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'Set prisoners free for Christmas'

Reformer nun hails papal plea to Govt

Chai Brady

A plea by Pope Francis for a Christmas clemency for prisoners has been hailed as "powerful and courageous" by an Irish nun who has dedicated her life to supporting prisoners and their families.

In a letter to governments around the world – including Ireland – the Pontiff this week asked for a gesture of mercy as communities prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The Pope asked world leaders to grant leniency to "those of our brothers and sisters deprived of their liberty whom they deem fit to benefit from such a measure, so that this time marked by tensions, injustices, and conflicts may be opened to the grace that comes from the Lord".

Veteran prison chaplain Sr Imelda Wickham PBVM welcomed the Pope's message, saying he has consistently raised the issue of imprisonment and is calling "all of us to recognise the dignity and humanity of each person".

"There are many, many people in prison today who could actually be with their families during Christmas time and it's not facilitated. I think he's asking us to look at ways you could show clemency, that you could show mercy. It's also recognising their dignity, their

» Continued on Page 2

Beautiful Bambinelli...



A girl holds a figurine of the baby Jesus to receive Pope Francis' blessing on Sunday, December 11, also known as 'Bambinelli Sunday'. The Pope blessed figurines of the baby Jesus brought by children for their Nativity scenes. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

NI Catholic schools top parent poll

Ruadhán Jones

Catholic schools have dominated a poll of top performing schools in the North, taking the top three spots and five out of the top 10.

St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt, Co. Derry, took top spot for the second year running in the 30th edition of *The Sunday Times* 'Parent Power' poll, which identifies the highest-achieving schools in the UK.

Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast, and Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock, in Belfast close out the top three in the poll, published December 11.

Principal of St Mary's Paul McLean expressed "delight" at the news, saying students leave the school "with a value system that sets pupils up for life".

"There are so many challenges and competing priorities in young peoples' lives that the safety and support of parents and schools working closely together is a necessary element to each pupil reaching their potential," Principal McLean said.

More than 1,600 schools were studied for the survey, with rankings based on grades achieved in the schools.

"The quality of Northern Irish grammar schools shines through yet again in the national rankings, with seven schools in the top 50" across the UK, the release states.

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Reformer nun hails papal plea to Govt

» **Continued from Page 1** human needs and their humanity.

"Christmas is a very, very difficult time for people in prison, I've worked in prison on Christmas days, it is a very poignant day. A joyous day in one sense but also a very, very sad day," she said.

Sr Wickham, who founded 'New Directions' which supports families affected by a loved one's imprisonment, said the Pope's plea is particularly important following the pandemic when prisoners were locked in their cells for most of the day.

"People in prison are members of our families, of our communities, and I think many of them could be facilitated in spending a little bit of time with their children,

with their elderly, sick parents at Christmas time," she said.

"Not only has he [Pope Francis] called on other people to do it, he does it himself, he walks into the prison and he meets prisoners. It might seem simple but the message behind his actions is very, very powerful. It's a very courageous, powerful call to the heads of state," she added.

Over the weekend, at the end of his Angelus address on December 11, the Pope gave a shout-out to "the detainees in the Due Palazzi prison of Padua: I greet you affectionately!"

The Department of Justice did not respond when asked whether the Pope's call would be considered before this paper went to print.

Wither the freedom even to speak?

The pre-Enlightenment era is often viewed as a time of rigid conformism and a lack of liberty compared to our own day.

People point to the traditional formula *error non habet ius* (error has no rights) and shake their head confidently assuring themselves that we live in a better time when people are free to say and do what they want.

But the idea that we live in an age of unparalleled freedom is a nonsense that we can see is an illusion by looking all around us.

The latest attack on freedom – in a twist worthy of Orwell couched as preserving freedom – is the decision of the Supreme Court in Britain that it is legal to impose no-go zones around hospitals where people who hold pro-life positions are banned from entering.

Own way

The same is coming to Ireland if the current Government gets its own way. This is despite the fact that the Garda Commissioner says that such a law is unnecessary since:

1. Protests at hospitals by pro-lifers are not really a thing;
2. If a prayer vigil outside a hospital was to become a nuisance, there are already laws to deal with it.

Unperturbed, the Government here is pushing ahead insisting that it is a major legislative priority.

Pro-choice activists insist that the fact that only one-in-ten GPs are interested in providing abortions is down to a concern about pro-life protests. Do they present evidence for this claim? Nope. It's based on nothing more than a hunch. Even the GP representative body recently said it had not been contacted by any members expressing such a concern.

The real motivation, of course, is just to prove to pro-life activists that as far as the Establishment is concerned the 2018 repeal referendum marked the decisive victory and all dissent should have ceased at that moment (error has no rights, remember?)

Buffer zones will further silence the voice of the innocent unborn. As



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Pro-life supporters pictured holding signs outside the High Court in Belfast.

Archbishop Eamon Martin pointed out this week: "Given that the law already prevents harassment and intimidation, I believe the new legislation represents a disproportionate response with potentially wide implications for freedom of religion and speech".

The idea that we live in an age of unparalleled freedom is a nonsense that we can see is an illusion by looking all around us"

"Over the years many mothers in crisis have felt supported – sometimes at the very last minute – by a sensitive offer of practical help to find a way out of their crisis other than by ending the life of their unborn baby. It is perfectly reasonable to want to reach out in compassion to help vulnerable women and to be free to protect the life and well-being of both a mother and her unborn child," the Primate of All-Ireland insisted.

"What next?" he then asks. "How long before it is deemed unlawful to openly express the reasonable opinion that there are two

lives in every pregnancy worth protecting – the life of a mother and the life of her unborn child?"

Hypothetical

How long indeed. These are no longer hypothetical questions or the wild fantasies of people with a persecution complex.

Parallel to this, the Government in the Republic is also pushing ahead with so-called 'hate speech' laws which are for all intents and purposes just secular blasphemy laws.

Our Government rightly points out the disgraceful situation in Pakistan where people are regularly imprisoned for blasphemy. At the same time, the Department of Justice issues guidelines underlining in what circumstances in Ireland people will be prosecuted for saying something that hurts the feelings of someone else.

There is no legislative gap which means that 'hate speech' laws are necessary. Incitement to hatred laws already exist to protect people.

If, for example, I was to use this column to urge violence against the people of Co. Leitrim, as well as being accountable to the Press Council of Ireland, someone could report me to gardai for inciting hatred against the people of Co. Leitrim

(for the record, I love the people of Co. Leitrim).

On the other hand, if a 90-year-old man stains his forehead while trying to dye his hair in a bit to appear younger than he actually is where do I stand? It may be impolite to say that he looks like a fool and Christian charity might well prevent one from articulating that view, but should his hurt feelings be enough to say that I have been guilty of 'hate speech' against him because he is upset?

I certainly don't think so.

Our Government rightly points out the disgraceful situation in Pakistan where people are regularly imprisoned for blasphemy"

There is a more serious point here: could in the future a priest be prosecuted for saying in a homily that the Christian understanding of marriage is between one man and one woman, exclusive and for life?

Could a teacher in a Catholic school be in trouble for telling teenagers that the Christian community upholds the idea of reserving sex for marriage?

I'm afraid that if the Government is determined to push ahead with hate speech laws, there will come a day when they will have to be challenged in the courts. It could well be down to the Supreme Court to decide whether the revealed Word of God is permitted to be spoken or not.

Don't listen when people tell you we live in an age of liberty – we don't.

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Lay ministry not solution for priest shortage, says Bishop Phonsie Cullinan

Ruadhán Jones

We will always need "good and holy priests", the head of the bishops' council for vocations has said, adding that the lay ministry is not a solution to the vocations crisis.

The national synodal synthesis came across as proposing the lay ministry as the "solution to the whole question" of priest shortages, said Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan.

However, while the lay ministry holds an important place in the Church, "we will always need good and holy priests", the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore continued.

"We cannot simply rely on lay ministry going forward, we will need priests and they are out there," he added.

Many dioceses are already preparing for lay-led liturgies in the future, particularly for weddings and funerals, while just nine new seminarians entered Maynooth this year.

"The whole question of vocations [to the priesthood] is critical," he said, stressing the need to confidently propose the vocation to the priesthood to young people.

"We must put it out there, as young people like a challenge," he said, adding that we have been too reticent in the recent past.

The witness of "holy, happy and joyful priests" is hugely important Bishop Cullinan continued, with many newly ordained priests attesting to the great influence of encouragement received from

priests who spoke to them about the priesthood.

His comments came as the Irish bishops' conference announced that a year for vocations to the diocesan priesthood will begin on April 30, 2023, concluding in April 2024.

The theme for the year is 'Take the Risk for Christ'.

On April 25, 2023, a conference will be hosted on evangelisation and vocation in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, and it is planned to host events each month of the year of vocations.

The National Vocations Office is responsible for managing the Year of Vocations, with Bishop Cullinan saying they are hopeful it will yield great fruits.

England's Bukayo Saka to remain rooted in God despite defeat

Jason Osborne

Speaking at a press conference just before England's exit from the world cup at France's hands, 23-year-old footballer Bukayo Saka spoke of the importance of keeping your eyes fixed on God.

"I read my Bible every night, I've been continuing to do that out here. For me, it is really important to have the presence of God in me all the time and it gives me more confidence to know that God's plan is perfect. So I can go on the pitch and know that God has my back," Mr Saka told the assembled journalists.

The main thing for Mr Saka is just "keeping my faith".

"Just having faith in God so I don't need to be nervous or worry about any outcomes because obviously this is my first World Cup. You know, I can start worrying about different things and different outcomes, but instead I just choose to put my faith in God," he said.

The world-class footballer is extremely vocal about the central importance of a relationship with God, telling *GQ magazine* earlier this year that he can be "fearless" because he "can be



Bukayo Saka gives praise to God during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Photo: Twitter

confident and go into places knowing that God's got me".

His Yoruba name, Bukayo, was given to him by his grandmother 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," Mr Saka said previously.

120 years of Christmas with Palestrina choir...



Palestrina choir members share a laugh before going on stage at the National Concert Hall, Dublin, on Saturday night, December 10, where they performed the Christmas concert. The performance launched a year of celebrations as the choir marks 120 years since its foundation. Photo: John McElroy



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UK Supreme Court's exclusion zone verdict a 'travesty of justice'

Jason Osborne

The decision by the UK Supreme Court to uphold the banning and criminalising of pro-life activities around abortion facilities has been condemned as a "travesty of justice" and as an attempt to silence the voice of the unborn by pro-life voices in Northern Ireland.

The court was asked to review the validity of Northern Ireland's

ban on "direct" and "indirect" pro-life "influence" within 100m of abortion facilities.

The bill in question criminalises not only harassment, which is already illegal, but also quiet or silent prayer. Offering leaflets about charitable services available which provide alternative options to abortion is included in the ban.

Precious Life described the ruling as a "mockery of the whole judicial system," and said that it has impli-

cations for the rights of freedom of speech and assembly for all people.

"Our work to protect mothers and babies from abortion has always been peaceful and legal. We will use innovative and creative new methods to continue offering help and support to women outside abortion centres," Precious Life said, adding that they will work to create "safe zones" for all unborn babies and their mothers throughout the North.

Archbishop of Armagh Eamon

Martin criticised buffer zones as "further silencing the voice of the innocent unborn".

"What next? How long before it is deemed unlawful to openly express the reasonable opinion that there are two lives in every pregnancy worth protecting – the life of a mother and the life of her unborn child?" the primate of all-Ireland asked.

"The way has now been paved by the UK Supreme Court to impose exclusion zones outside centres

in Northern Ireland that provide or facilitate abortions," which Dr Martin described as "tantamount to enforcing a ban on pro-life activities" outside such settings.

"Given that the law already prevents harassment and intimidation, I believe the new legislation represents a disproportionate response with potentially wide implications for freedom of religion and speech," he said.

Catholic group honours Irish American for philanthropy

Ruadhán Jones

Loretta Brennan Glucksman, whose philanthropic efforts on behalf of charities and educational institutions has spanned three decades, received the 2022 Spirit of Francis Award from Catholic Extension in New York.

The native New Yorker was honoured for work in education, the arts,

health care and peace initiatives in the United States and Ireland.

In presenting the award, Fr Jack Wall, Catholic Extension president, commended Ms Brennan Glucksman's work in caring for "the poorest of the poor among us".

"Loretta has asked us to live that mission and she so graciously and gracefully radiates the very spirit of Francis through her life-giving presence and care for others," Fr Wall

said.

Ms Brennan Glucksman is the chair emeritus of the Ireland Funds America – under her leadership, the charitable organisation raised \$226 million in its Promising Ireland Campaign to assist Irish charities.

She also established a chair in Irish and Scottish studies at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, the Lewis Glucksman Gallery at University College Cork in Ireland, the Map

Conservation Library at Trinity College in Dublin and the Glucksman Library at the University of Limerick in Ireland.

The Irish-American philanthropist told attendees she was "touched, honoured and humbled" to receive the award.

"This award means a great deal to me, as I appreciate the breadth and depth of Catholic Extension's work so much," she said.

Ukrainian artist displays Christ under rocket fire

Staff reporter

The works of a Ukrainian iconographer depicting images of "Christ under the fire of rockets" have gone on display in a Dublin church.

Artist Ulyana Krekhovet's iconographical works reflect on the stag-

gering scenes she saw in Lviv as the war in Ukraine broke out.

"It was important for me to show iconographically everything that took place," Ms Krekhovet said, as her exhibition in Our Lady of Consolation Church, Malahide, opened on December 11.

She compared the scenes of moth-

ers and children feeling rocket fire to "the Virgin with Christ under the fire of rockets".

"It is known when the Virgin with little Christ and Joseph escaped to Egypt, they hid from elimination and pursuit," the Ukrainian artist continued.

"It is associated with present days.

All women and children that escape from the war are the reiteration of that biblical history."

Ms Krekhovet's icons are on display until December 20. She is a teacher and project manager of programmes in the icon painting school Radruzh in the Ukrainian Catholic University.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Parish hall 'place of sanctuary' for Ukrainians

A Kildare parish has been designated a "place of sanctuary", after taking in nine Ukrainian refugees, who are staying in the parish hall.

The parish of Clane and Rathcoffey, Co. Kildare, said they were "delighted" to receive the recognition from Places of Sanctuary Ireland.

"The parish faith community welcomed a family of five from Syria through the Community Sponsorship Programme three years ago and more recently we welcomed an extended Ukrainian family of nine to live in our parish hall," said Fr Paul O'Boyle PP.

"We are pleased to accompany and support these fine people at this time of great need for them as we respond to the challenge posed by Jesus: 'Who is my neighbour?'"

Safeguarding reviews for dioceses near completion

The Church's national safeguarding body's review of practices in the 26 dioceses on the island of Ireland is nearing completion, the Irish bishops' conference announced recently.

The majority of the reviews have taken place and every diocese will be assessed in the coming months, Judge Garrett Sheehan, Chair of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church, and Teresa Devlin told the bishops' conference.

A review of practices under the 2016 standard will also take place for religious communities across the island of Ireland.

The Irish bishops and leaders of religious and missionary orders are working to develop dialogue to support healing for survivors/victims.

Witnessing to Our Lady...



A statue of Mary is carried during a procession through the streets of Cork City, December 8, in celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Photo: CNS

The cold may draw us more together

“Is it true that people in Ireland may no longer have turf fires?”

asked my cousin, who has lived in England for some years. Yes, I said, that was how things were going, ever since Eamon Ryan introduced the Solid Fuel Regulations Act in October this year. Peat, we are told, pollutes the atmosphere, and its pollution also causes heart attacks, strokes, respiratory illnesses and even dementia. How did our ancestors – some of whom lived well into their eighties – ever survive at all?

Reminisce

My cousin began to reminisce about the peat briquettes of her childhood, and the lovely aroma they brought, as they burned in the hearth. The memory was not only about the turf fire itself, but the way in which family members, and visiting friends, would sit together around the hearth, talking and telling stories.

All gone now? I'm not so sure. Perhaps the peat we liked so much is consigned to the past: but I think it's also possible that the low



Mary Kenny

temperatures we're experiencing may have a positive impact on social trends.

“We are being encouraged to keep one room warm, when heating the whole dwelling becomes alarmingly expensive – and wasteful of energy”

Modern life has been very much about individualism and atomisation: people do their own thing – watching their own private screen entertainment, listening to their own chosen podcasts, eating when the mood takes them, rather than around a family table. It is agreed that this weakened family and community life, increased isolation and elevated individual choice into a sacred mantra.

But events like arctic weather, huge energy prices

(and the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown) may well change human behaviour again. We are being encouraged to keep one room warm, when heating the whole dwelling becomes alarmingly expensive – and wasteful of energy. More communal food like soups and stews, devised for a shared pot rather than an individualised menu, make a comeback during icy times.

