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Fr Ron Rolheiser: Straining to hear the voice of Good Friday – Page 30

The Irish Catholic

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Religious orders quietly lifting hundreds out of homelessness

Ruadhán Jones

While religious orders often get a bad press, *The Irish Catholic* can reveal that the same congregations are quietly housing hundreds of people who would otherwise be homeless as the Government continues to struggle to come to terms with the accommodation emergency.

Religious orders in Ireland have “unlocked the barriers” to housing for many families with “under the radar” support that lifts people out of a cycle of poverty, a housing charity has said this week.

Tony O’Riordan, chief executive of Sophia Housing told *The Irish Catholic* that religious congregations “don’t get anywhere near the credit they deserve” for giving families and individuals across the country access to homes.

“There’s hundreds of people being moved out of poverty because of their [the religious orders] choices,” Mr O’Riordan said.

“I think the religious congregations are very quiet about this, they’re more interested in the outcomes and doing the work,” he said.

Mr O’Riordan said the Government needs to take “a serious look” at what the religious are doing and “speed up their response” in getting support to the orders.

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‘In God we trust’



Members of the 97th Cadet Class and 11th Potential Officers’ Class of the Defence Forces are sworn in having received their commissions in Collins Barracks, Dublin, April 5. Photo: Airman Gibney.

Et cum spiritu tuo, Tánaiste

Brandon Scott

Devotees of the traditional Latin Mass may have been feeling unloved of late after Pope Francis restricted the pre-Vatican II liturgy. However, apparent support came from a perhaps unlikely source at the weekend when Tánaiste Leo Varadkar attended the Mass in Dublin.

The Fine Gael leader made a discreet entrance at St Kevin’s Church in Dublin’s Harrington Street – home to the Latin Mass Chaplaincy in the capital – on Sunday morning. Mr Varadkar stayed for the entire Mass, however he did not receive Holy Communion.

While Mr Varadkar does live within the bounds of the parish in the south inner-city, he is not a regular at St Kevin’s and it is understood that this is his first time attending the traditional Latin Mass.

Ahead of the visit of Pope Francis in 2018, Mr Varadkar spoke about his faith and admitted: “I don’t practice any religion at the moment – so I guess like a lot of people in Ireland I come from a Catholic background but I’m still searching for the truth”.

In 2020, Mr Varadkar described himself on social media as: “not religious. Raised Catholic. Find faith and religion fascinating”.

Last year Pope Francis published a document *Traditionis custodes* which placed restrictions on the traditional form of the liturgy and re-emphasised the liturgical reforms of Vatican II (1962-65).

MARY KENNY

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Easter is about love, sacrifice and redemption Page 8



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The paradox of Holy Week

In our calendar, Holy Week is one which turns from triumph on Palm Sunday to breaking bread together on Holy Thursday, betrayal in Gethsemane, death and humiliation on a cross on Good Friday, the silence of Holy Saturday and ultimately the victory over the grave of Easter Sunday.

On the first Holy Thursday at the Last Supper in the upper room, Christ knew that his followers were facing the worst crisis yet. It increasingly dawned on the disciples that they would lose him, that they would deny him, run away and their fragile little community would collapse.

It is a far cry from the joy of Palm Sunday on the Mount of Olives – but when all seemed lost, Christ gave them an eternal promise:

“this is my body given for you”.

This is why we describe the Eucharist as the “source and summit” of the entire Christian life. It is also a promise of immortality – an assurance that our lives and the lives of those around us have eternal value.

Assurance

Holy Week and Easter are also the assurance that darkness and evil never have the final word. It can be hard to believe this in a world marked by so much suffering. The people of

**Editor's
Comment**
Michael Kelly



Ukraine are experiencing their own prolonged Good Friday at the moment – the words *Eli Eli Lama Sabachtani?* are not a pious recollection from a far-away hill 2,000 years ago.

“The Eucharist is the promise that God is always with us”

Calvary is a closer hill for many people this Holy Week. People are mourning loved

ones, broken relationships and alienated friendships. The spectre of sickness of mind, body and spirit looms large in many homes and families.

I was lucky to be in Jerusalem with a group from *The Irish Catholic* in February and a high point of our pilgrimage was our journey towards the Holy Sepulchre along the way of the cross – the via dolorosa.

Everyone brings something different to a pilgrimage to the Holy Land: there is thanksgiving, petition, joy but also sorrow. There is something comforting in the fact that we believe in a God who is no stranger to suffering and can be with us amid the struggles and suffering that comes our way.

Paradox

There's a paradox in the fact that Good Friday was the worst day in human history, but also the day that gave way to Easter Sunday and the resurrection of Jesus which transformed human history forever.

The Eucharist is the promise that God is always with us – and that promise is fulfilled first and foremost in the Celebration of the Eucharist at Mass. That's why Easter is a good time for people who have felt unable to attend Mass due to the pandemic to consider their circumstances and think about coming back. Our individual relationship with God is vital, but we are more perfectly the People of God when we gather together.

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Dublin parish pays tribute to shopkeeper-turned soldier

Brandon Scott

Parishioners in south Dublin have paid tribute to a local man who was killed after he returned to his native Ukraine to try to protect his family from the brutal Russian invasion.

Friends said Oleksandr Zavhorodniy – known to many as Alex – gave away everything that he owned before leaving Dublin.

Mr Zavhorodniy, who was the assistant manager in the Aldi supermarket in Sandyford, decided upon his return home to take up arms to defend his family and homeland. Mr Zavhorodniy was killed in battle on March 30 in Popasna which is situated in the east of Ukraine.

Parishioners in Balally, where Mr Zavhorodniy lived, took to the parish Facebook page to recall a man who was a familiar face they met frequently while shopping.

The parish paid tribute to the local resident and comments of condolence poured in

from parishioners, who hailed Mr Zavhorodniy's bravery and recalled his affable nature when they encountered him in the store or around the area. “He was a neighbour for a few years. A lovely man,” one comment said. “Very familiar face in Aldi in Sandyford. A gentleman”, one woman posted. “You will not be forgotten – a very brave soul. May he rest in eternal peace,” another parishioner wrote.

Mr Zavhorodniy's funeral took place in his native Ukraine. Writing on the website GoFundMe, friends described Ireland as “his second home”.

“His heart, however, remained in Ukraine, and that's why he chose to go back...to protect his country and its people.

“When Alex arrived in Warsaw, he gave everything he had at the time to those in need,” his friends say. As *The Irish Catholic* went to press this week, the page had raised almost €30,000 for his family to help them.

Religious quietly lifting hundreds out of homelessness

» Continued from Page 1

“The congregations are giving land, and we need the State then to help us put houses on that land and convert convents and schools into homes,” he continued. “And we wouldn't be satisfied with the speed that has been acted on,” expressing disappointment in the Government response.

He said there needs to be “greater urgency in providing capital funding to turn the lands and properties owned by the Church that they're willing to donate into homes for people that need them”.

Sophia Housing works with religious orders who contribute to addressing homelessness by making lands and property available to be converted into much needed homes.

“They could have made lots of different choices looking at their assets and properties they have,” Mr O'Riordan said, “but the one that was to the forefront was making a difference

to people's lives. I think there isn't enough that could be said of that.”

Referring to whether the public has swung too far in its criticism of religious orders following issues of abuse by religious in the past, Mr O'Riordan said: “The consequences can't be denied and have to be faced up to.”

“But this [addressing homelessness] is something that religious congregations are not getting the credit for – they're not getting the credit for the fact that they're unlocking the barriers to getting access to housing for families and individuals across the state.

“It's a very under the radar type of support that they're giving, but it is impacting on hundreds of people's lives.”

Religious orders have been the “catalyst for this change” in addressing the housing crisis, Mr O'Riordan continued, because they have

discerned how pressing the crisis is now.

“It was education maybe 100 years ago and they stepped into the breach – they're now looking at housing and homelessness as the pressing need,” he said.

Mr O'Riordan was speaking at an event on Tuesday to mark Sophia's 25 years responding to homelessness, which paid tribute to the major role congregations play.

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Alternatives needed to turf selling as rural Ireland feels 'abandoned'

**Chai Brady
and Brandon Scott**

Rural priests and politicians have expressed concern after the Environment Minister Eamon Ryan announced the aim to ban the sale and distribution of turf – making it illegal by September 2022.

Fr Joe Tynan PP of Killeely and Dromkeen in Limerick said that there must be an alternative fuel or compensation given to those who depend on its sale as part of their livelihood.

He told *The Irish Catholic*: "Everybody believes that we do have to move to a more sustainable form of living but a lot of the

time it's brought in so fast without a viable alternative in place – in many instances that is the case."

Changeover

"You want a gradual changeover. What you would be looking for is some form of compensation if people's livelihoods are taken away."

While the majority of his parishioners would not use or sell turf, in his former parish of Littleton, Co. Tipperary it would have been more widely used. There was also a briquette factory that was closed down.

"From a Littleton point of view, when the factory closed it was said priority would be given to finding

something else but ultimately you find down the road that nothing has happened. People are left then, and it's part of the rural Ireland feeling, abandoned. You get that feeling, that what happens down the country doesn't matter," Fr Tynan said.

"I know many households that would have a stove or a range which heats their home and they might not have oil or gas at all"

He added that people feel "shoved out" when a suitable and

inexpensive alternative is not identified for the fuel they normally buy.

The Aontú representative in Tuam in Co. Galway, Luke Silke, said the push from the Green Party "represents another attack on rural Ireland".

Understand

"I think the government don't understand how things work in the West of Ireland. I know many households that would have a stove or a range which heats their home and they might not have oil or gas at all," Mr Silke said, adding that for some elderly people turf would be used for cooking and as their main source of heat.

"They might be too elderly to cut their own turf, so they're relying on people to sell it to them or perhaps a family member to fill their shed with turf. The proposal by the Green Party will ban the sale and distribution of turf so it really leaves an elderly person in that situation stranded," he said.

Fr Andrew Doyle of Bohermee Parish, Co. Meath said that people still frequently cut turf at the nearby Jamestown bog.

Speaking of the Government measure, he said: "Locals will definitely be upset about it. They depend on it for their heat. There would be dozens in the parish who cut it still."

'God's Child' Bukayo Saka credits fearlessness to faith

Jason Osborne

Arsenal and England football star Bukayo Saka has spoken up about his gratitude to God and the importance of his faith in a recent interview with *GQ* magazine.

Bearing the moniker 'God's Child' on his Instagram, Mr Saka isn't shy about his faith, and he said it's because his Pentecostal

Christian faith is "very important" to him.

"When we were growing up we were taught by our parents to have faith in God," Mr Saka said.

Younger

"When you're younger you don't fully understand. But throughout life, you keep exercising your faith, so when you get into different challenges, you decide, 'this time

I'm going to trust God', and God comes through for you."

Mr Saka said that's how it kept "building and building" for him, so now he "can be confident and go into places knowing that God's got me".

"That's why a lot of times I can be fearless," he said.

Asked about his Yoruba name, Bukayo, during the interview, Mr Saka said his

grandmother gave it to him because of its meaning.

"It means 'God has added joy to my life.' She wanted me to add joy to the family, so she named me that...Every time she called me, that's probably what I meant to her."

Tagging many of his social media posts with the hashtag "GodsPlan", Mr Saka makes no mistake about where his sporting success comes from.



Bukayo Saka
Photo: Twitter

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Aontú committed to being 'voice for voiceless' Catholic schools

Ruadhán Jones

Aontú is committed to being a "voice for the voiceless" including Catholic and Irish language schools, East Derry candidate Gemma Brolly said.

Ms Brolly called the emphasis on integrated education "a distraction" from the education crisis.

"I feel that people don't realise the emergency that our education system is in," Ms Brolly, who is also a primary school teacher, told *The Irish Catholic*.

"The focus has been on changing the system and integrated education – I've nothing against integrated education, but there should be equality for all. There should be no hierarchy of one section

over another.

"It's almost like it's a distraction from the complete mess our education system is in. We are crying out for investment," Ms Brolly added.

Ms Brolly said that there is a picture being painted of Catholic schools that "there's somebody standing over children with a ruler drumming the catechism into them".

"That's not what happens – I came through that system and I teach in that system," the Aontú candidate said. "I feel our children need that Faith, they need to know it's there.

"In my school, we had children talk about their worries and what came up was about the Ukraine. And you know one thing we can tell children when they

cannot control anymore is to offer that up and pray."

She also warned that the Irish language has been politicised in the North, saying that "as a society we can do so much more through action without using it as a weapon".

Ms Brolly said that it is disappointing that parties she previously thought were a voice for her and her constituents no longer are. The parties "broke every law and belief" when they went and "begged" Westminster to intervene in Northern Ireland.

She wants to fill the "deafening silence" that they have left for many people, saying that she hopes "to be a voice for the voiceless".

Pope may meet controversial patriarch in Jerusalem

Staff reporter

Vatican officials are reportedly discussing extending Pope Francis' trip to Lebanon in June so he can fly to Jerusalem to meet Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, who has backed Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Their first meeting in 2016 was the first between a Pope and a leader of the Russian Church since the Great Schism in 1054.

Kirill has been widely criticised by other Christian leaders for giving his backing to the war. The plan is reportedly for the 85-year-old Pontiff, who is in Lebanon on June 12-13, to fly to Amman, Jordan on the morning of June 14. From there, he would board a helicopter to Jerusalem on the same day for the meeting with Kirill and then return to Rome from there.

'Outraged' NI voters tackle SDLP and Sinn Féin on abortion

Chai Brady

The SDLP and Sinn Féin are being challenged at doorsteps by "outraged" voters due to their position on abortion as the election in the North of Ireland approaches.

Pro-life group Precious Life say part of this is down to their campaigning to inform people about how abortion was "imposed" on the North following a decision made in Westminster

in 2019 when Stormont was defunct.

Speaking particularly about disappointment related to the SDLP, Bernadette Smyth of Precious Life said: "That particular time people were really lobbying the SDLP as the party that would stand with the DUP. By doing that they could have stopped the imposition of abortion. They had assured their constituents that they would work to stop the Westminster government. What happened is the SDLP walked out of Stormont which

meant there was no agreement that would have formed a government to stop the legislation."

She said that "people have really woken up" and pro-life Christian groups have come together on the issue.

"There's a great unification of nationalists and unionists coming together on the ground: the grassroots pro-lifers are really putting their energy into exposing what happened," Mrs Smyth added, saying there will be

many more pro-life candidates standing in the May 5 election.

"There's a new flavour in terms of Aontú as a nationalist pro-life party, people are yearning for something new in politics. We're seeing people outraged by the SDLP who now hold similar policies to Sinn Féin: they no longer hold a pro-life policy," she said.

"This was bound to happen at some stage because people are fed up with the old politics of Northern Ireland."

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Getting into the Sacraments



Students from year 8 of Trinity College Belfast get into their active learning about the sacraments in their latest unit of work, April 1.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Dáil committee told commercial surrogacy led to 'exploitation'

The Department of Justice has warned that commercial surrogacy in other countries has resulted in "exploitation", and that children are being given to parents with whom they have no genetic link.

An Oireachtas committee on international surrogacy was told that "bad actors" have exploited surrogate mothers, children and intending parents in countries where surrogacy is legal.

"We have seen some very

difficult examples in the past where, to be fair, intending parents were trying to do the right thing ... a lot of people got exploited by bad actors, where the egg that was purportedly supplied by a purported donor was not the egg. The child given to the intending parents had no genetic link," Andrew Munro of the Department of Justice told the committee.

World needs Easter more than ever, Primates' message

The Easter message of peace is more important than ever, Archbishop Eamon Martin and his Church of Ireland counterpart has said.

"How much the world needs to hear and embrace this message of an Easter peace which does not deny the reality of suffering and death," Archbishop Eamon and Dr John McDowell say in a joint message to mark the holy time. "From Ukraine to Tigray, from Syria to South Sudan, the

cross of Good Friday continues to cast its shadow in the suffering of millions caught up in the violence and aggression of war.

"Mercifully, also, the work of peacemakers and the enormous outpouring of love, welcome and humanitarian aid bears witness to the hope and promise of Easter peace that can never be extinguished by war or hatred," the Churchmen said.

French Catholics and President Macron

Emmanuel Macron, who is likely to remain President of France, was educated mainly by the Jesuits, at the Lycée la Providence in Amiens, and he chose to be baptised a Catholic at the age of 12. And according to a poll carried out by Ifop, 28% of French Catholics voted for him in the first round of the presidential election, and will continue to support him in the second. This is just above the national average.

“Catholic voters, says M. Pruvote, are not entirely at ease with their president on bioethical issues”

Samuel Pruvote, of the Catholic publication *Famille chrétienne* has conducted a series of interviews with Monsieur Macron over the years and reflects on the president's religious attitudes in a new book, *Conversations with the President*.

Catholic voters, says M. Pruvote, are not entirely at ease with their president on bioethical issues. President Macron's own



Mary Kenny

position is laissez-faire: he is not an enthusiast for euthanasia, or a supporter of universal IVF (French law has distinguished, in the past, between assisted conception for heterosexual married couples, and single people or gay couples). His instinct is to let matters drift and see how events turn out – a very political response.

Agnostic

Although he calls himself agnostic, President Macron believes in “some form of transcendence”, and in a force that is beyond the material. He has a religious sense, according to M. Pruvote, and while he exalts “science and enlightenment”, he doesn't think that progress is an excuse for anything and everything.

When M. Macron first declared himself as a candidate in 2017, he posed in front of the Basilica of St Denis, which holds many of the remains of French kings and queens. Samuel Pruvot considers this significant – that M. Macron regards the Catholic France of the pre-Revolutionary period a meaningful part of

the national story. He also believes the guillotining of King Louis XVI (in 1793) left a ‘hollow’ at the centre of French life.

“When he first became president, M. Macron's Jesuit educators spoke proudly of his achievement”

The president takes advice from a number of religious leaders, although he is critical of Islam. It's troubling to French politicians that 74% of French Muslims under the age of 25 say their allegiance to Islam is greater than their loyalty to France.

When he first became president, M. Macron's Jesuit educators spoke proudly of his achievement. They drew no judgement on his private life – marrying his former teacher after her divorce – but then, those occupying the Elysée Palace have seldom had uncomplicated personal lives!



Pope Francis and French President Emmanuel Macron are seen as they conclude an audience at the Vatican in 2021. Photo: Vatican Media

● Two prominent left-wing French philosophers, Michel Onfray and Éric Naulleau, have launched a fierce critique of surrogacy, in a best-selling book (*Le Gauche Réfractaire* – The Rebellious Left). The left, M. Naulleau writes, should have no part in “the merchandisation of the uterus of women.” Surrogacy is part of a “terrifying picture” which represents the exploitation of the human body.

M. Onfray, probably the most influential of public intellectuals, compares the women who are used surrogates to Victor Hugo's Fantine in *Les Misérables*, who sold her hair and her teeth for the use of others. “Today, a certain left exploits women, not in buying their hair and their teeth, but in renting their uterus to obtain children with their sperm...all the while explaining on television or in commentaries that this illegal commerce is all about love. They probably suggest that prostitution is also about love.”

Both claim that the traditional left has become part of the culture of consumerism, which tells us we are entitled to whatever we want because it is our ‘choice’.

Christians have raised ethical objections to surrogacy for some time, but it's interesting to see the critique coming from rigorous thinkers from a Marxist background.

The saintly side of France

France is a divided country: there is an invisible line running horizontally across the hexagon, from north-west to south-east, known as the St Malo-Geneva line. I hadn't known of this until my son Ed informed me about it on a trip to Brittany last week: it's an established

demographic delineating mostly rural France from mostly industrial France.

On the western side of the divide, many more towns, and especially villages and hamlets, are named after saints – St Malo itself, St Briec, St Servan, St Mathieu, St Renan, St Pol de

Léon, St Guénolé, St Nicolas-du-Pélem. East of the line, locational saints' names are rarer.

Breton towns also often have little Marian statues carved into the corner of a street building, a beguiling aspect of their local architecture.

● The choirboys of Winchester Cathedral, in Hampshire, walked a donkey through the town as part of their Palm Sunday service, invoking Our Lord arriving into Jerusalem on the beast G.K. Chesterton called “the tattered outlaw of the earth”.

Chesterton's poem *The Donkey* honours the humble donkey's “One far fierce hour and sweet/There was a shout about my ears/And palms before my feet.” Although Dermott the Winchester donkey does look rather well-fed for a tattered outlaw...

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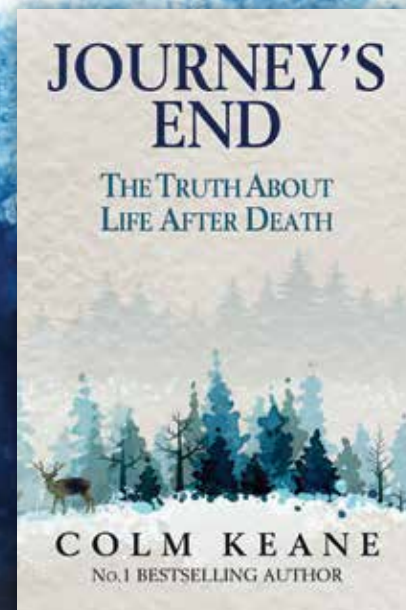
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Divorce affects children educationally more than death, recent study says

Jason Osborne

Parental divorce has a larger impact on youth educational attainment than parental death according to a new study published by *Demographic research*.

The study, based on data from 17 countries across Europe, shows that the negative effect of parental divorce on educational attainment seems to be stronger for children of higher-educated parents.

The study suggests that experiencing divorce may have a stronger impact on these

children as they have more to lose in terms of financial and non-financial resources.

Meanwhile, lower-educated parents traditionally accumulate lower "parental resources" than higher-educated parents, which means that the "drop-off" in resources for children resulting from divorce is less steep.

"Our results indicate that although both parental death and divorce harm children's educational attainment, their impacts differ across family and country contexts," the study reads.

"The consequences of divorce strongly

depend on the resources available in a family, while the effects of parental death are mitigated by educational and welfare policies."

Commenting on the study in *Unherd*, Dr Rakib Ehsan said that for decades, "the mainstream has consistently undervalued the negative impacts of divorce".

"The Demographic Research study confirms that parental divorce can be an incredibly traumatic experience for children. While it is admittedly sensitive territory, there now needs to be a frank national conversation on the risks of marital breakdown and the degree

of public respect for marriage as a social institution with moral obligations," he wrote.

The study also found that the impact on the educational attainment of children who experienced either parental death or divorce was not equal across social environments, which was taken as "underscoring the importance of recognising how children's family experiences affect their educational attainment".

"It thus remains important to find ways to help children from various backgrounds and with various experiences during their youth," the study reads.

Parties must commit to tackling paramilitary-style attacks, campaigning priest says

Ruadhán Jones

Fr Martin Magill said the issue of paramilitary style attacks such as beatings, shootings and assaults are an urgent human need that parties must commit to dealing with.

Speaking ahead of the North's election, Fr Magill warned that if the attacks continue and "if people do not see real improvement, it is inevitable that they feel forgotten".

"I could take you to some parts

of Belfast and I think you could conclude that they have been forgotten," he told *The Irish Catholic*.

The effects of the Good Friday agreement have not reached all communities yet, he added.

"There are still some communities where issues like poverty, unemployment and a lack of hope persist.

"Research shows that these sorts of areas are where most of these attacks will happen, there is a direct correlation," he continued.

"It's 24 years since the actual day of the signing of the Good Friday agreement and still we have these."

In 2021, there was an average of one paramilitary style attack in Northern Ireland every week.

"If that is not a human need to be dealt with urgently 24 years on, then I don't know what is," said Fr Magill, who is a member of Stop Attacks, a group committed to freeing communities from violence and trauma inflicted by criminal gangs.

