bulldozing the opposition.

In the last decade this autocratic but relatively stable regional balance has been undermined first by the US-led regime change in Iraq and then by the broader Arab Spring process and the resulting civil war in Syria. So we are now in a period where the central question facing both the West and now Russia is whether Humpty Dumpty should be put back together again? If there is the political will, all the king's horses and all the king's men can clearly defeat ISIS, but the challenge is what happens next. Specifically, does re-establishing a political map drawn by a Yorkshire baronet and a French bureaucrat serve any useful purpose in today's Middle East?

The entropy of artificial political entities has been a familiar theme in the post second world war world. In Europe Yugoslavia was torn apart by ethnic violence while Czechoslovakia managed a velvet divorce. Occasionally the polarity is reversed, with Ireland one example of a violent campaign to try and recreate a larger political entity, but the trajectory is clearly towards fragmentation. In the last 40 years the membership of the UN has grown from 140 to 193 countries, and despite Vladimir Putin being in 'Empire Strikes Back' mode, the country count is likely to grow to over 200 within the next decade. The challenge in the Middle East is that if you start erasing the Sykes-Picot lines, the next layer of stable political boundaries is by no means clear.

Political scientists will tell you that nation states emerge when the gravitational forces drawing people together are strong enough to overcome the factionalism that pushes them apart. At the most basic level, political gravity is genetic and manifests itself in the bonds of tribal and clan unity that go back to pre-civilisation times. But functioning nation states need to find an equilibrium at a level above shared DNA. Whether it is geography, a common language, religion, culture, or shared fear, there needs to be something strong enough to form the basis of 'us and them'.

The US likes to think of itself as sitting at the apex of nation state evolution, with Founding Fathers who created a country built on shared values rather than religion or ethnicity. However, George Washington appreciated the inherent fragility of this foundation. In his farewell address he cautioned Americans to 'properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness and cherish a cordial, habitual and immovable attachment to it'. Yet only 60 years later, the single issue of slavery was enough to temporarily tear the country in two. As Scotland discovered in 2014, even in a stable peaceful democracy, any attempt to create a new political entity through a process of bottom-up self-determination can be fraught with difficulty.

As the body count mounts in the Middle East and beyond, what is the future political settlement that stands a chance of its citizens having a 'cordial, habitual and immovable attachment' to it? With the West no longer as reliant on the Middle East's oil, should we let Iraq atomise into Kurdish, Sunni and Shia areas, with the absorption of the latter into Iran a far more likely outcome than a stable Federal Iraq? Should the Iraqi Kurdish enclave absorb parts of northern Syria and what then happens to the Kurds currently in open revolt against the Turkish government? Rather than getting dragged into the

proxy wars between the Saudis and Iranians in Yemen, Syria and elsewhere, should we just let a Sunni/Shia equilibrium emerge that doesn't require constant international policing?

The political end game in the Middle East has become an interesting and important fault line in the US presidential election. On one side you have Kissinger-like realpolitik from Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush and to an extent Hillary Clinton who see the lines of the Sykes-Picot map as the devil we know, and that maybe a return to regional strong men like Assad and Saddam who can keep the peace and suppress the jihadists isn't such a bad outcome. On the other hand there are the strange bedfellows of Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders who would happily take a step back, lock the door that is the Middle Eastern saloon and let the bar brawl sort things out, with the one caveat that the fighting doesn't spill out into the West. Implicit in this worldview is the idea that maybe the Middle East needs its equivalent of the 16th- and 17th-century religious wars in Europe to reach a stable equilibrium. Unfortunately, anyone who has ever been in a bar fight can attest to the difficulty of both containing the scope of it and moderating the behaviour of the participants.

Maybe if George Sykes didn't have a ruler, the Middle East wouldn't be quite the mess it is today, but then again maybe it would be worse. Regardless of the history, General Colin Powell's 'Pottery Barn Doctrine' still applies: 'If you break it, you own it'. Despite the isolationist rhetoric coming out of the US, the West has had a pivotal role in breaking the Middle East and has to be part of the solution; but unfortunately it may be too much to expect stable nation states to emerge to which the traumatised population of the region has a cordial and immovable attachment.

State of the Union highlights Jordan's rift with Obama

Despite the harsh divide among Republican presidential candidates on foreign policy, the importance of Jordan has been a unifying theme. Donald Trump praised King Abdullah on Twitter and Ohio Gov. John Kasich wished in a presidential debate that Jordan's king "would reign for a thousand years." In stark contrast to the Republicans, President Barack Obama downplayed or did not mention Amman's most critical national priorities — the Islamic State [IS], Palestine and the war in Syria — during his Jan. 12 State of the Union address.

Addressing members of Congress that evening, Obama emphasized, "As we focus on destroying [IS], over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands." The American leader's assertion that such dire warnings about IS are misguided directly contradict one of Abdullah's main talking points when traveling overseas.

Over and over — whether at the United Nations General Assembly podium, during an interview with PBS' Charlie Rose or even in Kosovo — the Jordanian monarch has declared that the battle against IS is "a third world war, and I believe we must respond with equal intensity."

After IS kidnapped Jordanian pilot Lt. Muath Al-Kaseasbeh and burned him alive in a cage in February of last year, the Jordanian air force launched a series of strikes against IS targets in Syria and Iraq. Jordan claimed to have killed 7,000 fighters in the days following Kaseasbeh's execution.

Obama's minimizing of the IS campaign speaks to a fundamental divergence with Abdullah and has led many leading thinkers in Amman to question America's determination and willingness to, in the president's own words, "degrade and ultimately destroy [IS]." If the world's strongest and most advanced military cannot defeat a far inferior and less organized group, what are Obama's true intentions?

In addition to IS, the State of the Union illustrated a major policy rift with Amman regarding the Palestinian peace process. Obama did not once bother to mention Palestine or Israel in the speech setting up his administration's goals for the upcoming year. Here again, Jordanian leaders take an opposite approach to this sensitive issue. House Speaker Atif Tarawneh said in October, "Jordan, under the leadership of King Abdullah II, has placed the Palestinian issue on top of its priorities." Amman raises the urgent need to create a Palestinian state in almost every meeting abroad.

The Hashemite Kingdom's difference with the Obama administration is not solely focused on this speech, but rather encompasses a larger policy divide. Since Secretary of State John Kerry's peace efforts stalled in 2014, the United States has not led an ongoing effort to end the Palestinian conflict. White House Middle East coordinator Rob Malley told reporters in November that reaching a

negotiated solution between the parties during Obama's remaining term "is not in the cards." In contrast to Amman's wishes, the Obama administration no longer prioritizes tackling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a region filled with violence.

Read more at:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/state-union-address-jordan-abdullah-rift-obama-isis.html#ixzz3xFA5XH1g>

A gulf between them: Understanding the Saudi-Iran dispute
Could open conflict now be one step closer between the two big regional powers in the Gulf? This week has seen tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran rise to dangerous levels following the Saudis' execution of a Shia cleric and the subsequent storming of the Saudi embassy in Tehran by an angry mob.

The BBC's Frank Gardner, whose attempted murderer was also executed by the Saudis last weekend, examines the historic enmity between the two regimes and assesses whether they can ever settle their differences.

In Saudi Arabia, a country that last year put to death a record 153 convicted prisoners, there has rarely been a more controversial execution in recent years. Amongst the 47 condemned men whose sentences were carried out simultaneously on 2 January one name stood out from all the others.

Sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr, a firebrand Shia cleric and popular figurehead for thousands of disaffected Saudi Shias living in the country's Eastern Province.

Arrested in 2012 in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings and charged with "disobedience to the ruler" and bearing arms, Al-Nimr's supporters insisted he only ever called for peaceful protest and fair rights for the Shia minority. His critics, including Sunni hardliners, called him a terrorist, while the Saudi government suspected him of being an agent of Iran.

Of the 47 people executed that day, 43 were Sunnis and most of those were extremists. One was the last surviving criminal from a gang that attacked our BBC film crew in Riyadh in 2004, killing my Irish cameraman Simon Cumbers and putting six bullets into me and crippling me for life.

Yet it was the death of the Shia cleric Al-Nimr that was always going to be the most inflammatory in a region already beset with sectarian fault lines. There have been angry protests by Shia in Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon.

In Iran, a country ruled since 1979 by Shia clerics, and which reportedly executed nearly 1,000 of its own people last year, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei said the Saudi leadership would face "divine revenge".

Optimists hoped that was a subtle way of absolving Iran from having to take any action itself.

But within a day an Iranian mob had vented its fury on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, setting it on fire and prompting Riyadh to sever all diplomatic, trade and transport links with Iran. For the hardliners in the Iranian regime, wary of their country's coming return to the world stage, this was probably a relief.

But for moderates and pragmatists keen to see last year's nuclear deal ratified and billions of dollars unfrozen, the embassy storming was an embarrassment they could have done without. One by one, Riyadh's allies - Bahrain, Sudan, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE - have taken their own punitive measures against Iran. Saudi-Iranian relations are close to their lowest ebb for 30 years.

So where did this Saudi-Iranian hostility spring from and is it all about religion?

As a nation, Saudi Arabia has only been in existence since 1932 but the land it governs - most of the Arabian Peninsula - is the birthplace of Islam and home to its two holiest shrines, in Mecca and Medina.

In the early years of the Islamic conquests in the 7th Century AD Muslim armies burst out of Arabia

to defeat the Persians, ending their Sasanian Empire. Later on in that century, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, a dispute erupted over who should succeed as "khalifa", or caliph, to rule the burgeoning Islamic empire.

A breakaway group believed it should have been Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, who was assassinated and his two sons denied the succession. The group became known as "Shia Ali", the party of Ali, and Shias still harbour this historic grudge. Today they are in a majority in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain.

But in more recent times, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry has been primarily about power play, sparked by Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Before then, while the Shah of Iran was on the throne, relations were cordial and the Arab Gulf states were content to let Iran's navy act as "the policeman of the Gulf". Western expatriates living in either Iran or Saudi Arabia enjoyed a relatively relaxed, liberal lifestyle with frequent alcohol-fuelled parties in both affluent north Tehran and in the housing compounds of Dhahran.

That all changed with the Iranian revolution. Suddenly, a competition emerged to prove which country was most worthy of leading the Islamic world. As Iran's new rulers vowed to export their Islamic Revolution and undermine what they saw as corrupt, unworthy princes, Saudi Arabia outdid itself to crack down on anything deemed to be un-Islamic.

The final straw was the brief storming and occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by a dissident Islamic group. The Al-Saud regime was shaken to the core and decided its key to survival was to cement its ties with the austere Wahhabi religious establishment, giving the clerics a huge say in areas of public life like education, justice and social mores.

In practice this has led to a sort of quasi-arms race for influence, with both Iran and Saudi Arabia exporting and promoting their own versions of Islam, in direct competition with each other.

Iran's allies now include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria's President Assad, and the powerful Shia militias in Iraq, such as Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haqq, the same group that kidnapped five Britons in Baghdad in 2007 and murdered four of them.

The Saudis believe that what they call Iran's "meddling" in the region extends to other countries too, giving them a degree of paranoia. They accuse Iran of fuelling Shia discontent in Saudi and Bahrain and of backing the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Iran's rulers for their part accuse the Saudis of bankrolling such an extreme, intolerant brand of Sunni Islam that they hold them responsible for the rise of jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State (IS).

The current war of words between Riyadh and Tehran is only the latest in a succession of spikes in tension.

For eight years, as Iran and Iraq fought each other to a standstill in what locals called "the First Gulf War" from 1980-88, Saudi Arabia and its Arab Gulf allies backed Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a bulwark against revolutionary Iran.

In 1987 over 400 people were killed in Mecca when Iranian pilgrims held a political rally and clashed with Saudi security forces, leading to a three-year break in diplomatic ties.

When Iran's moderate President Khatami came to power in 1997, better relations followed.

Soon after he was elected I sat with Iranian friends in a cafe in Shiraz. "You see those guys over there?" they said, pointing to a group of well-built, thuggish-looking men with scruffy beards and military jackets, sipping sweet tea and scowling. "They're the old guard, die-hard revolutionaries who hate the West and its allies. Their time is over."

How wrong they were. In 2005 Khatami was succeeded by the combative President Ahmadinejad and

relations with the Gulf Arabs took a nosedive as his mentors, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, were once more in the ascendant.

When the Arab Spring protests erupted in 2011, Iran, which had crushed its own democratic protest movement two years earlier, claimed the credit for sparking reformist movements across the Arab world.

This only deepened the Saudis' distrust of Tehran and in March that year, as Shia-led protests erupted in Bahrain, the Saudis sent 1,000 National Guard troops into Bahrain to guard key installations. It was a largely symbolic gesture, aimed at warning Tehran to back off and forget any idea of toppling the island's Sunni monarchy and replacing it with a Shia Islamic republic.

Today, Iran once again has a relatively moderate, pragmatic president in the form of Hassan Rouhani, while Saudi Arabia has embarked on a new and aggressive foreign policy that has seen it bogged down in an unwinnable war in Yemen.

Yet only two weeks ago there was talk of Saudi Arabia and Iran burying their differences around the table at the Syria peace talks. Perhaps a grand bargain could be struck that would finally end that country's appalling civil war. IS could be defeated as a common foe and Saudi Arabia and Iran could both end their military support for opposing sides.

Today those goals, while not impossible, have definitely receded over the horizon.

Merkel Lacks Both EU and Domestic Support

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has found herself in an awkward position: she lacks substantial domestic support as well as powerful partners with which to establish workable compromises in the EU; all this leads one to question if Germany will retain its position as the EU's 'flagship' state.

It has been a really hard year for Chancellor Angela Merkel: her approval ratings have plummeted while the number of fellow politicians in the European People's Party (EPP) she could consider her ideological partners has diminished tremendously.

Simultaneously, Germany's image as the longstanding flagship of the European Union has been called into question.

While the EU's member states are turning "left" and "right" amid the ongoing refugee crisis, "the center right — and Germany itself — is losing influence," Eder noted.

To complicate matters further, new alliances are arising within the union, throwing into question Berlin's leadership.

"The influx of refugees has consolidated the Visegrad Group, bringing together the national-conservatives of Poland, Slovakian leftist Robert Fico, Czech Social Democrat Bohuslav Sobotka and [Hungarian President Viktor] Orban," Eder points out, adding that the Hungarian President and his allies denounce the policy towards migrants espoused by Merkel and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

Eric Maurice of Euobserver.com also points to the lack of support for Merkel's refugee policy in Europe, citing German transport minister Alexander Dobrindt.

Commenting on the Chancellor's initiative to organize the relocation of refugees across the EU, Dobrindt noted: "Who speaks of a coalition of the willing to manage this crisis must also name the reality... On this issue there is a pact of the unwilling against us."

Meanwhile, Merkel's popularity in Germany has declined considerably. The Chancellor has long been celebrated as a "top" EU politician, who was named "Person of the Year" by the Times of London in 2014 and by America's Time magazine in 2015. However, many people turn a blind eye to the fact that domestically, things have been getting more and more difficult, Christoph Strack of Deutsche Welle wrote in a recent op-ed.

The journalist refers to the fact that the country's mass media are expressing opinions "with a new dimension of harshness."

"Is Merkel still the right one?" the popular German daily Bild am Sonntag asks, stating that at the root of the current political crisis that has stained the chancellor's administration, one finds "lack of respect, loss of authority, internal political struggle, terrorism, criminality and overstrained authorities."

