

## Catholic academies

I agree wholeheartedly with Mike Craven's call to Catholic dioceses to embrace the move to academy status for Catholic schools ("Bring on Catholic academies", *Tablet Education*, 4 February). It is essential that the schools themselves and not the dioceses decide which model of academy suits them best.

My two boys attend the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School in west London where parents and the Diocese of Westminster have been involved in a controversy that everyone wants now to consign to the history books. The possibility of a move towards a model of academy status that is suitable for the Vaughan presents a great chance to build bridges and achieve unity of purpose among governors, parents, staff and the diocese.

I do hope and pray that everyone involved will do everything in their power to seize this opportunity and build on it.

**Bernadette Judge**

*London W5*

Mike Craven raises the question of the purpose of Catholic schools. I am in agreement with his view that the Catholic educational ethos founded on Christ at the centre of the school has much to offer wider society; the Catholic school seeks the education of the whole person, provides access to students from all sectors of society, contributes to the common good and builds community cohesion.

The Diocese of Westminster, through its education service, is involved with many schools considering becoming academies and helping to assess the opportunities and risks of different models in an ever evolving situation. Each governing body is engaged in dialogue with the diocesan education service, and often with other schools, in the search for decisions which are for the good of the particular school and for the good of all the schools in the diocese. It is premature of Mike Craven to make a statement that the trustees have said categorically, "Single-school academies are specifically ruled out." There are a variety of ways in which the proper solidarity recognised by Mr Craven can be securely established.

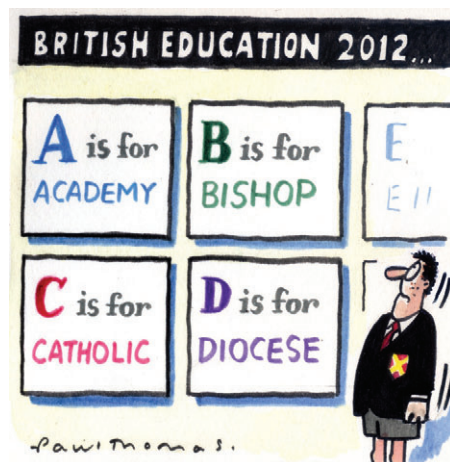
**(The Right Rev.) John Sherrington**

*Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster*

## The new evangelisation

Archbishop Fisichella's laudable plan to reach out to Catholics who have drifted away from the Church ("Back to basics", 4 February) is not helped by his description of them as people who have "an attitude of indifference, arrogance or detachment" towards the Church.

Such a description is scarcely charitable, ascribes the "fault" to the attitudes of the lapsed and does not acknowledge those among them who are confused, hurt and scandalised by the faults in the Church itself.



I am confident that the missions will consistently project a love for our separated brethren which will be a shining testament to the overwhelming love of God.

**Frank Murphy**

*Sheffield, South Yorkshire*

## Impact of university fee rises

Following your news story headlined "Fees hike hits applications to Church-affiliated universities" (*News from Britain and Ireland*, 4 February), there are two important points to make about university admissions in general and Liverpool Hope University in particular.

The Government's decision to increase tuition fees undoubtedly puts all universities in unknown territory as we wait to see enrolment figures for 2012 and the impact this increase will have. However, it is incorrect to presume that this is an issue faced by Church-affiliated universities alone. Every student in England, and as a result every university, faces the same increase in fees.

However, to give credence to a discredited trade-union report in which liberal arts institutions such as church colleges and universities were assumed to be at "high risk" from government cuts for all but STEM [science, engineering, technology and mathematics] subjects was ill-advised. Hefce [Higher Education Funding Council for England] at the time gave a very clear response to this report which your journalist should have consulted.

Liverpool Hope University, the largest of the Catholic-affiliated institutions, has delivered strong financial results for several years, which has placed us in the top 25 per cent of universities in 2008/09 and 2009/10 in terms of annual surplus percentage. Comparative information for 2010/11 is not yet available but we have every reason to believe we will remain in this top 25 per cent. We are in a very strong financial position as we enter this new age of university education and we are confident we will continue to thrive. This Government is keen to create a market in higher education and reports like this one dam-

age the market impression of the very institutions that your paper is interested in.