'Safe zones' bill bans peaceful prayer, senator Keogan warns

Staff reporter

Senator Sharon Keogan has warned that a bill seeking to establish safe access zones around abortion facilities bans "peaceful and respectful citizens from praying silently for pre-born children".

The Safe Access to Termination of Pregnancy Services Bill 2021, which would establish "safe access zones" of 100m around premises that provide abortion and contraception services, was passed in the Seanad. The move comes despite the Garda Commissioner having said that such a bill is not neces-

sary.

Speaking during the debate on the bill, Senator Keogan tabled an amendment to exclude prayer from the bill as a prohibited action, calling it an "unconstitutional overreach".

"The Bill intends to prevent harassment, but it actually bans peaceful and respectful citizens from praying silently for pre-born children," Ms Keogan said.

The amendment was not carried, with one senator claiming that people pray outside clinics "to intimidate women who are accessing the health-care that is available".

The Feast of Mercy

Sunday 24th of April
Divine Mercy Sunday

St Saviours Church
Dominick Street
Dublin 1

Starts 2:30m p.m.

Confession - Mass - Communion - Veneration of the Image

These conditions that Jesus asked for in order to receive the special grace of complete pardon of all your sins with no punishment to serve. These conditions will be faithfully adhered to in this Church on this Feast of Mercy

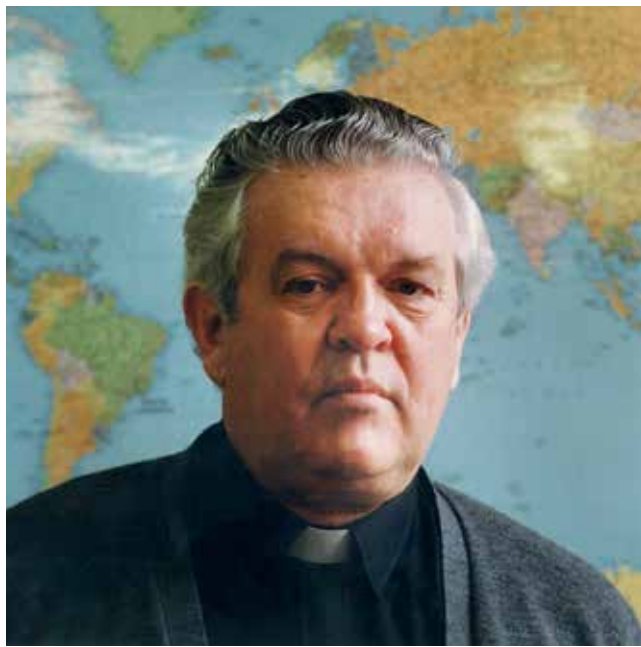
www.hudt.org

All God's creatures...



Altar server John O'Dwyer, playing Jesus, walks with Augustina the donkey and Noel Thynne on Palm Sunday in Kilshanny, Galway, with Fr Robert McNamara PP of Lisdoonvarna and Kilshanny and parishioners in the background.

“A legacy of *incredible* humanitarian significance”



Fr. Aengus Finucane.

The Irish Catholic looks at a rich and varied life lived in the service of others and of God.

Fr. Finucane was ordained as a Holy Ghost Priest in 1958. In his first assignment in Uli, Nigeria, Fr. Finucane found himself involved in the bitter civil war between Nigeria and Biafra.

Following Biafra's attempt to secede, this widespread conflict had displaced millions. What's more, there was a blockade of food, medicine and basic necessities by the Nigerian authorities.

At the height of the crisis in the summer of 1968, it was estimated 6,000 children died every week.

An Irish effort

In response to the Biafrans' terrible plight, Concern Worldwide – originally called Africa Concern – was founded and began raising awareness and funds to help those suffering.

On 6th September 1968, the 600 tonne, Columille set sail for Sao Tome – a Portuguese island close to West Africa. The cost of chartering the ship and its vital cargo of powdered food and medicines was all paid for with donations from the people of Ireland.

To circumvent the blockade, the supplies were then flown from Sao Tome to Biafra overnight. The following day in Uli, Fr. Finucane was among the Holy Ghost priests who would help distribute the life saving supplies.

With his commitment and

that of the Irish public and priests, this operation grew into one flight a day for 11 months.

Fr. Finucane was deeply committed to helping the poorest of the poor. So after leaving Biafra, in 1972 he became Concern's Field Director in Bangladesh after its war of independence from Pakistan – the war had left millions in desperate need of food.

The period after Fr. Finucane's time in Bangladesh was particularly testing. In Thailand's Kampuchea refugee camps he saw the desperation of Cambodians who had fled the Khmer Rouge's genocide.

And in Uganda the horror of HIV in Kampala, where even in the best hospitals one third of the children born were HIV positive.

Fr. Finucane worked tirelessly to alleviate suffering, and recognised his responsibility to help the poor and underprivileged.

Concern appointed Fr. Finucane as its Chief Executive in 1981.

During his 16 years as the head of the charity he was 'on the ground' during many of the world's worst disasters. These included the 1983-1985 famine in Ethiopia and the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Relinquishing his post in 1997, Fr. Finucane became Honorary President of Concern Worldwide US. He held this post until his death on 6th October 2009.

Fr. Finucane's legacy

Fr. Finucane is the cornerstone behind much of what Concern has become today. It was he who expanded its aid work into 11 countries and dramatically increased its fundraising.

Tom Arnold – Concern's CEO from 2001 to 2013 – says:

“There can be few Irish people of his generation, or of any other generation, who have contributed as much to improving the lives of so much of humanity.”

“He inspired a whole generation of Concern overseas volunteers.”

Fr. Finucane continues to inspire as his legacy still influences Concern 12 years after his death.

“Do as much as you can, as well as you can, for as many as you can, for as long as you can.”
– Fr. Aengus Finucane

In 2020 Concern worked in 23 countries, responding to 78 different emergencies, helping 36.9 million of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Concern's vision, mission and work continues to strive to end extreme poverty, whatever it takes. The charity believes that no-one should live in fear of not having enough food.

The devastation of climate change

Today one of the primary causes of acute food insecurity are weather extremes.

Climate change is increasing hunger levels and pushing even more people to the brink of famine. With multiple famines predicted, there are currently 41 million people teetering on the edge of starvation.

Extreme weather caused by climate change is having a devastating effect on the most vulnerable people in the world's poorest countries.

And these calamitous weather conditions are now more frequent and varied. No sooner has one disaster struck than another arrives. People don't have enough food for months, sometimes years on end.

In Malawi droughts, floods and strong weather patterns are a regular occurrence – placing huge stress

on land and crop production resulting in food shortages and hunger.

These weather extremes affect an already vulnerable population where 80% source their livelihoods from the land, 71% live below the poverty line and an estimated 20% are living in extreme poverty.

People like Yona Lambiki and his family.

Yona, a farmer, lives in Nkhambaza village with his wife and five children. He was always able to support his family with the crops and food he grew providing them with a healthy balanced diet. Any excess was sold, with some of the money used to pay for his children's schooling. But two years ago everything changed ...



Crops destroyed by Cyclone Idai.

In March 2019 Cyclone Idai caused devastating floods and loss of life in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The floods completely destroyed crops just weeks away from harvest – food people were relying on for survival.

Although his house wasn't affected, like thousands of others, the crops Yona was about to harvest were completely washed away. There was nothing for his family to eat, let alone any to sell.

Help for now and the future

But thanks to Concern's generous donors and Yona's hard work he is now able to look after his family again.

Yona immediately received a vital cash transfer from Concern. With this he bought food and other basic necessities his family needed to be safe and free from hunger.

Yona received seeds including maize, tomatoes, beans, three bundles of sweet potato vines and other vegetables to grow so he could, once again, support his family. He also received fertilizer and a hoe to help him grow his crops. As well as five goats for milk and manure.



Photo: Jason Kennedy / Concern Worldwide.

“I would really love to meet everyone that is behind this support so I could thank them in person.” – Yona Lambiki

Like other families in his community, Yona planted the seeds he received in his home garden. What they harvest is used to feed their families, any excess is sold to improve their livelihoods.

But Concern do far more than simply give communities plants, seeds and tools. They provide training in Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) to ensure long term, inter-generational support.

providing support for years – possibly decades – to come.

On speaking about the people who support Concern and make our work possible, he said, *“I'm so very happy with the support I have received from Concern. My life and family's life is healthy and can afford everything we could not afford before. I'm so happy and thankful to Concern.”*

Will Fr. Finucane inspire you too?

There's a way you, just like Fr. Finucane, can leave the world a better place. And help improve the lives of families like Yona's both now and for future generations.

How? By leaving Concern a gift in your Will.

When you leave a gift, your legacy lives on – helping for years to come.

*“I know that this is a very personal decision. But I assure you, **gifts in Wills have had a phenomenal impact in reducing extreme poverty, hunger and suffering around the world.** Today, as the catastrophic combination of conflict, climate change and COVID-19 have plunged so many people into the grip of crisis, **your gift will help us to be there in their time of need.**”*

– Dominic MacSorley, CEO, Concern Worldwide

Gifts in Wills are a vital source of funding for Concern.

Your legacy will help families like Yona's reverse the many struggles caused by Climate Change ...

... will provide the tools and knowledge they need to not just survive but help themselves – a gift from you they can pass down for generations.

To find out more about how a legacy gives a safe, secure future, please request your complimentary copy of 'A World Without Hunger' – Concern's legacy booklet.

You'll learn of others who desperately needed help, and how legacies from people just like you have done so much.

There are also answers to common questions people ask about leaving a gift in their Will. And explains how to get started.

Requesting your free booklet does not oblige you to do anything else.

To receive your free, no obligation booklet – in complete confidence – please contact Concern's Legacy Manager, Siobhán O'Connor. Call **01 417 8020**, email **siobhan.oconnor@concern.net**, or write to 52-55 Lower Camden Street, Dublin 2



Nuala O'Loan

The View



Easter is not about chocolate eggs – but love, sacrifice and redemption

It is the evening of Palm Sunday as I write this – just a few hours ago we came home from Armagh where the annual Mass for ‘the disappeared’ was celebrated by Archbishop Eamon Martin. It was a very poignant and sad occasion as we gave thanks for the recovery of the bodies of 14 people who were taken away by the IRA and murdered between 1972 and 1985, their bodies disappeared: Jean McConville, Eugene Simons, Peter Wilson, Eamonn Molloy, Brian McKinney, John McClory, Danny McIlhone, Gerry Evans, Charlie Armstrong, Gareth O'Connor, Brendan Megraw, Kevin McKee, Seamus Wright and Seamus Ruddy.

We prayed too for the return of the bodies of Joe

Lynskey, Seamus Maguire, Columba McVeigh and Robert Nairac who were also murdered and disappeared by the IRA.

It is 50 years this year since widowed Jean McConville was snatched away from her ten children, the youngest of them six year old twins. Her body was found in 2003. Kevin McKee and Seamus Wright were also abducted in 1972. Their bodies were found in 2015, 43 years later.

Recovery

We prayed too, for the recovery of the body of Lisa Dorian who disappeared in 2005 and whose murderer was reported to be associated with loyalist paramilitaries.

As I contemplate the journey of Jesus on Palm Sunday,

as he rode into Jerusalem to welcome and acclaim, but within days was arrested and sentenced to death, I think always of his loving mother Mary who watched and waited. Great must her pain have been, her terror, her anguish as they took him away, tortured him and sentenced him to death, and then crucified him.

“Jesus Christ died to redeem our sins, our evil over 2,000 years ago”

She had lived through wondrous things. Her baby's conception was miraculous. When he was just weeks old Mary and Joseph took him to the Temple, as they were required to do. There they

met the “just and devout” old man, Simeon, who, seeing their baby son, prayed, “Lord bid your servant go in peace. These eyes have seen salvation's dawn, this child so long foretold.” What did this mean to Mary and Joseph? Simeon also told Mary, “a sword will pierce even your own soul.” Did she always fear that something terrible would happen to her lovely boy, her strong young son?

Each of ‘the disappeared’ was some mother's, some father's beautiful, loved and precious child. Others loved them so much too: siblings, spouses, children, friends, and for each family there have been those long and terrible years of not knowing where they were, years of anguish and pain – for each of them it was and is a terrible cross to carry.

As the bodies were found, one after another, they have gathered together to give the loved and lost one a Christian burial, and they gather each year to give thanks for the work of those who laboured, often in terrible conditions, to find the bodies so that they could bring them home, and they pray for those who are still disappeared, pleading for those who know something to come forward and tell what they know. They are brave people. They comfort one another and care for one another and walk with one another on this unspeakable journey. They are wonderful.

Suffering

This terrible suffering is such a stark example of the evil of which man is capable. We have seen more of it in the last weeks, as we have seen the terrible slaughter of men, women and children in Ukraine at the hands of Russian troops. We have seen homes destroyed, cities pulverised by bombing, lives destroyed. As we watch the news, night after night and hear of the killing and torture, see the bodies lying in the street, in mass graves, we know that there must be so many people who do not know where their loved ones are, whether they are still alive or are dead. Last week we were told that 2,389 Ukrainian children have been abducted to Russia. What has happened to these children and to the other people who have been taken away from their families?



There are many in Ireland, like the families of the disappeared, of those who were murdered, maimed and whose lives were destroyed who know something of this horror, those who carry still the scars and anguish of trauma and loss. These things do not heal easily. The people of Ukraine have a long hard journey ahead as they try to rebuild their lives when the war is ended. The families of those Russian soldiers who have died fighting a war so many of them seemed not to want to be involved in, are suffering too – they too may never know where their precious sons and daughters lie.

“Each of ‘the disappeared’ was some mother's, some father's beautiful, loved and precious child”

We hope and we pray that the evil of the war in Ukraine and the other wars in the world today will end. We pray for healing for all those who suffer.

Jesus Christ died to redeem our sins, our evil over 2,000 years ago. As we contemplate his death and resurrection we know that even in the ongoing darkness of our Troubles, even in places like Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan and Tigray there is light, even in the hopelessness there is hope. Easter is not about bunnies and chocolate eggs – it is about love and sacrifice and redemption. What we have to do is to play our part as best we can in trying to ensure that wars come to an end, that countries are rebuilt, that children can begin to go to school again, that there will be hospitals to care for the sick and bring new life into the world, that people can live safely, with freedom, dignity and respect. Above all we have to make time in our busy lives to be with those whom we meet, who suffer still from what happened to them as a consequence of whatever evil they encountered.

As we celebrate Easter we are reminded again of the great goodness that pervades this wonderful world, and of our call to be holy, to love as Christ has loved us: completely.

ALL IRELAND Rosary Rally

SAT, JUNE 4TH
FROM 1.30 PM
KNOCK

Talk, Stations of the Cross,
Rosary and Holy Mass

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Thaddeus Okolo, Papal Nuncio to Ireland
Homilist: Bishop Michael Duignan

Rosary Talk: Fr Marius O'Reilly



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Christian Children In Iraq Are Targets of Discrimination

—They Need Our Help Today!

Dear Friend & Irish Catholic Reader,

I'm writing on behalf of Family & Life with grim news about the increased persecution of Christians in Iraq – courageous Christians who suffer terribly and depend on our prayers and support today.

While the war with ISIS has disappeared from our TV screens, the war to 'purge' Iraq of its Christian heritage and people is in full swing.

Destroy Christian villages and wipe out all traces of Christianity in Iraq

Since the war with ISIS, Family & Life has worked with our suffering brethren in the north of Iraq. We have helped persecuted Christians in the Iraqi villages of Nalu, Smil and other Christian villages in northern Iraq...

† We have helped rebuild a church destroyed by the terrorist group, ISIS.

† Last year we provided the Christian hospital with essential medical equipment when Iraq's government diverted a delivery of urgent hospital supplies.

† We helped equip a Christian orphanage with computers for the children

† Family & Life provided Christian farmers with farm equipment, seed and fertilizer...

...We also funded a school bus and security for children travelling to and from school... plus so much more, thanks to the readers of the Irish Catholic.

Here is how our Christian brethren are persecuted on a daily basis:

- Radical Muslim militia forces are growing rapidly and now threaten the security of one of the largest Christian cities in the region
- Christian families who fled Iraq to places like the Lebanon and Jordan are

prevented from returning home, others have had their homes stolen.

- Christian villages have had their names changed to remove any link to Christianity...
- The Christian villages we aid cannot afford their own school textbooks, so they are forced to use textbooks provided by Iraq's government – textbooks that promote Muslim culture and even claim that major Biblical figures are Muslim!

These young parents are trying to rebuild their communities, especially their schools and they need our help.

What our persecuted Christian friends need from us now...

St. Paul's is a Christian school serving a number of villages in the Nineveh Plains. For years, St. Paul's school was held by ISIS. They used St. Paul's as a terrorist centre. Christians were tortured and murdered there.

Here is one of many such stories...

... Almost all of the children at the now-reopened St Paul's experienced ISIS terrorism in one form or another. One of the boys (I'll call him "Daniyel" to protect his identity) lost his father to ISIS terrorists. Daniyel was only five years old when ISIS terrorists seized his father, severely beat him and then subjected the father to public execution.

I regret having to tell you Daniyel's story, but it powerfully illustrates how Iraqi Christians – especially children suffered and need and deserve our prayers and help.

The immediate needs at St. Paul's school include printing new 'Christian' textbooks, purchasing school desks and chairs. Family & Life has been asked for €8,000 to help provide these urgent supplies. God willing, we will provide them while making sure that

none of our essential pro-life, pro-family programmes suffer.

Two ways you and I can help provide this essential aid:

First, you and I must intensify our prayers for these persecuted Iraqi Christians. An extra prayer will take only a minute a day and it will cost nothing.

Then, we must make a financial sacrifice – one that will help the children attending St Pauls overcome the hardships they currently endure.

As always, we will raise the funds needed through gifts in these amounts...

€50 €75 €100 €150
€200. €250 €500

Are you in a position to sacrifice €1000, €1500, or even €2000? This would be an amazing blessing, but almost all of what we raise will come from gifts of €50 to €500 and in between. So please, in your charity for our persecuted Christian brethren in Iraq, will you make one of those sacrifices today?

Our Iraqi brethren are becoming the world's "forgotten Christians". If we don't help them who will?

With sincere thanks for your prayers and sacrifice,



David Manly
Family & Life

Ps. Please remember what these Christian children in Iraq are subjected to: Their government forces them to study textbooks that lie about their Christian culture. Help change this! Please post the Reply Section below to our FREEPOST address. Alternatively, you can donate securely on line at donate.familyandlife.org or you can phone a donation to our office on **01-8552145**

Other ongoing projects of Family & Life...

- Family & Life helps lead the fight against late-term abortion... our Educate for Life programme reaches students in classrooms across Ireland... our Leadership Academy trains volunteers to become future pro-life leaders... our panel of experts deliver public information talks every week, and our social media platforms promote the sanctity of life to over 150,000 followers...
- We also aid crisis pregnancy centres in Africa and other countries... especially in remote parts of Latin America, providing pro-life services that would otherwise be unavailable....
- Plus many more pro-life programmes that help families and save babies lives!

CUT OUT REPLY

URGENT REPLY... ... To aid Christians suffering persecution in Iraq

Cut out and FREEPOST to:
David Manly, Family & Life, 25 Mountjoy Square,
Freepost, Dublin 1, Ireland

Dear David,

☐ **YES!** I share your outrage at the persecution of Christians in Iraq – especially forcing Christian children to abandon their heritage!

Enclosed is my maximum gift of...

☐ €50 ☐ €75 ☐ €100 ☐ €125 ☐ €150

☐ €250 ☐ €500 ☐ €750

☐ I can make an extra special sacrifice:

☐ €1,500 ☐ €2,500 ☐ €5,000

Family & Life depends on gifts in ALL amounts. So if we can count on you for some other amount, please enter it here €_____

(Please make your gift payable to **Family & Life**)

This gift is from:

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You can also phone our donation hotline at **01-8552145**. Or donate now Securely online at: donate.familyandlife.org.

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www.familyandlife.org www.prolife.ie info@familyandlife.org

The resurrection of Jesus is an event for every day

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester
O'Flynn
OFM Cap.



Easter Sunday is the most important day of the year. Pope St Paul VI said that the resurrection is the unique and sensational event on which the whole of human history turns. It is so central to our Christian belief that St Paul wrote: "If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing is useless" (1 Cor. 15:14).

Beginning with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening up to Easter Sunday we celebrate what is called the Paschal Triduum. Paschal comes from a word meaning a journey or a passing and triduum means three days. So, in plain English this means a three-day journey through death and resurrection. "He was raised to life on the third day."

If you think of it, the third day is part of the storyteller's stock in trade. On the first day the problem arises: on the second day, there is no way out of it; but on the third day, the unexpected happens and all is changed.

Three-day Celebration

Nowadays we hold that a new day begins after midnight, but back in Jesus' time a day was measured from sundown to sundown. As the Last Supper was held after darkness had fallen, what we call Thursday night was the commencement of Friday for the Jews of that time, the first day of the three-day story. At the end of the meal, Judas allowed Satan to enter him and he turned his back on Jesus, the light of the word to walk out. Night had fallen. Then followed the agony in Gethsemane, the arrest and trial of Jesus, his crucifixion and death. Jesus died at the ninth hour - 3pm on our clock. It was just before sundown when his burial took place. And so ended the first of the three days.

The second day is when all seems lost. The Apostles' Creed says the Christ descended into hell. This is not suggesting that he

experienced the state of damnation. Hell originally meant the hiding place of the dead. Christ who came down to save all people, embraced all who lived and died before his time on earth. We call this day Holy Saturday.

After sundown, the third day has begun. The Easter Vigil commences in darkness. A fire is lit, the Paschal Candle receives the light, it is passed on to the congregation and the *Exultet* proclaims that Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld. The ceremony reaches its climax when we renew our baptismal promises, renouncing Satan's evil ways and committing ourselves to Jesus Christ.

Mystery of faith

When we are invited to proclaim the mystery of faith, one formula expresses it as an event of past, present and future. "Christ has died", an event of past history: "Christ is risen", in the present tense: "Christ will come again", looking with hope towards the future of joining Christ in heav-

en. Christ has conquered sin and death, and he invites us to walk the road of life as a risen people. The resurrection of Jesus is an event for every day.

Resurrection continues

Pope Francis has written: "Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated the world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 276). Yet the struggle goes on and the dreadful lies and violence which Jesus experienced continue today in the sufferings inflicted on the people of Ukraine as well as other, less publicised, war-zones. Pope Francis is aware of the ongoing machinations of Satan, identified by Jesus as the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning. His apostolic exhortation continues: "often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and suffering." Yet, even in the present-

day repetition of Calvary, Pope Francis could see glimpses of the resurrection. "But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life, and sooner or later, produces fruit. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads." Because of the war in Ukraine, virtually every country in the world is suffering because of spiralling inflation. Migrants are welcomed, regardless of the cost. The fruits of goodness are to be seen in the generosity, hospitality and sacrifices shown by other nations to those forced to migrate.

Jesus is in solidarity

The quotation from Pope Francis continues: "Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who are evangelised are instruments of that power."

Perhaps we thought that the horrors of two world wars in the Twentieth Century would ensure that human beings would never again engage in such evil.

This Easter, let us all put extra energy into the renewal of our Baptism

as we renounce the evil ways of Satan and commit ourselves to the ways of Jesus. The kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus Christ, is one of justice and peace, truth and kindness, respect and reverence. The resur-

rection is not just an event of the past but it is the source of power to transform humanity. In a sense, Christ is not fully risen until he is risen in us. And one weapon at our disposal is constant prayer for peace.

Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred let us bring your love, Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt let us bring faith, Where there is despair let us bring hope. Where there is darkness, light, And where there is sadness, joy. Alleluia!

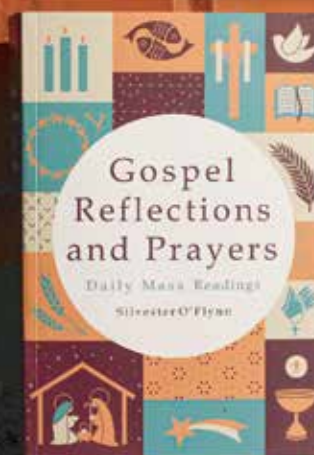


Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene After the Resurrection by the Russian painter Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov. Photo: CNS

“Beginning with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening up to Easter Sunday we celebrate what is called the Paschal Triduum”

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Doon CBS students confirmed in the Faith

Ruadhán Jones

Students from fifth and sixth class in Doon Christian Brother primary school received the Sacrament of Confirmation, April 6.

Archbishop of Cashel and Emly Kieran O'Reilly and Fr Jimmy Donnelly PP officiated the ceremony in St Patrick's Church, Doon, Co. Limerick.



Roy Collins pictured with Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly and his family.



Pupils from Doon CBS Primary School who received the Sacrament of Confirmation pictured with Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly and Parish Priest Fr Jimmy Donnelly.



Cian Murphy pictured with Archbishop O'Reilly.



Ronan Hanrahan pictured with Archbishop O'Reilly and his family.



Aaron Morris pictured with Archbishop O'Reilly and his family after his confirmation in Doon Parish Church.

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Pilgrims flock to Holy Land for Easter

Optimism abounds in the Holy Land with the relaxing of Covid-19 rules leading to a fresh wave of pilgrims visiting the holy sites associated with the earthly life of Christ.

Apart from local Christians, the sites remained largely shuttered for two years due to the pandemic but a more relaxed attitude from Israeli authorities is breathing new life into the pilgrimage season.

Thousands of Christians from all over the world have made their way to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth this

week to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and retrace the way of the cross in the Old City.

Pilgrims with *The Irish Catholic* were the first Irish pilgrims to return to the Holy Land in late February, and now the newspaper is inviting pilgrims for two trips scheduled for the autumn.

Accompanied by Editor of *The Irish Catholic* Michael Kelly and spiritual directors Fr Eamonn Conway and Fr Emlyn McGinn, the pilgrims will experience what many describe as the 'fifth Gospel'.

"After two years of not being able to travel, we hope people will jump at

the chance to follow in the footsteps of Christ," Michael Kelly said this week. "I have been blessed to be leading pilgrims to the Holy Land for more than 15 years and it is an unforgettable experience.

"It never ceases to touch me to be with people as they experience the Holy Land for the first time and the Bible really comes to life for them and their faith is enhanced," Mr Kelly said.

The first pilgrimage is due to leave Dublin on October 1 and the second group is due to depart on October 6. For more details see below, or email michael@irishcatholic.ie



Catholics sing while holding olive branches as they walk the traditional path that Jesus took on his last entry into Jerusalem during the Palm Sunday procession on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem at the weekend.



Worshippers pray in Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the Stone of Unction where the body of Jesus was prepared for burial. Photos: CNS

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**HOLY
LAND**

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OCTOBER 2022

AND

6 – 14

OCTOBER 2022

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SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS



Fr Eamonn Conway
(1st trip)



Fr Emlyn McGinn
(2nd trip)

Eight-night pilgrimage in four-star hotels

- Luxury air-conditioned coach daily
- Breakfast and evening meal served each day
- Full religious programme organised by Marian Pilgrimages
- Services of Marian Pilgrimages representative and professional English-speaking guide throughout the pilgrimage
- Full-day guided tour of Jerusalem including visits to the Western Wall, Dome of the Rock, Church of St Anne, Via Dolorosa, Holy Sepulchre and Shrine of the Book
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Church must regain the nerve to teach unpopular things



It is time to step up and embrace the call to prophetic witness, writes **David Quinn**

A strange thing has happened since the abortion referendum of 2018, namely the Church in Ireland has almost completely stopped talking about the issue. Church leaders rarely preach about marriage and the family either, or more accurately, about why we think marriage is the permanent and indissoluble union of a man and a woman.

In fact, contrary to popular belief, it is extremely rare for a priest or bishop to ever talk about sexual morality.

“However, this does not stop the Church preaching about issues like poverty and climate change”

In addition, although assisted suicide is becoming a hot topic of public debate, and is very much on the cards, politically speaking, we hear very little from the Church about this either. It's all very strange. What explains the relative silence? A few factors, I believe.

One is the effect of the scandals. These have enormously damaged the moral authority of the Church and undermined its capacity to gain an audience for what it has to say.

However, this does not stop the Church preaching about issues like poverty and climate change. On these matters, it doesn't seem to believe it should remain silent due to the scandals. Why is this?

The reason is factor two;



Fr Maurice Colgan OP administers ashes on people's foreheads in St Mary's Church in Cork on Ash Wednesday. Photo: CNS

liberals (I use the term advisedly) don't mind the Church speaking up on these matters because Church preaching about poverty and climate change does not clash with the predominant liberal consensus.

On the other hand, what the Church has to say about the right-to-life, marriage, and sexual morality generally, very much does clash with it. When the Church speaks up on these issues it can expect a backlash, and to be reminded about the scandals, and so a lot of the time it seems to conclude that discretion is the better part of valour.

Related to this is factor three, which is that the Church doesn't want to alienate people from the general Gospel message. If people become annoyed by Church teaching on issues like marriage and sexuality, they are less likely to listen to it on anything else, and therefore it is best not to say much, if anything, about them. Worse, speaking out about controversial matters might even drive some people towards agnosticism or atheism and away from religion altogether.

Sexual morality

A fourth factor is that some people in the Church, including priests and religious, don't really believe anymore what the Church has always taught about sexual morality and so on. They think the teaching on matters like divorce, contraception, homosexuality etc is flat out wrong and should be changed. They are working away to bring this about, and when they are not doing that publicly and explicitly, they stay silent altogether and ignore these issues.

A fifth factor is that Pope Francis has 'dialled down' on

these topics compared with John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Many bishops and priests are happy to follow his lead. Except they overdo it. In fact, Pope Francis is often very outspoken about issues such as abortion, assisted suicide and gender ideology. He has compared abortion with hiring a mafia hitman. He has condemned assisted suicide as part of the 'throwaway society' which encourages us to get rid of anything considered 'burdensome'. If bishops and priests were really following the lead of the Pope, they should say things like this, but they very rarely do.

“You need plenty of training to be able to do it, or do lots of reading independently”

A sixth reason is that it has become hard to preach effectively on these topics. If you do, you will have to defend yourself in depth, maybe even on Liveline. That's not a bit easy. You need plenty of training to be able to do it, or do lots of reading independently.

Even the priests who believe the Church is right about these matters might still harbour a doubt, deep down, that the teaching on something like divorce is really compassionate. In other words, the Gospel requirement to show compassion seems to contradict Jesus's own very strict teaching about divorce. (Even if you take the traditional Protestant view that Jesus allowed adultery as a ground for divorce, his teaching is still extremely strict by modern standards).

What is to be done in response? The most important

thing is probably to devote far more attention to training priests in what the Church teaches what it does about these topics, and to show why it makes sense.

Personal autonomy

For example, why is it that these teachings in particular clash so badly with the prevailing liberal consensus? The answer is that they are a direct challenge to the modern, liberal emphasis on personal autonomy.

The ideology of choice says that people should be able to marry whom they please, or simply live with someone if that suits them better. They should be able to divorce when their marriage no longer makes them happy. If a pregnancy occurs at an inconvenient time in their lives (inconvenient to the boyfriend, perhaps), there should be a right to terminate it.

If we become inconvenient to ourselves, or others,

because we are very sick, then we should have the right to end our lives, with the assistance of a doctor, if need be.

“The Church needs to regain the nerve and the confidence to preach on these matters”

If you stand in the way of any of these things, then you are told you lack compassion. Furthermore, you are violating the new 'sacred' value of choice.

In fact, our new 'sacred' value is heaping misery upon misery because in net terms it is doing far more harm than good. Marriage itself has become disposable, and so have our very lives. In England, they have just made it easier to divorce a spouse against their will. (So much

for 'choice'). A new study shows that from an educational point of view, the divorce of parents can cause a child more damage than the death of a parent.

Abortion in the name of 'choice' obviously means the death of a child, and euthanasia the death of someone who is very old or very sick or, as in some jurisdictions, simply 'tired of life'.

True Christian compassion means helping someone with their burden, not assisting them to eliminate it in the ways described above. 'Choice' is piling up the casualties, often literally, and the Church does no good at all when it remains almost silent in the face of it.

The Church needs to regain the nerve and the confidence to preach on these matters. It must do so with due sensitivity and skill, but do it all the same. It is a matter of both prophetic witness and urgent pastoral need.



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Uncovering the role of women in the early Church



Profs Helen Bond and Joan Taylor continue to bring women's role in the early Church before the public's eyes, writes Jason Osborne

Anyone with any experience of Church-circles will know that the role of women in the Church has been a hot topic of conversation, debate, argument and more in recent years in particular. Two women who've contributed much to this discussion are Professors Helen Bond and Joan Taylor, best known for their popular Channel 4 documentary *Jesus' Female Disciples*. Attracting an audience in the UK of 1.4 million and proving itself one of the most talked about religious shows in decades at the time, the appetite for further discussion of the

topic was evident to them.

Their latest offering is *Women Remembered: Jesus' Female Disciples*, in which the professors use their extensive familiarity with the history of the early Church and its texts to re-examine and uncover the central roles women played as disciples, teachers and messengers of esteemed standing in the early Christian community.

Hopes and motivations

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism at King's College London Joan Taylor told of their hopes and motivations behind their new book.

"We had various different hopes. I mean, in some ways, we hoped that we could follow through from our documentary on Jesus' female disciples and really build something that developed things in more detail because in a documentary as you know, we can only skim the surface," Prof. Taylor says.

"We were getting this kind of request from our audiences saying, 'Well, where's the book that goes with the documentary?' People were feeling like there was all this material that we were aware of and they just didn't know about it.

"And in fact, a lot of the things we presented in the documentary and talk about are things that have been known in academic circles for a long time. The techniques we use in terms of our historical study, it's a particular technique of working that has been around in academia since the 1980s. Looking at the sort of evidence there is for women widely in the Churches, not only within sort of heterodox, gnostic

circles, but also in the mainstream of the Church. All of this has been very well picked over, actually, by academics, but it's just not really got out there to the wider public so I think a lot of what we're doing is trying to make a lot of what is known accessible to the sort of audiences that appreciated the documentary and come along to our Church talks."

Professor of Christian Origins and Head of the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh Helen Bond adds that they just want to "put them [women] back into the story".

“We’re told that women are leaders of house churches, women are missionaries, women are apostles”

"It does seem sometimes like people know nowadays that Mary Magdalene was there too. Whenever you see a modern representation of Jesus and the disciples, it's Jesus, the twelve and one woman. Everybody of course knows that the mother of Jesus was there at the beginning and she pops up again at the end, and what we're wanting to say is, if you just look at the texts, there are loads and loads of women, a lot of them are even named, a lot of them don't have names, but still, they're there, right at the thick of things. We wanted to just, sort of, put them back into the story," she says.



You don't have to do "too much digging around" in order to do this, Prof. Bond says.

"They are there, you just need to read the texts. I mean, a really good example is the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 16. It has a third of the people, it's just a snapshot of the people that Paul knows in the Roman Church, a third of them are women.

New Testament

"We're told that women are leaders of house churches, women are missionaries, women are apostles. We see elsewhere in the New Testament that women are teachers. Women have all of these roles, and it's very clear, and even Paul's great letter to the Romans, it's very obvious that he sends that by a woman," Prof. Bond says.

"Phoebe is the one who reads out this letter and so Phoebe is the first interpreter of Paul. It's all there in the

biblical record, you don't even have to scratch the surface too hard to find it. By scratching around, I think you can uncover a lot more as well. I think it's great that this is finally capturing popular imagination and people are starting to ask about the women and starting to become aware of just the vast number of women that are there, but it's very clear."

Prof. Taylor laughs as she says that there's a sense in which with this new book, they're just pointing out "the blindingly obvious". She says the women are there for all to see, but that much of the focus is placed on the men in the text.

"It is the case that gospel texts shine the light on the men more than the women. That is just simply because it was part of a world that was patriarchal and they were interested in what men do. There were various reasons why the gospel texts do that, and some of those reasons are,



Professors Joan Taylor and Helen Bond.

they're defending themselves against the sort of critiques out there in the wider world that Christianity was a womanly religion, and it was based on the testimony of a delirious woman.

"You think about the story of Jesus and the twelve, the twelve configured as twelve men, the twelve abandon him completely before he dies. He has a horrible execution on a cross, which is not a very manly thing for a great leader. His men are nowhere around. The women are there at the cross, they're the ones who really will have passed on all the traditions that we have of Jesus: on the cross, his burial and the empty tomb, and very significant in terms of the resurrection experiences," Prof. Taylor explains.

“As historians, we are very keen to try and understand what those first few decades were like without the latest spin”

"So, on plain reading, this is a very womanly story, so you can see the gospel texts actually being very conscious of gender and thinking, 'We need to shift this around to make it much more masculine'. So, then what happens is the women are there and they get named, but the light isn't shone on them. The light is shone on the men to make it much more of a masculine story."

Asked about the concerns many people have these days about the re-reading of Scripture in light of what could be understood as "modern" issues, and how easy (or how difficult) it is to separate the temporal trappings of Scripture from the eternal truths of Christianity, Prof. Bond says that as historians and coming from Christian traditions themselves, they're always trying to get to the truth of the matter

historically and theologically.

"We're trying to unmask what things were like in the first century and I suppose because we both come from Christian traditions, we're also interested in Christianity and the truths and the theology behind all of this, too. So, we have those double interests.

"As historians, we are very keen to try and understand what those first few decades were like without the latest spin. I can completely understand that people say, 'This is a modern concern, that the texts aren't interested in women'. Of course, that is right, but the thing is you've got to get back behind the texts, behind the texts that Joan has rightly said are so masculine, so androcentric, so patriarchal, and ask what things were like early on.

Evidence

"There's plenty of evidence that the texts have spun the story in a particular way. When you think about early Christianity too, it's what people call a millenarian movement, so it's a movement that very much expects the end of the world is going to come really, really soon. You can tell that from Paul's early letters, from the whole way that they arrange themselves.

"And so there's lots of very good evidence, both reading between the lines in the texts and from general cultural and sociological knowledge, that makes us very confident that although we are feminists, what we're doing here is not primarily or just reading modern concerns back

into the texts," she says.

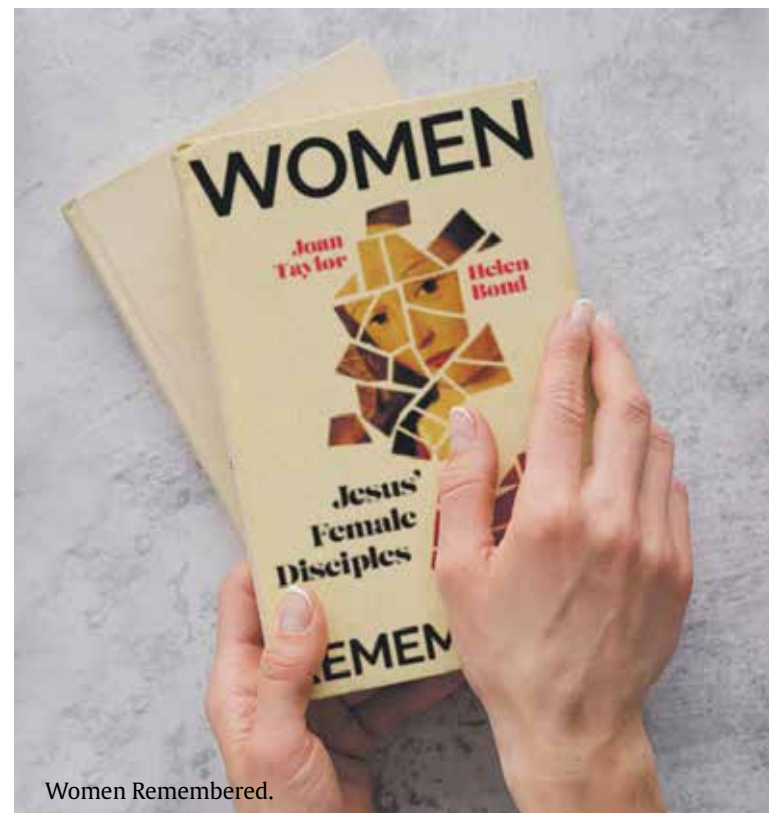
Profs Bond and Taylor don't confine themselves to the gospel texts, but make use of non-canonical and historical sources too in an effort to get a better sense of how the women around Jesus were portrayed and understood in the decades and centuries after Christ's death and resurrection.

“That it was actually part of the mainstream, Christian tradition, and it goes in all sorts of different directions”

"I think the non-canonical gospels have really claimed some public awareness in terms of the gnostic gospels and what people know is that... Mary Magdalene being configured now as the woman among the group of men because she does have a very important role in the gnostic gospels, but so do other women like Martha or Salome or Arsinoe, the totally unknown Arsinoe who pops up in one of the texts. They just get mentioned by-the-by, they're just among the group and they ask questions of Jesus and he answers them respectfully, so that is the gnostic gospels," Prof. Taylor says.

"But actually, in the documentary and in our book, while we're interested in the more non-mainstream

“The women are there at the cross, they're the ones who really will have passed on all the traditions that we have of Jesus: on the cross, his burial and the empty tomb, and very significant in terms of the resurrection experiences”



Women Remembered.

material, we generally tend to focus more on what is mainstream because that means that it can't just be dismissed as some marginal, weird thing in these heretical sects. That it was actually part of the mainstream, Christian tradition, and it goes in all sorts of different directions.

Middle Ages

"In the Middle Ages, there were great stories told about these women disciples and certainly in the early Middle Ages, there were great opportunities for women within the Churches as well. Abbesses were very powerful, the monastic culture of the Middle Ages provided enormous opportunities for women and in that context, a lot of these women disciples were greatly esteemed and stories were told about them."

Prof. Bond says it's important to note that these women obviously weren't Christian from the very beginning, as Christianity began as a Jewish movement, and it was within the Jewish context that they lived and acted from.

"I think it's important to say that they obviously weren't Christian women at the beginning, they were part of a Jewish movement and so what we're talking about largely are Jewish women who are believing in Jesus as their Christ. So we're very keen not to say that Jesus comes along, good Christianity, Jesus the feminist, and against this sort of bleak picture of womanhood in Judaism. These women can act in this way because the Jewish society around them allowed them to act in this way," Prof. Bond says.

"Clearly within this movement, this early Christian movement that was Spirit-inspired, charismatic, millenarian and waiting for the kingdom of God at any moment, women were

doing all the things that men were doing. And I think it's very important because of the patriarchal nature of the society, that your male disciples could go and preach to men standing in the market place, for example, but they would have had trouble going to women washing their clothes by the bank of a river. That would have been considered quite scandalous and certainly a man going into a woman's house and touching her, maybe, baptising her, healing her with oil - you couldn't have done that because of the gendered nature of society.

“We're at a time where we need to rethink again and all of this energy is going to go somewhere good”

"So you need women, on a very practical level, you need women to spread the message and I think it's no accident that we frequently see men and women as joint pairs, either married men and women or as sister-brother pairs, going around. Prisca and Aquila, we hear of lots of other pairs like that who go around, and presumably, that's so that they can have this double-mission to men and women, and get everybody," she says.

Prof. Taylor says that what they're really trying to do is "restore a sense of balance" in terms of the understanding of women's role in the Church, and that the way forward involves creativity and a willingness to let the Spirit move.

"I think one has to be creative and let things happen and let the Spirit move in whatever way it's going to move today because just restoring the order of widows is probably not going to be the solution. I think it's an interesting time. We're at a time where we need to rethink again and all of this energy is going to go somewhere good."

Pope Benedict – a man in love with God



Peter Seewald's extensive biography gives invaluable insight into Benedict XVI's life, writes Ruadhán Jones

“His resignation, and not just his resignation, showed anyone saying that this pope was ‘conservative’ how nonsensical that reductionist label was,” writes Peter Seewald in the second volume of his monumental biography of Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI.

Although this comment comes in the latter stages of the book (page 517 of 540), it could well stand as summary of Seewald's mission and his style. While many have sought to reduce Benedict XVI to a caricature – the grand inquisitor or the panzer cardinal, a stuffy and cold academic – Seewald's dense and argumentative study seeks to dismantle the myths and build up a truer reflection of the first pope to voluntarily resign in almost 1,000 years.

There are few men as well equipped for the task. Throughout his career, Seewald has remained one of the writers closest to Pope-emeritus Benedict. The first volume of his comprehensive biography *Benedict XVI: A Life* came out in 2020 and focused on Benedict's life up to the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

The second volume, subtitled *Volume II: Professor and Prefect to Pope and Pope-emeritus – 1966–The Present*, was published late in 2021 and follows Benedict from his life as Prof. Joseph Ratzinger, then onto Archbishop and Cardinal Ratzinger, before finally tackling his service to the Church as Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013). The post-resignation period is hardly covered – one of the few major disappointments of the book – except by brief excerpts of recent interviews with the retired pope.

A man in love

The overall impression Seewald gives of Benedict is a man fired by a great love for God. As a professor, as a cardinal and as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, he was not involved in a disinterested pursuit of knowledge; he was inspired by a love of the truth found in Christ's person.

It surprised many, Seewald writes, that the theologian-pope's first encyclical was not a densely



Pope Benedict XVI receives his book *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Sign of the Times* from its writer, German Catholic journalist Peter Seewald, during a 2010 meeting at the Vatican. Photos: CNS

argued work of theology, but a discourse on God as love. *Deus Caritas Est*, which translates to God is love, had a “poetic chore” in which Pope Benedict “had not raised individual questions of morals or doctrine but expressed fundamental trust in love's victory over injustice”, Seewald says.

“Seewald attacks the myth at its roots, with an impressive control over the facts”

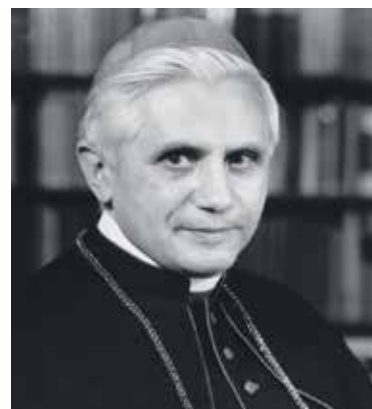
The document comes to a climax, he adds, with the definition of love as “the light – ultimately the only light – that lights up a dark world and gives us the courage to live and to act. Love is possible and we can do it, because we are created in God's image”.

Demythologising

Whenever he attempts to demonstrate the positive image of Benedict, it is to this theme that Seewald returns, whether it be love of God, love of men and women or love of the truth. However, he tends first to address common misconceptions or myths about Benedict that led many to see him as cold and distant.

For instance, one the first myths he tackles is that Benedict was a radical reformer until 1968, when his experience of the student rebellions in Tübingen fatally coloured his vision and turned him into a conservative. Seewald attacks the myth at its roots, with an impressive control over the facts.

First he gives air to the myth-makers, such as theologian Horst Herrmann, who wrote in 2005 that “the shy theologian [Prof. Ratzinger] was shouted down. In the middle of the students' revolt the reforming theologian became a conservative, turned from being an optimist into a pessimist”.