According to Strack, certain omissions are becoming apparent — "from the cost of the Greek bailout to the continual deferment of an immigration law."

"This year will not only determine the future of Merkel's chancellorship — it will also affect the way that chancellorship is viewed as a whole," the journalist underscores.

The question remains open whether Merkel's potential political failure will ultimately undermine Germany's leadership position in the EU and deal a blow to the bloc's unity.

Cancer treatment for MS patients gives 'remarkable' results
UK doctors in Sheffield say patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) are showing "remarkable" improvements after receiving a treatment usually used for cancer.

About 20 patients have received bone marrow transplants using their own stem cells. Some patients who were paralysed have been able to walk again.

Prof Basil Sharrack, of Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire Hospital, said: "To have a treatment which can potentially reverse disability is really a major achievement."

Around 100,000 people in the UK have MS, an incurable neurological condition. Most patients are diagnosed in their 20s and 30s.

The disease causes the immune system to attack the lining of nerves in the brain and spinal cord.

The treatment - known as an autologous haematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT) - aims to destroy the faulty immune system using chemotherapy.

It is then rebuilt with stem cells harvested from the patient's own blood. These cells are at such an early stage they've not developed the flaws that trigger MS.

Prof John Snowden, consultant haematologist at Royal Hallamshire Hospital, said: "The immune system is being reset or rebooted back to a time point before it caused MS."

About 20 MS patients have been treated in Sheffield in the past three years. Prof Snowden added: "It's clear we have made a big impact on patients' lives, which is gratifying."

In MS the protective layer surrounding nerve fibres in the brain and spinal cord - known as myelin - becomes damaged. The immune system mistakenly attacks the myelin, causing scarring or sclerosis.

The damaged myelin disrupts the nerve signals - rather like the short circuit caused by a frayed electrical cable. If the process of inflammation and scarring is not treated then eventually the condition can cause permanent neurodegeneration.

The BBC's Panorama programme was given exclusive access to several patients who have undergone the stem cell transplant.

Steven Storey was diagnosed with MS in 2013 and, within a year, went from being an able-bodied athlete to needing a wheelchair and losing sensation in much of his body.

He said: "I went from running marathons to needing 24-hour acute care. At one point I couldn't even hold a spoon and feed myself."

Within a few days of the transplant he was able to move his toes, and after four months he could stand unaided.

Steven still needs a wheelchair but is astounded at his progress: "It's been incredible. I was in a dire place, but now I can swim and cycle and I am determined to walk."

Holly Drewry was just 21 when she was diagnosed with MS and her condition deteriorated after she gave birth to her daughter Isla.

She said "Within a couple of months I got worse and worse. I couldn't dress or wash myself; I didn't even have the strength to carry my daughter."

Holly needed a wheelchair before her transplant, but after the treatment she walked out of hospital.

She said: "It's been a miracle. I got my life and my independence back and the future is bright again in terms of being a mum and doing everything with Isla."

Two years on she has suffered no relapses and there is no evidence of active disease on her scans.

Doctors describe her MS as dormant, but there is hope that the transplant might be a permanent fix.

The Royal Hallamshire Hospital - together with hospitals in the United States, Sweden and Brazil - is part of an international trial, MIST, which is assessing the long-term benefits of the stem cell transplant.

All those on the trial have relapsing remitting MS, where patients experience attacks - or relapses - followed by periods of remission.

The treatment involves intensive chemotherapy, so patients are warned that there are side-effects such as nausea and hair loss.

Paul Kirkham, another MS patient, said he was glad to have had the transplant but added: "It does knock you. I'd rather have done 10 rounds with Mike Tyson."

The transplant involves a one-off cost of around £30,000, which is comparable to the yearly cost of some MS treatments.

Because the procedure involves no new drugs and instead re-purposes an existing therapy using the patient's own cells, there is little profit incentive for drug companies to get involved.

Prof Richard Burt, Northwestern University, Chicago carried out the first HSCT for MS as long ago as 1995 and is coordinating the international trial which began in 2006.

He said: "There has been resistance to this in the pharma and academic world. This is not a technology you can patent and we have achieved this without industry backing."

A study published last year involving MS patients in Chicago showed significant reductions in neurological disability, and for some the improvements persisted for at least four years, although there was no comparative control group.

The outcome of the more detailed MIST trial - which will report in a couple of years - could determine whether the stem cell transplant becomes a standard NHS treatment for many MS patients.

Dr Emma Gray, head of clinical trials at UK's MS Society, said: "Ongoing research suggests stem cell treatments such as HSCT could offer hope, and it's clear that in the cases highlighted by Panorama they've had a life-changing impact.

"However, trials have found that while HSCT may be able to stabilise or improve disability in some people with MS it may not be effective for all types of the condition."

Dr Gray said people should be aware it was an "aggressive treatment that comes with significant risks", but called for more research into HSCT so there could be greater understanding of its safety and long term effectiveness.

The imminent death of the Cavendish banana and why it affects us all

Buy a banana and it will almost certainly be descended from one plant grown at an English stately home. But now we face losing one of the world's most-loved fruits.

Sitting in picture-perfect Peak District grounds, Chatsworth House seems an unlikely birthplace for today's global banana industry.

But practically every banana consumed in the western world is directly descended from a plant grown in the Derbyshire estate's hothouse 180 years ago.

This is the story of how the Cavendish became the world's most important fruit - and why it and bananas as we know them could soon cease to exist.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35131751>

Gravitational waves from black holes detected

Scientists are claiming a stunning discovery in their quest to fully understand gravity.

They have observed the warping of space-time generated by the collision of two black holes more than a billion light-years from Earth.

The international team says the first detection of these gravitational waves will usher in a new era for astronomy.

It is the culmination of decades of searching and could ultimately offer a window on the Big Bang.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-35524440>

Toilet tech proves that where there's muck there's brass

Nearly a third of the world's population still has no access to safe, hygienic sanitation. This means they have to go the toilet out in the open - in the bush, fields or forests.

This leads to about 700,000 deaths each year from related diseases, says the World Bank, and stops children getting a proper education.

"Sanitation lies at the root of many other development challenges, as poor sanitation impacts public health, education, and the environment," says Jyoti Shukla, senior manager of the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program (WSP).

So what are the technology innovations helping to address this issue, and is the private sector better placed than the public sector to implement these solutions?

'Cool' toilets

One of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals is to make universal access to safe sanitation and water a reality by 2030.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35305796>

The little car you can drive in France without a licence



If you are planning on driving in France, beware - one could be heading straight for you at the next roundabout. Carolyn Brown, who lives part of the year in Brittany, has a cautionary tale about a very small car.

Losing one's driving licence in the UK is a serious matter - expensive and, to say the least, very inconvenient.

But in France, no licence? No problem. You can simply go shopping for a VSP a voiture sans permis - a small two-seater car that anyone aged 14 or over can take out on the road with as little as four hours' experience behind the wheel, sometimes not even that.

It's impossible to say how many there are as no official figures exist. It is what the French call a chiffre noir - an unknown quantity.

You'll probably hear them coming first, a high-pitched whine like a sewing machine being run at full throttle. If you get stuck behind one on a windy rural lane, tant pis. Top speed is 45km per hour (28mph). It's probably a good idea to stop in the next lay-by and admire the view for a while rather than sit fuming in its wake.

On market day in my nearest town here in Brittany the little voitures sans permis splutter into the main street. Although the literal translation is "car without licence" it is in fact the driver who doesn't need to bother himself or herself with any proof of ability behind the wheel.

Once seen as an anachronism that, given time, would inevitably be legislated out of existence they remain a vital means of transport for an ageing rural population. For the most part they are scruffy and battered. Their bodywork is faded and peeling, often touched-up with a spot of household gloss paint. Wire and gaffer tape hold loose panels together and one I saw had its bumper held in place with washing line fashioned into an elaborate blanket stitch.

My local notaire, or solicitor, admits she is nervous on Thursdays - which is market day. Especially of the old ladies. The problem, she told me is one of inheritance. A husband who always did all the driving passes away and the voiturette is inherited by his wife.

Because it's impossible to survive here without wheels she will nervously trundle into town at snail's pace. She won't do much damage because she is going so slowly. Insurance will only get expensive if she hurts someone, but most of the time it's just a busted wing mirror or a slight scratch and the insurance company just takes the hit.

I tell her that I am frankly astonished that VSPs still exist.

"Well," she says with a shrug, "there are people who would still drive without a licence but they would be in much more powerful, and therefore more dangerous cars."

The fact is that a lot of conducteurs who lose their licence because they are too fond of the pastis, walk out of court down to their local VSP outlet, et voila they can be back on the road in hours. Yes, they ought to have insurance, which is pricey if you have a record of illness or a fondness for alcohol - it can set you back as much 85 euros (£63) a month. A reputable dealership won't sell you a car unless you can show insurance, but it's not a problem if you pick one up from your mate.

I asked around in my local bar but the drinkers were coy about their reasons for driving sans permis.

One chap told me the theory exam for a full licence was too difficult. But in a quiet moment the patron told me what he said was a common story. One of his regulars lost his licence and bought an ancient voiture sans permis. When his licence was reinstated, he sold the voiturette to a drinking chum who had just had his licence taken away. It changed hands once more in the same way and then after a year or so the original owner (who evidently hadn't kicked his pastis habit) bought it back again.

The barman shrugged. "Ca roule," he said. That's how it goes. (So many people shrugged while I was investigating this story I looked to see what the French word was for "shrug". They don't have

one.)

Curious as to how strict a dealership would be, I went to the local VSP outlet - it's not a regular garage, they are sold alongside tractors and motor-mowers.

The salesman tells me they sell three a week on average. So, would they sell a voiturette to just anyone who walked in off the street? "Mais, oui," he says, "provided they have insurance." But what about knowing what to do at a roundabout? It turns out that the salesman takes the would-be purchaser for a spin. If he and the car come back in one piece, he'll do the deal.

"That's a big responsibility, isn't it?" I ask. Another eloquent shrug.

Here my eyes were opened to the new generation of VSP. I got to take a ride in the latest top of the range model - called, without any intended irony, the "sports" model. (Top speed still 45km per hour.)

At a cool 14,000 euros (£10,000) it has air conditioning, a reversing camera and a top-flight sound system, which is essential for the new target market.

Microcar, Aixam, Ligier and other manufacturers are aiming their publicity at young urbanites. You can't take VSPs on motorways or expressways but they are cheap to run, turn on a centime and are easy to park.

They also aim the hard sell at parents. Since last November children as young as 14 can drive VSPs. They're deemed to be safer than a scooter and it's a way out of the cliché of "Mum's Taxi" service.

Youngsters at least have to take a theoretical exam in the French highway code (this is waived entirely if you were born before the law was last changed in 1988) and drive accompanied for a minimum of four hours, but no-one has to sit any kind of practical test to frapper la rue (hit the road) in a VSP.

So whether you prefer red, white or rose, to stay safe on French roads there is perhaps another French "whine" you should be steering clear of.

Pete, Audierne, France: Interesting slant on these. There are plenty of them around where I live. The vast majority of them are driven by old people who for whatever reason no longer have a licence - but I very much doubt that the reason is Pastis or any other form of alcohol. There is a fair chance that I'll consider getting one when the time comes. I don't know what the system is here, but if regular medical checks are needed to see if a person is "still fit to drive" then one of these may be a more attractive option.

Barry Taylor, Benidorm, Spain: Quite common here in Spain but you do have to have a licence. They are a bit of a pain on main roads (they tend to drive on the hard shoulder but you rarely find them in the mountains, and about town they don't seem to get in the way any more than hire cars full of tourists.

Steffen Holzt, Noumea, New Caledonia: These cars are a best seller in New Caledonia which is a French overseas territory. Most of the schoolkids have one and there are hundreds parked in front of the high schools. My son has one which is the 16 year version, it goes 105 km/h, amazing. I am totally astounded that this has not caught on everywhere in Europe. I'd rather have my kids drive a thing like this than a motorbike.

Jose Amarante, Lisbon, Portugal: They also exist in Portugal, mostly in the countryside, where they are called "mata-velhos", in English maybe "oldies-killer", because they are mostly used by old people and there are many fatal accidents.

Alan McDonald, Castelo Branco, Portugal: They are quite common in this inland area of Portugal. Almost all Aixam. They are no problem on the road - their slow speed makes them very easy to pass. They are much safer than more powerful cars for timid drivers. They give rural dwellers (a threatened species in many parts of Europe) the freedom of being able to take themselves into town and back. Public transport is infrequent or non-existent.

Scotland could become leading producer of new superberry
The fruit tastes like a cross between a raspberry and a blueberry and resembles a mini blue banana.

Fruit producers say the nutritious honeyberry is easy to grow and perfectly suited to the Scottish climate. The first orchard of the soft fruit has already been planted north of the Border, at a farm in Angus.

But it is hoped production of the crop will increase to 5,000 acres across the country in the next decade.

Experts say the fruit has the potential to bring in important new income streams for farmers, with possible rewards of up to £25,000 an acre.

Could this be a crop for Canada?

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/scotland-could-become-leading-producer-of-new-superberry-1-4034178>

Also on the same topic...

At home and abroad, Nova Scotia is traditionally known for its blueberry crops. But with the recent arrival of what some are calling a new "superberry," that may change.

The haskap, an oblong bluish fruit popular in Japan which tastes something like a cross between a blueberry, a blackberry and a raspberry, happens to grow well in the province due to our cold winter and rainy spring weather. The plant bears fruit much earlier than most other plants, it's easy to farm with existing equipment, and the berries are rich in antioxidants, calcium and vitamin C.

It's being researched and distributed from the University of Saskatchewan, and, some say, it could very well be the next big thing in Nova Scotian agriculture.

In the seven months since it began offering them, Bridgewater-based LaHave Natural Farms, the largest haskap purveyor of its kind in Atlantic Canada, has taken orders for 55,000 plants to 98 different large and small farms, hobbyists and gardening clubs in Nova Scotia and the U.K., and is currently working on haskap juices, jams, wines, liqueurs and even antioxidant face scrubs.

Some Sobeys and Atlantic Superstore locations began carrying gallon pots of the plant this year, which cost around \$20 each for male and female plants at both stores.

Where new dads are encouraged to take months off work

In some countries the idea of paternity leave - when a father takes time off work to stay at home with a new child - has yet to take hold. In Sweden, which has been encouraging fathers to take paternity leave since 1974, there is now a new incentive for them to spend a full three months at home.

"It took 20 minutes to get the kids into their winter clothes this morning," says Fredrik Casservik, putting his son, Elton, into a high chair. Next to him, another dad, Rikard Barthon, agrees. "It's the worst time of year," he says, as he carefully helps his 16-month-old daughter, Juni, out of her padded onesie.

The two dads are in a suburban cafe in southern Stockholm drinking coffee and sharing cinnamon buns with their children. They discuss how to spend the afternoon while their toddlers wave enthusiastically at two more small children at the next table.

Groups of fathers lunching together surrounded by toddlers or pushing prams through parks are not an uncommon sight in Sweden. In 1974, the country was the first in the world to replace maternity leave with parental leave, giving both partners the chance of time at home with their children.

"It's a very strong tradition here," says Roger Klinth, a researcher and senior lecturer in gender studies at Linköping University. "That all political parties voted for it in 1974, was a clear signal from

the state that men and women should have the same status as parents and that one gender shouldn't take main responsibility."

The idea was that couples got six months' leave per child with each parent entitled to half the days each. However, men had the option of signing their days over to the women - and most of them did. As a result, two decades later, 90% of the leave days were still being used by women.

