

Comment

MARY KENNY



From the Ritz to the rectory

I'm not at all surprised that my old colleague, Jonathan Aitken, now 75, will shortly be ordained in the Church of England. For years, he's been described in tabloid headlines as "the disgraced former MP". This followed his prison sentence for perjury, after it emerged that he had lied over the matter of having his sojourn at the Ritz Paris paid for by a rich Arab. But he took his punishment in a Christian spirit, accepting his guilt, doing time in jail and befriending and often helping the other inmates, especially with their reading and writing.

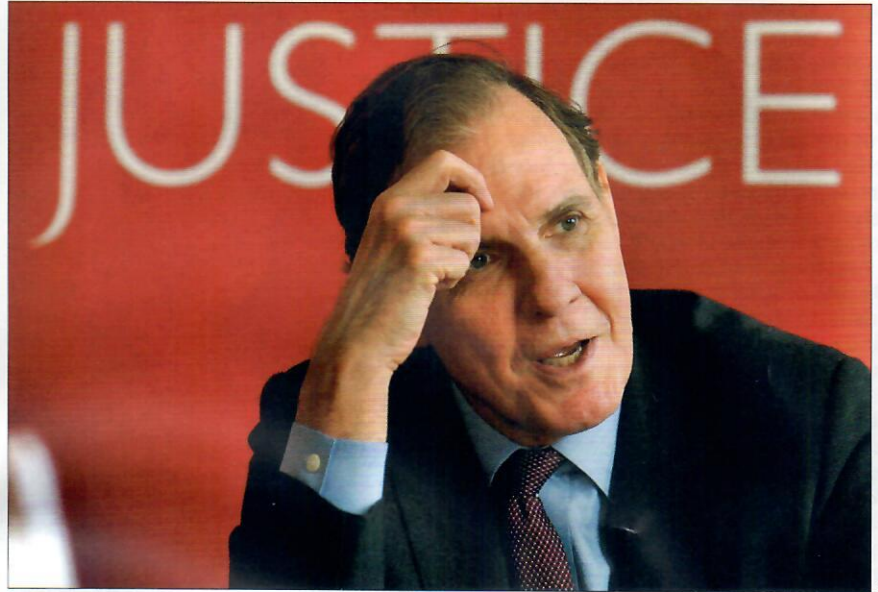
When I was Master of the Keys (at the Catholic Writers' Guild) for two years from 2011, Jonathan proved to be one of our most popular speakers. He was funny and good-tempered, and he spoke of his prison experience with kindness and respect. He had maintained friendships with some of the inmates after his – and their – release.

Jonathan, whom I first knew in the 1960s when we were reporters on the *Evening Standard*, has known high life and low life. He's been on familiar terms with Richard Nixon, Margaret Thatcher and Henry Kissinger, not to mention those Middle Eastern sheikhs who sought his counsel. He's fallen from grace, been a bankrupt and lost many of his privileges. But he picked himself up, found solace at Holy Trinity Brompton, and produced a biography of John Newton, the former slave owner who repented and wrote the song *Amazing Grace*.

Though worldly, Jonathan always had a spiritual streak, and it strikes me that a man who has experienced the full roller-coaster of life is an excellent candidate for ordination. Perhaps it will encourage other 75-year-olds to do likewise.

He is divorced from his first wife and is now married to Elizabeth, formerly married to the late Richard Harris and Rex Harrison. But if the Anglican Church doesn't object, it is not our place to do so, and I wish him a long and fulfilling pastoral vocation. He'll be an engaging preacher too ...

The Impressionist painter Claude Monet is best known for his paintings of lilies and his garden at Giverny, but the current Monet exhibition



Jonathan Aitken, soon to be ordained in the Church of England

at the National Gallery focuses on his interest in architecture and buildings. And it's striking how many of his townscapes are dominated by a church.

Monet seems to have been particularly fascinated by Rouen Cathedral, which he painted repeatedly and from many angles. He would take a room in a nearby house to gain yet another perspective to the cathedral, painting it at different times of the day, when the light would reflect on his subject in different shades.

The exhibition, on until July 29, demonstrates how hard Monet worked over a long life, and how much he struggled in his early years, when he had very little income, his wife was ailing and he was left a widower with two young children. Even for a great artist, achievement doesn't come easily – and nor should it.

Art exhibitions in London are usually full these days – a sign that fine painting is appreciated. But they can be pricey: entrance to the Monet show is £20 at the door or £18 online. It's gratifying that the galleries are so well attended, but you seldom see less well-off Londoners at these events, and almost never people of

Afro-Caribbean or Indo-Pakistani heritage. More diversity needed.

The Prince of Wales and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, are due to pay yet another visit to Ireland next week. They seem especially to like that rugged west coast, now branded the "Wild Atlantic Way", stretching from Donegal down to Kerry. This time, they'll be visiting Cork, Killarney – which Queen Victoria loved – and Daniel O'Connell's Kerry home at Derrynane, Caherdaniel.

There's much anticipation and a warm welcome awaiting the couple in this part of Munster, known for its friendly and extrovert people. And there's an unspoken conciliatory note to the visit: it's time to move on and forget the grievances of the past. There's also an appreciation that Charles has built ecumenical relations in the decades after the IRA killing of his uncle, Lord Mountbatten.

And for Camilla, there's always the horses (and even legal hunting!).

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