Then-Archbishop Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, is pictured in this file photo May 28, 1977, the day of his ordination as archbishop of Munich and Freising.

In another analysis, Ratzinger's behaviour was contrasted to that of his one-time collaborator, Hans Küng, who was said to have responded with “the pugnacity of a bullfighter” while Ratzinger “did not enjoy the battle”.

“Another Tübingen contemporary described Küng as politely withdrawing and waiting until the storm blew over”

Having given their views, he argues against them, marshalling the facts to show that this is a “legend”. Prof. Ratzinger did not suffer personal attacks, according to students and staff who witnessed his lectures. He simply was not “in the line of fire”. Any statements to contrary were “an invention” and the reason for his so-called ‘conservative’ turn were much subtler.

He goes further, quoting Küng's biographer Freddy Derwahl, who said that it was Küng who was “exhausted” by the end of the '68 semester and dropped his lectures. Another Tübingen contem-

porary described Küng as politely withdrawing and waiting until the storm blew over.

Cutting

This approach is the standard one taken by Seewald in dealing with the ‘panzer cardinal’ myths. He is particularly cutting when it comes to the German press. Analysing *Der Spiegel's* coverage of Benedict XVI's papacy, he writes acerbically: “*Der Spiegel's* cover story was not to be its last attack on Ratzinger. ‘The Unworldly One’ was followed by ‘The Remote One’ (2009), ‘The Infallible One’ (2010), ‘The Incurable One’ (2011) and finally ‘The Exhausted One’ (2012), as if it was a matter of killing off a dangerous wild beast.”

While this often serves his purpose in demonstrating the inaccurate, often personal attacks on Ratzinger, there are occasions when Seewald goes too far in landing a punch for the Benedict team.

It is not that he says anything false, it's that he distracts from his central focus – Pope Benedict – by engaging in wider debates. For instance, in the otherwise insightful chapter on Pope Benedict's response to the abuse crisis, he spends a number of pages demonstrating the level of abuse in wider society, hitting back at criticisms of the Church.

While the information is interesting, it doesn't belong to Ben-

Retired Pope Benedict XVI is assisted by his private secretary, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, in St Peter's Square at the Vatican September 28, 2014.



edict's biography and this is not the only example. Seewald's style is pugnacious and combative, but he is more insightful when dwelling on Benedict's life, producing nuggets of information or a well-placed quote that reveal the positive truth, without dwelling overlong on the negative myth.

Tale of two theologians

That being said, there are times when his more dramatic flourishes are appropriate, as they are in the initial portion of the book, 'Part One – Professor'. This could well be titled *A Tale of Two Theologians*, these being Ratzinger and Hans Küng, and reveals the true roots of Benedict's split from the progressive wing post-Vatican II.

“On a similar path was Prof. Hans Küng, who at the time was a close collaborator of Ratzinger and was similarly a rising star teaching in Tübingen”

Back in 1966, Fr Joseph Ratzinger was a young, handsome and quite provocative theologian, who had been on the 'progressive' wing during Vatican II. As a professor in Tübingen, “the Olympus of German theology” writes Seewald, he was nearing the height of his powers and the only way seemed up.

On a similar path was Prof. Hans Küng, who at the time was a close col-

laborator of Ratzinger and was similarly a rising star teaching in Tübingen. However, the divergent trajectories of their careers and views as theologians provides the central tension of the early chapters.

The quarrel between them “became so sharp because it was about an epochal turning point in Church history... ‘what was at stake was the identity of the Faith and its relevance and relationship to the modern world’”, Seewald writes.

As the legacy of Vatican II came up for debate, and as the world changed rapidly, symbolised in the 1968 student protests that rocked Tübingen, Küng and Ratzinger diverged. While Küng increasingly questioned the foundations of the Faith, arguing that this was the mandate of Vatican II, Ratzinger's assessment was more measured.

“An important difference had arisen between what the Council fathers wanted and what was communicated to the public,” Ratzinger said. An impression had arisen that “‘reform’ simply meant discarding dead weight; making it easier for ourselves, so that now reform was not seen as a radicalisation of the Faith, but as a kind of watering down of the Faith”.

While Hans Küng came to embody that vision of reform, Ratzinger worked to discover a new vision. “‘True reform’ was... as far as possible letting what is ours disappear so that what is his, what belongs to Christ, becomes more visible”, Ratzinger said in a 1984 interview with Vittorio Messori. This was the true mandate of the council, one to be followed because of Vatican II and not despite it.

Benedict and modernity

Rather than wanting the Church to become watered down, Benedict wanted to strengthen its core message, Seewald shows. He believed

that the fate of the world rested on whether “God exists – the God of Jesus Christ – and is recognised or whether he disappears”. The fate of the Church and the modern world were closely intertwined in Benedict's vision.

Knowing this, it should not be a surprise – and yet often is – that Benedict was an astute critic of the challenges posed by developments in modern life, as they related to the Church and society. His experience of the 1968 student rebellions seems to have made him particularly aware of the desires of the young.

“What is out-of-date and a failure is a materialistic lifestyle, all attempts to live a life without God”

In his parting address as archbishop of Munich, February 28, 1982, he said to the young: “You have realised what is unsatisfactory about our materialistic society more sharply than the older generation.” But he warned them to take care, as ideologies sought to exploit their longings. “Get to the bottom of things! Seek the heart of the matter, dare to go for the real alternative.”

It was in this final address, Seewald explains, that he came upon what became his motto as pope: “Dare to live like Jesus Christ. Let us have the courage to live the Faith. Don't be talked into calling that old-fashioned or out-of-date! What is out-of-date and a failure is a materialistic lifestyle, all attempts to live

“It seems that we will have to wait until after the Pope-emeritus is called to the Lord for the final assessment of the issue, from Benedict's and the Church's perspective”

a life without God. But Christ is not just yesterday and today, he is also tomorrow, because eternity belongs to him.”

Then-Cardinal Ratzinger spoke from the heart, to the heart. It was a statement of intent, one that he brought with him to his leadership of the CDF and of the Church.

Relativism

As the biography continues, you can see Benedict's awareness of the shifting challenges modern life posed. In his 1982 address, he warned of political evils, perhaps thinking of the Marxist ideology that was such a force of the time.

However, by the time of his famous homily at the opening of the papal conclave following John Paul II's death in 2005, he had recognised a new evil. It was in this homily that he defined the “dictatorship of relativism”. Seewald identifies this as one the three key speeches of his career.

“Many Christians' little mental boat is often rocked by these waves from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism, from collectivism to radical individualism, from atheism to a vague religious mysticism, from agnosticism to syncretism and so on... A dictatorship of relativism has arisen, which acknowledges nothing as final and takes its own self and desires as the ultimate standard,” Cardinal Ratzinger said.

And having laid out the challenge, he returned to the perennial solution, as Seewald relays with a sense of drama.

“Ratzinger spoke falteringly and kept clearing his throat. But again and again loud applause broke out in the basilica. We Christians, he [Ratzinger] continued, ‘have a different standard: the Son of God, the true human being. He is the measure of true humanism. To be “mature” does not mean having a faith driven by the waves of fashion and the latest novelty. A mature, adult faith is one that is deep-rooted in friendship with Christ. That friendship opens us up to everything good and gives us the criterion to distinguish between true and false, truth and lies”.

In this analysis, Ratzinger wanted to make clear what challenges the new pope must be prepared for – at the time, he didn't expect that it would be he facing them.

A theologian-pope

This speech brings to a close the first half of the book, which covers Benedict's life before being crowned pope: the second covers his papacy. Many intriguing insights could be drawn from Seewald's narrative on the papal years, too many for this review to cover in full.

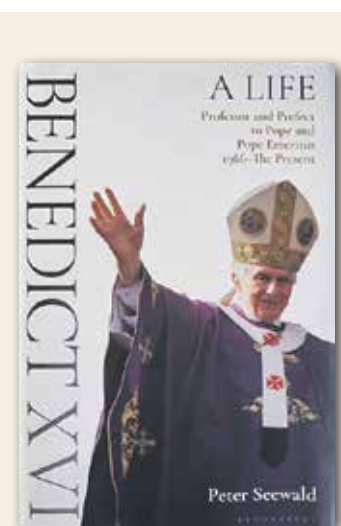
There is the perhaps surprising popularity of the ‘panzer cardinal’, who thousands flocked to see as he travelled around Italy and the world; there was the controversy over his

Regensburg address, blown out of proportion to his actual words; there were his changes to the dress code and names of the pope, presaging Pope Francis' pontificate; and there was his response to abuse, which one analyst summarised saying “no pope, no bishop in the world did as much as Benedict XVI in this swamp”.

However, knitted through the chapter are reflections on perhaps Benedict's most momentous decision – his resignation. While it came out of the blue for all but a few of Benedict's close circle, it was a decision that had weighed on his mind for some years.

As Seewald shows, it was also one that popes from Paul VI onwards wrestled with, each commissioning a study of the pros and cons. While the full ramifications of his decision continue to be worked out, it is clear the Benedict XVI gave it much thought and prayer, and felt very strongly that it was ultimately God's will for him.

In that light, it is disappointing but also understandable that the book does not delve too deeply into the retirement years. It seems that we will have to wait until after the Pope-emeritus is called to the Lord for the final assessment of the issue, from Benedict's and the Church's perspective.



Benedict XVI: A Life – Professor and Prefect to Pope and Pope Emeritus, 1966-The Present
By Peter Seewald
(published by Bloomsbury Continuum, €34.95)
is available in stores and online.

Faithful of war-torn South Sudan await significant papal trip



Amidst supporting refugees and ongoing instability the Jesuit Refugee Service are determined to support 'hugely significant' papal trip, **Chai Brady** hears

The Covid pandemic and now the devastating invasion of Ukraine have gripped the world, both causing untold grief and sometimes leaving little room for other thoughts or concerns – particularly among the people of Europe.

At a time when there seems to be nothing but bad news, the Faithful in the embattled nation of South Sudan are looking to the Pope as a sign of hope as his papal trip to their country grows closer.

The Vatican announced the historic visit last month, on March 3. Lasting from July 2-7, it will be the Pope's third trip to sub-Saharan Africa and will be the first time a pope has ever visited South Sudan. He will also be going to the Congo on the same trip, marking just the second time a pope has been there.

The Country Director of South Sudan for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Noelle Fitzpatrick, tells *The*



Trainee teachers in Maban outside JRS's new teacher training block and library.

Irish Catholic that the visit will be "hugely significant".

Business

"There's a lot of people who wouldn't necessarily know about it," she says, "It's this business of being seen and the fact that he would come to South Sudan and give that time, I think for local churches it's just going to be hugely significant. The Church has gone through a lot, it has been to the forefront in terms of supporting

people through the years of struggle, in education and health."

Ms Fitzpatrick added that "last year was difficult for religious". Recently the Church there has suffered from tragic events. In April 2021 a bishop-elect was shot in both legs a month after the Pope named him bishop of Rumbek. Just four months later two Sacred Heart sisters were killed while travelling by bus to Juba after an ambush by armed men.

"I think it's going to be a shot in the arm for them. I think it's going to be on the level of Pope John Paul II's visit to Ireland in 1979, already I hear stories about people coming on pilgrimage, and I'm thinking how can people come by road with the insecurity? It's going to be huge," she says.

“In April 2021 a bishop-elect was shot in both legs a month after the Pope named him bishop of Rumbek”

Although there is currently a ceasefire in the country following a multi-sided civil war which lasted for more than six years, conditions remain extremely challenging in South Sudan.

For instance, the Irish Government advise against all travel to the country, with the Department of Foreign Affairs stating: "The security situation in South Sudan

is volatile and unpredictable, due to armed conflict, subnational violence and high levels of violent crime. The security situation in Juba has the potential to deteriorate with little warning. There are daily reports of fighting throughout the rest of the country. The Equatoria region and the border areas with Sudan and Ethiopia are extremely unstable."

JRS provides a variety of services in South Sudan, such as teacher training, the provision of school materials, a daycare for disabled children, home visits, counselling, and emergency assistance in Maban. They also coordinate social centres for refugee women while providing opportunities to learn tailoring, life skills, and gain psychosocial support.

Education

In Yambio, JRS provides education scholarships to young women attending school and teacher training scholarships to assist with diplomas and education degrees.



JRS Maban County project director Sean Kenney, from Texas, US with Fr Francis Njuguna SJ and others attending the inauguration of a new library.

“It will be the Pope's third trip to sub-Saharan Africa and will be the first time a pope has ever visited South Sudan”



County Director for the Jesuit Refugee Service Noelle Fitzpatrick with some of the team in Yambio, Western Equatoria state.

“There’s already huge issues with access to education but there’s even bigger issues with quality education”

They also provide a community and school-based peacebuilding initiative that uses mediation and workshops for encouraging reconciliation rather than violence.

Regarding their work in Maban, where JRS have worked since 1997, Ms Fitzpatrick says: “A big focus of our work at the moment is teacher training because the majority of the teachers in South Sudan, they would be lucky to have finished secondary, some of them have only finished primary school, most of them haven’t received any formal teacher training or education training, so there’s a huge need.

“JRS provides education scholarships to young women attending school and teacher training scholarships”

“There’s already huge issues with access to education but there’s even bigger issues with quality education,” she says.

“It is a very patriarchal society still, the reality of that is that so many girls don’t make it into secondary school or through secondary school so therefore you don’t have girls coming out that could potentially move into teacher training to be role models for other girls.”

Teacher training

There is a need for those who take part in the teacher training programme to be proficient in English, but many of the girls in Maban would not be, according to Ms Fitzpatrick, who says: “We have intensive English language courses and computer courses because first of all having those opens up more options, but also then it is a pathway for anyone who would want to avail of the teacher training programme, an intensive pre-service two-year programme.

“I feel really proud about that work because one of the things that is quite unique about Maban is that it’s a very arid area and it is volatile but we’re the only organisation that

has a compound where we bring the refugees from the four different camps, we bring them on a Sunday afternoon, they spend the week, studying, living, working together, being together in our compound: Four different refugee communities, rival communities, with members of the host community. Then on Friday afternoon we bring them back and they’re home for the weekend.”

Education and peacebuilding are undoubtedly an important part of JRS, and that is reflected in their ongoing work in South Sudan. They are not alone in this pursuit, as notably Pope Francis has also pushed for peace in the country

In April 2019 Pope Francis knelt to kiss the feet of South Sudan’s previously warring leaders in a dramatic gesture after an unprecedented retreat at the Vatican. He urged them not to return to a civil war, saying in improvised remarks: “I am asking you as a brother to stay in peace. I am asking you with my heart, let us go forward. There will be many problems but they will not overcome us. Resolve your problems.”

Regarding the Pope’s actions, Ms Fitzpatrick said: “I think people were really taken by the retreat in the Vatican.

“Some people were confused by it because it is so countercultural, but people were really taken by it and I think anyone that is involved in Church, whether Christian or Catholic will know that Pope Francis has been very strongly behind the peace process for South Sudan and has been wanting to come for some time.”

Awareness

For Ms Fitzpatrick, she is trying to raise awareness of the Pope’s visit. “As a Church-based organisation we will be asked to contribute and support the local Church in their preparations because they don’t have money themselves and even now if there’s a centenary or there’s strategic planning, you’re asked to contribute,” she says.

“I think it’s going to be really important as a Church entity but also as a Jesuit organisation that

when those requests come, we’re able to say ‘yes, we’re able to do something’, at least for the diocese in which we have a presence.

“For me, as JRS, it will be trying to enable some of our team – there’s South Sudanese team members who will come to Juba to be part of it – and some of the people who are displaced that we are working with, to come. We have a small compound in Juba and I think there’ll be mattresses all over the place but I think it will be great and it will be a carnival.

“Regarding the Pope’s actions, Ms Fitzpatrick said: ‘I think people were really taken by the retreat in the Vatican’”

“But because the road network is so bad mostly it is air transport – there’s a chance that some people from western Equatoria can come by road, it depends on security – so we need some money for that but we also need to be able to contribute to the local Church in their own preparations.”

Ms Fitzpatrick urged Irish people to pray for peace and stability in the region and for the good health



Pope Francis kisses the feet of South Sudan President Salva Kiir April 2019, at the conclusion of a two-day retreat at the Vatican for African nations’ political leaders. Photo: CNS

of Pope Francis. “To have him there for a couple of days will be massively impactful, I don’t think it can be overstated,” she added.

“I think for Pope Francis to go to South Sudan now and engage the president, the vice president, the diplomatic corp, the humanitarian community and the people... everyone will appreciate it and everyone will get something from it,” she says.

Pressure

Acknowledging that people are under pressure emerging from two years of Covid restrictions and the need to support those affected by the war in Ukraine, Ms Fitzpatrick admits it has made funding more of a challenge for them.

“There’s a huge response, which I completely understand because we have Ukrainians living amongst us and this is war in Europe, but the challenge for us is that our

donors are European and American and when there’s such a huge response to Ukraine automatically it gets sucked out of our possibility to fundraise for our work in South Sudan and other countries around the world,” she says.

“In terms of this visit, it’s not a core part of our work, but we need to be able to respond and support and we don’t have the funds to do it because all of our money is linked to institutional donor budgets so if anyone felt like they wanted to contribute something to support our preparations and our support for the local Church for this visit they could make a contribution through the Irish Jesuits International for that, that would be the best way to do that. Every little helps.”

Those who would like to donate online can visit: <https://www.iji.ie/donate/>



Noelle Fitzpatrick (centre back) with some of the JRS team working across Western Equatoria state.

Order of Holy Sepulchre celebrate in Derry



Knights and Dames of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem at Spring Mass Celebrations St Columb's Church, Waterside, Derry City on Saturday April 2. Pictured are: Chevalier Gerard Lawler (Dublin), Peadar O'Mordha (Dublin), Dame Mairéad Walls (Toomebridge, Co. Antrim), Chevalier James Nidal Agha (Westminster, London), Chevalier Peter Moylan (Ennis, Co. Clare), His Excellency Peter Durnin, Lieutenant of Ireland (Drogheda, Co. Louth), Chevalier John Mc Caffrey (Belfast, Co. Antrim), Chevalier William David Williams (Ennis, Co. Clare), Chevalier John D. Turkey (Portlaoise, Co. Laois) and Chevalier Gearóid Williams (Kilrush, Co. Clare).

Ruadhán Jones

The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, Lieutenancy of Ireland hosted a black tie gala dinner for Knights, Dames and friends of the order, April 2.

The dinner marked the

Spring Mass celebrations that took place in Derry City and the Lieutenancy said they were honoured to have as their invited guest the Bishop of Derry Diocese Donal McKeown and Chevalier James Nidal Agha from the Lieutenancy of England and Wales-Westminster Section.



Prof. Richard Conroy (Dublin), Chevalier John Mc Caffrey (Ballymena), Bishop McKeown (Derry), Chevalier Peter Moylan (Ennis).



Chevalier Eiver O'Hanlon and Dr Rose O'Hanlon (Athlone, Co. Roscommon) and Chevalier Gerard M. Lawler (Blackrock, Co. Dublin).



Dame Mairéad Walls (Toomebridge, Co. Antrim), Bishop Mc Keown, Chevalier Agha (Westminster, London) Mrs Nora Durnin and the Lieutenant of Ireland H.E. Peter Durnin (Drogheda, Co. Louth).



Chevalier Barry and Dame Lidia Mc Loughlin (Ballina, Co. Mayo).



Chevalier M. Joseph McDonnell (Malahide, Dublin) and Chevalier Thomas J. Kilduff (Cavan, Co. Cavan).

Out&About

Apologetic Catholics



DUBLIN: More than 100 young people attended Evangelium Ireland's Catholic apologetics conference in All Hallows, Dublin City University, March 26.



CORK: North Monastery NS's 6th class pupils who made their Confirmation are pictured outside the cathedral of St Mary's and St Anne's after the ceremony, April 1. Their teacher was Mr Cormac Hill and the Mass was celebrated by Fr Seán Crowley.



ROSCOMMON: Students from St Attractas NS in Ballaghaderreen are pictured with Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey after being confirmed, April 2.

IN SHORT

Living Water offers spiritual 'recharge' with 8-week course

Charismatic Catholic young adult group Living Water is hosting a weekly in-person spirit seminar to help Catholics "recharge their spiritual batteries".

The Transformer 2022 'Life in the Spirit Seminar series' will be run across eight weeks every Wednesday at 7pm, starting April 27 in the Edith Stein room at St Teresa's Church, Clarendon St, Dublin.

"After the Covid-19 pandemic, many

people are left with their spiritual batteries drained, longing for peace, longing for a deep knowledge that God is there even if he seems so far in times like these," said spokesperson for Living Water Rose Sweeney in a statement.

"Transformer aims to help participants have a deep encounter with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit," she continued.

The seminar is "an adventure in faith, a journey to be open to, learn about, share, and receive the richness of our Catholic faith and be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and how he moves and lives within us".

Every evening has praise and worship and a talk on topics such as 'Father's love',

'Salvation through Jesus' and 'New Heart, New Spirit'.

You can register for the seminar at www.livingwater.ie and the cost is €30.

Sod turned on 12 social housing apartments

The sod has been turned on a dozen new social housing apartments in Dublin City Centre.

The apartment block being built on Shaw Street in Dublin 2 will see the construction of 12 new apartments for people impacted by homelessness, costing €4.4 million. It

is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2023 and consists of 11 one-bed apartments and one two-bed.

The project is a partnership between Dublin City Council, the Department of Housing and Peter McVerry Trust.

Peter McVerry Trust CEO Pat Doyle said he was "delighted", adding that: "Over the course of 2022 we will commence construction works on projects in Dublin 1, Dublin 2, Dublin 6 and Dublin 9 with a combined delivery of 70 social housing units and 95% of those will be one-bedroom apartments, a reflection of the need of people in homeless services in Dublin."



ITALY: Mario and Una Russo were presented with a papal blessing on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of their wedding which occurs this Easter Sunday. They have been tour guides for thousands of pilgrims across Ireland at many shrines in Rome and Italy for many years. Fr Michael Toomey presents them with the papal blessing on their first pilgrimage since lockdown in San Giovanni Rotondo



DUBLIN: Pro Life Campaign volunteers outside Leinster House are pictured following the PLC's submission to the Government's three-year review of the abortion law. Photo: John McElroy.



WICKLOW: Fr Richard Behan PP blesses a native Irish cherry tree which was planted in the grounds of Lacken Church, Blessington, March 25 to mark national tree week. The ceremony was attended by the pupils from 2nd and 3rd class in Lacken NS and Ms Carmel O'Neill.



KERRY: Bishop of Kerry Ray Browne confirmed students from Raheen, Barraduffin, Knockanes and Glenflesk regions, April 1. Photos: Seamus Healy.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones
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Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



ROSCOMMON: The Augustinian order in Ireland elected new council members at its chapter in the last week of March. They are pictured with the Prior General and Prior Provincial in the Franciscan friary, Athlone. Pictured from left are Fr Pat Gayer, Fr Tony Finn, Fr Paddy O'Reilly, Fr Tony Egan, Fr Alejandro Moral Antón, Fr Colm O'Mahony, Fr Stephen Shields and Fr Michael Collender.



DOWN: Newly installed bereavement ministers for Newry parish are pictured outside Newry cathedral with Canon Francis Brown and Deacon Brendan McAllister, April 3.



DUBLIN: The Irish Hospice Foundation launch their Pledge to Plant fundraising campaign in St Stephen's Green, March 31. Pictured are (from left) gardener Marie Staunton, Aisling Easton (7), IHF CEO Sharon Foley and Hazel Easton (4). Photo: Paul Sherwood



ANTRIM: Men pray the rosary at a rosary rally held in Ballymena, one of a number of such rallies taking place across the country, April 2.