A "daddy quota" was introduced in 1995 to resolve this. It allocated 30 days' leave solely to the father on a use-it-or-lose-it basis. If the father didn't take a month off work, then the couple as a whole would lose a month's paid leave. In 2002, this was extended to 60 days. Both reforms had a direct impact on the proportion of leave taken by the father so that by 2014 men were taking 25% of all the days available to the couple. As of 1 January this year, the quota has risen to 90 days.

Today, Swedish couples get around 16 months (480 days) paid parental leave when their child is born. For the first 390 days, the parent who is off work gets paid 80% of their salary by the state. After that, parents can take up to 90 days more leave and be paid a lower rate. As a result of the latest changes the maximum amount of leave a mother can take has gone down from 420 days to 390 - or from roughly 14 months to 13.

Rikard is 41 and works at TV network TV4 and Fredrik, 40, is an advertising agency graphic designer. Both are taking at least four months' leave.

There are Facebook groups that help dads on paternity leave meet up with other fathers. While the children play, the dads have coffee or lunch together and exchange stories and childcare tips just as their own mothers once did.

Fredrik's wife Susanne has noticed that Elton has become more attached to his dad since she went back to her job at a recruitment company.

"I'm a bit sad sometimes when I can see that Elton wants to be with Fredrik, but I know it's because they're home together more," she says. "But then it can be a bit hard for Fredrik when the children want to be with him all the time as well!"

Things were very different for Fredrik's father, Jan Casservik, in 1975. He only took a few days' leave from being a head teacher when Fredrik was born, although by law he could have taken more.

"It wasn't that common back then. If someone did take leave, it was almost a bit suspect. It just wasn't what you did as a man," he says.

"Being at the birth was OK, but you wouldn't be home forever. If I had small kids today like Fredrik, then I'd definitely like to be home and take paternity leave."

His wife, Margareta, agrees. She took all of the parental leave when they had their three children and thinks it's brilliant to now see Fredrik spending time with his two children. "The experience that he's getting when the children come to him is something I felt many times and it's such a lovely feeling. I think everyone should experience it."

Swedish photographer Johan Bavman made a photo book called Swedish Dads when he was home with his own son, Viggo.

The 45 portraits show men who have chosen to stay home for more than six months to look after their children. Johan says he didn't want to portray the fathers as "super dads", but to show the hard work that goes into becoming a good parent.

"This is something that women have never been recognised for before, and something we men have always taken for granted. It's hard to change history and it takes time to change the mindset of both parents."

The dads in the cafe say they have never had any adverse comments from people in the street seeing them pushing prams, though on one occasion a friend of Rikard's overheard a tourist in a cafe

asking who all the "gay nannies" were.

Sweden is rated as having one of the world's narrowest gender gaps according to the World Economic Forum.

Niklas Lofgren from The Swedish Social Insurance Agency says equal parenting in the early days has long-term benefits.

"I think it's a natural step that if you've shared the responsibilities more equally when the child is small, there's a bigger chance that you'll take more responsibility later on if the parents separate. We can't show that there's a direct link but it's certainly more common now in Sweden that parents have shared custody and the children live alternate weeks with each parent after a separation," he says.

"From an international, or non-Swedish perspective, it probably seems a bit strange that men go around changing nappies and doing the washing up," says Fredrik. His brother lives in the US with his wife, who stays at home with their two children. Fredrik thinks that his brother, and other fathers in a similar situation, might have a different relationship with their children as they spend less time at home.

Much as they love looking after their children, both men are looking forward to going back to work. "I like working. I see this as a chance that won't come again so it's nothing to do with me not wanting to work," says Rikard.

Most employers are behind them. "Companies need reliable access to competent people to be strongly competitive," says Catharina Back, a social security expert at employers' organisation Swedish Enterprise.

"Therefore it's important that companies are attractive to men and women so that both have possibilities to develop their careers while they have small children."

In 2015 parental leave cost the Swedish state \$3.2bn (£2.2bn), largely funded by the relatively high payroll taxes levied on Swedish companies.

In terms of the logistical impact on individual businesses, Back says long periods of leave aren't necessarily a problem. "Of course it's challenging to bring in extra cover when employees are away on parental leave, but so as long as parents forewarn their employers, then companies can plan ahead and then they're happy. It's more when it is shorter periods that it's harder to plan."

According to Niklas Lofgren, when the woman has a higher level of education than the man, the parental leave days tend to be shared more equally.

It has taken 40 years and many political reforms to get halfway to complete equality in parental leave in Sweden. Women are still more likely to work part-time or take longer periods of unpaid leave.

However, if the trend continues as it has in the last few years, the paid leave should be divided 50-50 between the two parents by 2035.

China's Power Play in Djibouti: First Step to Great Naval Power Status?

China's plans to open a military facility in Djibouti have been giving US pundits the chills, with commentators suggesting that Beijing may be attempting to "edge out Western influence" in Africa and the Middle East. Russian experts suggest that the base is, more than anything, a sign that China is ready to emerge as a great naval power.

Read more:

<http://sputniknews.com/military/20151130/1030992194/china-djibouti-great-naval-power.html#ixzz3tPqWb1gz>

How The Bridge's heroine became a role model for women with autism

Saga Noren from the Scandinavian TV crime drama The Bridge has become an unlikely hero. Widely diagnosed by viewers as being on the autistic spectrum, she is lauded not just because she is a leading character with the condition, but - more unusually - because she is a woman with it.

She is blunt, doesn't understand jokes and struggles to build relationships. She strips down to her underwear to get changed in the office without embarrassment, and asks and answers questions with often excruciating honesty. "Would you like the recipe?" asks her dinner host. "No, thanks, it wasn't tasty," comes her reply.

While the writers of The Bridge have never confirmed that Saga has Asperger syndrome - a form of autism - it has been generally assumed to be the case. Sofia Helin, the actress who plays her, has regularly referred to it in interviews. She researched the condition before filming started and has been sent letters and fan mail from people with the condition, as well as from the Swedish Asperger society.

Read more about this at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/disability-34995327>

NATO Not Capable of Beating Russia - US Media

Russia has a number of advantages that can ensure the country's military forces will succeed in a hypothetical armed conflict, if it ever happens, American columnist Loren Thompson claims.

As the tension between the world powers appear to escalate, stories suggesting how the hypothetical conflict between Russia and the NATO bloc would unfold are increasingly more common in various media outlets. And in this potential standoff, Russia has lots of advantages that could help it to gain an upper hand, Loren Thompson, a Chief Operating Officer of the non-profit Lexington Institute and a columnist, wrote for Forbes magazine.

First of all, according to Thompson, NATO has neglected preparations necessary to meet high-tech threats.

Read more at:

<http://sputniknews.com/military/20151213/1031666977/NATO-Not-Capable-Beating-Russia.html>

The Christian school in Israel described as an oasis

Amongst the conflict that defines the Middle East lies something of a surprise.

It is described as "an oasis" in the midst of religious division. Tabeetha is the last remaining Church of Scotland school and, intriguingly, it's in Israel.

The gates of Tabeetha are easy to miss. They take you off a busy street where wires stick out of walls.

At first, the playground sounds like any playground: the same games, just as noisy but the children are speaking Hebrew, Arabic, English and other languages.

From the hall, which doubles as a bomb shelter and chamber which can be sealed in the event of chemical and biological warfare, I hear a Scottish Accent. The vice principal is from Aberdeen.

It is marked out as a Christian school by the Bible inscriptions on the alcoves.

Its founder looks down sternly from the wall in the hall. Jane Walker-Arnott was a Scottish woman, from Glasgow, who started Tabeetha in 1863 - long before the state of Israel even existed.

Under the gaze of the founder, the children file in to rehearse their nativity play.

Many people associate Bethlehem with the songs they sing at Christmas - the birthplace of Jesus, according to the Bible.

At Tabeetha, they are about 40 miles from Bethlehem, acting out a Christian tradition, about a Jewish family and Joseph is played by Adham, a Muslim. That sums up the ethos of this school.

Nawras is an A-level pupil. She is Muslim. At Tabeetha, she's encouraged to talk about the unwanted politics that invade her life.

"As somebody who lives in Jaffa, it gets quite tense, but we don't have a lot of places here in Israel where people are together, but if this expands, then our potential would be impossible to imagine," she said.

"At one point I see my brother being stopped for wearing a gold necklace, because it looks suspicious, and on the other side, I hear my friend's family being victimised from a terrorist attack. What we do is learn from it and not taking one stand, one position."

Yan, who's from a Jewish family, says life goes on as normal for him. He lives in an area where people of different faiths live peacefully side by side.

He said: "In this school there is no tension between pupils in regard to religion and race."

So I expect him to be hopeful about the future but he pauses before saying: "Things are really messy right now."

He has heard too much to have the optimism of youth. "So no. I'm not optimistic".

In 12-year-old Roberto's class they were learning about the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. Roberto is Christian and eager to talk. I ask him what he thinks about the conflict around him.

"I think people are fighting for nothing; they're fighting for something useless, and I think the people should get along," he said. "I want to see people just stop have racism."

I would be unlikely to ask what religion a child is in the UK. It's unlikely it would matter. In Israel, it's entwined in their lives and ingrained in the school curriculum.

When I meet the Middle East secretary for the Church of Scotland, Kenny Roger, he is every bit the modern missionary. He wears a linen suit and drives a hybrid car.

He says Christians can chose to go to Tabeetha rather than an Israeli State school.

"Within Israel, you are either Christian, Muslim or Jew and therefore here at Tabeetha we recognise all religions," he said.

"Within the Israeli state system, it's clear that they don't recognise necessarily the Christian and the Muslim faith, so children going there, their teaching will be solely based on the Jewish religion."

Father Abdel Masih F Fahim represents Christian Schools in Israel. As we walk through St Joseph's Church in Ramleh, he casually mentions that it is named after Joseph of Arimathea who, according to the Bible, took Jesus down from the cross.

The friar tells me that St Joseph came from this town.

Fr Abdel says funding to Christian schools from the Israeli government has been cut from 75% to 29% in recent years. He describes that as discrimination against Christians.

Fr Abdel is in talks with the Ministry of Education but says even 75% is discriminatory against 100% given to state schools.

Kenny Roger adds that if Tabeetha school was to close, some of the families at the school would leave Israel entirely.

Although discussions with the Israeli government are showing signs of hope, he says he feels Christians are being marginalised.

The Israeli Ministry of Education said: "The Tabeetha school is under the status of a 'recognised but not official' institute, and therefore it is funded like all other schools in Israel that are recognised but unofficial, meaning up to 75%.

"High-schools are funded like all other high-schools in Israel, at a rate of 100%."

'Mutual respect'

The government spokesman added: "The Tabeetha school, along with other recognised schools in Jaffa that are multi-cultural schools, share an attitude of mutual respect and equality among all students of the school.

"The district emphasises that the Tabeetha school participates in many activities run by the Ministry of Education which encourage the values of tolerance."

I leave Tabeetha school with an "earworm".

"Lie-lee-da, lie-lee-da." Too young to fully understand the politics, the five-year-olds sang Jingle Bells in Arabic at home-time. Home to their life in a divided land they call the Holy Land.

To watch a video of the school see

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-35131342>

Why Erdogan is Terrified Over Prospects of Russian Dialogue With Kurds

Ankara is closely following the intensification of Russian-Kurdish contacts, fearing that Moscow will use its contacts with Syrian and Turkish Kurds to undermine Turkish influence in the region, according to Lebanese newspaper Ad-Diyar.

On Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks with Selahattin Demirtas, the co-chairman of the Turkish pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), the country's third-largest parliamentary group, and second-largest opposition party.

The opposition leader criticized the ruling Justice and Development Party government's actions, adding that "a solution that won't harm our two nations should be found." For his part, Lavrov reiterated that Russia's conflict was with the Turkish government, not the Turkish people.

According to Ad-Diyar, Russia understands that by strengthening its relations with the Kurds, in Syria, Iraq and Turkey itself, it can put significant pressure on Erdogan, both domestically and in the region.

Recalling the Kurds' intention to seek autonomy in northern Syria, the paper noted that "to this end, Russia insisted last week on the need to give the Democratic Union Party, the Syrian Kurdish party associated with the [banned] Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party, a seat at the negotiating table alongside other Syrian opposition groups."

Ultimately, the prospects for Kurdish autonomy, accordingly, could result in northern Syria "becoming a fertile stronghold for PKK activity," with the group gaining the capability of launching strikes into Turkey from northern Syria, something which "would be disastrous for Ankara."

Thick smoke rises following an airstrike by the US-led coalition in Kobani, Syria as fighting intensified between Syrian Kurds and the militants of Islamic State group, as seen from Mursitpinar in the outskirts of Suruc, at the Turkey-Syria border, Lavrov Asks Why Turkey is Bombing US-Allied Kurds in Syria.

As far as Demirtas and his visit to Moscow is concerned, Ad-Diyar suggested that the meeting with the Russian foreign minister was aimed at demonstrating Turkish Kurds' independence, and their ability to gain Moscow's political support.

"Demirtas wants to show Erdogan that the Kurds are a political force which cannot be pushed aside at election-time, or crushed in the streets."

Moreover, the visit, the paper noted, came at a sensitive time, with the smoldering conflict between Ankara and the PKK igniting into all-out military conflict this past summer, with Turkish security forces launching large-scale military operations involving nearly 10,000 personnel, and Erdogan promising to "annihilate" PKK members in their homes. Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, meanwhile, have accused Ankara

of repeatedly bombing them in recent months, amidst their campaigns to defend against assaults from Daesh (ISIL/ISIS).

Jordanians at boiling point over refugees

King Abdullah of Jordan says his country is at "boiling point" because of an influx of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees.

Ahead of a donor conference on Syria, the king told the BBC that there was enormous pressure on Jordan's social services, infrastructure and economy.

"Sooner or later, I think, the dam is going to burst," he warned.

He said the international community would have to offer more help if it wanted Jordan to keep taking refugees.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35462698>

Finland's basic income plan could change everything

Gordon MacIntyre-Kemp

FINLAND looks set to challenge the global economic orthodoxy in a way that could usher in the biggest step change in economic thought since the Industrial Revolution – it could signify the end of the link between hourly work and income, signalling the true end of the industrial age. Its stated intent – to introduce a basic income for all adults – has a few economic commentators excited but so far hasn't sparked the national consciousness. That's partly because it is a fairly radical idea and partly because most progressive economists already see the end of the welfare state and a move to a basic income as inevitable. They just can't decide on the timescales nor the method for implementing it or managing such a massive change.

The government in Finland is planning on scrapping all welfare payments for adults and paying an unconditional basic citizens' income to all adults of €800 (£576) per month. The idea of a basic income is not a new idea. There have been several limited trials, but only one large-scale one, in the Canadian town of Dauphin, Manitoba between 1974 and 1979. That made the case for a basic income overwhelmingly, but the data was locked away in a warehouse until being rediscovered by Evelyn Forget, who was inspired to write the report *The Town with No Poverty*. She found that even in that short time the basic income experiment resulted in a significant reduction in hospitalization for accidents and injuries, and massive improvements in mental health, including far less anxiety and depression.

A higher proportion of high school students also went on to graduate and although some young mothers did spend more time at home looking after children as they could now afford to, main breadwinners kept working, and there was no increase in unemployment. Historically, basic income has supporters on the right who see the benefits of a smaller state and less complex welfare systems, and on the left, who see basic dignity and an end to poverty as motivating factors.

