

No obligation

● “Obligation”, a word often used by the hierarchy to tell Catholics what they must do, is legalese that has no place in the language of faith and love.

This week, in our diocese, a reminder of our obligation vis à vis marriage and the raising of children was issued to those who were in church to hear it. The bishops are also considering when to reintroduce the “Sunday obligation”.

Never in 32 years of marriage has my husband sought to remind me of my obligation to him as a spouse, nor I him. It would be laughable.

We have to find a new language if the pews are not to empty still further. People no longer respond to the language of obligation. The eternal Christ draws people to himself through compassion and love. Pope Francis invites us to dream of a new way of being and acting post-Covid.

Let's be done with the word “obligation”. There is a better way.

KATHRYN CROSS
BIRSTALL, LEICESTERSHIRE

Goings-on at No 10

● In her absorbing analysis of Boris Johnson's incompetence and hypocrisy (“Sheer humbug”, 29 January), your lobby correspondent, Julia Langdon, refers to the “complexity” of the relationship between politicians and political journalists, and wonders whether the long silence about “Partygate” may be due to the presence of journalists among the guests.

She illustrates the long-standing nature of this relationship with reference to the case in the mid 1970s of Marcia Williams (subsequently Lady Falkender), then head of Harold Wilson's private office.

Langdon recalls that the press did not reveal that Williams' two small sons were the children of the (married) political editor of the *Daily Mail*, despite the fact that “at least two other political editors had known the circumstances” – with Ian Aitken of *The Guardian*

explaining that he “did not think it was any of his business”.

The only paper that published the story at the time was *Private Eye*, which did not have a lobby correspondent. The interest lay not in the paternity of the children but in the fact that Mr Wilson's political secretary had apparently been raising them secretly at 10 Downing Street, where for a time she had a flat. The *Eye* acquired this information from three other members of Wilson's private office, who were appalled by the tyrannical influence Williams

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

Crisis at Christ Church

ANGELA TILBY'S article (“Oxford through the looking glass”, 5 February) should make “Hell's foundations quiver” at Christ Church.

As an alumnus involved in the four-year civil war as a supporter of Dean Martyn Percy I thought I knew most of the details. Not so. I was shocked by Angela Tilby's revelations of the ruthlessness of the group of controlling Censors and ex-Censors now immortalised by *The Tablet* as “the Tribal Elders”.

The day after your article appeared, the settlement between the Dean and the college was announced. Insiders knew that this was achieved only after heavy pressure applied by Oxford University's chancellor and vice-chancellor and by the Charity Commission (CC). One Censor vilified the CC as “that branch of the Martyn Percy Supporters Club”. An unwise description of the college's ultimate regulator, which still has much unfinished business to sort out. Some of the business involves money. Christ Church has blown £20m of its charitable funds on legal and PR fees (£6m), lost donations and legacies (£12m) and £2m on the Dean's compensation settlement and repayment of his legal fees.

If the clean-up of the Augean stables proves painful it will largely be due to the lack of remorse from the Tribal Elders for the financial and reputational damage they have inflicted on the college. Instead the situation was inflamed by the publication of an arrogant, partisan statement on the college website.

Social media is on fire with condemnation of the college's stance. Alumni are furious. Questions in parliament and the Church of England Synod are planned. An audit of Christ Church's finances and a governance review

are being widely demanded. This one will run and run. Well done Angela Tilby and *The Tablet* for making some of the running.

(REVD) JONATHAN AITKEN
LONDON SW5

AS ONE OF the Honorary Ecumenical Canons of Christ Church (and the only Catholic) may I suggest that what happens there concerns us all as Christians and people of good will? The cathedral is the place of a shrine to St Frideswide, a saint loved by many, particularly the local Russian Orthodox community. For Methodists it has associations with John Wesley. For both Catholics and Anglicans it is the place where St John Henry Newman was ordained deacon and priest for the Church of England, beginning his great ministry for us all. These holy persons bind us together.

Without prejudice to the safeguarding issue, the story, as Canon Tilby shows, is part of a larger picture and one which, alas, sometimes happens in church and academe. It leaves behind it many hurt people and does not show “church” in its best light. We all need to work towards not only healing, but a sense of restorative justice.

I am a friend of the Dean and his wife Emma, and understand the difficulties they have gone through over the past four years. I was saddened that Martyn's gracious and godly response to the settlement was not given space in the public arena alongside others; I hope that will be rectified, and also that his work for Christ Church be celebrated in some farewell service.

(CANON DR) ROBERT (ROBIN) GIBBONS
OXFORD

was by that time exercising over her boss.

The only public reaction to the revelation of this unorthodox domestic arrangement came in the *New Statesman*, whose editor, Anthony Howard, attacked *Private Eye* for committing an outrageous intrusion into the lady's privacy. Faced with the evidence that something had gone seriously wrong with the prime minister's affairs, the rest of the lobby maintained a loyal silence.

PATRICK MARNHAM
WOODSTOCK, OXFORDSHIRE

Latin and English

● I agree with Fr Martin Clayton (Letters, 5 February) that the term “Latin Mass” adds to today's liturgical polarisation. But it does not have to be all or nothing, Latin or English. Here in Leamington we regularly sing the New Order post-Vatican II Mass with all the Ordinary, from the Kyrie (Greek) to the Agnus Dei, in Latin, often to the well-loved Missa de Angelis setting. The priest faces the people, all the readings are in English. No one