In Britain, more than 2,500 churches have joined together to create a 'warm spaces initiative', providing locations where people can drop in for heat and refreshments – as well as 'friendly company'.

The turf fire wasn't just about the welcoming warmth it provided, or its wonderfully evocative smell: it was about the role of the hearth, in a home, and the way in which it bonded us together and imparted a sense of sharing our common journey through life. When it grows cold outside, we want and need more shared community.

“Peat, we are told, pollutes the atmosphere, and its pollution also causes heart attacks, strokes, respiratory illnesses and even dementia”

● “Catholic countries dominate world football,” my nine-year-old grandson James Carlos explains to me. Looking at the teams which reached the final quartet of the World Cup – France, Argentina, Croatia and Morocco – if we reckon three out of four, you could make a case for that theory. And Brazil, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal being among the top ten is perhaps relevant.

Interesting to note that when Muslim Morocco won their match against Portugal, footballers fell to their knees to give thanks to the Almighty. Back in 1956 the Irish athlete Ronnie Delaney did likewise when he won an Olympics gold medal. Thankfully, Ronnie is still with us – a spokesperson now for an old-age charity.

Media-ravaged royalty

The scene that seems to have caused offence in the Harry and Meghan Netflix documentary is the part when the Duchess of Sussex performs a sort of pantomime curtsy, describing her first meeting with the late Queen Elizabeth. Harry himself looks somewhat uncomfortable as his wife mocks the courtly ritual – and, seemingly, his grandmother.

When Queen Elizabeth made her historic state visit to Ireland in 2011, some Irishwomen expressed anxiety about the curtsy possibly arising. They needn't have worried: only *subjects* traditionally curtsy. Nancy Reagan, for example, made it clear she wouldn't curtsy, which she considered

unsuited to an American Republican: although the protocol didn't apply to her anyway. Before marrying Harry, Meghan didn't need to either.

The Netflix documentary shows how Prince Harry was hurt, and damaged, by his mother's – and his own – experiences of the paparazzi. I recall an absurd moment back in the 1990s when the tabloid press was fussing over whether Diana's thighs bore the marks of cellulite. Photographs were taken of her limbs, blown up and minutely examined. Petty and humiliating.

What goes unmentioned is another aspect which occurred: some publications, including *The Times*

of London, speculated about Harry's paternity – there were suggestions that Prince Charles was not his biological father. Some tabloids even tried snatching strands of his hair to conduct a DNA test. This allegation is no longer mentioned, presumably scotched: but it must have been horrible for him.

Both Harry and Meghan seem to have been damaged by parental divorce, as well as, in Harry's case, by the tragic loss of his mother. Meghan was ferried between her separated parents from the age of two, and was always longing to have one united home, all the family together around a log fire (like the turf we knew)



Britain's Prince Harry. Photo: CNS

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Irish troops keep the peace and prepare for Christmas in Syria



Pope Francis' call for priests to engage closely with their flock is alive and well in army chaplaincy, writes **Chai Brady**

More than two months into their UN mission in Syria, the spirits of Irish troops are high and those with faith have been bolstered by it, according to the army chaplain on the mission.

The 66th Infantry Group are currently in the Golan Heights as part of efforts to keep the peace in the area as part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Ireland has been involved in the mission since 2013. At the beginning of October the 130 soldiers left Ireland.

While the majority of the troops have gone overseas before, it will be the first deployment for a quarter of them. The oldest member of the unit is 57 years old, and the youngest is 21. The average age of a soldier in the unit is 32 years old.

It will be the first time away from home during Christmas for many of the troops, including army chaplain Fr Michael Hinds, who has been overseas before but during summer. It is also one of the first missions that isn't experiencing the full effects of Covid-19 restrictions.

"I guess I'm experiencing, together with the lads, not being in the heart of the family at Christmas time, we know that is so important," Fr Hinds told *The Irish Catholic*.

Chalk

While some soldiers will miss Christmas in Ireland, others will be able to get home on the first leave, known as a 'chalk'. All the soldiers receive two weeks off, with the first chalk



Lt Ross Flanagan, Capt Mike Fitzpatrick and chaplain Fr Michael Hinds (front row far right) with their Irish patrol group on Mount Hermon.

being in mid-December and the soldiers returning very shortly after Christmas day.

Fr Hinds explained: "A lot of the dads on the trip, a lot of the people who have a young family have been facilitated in that first leave chalk to try and ensure that families aren't without their beloved Dad at Christmas time. That's great to see, that we were able to facilitate that very important human reality, that people would be home with their loved ones for Christmas."

“It will be the first time away from home during Christmas for many of the troops”

"I think for me as chaplain there's also a bit of a challenge of trying to do even just small things to promote that connection with home. Social media has made such a difference, particularly when you hear the older guys talking about the days when they used to be waiting with baited breaths for letters to come through in a couple of weeks or whenever. It was a very, very different reality."

He added that the ability to have instantaneous connection to family and friends back home, assisted by good Wi-Fi in the camp, is a comfort for

soldiers. The chaplain will also introduce a Christmas tree to the church.

Before deployment the soldiers and commanders go through a demanding 'Mission Readiness Exercise' which places them in a series of scenarios which include responding to threats they could face in the Golan Heights. The unit's knowledge of the UN's rules of engagement, its negotiation skills, and its ability to plan and conduct a rescue operation are some of the skills assessed.

Proud

Fr Hinds has found Irish people generally come across as "proud" of what the Defence Force members are doing and of Ireland's international mandate as well as the "profound level of skill" among soldiers.

"Really in a way being a small neutral country, I think on the international forum we contribute largely given the role we've had in so many countries. To be part of something that is ultimately for the greater good of all of humanity, I hope it's something that the Irish people are proud of and I'd imagine that it is," he said.

"Really, I'd have to say pride is probably the greatest emotion I feel. And, in the sense that here's this group of Irish Defence Forces personnel, all pulling together, all fulfilling their roles, all being extremely professional."

Memorial wreath used by Fr Michael Hinds during a ceremony in Syria remembering the deceased.



There is so much diversity in their skills, which come together in a cohesive unity to contribute something "meaningful for our world... each one of us here is an international ambassador for peace," he added, saying that Christ himself was 'Prince of Peace'.

Fr Hinds dubbed the group of soldiers on the trip "dedicated" and "fantastic".

Welcome

"I found an amazing openness in the guys... I found this huge sense of welcome from them as well, a hospitality, they maybe don't get the full ramifications of your role. There's something really privileged about being with them. Pope Francis speaks of the smell of the sheep and being immersed in reality. In a way, the Defence Forces gives

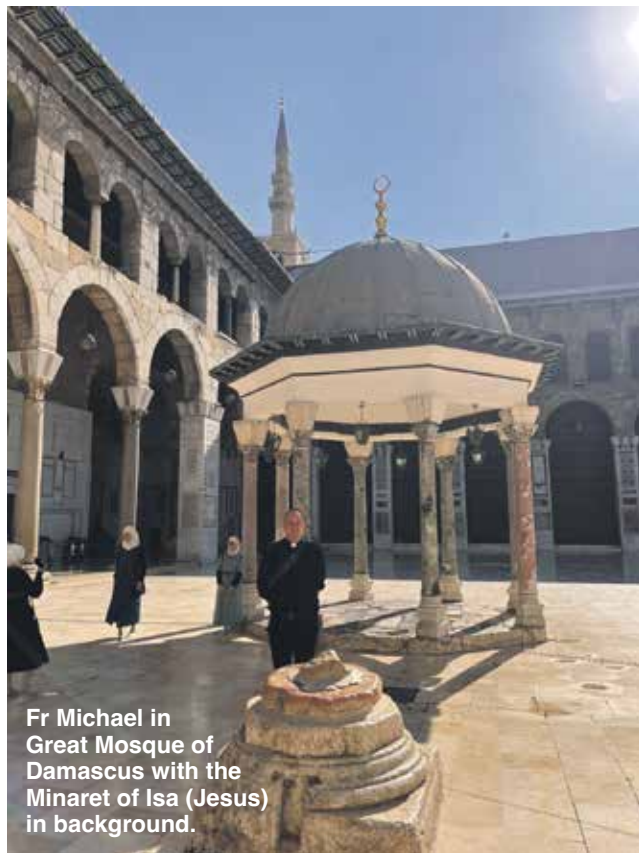
you this ready-made community that you're automatically immersed in and a part of," he said.

“I found an amazing openness in the guys... I found this huge sense of welcome from them as well”

"They have this amazing kind of refreshing candour, I would say there's no facades, there's no pretences, they are who they are, and they accept you 100%, but they also welcome you very much into their realities and it's a kind of a privilege for me to feel that they're that open to you."

The chaplain added that he has already been asked by the troops to assist them with a wedding and some baptisms when they return to Ireland.

Fr Hinds started out as a priest for the Diocese of Meath, entering seminary as a mature student in his late 20s. He had originally studied law and was working at a solicitors' practice. While he always felt a vocation towards the priesthood his parents advised him to complete university before making the decision. After entering seminary, studying in the Irish College in Rome, and subsequently serving in several parishes, he decided to do something different. Two years later, Fr Hinds has since served six months overseas in Lebanon and is now in Syria,



Fr Michael in Great Mosque of Damascus with the Minaret of Isa (Jesus) in background.

with his Christmas Mass set to be celebrated thousands of miles from home.

“Overall the chaplaincy is a pastoral role but within that there’s different aspects of priestly ministry, some of its very traditional stuff, the same sort of stuff you would be doing in a parish, in terms of celebrating Mass, memorial Mass, anniversary services – we had one there last week for the deceased members of the Defence Forces and then our own loved ones as well,” Fr Hinds said.

“While a lot of Western countries closed their embassies due to the war, the nunciature often stays open”

“There’s spiritual engagement with individual people as well. In a way it’s not that diverse from parish life and then in another way it’s totally different, you never know what’s going to come your way – certainly experiencing places like Lebanon and Syria. Even in the last couple of weeks there’s a Christian-rich heritage to this area, just experiencing some of that and seeing some of the sites can’t not have a massive impact, certainly on me.”

Trips

Along with trips to Damascus the soldiers were able to visit Mount Hermon. It is the location of the world’s highest permanently manned United Nations position, standing at more than 2,800 metres. Known as ‘Hermon Hotel’ by soldiers, it is manned by Nepalese UN troops who at times have to ski to get around during the winter due to snow.

It is a good vantage point as UN soldiers protect the ‘Area

of Separation’ (AOS) which separates Syria from Israeli-controlled territory to the west. The AOS is approximately 75km long and varies in width from approximately 10km in the centre to 200 metres in the extreme south.

Not only do peacekeepers work to prevent conflict in the area, Fr Hinds believes the soldiers are also positively affected by experiencing different cultures and faith in the Middle East. He said they visited a mosque in Damascus and were “very respectful and engaged”.

Opportunity

Last month some of the Defence Forces also had the opportunity, including Fr Hinds, to visit the papal nuncio to Syria, Cardinal Mario Zenari who has been the Pope’s representative for 14 years, living through the Syrian civil war which kicked off in 2011.

In September of this year, Cardinal Zenari decried the loss of hope experienced by Syrians and appealed to the world not to allow the nation to lose its place amongst nations and become what he called “a beggar-nation”. Recent UN estimates state that 13.5 million Syrians are in need of aid, and 11.5 million of them have no access to health care; 40% of these are children.

Fr Hinds said Cardinal Zenari saw their delegation for an hour and half and was “very welcoming”. He’s very heavily involved in the Open Hospitals Project in Syria with several Italian Catholic hospitals rescued in Damascus. The aim is to ensure free, healthcare to the most needy.

While a lot of Western countries closed their embassies due to the war, the nunciature often stays open. The cardinal’s decision to stay there, Fr Hinds describes as important as it lets Syrian people know there is hope for the future.



Lt Col. David McNamara, papal nuncio to Syria Cardinal Mario Zenari, Msgr Filippo Colnago along with INF Group personnel who were received into the apostolic nunciature in Damascus, Syria last month.

Regarding the Faith of Irish soldiers, those who have Faith, Fr Hinds said he believes it is certainly a “particular source of strength” for most of the men and women who attend church. He adds that those who attend Sunday Mass are there every Sunday.

“Fr Hinds believes the soldiers are also positively affected by experiencing different cultures and faith in the Middle East”

He adds: “There’s people too there that maybe wouldn’t be regular Massgoers at home but when they are abroad, they will come to church and they’ll tell you they always do it. Then maybe you have some

as well that might be regular Massgoers at home with family that mightn’t attend regularly here.

“We have a couple of Masses during the week in the evening, oftentimes it’s myself and God on our own at it,” he laughs, “but just the odd times you get individuals come to it as well and there are one or two who are very loyal to coming to it especially if they don’t get Mass on a Sunday.”

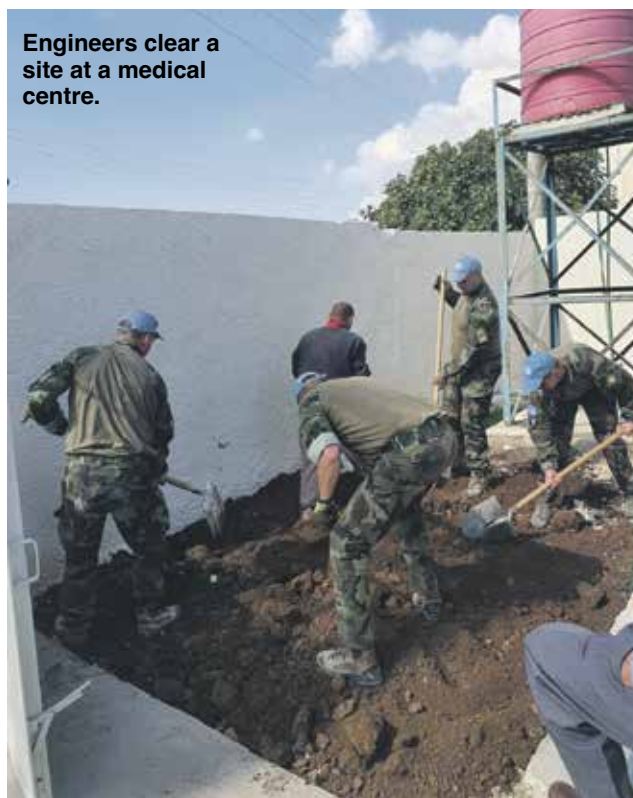
Strength

Asked about soldiers and Faith, the chaplain adds: “I think it is a source of particular strength. Certainly in how I approach the preaching as much that is possible – as much as the Scripture allows – I would try and be preaching a message of encouragement and using our Faith as that support in life and using that knowledge that we’re all loved by God no matter what our

realities are and to be bolstered by that and to be strengthened by that each day as part of our mission here.

“I’d also be very much praying for our families at home, for our loved ones, at the end of every Mass on a Sunday I pray for our chil-

dren and our grandchildre and I just think that connection in prayer is something that has particular resonance when we are out here abroad. It enables us really to feel that sense of connection with home as well as to know that all are incorporated in God’s love.”



Engineers clear a site at a medical centre.

JOE WALSH TOURS



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People of faith were subject to the harshest restrictions in Europe, we shouldn't forget this, writes **David Quinn**

It is now three years since the world got its first hint that something bad was brewing in a place in China almost none of us had heard of before, namely the commercial city of Wuhan on the mighty Yangtze River with its population of 11 million people.

We all hoped it was one of those new viruses that would have little impact on the world at large, or at least be a localised outbreak only. Even as reports of its spread became more persistent, and it seemed to be breaking out in other parts of Asia, still we



hoped it would not arrive in Europe.

In the general election of February 2020, the new virus barely rated a mention. Almost everyone was complacent about it.

First case

But at the end of February, the first case on the island was notified and within weeks we were in a total lockdown, fearful that tens of thousands of us might

die unless we stayed at home. 'Social distancing' became a new term of everyday life.

Every sector of society was affected, and one was the Church. Church-goers in many areas tend to be on the older side, including priests and religious, and therefore were particularly vulnerable to the virus. They were well advised to stay at home and take precautions.

In the early stages at least, we did not know how bad the

virus might be and were terrified of images coming out of northern Italy where the disease hit hard, fast and unexpectedly.

But as it turned out, our position as an island on the edge of Europe where a younger-than-average population and a relatively low population density served us well. We had not been 'seeded' with the virus before we knew about it, although the nursing homes were a different story.

tionate and just, and it was not.

Then businessman, Declan Ganley, tried to challenge it but the courts continually kicked his case into the long grass, and it was never heard. Fr Hughes was hit with a €500 fine which he did not pay. The authorities seem content now to leave well enough alone.

All of this was happening while worshippers elsewhere in Europe, including in Northern Ireland, were able to attend religious services, albeit in limited numbers and social distancing, which very few people objected to.