If you thought automation had decimated the manufacturing industry, just wait till you see what happens when the new smart machines enter the job market over the next decade. Driverless cars are proving to be safer than human-driven ones. How long before all taxis, buses, trains and trams are automatic? Have you used the Dubai or Stansted Airport trains, Copenhagen's trams or the Barcelona underground? There are no drivers and you didn't even notice. How long before you see the rollout of 3D-printed housing with all wiring done by automated mice? Search the internet for "Monster machine building bridges in China" – there are humans involved: dozens not hundreds, and for weeks not months. Within a generation job availability will be limited to only the most creative and self-employed craftspeople unless we radically change the nature of work and remuneration – this makes basic income an inevitability. A recent American study estimates that 47% of jobs are in danger from automation in the next 20 years.

Many from the section of society that used to manufacture tangible goods now see jobs as dead-end, intangible and often soul-destroying roles in call centres and superstores that often pay less than the living wage, leading them into debt and qualifying them for a raft of complex and very expensive

government welfare payments. Alcohol consumption, drugs and obesity are symptoms of excess in the wealthy but of desperation in the poor and the cost of the diabetes explosion alone to the NHS will soon reach unmanageable levels.

So how much would it cost? Applying a basic income level to all adults in the UK of around £6,000 a year (matching the state pension plus a bit) would cost £300 billion a year. That's a huge figure but it applies to all adults and so you do away with the state pension, saving £75bn, you do away with all benefits (except disability and child benefits), saving £140bn. Anyone earning more than the non-taxable earnings threshold pays tax on it. Many administration jobs would go with time, and maybe that saves another £10bn, meaning an on-cost of £75bn per year.

Businesses would have to raise wages to above the living wage to attract people to what are currently lower-paid jobs – assuming that means they will have to pay living wage + 5%. This will generate billions in new taxes and National Insurance per year in the short-term and increase the consumer spending power of large sections of our economy, increasing VAT revenues.

Ending poverty would have significant health benefits, and although it is impossible to calculate, NHS spending would be likely to drop significantly, especially in rapidly expanding areas such as the diabetes crises, amounting to 10% (over £10bn) of the NHS budget, up 60% in the last ten years.

Could using Quantitative Easing to underpin a basic income create QE that actually works?

Rough estimations on the above start to get us close enough for scrapping projects like Trident and HS2 to close the gap but why not look at radical solutions? Today 97% of new money is created by banks, and they then charge interest on that money they create, not just to mortgage holders and business lenders but to governments. It is the interest on sovereign debt that is driving the deficit. The government can simply issue the balance of the basic income cost through a new government-created currency. Bypassing the private banking sector's monopoly on money-creation, and therefore paying no interest on the cost of the basic income, would significantly lower government indebtedness over time.

The basic income could be issued as sterling to those under a certain income and in the form of a new electronic currency (pegged to sterling) to higher earners. This e-currency, the Basic Income Grant (or Biggies), would pay no interest as a disincentive to save, increasing the turnover of currency in the economy. It could also have a time value reduction so if it is not spent in a year it loses 25% of its value, which returns to the Government who can then (exclusively) convert unspent Biggies into sterling and pay back sovereign debt with it. On top of that the ability to accept Biggies could be withdrawn by the government should a company transfer profits out of the UK to avoid tax, possibly adding £3bn more in tax revenue.

An answer to end poverty, to bring respect and dignity, hope, and a feeling of being valued, rather than pitied, by society, to our poorest communities. A solution that prepares us for the coming unemployment crises of the new automation wave, increases tax revenues, addresses inequality, raises wages and addresses growing health crises and their associated costs. Right now critics will say we can't afford it, and yes, it needs a lot of work, but in ten years we may realise we can't afford not to. Finland is going to test it, and it might change everything.

Zika-linked condition: WHO declares global emergency

A disease linked to the Zika virus in Latin America poses a global public health emergency requiring a united response, says the World Health Organization.

Experts are worried that the virus is spreading far and fast, with devastating consequences.

The infection has been linked to cases of microcephaly, in which babies are born with underdeveloped brains.

The WHO alert puts Zika in the same category of concern as Ebola.

It means research and aid will be fast-tracked to tackle the infection.

There have been around 4,000 reported cases of microcephaly in Brazil alone since October.

WHO director general, Margaret Chan called Zika an "extraordinary event" that needed a co-ordinated response.

"I am now declaring that the recent cluster of microcephaly and other neurological abnormalities reported in Latin America following a similar cluster in French Polynesia in 2014 constitutes a public health emergency of international concern."

She said the priorities were to protect pregnant women and their babies from harm and to control the mosquitoes that are spreading the virus.

She advised pregnant women:

to consider delaying travel to areas affected by Zika

seek advice from their physician if they are living in areas affected by Zika, as well as protect themselves against mosquito bites by wearing repellent

Dr Chan justified declaring an emergency even amid uncertainties about the disease, saying it was time to take action.

The WHO faced heavy criticism for waiting too long to declare the Ebola outbreak a public emergency.

Canadian Update

Living in Canada

I came across a free download of a guide to living in Canada which I highly recommend you download from:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/before-you-go/9203179/expat-guides.html>

When you arrive at this link you will also see downloads available for New Zealand, USA, Spain, France and Australia.

I downloaded the Canadian one and it is an excellent guide and through it you will learn much about Canada. For example it says...

"If you have any doubts, for seven consecutive years the United Nations has rated Canada as the best country in the world to live in".

Order of Canada

COMPANION OF THE ORDER OF CANADA

The Honourable Robert Keith Rae, P.C., C.C., O.Ont. Toronto, Ontario

Bob Rae is deeply engaged in advancing the public good in Canada and abroad. Insightful, diplomatic and charismatic, he is renowned for taking on some of our nation's most complex issues and working to find resolutions. His work with First Nations communities, particularly in the area of treaty renewal, is helping to bring about reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. He has also been sought out by governments in Kenya, Iraq and Sri Lanka for his expertise in mediation and federalism. As a parliamentarian, he was known for his eloquence, good humour and passionate commitment to good governance and consensus building throughout our country.

This is a promotion within the Order.

OFFICERS OF THE ORDER OF CANADA

Mary Gospodarowicz Evans, O.C. Toronto, Ontario

Mary Gospodarowicz is an international leader in cancer treatment. For over 30 years, she has maintained a clinical practice while conducting research in the treatment of lymphomas and genitourinary cancers. Concurrently, she has been a guiding force at the helm of the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, where she has built a highly advanced radiation medicine program and one of the most comprehensive cancer centres in the world. Most recently, she placed Canada at the centre of global efforts to combat cancer when she ascended to the presidency of the Union for International Cancer Control.

Magella Gros-Louis, O.C., O.Q. Wendake, Quebec

Max Gros-Louis has dedicated his life to building a strong and proud Indigenous people. Formerly grand chief of the Huron-Wendat Nation in Wendake for over 25 years, he shaped his community into a model for others to follow. He has also championed First Nations' rights and was one of the founding members of the National Indian Brotherhood (today known as the Assembly of First Nations) and the Indians of Quebec Association, for which he served as spokesperson and vice-president. A man of dialogue, he has also raised awareness of the reality and culture of Indigenous peoples through various international forums.

Norman Emilio Marcon, O.C. Toronto, Ontario

Norman Marcon has popularized several minimally invasive techniques used across Canada to treat digestive diseases. A specialist for over 40 years, he was the head of gastroenterology at the Wellesley Hospital and is now the director of the advanced therapeutic endoscopy training fellowship program at St. Michael's Hospital. He initiated the use of flexible endoscopes as an alternative to open surgical procedures to treat gastrointestinal cancers. Also a gifted educator, he founded the world's premier international course in therapeutic endoscopy, which has disseminated the latest developments in the field for over a quarter century.

Julio Montaner, O.C., O.B.C. Vancouver, British Columbia

Julio Montaner has helped set the global standard of care for HIV/AIDS. He is the director of the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, the Chair in AIDS Research at the University of British Columbia, and the former president of the International AIDS Society. His groundbreaking clinical trials identified combination antiretroviral drug therapy as the first effective treatment for preventing HIV transmission, the progression of the virus to AIDS, and premature death. In his province, he initiated a comprehensive strategy known as Treatment as Prevention that has recently been adopted by the United Nations as the cornerstone for the control of HIV/AIDS.

Linda F. Nazar, O.C. Waterloo, Ontario

Linda Nazar is helping to create the next generation of batteries. A Canada Research Chair and professor in the departments of chemistry and electrical engineering at the University of Waterloo, she is one of the world's leading experts in the design of energy storage materials. She is renowned for advancing rechargeable lithium batteries and for developing a new type of battery using lithium sulfur. Her efforts are contributing to breakthroughs in the design of electric vehicles and other clean-energy technology.

The Honourable Louise Otis, O.C., O.Q. Montréal, Quebec

With a forward-thinking approach, Louise Otis helped expand the administration of justice in Canada and abroad. A retired justice of the Quebec Court of Appeal, she instituted the first integrated judicial mediation system in Canada, thereby easing and expediting the dispute resolution process. In addition to being a mediator, arbitrator and judge in international courts, she founded such organizations as the Canadian Conference of Judicial Mediation. She is also renowned as an outstanding educator in McGill University's Faculty of Law.

Donald John Taylor, O.C. Calgary, Alberta

Don Taylor is among Canada's most generous and principled philanthropists. He founded an ingenious engineering business that has been successful across North America, giving him the opportunity to enhance important public causes. His passion for improving the arts, education and health care has resulted in world-class facilities being built at the University of Calgary, Mount Royal University and the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. At the international level, he has funded an integrative medicine centre in California and an eye hospital in Ghana. His determination to use philanthropy to change people's lives has been a model and an inspiration for other benefactors to

follow.

This is a promotion within the Order.

For other member details see

<http://www.gg.ca/document.aspx?id=16326&lan=eng>

Canada mining firm strikes gold as oil price falls

THE slump in oil prices has boosted a Canadian gold mining company whose fortunes have been transformed since a Scottish industry veteran took over as chief executive two and a half years ago.

Motherwell-born George Ogilvie, president and chief executive of Kirkland Lake Gold, which last week poured its one millionth ounce of gold from its Macassa mine complex in Ontario since operations started in 2003, said: "The collapse of the oil price has definitely helped us. The industry is seen as a safe haven, a last resort. Other things have also helped gold's popularity for investors, such as the collapse of Asian stock markets, which have seen a depreciation of about 50 per cent since last year and created jitters."

Ogilvie said weak oil prices, which led to energy major Shell revealing last week that its profits fell 80 per cent in 2015, has boosted the company by putting pressure on the Canadian dollar, as the country is a big energy producer.

"The Canadian gold miners have 80 to 90 per cent of their costs in Canadian dollars, so a weak oil price putting pressure on the currency is always going to be a positive," he said.

Ogilvie said the positive implications for gold of the oil slump were also likely to continue for another 12 to 18 months, according to strategists, as Opec was showing no signs of easing production, and Iran, with sanctions lifted, was entering the market.

"I'm very confident about our prospects," the Scot said. In January, Kirkland Lake Gold announced the acquisition of Canadian gold miner St Andrew Goldfields, beefing up its presence in Ontario with three new working mines.

Ogilvie said the deal gave the firm diversified gold production from four mines, while Kirkland is also exploring prospects on four dormant mines it has near Macassa.

It invested \$5 million in this exploration in 2015, and plans to invest another C\$7.5m in the coming year, he revealed. "We have put down nine holes at between 6,000 and 6,500 feet and each of them has hit gold. But we don't know if it can be definitively called ore yet."

Ogilvie has 24 years management, technical and operating experience in the industry after receiving his degree in mining and petroleum engineering from Strathclyde University. He began his working career with Anglo American in 1989 and other positions have included mine superintendent at Hudson Bay Mining. Most recently, he spent seven years at the helm of Rambler Metals and Mining in Canada, during which it has transformed from a grass roots explorer to a profitable junior producer.

His chairman at Rambler Metals and Mining was Harry Dobson, the Scottish mining tycoon, who is also said to be a "supportive" 4.5 per cent investor in Kirkland Lake Gold after stepping down as chairman last year.

Kirkland's stock market value has more than trebled to C\$640 million now compared with C\$200m when Ogilvie came on board. Two years ago its shares were trading at C\$2.20, before hitting C\$6.80 last summer, and are currently at C\$5.60. The company gave up its Aim listing in London last year and the stock is now traded out of the Toronto market.

Ogilvie said the decision to leave Aim was backed by UK investors as there was little liquidity in the stock here.

He added that further acquisitions were unlikely in 2016, which he saw more as a "bedding-in" year. "I don't see us doing anything [in terms of acquisitions] over the next 12 months. But there could be

some bolt-ons in 2017.”

Landmark deal to protect Canada Great Bear Rainforest

Indigenous tribes, timber firms and environmental groups in western Canada have welcomed a deal to protect one of the world's largest remaining tracts of temperate rainforest.

The Great Bear Rainforest on the Pacific coast of British Columbia is home to many animals and ancient trees.

Logging will be banned across a huge area of the forest.

Environmental campaigners say the deal is a model for resolving similar land-use disputes around the world.

Read more about this at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35467660>

Congress eyes Syrian refugee threat — from Canada

US lawmakers have identified a new potential source of poorly vetted Syrian refugees: Canada.

The Senate Homeland Security Committee is slated to hold a hearing Feb. 3, on Canada's so-called "fast-track" refugee plan and its implications for US national security. Canadian experts and a US Border Patrol agent are slated to testify.

The hearing comes as new Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has vowed to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees over the next year. Trudeau initially planned to admit them in just six weeks, but was forced to review that timeline amid worries that they could not be properly vetted in such a short time.

US lawmakers, particularly Republicans, remain worried that even the new plan remains far too ambitious and could put America at risk since Western intelligence agencies have little information about Syrian applicants. The House voted in November to pause President Barack Obama's plan to bring in 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next year. The bill died in the Senate on Jan. 20 on a strict party-line vote.

Montreal traffic camera captures stunning images of snowy owl in flight

Owl, which was likely looking for a place to perch, has become viral internet star after Quebec transport minister Robert Poeti shared the photographs online...



See pictures and video at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/08/montreal-traffic-camera-captures-stunning-images-of-snowy-owl-in-flight>

The true costs of Canadian oil imports

Every year, Canada spends tens of billions of dollars buying foreign oil. That's a lot of money considering our country's production could theoretically largely cover a local demand that averages 2.7 million barrels per day.

The issue is not a lack of oil. It is structural.

Today, barrels produced in Alberta and Saskatchewan can't travel east because there is no continuous pipeline bridging the energy-rich west to Québec and the Maritimes. As a result, every single day Canada is forced to import some 634,000 barrels of crude oil, a majority of which supplies refineries in Eastern Canada and Québec.

This bottleneck fills the pockets of foreign producers. Leading importers include Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Norway, Algeria and Angola, which sell a combined \$8 billion worth of crude to Canada every year.

The most recent dollar figures by the National Energy Board shows that in a single year Canada spent a little more than \$26 billion importing oil.

Energy East will curb these costly imports, which would help keep more money at home. Every single day, the West-to-East pipeline will transport 1.1 million barrels of oil to Québec and New Brunswick. That's nearly double the amount imported into the region right now.

Pipelines are the safest way to transport oil over long distances. They're safer than train, truck and boat transport. It's a fact, backed by independent research.

The Energy East pipeline will shore up our country's energy independence and help ensure that the billions of dollars now spent on foreign imports are invested right where they are needed, here in Canada.