**Graham Donelan**

*University Secretary,  
Liverpool Hope University*

## Romney's Mormon faith

Michael Sean Winters writes about national and church life in the United States with intelligence, candour and verve ("God's Own Party", 21 January). This article is introduced with the comment, "but as he (Romney) is a Mormon, his faith is controversial". I understand "controversial" to mean "not Christian". This judgement is one shared, according to my understanding, by the Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical and Roman Catholic Churches. Reason: the fundamental doctrine and point of departure for Christianity is the Trinity – one God in three divine persons. For Mormons, the Trinity is three gods who form one divinity.

Moreover, God the Father is an exalted man, a native from another planet. In addition, God the Father has a wife, the Heavenly Mother. Their first-born was Jesus Christ, who acquired his divinity in a pre-mortal existence. Finally, the Holy Spirit is the son of heavenly parents. In fine, four gods were responsible for the universe, three of whom established a covenant and formed the divinity. Consequently, this belief characterises Mormonism to be "not Christian" as Christian tradition for centuries has understood and today teaches its faith.

**(Dom) Leo M. Ryska, OSB**

*St Benedict's Abbey, Benet Lake, Wisconsin, USA*

## Australia at the Vatican

Tim Fischer's relinquishment of his appointment as Australia's Ambassador to the Holy See ("Letter from Rome", 14 January) raises several interesting issues for the Australian Government. One relates to the decision of the then Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to appoint Tim Fischer solely as Australia's Ambassador to the Holy See to the exclusion of any other ambassadorial appointment. Previously, this role was discharged in conjunction with an appointment to another country. Another was the purchase of an embassy building in Rome for the Ambassador to the Holy See, which attracted the ire of staff within the Australian Foreign Affairs Department at a time when cost-cutting measures had been introduced.

If the decision is made to appoint another Australian ambassador solely to the Holy See, an excellent appointment would be that of General Peter Cosgrove AC MC. His appointment would be a fitting tribute to the general's outstanding contribution to Australia and would no doubt be welcomed by the Holy See.

**Jeff Ahern**

*Brisbane, Queensland, Australia*

## Young and gay in a Catholic school

It would be a pastoral opportunity wasted if Ontario's Catholic schools did not permit GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances) (*Tablet Education*, 4 February) in the wake of the tragic suicide of 15-year-old Jamie Hubley, bullied because he was gay. To be young and gay can be a lonely and frightening experience, and the history of being gay is littered with prejudice, violence and suicide. Surely our Catholic Church and schools should be at the forefront of any well-intentioned initiatives such as the youth-led school-based clubs with gay and heterosexual members socialising together, with the added bonus in a Catholic school of the faith input.

As for the word gay, it's here and it's here to stay and everyone knows what it means. Being gay is not something you learn or volunteer for; it's a "given". To be gay and Catholic and to know that one is valued and accepted is part of the Church's contemporary pastoral duty, and this must be real and felt to be real by those who are gay, and not just a distant pastoral guideline for teachers and clergy.

There must be some way too that young, gay Catholics can access clergy who are also gay so that they can experience real pastoral and spiritual support in order that the hurt isolation does not lead to more young suicides.

**(Fr) John Michael Hanvey**  
*Blackburn, Lancashire*

Catholic schools seem to have a problem with homosexuality in general and gay bullying in particular. In my work as a psychotherapist specialising in the sexualities and gender, I note continuing high levels of emotional disturbance and psychiatric morbidity among some, especially younger, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] people. In addition to the research work of Professor Michael King at UCH [University College Hospital, London], my own clinical findings are that, among the risk factors for disturbance among this patient group, is growing up in a faith that has particularly negative attitudes to homosexuality – such as Catholicism and Islam. Unlike black children growing up with racism, who usually have parents who are able to detoxify some of the negativity towards them, gay and lesbian children usually live a self-imposed secret world of confusion, from as early as four or five, knowing that they are "different".