ANTRIM

Fr Perry Gildea CM and the Drumalis parish team will host a residential Easter Triduum called Walking Together Towards Easter at Drumalis, Larne 14-17 April. For further details or to book a place, contact Drumalis – 0044 28 28272196/28276455 or email drumalis@btconnect.com.

ARMAGH

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed in the cathedral every Thursday from 5pm until 9pm, on Saturday from after the 10.30am Mass until 5.30pm and Sunday from after the 12 noon Mass until 5.30pm.

CARLOW

Grange Church will celebrate its Bicentenary on Sunday at St John the Baptist Church, June 19 at 3pm.

CLARE

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will take place Monday to Friday in the Cathedral from 5pm until 7pm in Ennis Parish.

CORK

The Cloyne Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock led by Bishop William Crean, will take place on Sunday May 8.

Eucharistic Adoration at Skibbereen Cathedral takes place every Saturday morning from 10am to 11am.

DERRY

Eucharistic Adoration takes place every Thursday from 10am until 5pm at Star of the Sea Church, Portstewart.

DONEGAL

The prior of Lough Derg, Fr Laurence Flynn and his team will host a guided walk on the lakeshore Lough Derg Pilgrim Path on Easter Monday April 18 to celebrate Pilgrim Path Week. Registration essential. For further information contact the Lough Derg Office on 071 9861518, or info@loughderg.org or www.loughderg.org.

There are weekly junior and senior youth group sessions held in Letterkenny parish. Junior youth group events will take place on Sunday evenings from 7pm-8.30pm in the pastoral centre hall while senior youth group meetings will be held on Friday evenings from 5pm-6.30pm in the cathedral conference room.

DOWN

Cemetery Sunday will be held for Dromara and Drumgooland Parish on May 22.

DUBLIN

The Priory Institute will offer a free of charge online retreat from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday, meditations on the Easter Triduum with Fra Angelico. Visit the website prioryinstitute.com to register.

The Dublin archdiocese will celebrate its annual pilgrimage to Knock on April 23, concluding with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Dermot Farrell at 3pm at the Basilica of our Lady.

GALWAY

The Tuam Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock will take place on Sunday May 1. Ceremonies commence at 2.30pm with Mass at 3pm.

KILDARE

The Legion of Mary meet at Our Lady's parish centre every Tuesday after morning Mass (Room 2) in Leixlip.

Children's Rosary Group: Families are invited to bring their children to come and pray the rosary together every Saturday at 6pm in Our Lady and the Guardian Angels Church, Sallins.

KERRY

Franciscan Friary Holy Week Celebrations in Kerry will feature a Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper at 8pm; Good Friday Solemn Liturgy of the Lord's Passion at 3pm; Good Friday Stations of the Cross Friday at 12 noon; Easter Vigil of the Lord's Resurrection on Saturday 16 at 10pm.

KILKENNY

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will be in the Church of the Assumption Mooncoin following Mass and will conclude at 12pm.

LAOIS

A triduum celebrating the Paschal journey in the 21st Century will take place at Mount St Anne's Retreat and Conference Centre, Portlington from April 14-17 and will be facilitated by Fr Diarmuid O'Murchú. For more information visit www.mountstannes.com.

LIMERICK

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Blessed Sacrament Church

Abbeyfeale, every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of Lent from 10.30am to 8pm

MAYO

The Blessed Sacrament Chapel is open for Adoration at St Patrick's Church, Ballyhaunis from Fridays 10.30am until 7pm.

MEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place Fridays between 2pm - 6pm and Sundays from 1.15pm until 8pm at St Patrick's Church, Trim.

MONAGHAN

Rosary takes place at St Mary's Clontibret Monday to Friday and Sunday at 6pm.

OFFALY

Adoration of the Blessed Eucharist takes place Monday and Friday from 5pm until 6pm and Tuesday and Wednesday after 7.30pm Mass to 9pm in St Bridget's Parish Clara and Horseleap.

ROSCOMMON

Adoration is scheduled weekly for the following hours at the Sacred Heart Church, Roscommon: Tuesday: 1pm-2pm. Thursday: 11am-12noon, 5pm-6pm. Friday: 1pm-2pm. Saturday: 11am-12noon, 2pm-3pm.

SLIGO

Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Colmcille's Church, Rathcormac every Sunday from 3pm until 6pm

TIPPERARY

Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Cronan's Church Roscrea every Thursday from 2pm-10pm including Divine Mercy Holy Hour at 5pm.

WESTMEATH

The Anawin Prayer Group facilitates prayer meetings at Drumraney Pastoral Centre every Tuesday at 7.30pm.

WEXFORD

Adoration will take place on the main altar on Thursday 10.30am to 11.30am, Friday 10.30am to 5pm and Saturday 10.30am to 11.30am at St Aidan's Cathedral Parish, Enniscorthy.

WICKLOW

Polish Mass to be celebrated at St Mary's and Peter Church Arklow on Easter Sunday at 10am.



World Report

IN BRIEF

US bishops receive Blessed Carlo Acutis relic

● The US bishops recently welcomed a relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis. It is the teenager's pericardium, or the sac that protected his heart.

"I now bring to you the relic of the pericardium, which is the membrane that surrounds the heart of a new blessed," Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino said April 7.

Archbishop Sorrentino presented the relic to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) for the national Eucharistic Revival, a multi-year initiative by the bishops to foster devotion in Christ's real presence.

The US bishops will house the relic for one year "for a pilgrimage of faith and sanctity for all, especially for young people," Archbishop Sorrentino said.

German diocese hires trans man to teach religion

● A German diocese has defended its decision to grant a biological female who identifies as a transgender man permission to teach Catholic religion to schoolchildren, amid questions over whether it is attempting to sidestep canon law and the Catholic Church's teaching on sexual morality.

"I can confirm that Mr Theo Schenkel is granted a permanent teaching license for Catholic religious education in state schools," a spokesman for the

Archdiocese of Freiburg told CNA on April 7.

Since canon law precluded the trainee teacher from receiving the requisite *Missio Canonica* of the bishop, the diocese said it had issued the teacher with an "unlimited teaching permission," signed by the vicar general. Both the diocese and the state school authority consider this authorisation sufficient for Schenkel to teach Catholic religion classes, media reported.

Vatican Ramadan message urges Christians and Muslims to help poor

● Aware of God's bounty and gifts, Christians and Muslims are called to share those gifts with others, said the leaders of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

God's "generosity fills our hearts with gratitude toward him and, at the same time, encourages us to share his gifts with our brothers and sisters who are in any kind of need," the Vatican officials said.

In a message wishing Muslims a peaceful and fruitful month as they fast during Ramadan and a joyful

celebration of Eid al-Fitr when Ramadan is over, the officials focused on the importance of sharing, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

The message was signed February 18, before Ramadan began, by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso, council president, and Msgr Indunil Janakarathne Kankanamalage, council secretary.

The Vatican released the message April 8, seven days after the Ramadan fast began.

Spain criminalises pro-life witness near abortion clinics

● Spain's Senate voted April 6 in favour of a bill amending the country's penal code to criminalise "harassment" of women entering abortion clinics.

The bill was passed without any changes April 6 by a vote of 154-105. It had already been approved by the Congress of Deputies in February.

The measure was introduced in May 2021 by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party's coalition. It criminalises "harassing women going to clinics for the voluntary interruption of pregnancy." Anyone promoting, favouring, or participating in demonstrations near abortion clinics will be subject to penalties.

Vatican looking at implications of possible papal visit to Kyiv

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, said it appeared Ukraine could keep Pope Francis safe if he made a wartime trip to Kyiv, but the Pope's safety was not the Vatican's only concern.

During his trip to Malta April 2-3, Pope Francis had told reporters that a proposal for him to visit Kyiv was "on the table".

"A trip is not impossible; it can be done. It's a matter of seeing what consequences this trip would have and assessing whether it would really contribute to ending the war," Cardinal Parolin told reporters April 7.

However, "the Pope would not go to take a position either in favour of one side or the other," maintaining his practice of condemning the horrors of the war without specifically denouncing Russia, Cardinal Parolin said, according to Vatican News.

And, he said, the Vatican's "delicate" relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, which supports Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "also will have to be taken into account in the overall consideration of the possibility of making the trip or not".

The Ukrainian government has "given ample assurances that there would be no danger" to the Pope in visiting Kyiv, Cardinal Parolin said, pointing out that "other leaders have made and are



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen departs Przemysl, Poland for Kyiv, Ukraine, April 8. Photo: CNS.

still making" such visits. The prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia visited in mid-March and Roberta Metsola, president of the European Parliament, went April 1.

Andrii Yurash, Ukraine's ambassador to the Holy See, told the Reuters news agency April 7 that Ukraine would expect Russia to suspend its bombings, at least in central and northern Ukraine, while the Pope is there.

Asked about the apparent atrocities committed by Russian soldiers in Bucha

and other Ukrainian towns, Cardinal Parolin said, "that one should lash out in such a way against civilians is inexplicable".

"I truly believe, as has been pointed out by many, that these episodes mark a turning point in this war," he said. "And I hope that they mark it in a positive sense, that is, that they make everyone reflect on the need to put an end to the fighting as soon as possible, and not that they harden their positions, as some fear."

The cardinal also was

asked about NATO countries sending more weapons to Ukraine.

"The principle of legitimate self-defence" is valid, he said. However, "an armed response in a manner proportional to the aggression, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us, can lead to an escalation of conflict which can have disastrous and deadly consequences."

What is needed, he said, is a "return to reason" and "a negotiated way to get off this one-way street".

Legionaries' updated abuse report reveals four new allegations

The Legionaries of Christ received four new allegations of sexual abuse against members of the congregation between March 2021 and March 2022, and new allegations also have been made against priests already undergoing canonical procedures after being named in previous reports.

The Legionaries' 2021 "Annual Report: Truth, Justice and Healing" was released April 6 with updates to their ongoing effort to "give an account of their commitments to the victims of sexual abuse since the publication three years ago (December 2019) of all cases from their history."

Since releasing its previous annual report in March 2021, the congregation received four new allegations, it said.

"One is awaiting the conclusion of civil and canonical proceedings. Three are under investigation prior to an eventual canonical trial," the congregation said on its site, Oabuse.org, which provides updated data on cases and documents.

Concerning the status of allegations received between December 2019 and March 2021, it said, "One is awaiting a ruling from the Holy See after having concluded the canonical criminal trial. One is

awaiting a ruling from the Holy See after having concluded the preliminary canonical investigation. Two are under preliminary canonical investigation prior to an eventual canonical trial."

The report said, "Furthermore, new claims, allegations and formal declarations have been received during the canonical proceedings of priests which had already been published in the previous reports in relation to events of past decades."

It added that "a previous case mentioned in the 1941-2019 report is awaiting the results of a police investigation."

Burmese soldiers invade cathedral and detain archbishop

Approximately 40 Burmese soldiers forcibly took control of a Catholic cathedral in Mandalay prior to a Lenten prayer service on Friday and detained an archbishop and dozens of other worshippers, including a correspondent for CNA.

The soldiers entered

Sacred Heart Cathedral at 2:30 pm local time April 8 and refused to allow worshippers to leave. Soldiers also occupied other buildings on the compound.

Archbishop Marco Tin Win and employees of the Archdiocese of Mandalay were similarly herded into

the building and forced to sit in the pews along with the worshippers.

A correspondent for CNA was present and was detained for about three hours, then allowed to leave. The others detained were released several hours later. "I was so afraid," one

elderly Sacred Heart Cathedral parishioner, who did not give her name for safety reasons, told CNA. "The military was always crazy but they never acted like this before. We ran home as soon as we were allowed out of the church."



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Thirsty work



Inmate firefighters from Holton Conservation Camp battle temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit as they extinguish a brushfire in California, April 6. Photo: CNS

US activists say abortion clinic foetuses ‘proof of illegal abortions’

Two members of a group called Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising said April 5 that five foetuses taken by the police a week earlier from the Capitol Hill residence of one of the activists were “proof of illegal abortions” being performed at a Washington abortion clinic.

Activists Lauren Handy, 28, and Terrisa Bukovinac, 41, made the comments at a news conference, where they were joined by Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue. The same day, a

group of 23 congressional Republicans wrote a letter to Mayor Muriel Bowser and Police Chief Robert Contee III asking for a thorough investigation of the remains “of five preborn children” and urging they not assume – “without conducting any medical evaluations” – that “each child died as the result of a legal abortion.”

Ms Handy and Ms Bukovinac said the foetuses are from a box of medical waste they got from the driver of a medical waste

truck at an abortion clinic, and they claimed the foetuses looked like they were from late-stage abortions.

The box also contained more than 100 foetuses that appeared to be from early stage abortions, they said.

According to a *Washington Post* story and other news accounts, the two women described walking up to a Curtis Bay Medical Waste Services truck outside the Washington Surgi-Clinic, one of a few US abortion

clinics that does late-term abortions.

They said they asked the driver if he had picked up anything from the clinic. The driver told them yes, they said, so they asked for a box.

“The driver asked what they would do with the remains inside,” *The Washington Post* reported.

“After they told him they would give the (foetal) remains a funeral and bury them ... the driver gave them a box.”

Bishop in Tigray sends out an SOS for his people

Bishop Tesfaselassie Medhin of Adigrat, Ethiopia, has sent out an SOS call for swift humanitarian aid in Tigray to save millions of people facing death due to a “merciless man-made famine” in the war-torn region.

While condemning the war atrocities, the bishop acknowledged individuals, institutions, governments and partners working tirelessly to bring hope to the region’s people. He warned of mass deaths unless relief

aid urgently reached the area soon.

“This is a dire call once again for a swift action by all concerned and competent international communities to save the lives of the millions of people at the verge of death from a merciless man-made famine in Tigray,” he said.

“The current pace to deliver the promises (of aid) on the ground is not bringing any meaningful change on the lives of the people ... who have

been under siege of total blockade for over 500 days from all basic services and rights,” Bishop Medhin said in a statement April 6.

“In this critical moment, we desperately call upon the international community to take a quick action to save millions of people in Tigray from perishing, before it reaches (an) irreversible level,” he said.

Vatican roundup

Vatican Children’s Hospital to treat little patients from Libya

● The Libyan healthcare system has been devastated by over a decade of war and instability. Libyan doctors and medical staff face major challenges every day, and the country’s hospitals and medical centres face problems ranging from frequent power cuts and insufficient medical supplies to staff shortages.

The emergency caused by Covid-19 has further impacted medical care in Libya, resulting in a state of near-total insufficiency.

Responding to the crisis, the Vatican’s Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital has signed an agreement with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) for the treatment in Italy of paediatric patients with serious diseases.

The agreement, worth nearly €2.5 million, is part of an AICS project in favour of Libyan children suffering from serious diseases.

It will allow 25 paediatric patients, who cannot be treated in Libya, to be flown to Italy and assisted by the Bambino Gesù Hospital.

The children will be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, will receive health care, social and psychological assistance, and will be able to continue schooling. Arabic-speaking cultural mediators will facilitate proper communication between the young patients, their families and the hospital staff.

Pope entrusts families with Good Friday Way of the Cross meditations

● Pope Francis has entrusted the meditations and prayers of this year’s Good Friday Way of the Cross to families, the director of the Vatican Press Office, Matteo Bruni said in a statement.

“On the occasion of the year dedicated to the family with which the Church celebrates the fifth anniversary of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, Pope Francis has entrusted the preparation of the texts of the meditations and prayers for the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday at the Colosseum to a number of families linked to Catholic communities and associations for voluntary work and assistance,” he wrote.

“According to the chosen

themes,” he said, “some families will carry the cross between the stations.”

Amoris laetitia is the post-synodal apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis addressing the pastoral care of families. Dated March 19, 2016, it follows the Synods of Bishops on the Family held in the Vatican in 2014 and 2015.

On March 19, 2021, the Church marked the fifth anniversary of the publication of *Amoris laetitia*, on the beauty and joy of love in the family. On that day, Pope Francis launched the *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year which will conclude this year on June 26, with the 10th Meeting of Families in Rome.

Cardinal Parolin says that curial reform might not be over

● The publication of the new Vatican constitution is not necessarily the end of curial reform and new offices could be added later, the Vatican Secretary of State has said.

In a recent exclusive interview with CNA, Cardinal Pietro Parolin spoke about the reform of the Roman Curia and the role of the Secretariat of State after the release of Praedicate evangelium.

He also discussed the Holy See’s current lack of diplomatic personnel.

In 2014, Cardinal Parolin talked about the possibility of creating an office for pontifical mediations within the Vatican Secretariat of State. The office would have had the task of overseeing the Holy See’s conflict mediation efforts.

The Holy See has proposed to act as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine.



Letter from America

Wahlberg says 'Father Stu' found him, not the opposite



Mark Pattison

Mark Wahlberg, the Catholic star of the new movie "Father Stu," has been hitting the interview trail to support the film. He's got skin in the game, as he's one of the movie's producers, financing "Father Stu" largely with his own money.

Not that it was his idea to make "Father Stu." Rather, the film found him instead.

Wahlberg went back to his native Boston for a guest appearance on "The Greg Hill Show" on WEEI-FM to tout "Father Stu."

In an April 5 interview that was aired April 6, Wahlberg said it was on a Saturday when he met two priests from Good Shepherd Parish in Los Angeles who met him after hearing confessions for a 5 pm dinner – "the old guy dinner," said the 50-year-old actor.

"All of a sudden Father Ed starts pitching me on this movie," Wahlberg said. "And I'm (thinking), 'Why is he pitching me on this movie? Doesn't he have a job?' ... It dawned on me this is something I should be paying attention to ... to take Father Stu's story and bring it to the world."

Father Stu's story, in short, is that of an impulsive renegade who quits an amateur boxing career in Montana to become a movie star in Hollywood. He meets an attractive woman and becomes a Catholic for her.

But a near-death experience convinces him the priesthood is his true calling. As he nears ordination, he is stricken with an ultimately fatal disorder. But he was ordained nonetheless in 2007 and served as an example of unshakable faith, even in infirmity, until his death in 2014.

"I've always talked about my faith, which is good and fine and dandy and people know that"

In an episode of "Conversation with Cardinal Dolan," broadcast on SiriusXM's The Catholic Channel, Wahlberg said: "Probably people thought, what was I thinking? But you know, I prayed about it and every time I did, I just got the affirmation that I need to be making this movie. This movie is a film that is important. It's gonna touch people, and like I said earlier, I think the film chose me."

"So it's one of those things where I'm like, OK, I'm having lots of success, I have this platform, what am I using it for?"



Mark Wahlberg stars in a scene from the movie *Father Stu*. Photo CNS

Wahlberg went back to his native Boston for a guest appearance on 'The Greg Hill Show' on WEEI-FM to tout 'Father Stu'

In response to an observation by the show's host, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, Wahlberg said Father Stuart Long is still inspiring him long after filming has wrapped on the movie.

"He's still very much hard at work today and challenging me constantly to do more and to do better," Wahlberg said. "I've got pictures of him kind of in my office where I usually do most of my work and every time I glance over, if I'm in a conversation or something, he'll remind me how I need to be approaching the situation."

"I've always talked about my faith, which is good and fine and dandy and people know that," Wahlberg told Bill McGarvey in an interview for *America* magazine, which posted the article April 6. "But then at the same time, you've got to kind of put your money where your mouth is."

Script

That's exactly what Wahlberg did after a first script failed to grasp the

essence of the real-life Father Stu.

He told WEEI he went to talk to Mel Gibson for advice. "Mel had made *The Passion of the Christ*, a love letter to the Lord, so I wanted to get his opinion on what it was like for him – all the pros and all the cons."

Gibson wound up playing Bill, Father Stu's dad; Wahlberg said Gibson was his first choice for the part. "So we attracted the likes of Mel, and Jacki Weaver (as Stu's mother), and Malcolm McDowell (as his seminary rector).... They all wanted to bring Father Stu's voice to the big screen," Wahlberg said.

He recalled when he went with the real-life Father Stu and his father and Father Ed – whose surname was never mentioned in the WEEI interview – to see *The Fighter*, a 2010 film that garnered Wahlberg a Best Actor Oscar nomination.

Coming out of the theatre, "everybody was shadowboxing and stuff," Wahlberg said, but "it was personal" for Father Stu and Bill Long, Father Stu's real father, who

was wheeling his son out of the theatre. The priest was in a wheelchair by then.

"It was personal to them, they could see that family dynamic in the film. That's what we were going for tonally (in *Father Stu*)," the actor said. "If you could compare it to anything, you could compare it to *The Fighter*. Cause there's lots of dysfunction, but there's plenty of humour and heart and that's inspiring."

Wahlberg said Father Stuart Long is still inspiring him long after filming has wrapped on the movie"

Wahlberg told *America* that *Father Stu* should appeal to all audiences despite its protagonist wearing a Roman collar.

"Tough grace and tough mercy is what Stu earned through his suffering, and through his work and

giving back," Wahlberg said, adding the movie means to display "the importance of redemption and rooting for people to change and grow as opposed to turning our backs on them".

Encourage

Wahlberg said his intent is to "give people hope, and encourage people to pursue their faith, whatever that is".

And Wahlberg clued in WEEI listeners as to how he gained 30 pounds to show Father Stu gained weight as his muscles atrophied.

"When I did all the weight-gaining for this movie, people thought, 'Oh, how fun, you get to put on 30 pounds.' I wasn't eating Wahlburgers all day," he said. (The actor and his brothers Donnie, also an actor, and Paul, a chef, own the Wahlburgers restaurant chain.)

"I went to this doctor, who was supposed to be, like, 'I'm the guy who knows how to do it the healthy way.' And I was just eating stuff you wouldn't want to eat once in a day, never mind eating seven, eight times a day for six weeks," he explained.

The regimen, he said, included olive oil. "You can soak it in rice and all that stuff," Wahlberg said, "but I just chugged it down."

Ukrainian prelate says blood of dead ‘calls to heaven’



Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk presides over a memorial service at a mass grave in Bucha, Ukraine on April 7. Photo: The Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine



Elise Ann Allen

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, visited several cities recently liberated from Russian occupation, including Bucha, where war crimes are believed to have been committed against civilians.

On April 7, Archbishop Shevchuk also made stops in Gostomel and Irpin, according to the website for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Standing before the mass grave in Bucha, Archbishop Shevchuk said, “It’s very difficult to speak. Their blood calls from here, from this land, to heaven.”

“A good ear must hear the cry of that blood,” he said, noting that many of the dead are young people.

Lives taken

“It is clear that their lives were taken. We came here to pray for their eternal peace,” he said, saying it is important that not only Ukraine, but the whole world feels the pain experienced by those who suffered torture and death.

Archbishop Shevchuk said that he is also praying for justice, because “if this sin is not condemned, if this crime is not exposed, it can be repeated.”

“Any of us could be in this mass grave,” he said. “May the Lord God

rest the souls of his innocent slain servants, may he save lives, may he rid Ukraine of those criminals who came to kill, plunder, and destroy. Eternal memory of the innocent slain!”

In Irpin, Archbishop Shevchuk visited the Greek Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, which was damaged by Russian troops during their occupation of the city. While there, he invoked the protection of the Mother of God.

The archbishop’s visit came days after reports emerged accusing Russian troops of war crimes during their occupation of Bucha. The Russian forces left the area on April 1.

“May he rid Ukraine of those criminals who came to kill, plunder, and destroy. Eternal memory of the innocent slain!”

According to photo and video images of the aftermath, citizens were shot with their hands tied behind their backs, or were gunned down while attempting to evacuate, delivering food, riding their bikes, or sheltering pets. There were also reports of rape, torture, and mutilated corpses.