So why on earth aren't we moving on this pipeline now instead of spending years on useless debates? This is a Canadian issue which will support all Canadians!

Food

And likewise we hear that food inflation is at its highest levels right now with a year on increase in Fruit and Veg at 13% and a head of cauliflower selling at \$8 whereas it used to be just \$2. I'm told this is because we import so much of this from California which has experienced severe drought conditions and of course our loonie being so low it's also costing us more to import.

The question I have is what are our farmers doing about this?

In a previous edition I highlighted the strawberry crop which through use of poly tunnels in the UK had increased their growing season by some months. It seems Canadian growers simply don't use this method so they only have a few short weeks in which to sell their crop.

Now given this strawberry crop it would be interesting to find out how we are at growing other crops. What is our department of Agriculture and our farmers doing about it?

There is some information available at:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/2014001/article/11921-eng.htm> which suggests that we are doing quite well but it seems that consumer habits are what is harming us so is it time to re-educate the consumer and convince them to buy Canadian?

Red River Women

By Joanna Jolly

Each year, dozens of Canadian Aboriginal women are murdered or disappear never to be seen again. Some end up in a river that runs through the heart of Winnipeg.

This was a major BBC investigation that they also highlighted as one of the most important stories of 2015.

You can view this at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-dc75304f-e77c-4125-aacf-83e7714a5840>

CAD to USD: Insiders Issue Dramatic Warning for Canadian Dollar
Worst to Come for Loonie: Analyst

The Canadian dollar plunged to its lowest level since 2003 last week, falling as low as US\$0.68 during one trading session. Over the past two years, the CAD to USD exchange rate has dropped 33%—the loonie's biggest decline versus the greenback in more than 40 years.

But according to some Bay Street insiders, this could just be the beginning.

David Doyle has issued a dire forecast for the Canadian dollar. In a report published last week, the Macquarie Capital analyst predicted the CAD to USD exchange rate could fall as low as US\$0.59. The combination of weak oil prices and low interest rates, Doyle believes, could be a one-two knockout for the loonie. (Source: "Canadian dollar will drop to 59 cents US in 2016, Macquarie forecasts," CBC, January 13, 2016.)

"Once [the loonie] reaches this level," Doyle predicts, "it should remain subdued through [the end of] 2018 and potentially even longer." (Source: Ibid.)

"You could imagine a situation [that] is worse today than in the 1990s," Doyle added. "We're much more dependent on oil now than we were in the past." (Source: "Canadian Dollar Forecast To Fall To 59 Cents U.S. As Economic Clouds Darken," The Huffington Post, January 13, 2016.)

Investors should pay attention. Last year, Doyle was mocked when he said the loonie would drop to US\$0.69. Needless to say, they're not laughing anymore.

And he's not alone.

Last week, RBC Capital Markets strategist Adam Cole said he doesn't see the loonie bottoming out until it hits US\$0.65. (Source: "Analysts warn of further decay as Canadian dollar nears 68¢ before firming," The Globe & Mail, January 18, 2016.)

BMO Capital Markets' chief economist, Douglas Porter, added to the choir. He warned the Canadian dollar could drop below US\$0.66. (Source: "'Currency instability' now a serious concern for Canada," The Financial Post, January 18, 2016.)

Insiders are worried. Low resource prices have crushed exports, putting thousands out of work. Canada's economy barely grew in the third quarter of 2015, after six months of negative growth.

Canada's rediscovery of socialism is also biting. Left wing parties, at both the federal and provincial levels, have ushered in a wave of tax hikes and new regulations. Millennials are shocked to learn that when you scare capitalists from your country, they take the jobs with them.

With investors running for the exits, there's little to hold up the loonie. Unless Prime Minister Justin Trudeau starts exporting selfies, brace yourself for a lower Canadian dollar.

For Main Street, it means higher prices on everything from food and electronics to vacations priced in U.S. dollars. Last week, Bloomberg reported some shoppers were paying CA\$3.00 for a cucumber, CA\$8.19 for a dozen eggs, and CA\$10.00 for a pound of grapes. One supermarket charged CA\$15.00 for a box of "Frosted Flakes." (Source: "Canadians Are Going Loonie on Social Media About Skyrocketing Grocery Bills," Bloomberg, January 13, 2016.)

The New York Times has also noticed. In a piece published Wednesday, the publication highlighted some of the crazy prices in the vegetable aisle. (Source: "In Canada, the 8-Dollar Cauliflower Shows the Pain of Falling Oil Prices," The New York Times, January 20, 2016.)

Cauliflower hit a record CA\$8.00 per head. Iceberg lettuce sells for CA\$3.00 per head, up from CA\$0.90 last year. One head of broccoli goes for CA\$4.00, compared with CA\$1.50 for two in the

past.

Savers are being crushed, too.

In a last-ditch effort to jumpstart the economy, the Bank of Canada has slashed interest rates. Seniors have been hit by a double whammy. Their nest eggs are now earning lower returns, while buying less and less each day.

Most savers, who just stick their cash in a bank, earn less than a half a point in interest. You can boost those returns a little with GICs, but given the “official” inflation rate is over two percent, your real wealth is being chipped away each passing month.

This is no way to build wealth. The media won't say it, but a weak loonie is effectively a 40% pay cut. Boomers nearing their golden years will have to learn a concept I call the “bologna retirement.”

Or as my neighbor says, “Freedom 75.”

Is Your Retirement Safe from a Dollar Collapse?

So opt for lamb chops over steak. Take the kids to Wonderland instead of Disney World. Maybe even check out Dave Ramsey's new book, *101 Ways to Prepare, Alpo and Love It*.

Is there anything savers can do? Don't count on the government. In my books, politicians rank just above lawyers and slightly below ax murderers.

For seniors or retirees-to-be, I have three words: Diversify! Diversify! Diversify!

Forget about multiculturalism. Canadians are financial bigots. Few savers go outside of their national borders, if they invest in equities at all.

The trick is balance. Those who went all-in on Maple stocks just took a 20% haircut. Savers with stashes outside of Canada, in contrast, have made out just fine.

Here's the game plan:

Go Abroad: Foreign cash will likely hold its value better than the loonie. I have kept a big chunk of my net worth in U.S. dollars. This has allowed me to dodge the worst of the Canadian dollar collapse.

Hard Assets: Hard assets, like gold and real estate, do well through high inflation. Sure, the media laughs at owning precious metals. But over the past six months, gold prices have surged 12% in Canadian dollars.

Dividend Stocks: Wonderful businesses are able to pass on higher costs. Do you think people will skip their Tim Hortons coffee if the price goes up a nickel? Great companies like Timmies can hike prices, resulting in bigger dividend checks for us shareholders.

Nothing fancy here.

The Bottom Line for the Canadian Dollar

Gen Y take comfort. You've elected the coolest head of state in the world. Beautiful hair... Beautiful hair... Beautiful hair... You are getting sleepyyyyyyyyy.

The adults in the room, however, should be nervous. If the Bank of Canada cuts interest rates this spring, it could spark another sell-off in the CAD to USD exchange rate. That means higher prices at the grocery store—and lower returns on savings.

Insiders are worried. Should Canadians be worried, too?

Canadian Poet William Robert Service (1874-1958)

I got an email in from Russia telling me of Russian translations of the poems of Robert Service. You can view these at:

<http://feldman.omsklib.ru/index.php/perevody/iz-kanadskoj-poezii/175-servis-robert-uilyam-1874-1958>

Cost to build navy's new warships more than doubles to \$30B

Independent analysis suggests Canada will have to accept fewer ships — or spend a lot more money

The price of 15 new warships for the navy has more than doubled, from \$14 billion initially set aside for construction to more than \$30 billion, says an independent analysis of the largest military procurement in Canadian history.

That takes the total cost to upgrade Canada's navy to \$42 billion — \$16 billion more than the \$26.2-billion approved by the government for the Canadian Surface Combatant program.

That would make the warships component alone more expensive than the approved budget for the entire national shipbuilding program, which also includes supply ships, coast guard ships and Arctic vessels.

The cost analysis was conducted by the firm A.T. Kearney earlier this year.

Kearney was asked to provide a qualitative analysis that examines "the relationship between the draft requirements and the feasibility and affordability of delivering a solution that achieves full mission performance."

The report has not been released, but CBC News has learned the blunt answer is that it would be impossible to deliver the ships the navy asked for at the price the Defence Department had set.

A spokesman for the military said the report demonstrates the government is "exercising due diligence" and exploring options to "meet full mission performance."

"The work being done serves to inform our costing process and is certainly not a final, estimated cost for the project," Daniel Le Bouthillier said in an email to CBC News. "It is part of our commitment to being responsible stewards of public funds and ensuring value-for-money as Canada works towards rebuilding its navy."

Le Bouthillier added that "is extremely premature to discuss budgets on a ship for which requirements and capabilities have not yet been set or designed."

Budget too low?

The project budget was set years ago at \$26.2 billion. Of that, \$14 billion was to be spent on the design and construction of warships.

The rest of the budget is for the provision for ammunition, infrastructure costs such as jetties, spare equipment and support.

It's the cost for the design and construction that has been found to have more than doubled.

Those costs were confirmed to CBC News by officials and staff of the former Conservative government, some of whom had been briefed on the report's contents.

One of those sources said the navy had specified requirements for its new warships that would make them "the most capable ships in the world."

The former official said the navy's requirements would make the vessels among the fastest single hull warships in operation.

Some capabilities don't yet exist

Many of those requirements are also said to be developmental, in other words a capability that does

not yet exist or requires further work before it's ready for production.

Developmental costs are hugely expensive and difficult to peg, industry sources say. It's impossible to know exactly how much it will cost to develop the technology to make a requirement feasible.

That level of complexity — and the budget uncertainty it produced — angered one former Conservative official, who said the navy was demanding a warship beyond Canada's needs.

"Why do we need to be better than the Brits and the Americans," the official wondered. "We're a middle power."

The Kearney report is controversial within government. It was paid for by Irving Shipbuilding Inc., the company selected to build combat ships for the navy.

The audit was tendered with the approval of Conservative government officials, who after recognizing increasing budget problems in the \$39-billion National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy were anxious to see an independent assessment of what the Defence Department's demands would actually cost.

Liberals warned about growing costs

Some allege the Defence Department tried to keep the Kearney report under wraps, claiming the information was protected by regulation.

The tension between Defence and other actors in the procurement system has been high since former public works minister Rona Ambrose forced a reset of the controversial process to replace the CF-18 fighter jets.

That file became problematic once it was learned the full cost to own and operate the preferred F-35s was in the neighbourhood of \$25 billion — far more than the \$9-billion purchase price Defence had once advertised.

There's a similar discussion underway with ships. The full cost of 15 of those new warships, including personnel, operating and maintenance costs over 30 years, was set at more than \$90 billion.

With the production cost increases pegged by Kearney, the full warship budget grows to more than \$106 billion.

The trouble might not end there.

Could costs grow?

Others in the industry expect production costs to grow even further.

They point to Australia's current experience with the Hobart-class warship, which is a rough equivalent in air-defence capability to what is proposed for three of Canada's 15 new warships.

Australia's Hobart-class is over budget and projected to cost nearly \$3 billion per ship. If that trend holds for Canada, costs could climb yet again.

It's this reality the new federal cabinet was briefed about earlier this month.

Last week, CBC News reported Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan and Public Services Minister Judy Foote were warned the shipbuilding strategy is in need of repair, with costs for some projects soaring by as much as 181 per cent and others on the cusp of being cancelled.

A briefing to the ministers called for an "action plan" to get the program back on track.

Tradeoff: Cost vs. capability

Put simply, the government will have to decide how much capability is appropriate for the Canadian navy and at what cost.

Dave Perry, a defence analyst at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, said there is a significant funding issue that could affect capability.

"It's a question of what the government actually wants to do. Do they want to maximize on the numbers? Do they want to maximize on the capability?"

Perry agreed officials have underestimated the true cost of each ship.

"I certainly think that [the cost is] at least \$2 billion for a fully capable ship, the ones they're talking about with sophisticated air defence capability, as well as the ability to lead in a task group function," he said. "And potentially more, depending on exactly what goes into it and when they're built."

Canada
From the Scottish Review

I should say that the Scottish Review is my favourite news publication as they often run articles counter to the main stream press and really make you think. In the current issue they were talking about Canada and I thought you might like to read what they say...

It is not an exaggeration to say that a new dawn broke in Canada on 19 October. No political party here had ever before risen from third place to become elected with a clear parliamentary majority. Under Justin Trudeau, this has just happened in Canada.

Although he is clearly his father's son, Justin Trudeau is a very different kettle of fish. He is as tough as Pierre was, and not as cerebral. Justin is smart though in very different ways, and he doesn't have the perceived arrogance of Pierre. Pierre could be distant, but Justin Trudeau genuinely seems to like people. So much so, that the security people are already having fits.

At his inauguration on 4 November, Trudeau invited the public to the swearing-in proceedings at Rideau Hall in Ottawa. Thousands of people came to see the new prime minister to be, and his 30-member cabinet to be, walk from the street through the grounds to the governor general's residence. This had not been seen before. 'It's been a long time since you've heard a crowd cheering that way in Ottawa for something other than a sports team,' said one. 'It's a very different feel.'

A few days later, Trudeau and several new cabinet members received an enthusiastic greeting from a large crowd of civil servants when they came out of a meeting in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in Ottawa. As the CBC reported:

[Trudeau] was swarmed. Many [civil servants] took photos and even selfies along the way. The prime minister was hugged. Cheers erupted. He smiled, waved and stopped by the door. He thanked the crowd for supporting the members of his cabinet, who had just left. Then he continued: 'We're going to need every single one of you to give us, as you always do, your absolute best'. They applauded and cheered some more. Some yelled back: 'You've got it'. One long-time staffer said he'd never seen anything like it. Not in all of his years.

Trudeau's new cabinet, sworn in on 4 November, is 50% female, 50% male. While this is not unknown in Scotland, it has not been seen before in a Canadian federal government. The new cabinet also contains a fascinating and broad ethnic mix. There are two Sikh ministers, several second-generation Canadians with European or Asian backgrounds, and a young (30-year-old) woman who was born in Afghanistan and came to Canada when she was 12. One of two first nations ministers, Jody Wilson-Raybould, is Canada's new attorney general and minister of justice. There are two ministers with serious physical disabilities, a male minister who lives in a same-sex marriage, and more.

There was a lot of breast-beating about Trudeau's promise during the election campaign to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet. Demands for merit-based appointments came from conservatives. Some women on the other hand were concerned that Trudeau might not be able to find enough qualified

men to fill that side of the 'quota'. But when the dust had settled it was quickly clear that Canada now has the most intelligent, accomplished and diverse cabinet in generations.

Asked by the media after his inauguration why it was so important to have a gender-balanced cabinet, Trudeau replied: 'Because it's 2015'. This is 'a cabinet that looks like Canada,' said Trudeau, before adding, 'government by cabinet is back'. That was a reflection on what had been an unprecedented concentration of power in a secretive, dogma-driven prime minister's office. For years former PM Stephen Harper had refused to hold open press briefings, or allow his ministers to speak from anything other than robotic 'talking points' dictated by the Prime Minister's Office (the PMO).

Despite years of relentless attack ads, on prime-time TV and in expensive front page advertising – ads designed to feminise Trudeau's image and disparage his accomplishments and character – Harper's powerful, well-financed campaign team still underestimated Justin Trudeau. They first underestimated his physical courage when they manoeuvred him into a boxing match not long after he was elected to parliament. Ostensibly for charity, the bout was clearly intended to deliver a knock-out blow to the 'young pretender'. It pitted the relatively slight Trudeau against a much heavier, well-muscled, young Harper-appointed senator by the name of Patrick Brazeau. Trudeau caused a major upset by scoring a TKO in the third round.

