

# WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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## For better or worse...

THUNDERCLOUDS, cataracts and hurricanes retreat; the seasons turn – and periodic downpours (we hope) give way to more pacific climes. But even in the springtide tranquillity you can still hear the baying of the hounds of heaven. Depends on where you're listening from, of course. Try Belmarsh prison, where incarcerated Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has made an unexpected request for his upcoming nuptials: a Catholic chaplain's blessing.

Assange, currently on his third year of remand, and nervously awaiting the conclusion of his drawn-out battle to avoid extradition to the United States on espionage charges carrying a likely life sentence, has received a rare bit of good news recently: he can get married. Under certain conditions, of course: one of them, complains his fiancée, Stella Moris, is that Assange can't get married in the "chapel where he worships". But Assange (in a kilt designed for the occasion by his friend Vivienne Westwood) and his bride will be blessed by Belmarsh's Catholic chaplain.

This suggests an intriguing volte-face on the part of the international fugitive, who once described the Sacrament of Confession



as a kind of espionage. If Assange has had a change of heart, who's responsible? Perhaps one of his many correspondents may have had something to do with it. Pope Francis sent him a personal letter on Palm Sunday 2021. What did it say? For once in his life, Assange has information he won't leak.

BRENDAN Hoban was born in Ballycastle, Co. Mayo, in 1948. Ordained a priest of the Killala diocese in the west of Ireland he served in seven parishes over 45 years in north Mayo and west Sligo before retiring a few years ago. He has written several books, learned articles

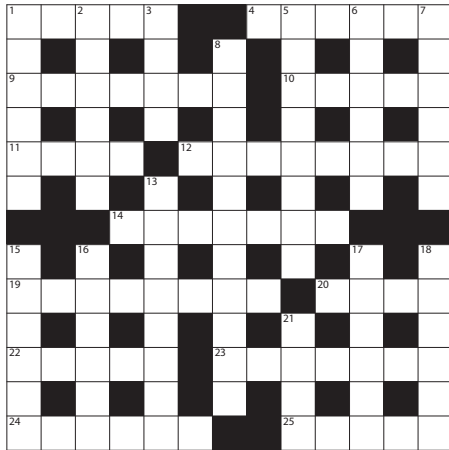
for the venerable theological monthly, *The Furrow*, and contributes a boisterous column to the local paper, *The Western People*. He is one of the founders of the Association of Catholic Priests, a lively symposium of clergy which keeps Irish bishops on their toes.

"As I come to the end of my life," he writes in his latest book, *A Priest's Diary* (Banley House), "I find that more happens without me. The mysterious anthems of parish life, which revolved around me, no longer seem significant and, such as they are, progressively I seem to play a diminishing role in them. Once chairman of everything, now I'm shuffled sideways to some prestigious but empty post. Patron or President. The empty honours attest to my peripheral role. I never really learned a trick of sociability. My stolid and unswerving flock live their lives and organise their affairs at a distance from people. I am, if anything, a slightly awkward presence on the periphery of their lives, routinely doing the holy things but aware that the goal-posts have shifted."

In their wry acceptance that, even as the ground under his feet has collapsed, there remain duties to be performed, Hoban's diaries put him alongside that other poignant chronicler of contemporary Irish clerical life, the novelist William King.

## PUZZLES

### PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 797 Alanus



#### Across

- 1 French and German agreement for pagan communication board (5)
- 4 & 10 Across: Our Lord's arboreal association with David's father (4,2,5)
- 9 Mail nothing new about approval of mission base of St Damien (7)
- 10 See 4 Across
- 11 & 24 Across: Most unlikely subjects for eschatologist to study? (4,6)
- 12 Laid main arrangement for bishops' obligatory visit to Rome (2,6)
- 14 Homer epic figure deploys item in sly variation (7)
- 19 Native American single chap with a research facility (8)

- 20 Acts writer we are soundly instructed to regard (4)
- 22 Uniform colour we hear for vehicle access (5)
- 23 Back of Caribbean firm producing Verdi work (7)
- 24 See 11 Across
- 25 No sign of life if end letters and numbers nought to ninety-nine (5)

#### Down

- 1 Candlestick alloy found with loom linked to Ur originally (6)
- 2 Worst one avoiding work with saint (6)
- 3 Cross that can be seen in suburban Khartoum (4)

- 5 Shouts "hallelujah" concerning authorship of 14 Across we hear (8)
- 6 Nickname if coming from Essex direction that is (6)
- 7 New leaf to turn over concerning unborn child (6)
- 8 Infer island could be a Holy Island (11)
- 13 Devour with ostentatious jewellery all around sounding sheepish! (8)
- 15 Gamble about request for collection item (6)
- 16 One is backing the rule inside country (6)
- 17 Pair holding liquid measure with me presenting Sieneese medieval artist (6)
- 18 Valiant reference to Leander's lover? (6)
- 21 Graduate with blood type of Father (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 19 March The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk, with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on Saints, Monasticism and Philosophy of Religion – from the OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random. **■ We are processing entries but there may be a delay in notifying winners and sending out prizes. Please keep entering.**

### SUDOKU | Moderate

			9		2			
6				1				7
			4	3	6	7	8	
	3						9	2
2								4
1	7						3	
			2	7	3	5	6	
3				4				9
			2		8			

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

#### Solution to the 26 February puzzle

6	7	4	2	8	9	5	3	1
1	9	5	3	7	4	2	6	8
8	2	3	5	6	1	4	7	9
2	3	1	4	5	8	6	9	7
9	4	7	6	1	2	8	5	3
5	6	8	7	9	3	1	2	4
4	5	2	8	3	7	9	1	6
3	8	9	1	2	6	7	4	5
7	1	6	9	4	5	3	8	2

#### Solution to the 26 February crossword No. 794

Across: 1 Habeas; 5 Padua; 8 Desai; 9 Brubeck; 10 Well; 11 Ancestor; 13 Umbra; 14 Scams; 19 Alluvial; 21 Orla; 23 Ahimaa; 24 Eliot; 25 Awdry; 26 Corpus. Down: 2 Absalom; 3 Erin; 4 Sabina; 5 Prudence; 6 Drefit; 7 Ankara; 8 Dewi; 12 Brevari; 15 Martinu; 16 Havana; 17 Balzac; 18 Sant; 20 Laird; 22 Lear.

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