The mayor of Bucha, Anatoliy Fedoruk, initially said more than

300 inhabitants of the city were found dead after Russia’s withdrawal, and the Ukrainian government has asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the events that unfolded in Bucha as part of an ongoing investigation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to ascertain whether war crimes have been committed.

Archbishop Shevchuk’s visit to Bucha, Irpin, and Gostomel came the same day the United Nations voted to suspend Russia from its Human Rights Council over the alleged human rights violations in Bucha and other Ukrainian towns.

Speech

The vote followed an impassioned speech by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which he urged the UN to punish Russia for war crimes.

Pope Francis last Wednesday in his weekly general audience denounced the massacre in Bucha and said the United Nations and other international organisations have proven “impotent,” consumed by private interests rather than the pursuit of justice.

Heavy fighting is still happening throughout Ukraine, including in its eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, as well as the besieged city of Mariupol.

In a video message Friday, Archbishop Shevchuk said Ukraine is still standing and fighting after 44

days of war, but the country is also “bleeding”.

“We see more and more that this war is, in fact, a war of total annihilation. We see how our occupiers, those who are capturing towns and villages, abuse the civilian population,” he said, noting that several evacuation sites, including train stations in eastern Ukraine, have been struck by Russian missiles.

Reports

There are also reports that the Russian military has confiscated humanitarian cargo being transported to those in need, he said, saying, “Among all the horrors of war, every believing Christian asks themselves, ‘How do we live in a Christian way in such circumstances?’”

“We see more and more that this war is, in fact, a war of total annihilation”

“We know that the main commandment of Christian life is the Commandment of Love. Love for God and for one’s neighbour. On these two commandments, says Christ, all the law and all the prophets are founded,” he said.

Archbishop Shevchuk said he visited Bucha to see the tragedy with his own eyes, calling what happened in the city “an open wound on the body of Ukraine.”

“There, above the open mass grave, seeing the mutilated, breathless bodies, we prayed for their eternal rest. And in that prayer, I asked myself, I asked God, ‘God, what does it mean to love You and love one’s neighbour?’”

Buried

Looking down at the bodies buried in the mass grave, the archbishop said he understood that “to love your neighbour means to feel related to him. It means feeling that we are human beings together, to belong to the same human race, and where he or she rests in the mass grave, I could have been laid to rest there as well.”

“We have a common vocation, a common fate,” he said. “We, as brothers and sisters in Christ, belong to the same human race. To love one’s neighbour means to be aware of and experience one’s humanity, and thus to show one’s humanity.”

Because of this, every Christian, he said, no matter where they live or to what nationality they belong, when they see the atrocities that happened in Bucha must say, “I am Ukrainian”.

“Feeling this unity in our human race with those innocent victims, the occupier is waging war against you and me, to put us in that mass grave tomorrow,” he said, and urged Christians to pray for the grace of learning to love one’s enemies.

To love one’s enemy in this case, he said, “means to stop his murderous hand, to take away his weapon, not to give him the opportunity to kill. We ask that in the circumstances of hatred and murder of war, that we know how to love God and our neighbour, that we remain human.”

“‘A good ear must hear the cry of that blood,’ he said, noting that many of the dead are young people”

Letters

Letter of the week

Place of faith-based schools in a pluralistic society

Dear Editor, There is much public discussion about the place and role of Catholic schools in Ireland today; a great deal of which is anecdotal and without much evidence. To this end, researchers with the Theology and Religious Studies Department of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick are currently undertaking a study to gather data that will be helpful in planning a way forward for Catholic schools. In this study, we aim to explore the relationship between the stated policy regarding the school's Catholic identity and the lived reality within them. The survey is intended for principals, school staff and members of the board of management.

At this point we would like to make an appeal to any of your readers who are members of boards of management of Catholic schools, to get involved by filling out the questionnaire online. If any board member (or indeed a principal or staff member) is interested in taking part in the survey but has not received it, we would be delighted to hear from them, we can be contacted at:

Post Primary Schools: Catherine.mccormack@mic.ul.ie

Primary Schools: Daniel.oconnell@mic.ul.ie

We hope that this national survey will help develop an accurate picture of how Catholic identity/ethos informs

the practice and culture of these schools. The data will be used to inform policy around issues of divestment, inclusion, continual professional development, and the place of faith-based schools in a pluralistic society.

This is the first national survey of its kind, and it is vital that as many people, with a variety of points of view, participate. The questionnaire is accessible on google forms and the format is multiple choice. It can be completed on a laptop/desktop/tablet/phone and takes no more than 10 minutes.

Yours etc.,

**Dr Catherine McCormack and
Dr Dan O'Connell**

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Joining the consultation about the next census

Dear Editor, If anyone felt concern that the options provided as answers to the question about religion on the 2022 census form began with 'No religion', and that Judaism (one of the major monotheistic and Abrahamic Religions) was left out completely, it is possible to take action by joining in the consultation (2023) for the next census. This consultation will be announced on the Central Statistics Office website, www.cso.ie and in the national press.

The consultation for this year's census took place in 2017 and over 400 submissions were received.

There were almost no other questions on the 2022 census form where the first answer was: None or other.

Yours etc.,

Judith Leonard
Raheny, Dublin



Every effort should be made to support the persecuted Christians living in the Middle East

Dear Editor, It was good to read Fr Morty O'Shea's letter regarding persecution of Christians in the Middle East [*The Irish Catholic* – March 31, 2022]. Efforts have been made from time to time to highlight this

persecution but have been largely unsuccessful, as the mainstream media continues to ignore them. It is indeed important to do what we can to help these Christians and this has been aided by Fr Morty

giving contact details for the Church in Need, etc. Of course, not just the media but our Government has refused to speak out against this persecution, and this is just inexcusable. The pressure must be kept up to

ensure that they are held to account in this regard and every effort made to support persecuted Christians throughout the world.

Yours etc.,

Mary Stewart
Ardeskin, Donegal Town

Throwing people in prison for longer does not solve society's rottenness

Dear Editor, The issue with crime and punishment when it comes to sentencing and jailing people is complex. While some call for bigger sentences for those who have dozens and dozens of previous convictions, and this is perfectly understandable, it doesn't address the underlying issues behind anti-social behaviour and crimes related to deprivation and poverty in so many communities across Ireland.

There is a need to jail people who are likely to do harm, and this is the problem with light sentencing. It is certainly wrong to allow a hardened and dangerous criminal who in no way repents, and who is more than likely going to reoffend, to walk

the streets terrorising innocent people.

Does the prison system need to reform and become a place in which prisoners themselves can reform? Yes of course, but it is wrong to completely blame prisons for not turning people who have committed crimes into angels.

Looking at your front page [*The Irish Catholic* – April 7, 2022] I wholeheartedly agree that addiction is a major cause of crime and the subsequent jailing of many, many people. In my opinion it is important to try to help people once in prison, but it is far more important to tackle the problem at the root, which is the addiction and the pathway to that addiction, whether it be alcohol, drugs or gambling.

Ireland's ability to support people with addiction issues is tragically bad. There are not enough resources put into this absolutely essential service. The State does not seem to have the interest to continue the courageous work of religious men and women – who set up addiction charities and supports across Ireland. While these charities continue to function, they are just not able to cope with the demand. Throwing people in prison for longer does not solve the rottenness and growing inequality developing in our society.

Yours etc.,

Jack O'Halloran
Newcastle West, Co. Limerick

facebook community

Each week we publish a selection of comments from *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

Go, and sin no more...

Never experienced "harsh legalism" in the confessional. If anything the opposite is more often true. Priests who rarely hear confessions making statements like "that's not really considered a sin anymore" or "you don't have to come to confession so often". Sometimes even skipping the absolution in favour of their own wording. – **Adam Conroy**

Unfortunately it's the opposite I've experienced in terms of bad confessions (which thankfully have been very few). I've had priests tell me that what I'm confessing isn't a sin (when I know for certain it is), that just going to Mass is enough and that next time I should only tell one little thing in confession instead of the full confession. We need to remember the words of Jesus, both of "neither do I condemn you" and "go and sin no more", either on its own is not enough. We need mercy and truth one over the other. – **Máire Ní Éineacháin**

Likewise, I've never experienced harsh legalism; I've had wry good humour, gentle encouragement and sound good sense. The most striking and stentorian preacher I ever heard was gentle and kind in the confessional. I think the Holy Father needs to stop projecting his neuroses onto the presbyterate at large. – **Eamonn Gaines**

To go to confession you receive the Sacrament of Penance, sometimes the priest may not be very caring but just think of how he feels at that moment, maybe he is in that box all day, who knows, but receive the sacrament with a grateful heart and also absolution. It's part of our Catholic Faith. – **Noeleen Moffatt**

I have to say that generally my experience of confession has been positive and priests very understanding. Maybe one or two exceptions but speaking generally. That said, Pope Francis must have reasons to say what he did. Confession can help give peace. – **Declan McSweeney**

What do you think? Join in the conversation on *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

Better to live for your country and find out who owns it

Dear Editor, Dying for one's country in a global world that is owned by large corporations makes no sense, especially when in the end your death will simply be used as another statistic to promote the career of some upstart politician.

These politicians in turn call for more spending on armaments which inevitably funds that industry leading to more and more deaths.

You don't know who owns what anymore... lots of government buildings have been sold off then rented back from investment funds. So living for your country and finding out who owns it is a far better option.

Yours etc.,
Nuala Nolan

Bowling Green, Co. Galway City

Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.

Around the world

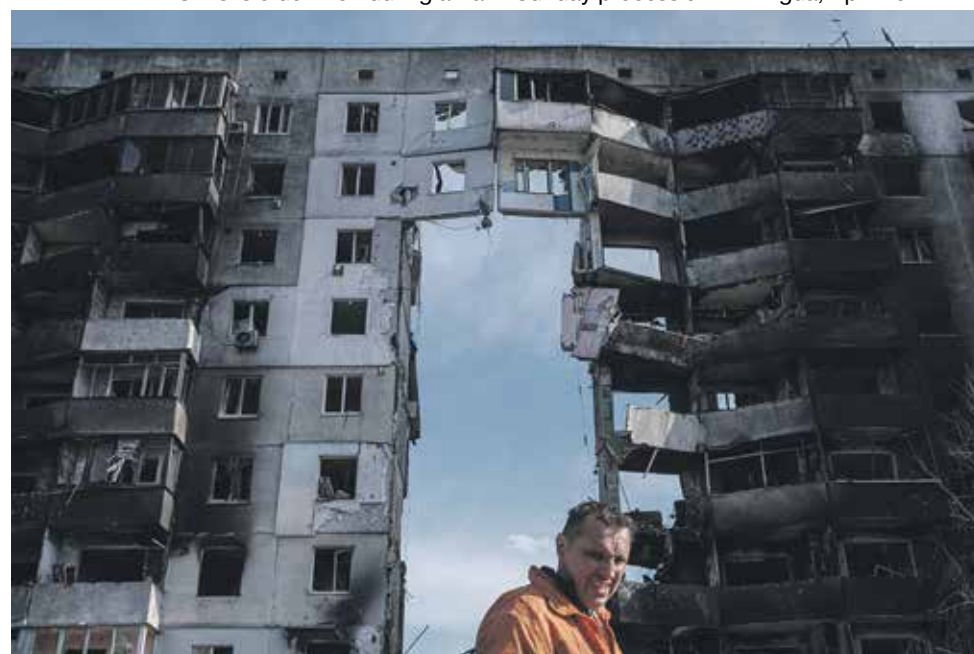


▲ **HOLY LAND:** Christians carry olive and palm branches as they walk the traditional path that Jesus took on his last entry into Jerusalem during the Palm Sunday procession on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, April 10. Photos: CNS.

◀ **GUATEMALA:** Catholic Faithful carry a large platform with a scene of Christ's crucifixion during a Palm Sunday procession in Antigua, April 10.



SENEGAL: A man digs a pit to obtain water in a dry riverbed in Matam, March 30. Senegal is located in the Sahelo-Sudan zone where drought has occurred sporadically for several decades.



UKRAINE: A clean up worker walks past buildings that were destroyed by Russian shelling in Borodyanka, near Kyiv, April 7.



EL SALVADOR: Women hold palm fronds before a Palm Sunday procession at the San Esteban Chapel in Panchimalco, April 10.



VATICAN: Pope Francis greets the crowd after celebrating Palm Sunday Mass in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, April 10.

Straining to hear the voice of Good Friday



“They shall look upon the one whom they have pierced!” A phrase that names the voice that’s left behind on Good Friday.

In 1981, an anonymous, young girl was brutally raped and murdered by the military at an obscure location in El Salvador, fittingly called *La Cruz* (the Cross). Her story was reported by a journalist named Mark Danner. In his account of this, Danner describes how after a particular massacre some soldiers shared how one of their victims haunted them and how they could not get her out of their minds long after her death.

They had plundered a village and raped many of the women. One of these was a young girl, an evangelical Christian, whom they had raped many times in a single afternoon and tortured. However, throughout it all, this young girl, clinging to her belief in Christ, had sung hymns. The soldiers who had violated and eventually executed her were haunted by that. Here are Danner’s words:

Chest

“She kept right on singing, too, even after they had done what had to be done, and shot her in the chest. She had lain there on *La Cruz* with the blood flowing from her chest, and had kept on singing – a bit weaker than before, but still singing. And the soldiers, stupefied, had watched and pointed. Then they had grown tired of the



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

game and shot her again, and she sang still, and their wonder began to turn to fear – until finally they had unsheathed their machetes and hacked her neck, and at last the singing had stopped.” (*The Massacre at El Mozote, N.Y., Vintage Books, 1994, pp. 78-79.*)

“She kept right on singing, too, even after they had done what had to be done, and shot her in the chest”

“They shall look upon her whom they have pierced!” Notice the feminine pronoun here because in this instance the one who is looked upon after being pierced is a woman. Dying such a violent, unjust, and humiliating death with faith in her heart and on her lips

makes her the crucified Christ, and not just because she (like all Christians) is a member of the Body of Christ. Rather because at this moment, in this manner of death, with this kind of faith overt in her person, like Jesus, she is leaving behind a voice that cannot be silenced and which will haunt those who have done violence to her and all the rest of us who hear about it.

Haunting

What haunted those soldiers? The haunting here is not that of some wounded spirit that now seeks retribution by frightening us and forever unsettling our dreams. Nor is it the haunting we feel in bitter regret, when we recognise a huge, irredeemable mistake which had we foreseen the consequences of, we would never have made. Rather,

this is the voice that haunts us whenever we silence, violate, or kill innocence. It’s a voice which we then know can never be silenced and which irrespective of the immediate emotions it evokes in us, we realise we can never be free from, and which paradoxically invites us not to fear and self-hatred but to what it embodies.

“When we take a reflective look at Jesus on the cross or at the death of this young evangelical, we cannot but feel a wound at a gut level”

Gil Bailie, who makes this story a corner-piece in his monumental book on the cross and non-violence, notes not just the remarkable similarity between her manner of death and Jesus’, but also the fact that, in both cases, part of the resurrection is that their voices live on.

In Jesus’ case, nobody witnessing his humiliating death on a lonely hillside, with his followers absent,

would have predicted that this would be the most remembered death in history. The same is true for this young girl. Her rape and murder occurred in a very remote place and all of those who might have wanted to immortalise her story were also killed. Yet her voice survives and will no doubt continue to grow in history long after all those who violated her are forgotten. A death of this kind morally scars the conscience and leaves behind a permanent echo that nobody can ever silence.

When we parse out all that’s contained in that echo, when we take a reflective look at Jesus on the cross or at the death of this young evangelical, we cannot but feel a wound at a gut level. To gaze upon the one whom we have pierced, Jesus or any innocent victim, is to know (in a way that undercuts all culpable and invincible ignorance) that the voice of self-interest, injustice, violence, brutality, and rape will ultimately be silenced in favor of the voice of innocence, graciousness, and gentleness. Yes, faith is true.

A critic reviewing Danner’s book in the *New York Times* tells how, after reading this story, he kept “straining hopelessly to hear the sound of that singing”.

In our churches on Good Friday, we read aloud the Gospel account of Jesus’ death. Listening to that story, like the soldiers who brutally murdered an innocent young, faith-filled woman, we are made to look upon the one whom we have pierced. We need to strain to hear more consciously the sound of that singing.

“Danner describes how after a particular massacre some soldiers shared how one of their victims haunted them and how they could not get her out of their minds long after her death”

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, April 14, 2022

Personal Profile

God's love fills
the empty heart

Page 34



Keeping up almsgiving as Lent comes to a close



Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three pillars upon which a successful Lent stands. Many Catholics know of the spiritual benefits of prayer and fasting, but view almsgiving as a purely material practice that one must dabble in from time to time in order to attain holiness.

Almsgiving is more than a token donation at the end of Mass or a once-off gift to some lucky cause; it's a practice that's intended to relieve the suffering of the world and reorder your soul more generously. It's not meant to be confined to Lent, but to permeate our lives as Christians as a key part of our spiritual lives.

As always, the best place to start when seeking to understand any aspect of the Church



Almsgiving is about more than the material help we offer; it has an effect on our souls, writes Jason Osborne

or its life is the catechism.

Almsgiving in the catechism

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us in paragraph number 2462: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity; it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

The two key elements here are that almsgiving is "a witness to fraternal charity" and that it's a "work of justice pleas-

ing to God". Both things that a Catholic should be striving to do! However, what do they mean in practice? Almsgiving is essentially offering aid or help to the poor through either monetary or material donations, as well as performing other acts of charity. As will be seen, quite a few activities can come under the umbrella of an act of charity.

The roots of the words involved here give good insight into what we're dealing with when we

commit to giving alms or acts of charity. "Alms" comes from the ancient Latin and Greek words for mercy and pity. Similarly, the root of the word "charity" comes from the Latin word "caritas" meaning, quite simply, love.

The goal of almsgiving is on the one hand, to donate to the poor and needy by making a sacrifice yourself. On the other, almsgiving establishes community by forming a relationship between the one doing the donating and the person receiving. Without almsgiving, the world itself is a poorer community.

Not just for Lent

Almsgiving isn't just for Lent, as many of us might be inclined to believe. Like most people, I certainly maintained the notion for an embarrassingly long time that

Lent was the ideal time for making small charitable gestures, and that after that it could be back to business as usual.

Well, it can be – but it shouldn't. While almsgiving is most widely known in association with Lent, it can and should be a year-round practice for all Catholics. Giving alms adds an invaluable element to our spiritual lives in that it offers us another concrete opportunity to step out of ourselves and focus on those less fortunate than us.

Almsgiving works beautifully in union with prayer and fasting. If prayer is the engine behind our spiritual lives and the fountain we return to in order to receive God's presence and grace in our lives, almsgiving is how we give

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Family News

AND EVENTS

**'STOLEN' DARWIN
MANUSCRIPTS
ANONYMOUSLY
RETURNED**

Two Charles Darwin manuscripts that were reported as stolen from Cambridge University Library have been anonymously returned in a pink gift bag, with a typed note on an envelope wishing a Happy Easter to the librarian.

The precious items were found to be missing in 2001, but at the time staff believed they may have been mis-shelved.

They carried out extensive searches in the library – which is home to around ten million books, maps, manuscripts and other items – but in October 2020 they were reported as stolen to Cambridgeshire Police.

The force launched an investigation and notified Interpol, with the university making a worldwide appeal for information.

Almost a year-and-a-half later, the notebooks – one of which contains Darwin's famous 1837 Tree of Life sketch – have been anonymously returned.

They were left on the floor of a public area of the library outside the librarian's office, on the fourth floor of the 17-storey building, on 9 March.

The area is not covered by CCTV.

**AUSTRALIA TO REBURY
ANCIENT REMAINS**

Australia's oldest human remains, dating back at least 40,000 years, will be reburied near the Outback site at Mungo Lakes where they were first uncovered, the Australian government has announced.

The ancestral remains of 108 people, including the most famous bones known as the Mungo Man and Lady, will be interred near their original resting place in the Mungo National Park – about 11 hours' drive west of Sydney, NSW Environment minister James Griffin said.

"While the discovery of Mungo Man and Mungo Lady helped scientists establish that Aboriginal people have been in Australia for more than 42,000 years, it's time to let their spirits rest in peace," he said.

The discoveries at Lake Mungo and Willandra Lakes between 1960 and 1980 redefined the anthropological understanding of Australia, pushing back the estimates of when humans first arrived on the continent by tens of thousands of years.

Mungo Lady is still among the earliest evidence of cremation in the world.

**MARADONA'S 'HAND
OF GOD' JERSEY SET
TO FETCH MILLIONS AT
AUCTION**

The shirt worn by Diego Maradona when he scored two unforgettable goals to knock England out of the 1986 World Cup, including the so-called 'Hand Of God', is set to fetch more than £4 million at auction.

Midfielder Steve Hodge, who had unintentionally flicked the ball to Maradona in the 'Hand of God' play, swapped shirts with his rival in the tunnel after the game and has owned it ever since – although the item has spent the last 20 years on loan at the National Football Museum in Manchester.

It will now go under the hammer at Sotheby's in a dedicated sale open for bidding from 20 April, and will go on public view at the auction house's New Bond Street gallery in London.

Love as an active verb



In my article in February I wrote about meditation and marriage and how both contribute to deepening our sense of who we are at the deepest level of our being. Couples are often reminded at the marriage ceremony to view love, not as a noun, but as an action verb; to see love not merely as something they experience but as something they do which honours and celebrates the astonishing miracle of their being together.

“The birth of a child stirs something primal in the depths of the human person and awakens us to our inner depths”

Neither meditation nor marriage is a permanent state of bliss! To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here, right now. Meditation helps us to begin to do just that, firstly with ourselves. Until we can accept ourselves as we truly are, we will never be able to recognise or accept others as they truly are. As they grow together in marriage, couples come to appreciate that the deep love they feel for their partner in marriage is really a reflection of God's love for them, which meditation also awakens. As in meditation, the commitment in marriage is to move beyond the self, to commit to live life together.

We were blessed in our marriage to receive three wonderful gifts from God. Holding each of our children in our arms for the first time were deeply graced moments. The birth of a child stirs something primal in the depths of the human person and awakens us to our inner depths. And before long, love is made manifest in the myriad of ways a parent is called upon to respond to the demands

Mindful living

Dr Noel
Keating



of a little child. And the joy such responses bring opens us up to receive love in ways we never thought possible. I always loved putting them to bed at night, tucking them in and reading or telling them stories. And, last thing at night, I did every night what my father had always done with us – I went to their bedrooms and gently touched them on the forehead with the palm of my hand.

I love to play with my granddaughters and their favourite game at the moment is playing what the eldest (five years old) calls 'Mammies and Daddies'. This involves us minding our children, waking them up in the morning, feeding them and bringing them to creche and big-school and then returning to our 'house' to work from home – just as her Mammy does! She has heard me talk about my Dad and now I see that when she puts 'our' children to bed, she kisses each doll gently on the forehead after she has tucked them in!

That simple act, that loving gesture by my father each night was always a great comfort to me and contributed greatly to my understanding of God as a loving Father; as being loved for who I was, as I was. Meditation also gives rise to that same kind of experiential knowing.

Marriage teaches us that love is more than a feeling; that it can be hard work, often fierce and imperfect, but always life-giving.

It becomes a choice we make over and over again, ever-renewed by wonder. These days, I am re-discovering this with my grand-children. When I watch them sleeping after a period of play I cannot help but recall the verse penned by Rainer Maria Rilke:

"A billion stars go spinning through the night, blazing high above your head.

But in you is the presence that will be, when all the stars are dead."