Now an important new study suggests that the curbs on religious worship had little effect on the spread of the virus or on the death toll over time.

In America, different states tried different approaches. Some had very strong restrictions on public worship, like here, while others had a more light-touch approach. This allowed researchers to compare the effects of these different policies.

The study appeared recently in the peer-reviewed *European Economic Review* and looked at a sample across the US of 50,000 people. It is called: *When houses of worship go empty: The effects of state restrictions on well-being among religious adherents*.

Long story

To cut a long story short, the study found that there was "no statistically or economically significant association between restrictions on houses of worship and either Covid-19 infections or deaths regardless of how restrictions are measured".

In other words, the very strict curbs on religious worship do not seem to have saved lives.

This seems remarkable and totally counter-intuitive. How can it be that preventing people attending church made no difference? Surely if lots of people had gone to Mass etc, the virus would have spread among worshippers? We saw

this happen in the very early stages of the pandemic in South Korea, for example, in one of so-called 'mega-churches' with a huge congregation.

But lockdown restrictions have always assumed that without them, people would never have modified their behaviour voluntarily. The outbreak in a mega-church in South Korea occurred before the nature of the virus was really known.

Once it was, people began to avoid each other and stay indoors voluntarily. Even before total lockdown was imposed here towards the end of March 2020, the streets were almost empty anyway.

Argument

This is not an argument against the first lockdown, or even the one imposed after Christmas 2020, but it does bring into question whether some of the measures were excessive and lasted too long, including the ones imposed on Churches.

Did we really need to ban public worship for 40 out of 60 weeks? When we were allowed to go to Mass, the general limit on the number who could attend was 50, everyone socially distanced, and volunteers ensured the rules were adhered to, including sanitising your hands on entering a church. This worked, so why were we shut out for so long?

“The very strict curbs on religious worship do not seem to have saved lives”

None of this is being wise after the event. Some of us questioned the proportionality of some restrictions as they were happening.

Even now, many have not returned to Mass. Anecdotal evidence suggests that between a third and 40 percent of people who were attending Mass regularly before the pandemic have not come back. That is a disaster, and it was certainly made worse by excessive restrictions.

Some probably simply lost the habit of attending while others are still scared of crowded spaces (even though it is usually easy to socially distance at Mass anyway).

Other countries are holding public inquiries into Covid-19 and how they responded. What did they do right, what did they do wrong, and what are the lessons to be learnt? Here, we seem to have no interest at all in those questions even though they are of first rank importance given how the pandemic and the restrictions totally upended our lives for a prolonged period.

If some sectors of society suffered unnecessary long-term damage, and that includes the Churches, then we ought to know. Religious leaders should ask for answers.

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Michael W. Higgins is a biographer, documentarian, scholar, columnist, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Sacred Heart University (CT), Basilian Distinguished Fellow of Contemporary Catholic Thought, University of St. Michael's College (ON), Senior Fellow, Massey College, University of Toronto

“Every sector of society was affected, and one was the Church”

All along, however, we had to ask ourselves, what measures were proportionate and which were excessive? This was a perfectly legitimate question to ask although anyone who asked it tended to find themselves subjected to extreme moral blackmail and were accused of not caring if people died.

Those paying proper attention to what was happening in Ireland compared with overseas, soon spotted that different countries were taking different approaches to the virus, especially after the first lockdown from spring to summer 2020.

For example, the churches in Ireland were subject to the harshest restrictions in Europe. We could not attend religious worship for 40 out of 60 weeks, longer than anywhere, and harsh penalties, including fines and imprisonment, awaited anyone who tried to attend religious worship.

In Cavan, a priest named Fr PJ Hughes did allow members of the public to attend Mass in his church. He faced a fine, and prison if he did not pay it. Gardaí threw a cordon around the church. It will be argued, with justification, that the law had to be applied without exception. But the bigger question is whether the law was propor-

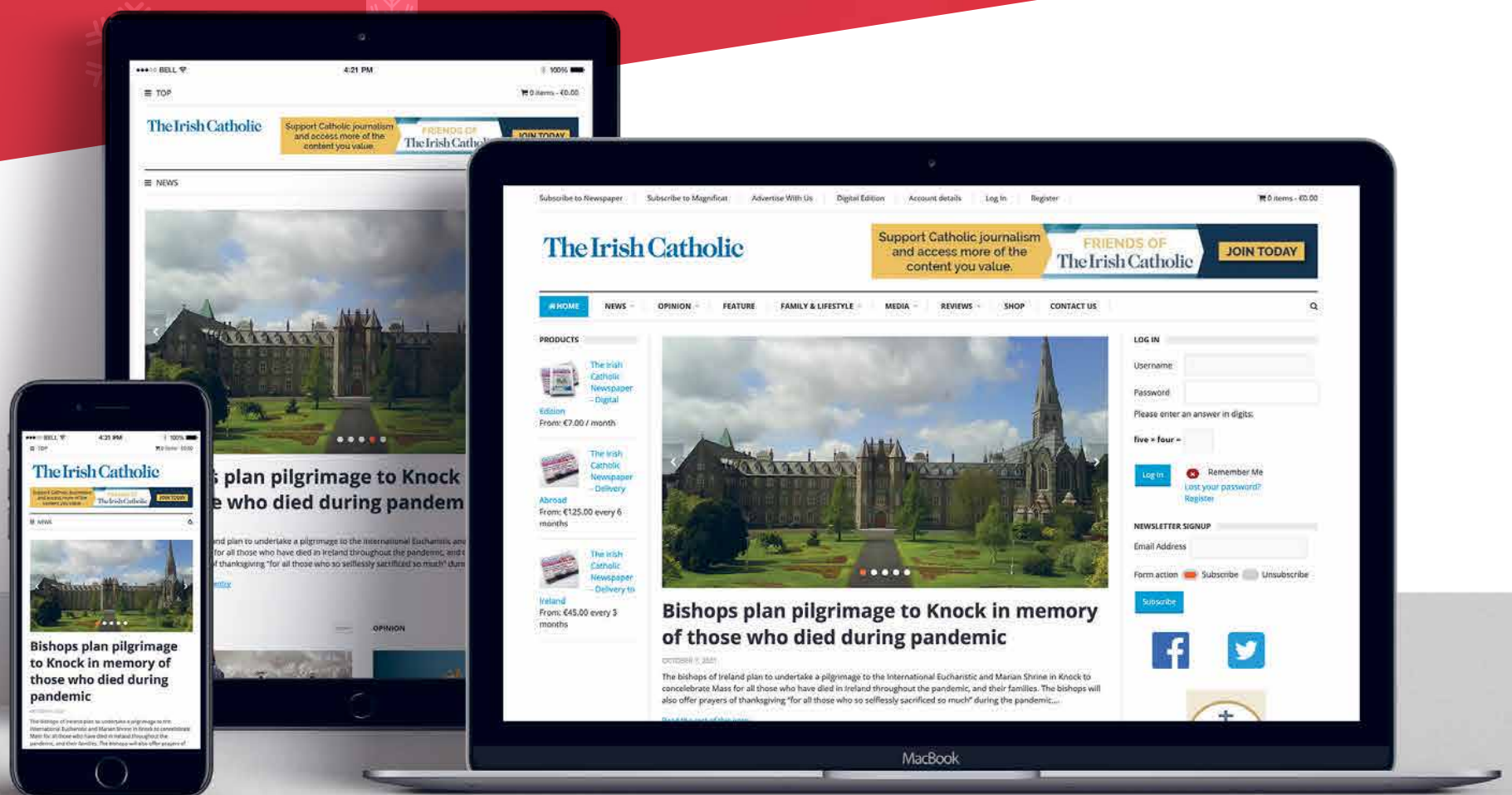
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Orthodox iconographer Jonathan Pageau's work is helping people to see the patterns of heaven and earth as never before, writes **Jason Osborne**

One of the things faith does is cast the world in a new light. For many today without faith, the universe is a cold, dark, hopeless place – at worst a force hostile to life, working at every opportunity to quench the flame of human activity, at best, an indifferent mystery unlikely ever to be solved. It makes all of the difference in the world, then, to understand the world as coming from the hand of the Father, who is love, and who is trying to draw that world and all of the people in it into right relationship with himself through his Son and the Holy Spirit.

One of the people working fervently to help people see the proper order of creation is French-Canadian icon carver, public speaker and YouTube Jonathan Pageau. Through his 'Symbolic World' blog, podcast and community online, he's helping those with faith and without to understand that the modern vision and understanding of the world is sorely lacking. Asked about how he views his work as an icon carver in relation to his unique way of seeing creation and understanding our place in it, Mr Pageau tells *The Irish Catholic* that his making of sacred art is a way "to try to live out how I think about the world and how I view the solution to the problem of being" and that's to make things that serve "the highest good".

"For myself as an artist, I really wanted to have that priority, which is that I'm able to make something that participates in a community – when you make an icon, it enters into the life of the person that you're making it for, whether it's a gift for a Baptism or to a priest," Mr Pageau tells me.

Iconography

Describing iconography as in some ways "a language" that was developed in the Middle Ages universally in Christianity, a "universal grammar of Christian images", Mr Pageau says he thinks that in that grammar, "there is a way to rediscover and re-participate in the real patterns of reality".

His iconography is a way to "engage with reality and not it just being about thoughts and about ideas, but really doing what I think needs to be done," he says. And what is it that needs to be done, in Mr Pageau's estimation? At least part of it is as mentioned above: helping people with faith and without to

Carving and conversing



The Calling of St Peter by Jonathan Pageau. Photos: pageaucarvings.com

understand that the modern vision and understanding of the world is sorely lacking. He does this by sharing with them the "symbolic worldview", that both he and his brother Matthieu developed over the course of 20 years by engaging deeply with Scripture and the Church Fathers in an attempt to better understand how they depict and understand the world respectively.

“His iconography is a way to ‘engage with reality and not it just being about thoughts and about ideas’”

"The best way to understand the symbolic worldview is to contrast it to the worldview that has been prominent, let's say, since the Enlightenment. We [humanity] have moved towards a kind of strength in the capacity to predict and describe material causes and that has made people quite arrogant in thinking that they understand the world completely, and that they can discount things like rituals, like beliefs in a god. But what we're realising, I think, at the end of that process where scientific materialism has invaded most of the intellectual spaces, we're realising that we have a problem which is that consciousness seems to be part of how the world comes together for people," Mr Pageau says.

Alluding to the famous philosophical "hard problem of consciousness",

which is that a purely materialistic, scientific worldview has no explanation for the phenomenon of human consciousness, Mr Pageau says that for such a worldview, "the world is actually too complex, there are too many details, there's so much multiplicity in reality that in order for us to be able to even perceive the world, it has to be patterned."

Patterns

"Patterned in space in terms of recognising backgrounding and foregrounding certain objects. Also patterned in time, that is, stringing events together in order to create coherent connections between them. The way that we do that is not arbitrary. It actually has a pattern, it's a pattern – a meaningful pattern – of purpose.

"And so, that is the foundation of the symbolic world, and then understanding the symbolic world is mostly understanding that this is coherent, that you can understand the patterns by which the world appears to us. You can understand the patterns by which we're able to

string events into stories and that those patterns are most profoundly found in religious traditions," he says.

As an Orthodox Christian, Mr Pageau is quick to say that "the most profound versions of these patterns 'exist in Scripture and culminate into the story of Jesus Christ'".

"So that is really the foundation of the Symbolic World, and then we look at the stories and what happens is, when you read Scripture with that in mind, you realise that Scripture isn't just a description of things that happened. First of all, it's

a description of things that happened that are deeply patterned, but they're so deeply patterned that in some ways they actually become a template for us to be able to understand the rest of the events in our lives.

And so Scripture and our Tradition become something like a pair of glasses that you put on in order to more clearly see reality. Not in a scientific way, but rather in the way in which it's meaningful to us and in the way in which we can engage reality as humans with love and desire and a sense of good and evil."

Mr Pageau readily admits that there's no need for Christians to

"fully understand" the ramifications of their beliefs – indeed, none of us do. Most of us know and understand enough to get on-board with Christ, and much of our faith will remain a mystery to us our whole life long. As Mr Pageau says, it can certainly be enough for a person without extensive understanding of their faith and how creation works "to live in the love of God, you know, in the love of others, submitting to God and living that life of confession, of communion".

“The most profound versions of these patterns ‘exist in Scripture and culminate into the story of Jesus Christ’”

The problem arises when this intuitive faith encounters the "debunking" attitude of the day. Here, implicit, sometimes naive, religious faith can be "raked across the coals" and lost. That's why, Mr Pageau argues, it can be helpful to have a proper grasp of the Christian understanding of the world, and how our faith relates to it. He takes "Where is heaven, if we haven't seen it with our telescopes?" as an example of a debunking question that often stymies an unformed faith, but really need not.

"The question of 'Where is heaven?' is probably one of the easiest to understand because, 'Where is heaven?' Well, heaven is up. Heaven



Jonathan Pageau

about the language of creation

is above us. But because of our scientific perspective, we can no longer think that in scientific, material terms. We still experience up in the very way the ancients experienced it – as something beyond our grasp, as something above us, as the place from which light comes. The light which makes things visible but is invisible itself. All these analogies that the ancients used related to heaven are completely understandable, but if you enter into the material frame and then you think, 'Ok, so, God is in heaven, is he? So where is he exactly? Is he up there on a cloud? Is he hanging up on a star?' Then, it seems completely ridiculous.

“One of the things that happened is that now I feel like there’s a *kairos* moment of all these elements coming together and making it possible for people to understand what we’re saying”

“When Jesus went up into heaven, where did he go, you know? Is he up there now? Is he talking to the people at the space station? There’s this ridiculous way of debunking the vision, and most people engage in this without thinking. Even the same materialists who would criticise this idea would still use all the same analogies and say things like, ‘I’m going up in the world’. ‘I’m climbing up the hierarchy at my job.’ He’s using all the analogies that the ancients would have used – you know, ‘you’re above me’, ‘you’re higher than me’. They’re using all the same analogies that the ancients would have used, actually, it’s inevitable to use the image of heaven,” Mr Pageau says.

Using an example his brother came up with a couple of years ago to explain the concept of ‘heaven’ in a way that a materialist could understand, he says, “If you have a crowd of people, and then someone stands up on a chair above all the others, something will happen – that is, that person can now be seen by everybody. That person can see everybody else. If that person speaks, everybody can see and hear them. But that’s not the case for the people standing on the ground. They can’t see everybody. They can only see the people next to them.

“It’s the same for when you go up a mountain. As you go up a mountain, you move from the particular and the particulars start to join together and you start to see a more and more encompassing vision of reality until you reach the summit of the mountain and now you can see the whole world below your feet and that’s what heaven is. It’s that type of experience.”

Mr Pageau describes this as “moving from quantity into quality, it’s the movement of the many into the one”. That’s what heaven is, he says, and that’s what it was for those who wrote the Scriptures and lived with the biblical worldview.

“It’s just that because they didn’t have this materialist, scientific worldview, they didn’t have to defend it against that, but you can read – if you read Dante, for example, he actually warns people not to have a materialistic vision of what heaven is. St Augustine says basically that everything you see, everything down here below and everything up in the sky – that’s all earth. It’s all earth, actually, and so heaven is beyond that. Heaven is that which makes all these things move, which makes all of these things exist. And so, this is true for many things, in terms of the symbolism, once you start to think this way, then all of a sudden a lot of things which seemed even superstitious or naive to the material-minded now become coherent.”

A simple example, Mr Pageau says it’s demonstrative of the way in which materialism as a philosophy has infected even Christian thinking in the present age. The proper understanding of heaven is far removed from the notion of a place in the clouds, or perhaps on another planet, but is all the more relevant to our lives today because of it.

A close friend of the famous Canadian clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson’s, Mr Pageau says that Christians are living through something of a *kairos* when it comes to explaining Christianity sensibly to those who are curious. He says Mr Peterson has played a key role in enabling that to happen.