During the few televised debates that Harper allowed during the election campaign (none of them on mainstream television channels), the Conservatives and the official opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) hugely under-estimated Trudeau's grasp of foreign and domestic affairs and, not least, the aspirations of Canada's people. After spending millions of dollars on other attack ads that portrayed Justin Trudeau as an intellectual lightweight, and 'Just Not Ready', they did not expect him to communicate a sense of vision for Canada's way forward. To give you an idea of the Conservatives' attempts to demean Trudeau, Harper's spokesman Corey Teneycke stated of Trudeau before the first debate that 'if he comes on stage with his pants on, he will probably exceed expectations'.

Trudeau did more, he energised and inspired an electorate – two thirds of whom had by then adopted an 'Anybody But Conservative' mantra. In what might be the first time that Canadians have resorted to a semblance of strategic voting, the electorate in the last weeks of this longest-ever Canadian election campaign focused on the third-place party, Trudeau's Liberals.

Andrew Coyne, a widely read, somewhat conservative, national newspaper columnist, called Trudeau's election proposals '...an ambitious platform. Strikingly so, in fact'. He termed them substantive, and wrote that they lent 'credibility to the "Real Change" slogan'.

'When did you last hear Conservatives setting out, with the same assurance, their own big, bold, risky proposals,' he went on, 'for root-and-branch tax reform, say, or revamping sclerotic state monopolies like Canada Post, or finally getting Corporate Canada off the government teat? I'll tell you when. It was before they were in government, before they were suckered into trading their souls for power, when all it got them was the right to sit in silence while the leadership wasted a decade picking fights and settling scores'.

It is hard to know where to begin to catalogue the relentless erosion of social, cultural and democratic values under Harper. The degree of change that Trudeau has promised, that Canadians expect, is enormous. Some of it is already evident in the new government's demeanour and operating manner; the festive inauguration at Rideau Hall a small example. Trudeau's obvious pleasure at getting to know his civil service, his back-and-forth ease with the media is another. In his first press conference right after the inauguration ceremony, Trudeau blew a few minds when he stated that a key role of the media, along with the parliamentary opposition, is to hold the government accountable to Canadians.

After years of mean-spirited, fear-based, divisive government, after robo-calls that emanated from Conservative Party personnel and misdirected voters on at least one election day, after the so-called 'Fair Elections Act', which virtually disenfranchised thousands of poor, elderly and first nations people, and after consistent, multiple abuses of power far too widespread and numerous to relate here, a lot of Canadians are looking for a different path; one that exemplifies the character of this normally most generous of countries. After years of dubious ethics and contempt for parliament, millions of Canadians seem prepared to give Trudeau their trust. And that's saying something because, just as it

is in the UK, trust is not a word that sits easily beside the name of many politicians.

The list of cuts to social, science and cultural programmes under 'The Harper Government' – as he insisted it be termed – was massive. And still the Conservatives, despite all the talk that they were the only party who could manage the economy, ran deficit budgets more times than they didn't, and increased Canada's federal deficit by more than \$170 billion during nearly 10 years in office.

The dogma-driven policies of the Harper government saw the widespread muzzling of Canadian scientists, the destruction of Canada's copyright laws with massive damage to the abilities of its writers to earn income, the evisceration of far-sighted fisheries protection programmes, and numerous attempts to manipulate and circumvent legal processes. These years saw the destruction of census data, the dumping of social, and employment/unemployment programmes, health programmes, and charities organisations. They saw policies that have reduced living standards for thousands of Canada's first nations peoples to third world status, and the slashing of youth programmes and compensation for military veterans – while giving tax breaks to big corporations and Canada's wealthiest citizens. People are hungry for the kinds of change that Trudeau has promised, for humanitarian, evidence-based, science-based policies and programmes.

The erosion of democracy was perhaps the most damaging and dangerous element of Harper's government. His omnibus bills, many hundreds of pages long, bundled budget legislation, new security and 'anti-terror' laws, across-the-board programme cuts and draconian new programmes together in one massive document. Presented to parliament as single bills they were passed by Harper's majority with little time for examination and almost no debate in Canada's House of Commons.

The most immediate impact of Justin Trudeau's government will be seen in Canada's position on environmental matters, where there has been an embarrassing absence of action for years. Trudeau famously called Peter Kent, Harper's minister for the environment, 'a piece of shit' in parliament. That was after Kent had publicly chastised Megan Leslie, the opposition environment critic, for not attending the Durban climate change conference – which she had been unable to attend because the Conservatives had refused to grant her accreditation. Trudeau apologised later for that un-parliamentary outburst, but it gave Canadians an early insight into his passion.

Immediately after his election, Trudeau invited the leaders of the other parties in parliament – including the Harper Conservatives – to come with him to the Paris climate change conference. At the same time Trudeau announced that he would meet with all 10 provincial premiers and the three leaders of the northern territories, in an effort to develop a climate change position for Paris that all Canada could agree upon. He has invited all those premiers to accompany him to Paris, where they will present Canada's revised position on climate change. That conference is underway as you read this article. In his 10 years in office, despite the fact that it was agreed in 1961 they should be an annual event, Harper never once held a national premiers conference.

There are times when a sports team, a political party, or a government, have to recognise that they were beaten by something that was far, far better. Something with a passion, energy, intellect and vision that they could not match – despite great disparities in size and money. This was such a time in Canada.

The recently-retired Guardian correspondent Duncan Campbell told me the other day that he remembered Richard Neville, the former Oz editor, saying that the difference between Labour and the Tories was about half an inch, but it was the half an inch in which we lived. In Canada, Duncan went on, 'it sounds like you now have a yard or two to live in'. He was right, and it's enormously refreshing; heady even. Believable? Well, we'll see. Whether it will last, or whether Trudeau and his government will come to Oscar Wilde's belief that: 'Once we had the rack, now we have the press', remains to be seen.

For now though, Canada seems to have elected a pretty good team, which actually believes in the people of its country; a government that has the ability and the desire to take Canadians somewhere exciting. Which is why many of them believe today, as Trudeau said on election night, that they've got their country back.

Canadian History

The Life of James Robertson
Missionary Superintendent In the Northwest Territories
By Charles W. Gordon (Ralph Connor)

To say that the book is not worthy of its subject is to anticipate the verdict of every reader who knew and loved the great Superintendent. But to portray in fitting words his service and his worth, is beyond the pen of living man.

The book is my best attempt to set him forth as he was among us; not to praise him—he needs no praise—not to tell of his character nor to describe his work, but to show him living, loving, toiling, suffering, as we saw him. It is my humble hope that this, in some measure at least, I have achieved.

I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of his family, of brethren in the ministry, of friends, and especially of conveners of committees and officials of Presbyteries and other Church courts, who have placed their correspondence at my disposal, and who have assisted much with reminiscences and appreciations. Especially and gladly do I record my debt to Mrs. H. J. Parker, of Winnipeg, for invaluable aid in arranging and classifying material, for suggestion and criticism, for reading of manuscript and proof, and for help in many ways. And all the more gladly do I acknowledge her aid, that I know it was freely given in loving and grateful tribute to him whose life-story was being recorded.

The book is sent forth in the hope that it may inspire my brethren in the ministry with something of that spirit of devotion, so free of taint of self that made Dr. Robertson what he was, and that it may, perhaps, determine some young man who has not yet made choice of his career, to give his life to his country and his God in this great service which commanded the life of this great Canadian.

CHARLES W. GORDON
Winnipeg, November, 1908.

You can read this book at:
<http://www.electricenseanadian.com/Religion/robertson/preface.htm>

Owen Britton

A 16-year-old student at Balfour High School, died suddenly during the night of 27-28 January. A few days earlier, the adjudicators of the Scottish Schools' Young Writer of the Year had named him joint runner-up in the competition – a fact of which Owen was unaware.

As a tribute to this exceptional talent – who excelled in athletics as he did in writing – we publish today his award-winning piece, 'Blurred Recollections'...

Memories of my childhood are like smelling a faint and forgotten aroma. It lingers in my mind for a moment, a hint, a trace, a whisper in my ear. It softly whispers something: 'eighth birthday', 'ski trip', 'first day at school', before slipping away, leaving me to ponder the abstract painting of colour, heat, dialogue, sound and emotion of an experience.

One of the wildest of these paintings is the experience of the soft play area 'Kidzone' in Lasalle, Montreal, around the corner from my grandmother's house, which I visited frequently with friends and family. At the time – and even more so now – it was all a blur of colour and noise. I remember my imagination running wild and creating countless fantastical adventures, the maze of slightly disgusting sweaty plastic that the play structure was made of and the feeling of endless space. There was always a sense of grotesque and unhygienic characters – imagined and not – that shared the play space with me, almost becoming as much a part of the landscape as the structure. Part of the fun was that blend of the unknown: the surreal, garish, wild imagined fear and fun that contributed to the lasting allure of this place. There was a strong sense of heat, as everything baked under orange semi-spherical lamps.

The play structure had different moods: the tall tower where you could gaze at all the little ants beaver away; the ball-pit, a minefield of submerged children; and the dark corners at the back of

the structure that filled you with a buzz of fear. When the fun was nearing its end, I used to run and hide from my parents or family. Sometimes they would catch me at the bottom of a slide or send a cousin in to fish me out. The thrill of the chase, socks slipping on the soft, hollow plastic: I was on the run from the law.

When forced to take a break I remember choking down a dry hotdog and gagging on Sprite as I longed to return to my kingdom. When it was time to go, and I looked back through the glass as we stepped out into the mall walkway, I used to tear up. The tears blurred my parting visions of the building. And just as those final moments were, it is now all a blur in my mind. Yet this blur stays with me as both a place of comfort and experience of fear, fun and the many lessons of life – albeit at a very safe and artificial level.

I cannot remember the details of any of the adventures I had at Kidzone. But does it really matter? Those were moments in time where I was living in the present, legs carrying me from slide to ladder. I cannot possibly hope to recreate such vivid, intense emotion and ambience. Yet what does linger in a corner of my mind is the feel of the place, little details that bubble up into my consciousness from time to time. Memories that I know are warped by my nostalgia and by the traces of such a powerful feeling. I can never go back there, for the practical reason of being too old and for the fact that it no longer exists.

I was sad to find that at some point it had been closed down; the whole mall had caved in under the weight of change and development, stylish condos sprung up in its place like poppies after the battle. I cannot find a trace of Kidzone anywhere on the internet; the only trace is in my mind now. As I grew up, so did the world. And just like me, the world did not have a place for Kidzone. Except deep down, I do have a place for it, in the soup of my memories. I hope the world has a place for soft play areas too. Not as noisy playgrounds to dump hyper kids and let them 'run around for a bit', but as canvases where children can finger-paint their wildest dreams and emotions.

Be it a smell, movie or place, traces of childhood can have the uncanny power to transport someone. Sometimes they appear out of the fog of a dark valley of life, sometimes in a dream – almost mistaken as one. They can be alluring, drawing you out of your present situation, into the distorted dream world of the memory. A memory is like an island: it pokes above the surface of the ocean of your thoughts. It is an isolated ecosystem, full of amazing flora and fauna. A hint of the vast land that has been flooded by the waters of change and growth. The isolation that makes the memory so intense also makes it a prison: a desert island. You can become trapped on it. Your boat lured onto the rocks, castaway, alone in the lifeless colour. You can spend years on the island, marvelling at its beauty, yet never quite grasping the full landscape that once spanned this world. It is a sad yet inevitable fact that we must look at these memories from a distance, perhaps touching their sands, yet only briefly, for if we inhabit them they will snap shut on us like the jaws of a great whale.

All of life is but a series of fleeting, beautiful blurs. While some persist, others erode over time. You grow as a person, not by looking back at the landscape of the past, but by creating it anew as you bound playfully through life – just as you once did along the padded halls of the soft play area.

Citizen Lauder

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE DATE WHEN HARRY LAUDER, GUEST AND SPEAKER BEFORE THE ROTARY CLUB OF TORONTO, SOLD NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF A MILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF BONDS FOR CANADA'S VICTORY LOAN Written by ROTARIAN FRANK H. ROWE

A WURRD”

Never forget it, men.

Never forget Friday noon, the 30th of Nov., in the year of our Lord, Nineteen hundred and seventeen, and in the year of the Great War, the fourth.

Mark it down in your memories with a red ring about it, and a Victory Bond pinned to it, and a Scotch thistle beside it.

Tell your sons, and your son's sons, how on that day Harry Lauder sold nearly \$700,000 in Victory

Bonds at the Toronto Rotary Club luncheon.

That was, indeed, an epoch-making day which will go down in history, and that so notable an event may not gradually fade away into the mists of forgetfulness it has been crystalized in this permanent record.

No attempt has been made to do more than catch the spirit of the occasion by painting a word picture on very broad lines. Another's pen than mine and another's conception of the best purpose of this booklet would be necessary if an exact record was to be written down.

I have painted on broad lines, but you who were there will fill in for yourselves the whimsical smile, the first, almost startled, look of appreciation as the high level of pledges was struck and the pace set, the characteristic burr of his Scotch, his deep good nature always tempering his insistence, his flashes of wit, and, finally, his intimate little speech in which he hoped to come back again.

Yes, my story is but a picture. I respect the Scotch dialect too much to desecrate it with impossible imitation. If you're no Scotchman it will not hurt you to miss the dialect and if you are a Scotchman it will hurt you less to miss it than to get my rendering. So there you are.

F. H. R.

God of battles! see the man!
Watch him—Rotarians!

Little man, did they say? He's a giant, I tell you. A giant of power with his soul aflame! Yes, a giant of spirit transfigured by passion!

Forgotten is his stature; how he towers above us! Forgotten is the comedian—seen only is the MAN, the patriot, the father who has laid his one son upon the altar in Flanders. We salute you—Harry Lauder.

Don't you hear him, men? Don't you hear him?

What a voice! That voice we have known for its merry quips, its mellow melodies and its crooning home songs. To-day that voice is a clarion call! A giant's Voice—Lauder's voice with its never-to-be-forgotten echoes of Scotland, but Lauder's voice as we've never known it before—arresting, stirring, transfixing, commanding.

Close your eyes—Rotarians—and listen:

"Some say that I should not be speaking in Canada. I say, I should be speaking in Canada. I say, that if there is a man in Canada who has a right to speak, it is I. My boy fought side by side with the Canadians; he died side by side with the Canadians; he's buried side by side with the Canadians. Haven't I a right to speak in Canada?"

Aye, Harry, a right, and more than right. And not in Canada only but anywhere in Christendom.

It's men's tears we are holding back as you speak to us, Harry, men's tears we are ashamed to have each other see—and it's tight throats that we have in us, and it's swallowing hard that we are. It's a citizen of all Civilization you are, Harry Lauder—the Civilization that would perish from the earth but for the sacrifice that fathers and mothers are making as well as sons. It's a citizen of Civilization you are, Rotarian Lauder, and who shall question a man's speech in his own country?

You listen again. Can't you hear him say:

"And when I visited the little brown mound in Flanders, and looked upon it, did I wish him back? Did I wish him back in the old home, cuddled down in his mother's arms?"

"No, no, I did not wish him back. But, oh, I wished I could reach these two hands down into that

brown grave and take hold of my lad, and kiss him on his cheeks and thank him for what he'd done for England and his mother.