Other children are often quite perceptive about gay pupils and, in any case, the word

"gay" is widely used as a term of abuse meaning "rubbish". Those children who need to bully others have easy targets and so it is not surprising that so many gay and lesbian youngsters are emotionally scarred. Every case of a young person committing suicide should be examined to see if homophobic bullying played a contributory part. Catholic schools, and the bishops, really need to think hard about their responsibilities to LGBT children.

**(Dr) Bernard Ratigan**  
*Leicester*

## Communion and understanding

I have a cousin with Down's syndrome and so was interested in your coverage of the case of a boy with Down's who was initially denied the right to make his First Communion with his classmates (News from Britain and Ireland, 28 January). I then read your related and inspiring Parish Practice article in the same edition ("One bread, one body", 28 January). Afterwards, I found myself asking which of us is truly ready when the moment comes to receive the Eucharist. "Understanding" for me is perhaps the least requirement.

**Esther Gordon**  
*Pinner, Middlesex*

One of the most steadfast altar servers in my Cheshire parish is a young lady with Down's syndrome. She has been serving on the altar for about 15 years. She is faithful and prompt on weekdays and also on Sundays. She has served Mass on her own or with other people, and she has also been joined by another young girl who suffers with Down's syndrome. Our parish does have a disabled group, which meets every month on Saturdays. In that group, the children gain faith and confidence with help from other people. I appreciate all the help they give me.

**Margaret Loughran**  
*Chester*

## Glimpsed from a prison cell

Unfortunately, the window in my prison cell before Christmas was a little too high to see birds feeding at a table under a cherry tree (Glimpse of Eden, 31 December). However, at least I did see a pigeon flying up and down C Wing in HMP Pentonville (where I was serving a sentence for refusing to pay a fine for non-violent resistance to war). Or was it a collared dove – or even the Holy Spirit? Whether or not, it does the spirit good, mine and other conscientious objectors alike, to be remembered in Jonathan Tulloch's poetic prose. There are perhaps only a few of us as yet, but in 60 years' time, who knows, maybe we will have grown in number like the gentle, gracious collared dove.

**(Fr) Martin Newell CP**  
*London N4*



## The living Spirit

The leper had no right even to approach Jesus, but must have felt that he would get a favourable response, no word of reproach. "Jesus felt sorry for him" is a weak expression; the Greek is far stronger: colloquially, it can literally be translated "was gutted"; Jesus felt it to the depths of his being. Then Jesus touched him, both touching someone ritually impure and risking the infection. There have been famous repetitions of this brave and heartfelt gesture: Francis of Assisi kissing a leper's hand, Princess Diana shaking hands with an Aids sufferer (when the sickness was thought to be contagious by touch). One can imagine the awestruck horror of the bystanders at this outrageous expression of love and sympathy ...

**Henry Wansbrough OSB**  
*The Sunday Word*  
(Burns & Oates, a Continuum imprint, 2012)

The spiritual life is a gift. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lifts us up into the kingdom of God's love. But to say that being lifted up into the kingdom of love is a divine gift does not mean that we wait passively until the gift is offered to us. Jesus tells us to set our hearts on the kingdom ... A spiritual life requires human effort. The forces that keep pulling us back into a worry-filled life are far from easy to overcome. Here we touch the question of discipline in spiritual life. A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship. The practice of spiritual discipline makes us more sensitive to the small, gentle voice of God.

**Henri J.M. Nouwen**  
*Circles of Love*  
(Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004)

"I was sick," Jesus says of himself, "and you took care of me" (Matthew 25:36). According to the logic of the same economy of salvation, he, who identifies himself with each suffering person, waits – in this man – for other men, who come to take "care of" him. He waits for the expression of human compassion, solidarity, kindness, love, patience, solicitude, in all their various forms.

**Pope John Paul II,**  
Homily, 11 February 1979

*Today is the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes*

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