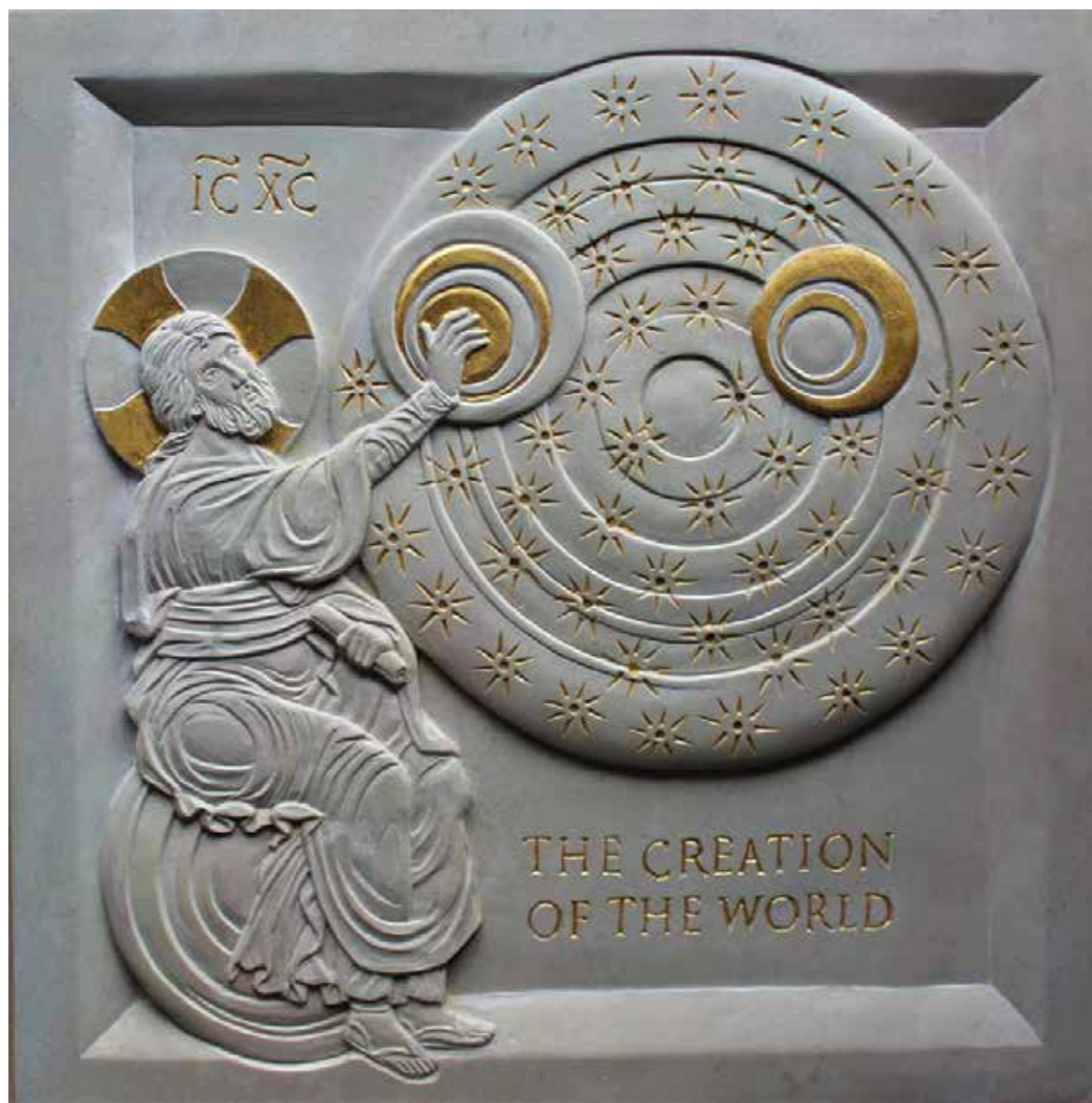
“I think pointing to Jordan is the right move in the sense that these types of thoughts or this approach to reality that I’m talking about is something that I developed with my brother for 20 years on our own, just trying to understand how the world works and understand these things. But we had done it very much in isolation, feeling almost as if there was no one to talk about this with and that no one would actually understand. Not just understand the content, but understand the actual subject of what we were talking about,” Mr Pageau says.

“One of the things that happened is that now I feel like there’s a *kairos* moment of all these elements coming together and making it possible for people to understand what we’re saying, understand the value of what we’re saying, and I think for sure Jordan Peterson has played a big role in that he really did come right at the proper moment and in some ways smashed the New Atheist drive. I mean, there are still remainders of it, but it’s almost completely gone.”

Cultural moment

The present cultural moment is making it much easier to explain to secular people the value of religious stories and of religious practices, Mr Pageau says, adding that Jordan Peterson has played “something like the role of a bridge,” or an intermediary.

“He is not himself, I would say, a fully committed Christian in a way. I mean it’s hard – I don’t know his heart, he’s definitely coming closer, but he’s definitely not part of a community – he’s not part of a Church, he’s not in



The Creation of the World by Jonathan Pageau.

communion with anybody. But I think the fact that he’s stood in between has been, for many secular people, a non-threatening position from which they could hear what he was saying and then be able to pay attention to the more religious thinkers who before that they would have thought were just spouting complete gibberish and nonsense. It’s exciting,” he says.

“The present cultural moment is making it much easier to explain to secular people the value of religious stories and of religious practices”

Commenting on their recent trip to the Holy Land together, Mr Pageau says that he hasn’t fully digested the trip, but that it was “very touching”.

“Many things happened and there was a lot of intensity in terms of the discussion about Jerusalem. I was there to go through the Christian sites with Jordan and then have conversations about it. That was quite intense and to have him go through the sites, being willing even to venerate the site of the Crucifixion, to offer a candle in prayer and to engage in these gestures for me was very touching.”



One of Mr Pageau's carvings depicting Jonah being swallowed by the fish.

Breda O'Brien
The View



Small prayerful steps done with love can change your life

At the end of November, Pope Francis suggested a two-minute daily practice of examining one's conscience. This catechesis, delivered at his Wednesday general audience, is part of a series that began on September 7, focusing on Ignatian discernment.

The Wednesday audience is often a vehicle for essential themes for Pope Francis, just like many of the popes who preceded him. For example, immediately prior to this catechesis on discernment, Pope Francis had 18 talks on old age, a theme close to his heart.

“Like many habits, examination of conscience can work on a simple human level but becomes something transformative when infused with grace”

Examination of conscience, known as the daily Examen, is an important part of Jesuit spirituality but long pre-dates it. The philosopher, Pythagoras, is probably best known to many of us because of the half-remembered Pythagorean Theorem that we learned in school. Pythagoras was Greek, born in the 6th Century BC.

Pythagoras advocated the use of what is called the Golden Rule: “Sleep must not fall on your tender eyelids before you have three times meditated each of your actions from the day: where have I failed? What have I accomplished? Which duty have I neglected to accomplish?”

The Roman philosopher, Seneca, had a similar practice of reviewing his day. Like many habits, examination of conscience can work on a simple human level but becomes something transformative when

infused with grace.

For a Christian, it is not about self-help or even self-improvement. It is about looking at our lives with the aim of coming closer to God, which is impossible without his help. Ignatius of Loyola was certainly not the first Christian to advocate such a practice. Origen, one of the fathers of the Church, wrote: “Everything we do in every hour or moment forges a certain image of us. Therefore, we should consider all our deeds and examine ourselves in order to know whether, in that particular deed or word, a heavenly or an earthly image is depicted in our soul.”

Ignatius, however, is famous for having systematised the examination of conscience for daily use. The classic Ignatian version has five steps. The first is giving thanks to God for his many blessings. The second is to ask for grace to see and root out our sins. The third is a review of the day, taking note of when you were close to God and when you felt distant. The fourth is to ask God's pardon, and the fifth is to resolve to do better with God's help.

Ambitious

This has been adapted in numerous ways over the centuries, but Pope Francis appears to be ambitious by suggesting that it can be done in two minutes. It certainly can be done in five minutes.

It has powerful spiritual benefits because the brain becomes primed to notice where God is at work in our lives. Many of us suffer from rumination, where we replay events from our lives in a destructive fashion.

This structured review, rooted in gratitude, helps to break the ruminative circuit, and instead focus on where we had moments



Pope Francis speaks during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican, December 7, 2022. Photo: CNS

of consolation and desolation (other important Jesuit concepts covered by Francis in earlier Wednesday catechesis) and how they reflect our nearness or distance from God.

Advent is the beginning of the Church's year. Even though we are halfway through the season, it is not too late to take up good habits.

Nearly 20 years ago, I read a self-help book by Dr Robert Maurer, called *One Small Step Can Change Your Life*. It looks at the Eastern-sounding practice of *kaizen*, small, continuous improvements. Despite the name, it did not

originate in Eastern philosophies, although it was enthusiastically embraced in Japan after the Second World War.

“Toyota was one of the first Japanese companies to embrace the idea”

In fact, it originated in the United States, with W. Edward Deming, who was brought by the American occupying forces to Japan to help with economic

recovery. He believed that small-scale continuous improvement was not only cheap but highly effective.

Japanese companies

Toyota was one of the first Japanese companies to embrace the idea. Dr Robert Maurer took the idea of *kaizen* and applied it to the individual. I was struck by the fact that he begins his book with a quote from St Theresa of Kolkata, then known as Mother Theresa.

“Small things with great love... It is not how much we do, but how much love

we put into the doing. And it is not how much we give, but how much love we put into the giving. To God, there is nothing small.”

As Christians, we can often long to make radical changes in our lives, to do something dramatic for God. The slow, simple changes are less newsworthy but likely to be much more long-lasting.

“Pope Francis promises that this small step can change our lives”

Lying in bed, or perhaps sitting in a chair before bed, we can spend two to five minutes reflecting in the presence of God. Pope Francis promises that this small step can change our lives.

“It has powerful spiritual benefits because the brain becomes primed to notice where God is at work in our lives”

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Wonderful foods for

Stained glass cookies



Appetising Christmas recipes for baked goods and delicious dinners, by **Kiley Jones**

The festive season is always filled with such wonderful foods, whether party foods, traditional desserts, or the ever-important Christmas roast. I must confess, the food at Christmas time is my favourite, as it just seems so much more special and exciting.

Here, I have put together

four recipes for you – one interesting new dinner, one excellent party appetiser, and two desserts to give away if you like to give home baked goods at Christmas. I have chosen recipes that are not exactly traditional, but that are excellent to make ahead for crowds or to have interesting Catholic traditions.

These cookies are simply adorable. They are great for the kids as well, as the colourful see-through centre looks very lovely when held up to the light. You can use lots of different shapes here – Santa, snowmen, gingerbread, stars, you name it.

You can also get kids involved by having them choose which colour candy centres they may want, whether one colour or multiple. I have seen variations of these cookies where a small hole is punched at the top and they are hung on the tree – I would rather eat them personally! These cookies would be great to give as a small gift, too.

Makes: about 24. Time: 3 hours including chilling time

Ingredients:

- 280g plain flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 170g softened butter
- 125g granulated sugar
- 1 egg, at room temperature
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 15-20 unwrapped hard candies/boiled sweets, in different colours

Instructions:

Whisk the flour and baking powder together in a bowl. Using a stand mixer or a hand mixer, cream the butter for about a minute then

add the sugar. Cream the butter and sugar together until it is pale yellow and creamy. Add the egg and vanilla and mix for another minute.

Add the flour mix to the wet mixture in thirds, mixing a little between each addition. The dough should be soft and come together. If it seems too sticky for rolling, add 1 tablespoon of flour.

Place the dough in the fridge and let cool for about 2 hours. This is very important as it helps the cookies bake better in the oven.

While the dough is chilling, divide the candies by colour and crush them. There are several methods you could use here.

You could place them in a plastic bag, sandwich the bag between a tea towel, and smash them with a rolling pin. Some sweets may be too hard, so you can use a pestle and mortar, which works like a charm. You don't want the candies to be in a very fine powder, you want them to be in medium-ish pieces. Failing either of these methods, a coffee grinder would work – just pulse the candies and make sure they don't turn into powder!

After two hours, preheat the oven to 170°/Gas 3. Take the dough out of the fridge, split it in half, and roll out on a floured surface to about ¼ inch thick. Using a cookie cutter, cut as many pieces

Pierogi

Pierogi isn't a Christmas time only food, but Polish Catholics have a longstanding tradition of making pierogi for Christmas Eve.

This is derived from Catholic tradition, where no meat was eaten before large celebrations such as Christmas Day.

Pierogi are also sometimes served as part of

the Christmas Eve feast in several countries in the region, where 12 dishes are served, representing the 12 apostles. This recipe is the one requiring the most effort in my little collection, but I think it is more than worth it. You can fill a bunch of pierogi and freeze them, then boil them when they are needed.



Makes: 24-30 pieces.
Time: 90 minutes

Ingredients:

For the dough:

- 250g plain flour, keep more on hand in case you need it
- 1 tsp salt
- 40g softened butter
- 1 egg, beaten

For the filling:

- 225g waxy potatoes (red rooster or another all-rounder will work too)
- 40g softened butter
- 3 medium onions, finely chopped
- 115g sour cream or quark
- 20g finely grated cheese

Instructions:

To make the dough, heat the butter and 120ml water in a small saucepan. Add flour and salt to a large bowl and whisk to combine. Gradually pour the butter mix over the flour, stirring a little as you pour. The dough will resemble pastry dough at this point. Stir in the egg, then dump the mixture onto a floured surface and knead until smooth – about 5 or 7 minutes. Add more flour if the dough is too sticky to handle; but it will

come together as you knead. Cover the dough with a damp towel or plastic wrap and set aside on the table for about 30 minutes.

While the dough is resting, make the filling. Peel and cube the potatoes, then place them in a pot of cold water. Bring the water to a boil and continue to cook at a simmer until the potatoes are done – this could take anywhere from 15 to 25 minutes so just check they are tender.

As the potatoes are cooking, prepare the onions by melting the 40g butter over a medium heat and adding the onions once it is melted. Cook the onions until browned, stirring occasionally – about 10 minutes. This will be divided.

Drain the cooked potatoes, then place them into a bowl and mash them. Add ¾ of the onions, the sour cream, cheese and a bit of salt/pepper if desired, and stir to combine. Prepare a large pot of water and place it on the cooktop on a high heat to start boiling.

The final step is preparing the wrappers and filling the pierogi. This can be difficult, so take it slow, and go simple with the folding – no need for fancily folded dough! Roll the dough out

until it is a few millimetres thick, then take a regular size scone cutter and cut out as many circles as you can. Roll up the scraps and set aside.

To fill them, place a small dough circle in your left hand, then spoon a heaped teaspoonful of the potato and sour cream mixture on one half of the circle, leaving space around the edges. Use your right hand to wet the edge of the dough opposite the mixture, and then fold the dough in half and press a little around the wetted edges to seal. You are essentially filling a small circle, wetting the edges, and folding it in half. Keep a small bowl of water near you for this task.

Once the water in the pot has boiled and you have enough pierogi to fit in the pot (without over-filling!), boil them for about 5 minutes. Repeat the cutting, filling, and boiling until you have used everything up.

To serve the pierogi, lay them on a plate and serve with the remaining onions sprinkled on top, along with chopped parsley or dill and sour cream. I like to have my pierogi with applesauce, so if you want to try it with plain applesauce then I highly recommend it!

“Pierogi isn't a Christmas time only food, but Polish Catholics have a longstanding tradition of making pierogi for Christmas Eve”

the festive season

from the dough as you can. Don't put them on a tray just yet – rather, use a very small cookie cutter to punch holes in the middle. I used a cutter made for mince pies to help me with this.

Place the shapes onto a baking tray lined with baking paper. Using a small spoon, place ½ tsp of candy in the middle of each cookie. You can mix the colours if you like, or go with one colour for each cookie.

Bake the cookies in the oven for about 12 minutes, but take a peek at 10 minutes to make sure they are not browning. After 12 minutes, take the trays out of the oven and leave the cookies on the tray for about 5 minutes. After 5 or so minutes, using a metal spatula, transfer the cookies to a wire cooling rack. Repeat this process until you have used all the dough.



Stuffed eggs



These are a bit of a novelty for any party, and really are more delicious than they have any right to be for being a fancy boiled egg. You can easily scale this recipe up or down, depending on how many

you might want to serve. I think the little holly decoration makes these perfect for a little Christmas party or family get together.

Makes: 12 halves. Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

- 6 eggs
- 1 tbsp mayonnaise
- ½ tsp yellow mustard
- 1 tsp sour cream (or use a bit more mayo)
- Salt, pepper, and paprika to taste

- Parsley and peppercorn or red pepper to decorate

Instructions:

Place the eggs in a pot of cold water, then bring the pot to a boil over a medium heat. You will want the eggs in the pot for about 20 minutes from the time they went in the pot – this recipe only works if the yolks are hard-boiled.

Once the eggs are done, place in a bowl of ice water. After a few minutes, take the eggs out.

Carefully peel the eggs, then cut them neatly in half down the middle. Cut slowly, as the whites need to stay intact. Gently pop the yolks out into a bowl.

In the bowl with the yolks, add the mayo, mustard, salt and pepper. Have a little taste to make sure you like it and adjust if needed.

To stuff the eggs, you will spoon the yolk mixture into the egg white halves. If you are serving these for a party, you can pipe the filling in neatly, but I spooned mine in and called it 'rustic'. I then sprinkled paprika over the egg halves.