"Men, until this war, we were asleep on the pillow of self satisfaction. Ah, you know it, men, you know it!

"How we sat down at our well filled table and gorged ourselves till we could eat no more. Then how we would walk to the mirror, pull down our Waistcoat, look at ourselves in the glass and say, 'Ah, I'm looking well!'

"But the scene is changed, men—the scene is changed.

"We need to be inoculated with the serum of service and sacrifice. It is not glory and riches we are fighting for, but the finest word in the English language —Liberty! The world is on fire, liberty-loving people have been called to put it out, and we must not leave it until it is out and blackened, never to break forth again.

"If Prussia can cement herself together for everything that is hellish surely the English speaking peoples can cement themselves together for everything that is good and noble!

Let us not be war-weary—let us not be war-weary. We are what our forefathers made us. We can't quit; it's the blood that's in us and the resolution—Victory or nothing.

"Come away, men—come away!

"Turn your silver dollars into silver bullets and shoot straight. We believe what God says, 'Love your enemies,' but God does not expect us to love His enemies.

"Come away, men—come away!

"Come away, men—come away!

"Be a shareholder in the Bank of Humanity."

Gad, how this man gets under our skin! Three hundred men sitting tense and expectant.

The air is electric—big with something we only begin to sense—akin in some remote way to that miraculous spiritual hush that precedes great revivals.

"Come away!"

Will the tension never break?

"Come away, men—come away! Who Will subscribe the first thousand dollars?"

"TEN THOUSAND!"

Men! How they cheered! A spark to powder that first ten thousand! A torch to prairie grass! How like a curtain there rolled back the puny picture of what we had hoped for, to disclose the mighty Vision of what, like a flash, we saw was about to be!

Sleep on, Harry Lauder's son, sleep on beneath the poppies of Flanders, and smile as you sleep.

Your work goes on. Away over here, in the land that the comrades you loved called "home," your father is speaking where he has a right to be heard.

"If Victory Bonds will bring back a lad to his mother, for God's sake buy a Victory Bond! Come away, men—come away! Every Victory Bond is a light on the road to Liberty. In the days to come let your children point to their Victory Bond and say: 'My Dad lit that!'"

Men, can't you see them! How they broke loose, those fathers and sons! Ten thousand— twenty-five

thousand—twenty-five again—one hundred thousand—more tens, tens upon tens—fives—fifteens—
how they stormed in! Can you ever forget it?

“Come away, men!.....

We’re making History all the world will read.

.....Come away, men—come away!”

How they came—two, three, yes, four at once. Oh! the deafening cheers and tumult—the laughter
that was almost tears—the boom and roll of the big drum—then the sudden lull, and the song—sung
as reward for \$20,000 pledged in twenty seconds to the Victory Loan.

Can’t you see, as Harry saw, the boy at the bow gun? Can’t you see him, men, scanning the deep for
the hell-hounds of the sea? Can’t you see him, eternally vigilant, but with thoughts of the little cabin
by the sea?

How Lauder pictured it! .

How he sang it!

How we joined in the chorus!

Ah, Harry Lauder, come back to us again. It’s a warm welcome we’ll be giving you. Come back with
your giant spirit, and your friendly smile, and your warm hand, and your big heart and your old black
pipe.

We love you, Harry Lauder.
We honor you, Harry Lauder.
We salute you —Rotarian
—Citizen of Civilization!

HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE

NOTE: Pledges to the Victory Loan by members of The Rotary Club of Toronto and the firms
represented by them, were in excess of Nine Million Dollars.

You can learn more about Harry Lauder at:

http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/lauder_harry.htm

The Black Battalion

Despite having defended Canada with courage and distinction during the American War of
Independence, the War of 1812 and the Rebellions of 1837, somehow the true bravery of African
Canadians was not well known. Consequently, the efforts of many Black men to enlist when World
War I broke out were rebuked. There were no separate Black units and Black individuals could enlist
in battalions only at the discretion of commanding officers. They were told it was "a white man's war."

As the war entered its third year, Canadian enlistment fell from 30 000 to 6000 per month. A separate
construction battalion was proposed and supported in order to increase the numbers. On July 5,
1916, military officials authorized the creation of No. 2 Construction Battalion with headquarters in
Pictou, NS, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel D.H. Sutherland. The unit's officers were
White, with the exception of the battalion chaplain, Reverend William Andrew White. African
Canadians enlisted from across the country and the United States. The battalion served with the
Canadian Forestry Corps. Their role as a construction unit was to support the front lines, building
roads and bridges and defusing land mines so advancing troops could move forward, and bringing out
the wounded. No. 2 Construction Battalion was officially disbanded on September 15, 1920.

Read an online digitized copy of Calvin Ruck’s book Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction,
1916-1920. From the Our Roots website at:

<http://www.ourroots.ca/e/toc.aspx?id=8185>

Religion

The Good Samaritan

Written by Luke (a physician) in Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

For the meaning behind this parable see:

<https://carm.org/parable-good-samaritan>

And here is a modern take on the story...

A Real Good Samaritan

One act of kindness that befell British writer Bernard Hare in 1982 changed him profoundly. Then a student living just north of London, he tells the story to inspire troubled young people to help deal with their disrupted lives.

The police called at my student hovel early evening, but I didn't answer as I thought they'd come to evict me. I hadn't paid my rent in months.

But then I got to thinking: my mum hadn't been too good and what if it was something about her?

We had no phone in the hovel and mobiles hadn't been invented yet, so I had to nip down the phone box.

I rang home to Leeds to find my mother was in hospital and not expected to survive the night. "Get home, son," my dad said.

I got to the railway station to find I'd missed the last train. A train was going as far as Peterborough, but I would miss the connecting Leeds train by twenty minutes.

I bought a ticket home and got on anyway. I was a struggling student and didn't have the money for a taxi the whole way, but I had a screwdriver in my pocket and my bunch of skeleton keys.

I was so desperate to get home that I planned to nick a car in Peterborough, hitch hike, steal some money, something, anything. I just knew from my dad's tone of voice that my mother was going to die that night and I intended to get home if it killed me.

"Tickets, please," I heard, as I stared blankly out of the window at the passing darkness. I fumbled for my ticket and gave it to the guard when he approached. He stamped it, but then just stood there looking at me. I'd been crying, had red eyes and must have looked a fright.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Course I'm okay," I said. "Why wouldn't I be? And what's it got to do with you in any case?"

"You look awful," he said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"You could get lost and mind your own business," I said. "That'd be a big help." I wasn't in the mood for talking.

He was only a little bloke and he must have read the danger signals in my body language and tone of voice, but he sat down opposite me anyway and continued to engage me.

"If there's a problem, I'm here to help. That's what I'm paid for."

I was a big bloke in my prime, so I thought for a second about physically sending him on his way, but somehow it didn't seem appropriate. He wasn't really doing much wrong. I was going through all the stages of grief at once: denial, anger, guilt, withdrawal, everything but acceptance. I was a bubbling cauldron of emotion and he had placed himself in my line of fire.

The only other thing I could think of to get rid of him was to tell him my story.

"Look, my mum's in hospital, dying, she won't survive the night, I'm going to miss the connection to Leeds at Peterborough, I'm not sure how I'm going to get home.

"It's tonight or never, I won't get another chance, I'm a bit upset, I don't really feel like talking, I'd be grateful if you'd leave me alone. Okay?"

"Okay," he said, finally getting up. "Sorry to hear that, son. I'll leave you alone then. Hope you make it home in time." Then he wandered off down the carriage back the way he came.

I continued to look out of the window at the dark. Ten minutes later, he was back at the side of my table. Oh no, I thought, here we go again. This time I really am going to rag him down the train.

He touched my arm. "Listen, when we get to Peterborough, shoot straight over to Platform One as quick as you like. The Leeds train'll be there."

I looked at him dumbfounded. It wasn't really registering. "Come again," I said, stupidly. "What do you mean? Is it late, or something?"

"No, it isn't late," he said, defensively, as if he really cared whether trains were late or not. "No, I've just radioed Peterborough. They're going to hold the train up for you. As soon as you get on, it goes.

"Everyone will be complaining about how late it is, but let's not worry about that on this occasion. You'll get home and that's the main thing. Good luck and God bless."

Then he was off down the train again. "Tickets, please. Any more tickets now?"

I suddenly realised what a top-class, fully-fledged doilem I was and chased him down the train. I wanted to give him all the money from my wallet, my driver's licence, my keys, but I knew he would be offended.

I caught him up and grabbed his arm. "Oh, er, I just wanted to..." I was suddenly speechless. "I, erm..."

"It's okay," he said. "Not a problem." He had a warm smile on his face and true compassion in his eyes. He was a good man for its own sake and required nothing in return.

"I wish I had some way to thank you," I said. "I appreciate what you've done."

"Not a problem," he said again. "If you feel the need to thank me, the next time you see someone in trouble, you help them out. That will pay me back amply.

"Tell them to pay you back the same way and soon the world will be a better place."

I was at my mother's side when she died in the early hours of the morning. Even now, I can't think of her without remembering the Good Conductor on that late-night train to Peterborough and, to this day, I won't hear a bad word said about British Rail.

My meeting with the Good Conductor changed me from a selfish, potentially violent hedonist into a decent human being, but it took time.

"I've paid him back a thousand times since then," I tell the young people I work with, "and I'll keep on doing so till the day I die. You don't owe me nothing. Nothing at all."

"And if you think you do, I'd give you the same advice the Good Conductor gave me. Pass it down the line."

Parables

By Matt Slick

The parables of Jesus are treasure houses of wisdom masterfully woven in story form. They are deep, theological, practical, sometimes confusing, but always worth the effort needed to unlock their mysteries.

Basically, a parable is a short story with a moral lesson. Jesus' parables teach a series of moral concepts using the culture of the times. Though the parables have much to offer to us in the present day via a casual reading, they have even more to offer when we understand the culture of the time and examine them in that light. For instance, in the story of the Prodigal son, when the son asked for his father's inheritance, that was equivalent to saying he didn't care if his father lived or died. He just wanted his money. Why? Because a son never ever asked for an inheritance until after the death of his parent. To do so prematurely was to imply he wished his parent's death!

There are many such cultural gems waiting for us to discover. When laid in the rich framework of the parables, we can see the majestic beauty and power of Jesus' living words reflected in the light of His truth... and we are not left unaffected.

In the presentation of these parables, I have gleaned heavily from the book *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, by Kenneth E. Bailey. This book forced open my eyes when reading the parables caused me to see things in them I had never thought of before.

It is important to know that the nobleman of ancient Israel did not run, but walked at a dignified pace. Then what does this mean when the Prodigal's father runs to his son?

Isolation from impure food and people was especially crucial for the Pharisees when they sat down to eat. How do we consider this when the Pharisee asked Jesus to eat with him and provided no means for Jesus to wash?

A person's ethnic background could be seen through his speech and his clothes. How does this bear upon the Good Samaritan parable where the man is left unconscious and naked?

A woman could be divorced for letting her hair down in public. What does this mean when the woman wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair?

The parables used familiar symbols so the listener could relate and, if need be, be shocked. Whatever the outcome in the hearer, the parables required a response. Either the hearer was to change a behavior, or a thought, or a belief, or something else. But change is the reason for the parables.

They were not simply stories. They were living words from the mouth of God.

Advice on Entering a New Year

This advice come from the publication "Good Words", published in 1860, which was edited by Rev. Norman MacLeod and in the first editorial of that years publication which you can read at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/goodwords/index.htm>

Here is his advice...

1. Let a short portion of time—say half an hour at least—be spent each day this year in private prayer, in reading God's Word, and, if possible, some devotional book.
2. Let it be the great spiritual work of the year to become better acquainted personally with Jesus Christ as the living and ever-present Friend, Brother, and Saviour.
3. Endeavour to concentrate your efforts to do good upon some definite unselfish work in your family or out of it, which may help others, as it certainly must help yourself.
4. In all things try to live more towards God, seeking His approval of your inner and outer life. The less you talk about yourself or your doings before men, the better for yourself and for them.
5. Aim this year at being a peacemaker between professing Christians; to allay disputes, and to heal breaches among friends and relations; and to make men respect and esteem each other more.
6. Do not leave behind you in the old year guilt unpardoned, but believe in Jesus for the remission of sins; nor enter a new year with sin loved and cherished, but accept of and rely upon His Spirit to sanctify you. Begin the year without enmity to any man on earth, "forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, even so do ye."
7. If you are the head of the house, resolve to read a portion of God's Word once a day at least to the family; and either read or offer up, always with them, a short but hearty prayer.
8. Endeavour to keep an account of your income and expenditure, that you may be able to live justly and generously. Give what you can to assist poor relatives, and poor Christians, and the Church of Christ. Try this one year to tax yourself ten per cent. on your free income for such purposes.

Learn to do these things, and many more will the Lord teach thee to know and do; and may the God of love and peace be with thee!

Why is Christianity in decline?

By Alastair McIntyre

I believe that Ministers are the main reason for the decline in Christianity as they seem to like to talk in speech that doesn't make any sense to ordinary people. In Scotland the Sabbath was respected as a day of rest and a day for church but this is no longer the case. We used to have Religious Instruction at school but this has now mostly gone. Who is to blame for this? Ministers in my view as they simply didn't fight to protect these. They enjoy talking in words that mean little to the majority of people and fail to make religion relevant today when most are looking for guidance.

I have a huge section on Religion on my Electric Scotland site which is an educational and research site. I have tracked the history of religion in Scotland and selected many biographies, sermons and religious texts over the many centuries. I have also tracked the work of our missionaries around the world and have also tracked the use of the Bible in home and schools.

I have also tracked religion in Canada on my Electric Canadian site and through that you can see how our ministers in the early days of Canada helped to open up the country. Many not only created churches but also schools. Their contribution to the making of Canada was immense.

Our old ministers were prolific authors and many histories of places around the world were written by them. It seems to me the quality of our ministers and priests in the old days were far higher than they are today.

Today our ministers seem to be contributing to a decline in church attendance as they have failed to

make religion matter to most people and so they really need to look at their work. We need to understand why they are performing so poorly. Is it their training? Is it because we no longer have the quality of people going into the church? We really need to look at this situation and try to understand why things are as they are today.

I have reported in this newsletter many instances of countries where the Christian religion is in decline, in Canada, USA, UK, Europe and in the Holy Land.

Then of course the Catholic church has had the pedophile issue all over the world. That makes it hard to trust Priests or let your children attend Sunday School.

In my view it is time we in the OSMTH order should hold our religious leaders to account as we rarely hear from them. It seems to me they want to be very important people and become leaders but that is just personal ambition and nothing to do with promoting religion to the masses.

I remember well the humour story where...

A taxi driver dies and goes to heaven and upon reaching the pearly gates he announces his presence to St. Peter, who looks him up in his Big Book. Upon reading the entry for the cabby, St. Peter invites him to grab a silk robe and a golden staff and to proceed into Heaven.

A preacher is next in line behind the cabby and has been watching these proceedings with interest. He announces himself to St. Peter. Upon scanning the preacher's entry in the Big Book, St. Peter furrows his brow and says, "Okay, we'll let you in but take that plain cloth robe and the wooden staff."

The preacher is astonished and replies, "But I am a man of the cloth! You gave that cab driver a golden staff and a silken robe. Surely I rate higher than a cabby!"

St. Peter responded matter-of-factly: "Here we are interested in results. When you preached, people slept; when the cabby drove his taxi, people prayed."