Both marriage and meditation also involve a great deal of letting go. There is a quaint phrase in the English language 'to knock the corners off' somebody; it means to accustom a person to the vicissitudes of life; to cure a person of naïveté, selfishness, etc. by exposure to reality. Whereas our education, our life experience and all of our relationships do that to each of us to some extent, the two most effective instruments in knocking the corners off me over the years have been marriage and meditation.



Both marriage and meditation hold a mirror up to us, allowing us to see with fresh eyes how we have developed habitual, often familial, ways of dealing with life's challenges and show us, sometimes with great humour and sometimes painfully, how such habits are often defensive and unhelpful in life and in relationship.

In meditation as we sit in silence we find ourselves assailed by a myriad of thoughts, emotions and sensations which reflect back to us the preoccupations, desires, needs, and worries of the egoic self. As we continually let them go and return to our word, we begin to discover a spaciousness underneath the noise from which emerges a deeper sense of who we are. And, in marriage, as our habitual ways of doing things rub up against the very different habits of our partner we slowly but surely learn that there is no single right way of doing anything but that a range of alternative approaches bring a great richness of possibility.

The poet Hafiz captured this beautifully when he wrote:

"The Beloved sometimes wants

To do us a great favour:

Hold us upside down

And shake all the nonsense out."

In meditation, the act of continually letting go of thought and returning to our world does the same thing and, devoid of all our baggage, we find we are, all the time, standing on holy ground, grounded in love.

After 40 years in the education sector Noel Keating was awarded a PhD for his research into the child's experience of meditation and its spiritual fruits. Noel now leads, in a voluntary capacity, a project which offers free in-service to primary schools who may wish to consider introducing meditation as a whole-school practice. Noel is author of Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents.

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God an opportunity to flow through us and out into the world, which is just as important a part of the spiritual life as receiving God is.

There is also a sense in which fasting and almsgiving were made for each other, or go hand-in-hand. One of the aspects of fasting is that it allows us to spiritually unite with those who have less than us, whether it be less food, comfort or otherwise. Almsgiving allows us to act on that recognition by resolving to make do with less, while intending to alleviate the suffering one of those people we seek to identify with through fasting is feeling.

“Such recognition opens a door to others in us, that we might better offer them our excess”

Just as fasting may awaken recognition within us that we consume and use too much, almsgiving or acts of charity can equally make us aware that we have more than we need. Such recognition opens a door to others in us, that we might better offer them our excess.

Biblical precedent

The practice of almsgiving is much older than your modern, non-profit charity – it stretches all the way back to biblical times. In the Old Testament, one of the primary ways almsgiving is understood is in

the context of justice. The Hebrew word for almsgiving *tzedakah*, means righteousness. This flows from the belief that to give to the poor helps re-establish right order and the proper ordering of society, in which everyone is treated according to their inherent dignity.

The book of Leviticus tells us that Hebrew law ensured that leftovers of the harvest should be left over for the poor in the fields and vineyards, while in Proverbs, we are told that “he who is kind to the needy honors him”, while refusing to give alms to the poor brings about “just” retribution.



Practical almsgiving

With the goodness and sense of almsgiving established, how does one go about actually doing it? With people still reeling from the effects of the pandemic, and Ukrainian refugees still searching for safe harbour across Europe and the world, there are more people than ever for us to extend a helping hand to. Here are a couple of practical examples of almsgiving help you can take up this Lent, and hopefully, beyond.

- Donate to a local food bank or food kitchen
- Donate to your parish or a charitable Church organisation
- Offer help to someone you know to be struggling
- Write to a prisoner
- Offer to help an elderly neighbour or family member with difficult, daily tasks
- Visit the lonely people in your life, or make a phone call
- Pray for the suffering people of the world, and the souls in purgatory
- Volunteer with a reputable, charitable organisation

These are but a few ideas to help kickstart your charitable resolutions, but there are obviously many, many more. As with everything, take the matter to prayer and ask God who most needs your help at the moment and how best you can offer it. If you listen closely enough, he'll be sure to tell you.

Faith — IN THE — family



Christina Malone

After two years of celebrating the most important week in our liturgical calendar behind closed doors, we are finally to welcome people back into church. How lucky are we! I mentioned this at a recent parent meeting for those whose children wish to be confirmed. Many blank faces looked back at me. I wondered, did they know we were closed for such a long time?

While typing about Holy Week I am reminded that these ceremonies were named by some parishioners when asked about their joyful experience of church in their lives. They shared how wonderful the church looks, from the emptiness on Holy Thursday to the flowers on Easter morning. I agree those in charge of the flower arrangements, decoration never disappoint. After all, we celebrate Easter and Christmas very well. Maybe that's why many still come for those days to the church. It looks good. I don't know, I'm just thinking out loud.

Suddenly this 'green paper' on my desk caught my attention. My census form has not been collected yet. I remember talking to my friend about it a while ago. We discussed the questions on the census form. We wondered about the relevance/importance and who would pick them.

My friend pointed out that in 2022 it is disappointing that the central statistic office is still only giving two options to tick for gender: male and female. Where is equality in that she asked me? I chose not to answer but I smiled when she said it. Her comment meant to me 'the Church' is not the only one 'behind' for those looking for more equality.

Surprisingly the census also came up during a listening session. A parishioner was referring to the census when talking about his hope. He was looking forward to seeing the responses of people regarding their religion. He was very hopeful that it would give him confidence that there are still many Catholics out there. While he was talking about it – his voice became quieter. He realised his hope was also his fear. What if less people ticked the box for Roman Catholic than the last census? What would that mean?

How would we, as a Church, respond if the percentage was below 70%?

I have to admit those listening sessions I have been involved in have been interesting on many levels. As you might have gathered from reading my articles in the past I have been (and still am) very sceptical about it. Referring to it as

“we have been here before”. And even

so we tried, we mostly were unable to attract those on the margin. However, what I heard during those sessions was reassuring.

Many parishioners were sharing similar

challenges and hopes like myself.

Isn't that what the Triduum is about? Between sorrow and hope?

Some hopes were crushed on Good Friday. Some stayed quiet. Others looking in, spectators, laughing, making fun. And still there were those who experience the hope of Easter Morning. Many will look at the cross on Good Friday in despair.

Some might cry out, feel left alone – wondering why “he has forsaken” them. First we are asked to stay with Jesus in the Garden, then go with him through the final hours of his life, but be patient, we are also asked to share in his resurrection. Yes, we Christians do Good Friday very well and sometimes we forget to smile when we talk about the resurrection – the light of the world.

If we truly believe he is the light of the world, if we truly believe the tomb is empty, if we truly believe he is risen, we should be out there rejoicing this message open hearted and share this joy with others.

Like someone said: If the people only knew how wonderful our faith is, they would not want to stay away. In that hope I am wishing you and yours a happy Easter. I am taking a break from my sharing here in this column but not without saying thank you for being on this journey with me. My own twelve months of the road to Emmaus come to an end in the hope other voices feel inspired to share their experience. Isn't that what Pope Francis wants us to do for the synod: Share our experience and listen to each other? I am looking forward to hear yours...



God's love fills the empty heart

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Sr Agnes of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal in Drogheda faced many battles before finding her vocation. However, when she came to have a personal relationship with Jesus, she found he had the joy that would fill her heart.

Born in Florida, Sr Agnes says that she grew up in a Catholic family in which "the Faith was a common thing through my parents and my family – I'm one of five children". While she received a grounding in the Faith from them, when she left home to attend college, she found her faith tested.

"I realised I knew a lot about Jesus, but I didn't have a personal relationship with him"

"I grew up playing tennis from the age of eight and I got a tennis scholarship to the University of North Florida," Sr Agnes begins. "When I went to college, I went about doing the college scene. I was not living at home at the time. Really, there was an emptiness in my heart. I was doing the college scene and trying to fill the void in my heart



Sr Agnes of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal. She is based in their convent in Drogheda.

with the things of the world and it left me empty.

"At the same time, my freshman year, I had a knee injury – I tore my ACL playing tennis. That's quite a serious injury and I was told that I would be out for a year. I began to ask the questions, who am I and who are you Lord? I actually had the surgery on Good Friday and it was Holy Thursday night I prayed that prayer before the Eucharist. It just came from my heart. Later on, I found out that it's a prayer St Francis prayed very much in his life."

After the surgery, Sr Agnes fell in with some Christians she met on campus. She recognised in them the joy she wanted in her own life: "I realised I knew a lot about Jesus, but I didn't have a personal relationship

with him. The group were on campus. They would just be present and I realised they had the joy I was missing. I began to read Scripture every day and began to grow in a beautiful friendship with Jesus."

Vocation

She laughs when I ask if it was then she discovered her vocation. "You might think it would be very easy from there to my vocation," she says, "but unfortunately in my journey it wasn't. To cut a long story short, I actually over the next couple of years ended up falling away from the Catholic Church and became anti-Catholic, believe it or not. It's the mercy of God that I became a sister!"

Sr Agnes credits her parents' prayers for bringing her back to

the Church, as well as Scott Hahn's famous conversion story, *Rome Sweet Home*, and a video called *Miracles of the Eucharist*.

"It's by an elderly couple – they've since passed on – Bob and Penny Lord. It was about a Eucharistic miracle in Orvieto, Italy. And I was watching it and it was through that miracle that I realised Jesus – who I had come to know and love as my best friend – is truly present in the holy Eucharist and truly present in the Catholic Church. And I said then, where else can I go?"

"Our community came here nine years ago at the request of Cardinal Timothy Dolan and the invitation of then-Bishop Michael Smith"

After that, at the age of 24, Sr Agnes made a consecration of her whole life to the Blessed Mother and prayed a 54-day rosary novena for her vocation. She also went on two pilgrimages, one to Rome and Orvieto, which she says was very healing.

"I went on a second pilgrimage for my vocation to a shrine to Our Lady," Sr Agnes continues. "I went there at the end of my 54-day rosary novena. It was on Divine Mercy Sunday, after making a general confession of my whole life, that the priest said to me, have you thought of your vocation?"

"I said yes. He said, how urgent do you feel like you need to make a decision on it. I said, out of a scale of one to 10, a nine out of impatience! He said, when you leave here from this place of pilgrimage, I want you to choose the path you're called to go

on and just try it for six months.

"I tried and every day, I would feel like I haven't picked it. I would think it was marriage and would have no peace. Finally, on Divine Mercy Sunday, I said ok, I'll try religious life. And this peace came over me and I began to cry. I realised, it's like he has been proposing to me and proposing to me and I have not been listening. I was working as a paediatric oncology nurse at that point for children with cancer and I felt the Lord asking me to quit my job and enter somewhere.

"And so that's what I did, I quit my job and I didn't know where I was going to enter and I started visiting convents and visiting our community [the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal]. I felt drawn to the joy and the Gospel way of life that I experienced with the sisters. I entered back in 2001."

It all happened very fast, Sr Agnes says. After her first visit in May or June 2001, she entered in September. She spent a year as a postulant, two as a novice and then was temporary professed for four years. In 2008, she made her final profession. However, it wasn't until last year that she came to Ireland.

"Our community came here nine years ago at the request of Cardinal Timothy Dolan and the invitation of then-Bishop Michael Smith," Sr Agnes explains. "We came and our community sent four sisters. I only arrived in November, so I'm a new sister here. I'm familiar of the journey of this mission, though I didn't experience it and I think it's a gift for me to be here. I really feel Jesus has called me here, so I feel very drawn to see what he has in store for me."

She has thoroughly enjoyed the Irish welcome, Sr Agnes says, saying the people are "very welcoming, very warm" and that she finds Irish culture beautiful and still very Catholic.

Do you know someone who we should profile? Send an email to ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Sweet Treats

Kiley Britten



A traditional Czech Mazanec (Easter Bread)

My *babi* (granny) makes this bread a lot. It is a traditional Czech bread which is served around Easter, Christmas, or other special celebrations and is a kind of mix between a brioche and challah. This Easter version is usually shaped in a round loaf to symbolise the sun, with a cross cut into the top. The bread is baked on Holy Saturday and brought to church on Easter to be blessed by the priest. I opted to shape my loaf by braiding it, which is not traditional but is the way my *babi* does it. It tastes delicious no matter the shape!

Ingredients:

- 180ml lukewarm milk
- 2tsp active dry yeast
- 400g plain flour
- 75g granulated sugar
- 1sp vanilla extract
- 60g softened butter
- 2 eggs
- 2-3bsp raisins
- 3-4tbsp flaked almonds

Instructions

1. Pour the lukewarm milk into a cup, then stir in 1 teaspoon of sugar and the yeast. Leave this somewhere warm for around 15 minutes until it becomes very frothy.
2. Crack open the eggs and carefully remove a bit of egg white, setting aside for an egg wash later.
3. This next step can be done in a stand mixer with a dough hook or in a mixing bowl with a spoon. Put the flour, sugar, vanilla, softened butter and eggs into a bowl. Add in the yeast and milk mixture.
4. Slowly mix all the ingredients together. Once it looks well combined, increase to a medium speed. If the dough seems overly sticky, you can add in some flour, one tablespoon at a time. The dough will be a little sticky, so make sure you don't add too much. If you are mixing by hand, turn the dough onto a floured surface and knead.



5. Once the dough is soft and smooth, mix or knead in the almonds and raisins.

6. Form the dough into a rough ball and then place in a bowl, leaving it somewhere warm to rise until doubled in size.

7. After the dough has risen, it is time to shape. You can leave it in a round ball and cut a cross into the top, or braid the dough – whichever you prefer. Punch the dough down and then divide into strands or shape into a round. Once the dough is shaped, place on a floured baking sheet and leave to rise for another 30 minutes. Turn your oven to 190°C.

8. Before placing the bread in the oven, brush with the reserved egg white and add more flaked almonds to the top – you can gently press them in to ensure they stay in place. Put the bread into the pre-heated oven and bake at 190° for 10 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 160° and continue baking for 20-25 minutes. Let cool a little before slicing and serving with some butter.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



A diverse journey of faith and discovery

It's great to see the idea of pilgrimage becoming more popular in recent years but sometimes it just becomes a secular or self-improvement exercise, with the spiritual side vague or side-lined.

Pilgrimage: Road to the Scottish Isles (BBC One, Sunday) is the third outing in this series from BBC. The formula is the same – celebrities of diverse beliefs and personalities walk a traditional pilgrimage route. I lament the 'celebrification' of so many programmes, though this time I hadn't heard of any of them before, so my 'celebrityphobia' (forgive me) wasn't overly activated. I actually enjoyed the first episode – the route this time follows the steps of St Columba from Donegal to Iona in Scotland. Donegal has never looked more beautiful, enhanced by sweeping drone footage and I suspect there will be more tourists and pilgrims this summer.

Comedian

The likeable group included the inevitable comedian – Shazia Mirza, a Muslim but educated in a Catholic school because her parents felt she needed the discipline; the bubbly social media influencer Scarlett Moffatt, a Christian who takes her Christian faith seriously and finds comfort in it; Louisa Clein a Jewish actor, emo-



The intrepid pilgrims.

tional about home and her Jewish heritage; the flamboyant interior designer Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen who identifies as a pagan; practising Sikh Monty Panesar, a former bowler for the England cricket team; TV personality and agnostic Nick Hewer who was educated by the Jesuits in Clongowes Wood and who feels he should pay attention to spiritual things as he gets to the 'last chapter' of his life; Paralympian and lapsed Christian Will Bayley wasn't able to join them until this

weekend's second episode. I enjoyed their discussions about faith and also learned a lot about St Columba aka Colmcille.

Moving

Their visit to the Church of St Columba in Derry was quite moving. Scarlett welcomed the priest's individual blessing, while Monty liked the thought of it but wondered whether it would be appropriate for a Sikh – he got his blessing. Louisa became emotional and longed to be in her synagogue. I feel

inclined to follow this series through.

RTÉ Radio One's flagship religious affairs programme **The Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio One, Friday) made a welcome return recently, with new presenter Siobhán Garrigan at the helm. Last week's programme gave some timely perspectives on the fallout from the conflict in Ukraine. Tiglin, a body with a Christian ethos, was housing around 100 refugees in Greystones, and founder Aubrey McCarthy introduced Yaroslav Bilous, a young teen who had been studying in the conservatory in Kyiv, he gave a beautiful piano performance of *River Flows in You*.

We learned that the Society of Friends (Quakers) had condemned the war and their pacifist tradition was explored with Quaker theologian Prof. Rachel Muers of the University of Leeds. She outlined brave opposition to the war within Russia – e.g. the over 200 Orthodox priests signing a letter of opposition. There were connections to fundraising in Bewley's Café (the original Bewleys were Quaker refugees) – selling 'buns for funds'. Col Campbell told how these 'red cross buns' were a variation on the seasonal fare. The café has also sourced interpreters for Ukrainian customers.

Dr Michael Jackson, Church of Ireland Arch-

PICK OF THE WEEK

EASTER VIGIL MASS

EWTV Holy Saturday April 16, 6.30pm

Pope Francis presides over the Easter Vigil Mass live from Rome.

MASS FOR EASTER SUNDAY

RTÉ One and RTÉ Radio One Extra/LW252 10am.

Bishop Jan Hendriks celebrates the resurrection of Jesus with live Mass in St Nicholas' Basilica, Amsterdam, with commentary and translation by Michael Kelly.

URBI ET ORBI

RTÉ One 11.45am

Pope Francis delivers his message and Easter blessing to the city and to the world from St Peter's Basilica - with commentary and translation by Michael Kelly.

bishop of Dublin, spoke of Irish faith communities' support for victims of the war. He was quite nuanced and cautious when it came to the political side of the war. He wasn't happy about what Siobhán Garrigan called the "tacit support" and "theological justification" of the war by Moscow's Russian Patriarch Kirill – he didn't like this kind of linking of religion and nationalism. He had strong words about the war – "human devastation...societal destruction...individual and corporate terror", but on the other hand wasn't keen on the idea of ejecting the Russian Orthodox Church from the World Council of Churches – that body would miss the richness of their tradition – but he thought some kind of censure was in order.

Stronger

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams was much stronger on the matter when interviewed on **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster, Sunday). While he understood Orthodox disapproval of what they saw as the 'decadence' of the West, he thought there was a "strong case for expulsion", and would have hard words for the Patriarch Kirill if he met him: "Your own flock are being killed in Ukraine by other members of your own flock – it is your responsibility to condemn the killing of your own flock for whom you are answerable to Jesus Christ".

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Aubrey Malone

Film

Curiosities of the Netflix phenomenon

I joined Netflix against my better judgment. People kept telling me I was missing out on a lot, that it had anything and everything. Maybe, I thought to myself, that's the problem.

I was accused of being snobbish when I said it reminded me of the cinematic equivalent of Woolworth's. That was my first impression. It remains my current one.

Like all supermarkets it's cheap. That's mainly why people flock to it.

Binge

When I joined it first I went on a binge of checking out its delights. I discovered it had a lot of classic oldies. Fine, but as someone who's been going to films since he was a toddler



Rosamund Pike and Ryan Gosling in the 2007 film *Fracture*.

I'd seen most of these. Many of them stand up to a second – or even third – viewing but is that the point?

Netflix is a bit like having another TV channel. It's okay if

it's bucketing rain outside and there's nothing on the 'ordinary' telly. But is it worth signing up for?

That's debatable. You could spend hours scrolling

through the choices and come up with nothing worthwhile. I'm reminded of the "bargain bucket" at Xtravision.

Condemn

I don't want to condemn it out of hand. I've seen some wonderful films on it, most recently *The Nest*. This is like a cross between *Room at the Top* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

You won't see a better study of the dissolution of the American Dream. Jude Law re-locates from the US to an English manor to pursue his idolatry of the dollar. Meanwhile his family life crumbles.

It's shot mostly in dark hues by director/writer Sean Durkin. We get a series of atmospheric vignettes that are distinctly

Machiavellian. The script is hatched to the bone with treasureable one-liners. A symbolic masterpiece.

You might also like to check out *Fracture*, a murder thriller featuring Ryan Gosling and Anthony Hopkins. Hopkins kills his wife at the start. He's evil personified. There's an ingenious twist at the end.

A lot of Netflix films deal with obsessions. *The Crush* has Alicia Silverstone developing a fixation for an older man and wrecking his life when he doesn't respond. I enjoyed it but it's derivative – recalling everything from *Lolita* to Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

A favourite Netflix theme is the Controlling Husband. You'll see this in *Intrusion*. Here we

have a beautiful house in a horrible area, a suspicious hubby and a wife who turns detective to try and find out what his secret is. It's fairly standard but I found myself becoming intrigued by it despite myself.

Another Netflix offering I watched recently was *Enduring Love*. This has a lot of moody cinematography and a documentary style of direction. For ninety minutes we see a pre-Bond Daniel Craig going through the dark night of the soul after a hot air balloon tragedy. Rhys Ifans, a witness to it, stalks him sneeringly.

What's it all about? I'm still not sure. There's more style than substance here. Sometimes you wish they'd just tell the story.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Seeking the truth of history at the holy places

Peter Costello

From the first century Christians and others have been interested in visiting the Holy Land and seeing the places associated with the life and death of Jesus. This is especially so at the pivotal feasts of the year, at Christmas and now at Eastertide.

In the early days this was a once-in-a-life time journey and those going there rightly called themselves pilgrims. But travel is now so easy that those crowding into the city may mostly be called tourists.

From the beginning certain places have been especially sought out: the Upper Room, the Garden of Gethsemane, Pilate's Palace, the Via Dolorosa, Golgotha and the Tomb offered the family of Jesus by the merchant Joseph of Arimathea.

Here, in this article, a sort of Easter special, we will explore briefly some aspects of these places and their history, and perhaps see that they may be far more authentic than the sceptics over the centuries often allowed. We can take them roughly in the order in which they are mentioned in those final chapters of the individual gospels.

The Upper Room

We can start with the location of the place where Jesus and the Apostles marked the Passover.

Today in an edifice on Mount Zion a room called the Cenacle is shown as the dining room of the Last Supper and also the room where by tradition the Apostles and Mary were gathered at the descent of the Paraclete. This is the "Upper Room" of long tradition. Yet to some it does not seem appropriate.

The term "Upper Room" had an exact meaning in the Old Testament. An ordinary house was of one story and was called *beit*. But a more



The Holy Women Encounter the Risen Christ in the Garden, by James Tissot, c. 1893

respectable house of some social standing, though necessarily of wealth, had an upper extension, called in Arabic 'alliyeh (see picture). This chamber was set aside for special occasions and for special guests, as in the story of Elijah and the Shunammite woman (II Kings: 4), as shown in the mid-19th century woodcut illustrated.

The Cenacle as envisaged by later translators and as shown to tourists, conforms not to the usages of ancient Israel but to Roman and Greek dining customs. The historical reality,

if we follow the gospel texts, would have been quite different, more familial and homely as is the style of Pasch among observant Jews today. Where this 'alliyeh was is not known except that it was outside the city.

The Garden of Gethsemane

Another site that was outside the city was the garden where the group went after observing the Passover. This was where Jesus was arrested, where Peter resisted with armed violence, and was told by Jesus that

"those who live by the sword dies by the sword" – a maxim many Christians are happy to ignore.

Pilate's Palace

Jesus was carried as a prisoner into the city before the chief priest and from there to Pilate's court, and from there to Herod's palace and then back to Pilate again.

What makes any discussion of the location of the sacred sites difficult is the fact that the city of Pilate and King Herod and the chief priest was annihilated after the Jewish Revolt in 70AD by the Roman Legions of the Emperor Titus. (The carvings on the Arch of Titus in Rome show the legionaries carrying away the sacred objects from the Temple, including the Menorah, the sacred, seven branched candelabrum.) Jerusalem was again razed after another revolt in the time of Hadrian.