To make the holly decoration, I used a bit of parsley for a holly leaf, and some red bell pepper cut out with a metal straw as the berries. You could use pink or red peppercorns instead of cutting out bits of red bell pepper. The eggs will keep for a couple of days in an airtight container.

Easy fudge



Again, this is not a recipe that is only made at Christmas time, but it is such an indulgent treat that I think it belongs to a season full of delicious and indulgent sweets. This is really a cheat's fudge, as the condensed milk makes the process a whole lot easier and faster.

I have added chocolate to mine, but I encourage you to go wild with additions here – I've made a white chocolate and peppermint version before which is also very nice. This dessert makes an excellent gift, as it looks very professional in a small little tin with some festive tissue paper.

Makes: about 25 large pieces Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 can sweetened condensed milk (397g)
- 150 ml milk (I would use whole milk as you want a high fat content)
- 450g sugar (yes this sounds like a lot but we need it to caramelize so trust me on this!)
- 115g butter
- 200g chocolate of your choice (optional)

Instructions:

Line a square baking tin, about 8x8 inches, with parchment paper and a light layer of oil.

Place all the ingredients in a large non-stick saucepan. If you want to use a candy thermometer, add it to the pot now, as you cannot place a thermometer in hot liquid. Melt the ingredients over a low heat, stirring until the sugar and butter are dissolved.

After everything is dissolved, bring to a steady boil for 10-15 minutes, stirring continuously and scraping the bottom of the pan to make sure nothing is sticking. If you are using the candy thermometer, you want the mixture to reach 113-115°C. If you are not using a thermometer, you want the mixture to be caramel in colour. Make sure to boil it for at least 10 minutes even if it is a little caramel coloured.

Remove from the heat and stir in the chocolate. After the chocolate has melted in, tip the mixture into the prepared tin. Allow to set overnight. Once set, cut into 1-inch pieces.

“It is such an indulgent treat that I think it belongs to a season full of delicious and indulgent sweets”

Figuring out how to share the Faith in a faithless world



Vatican II equipped the Church for mission in a world that's increasingly missionary territory, Jason Osborne hears

The Church has since its inception been trying to figure out how best to obey Jesus' command to go out into the world and "preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). Times change, and each era presents its own specific opportunities to capitalise on and difficulties to contend with.

Our own age is no different, and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was called in recognition of that. Convened 60 years ago this year, to say that its legacy hasn't been agreed upon by the Faithful would be putting it mildly. Some argue it transformed the Church's stance towards the modern world, while others argue it has the potential to, but that potential hasn't yet been realised. Still more claim that it was a severe misstep on the Church's part, that's seen it hold less faithfully to God's vision for his Church than beforehand.

Examination

Some 60 years later, examination of the Council and the documents it produced are still required in order to better understand the effect this momentous gathering had on the Church and its approach to mission. To that end, renowned Catholic author and Distinguished Senior Fellow of Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center George Weigel has released a new book explaining the necessity of Vatican II and its continuing – or rather, deepening – relevance for today's Church.

To Sanctify the World: The Vital Legacy of Vatican II goes

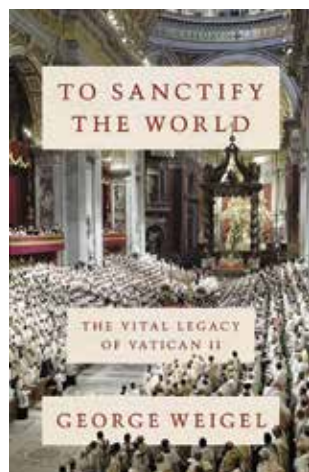


Prelates attend a Mass celebrated by Pope Francis in St Peter's Basilica October 11, 2022, to mark the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

some way towards recovering the truth of the Second Vatican Council, highlighting the texts it produced as vital keys with which to understand its vision for the Church's place in the world. Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Weigel shared the thinking behind the book, explaining why Vatican II remains so necessary in the – synodal – Church of today.

“Still more claim that it was a severe misstep on the Church's part, that's seen it hold less faithfully to God's vision for his Church than beforehand”

“Vatican II was necessary because the situation of the world in which the Church



must proclaim the Gospel had changed dramatically from the time of the Council of Trent and the time of the First Vatican Council,” Mr Weigel begins.

“The world was becoming not so much pagan as simply irreligious, as Cardinal Newman said in 1873. That was an unprecedented situation and the Church had to revitalise its Christ-centred faith and find ways to make that faith comprehensible to people who were living in a post-religious cultural environment. That's what Vatican II intended to do, and that situation – a changed world, and a Church that had not developed the tools necessary to deal with that changed world – that's why the Council was necessary.”

Problem

If that's the problem the Church was facing heading into the Second Vatican Council, what solution did it bring to the table? Mr Weigel suggests that Vatican II was essential in accelerating the Church's transition into what John Paul II called the “New Evangelisation”.

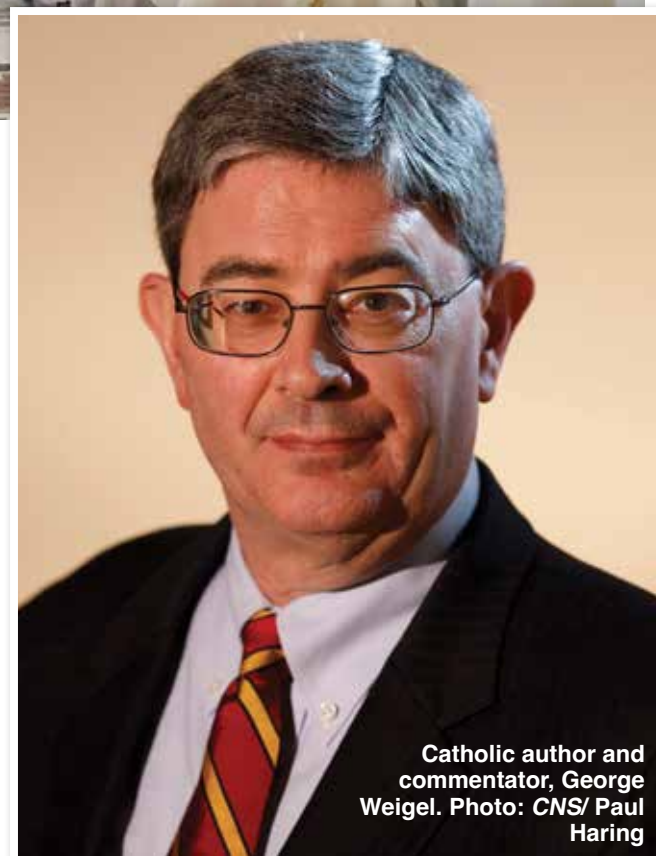
“I think we have come to understand that Vatican II was the council that accelerated the Church's transition into what John Paul II called the ‘New Evangelisation’. I believe this process actually began with Pope Leo XIII, who wanted the Church to engage the modern world in order to convert the modern

world. Pope John XXIII said a month before the council opened, quite simply, as he put it, the purpose of the council is evangelisation,” Mr Weigel says.

“If you read the documents of Vatican II through the lens of that concept, then it all fits together”

“So the vision that Vatican II offered to the world Church was of a Church of missionary disciples, in which everyone has an evangelical responsibility and every place is mission territory. Missions are not just places like where Irish missionaries used to go in deepest, darkest Africa. Mission territory is everywhere. That, to my mind, is the understanding of the Church that the Council proposed and at the centre of that missionary enterprise is the person of Christ. That the Church does not proclaim the Church, the Church proclaims Jesus Christ.”

In his new book, Mr Weigel offers the “keys” to Vatican II, as it was an expansive council spanning years and producing a number of documents. With that being the case, it's no surprise there's been confusion and disagreement about its purpose and final results. However, he believes there is a “master key” to



Catholic author and commentator, George Weigel. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring

understanding the Council, which allows us to read the documents in their “proper order” and properly interpret the spirit of the Council.

Understanding

“I think the master key to understanding Vatican II, by which I mean, the key that allows us to read the documents of the Council in their proper order, was given 20 years after Vatican II by the Synod of Bishops in 1985, called by John Paul II, to assess what had gone right and what had gone not-so-right in implementing the Council over two decades.

“And that synod came up with the master concept of the Church as a communion of disciples in mission. If you read the documents of Vatican II through the lens of that concept, then it all fits together. The difference of Vatican II is that unlike every other ecumenical council, it did not provide the keys for its own proper interpretation. You want to know what the Council of Nicea was about, the first ecumenical council, you read the Creed we recite every Sunday... You want to understand what Vatican I was about, you read its dogmatic definition of papal infallibility,” Mr Weigel says.

"If you want to know what other councils were about, you read the canons they wrote into the Church's legal system. You study the condemnation of heresies that they issued. The Council of Trent did a lot of that and also issued a Catechism. Vatican II did none of that, so it was necessary for the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to provide the authoritative keys to understanding the Council and that master key that I just described."

Lessons

Asked about what lessons the Second Vatican Council has for our current synodal Church, Mr Weigel rephrases the question: What lessons does the Church in the 21st Century have to learn from the past 60 years since Vatican II?

"The fundamental lesson is that those parts of the world Church that have understood and implemented the Council according to the authoritative interpretation of John Paul II and Benedict XVI are thriving and vibrant and living the vision of John XXIII for the Council," he says.

“The German Synodal Way was designed from the outset to avoid Church-legal sanctions while simultaneously creating ‘pressure’ on the Church”

"And those parts of the world Church, for example Germany, that are still trying to reinvent Catholicism, which was never the intention of John XXIII, which is not the nature of an ecumenical council, and certainly is not the nature of a synodal assembly, are dying. Quite bluntly, they're dying. That's the fundamental, empirical fact that should guide the present discussions in the Church."

That that's the Synodal Way's intention in Germany is hard to argue, with former president of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) Thomas Sternberg saying December 2 that the German Synodal Way was designed from the outset to avoid Church-legal sanctions while simultaneously creating "pressure" on the Church to change Catholic teaching on topics such as human sexuality and the ordination of women among others.

Speaking to German diocesan broadcaster Domradio, Mr Sternberg said the Synodal Way was proceeding "much more successfully than I had thought".

In light of the Vatican's interventions against the Synodal Way, he said it had become clear "it was right not

to use the form of a synod, as that would have been sanctioned by canon law" and "would have given canon law properly then also the possibility to prohibit something like that".

Offering some commentary on this trend, Mr Weigel said that Vatican II's "central, fundamental" document could shed light on why the Church is as it is for those seeking to change its teachings.

"I think it would be very useful in this synodal process if everyone involved would reread the central, fundamental document of the Council – *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, which robustly affirms the fact that God does speak into history, first through the Jewish people, later and completely in the person of the Son of God, the incarnate Son of God. That Divine revelation is authoritative and binding over time," Mr Weigel says.

"We do not know more than God does, and the notion that present historical experience judges Divine revelation so that we know more than God does about what makes for righteous living, for human happiness, for beatitude, for authentic human love – this is preposterous. We do not know more than God does, and if we start thinking that we do, we are on the road to ecclesiastical oblivion and that is exactly what is going on in Germany and in the low countries right now. So that's what I would take from the Council. I really wish everyone would read *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* and ponder its deeply countercultural message, you know? We're not in a silent world where we invent meaning out of our own limited understandings. We live in a world with windows, doors and skylights, and through those openings comes the Word of God, and that is binding on us and authoritative over time."

Surprised

Asked whether he's been positively surprised by any of the synodal developments, Mr Weigel says that "on the contrary" the reduction of bishops to "discussion group leaders" is contradictory to the concept of the teaching authority, governing authority and sanctifying authority of bishops in the Council's dogmatic constitution on the Church and in its decree on the office of bishops in the Church.

"To reduce bishops to discussion group leaders is a violation of both the spirit and the letter of Vatican II," Mr Weigel said.

With the amount of confusion in the Church surrounding the legacy of Vatican II, and the equal amount of confusion expressed throughout the Church's synodal journey thus far, I ask Mr Weigel

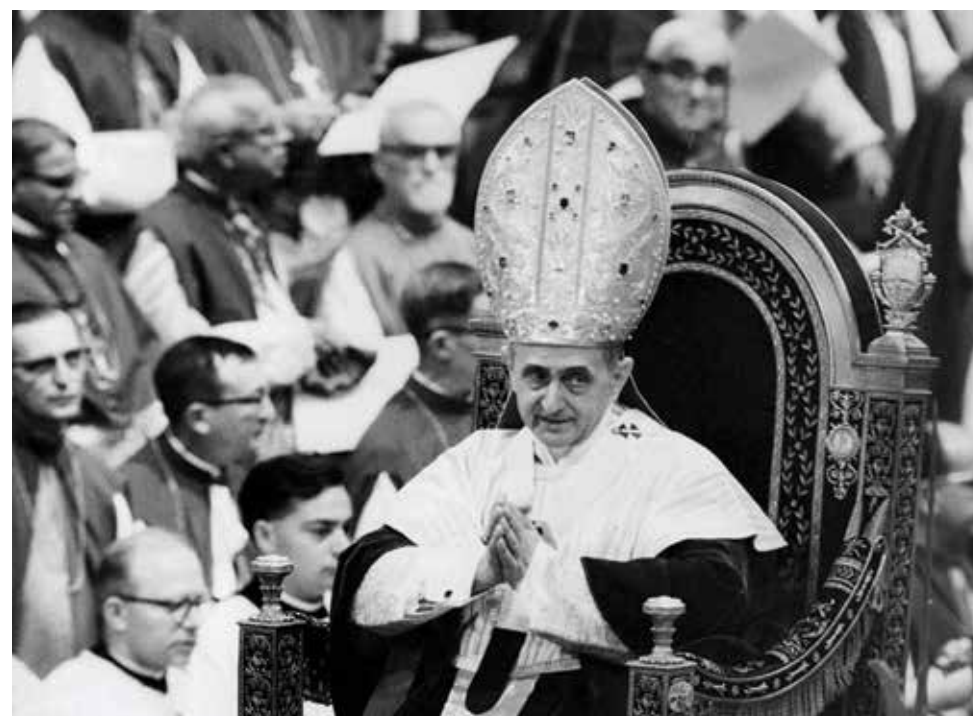


Pope John XXIII leads the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St Peter's Basilica October 11, 1962. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano

whether he suspects the Second Vatican Council has been paid lip service to as people attempt to shoehorn through their own thoughts about how the Church ought to be. That trend, Mr Weigel says, isn't exclusive to the synodal age of the Church, but has been going on since the Council itself.

“To reduce bishops to discussion group leaders is a violation of both the spirit and the letter of Vatican II”

"As I explain in the book, it was within Vatican II itself that this notion of reinventing the Church became a point of contention and controversy. That controversy continued after the Council, it was embodied in the split within the reformist group, the theologians, at Vatican II – one group identified with the journal *Concilium*, the other with the journal *Communio* – and this has been going on for 60 years. Now, it also should be said that there's nothing really new about this. Councils are always followed by controversy, which is why, thank God, we've only had 21 of the



Pope Paul VI makes his way past bishops during a session of the Second Vatican Council in 1964. Vatican II, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) promulgated by St Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, presents succinctly the Church's teaching on the role of the laity in the Church and in the world. Photo: CNS

things in two millennia," Mr Weigel says with a laugh.

Notion

"There's nothing really new about this. I think what's perhaps new in this present situation is the notion that I averted to a moment ago, namely, that present historical experience judges revelation rather than

the other way around, rather than revelation being a binding norm over time. That is, to dig down into the weeds of history, that's a very Hegelian notion of the human condition and it's not Catholic. Indeed, it's not biblical. To say that we stand in judgement on Divine revelation is an act of hubris that really needs to be called

out for precisely that."

Mr Weigel makes a compelling case for the vital importance of acquiring a proper understanding of the Second Vatican Council in the Church, not just of today, but in any age going forward. His new book makes a serious contribution towards making that task more achievable.

A Christmas spent sitting in a cell

Midlands prison.
Photo: Chai Brady



The loneliness of prisoners can become particularly acute at Christmas, but a Samaritans' scheme aims to help, writes **Chai Brady**

Christmas day is quiet in prisons as workshops and other activities are halted. Making a phone or video call home is a possibility but it is not the same as being physically close, sharing Christmas dinner or hearing the sound of excited children delighting over their presents.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the Governor of Mountjoy prison David Tracey and the Assistant Governor Ray O'Keefe of Midlands prison said that every prison is like its own community and would have the same population as any village.

Both prisons are closed, medium security prisons for adult males. Mountjoy has a capacity of 755 while Midlands' capacity

is 875 – Ireland's largest prison. The mission statement of the Irish Prison Service is to provide safe and secure custody, dignity of care and rehabilitation to prisoners for safer communities.