While that is a humour story it actually bears on what we are seeing today with Ministers boring us with their sermons and wanting promotion rather than bringing in converts or making you a better person.

I ask the question... what are we to do with bad performing religious leaders in our churches? Perhaps we just need to tell them that you didn't enjoy their sermon and got nothing from it and that might get them to think and do better?

Video's worth watching

Ancient Turkey and Knights Templar

at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JldZnx3msTY>

The Great Divide: Sunni vs Shia

at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MqJ8OldzTk>

Fun Music Video

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/tzgRw6V252s>

Oak Island Revealed. Knights Templar or Treasure Myth?

Here we look at the history of Nova Scotia and how it may apply to the Oak Island mystery. In other investigations it has become clear that a group of astronomers and cartographers became aware of the concept of the Axis Mundi and Prime Meridian. In Nova Scotia and possibly the Oak Island Treasure Mystery we may see the influence of early Nova Scotian and descendant of original Knights Templar Everhard Des Barres. Des Barres was an expert Cartographer who is interred in a crypt in the Halifax Round Church. This Church appears to be a copy of the Temple Church in London.

View this video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vTPJb2XCo0>

Libya Sequel - The US and Britain aim to strike again

The US and the UK are talking about another war in Libya, this time, under the pretext of getting rid of the problem that they themselves spawned: ISIS.

You can watch this at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5bGuNm0sFA>

Land and Sea

Land and Sea is a locally produced Canadian documentary television show broadcast in Newfoundland and Labrador on CBNT-DT in St. John's, and on all CBC Television outlets throughout the province. It has been on the air since 1964 (interrupted only by a short cancellation in the early 1990s, but revived after an outcry from fans); originally a black-and-white program, it began broadcasting in colour in the late '60s/early '70s. There is also a Maritime version of Land and Sea which is broadcast on the full CBC network on Sunday afternoons, and episodes from that version are often alternated with Newfoundland-based episodes.

See <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/programs/landandsea>

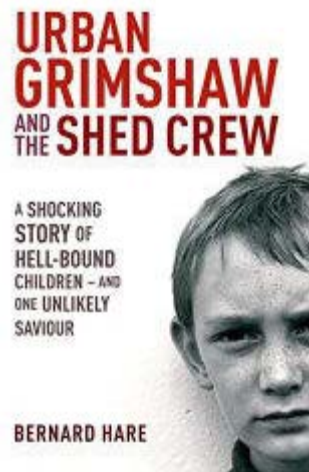
Book Review

A writer's life: Bernard Hare

The former social worker tells James Flint how pulling a semi-feral boy out of a canal inspired his book about an anarchic gang of urban youths.

For a man whose prose is so bluntly funny, Bernard Hare is remarkably reticent in person. Or maybe he's just got a hangover; he does confess that he sank a few jars with an old friend from his social-work days the night before our meeting.

Why "confess"? Because not so long ago you'd have taken it for granted that on any given day Hare would have been out drinking the night before: drinking, taking drugs, raising hell. But he doesn't do much of the first any more, and none of the second. As for raising hell - well, he still does that. But nowadays his methods are a little more refined: leading a march to protest the sighting of mobile phone masts on top of the blocks on his estate, for example. Running reading groups and inner-city chess clubs. And, of course, writing books.



The book in question, *Urban Grimshaw and the Shed Crew*, chronicles Hare's time with a bunch of kids living in East End Park in Leeds - an area described by Fergal Keane, who shot a BBC documentary there in 1998, as among the most deprived in Britain. A dark and bitterly funny window on to a part of British life that most would rather sweep under the carpet, the book is both inspiring and uplifting. It is also particularly timely, as it gives the lie to all those who suppose that social ills can be solved with a change of clothing.

Keane had gone to East End Park in response to the brutal death of teenager Sally Green, who was murdered not by some Ripper-style loner but by a group of kids not unlike Urban Grimshaw and his friends: kids with junkie parents; kids who'd been abused; kids too unruly for either school or children's homes; kids who'd grown up far too fast, without any kind of community to provide them with a moral compass.

"I was born in that area and I grew up there," Hare tells me, in his soft Yorkshire accent. "And when I were a kid there was a community there. I come from a mining family, and there was a lot of heavy industry in Leeds and full employment and a good atmosphere. But in between times Mrs Thatcher came along, everything collapsed and the community has gone."

When his father lost his job in the wake of the 1984 miners' strike, Hare left his post as a social worker in a children's home in London and went back up north. Anger at the strike and the government's response to it made him not really want to work at all - "I went through a little red phase" - but needs must, and eventually he got a job as a mechanic. "It was a bit dodgy, to tell you

the truth. If you're a mechanic it's compulsory to do something bent every day, so I committed a few offences." Though he never went to jail, Hare wound up with a small criminal record, and thanks to that he was no longer able to go back to the one profession he was trained for.

When a removals business he'd set up was crippled by a tax bill, Hare lost all direction and sense of purpose. Apart from a heroin habit he'd worked up in the company of Greta, a fellow junkie and part-time lover, he didn't have any focus to his life at all. At least, not until the day that Urban, one of Greta's six semi-feral children, slipped and fell into the local canal after sniffing too much glue. Hare happened to be passing, dived in and hauled the 12-year-old to safety. A bond was formed that would lead, some nine years later, to Hare's officially fostering the boy - and to the writing of his first book.

Urban's quite a character. He doesn't know the name of the country he lives in and a map of Britain means nothing to him. He can't read or write, gets high on stolen nail varnish, and has been in and out of care homes as long as he can remember. He's so used to his mother's deadbeat lovers passing out in his room that he keeps an electrical flex with the wires exposed under his bed for the sole purpose of electrocuting them. And yet he's bright, subtle, funny and has a way with people that would be the envy of many an adult.

Through Urban, Hare met the Shed Crew, a dark-side Red Hand Gang named after the kitted-out garden shed that served as their hideout from parents, step-parents, police and social workers. Girls and boys in their early and middle teens, they spent their days having sex, getting high and stealing everything from food and booze to high-performance cars. "To other people they were daunting, this big gang of rough kids walking down the street sniffing, nicking, stuff like that," Hare remembers. "But because of my social work skills I suppose they didn't seem very daunting to me."

Without really planning to, Hare found himself teaching Urban how to read and write and letting the Crew use his flat as a refuge. He encouraged them to draw and write poetry, got them playing chess (a particular passion of his), and introduced them to ideas of "honesty, decency, justice - concepts some of them had never heard of". But with the girls dabbling in prostitution and the boys continually in trouble with the police, he had to ask himself what good he was really doing. He also found himself suspected of having dubious motives. "A lot of [the kids] had been abused, or at least touched up, quite often within their own family, and so they were all very sexualised"; it was thus generally assumed that any adult spending time with them could have only one aim in mind.

And then Sally Green was killed, the media descended on East End Park, and Hare realised that his years with the Shed Crew had not been for nothing. "I knew that, although there were similarities between the two groups, the Shed Crew could never have done such a thing," he says. Largely thanks to his influence, "they knew the difference between right and wrong. Some people didn't. It was as simple as that."

After Keane's documentary was aired Hare got in touch with the filmmaker, who encouraged him to write about his experiences. He soon produced a piece for the Independent that stirred the interest of the literary agent Maggie Hanbury, and the next thing he knew he was working on a book. "Without them two I don't think it would've happened. It would still be a pile of papers somewhere."

Now drug-free and with a new energy and sense of purpose, Hare has started a creative-writing scheme - the Flatlands project - and is managing a proper community flat that has been provided for the purpose by the council. He's also hoping to start a community enterprise to provide opportunities for other kids like Urban, and is planning another book based around his relationship with Trudi, a member of the Shed Crew who has become a full-time prostitute.

"I feel like we're just starting," he admits, "but there's nowt else to do. We've lost so much in this country, and it's down to each individual to do the little something to try to rebuild it. Without that, life's not worth living, is it?"

'Urban Grimshaw and the Shed Crew' is published by Sceptre at £14.99 or £0.98 for paperback edition. <http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B001HPFZC0>

Miracle

By J. Helen Elza
For kids ages 8 and up

After they endure a prolonged separation, twelve year old Willie MacGregor and his best friend, Johanna, celebrate their reunion in Johanna's hospital room. But the celebration is short-lived when their hard-fought vacation turns nightmare and Johanna goes missing.

Willie's search for his friend, who now uses a wheelchair, leads him into a forest that bodes both fantastic and fearsome, and into contentious confrontations with an evil, shape-shifting prince who hates intruders and bedevils Willie at every turn. Annoyed with the boy's tenacity, the prince throws Willie's raccoon friend into a roaring river, then turns on Willie with an impossible challenge that threatens Johanna's life.

Fast paced, laced with laughter and high drama, *Miracle* follows Willie into a magical microcosm of four-leggeds, who, along with their finned, furred, and feathered friends, demonstrate the best and the worst of the two-leggeds who have invaded their mountain kingdom. *Miracle* reminds us of the power of faith, shares Scottish and Native American lore, celebrates the spirit of the physically-challenged, and applauds the bonds of friendship while highly commending good-parenting.



Available on Kindle for \$3.99.

This is the author's first entry into children's stories.

Don't Think, Know!

The new girl answered the manager's bell in a flurry of trepidation, which was not lessened when he demanded in imperative haste: "Has Kisslinger's order been filled yet? Did they fill it out of that last lot that came in?"

"I—I think it was filled," stammered the new girl. "I'm sure I heard Mr. Sloan reading it off. And I think they filled it out from the last lot."

"Don't think; know!" snapped the manager. "Go back and find out!" The new girl went, trembling in every muscle. She found that the order had been filled out from a lot previously received, a mistake that would have caused considerable loss had the manager accepted her "I think" as final.

The reproof, coming at a time when the girl was susceptible to new impressions and suggestions, burned itself into her brain and became the guiding principle of her business life. Often when she was tempted to take a fact for granted she was driven to look it up by that persistent echo within her mind that said, "Don't think; know!" She resolutely kept her eyes and ears open to what was going on about her, and within her own sphere she relentlessly pursued every detail to its last hiding place. The manager soon learned to place implicit confidence in her simple statement of fact, and she soon found herself answering the call of his bell with pleasure instead of dread.

How far this principle had affected her work she did not realize until she received a promotion to the headship of the office, above several workers who had been with the firm longer than she. She happened to overhear a conversation in which one of the girls was protesting against the injustice of it.

"Oh," the other answered, "it is all right; she deserves it. No matter what you ask her, she always knows. No guesswork about her. I guess if we did the same we'd be promoted, too." The principle had been worked out so plainly that it could be read without words, "Don't think; know!"

Recipe



Chicken Scallopini

"While many have heard of veal scallopini, you can make this Italian dish with most any meat or even vegetables. The trick is to use a demi-glace of the same style -- i.e., a venison demi if using deer. You can 'fake' a demi-glace by reducing an appropriate brown stock and adding a water and flour slurry to thicken. Makes an awesome romantic dinner for two. "

Ingredients

- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 2 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 4 ounces sliced mushrooms
- 20 capers, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons chicken-flavored demi-glace, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh parsley, or to taste
- 2 lemon slices

Directions

In a small bowl, stir together the garlic and butter until well combined. Set aside.

Place a chicken breast half on a work surface with the thick side facing to the right (if you're right-handed), and place your left hand down on the chicken breast. Using a very sharp knife, carefully cut the chicken breast from the thick side to about 1/2 inch from the edge of the thin side, in a horizontal cut.

Open the cut chicken breast and spread it out like an open book. Using a meat mallet, gently pound the butterflied chicken breast out until it's an even thickness.

Place the flour into a shallow dish, and dredge each chicken breast on both sides with flour.

Melt the garlic butter in a large skillet over medium heat until it stops foaming, and cook each chicken breast until golden brown on both sides, 6 to 8 minutes per side.

Sprinkle each breast with salt and pepper. Remove the chicken breasts to a platter, and keep warm.

Cook and stir the mushrooms in the same skillet as the chicken until the mushrooms have absorbed the remaining butter in the skillet and have begun to turn brown at the edges.

Stir in capers, lemon juice, white wine, and chicken demi-glace, and stir to combine.

Reduce to a simmer. Adjust salt and pepper again, and stir the parsley into the sauce.

Remove the chicken breasts to plates, and serve the sauce over the chicken. Garnish each serving with a lemon slice.

If you need to make this for a large party, cook the chicken as directed but in several small batches, and reserve the butter and flour from cooking each batch until you are ready to make the sauce for all.

You can of course serve this up with either Pasta or Potatoes.

A Wee Bit of Humour



UN Report on the Sexual Activity of Senior Males

The frequency of sexual activity of senior males depends on where they were born. Statistics just released from Statistics Canada and the United Nations B.O.H. Team, revealed that: North American men between 60 and 70 years of age, will on average, have sex two to three times per week, (with a small number a lot more), whereas Japanese men, in exactly the same age group, will have sex only once or twice per year if they are lucky.

This has come as very upsetting news to both myself and most of my buddies, as none of us had any idea we were Japanese.

I copied this email to a friend and she replied with...

Based on my knowledge of females with men in that age group, what the true results are is that North Americans are better liars than the Japanese.

Irish Airlines

Being airborne approximately thirty minutes on an outbound evening Air Lingus flight from Dublin, the lead flight attendant nervously made the following painful announcement in her lovely Irish brogue:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm so very sorry, but it appears that there has been a terrible mix-up... One minute prior to take-off, by our catering service..., I don't know how this has happened, but we have 103 passengers on board, and..., unfortunately, we received only 40 dinner meals... I truly apologize for this mistake and inconvenience."

When passengers' muttering had died down, she continued..., "Anyone who is kind enough to give up their meal so that someone else can eat, will receive free, unlimited drinks for the duration of our 4 hour flight."

Her next announcement came about 2 hours later... "If anyone would like to change their minds, we still have 40 dinners available."

Outside a secondhand shop:

WE EXCHANGE ANYTHING - BICYCLES, WASHING MACHINES, ETC. WHY NOT BRING YOUR WIFE ALONG AND GET A WONDERFUL BARGAIN?

Notice in a farmer's field:

THE FARMER ALLOWS WALKERS TO CROSS THE FIELD FOR FREE, BUT THE BULL CHARGES.

Longevity

The Italian who drank two bottles of red wine every lunchtime and another two bottles over dinner every night and has just died at the age of 104. Moral of the above story? We don't drink too much. We drink too little!

There is an old text about drinking which you might like to read at:

http://www.electricscotland.com/history/medical/sanitatis_chap1-35.htm

Notable Upcoming Events

Canadian International

[OSMTH GMC, Copenhagen, Denmark 13-17 April 2016](#)

[Wednesday 20 April 2016 Windsor Priory dinner meeting at the Church Of The Ascension. 6 PM for fellowship with dinner at 7 PM.](#)

[Tuesday 07 June 2016 Windsor Priory dinner meeting at the Church Of The Ascension. 6 PM for fellowship, with dinner at 7 PM.](#)

[Sunday 21 August 2016 Winndsor Summer Social at Beach Grove Golf and Country Club. 3 PM- 7 PM.](#)

[Saturday 24th September 2016, Toronto Investiture with dinner at the RCMI.](#)

[OSMTH Grand Convent General Sofia, Bulgaria 12-16 October 2016](#)

[Saturday 05 November 2016 Windsor Ascension Priory Investiture. More information to follow.](#)

[Sunday 11 December 2016 Windsor Christmas Social at Beach Grove Golf and Country Club. 3 PM – 7 PM.](#)

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