The Via Dolorosa

But if the houses were burned down, their cellars remained, and on these the old city could be rebuilt and was. So that the first Christians could be fairly certain about where the events of the Passion had taken place.

But as time went on doubts rose. The Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, visited the city and secured recognition of the sites we know today, as well as bringing to light the timbers that came to be thought of as "the True Cross".

“In the early days this was a once-in-a-life time journey”

The processional way that has become known down to today as the Via Dolorosa, was created to run from site to site through this new city, thus inspiring the devotion centred on the images that can still be seen in nearly every local church still, the Stations of the Cross. These represent *in peto* the way Jesus passed to the execution site which stood outside the city.

Golgotha and the Tomb

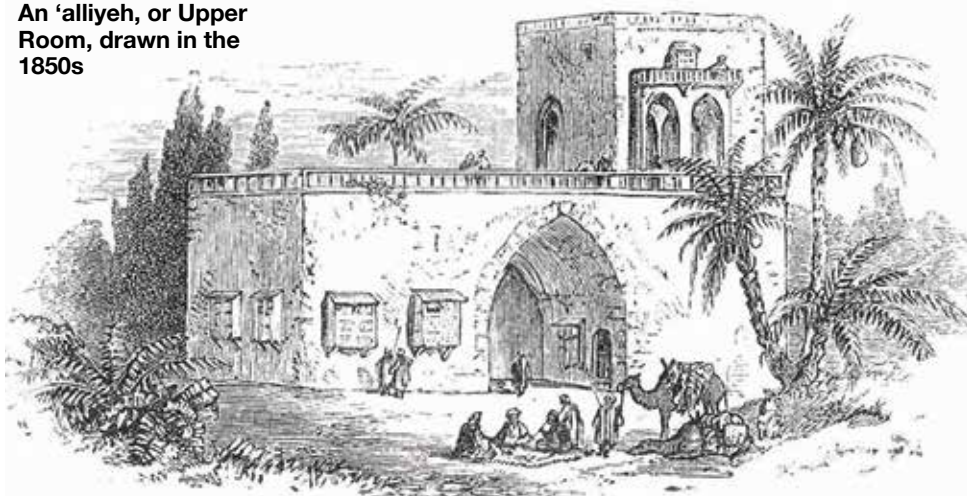
It is that scene of execution, which can never at any time have been a pleasant place, that poses a real problem, as does the connected mystery of the tomb which Joseph of Arimathea made available to the

family of Jesus. Burials were always made outside the walls according to Jewish custom. Recent Israeli archaeological work in around the shrine of the Holy Sepulchre have found earlier burials, demonstrating that at one time what is now an urban site was once suburban. And the Gospels narrative suggest the tomb was near Golgotha, or Calvary after the Latin, as it came to be known, "the place of the skull".

It was the increasing concern of some Protestant traditions that gave rise to doubts about Golgotha and the Tomb. Such different American writers as William McClure Thompson and Mark Twain found the atmosphere of Jerusalem dismaying. Both disliked the Oriental enthusiasm of the Orthodox and the Copts, and the elaborate ceremonials of Catholics. The image in their imaginations that they cultivated of the city in the time of Jesus was very different and more austere.

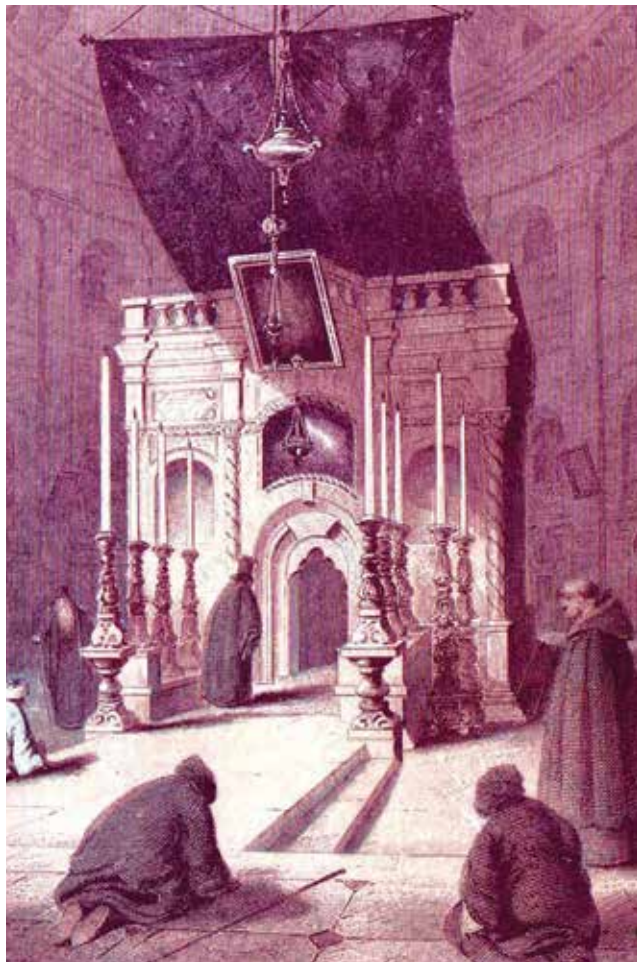
Thus the 'Garden Tomb' which was promoted by the British imperialist General Gordon appealed more to the tastes of such people. Certainly today the Garden tomb, which lies well outside

An 'alliyeh, or Upper Room, drawn in the 1850s



Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

of Jerusalem



The Shrine of the Holy Sepulchre, engraved in the 1850s

the old city walls, gives many visitors an impression of what might have been seen on the first day, not just of the week, as the Gospels says, but of the Christian era as a whole, when the holy woman arrived to anoint the dead body, and encountered instead evidence of the risen Christ. It is really a matter of projective imagination. Authenticity has little to do with it.

These arguments have gone on for hundreds of years and are unsettled. In the notes he provided to his mid-18th century edition of the translation of the New Testament (made at Rheims in 1582), Bishop Richard Challoner remarked about the divergence of learned opinion over the exact age of Jesus at the time of his death, that such differences "are of little consequence".

His opinion would be shared by many today à propos of many other differences between the learned. For Christians of faith, it is not *where* things happened that is of prime importance, but *what* is claimed to have happened. For it is on those claims that their confidence rests.

The same can be said of all places of pilgrimage. In this context we should per-

haps bring to mind the lines in TS Eliot's *Little Gidding*;

"You are not here to verify, Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity

Or carry report. You are here to kneel

Where prayer has been valid..."

On the over-all matter of pilgrimages and faith, even in this age when the numbers of annual pilgrims are said to be growing, those other lines from an early Irish poet are apposite:

"Techt do Róim,
mór saítho, becc torbai;
in Rí con-daigi i foss,
manim bera latt ní fhog-bai."

Or in the fine exactness of the translation by Frank O'Connor:

"To go to Rome
is little profit, endless pain;
the Master that you seek in Rome
you find at home or seek in vain."

For those in the right frame of mind, all places can be holy; if they believe God is everywhere, and Jesus ever attentive to their prayers, then every place in creation can be a source of saving grace.

That is not a problem: the problem is whether or not they truly believe what Jesus asks them in the Gospels to believe...

Exploring the iconic meaning of the image through which 'God spoke to St Francis'

The San Damiano Cross: An Icon of the Crucifixion

by Madeleine Stewart
(Conard Press, €12.00 / £10.50; ISBN 978-1-9161432-0-3; orders to conardicons.com)

Peter Costello

Madeline Stewart, who is an accredited expert on icons and their interpretation lives in Northern Ireland, but mentally she is a well-travelled global person through her explorations of icons of the Orthodox tradition. She gives a wonderful demonstration in this little book of just how they should be understood and used in devotions.

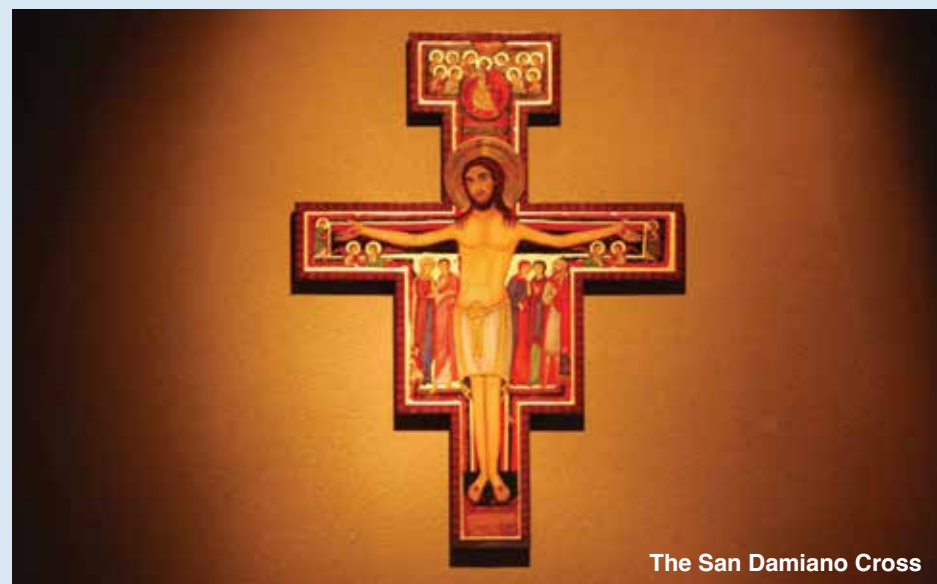
These images, as we all know from experience, often suffered from the failure of art experts trained in western ideas of art interpretation to do them full justice. (I am thinking here of those young graduates in art history whom we so often encounter in religious shrines which have developed into tourist attractions across Western Europe.)

This book will, I think, be an eye-opener in the matter of icons for many readers, short as it is. Her interest in the San Damiano cross began when she was asked by her sister, a Franciscan sister, to give a short talk to a pilgrim group who were visiting the Franciscan shrine at San Damiano in Assisi, where St Clare established her first community.

When St Francis himself had his mystical experience in 1205 the church was badly neglected and nearly in ruins. He felt urged to follow the divine injunction, "Francis, go and repair my church". This he took to mean the little church in which he knelt; only later did he realise the call was to repair the universal Church.

Preserved

The cross is now preserved in another chapel, a facsimile hanging at San Damiano. It has been described by some scholars as Romanesque, yet its entire inspira-



The San Damiano Cross

tion, as Madeleine Stewart decodes it, is entirely Eastern, entirely and correctly Orthodox.

She recounts how her initial talk merely developed initial ideas that she pursued at greater length on returning to Ulster with the aid of the computer programs that she had used in her architectural practice, and the practical help of other more skilled computer experts in handling the interpretive task she found she had taken on.

“When St Francis himself had his mystical experience in 1205 the church was badly neglected”

She recounts all this in a straight forward but simple way, for she is dealing with a complex tradition hardly known to most people in the Western Church. She was able to understand what it must have looked like originally. Over time it has suffered serious damage involving a total loss of a portion at the foot of the cross and its replacement by a tile, suggesting that over-zealous veneration by pilgrims in past centuries were responsible. But drawing on her knowledge of the icon

tradition she has been able to reconstruct and restore the losses. It is a wonderful art history detective story.

"Icons, and particularly an early and complex icon, like the San Damiano cross," she writes, "can look strange, and even unattractive, to the Western eye. Eyes used to realism, in a material sense, of Western renaissance art, and in modern times, to the highly individual works by artists regarded as great, can easily fail to recognise the beauty of icons; rarely do they see the integrity of the theological truths which they portray."

(Oddly, in an aside, she remarks on the use of a cockerel as a symbol of Christ's resurrection on an Irish penal cross, most of which it seems were made and sold to pilgrims at Lough Derg at the start of the 19th century).

When her sister asked her to give that talk to a group of modern Irish pilgrims she had no realisation of the journey into love she was setting out on.

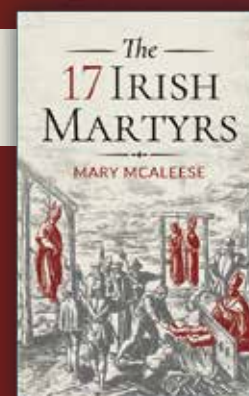
"It is my hope that this presentation on the cross will give you, as it did me, a greater appreciation of this unique and holy icon and assist you in your prayer and meditation as you spend time with your crucified Lord."

I myself have only one reservation about this short, but brilliant book, and that is it needs to be far longer and to be properly supported by a mainstream publisher (such as Thames and Hudson) to reach the far wider audience it deserves.

But for now, this is a wonderful happily accessible book on an intriguing topic which can be warmly commended to every reader.

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Trócaire

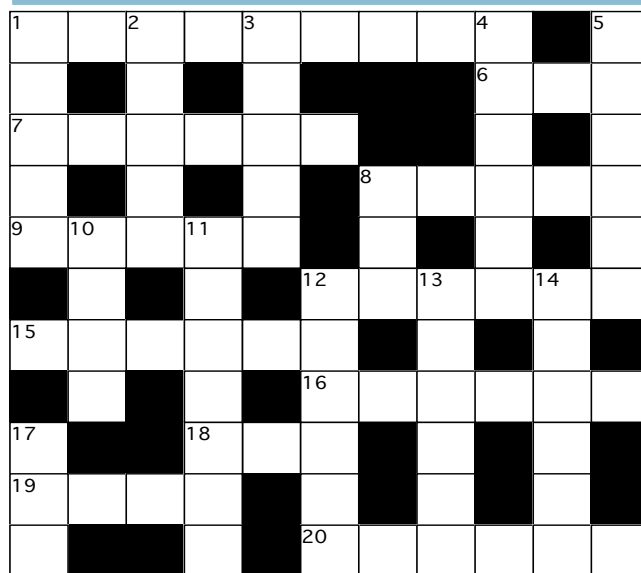
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Leisure time

Crossword Junior

Ferdia 428



Across

- 1 It may make the night bright when there is no cloud (9)
6 Meat we get from a pig (3)
7 This creature was supposed to breathe fire (6)
8 The fourth month (5)
9 Intends (5)
12 Took part in a game (6)
15 A soldier should do this when meeting an officer (6)
16 Homeless persons (6)
18 Him for a boy, ___ for a girl (3)
19 Wagon (4)
20 You can climb on its rungs

Down

- 1 You might write 'Dear Sir or ___' (5)
2 Surname of the American president from 2008 to 2016 (5)
3 Has a peep (5)
4 Three tens make this number (6)
5 Grinned (6)
8 Everyone or everything (3)
10 Test (4)
11 Bold (7)
12 Put it in the tank of a car (6)
13 Astounded (6)
14 The ___ State Building is in New York (6)
17 It's usually the best card (3)

SOLUTIONS, APRIL 7

GORDIUS NO. 553

Across — 1 Plebiscite 6 Hobo 10 Legal 11 Sacrilege 12 Menorah 15 Obeys 17 Exit 18 Pays 19 Heads 21 Battery 23 Ruder 24 Stem 25 Aloe vera 26 Hymns 28 Ragwort 33 Upskilled 34 Ozone 35 Else 36 Propaganda

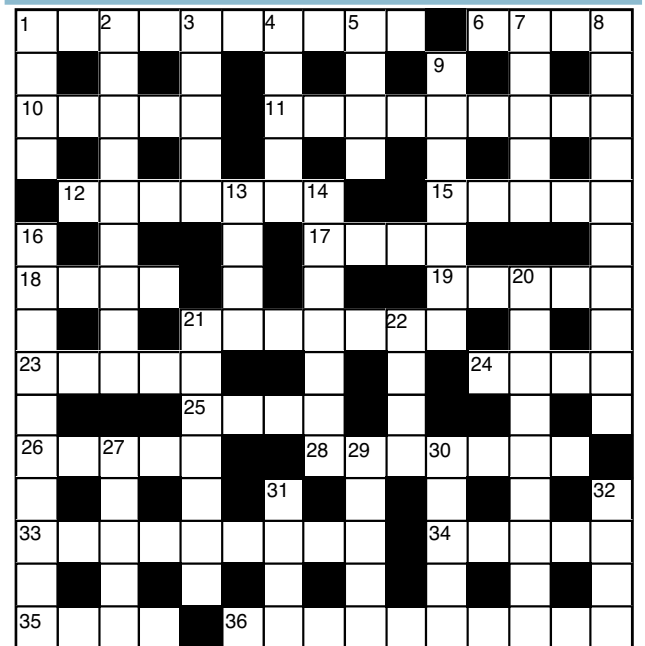
Down — 1 Pals 2 Eagle-eyed 3 Igloo 4 Costa Rica 5 Tack 7 Oxeye 8 Open sesame 9 Timothy 14 Heather 16 Opera house 20 Afternoon 21 Brassie 22 Ring 27 Muses 29 Add up 30 Wrong 31 Slur

CHILDREN'S No. 427

Across — 1 Double bed 7 Add 8 Early bird 11 Oar 12 Idea 13 Trained 15 Angry 17 Second 19 Finish 20 Easter 21 Aged
Down — 1 Draco Malfoy 2 Under 3 Library 4 Bray 5 Decide 6 Panda 9 Bin 10 Red 13 Trying 14 Ice 16 Adore 17 Shed 18 Case

Crossword

Gordius 554



Across

- 1 Widely used kind of medicine (10)
6 Reverberate (4)
10 Spoken tests (5)
11 This East European might lug a bairn around (9)
12 Long-term weather trend (7)
15 It is used to immobilise an illegally parked car (5)
17 Sprint (4)
18 St Colmcille's Scottish monastic home (4)
19 Tessa returns with something worth having (5)
21 Derived from the Latin for 'cross', vitally critical or decisive (7)
23 Eye-protector (5)
24 Scrutinise (4)
25 Eject forcibly (4)
26 Give fresh life to a broken ewer around the North (5)
28 Stretchable (7)
33 Clapped (9)
34 Coming from the Emerald Isle (5)
35 Slippery creatures (4)
36 One's judgment of the situation is to have masses sent around (10)

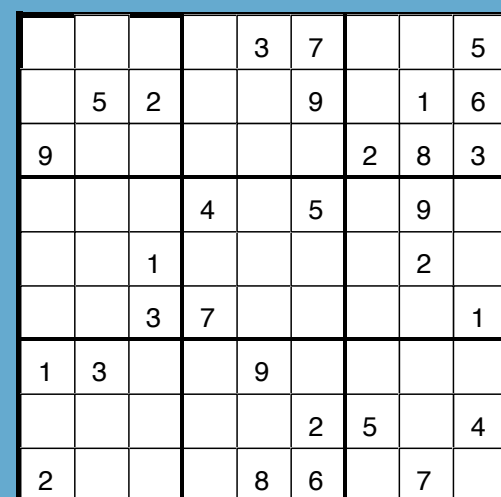
Down

- 1 Nautical cry (4)
2 Part of the tennis court that facilitates the likes of the Luas? (9)
3 Broom (5)
4 Path around a celestial body (5)
5 Doing nothing (4)
7 Country whose capital is Beijing (5)
8 The tin-pot omen could be all-powerful (10)
9 & 20d How one clips fresh acacia for Christ's act of redemption (7,9)
13 Attest (4)
14 Teach (7)
16 Fine cutlery (10)
20 See 9 down
21 Use it to force open a locked door (7)
22 Glow, emanation (4)
27 Where, in Asia, the plane crashed (5)
29 Implement used for serving soup, for example (5)
30 Secret agents (5)
31 Lyric poems (4)
32 Closed (4)

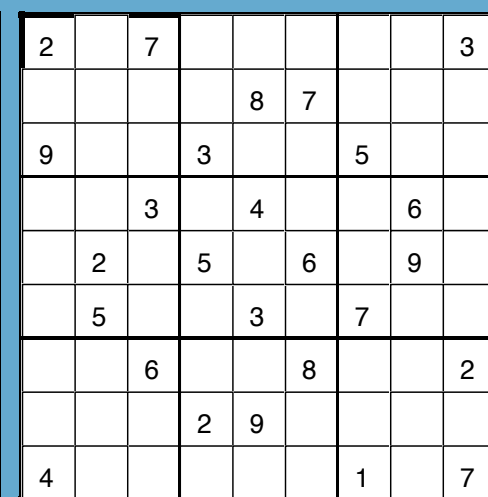
Sudoku Corner

428

Easy



Hard



Last week's Easy 427

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

Last week's Hard 427

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

Notebook

Fr Conor McDonough



Holy Week: Let us stand, sing, and grieve in community

NOTHING QUITE prepares you for the intensity of Holy Week lived in a religious community. Since I entered the Dominican novitiate in 2009, every Easter has been profoundly moving, with an emotion that is communal. Together the community experiences disorientation in this week: familiar timetables are altered, familiar statues are covered, and the Lord is removed from his familiar place in the tabernacle. Together we hear the same readings, sing the same songs, and make the same gestures of grief, love, and exultation.

Desolation

Holy Week, this journey through desolation towards the unspeakable joy of Easter, is best lived communally. At best, each Christian home, each parish, and the whole people of God experience the same agony and the same ecstasy, because they recognise the same Lord. For various reasons, though, it's not always easy for people in our time to connect with the communal Christian experience of Easter, above all because the world around us – apart from chocolate manufacturers – pays little attention to this feast.

With the help of the Internet, however, new possibilities are



opened up for us. One thing I love to do during Holy Week and the Easter season is to listen to seasonal music from around the Christian world: Serbia, Greece, Russia, the Middle East, and so on. These songs of the Christian people help me move beyond my own preoccupations to enter into "fellowship with ages past", to participate more profoundly in the common sentiment of the people of God.

In searching for the more exotic expressions of the Holy

Week experience, I have rediscovered a few gems from the Irish tradition, especially the sean nós lament, 'Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire' ('Lament of the Three Marys').

Tradition

This song is typical of the Irish tradition of reflection on the passion, which takes the little crowd at the foot of the Cross – and especially Christ's Mother – as our eyes and ears on Calvary. While the 8th-century Irish poet, Blathmac, writes a long poem on the passion with Mary by his side ("Come to me, loving Mary, that I may keen with you your very dear one"), the singer of this sean nós song goes a step further and sings as Mary, or rather, as the three Marys at the foot of the cross (John 19:25). Christ is so bruised that he is hardly recognisable:

"Is this the little son nourished at Mary's breast [...]"

And is this the little son I bore for three seasons?"

We see Christ through the teared-up eyes of his mother, as the tenderness of Bethlehem meets the violence of Golgotha:

"Is this the little son born in the stable [...]"

My son, my darling, your nose and little mouth are cut."

Throughout the song, the mournful refrain (or 'keen') is repeated, and its agonised syllables give musical form to the Good Friday anguish of every Christian generation. Together these assembled generations stand at Calvary, side by side with the three Marys, gazing at the Cross in Good Friday shock: "Óchón agus óchón ó..."

This Holy Week, let us stand, sing, and grieve in community with them.

Blathmac's Irish poem

The 8th-century Irish poem I mentioned, written by a man called Blathmac, really deserves to be better known by Irish Christians. It's full of extraordinary images, above all in the description of the crucifixion: "The King of the seven holy heavens, when his heart was pierced, wine was spilled upon the pathways, the blood of Christ flowing through his gleaming sides... The sun hid its own light; it mourned its Lord; a sudden darkness went over the blue heavens, the wild and furious sea roared... It was fitting for God's elements, the beautiful sea, the blue heaven, the sturdy earth, that they should change their aspect when keening their hero".

Connemara's Maamturk mountain range

I said that 'Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire' was a rediscovery for me. I had heard it as a child, during a Good Friday pilgrimage to Máméan, in Connemara's Maamturk mountain range. There's always an extraordinary atmosphere there on Good Friday: a small crowd gathered on a hillside, following the suffering Lord in the Stations of the Cross, mourning for him. The landscape itself seems to mourn too, as passing clouds darken its face.



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