"In this community Christmas can be difficult and lonely for people who are away from family and loved ones. There are Christmas cards and Christmas trees but it is not as homely as it is spending the festive season with loved ones," they said.

"Prisoners are waking up Christmas morning without the sound of kids opening presents and all the excitement that goes with that. Prisoners can phone their families but they will say it's not the same as giving them a hug and seeing their faces on Christmas morning."

Routine

The governors said that Christmas brings a break to the routine of prison and is normally "a quiet affair with the chatter and normal banter greatly reduced as there seems to be a quietness that descends on the prison".

"Christmas dinner is served in the afternoon and prisoners will then watch television in their cells for the evening. There are activities organised around Christmas for prisoners but although the majority get involved there is an undertone of loneliness and sorrow," they added.

The build-up of emotions during the Christmas period can be overwhelming for some but according to the governors the Samaritan 'Listener Scheme' continues to help prisoners in distress.

The Irish Prison Service and Samaritans celebrated the 20th anniversary of the programme in prisons this year. Samaritans vol-

unteers have been visiting prisons across Ireland on a weekly basis to support prisoners since the early 1990s and in 2002, with the first Listener Scheme beginning in Cloverhill prison.

It is a peer support programme which sees prisoners trained to give emotional support to other prisoners. It is delivered by Samaritans volunteers and supported by the Irish Prison Service.

“In 2021 there were 19,634 calls from prisoners with most due to loneliness and isolation exacerbated by restrictions on visits due to the pandemic”

The scheme aims to provide confidential emotional support to people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide, through listening to them non-judgementally and in confidence. The Samaritans support prisoners through peer support Listener Schemes, face-to-face support by volunteers from Samaritans branches, and access to Samaritans service by telephone.

It is now operational in every prison in Ireland, with 15 Listener Schemes in 12 prisons supported by more than 80 volunteers from Samaritans branches. There are

currently just more than 100 prisoners in the prison system trained as 'listeners', providing 24-hour support.

In 2021 there were 19,634 calls from prisoners with most due to loneliness and isolation exacerbated by restrictions on visits due to the pandemic. The charity trained 73 inmates to be listeners within the prison system. These made 1,074 'listener contacts' with fellow inmates in emotional distress.

Service

Governor Tracey and Assistant Governor O'Keefe said the Listener Scheme is an invaluable service to the prison community and helps people in custody all through the year... "especially at Christmas time".

"Events such as the death or the anniversary of the death of a relative, family events and life events can all result in a call on the Listener Scheme volunteers. There are many events which the wider community takes for granted such as a child's first day in school or football match which can impact on a person in custody. Prisoners have the opportunity to talk to someone on a one-to-one basis without being judged. Prisoners have a way of opening up and talking to someone without bottling up their emotions or frustrations," they said.

"These emotions and frustrations are quite visible at Christmas

time as it is a time for family and friends, and some find themselves in prison during this period. Prisoners have an opportunity to off-load and feel better, as we all know letting emotions or feeling build up can lead to self-harm or suicide. This in itself is a source of comfort to all. Most of the contact made with trained listeners is through informal contact. Our prisoner community have continued to use listener service and it is now part of the fabric of the Irish Prison Service."

“The build-up of emotions during the Christmas period can be overwhelming for some”

For Cindy O'Shea, who became the Director of the Cork branch of the Samaritans in 2012, it was at a workshop she attended that reflected the potential power of the Listener Scheme. Ms O'Shea said she was "blown away" by an address given by a prisoner who had become a listener under the Samaritan scheme.

"It was this ordinary man who had been in prison – his story of transformation, of empathy, of humanity really in terms of his work supporting other prisoners who really inspired me," she said. This spurred her to push for the scheme to be extended to

“The scheme aims to provide confidential emotional support to people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair”

“Our role there is to do a debriefing with the guys to see what issues they had to deal with”

Cork, because at the time she said the scheme did not exist outside Dublin.

“I literally started to bombard the prison in Cork with requests to come in to talk to them, to sell them the notion of a Listener Scheme, how that would work, what it would do, how it would not only support prisoners but prison officers in their work,” she said.

“Despite Covid restrictions they were still able to keep in touch with their listeners via Zoom”

“Not only is the Listener Scheme renowned for saving people's lives within a prison context it also supports prison officers in their work in terms of supporting prisoners, recognising signs of suicidal behaviour and reduces mental health issues within the prison context, where prisoners won't necessarily speak to staff but with the Listener Scheme they would speak to peers.”

After time and perseverance, the first group of prisoners were recruited in 2013 to be listeners. After this Ms O'Shea said she brought the scheme to Limerick, Roscommon, across the Midlands and Wicklow. In the next five years there was a Listener Scheme set up in every prison outside Dublin.

Ms O'Shea career started as a youth worker. She said that unfortunately an “awful lot” of young people who are disadvantaged and marginalised end up in prison.

“So to me in lots of ways extending the work into the prison environment was an extension of the youth work that I had done back in the past whereby you're still supporting vulnerable men, mainly, but a lot of vulnerable women too, and you're giving them an opportunity to see themselves differently and maybe learn skills that help them to communicate better with their families and in their communities, and maybe make different choices then when they come out of prison,” she said.

Epitome

“It's the absolute epitome of the ripple effect scenario, you train them to be listeners, they feel better about themselves, they learn more skills, they communicate better with their families and then when they come out of prison, because they've done something positive in prison, their concept of community and contribution is different. It's really hoped that when they come out they might make a different decision about a life of crime or whatever it is and of course with the ability to communicate better in families, maybe by being a listener in prison they may be breaking a cycle that they have grown up with all of their lives.”

She stated that the impact and potential of the listener scheme is huge, not only within the prison but in terms of people's lives, their family life and indeed their community.

Asked about Christmas in prison, she said the experience depends on the prisoner and their circumstance – like those who are not incarcerated.

“A lot of the time because prisoners know they're not able to celebrate Christmas, they try to ignore it, in lots of ways it's just another day,” Ms O'Shea explained, “But obviously when they're sitting in their cells on Christmas day, people miss their families, they can be very lonely, they can be very isolated, but ironically Christmas day can be a very, very quiet day in a prison. People are imagining that they could be at home with their families, or what's happening on the outside, so it can be a very sad day. So the listeners themselves, they get a lot of calls from other prisoners – talking about that sense of loneliness, talking about missing families, talking about isolation – so it can be very sad and difficult day for them.”

For Brendan Magee of the Samaritans in Coleraine, Co. Derry, mental health is the “big issue” at the moment for prisoners. Mr Magee has been with the Samaritans for 23 years and was involved in setting up the Listener Scheme in Magilligan prison, a medium security prison near Limavady.

Handful

What started off with a handful of prisoners has grown and he told *The Irish Catholic* prisoners have told him they feel they are better able to relate to people due to engaging in the scheme. Currently he meets the listeners in the prison every fortnight.

“Some of them are OK with Christmas, the turkeys coming and the food might be a bit better so they're happy enough with that”

“Our role there is to do a debriefing with the guys to see what issues they had to deal with and what the concerns were, and we capture the information and then that's fed back into the Samaritans system,” he said.

Despite Covid restrictions they were still able to keep in touch with their listeners via Zoom which also transformed the connectivity available to prisoners with their families. Mr Magee recalled the delight of one prisoner who saw his dog for the first time on a video call, as the dog wasn't allowed during prison visitation.

Regarding the issues listeners are coming across, Mr Magee said: “Mental health seems to be a



big issue at the moment, physical health as well. There's been some suicidal feelings as well.

“Occasionally loneliness too, where they don't associate with other people in the prison and there's been self-harm over a period of time,” he said.

Involved

He said one of the ways the listeners become involved with another prisoner is if a prison officer spots someone is having difficulties. Mr Magee said the prison officer will arrange for one of the listeners to go and see the prisoner. “We usually have two listeners that do that, they meet the individual, and they really do almost an element of counselling. They're finding out what the issues are, being supportive, reassuring. If it was massively serious they would arrange for the trained medical staff to help. There's a lot of support for them,” he said.

The meeting can last from one hour to three, according to Mr Magee, with mental health problems generally taking longer than others.

“The listener team really do work. They have a rota drawn up, each week there's two of them appointed and if the officer feels

someone needs their help they'll get those two to see that person,” he said.

Mr Magee explained the listeners also use their own initiative, they may come across someone, perhaps they're on the same wing or have met elsewhere, and they spot the individual has problems, they make the approach and ask how they can help.

“Occasionally loneliness too, where they don't associate with other people in the prison and there's been self-harm over a period of time”

“I have a lot of admiration for what they do, and it does help. It's something to be proud of. We don't always know what the crime is, but they take the initiative maybe in a difficult situation and they try to help somebody else, and they do help them,” Mr Magee said.

Regarding Christmas, Mr Magee added: “Some of them are OK with Christmas, the turkeys coming and the food might be a bit better so they're happy enough

with that, but for some of them they will be disappointed, particularly if they've been in a few years, feeling it would have been nice to be out with the family.”

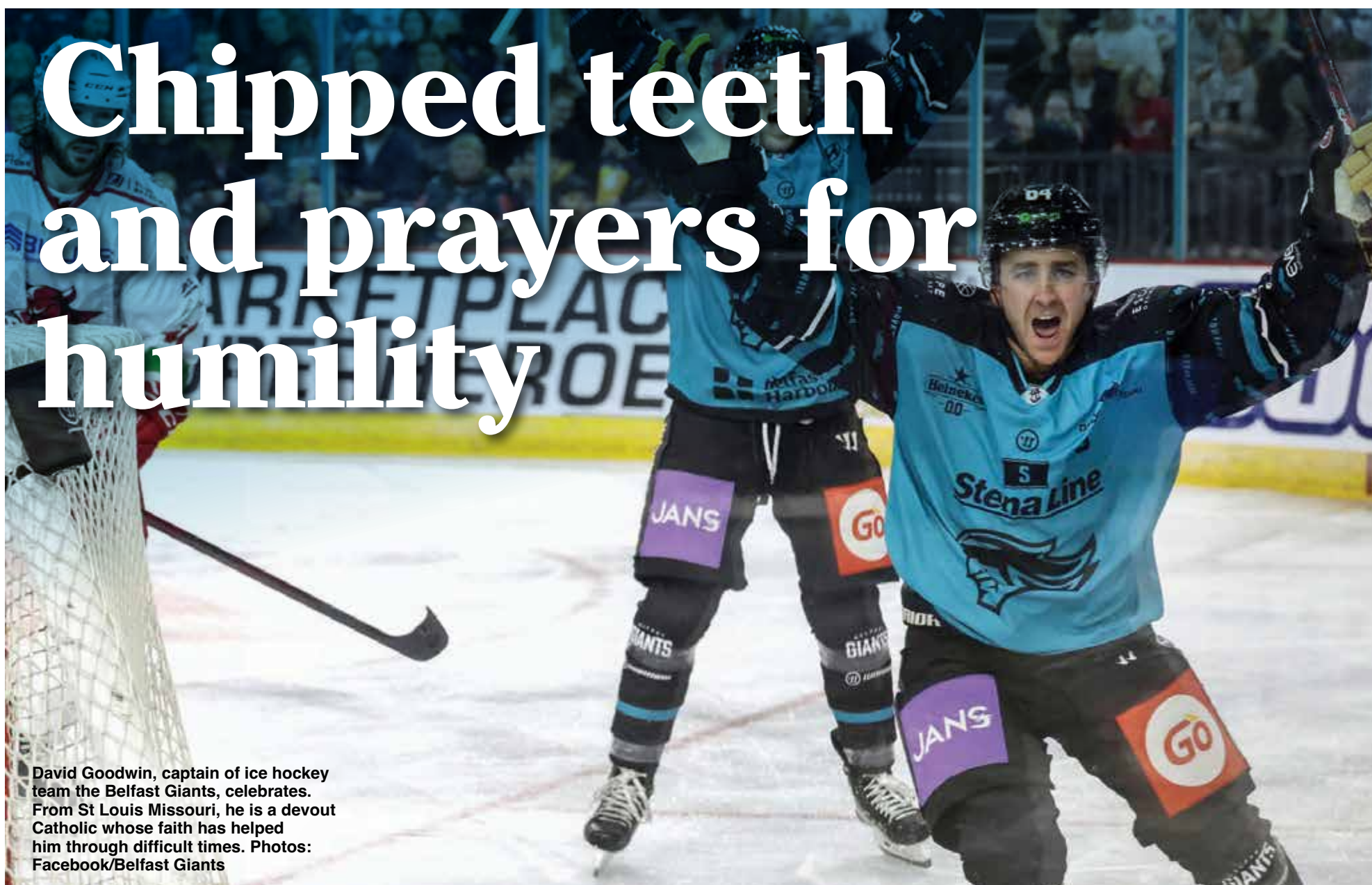
Dignity

While those in prison have committed offences – and have broken the law – they are still afforded a listening ear and are treated with dignity through the Listener Scheme.

As Pope Francis said during an international conference on the Church's pastoral care of prisoners: “It is easier and comfortable to suppress than to educate, to deny the injustice present in society and to create these spaces for shutting off transgressors into oblivion than to offer equal opportunities for development to all citizens.”

He said this is an “educated way of discarding persons”.

The Pope urged today's society to overcome the stigmatisation of someone who has made a mistake because, he said, “instead of offering help and adequate resources to live a dignified life, we are accustomed to discarding the person rather than making efforts for him or her to return to the love of God in his or her life.”



David Goodwin, captain of ice hockey team the Belfast Giants, celebrates. From St Louis Missouri, he is a devout Catholic whose faith has helped him through difficult times. Photos: Facebook/Belfast Giants



David Goodwin tells Ruadhán Jones what it's like to be a Catholic ice hockey player

There's a stereotype about ice hockey that it's a physically demanding game and occasionally violent. "I would say the stereotype is accurate," David Goodwin tells me. He adds the caveat that it's not much more so than Gaelic football.

All the same, "a lot of ice hockey players have missing teeth. I only have one fake tooth, so I think my mom is pretty happy with that," David says with a chuckle.

The 30-year-old captain of the Belfast Giants, who play in the UK's Elite Ice Hockey League (EIHL) and are one of Britain and Ireland's best ice hockey teams, is not an Irish native. From St Louis, Missouri, David came to ply his trade in the North almost four years ago.

Vital cog

Since then, he has become a vital cog in the Giants' team. As a winger, one of the team's main attackers, he scored 28 goals and 81 points in 64 games in all competitions last season. He was

awarded the captain's armband for both his skills as a player and for his leadership qualities.

Despite this, and despite winning two domestic trophies last season, David's return for the 2022/23 campaign was in doubt after the Giants lost their Play-Off Final to the Cardiff Devils back in April. He needed time to consider his options before deciding whether to sign for the next season's campaign.

“Particularly here in Belfast I feel like I’ve a great friend community among the mainly young adult Catholic community in Belfast”

He got so close to hanging up the skates that he had a few interviews for non-hockey jobs when he returned to the States for the summer break. But he wasn't done with Belfast just yet, having begun to feel at home and with two titles to defend.

Because of the shape of the ice hockey season, David isn't able to go back to America very often and spends most of the major family holidays in Ireland – that includes Christmas. He has been playing abroad for several seasons, in Finland, Sweden, Poland and now Belfast. Asked if it's difficult celebrating away from family, he says it was at first.

Community

"But particularly here in Belfast I feel like I've a great friend community among the mainly young adult Catholic community in Belfast. That's in addition to my work colleagues or my friends on the ice hockey team, I also have this other community," David says. "Because of that and maybe because Belfast feels a bit more like home than other places I've played, it's easier for me to be away from the United States."

This year, David will get three days off for Christmas from December 24-26. As he's a professional athlete, he has to mind what he eats over the festive season.

"I think our coach would prefer that we did not partake in the sugary Christmas treats," he says, half joking. "So we'll get a few days off, but professional athletes have to make those decisions about what they can and cannot put into their bodies to perform at the next match. I'll be weighing those pros and cons."

And there is much in the pros column to weigh up, as Belfast



David with members of CK19, the Knights of St Columbanus' council at Queen's University Belfast, after giving them a talk on his faith and career.

Giants chase the sixth title in their 22-year history. Currently, they're in and around the fight for first place, sitting in fourth just nine points behind the leaders, Guilford Flames.

Ice hockey isn't exactly a native Irish sport, but since their debut in the year 2000, the Belfast Giants have quickly become one of the elite league's premiere teams. Founded in 1997 by two Canadian businessmen, the Giants debuted in the 2000/01 season of what was then the Superleague.

They struggled at first, but on the whole acquitted themselves well. After bolstering the ranks in the off-season, they stormed to their first title in just their second season, going unbeaten for 16 games to finish it off.

“Since their debut in the year 2000, the Belfast Giants have quickly become one of the elite league's premiere teams”

The Superleague collapsed in mid-2003 and it looked like the Giants might follow suit due to financial difficulties. But again, they pulled through and joined Britain's elite hockey teams in the newly founded Elite Ice Hockey League. The Giants now regularly play in front a full house in their home stadium, the SSE Arena.

The fandom attendant on their success is a blessing and a curse for the players, says David. He's aware that it brings in an element of pride, which he has learned to be wary of. One of the ways he combats it is with his Catholic faith.

“Pride is something that I've struggled with,” he explains. “I think that's probably common given our level of fandom or celebrity status that we have in professional athletics. I've prayed for humility and prayed how can I better incorporate humility into my life given my career.”

“A lot of that has come through praying the litany of humility. I

try to do that before every game and I've found that's a good way to prepare myself mentally and physically for the success I'm hoping to achieve that evening.”

Fans

Included in those fans at one of David's hockey games this season was a group of young Catholics from Queen's University Belfast. These were from QUB's Catholic Chaplaincy and its own council of the Knights of St Columbanus. They have started following David's career with some interest, since he came and gave them a talk on his Faith life and sporting career, followed by a question-and-answer session.

“I think a majority of the questions that the lads [the Knights] had was around being a Christian on what they would assume is a very secular sports team,” David recalls. “I kind of told them, it's like anything, if it's important to you enough, you're going to stay committed to it. I feel fortunate that the Lord has given me the desire to remain close to him in the way that he has. The majority of the times have been quite easy, it's been what's on my heart.”

In many ways, ice hockey and David's faith have gone hand in hand as the most important elements of his life – though faith is top of his list of priorities. Just as David has been playing hockey almost all his life, since he was four or five years old, his faith has been passed down to him from his earliest years.

“I was fortunate, I grew up in a big, strong Catholic family,” he says. “My mom was the first one that exposed me to the Catholic faith and of course I'm eternally grateful to her. I grew up in St Louis Missouri, attending Mass regularly. Thankfully as I've become an adult and taken ownership of my faith, I've continued to do that as well.”

“I've never really had a revelation experience or anything like that. I'm grateful that I always did keep the Faith close to me and kept it a priority in my life. A big

part of that is my daily prayer life and as long as I've been prioritising that, I've been able to stay close to Christ. And yeah thankfully I haven't had any moments of desolation in that regard.”

Although David has gone well with the Belfast Giants for the last three seasons, it's not as though his career hasn't been without its setbacks. But in the end, with the Lord's help, he's always been able to pull through.

“In many ways, ice hockey and David's faith have gone hand in hand as the most important elements of his life”

“For example,” he begins, “when I was in Sweden, I was fired from two different teams. That would be a good example of when the Lord was saying, hey I want you to take a step back, re-evaluate everything, this isn't where I want you right now, and

then he opened the doors for me to go to Belfast, which has just been a phenomenal experience.”

Trust

“I can see the Lord's hand in that now. Maybe not so much at the time, but I was able to trust in him and trust in his will and he brought me to just a great experience here in Belfast. I knew nothing about Northern Ireland before I moved here in 2019. There's been a lot to learn and a lot to get used to, but compared to Finland and Sweden, there's of course a lot more similarities culturally, mainly with the language.”

Challenges

Despite the challenges, David does see an overlap between what makes a successful professional athlete and a healthy faith life. He's not alone in this, after all,

as St Paul resorts to the image of running a race when describing the path of holiness. “Ice hockey has certainly helped me in the discipline required for the spiritual life,” David affirms.

“I like to think that I keep Christ close when I'm going well in the joys and I'm able to express my gratitude to him for everything he's given me in that regard. But also in the struggles, in the emotional rollercoaster that professional athletics can be sometimes, I feel fortunate that I have a good relationship with Christ, a good prayer life with him where I'm able to lean on him when times have been difficult in my hockey life.”

“Although David has gone well with the Belfast Giants for the last three seasons, it's not as though his career hasn't been without its setbacks”

Although he spends the majority of his time abroad, as David says, he's lucky to be able to find a Catholic community as a home away from home.

“I've been fortunate to be a part of good faith groups on each part of my journey,” David says. “When I was in Finland and Sweden, the Church isn't as popular or as vibrant as I found in Krakow, for example. I think the Lord has put different experiences in my life, not testing me, I don't like that term, but showing me the universality of the Catholic Church.”

“Some people who had to drive for maybe an hour and a half to get to Mass, then in Krakow, they have Mass in every street corner of their neighbourhood. The Lord has given me both sides of the coin.”



Out&About

A heavenly choir



KILDARE: A special performance of the *Requiem* by Gabriel Fauré was given in memory of Dr David Connolly in St Patrick's College Maynooth's chapel recently. Pictured is the University Choral Society with conductor Dr John O'Keeffe, Director of Sacred Music, SPPU.



LONDON: Following the Investiture of new Knights and Dames of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in London recently, members – including a delegation from Ireland – and guests attended a luncheon in the Mansion House.



DUBLIN: Nikola Stipska, a student from St Mary's Secondary School Baldoye, ensures the court is ready for the next match in the Irish Badminton Open in Abbottstown.

IN SHORT

One in 23 will need humanitarian assistance in 2023

One person in every 23, a total of 339 million people globally, will require some form of assistance in 2023, Irish charity Concern Worldwide have warned.

The last year has been "devastating" for vulnerable and poorer communities around the world, with a 24% increase in the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance.

A combination of Covid-19, the climate crisis and armed conflict, compounded by the conflict in Ukraine, has been blamed for this increase.

"It's people living in the world's poor-

est countries that are hit hardest. We see this in the communities Concern works in, they are struggling to afford even the most basic of necessities, and many of their coping mechanisms are exhausted," said Carol Morgan, International Programmes Director with Concern.

"The world must redouble its efforts to support communities living in extreme poverty."

The statistics are contained in the United Nations' Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO), launched recently. The GHO is an annual assessment of humanitarian needs and the resources required to address them, based on data from international organisations, and global, national, and local NGOs.

It says US\$51.5 billion is needed to fund the most urgent needs of 230 million people

in 68 countries in 2023, 25% more than this time last year

HSE launches free hospice care course

The HSE has launched a new continuous learning programme aimed at supporting and empowering staff delivering palliative, end of life and bereavement care.

Caru – Supporting Care and Compassion at End of Life In Nursing Homes, was developed by Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF), in partnership with All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIHPC).

In a statement, the IHF said the course will lead to "enhanced quality of life for residents, a good death, easing the bereavement process

for their families".

"Shaped by a spirit of compassion for people in their care, it is underpinned by expertise, experience and research, to support and empower nursing homes," the press release says.

Siobhan Murphy, Director of Healthcare at IHF said: "Every year over 23% of deaths occur in nursing homes.

"We want to ensure that all staff in nursing homes are equipped and empowered to make decisions and have the difficult conversations that happen around those times.

"At IHF we will oversee the implementation of this new programme with nine regional leads recruited to deliver our quality improvement workshops, organise regional networking events and support nursing home staff and owners at local level."

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



TYRONE: Art club students at CBS Omagh proudly display their Christmas Gnomes/Gonks and handmade mugs, fired and glazed ready for the festive season.



DERRY: Catherine from Balloonz pictured with her son Aidan after donating a gingerbread house she crafted from balloons to St Eithne's Primary School.

DUBLIN: Pictured at the Irish premiere of Pope Francis' climate change movie *The Letter – A Message for our Earth* in Áras an Uachtaráin are President Michael D Higgins, Sabina Higgins, Director Nicolas Brown and Deputy CEO of Trocaire, Finola Finan. Photo: Mark Stedman.



CARLOW: Bishop Denis Nulty joined the parish of Graiguecullen-Killeslin to launch *Holy Cross Church and its Community*, a new book compiled by parishioner Pat Whelan (second from left) to coincide with the 200th anniversary of Holy Cross Church. The book costs €20 and will be on sale from the GK Parish Office.



ARMAGH: Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin is escorted through St Patrick's Cathedral by a troupe of scouts as the organisation celebrates 90 years in Armagh.

Events

● The events column will be back after Christmas. Please send in any events taking place in the new year to Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie. The deadline is a week before publication. Events sent in any later will not be considered for publication.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Fans pray for Pelé's recovery

● More than a hundred Santos Soccer Club fans gathered in front of the hospital in Brazil where Pelé, one of the greatest soccer players of all time, is undergoing treatment, to pray for his recovery.

The ACESSA.com website reported that fans formed a circle, lit candles, held hands, and prayed an Our Father and a Hail Mary, followed by a round of applause.

"We are here with spiritual strength so that, in this very difficult moment that the King is going through, he can rise up with more strength, because this battle is one of the toughest of his life," Marcos Bispo dos Santos, an admirer of the three-time world champion with the Brazilian team, told *Agence France-Presse*.

Pope and advisers discuss synod, safeguarding, COP27

● Pope Francis and his Council of Cardinals met at the Vatican December 5-6, discussing the continental phase of the synod process, safeguarding and the UN climate change summit, the Vatican press office said.

Also, "the meeting was an opportunity for a mutual exchange of updates on some current affairs in different key geographical areas and for an overall assessment of the council's progress in recent years," the Vatican said in a written

communiqué December 7.

All seven members of the council participated: Cardinals Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state; Seán O'Malley of Boston; Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India; Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, Germany; Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa; and Giuseppe Bertello, retired president of the commission governing Vatican City State.

US diocese to file for bankruptcy

● Bishop Robert Vasa of Santa Rosa announced that the diocese expects to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection because it faces more than 130 new claims of sex abuse dating from 1962 to the present, with "a vast majority of the cases" dating to the 1970s and 1980s.

The diocesan attorneys are expected to file Chapter 11 after December 31 and before March 1, he said in a statement.

"After months of careful and prayerful consideration and consultation with the priests of the diocese, the Diocesan Finance Council and professionals retained by the diocese," Bishop Vasa said, "it has become clear to me that it is necessary" for the diocese to take this action.

"This decision was made necessary due to the overwhelming number of sexual abuse lawsuits filed against the diocese after the statute of limitations was lifted for a three-year 'window'," he said.

Baltimore seals clerical sexual abuse documents

● A judge in Baltimore this week ordered all proceedings, filings, and communications related to the release of a major attorney general's report on clerical sexual abuse to be made confidential.

Judge Anthony Vittoria of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City issued a confidentiality ruling December 2 in response to a request from an anonymous group of people named in the report

but who were not accused of abuse, the *Baltimore Sun* reported.

At issue is a 456-page report compiled by the office of Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh, consisting of information given by the Archdiocese of Baltimore along with information gathered from interviews that claims to identify more than 600 victims of clerical abuse in the archdiocese dating back eight decades.

Peru's bishops plea for unity after president's failed coup

Peru's bishops called for national unity and urged citizens to stand up for democracy and the rule of law as the president closed Congress and was subsequently impeached and arrested.

In a statement December 7, the bishops' conference said it "emphatically and absolutely rejects the rupture in the constitutional order. The defence of democracy is the right and moral duty of peoples and citizens".

The bishops also called for state institutions to "protect and safeguard democracy" and to guarantee, preserve and reestablish "public and constitutional order".

The brief statement came amid a rapidly unfolding political crisis that began with President Pedro Castillo announcing that he was closing the national Congress, instituting a "government of exception" that would rule by decree, and calling elections for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.

His announcement came just hours before Congress was scheduled to vote on whether to impeach him. Two previous impeachment votes had failed to garner the necessary two-thirds majority, or 87 votes.

After his announcement, Cabinet ministers resigned and members of the judiciary spoke out against the move, as did the governmental Ombudsman's Office and various civil society organisations. The armed forces and national police eventually broke their



Protesters and police clash in Lima, Peru, December 7, after Congress voted to oust Peruvian President Pedro Mr Castillo. Photo: CNS/Gerardo Marin, Reuters

silence with a statement saying they would defend the constitutional order and calling for calm.

Meanwhile, Congress went ahead with the impeachment vote, with a tally of 101 in favour – including some from Mr Castillo's own party – six opposed and 10 abstentions. Mr Castillo was arrested after he and his family fled the presidential palace.

Vice President Dina Boluarte was sworn in as president, becoming Peru's first female head of state and the country's sixth president since 2018, including three in one week in December 2020. All the coun-

try's living former presidents have been charged with or are under investigation for corruption.

Mr Castillo's move was reminiscent of the institutional coup staged by former President Alberto Fujimori in April 1992, when he dissolved Congress and convened a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. At the time, Peru was convulsed with political violence and his action, which was backed by the armed forces, had wide public support.

But Mr Castillo, a farmer and teacher from Peru's northern Cajamarca region who had no

government experience before taking office in July 2021, had seen his approval rating drop from 40% in September 2021 to 25% in October of this year, and he lacked military support for his attempted institutional coup.

Prosecutors have accused him of heading a criminal organisation that profited from government contracts, and his administration has been unstable, with five Cabinet chiefs in barely 18 months and a constant turnover of ministers and vice ministers. Mr Castillo, in turn, has accused critics of being prejudiced against him because of his background.

European Parliament's Nativity scene first in its history

Christmas this year marks the first time in its history that the European Parliament has allowed a Nativity scene to be set up at its headquarters in Brussels. Until now, officials of the European institution had considered it "potentially offensive."

The efforts of Isabel Benjumea, a member in the EU's House of Representatives from Spain, were key to finally having a Nativity scene on display at the institution.

When she was elected in 2019, Benjumea tried her first year in office to prepare the groundwork for a gift of a Nativity

scene to the parliament that would be exhibited during the Christmas season. However, she ran into European bureaucracy and deadlines.

The following year she began to take the necessary steps. A Nativity scene could not be installed, she was informed by the office of the President of Parliament, because it was "potentially offensive" to nonbelievers.

"This had become a kind of crusade because it seemed unacceptable to me to ignore the Christian roots of Europe," the

parliamentarian told Spanish newspaper ABC.

Finally, this year the effort had the support of the Maltese president of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, although the Nativity scene has only been "authorised as a special exhibition," which may or may not be renewed in the future.

The Nativity scene on display in the European Parliament is from Murcia, a region in southeastern Spain with a great tradition of Nativity scenes and imagery.

Indian court orders police protection for Vatican appointee

A top court in the southern Indian state of Kerala has ordered police protection for the apostolic administrator of an archdiocese in the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church, which is embroiled in a bitter liturgical dispute.

The High Court of Kerala granted the request Decem-

ber 5 in a lawsuit by Archbishop Andrews Thazhath, administrator of the Kochi-based Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, ucanews.com reported.

The court also directed the police to remove the protesting priests and laypeople blocking his entry into the

archbishop's house.

Justice Anu Sivaraman in a brief order termed those who are blocking the archbishop's entry into the residence as "miscreants or outsiders".

Pope Francis appointed the archbishop as administrator July 30, with a mandate to settle a liturgical dispute caused

by the stiff opposition to the decision of the Syro-Malabar synod to have uniformity in the celebration of Mass.

The dispute began when Archbishop Thazhath unilaterally revoked a dispensation that had allowed priests to celebrate Mass facing the people.



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Rising to Heaven...



Pope Francis looks at a hot air balloon with his name on it, offered by the Italian island of Ventotene, at the Vatican on December 7. Photo: CNS /Remo Casilli, Reuters.

Pope strengthens oversight of Vatican-related entities

Pope Francis has approved a new law strengthening the oversight of Vatican-related foundations and nonprofit organisations as well as detailing sanctions and clarifying existing norms on transparency, accountability and mandated compliance with anti-money laundering measures.

The new law, which took effect December 8, applies to all legal "persons" or entities dedicated to a specific purpose and that are connected to the Holy See or Vatican City State.

These entities include foundations, nonprofit or volunteer organisations and specific funds that are dependent on

and supervised by either the Secretariat of State, the Governorate of Vatican City State, an office of the Roman Curia, a pontifical academy or university, or some other Vatican-related body.

Because these entities were established by "the initiative of private individuals" to carry out a mission or purpose beyond the work of the Roman Curia, they enjoy "a certain administrative autonomy," the Pope wrote in an apostolic letter published *motu proprio* (on his own initiative), on December 6.

However, since their assets and "goods are part of the patrimony of the Apostolic See,

it is necessary for them to be subject not only to the supervision of the curial institutions on which they depend, but also to the control and supervision of the economic bodies of the Roman Curia," the Pope wrote.

Specifically, the Secretariat for the Economy will supervise, inspect and verify the economic and financial activities, assets and budgets of these legal entities as well as their compliance to international standards against money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

The law specifies the secretariat and the office of the Vatican auditor general may have access to all accounting

records, information on financial transactions, donors, beneficiaries, governing members and other necessary information about the legal entity. It also outlines the process for the handling, liquidation and transfer of assets after an entity is suppressed.

The new law on "legal persons" related to the Holy See/Vatican City State reflects a number of recommendations made by Moneyval, the European financial watchdog committee, in its 2021 report assessing the Vatican's compliance with financial regulation standards to prevent financial crimes such as money laundering and terrorism financing.

'Outrage' as US excludes Nigeria from watchlist

For the second year in a row Nigeria has been left off of the US State Department's list of countries that engage in or tolerate the world's worst religious freedom violations, despite regular reports of kidnappings and killings of Christians, sparking outcry from members of a bipartisan government watchdog group.

For more than two decades, the US president has been required to annually review the status of religious freedom in every country in the world and des-

ignate those governments and entities that perpetrate or tolerate "severe" religious freedom violations as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs). US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced this year's designations on December 2, and although several Islamic terrorist groups active in Nigeria were listed, Nigeria itself was not.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said in a statement that its leaders were "out-

raged" by Nigeria's exclusion from the list as well as the exclusion of India, where reports of Hindu nationalism and violence against Christians have emerged in recent years.

"There is no justification for the State Department's failure to recognise Nigeria or India as egregious violators of religious freedom, as they each clearly meet the legal standards for designation as CPCs," said USCIRF chair Nury Turkel.

Vatican roundup

Vatican holds thermal shirt drive for Ukraine

● The Vatican's charity office is holding a drive to collect thermal shirts for people in Ukraine as they face an energy emergency amid the war.

Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Pope's almoner, said December 5 that the charity office of the Vatican is "already stocking up" on thermal shirts for men, women, and children.

Others are encouraged to join the initiative by bringing or shipping shirts to the Dicastery for the Service of Charity by the beginning of January, when the shipment of shirts will be brought to Kyiv, Ukraine's capital city, by truck.

"The Ukrainian people are experiencing an emergency related not only to the war but also to the lack of electricity, gas, and the very cold winter weather," Cardinal Krajewski said.

"We can help them this Christmas," he added, "with the gift of thermal shirts, suitable for maintaining body temperature, for men, women, or children."

Systematic bombing by Russia has damaged Ukraine's energy infrastructure, and the country's government has warned that the networks will not withstand winter's increased demands.

People in Ukraine are facing freezing weather without electricity, heat, or water, as January, the country's coldest month of the year, approaches.

Pope supports Jewish-Catholic project for social justice

● A person who helps others but does not worship God is a "good atheist", while someone who claims to believe in God but does not do anything to help others "is a cynic, a liar," Pope Francis said.

Meeting with a delegation from the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Pope supported their proposal to launch a series of educational programs aimed at helping Christians and Jews in Latin America tap into their common spiritual heritage to become "agents of social change".

Rabbi Ariel

Stofenmacher, rector of the seminary, said in a statement that they saw Pope Francis as a key ally in harnessing religious teachings to combat indifference, the breakdown of the family, growing social conflicts, "the disenchantment with democracy", hopelessness, addiction and "the madness of new wars".

Speaking without a prepared text to the group December 2, Pope Francis said that throughout the Bible, believers are called to love God and love their neighbour, "that is, worship and serve, worship and help".

Lviv mayor gifts shrapnel-cross to Pope

● The mayor of Lviv, Ukraine, and a team of doctors treating those injured in the war gave Pope Francis a cross with an embedded piece of shrapnel removed from the body of a young girl.

"Giving the Pope the cross, we hope he will pray each day for the injured children," the mayor, Andriy Sadovy, told reporters December 7 after meeting the Pope at the end of his weekly general audience.

Pope Francis asked everyone at his audience to pray that Mary would comfort every person living under the brutality of war, especially the people of Ukraine.

The Pope also noted the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of "Operation Reinhard", the Nazi plan to kill the Jews of German-occupied Poland, a plan that succeeded in murdering some two million Jews.

"May the memory of this horrible event arouse in all of us resolutions and actions for peace," the Pope said, before adding that "history repeats itself. We see what is happening today in Ukraine. Let us pray for peace".

‘Turncoats in robes’ – Reporting on religion in the midst of war

Yuliia Zaika, a nine-year old Ukrainian girl, holds her cat in the village of Moshchun near Kyiv, Ukraine, November 8. Photo: CNS/ Murad Sezer, Reuters.

Lilia Kovalyk

A religious journalist based in Lviv, reflects on her experience of reporting in war time

The war has turned Ukrainian journalists into inventors.

We all understood Russia would attack, but no one wanted to believe this. Before the war began, in the editorial office of *Religious Information Service of Ukraine* (RISU), we never discussed how we would work in wartime. Now we have adapted to the new realities of war: explosions, destruction of infrastructure by Russian missiles and, as a result, power outages.

Initially, several vital questions arose: how to keep working to provide religious information daily in full, despite the lack of electricity and the internet; how to avoid emotional burn-out, maintain self-control and cope with stress and

emotions after the rumble of rockets overhead and ground-shaking explosions.

New challenges

The war with Russia presented us, Ukrainian journalists, with new challenges, particularly concerning journalistic standards. During the last months, the editors of *RISU* had to decide how to publish photos of the bodies of the dead and whether to publish them at all, how to write about Russian atrocities, war crimes and genocide, taking into account religious correctness.

In the conditions of a full-scale offensive, Ukrainian readers and viewers have increased demands for media. They want the media

to be informative and speak frankly and truthfully, even when the truth is bitter and scary.

All this imposes a lot of responsibility. This is the crucible in which new Ukrainian journalism is being forged, particularly religious journalism.

“With the beginning of the full-scale war, the rules of work in our editorial office changed”

Currently, *RISU*, like many other Ukrainian media, is in a crisis caused by financial problems on the one hand and the restrictions of martial law on the other.

So, with the beginning of the full-scale war, the rules of work in our editorial office changed.

Today we have to work in particular conditions. There is a real problem with access to information when it is difficult to get answers to requests because people are fighting at the front or because of rocket attacks. People are left without the internet. Now, in our line of work, we don't pay atten-

tion to things like working hours, days off or time. We work 24/7, trying to seize the opportunity to use the internet and electricity and find correspondents, many of whom work on the front line or in regions previously occupied by Russia.

Human rights

Today, in war conditions, one of the professional challenges is finding an expert, a human rights defender, who will help to systematise information and summarise it.

This war is terrible, and it has changed the rules and approaches of journalism. We have already learned to publish sensitive content so that the world knows what it is dealing with, as well as the atrocities, genocide, and mass murders Ukraine has faced.

Journalistic standards stipulate:

“During a conflict, a journalist's main duty is to check

information from independent sources thoroughly. A journalist must stay out of the conflict, no matter how difficult it may be. Even if there is a war in your country.”

“In the conditions of a full-scale offensive, Ukrainian readers and viewers have increased demands for media”

I must admit the standards of Ukrainian journalism changed during the war, and religious journalism did, too. Before, when writing news about the work of the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Russia, we had to contact the accused person and take their comment to clarify their position. Now we state the fact of collaboration

based on information from official state sources.

Before, I did not have the right, according to the standards of journalism, to give my assessment of the actions of the collaborators. Now I allow myself to give a condescending evaluation of the traitors of Ukraine in cassocks.

Some “proper journalists and editors” might scold me for this, but I will say frankly that in the conditions of war, journalistic rules and standards regarding compliance with the balance of thoughts are no longer applicable. Not when my people are suffering and dying, when turncoats in robes help the enemy's rockets find their target. I am done with all that. The war made me like this. And it wouldn't even occur to me to call others and ask: “Why did you do that?”

White and black

We show “white and black” in this war.

“There is a real problem with access to information when it is difficult to get answers to requests because people are fighting at the front”



Lilia Kovalyk



Pope Francis greets Ukrainian Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, during a private meeting at the Vatican November 7. Archbishop Shevchuk presented the Pope with a fragment of a Russia mine used on a church. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

Of course, we also write a lot about the life of Catholics, about the invaluable help that the Catholic Church – in particular, the Catholics of America – provide for Ukraine. We covered Cardinal Konrad Krajewski's visits to Ukraine; prayers of Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, president of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, and Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop Borys Gudziak of Philadelphia.

Cardinal Krajewski, the papal almoner, has travelled frequently to Ukraine to bring help to the people and show the Pope's closeness to all there. Nine months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Pope Francis wrote a letter in which he expressed his sorrow and closeness to "the noble and martyred" Ukrainian people. The Pope's help for Ukraine is limitless. Ukrainians appreciate it – and we wrote about it.

In the first weeks, my fellow journalists hoped we would tell Russian citizens as much as possible about the horrors unfolding. We hoped they would take to the streets, overthrow Putin's government, fight against injustice, and see the insidiousness of the "Russian world" and its ideological satellite – the Russian Orthodox Church headed by Patriarch Kirill, who blessed the war against Ukraine. We hoped it would end soon.

Illusion

Although this enthusiasm still drives us, we eventually realised that it is an illusion, and many Russians support the atrocities committed by their army.

This became a disappointment, but we continue to share information about Russian crimes. We continue to show the graves with bodies in Bucha, Borodyanka and Irpin. We call on religious leaders to see these atrocities. And it works. The world was horrified, and politicians and religious leaders of the world condemned the brutality of the Russian occupiers. This is to the credit of *RISU*, among others.

“The world was horrified, and politicians and religious leaders of the world condemned the brutality of the Russian occupiers”

If there is no information from Ukrainian sources, people will read Russian ones. This happened during the times of the Soviet Union when religious life in Ukraine was presented to the foreign reader through Moscow's prism. It was a twisted and embellished religious life of Ukraine, where the Russian Orthodox Church alone was allowed by the Soviets and overrun with FSB agents.

At the time, no one in the world knew about the religious persecution of the Eastern and Latin Catholics and Protestants by the Soviet Union. And only when Ukraine became independent did the truth about the repressions come to light: The Greek-Catholic priests and Protestant pastors were tortured in Siberian prisons.

Such is the "truth" of Russians. They keep feeding the world such untruths.

The world must understand the price Ukraine is paying in the confrontation with Russia.

Every day, Ukrainian families receive news about the deaths of their relatives. War is not far away, and if it is not stopped today, it will influence everyone. The world must understand and know the truth. So *RISU* writes about this because the information is also a weapon.

Yes, *RISU* keeps its finger on the pulse of the religious life of Ukraine. Now, this life



Fr Bohdan Geleta, left, and hieromonk Ivan Levitsky, were detained by Russian troops November 16 and their families still do not know where they are.

is military, and the word is our weapon.

The Covid-19 epidemic taught us to work and communicate via Zoom and editorial chats. The *RISU* team has an algorithm of actions, sources of communication, energy supply and communication between the editorial office and those who work on news in case of internet and mobile communication disconnection.

Everyone who either had no electricity or communication or people who had those tools only periodically used every opportunity to get involved in the work. The editorial chat has turned into a kind of roll call: who is doing what.

Coordinate

We try to coordinate all the work through chats. On the day of a power outage, we try to proofread everything and set it up at the first opportunity. And the best oppor-

tunity occurs at night, when the voltage in the power grid is more or less stable, making it possible to work.

“On the day of a power outage, we try to proofread everything and set it up at the first opportunity”

Our editors and translators in Kyiv try to find a place with electricity during power outages: metro, coffee shops, coworking spaces.

And thank God generators are running at the Ukrainian Catholic University, which helps us immensely. However, due to long-lasting alarms in the morning, it is not always possible to get to UCU.

I must say I was preparing for a total blackout, probably immediately after the first rocket hit the electrical substation in Lviv. There are

always warm clothes, a power bank and a thermos at home. An emergency suitcase with documents is packed and ready.

Sources

Since the beginning of the war, I have replenished my stocks of rechargeable flashlights and candles. The most important thing is to diversify the sources of communication. This is what all Ukrainians do now.

We can also go to the "Points of Invincibility", opened in every Ukrainian city. There, people can have access to the internet and warm up. We cannot be broken. We will overcome these trials, for God is with us, as is the truth. Evil must be punished, for such is God's truth and the truth of life. The world should hear and know about the life of Ukraine during the war, particularly religious life. Such is the primary mission of *RISU*.



Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow leads a cathedral consecration service in Moscow April 10. Patriarch Kirill has been accused of championing Russia's war with Ukraine. Photo: CNS/Oleg Varaov, Patriarchal Press Service handout via Reuters

Letters

Letter of the week

World Cup should not be used as political platform

Dear Editor, I have been watching the World Cup, I dare say. Whenever the time comes around every four years, I become quite invested. It is a time when the world's best footballers come together and millions of people from multiple nations get behind their country's finest sportsmen.

Admittedly it was a terrible decision by FIFA to allow it to be held in Qatar which has a long history of human rights abuses, including the treatment of migrant workers who built the stadiums. How much are we morally obliged not to watch the competition due to this? For some the answer is obvious: in watching the World Cup you are endorsing

ing the actions of the country hosting.

However, no country is blameless, there was nowhere near the same outrage when Russia held the world cup four years ago, a country known for its corruption and silencing of free speech. I very much agree with David Quinn when he writes that politics should be left out of sport [*The Irish Catholic* – December 1, 2022]. He lays out very well the abuses in Qatar, against women and the persecution of minority religions, and states the country should not have been chosen as a host.

But there has to be some areas in which politics does not invade. Every day we are inundated with politics, can

there not be one place in which people can escape? I understand the benefit of using such a huge platform – the World Cup – to send a message condemning ideology contrary to the values of many, but there comes a point when people stop listening when their everyday lives are dripping with the 'culture wars' and heated debate. It is unhealthy and will drive people away from discussion or worse create further polarisation and drive normally even-tempered and reasonable individuals towards radicalisation.

Yours etc.,
Philip Boyle
Navan, Co. Kildare

Hate speech bill spells an end to religious freedom

Dear Editor, Law is supposed to be an ordinance of reason with the purpose of safeguarding objective rights based on the objective truth of human nature for the common good of all. But the proposed anti-hate bill will make law to be an ordinance of subjective feeling safeguarding the desires of small lobby groups who want to redefine human nature so that their immoral behaviour can henceforth be considered acceptable.

A person engaging in behaviour of, let us say, kind X, listening to a sermon when a priest says that such behaviour is sinful, can claim to be "offended and the target of hatred" if after Mass a few people remind him/her of what the priest has said. The priest and these people may have the charitable intention of calling the person back from his sinful ways for the sake of his soul, but nonetheless he can construe the sermon as "incitement to hatred"; and if the judge in court has already succumbed to the media propaganda that has been promoting that behaviour then the priest could find himself in jail.

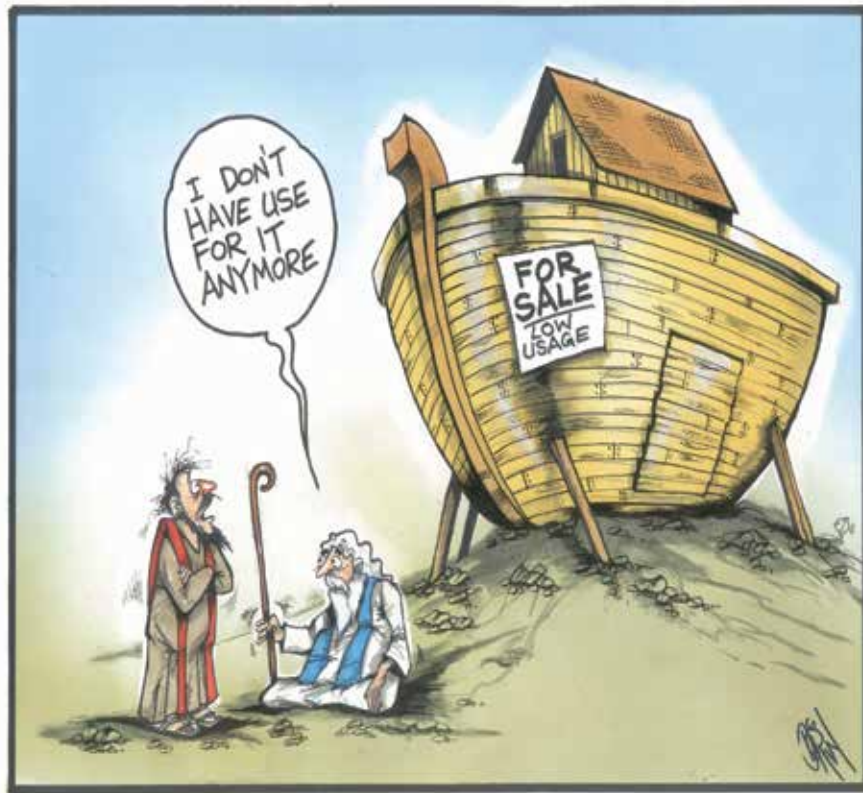
It should be easy to see that such a bill is not just bad law but a

change in the very nature of law; also that it spells the beginning of the end for religious freedom, which freedom is not just a civil right but a divine right because of the command the Lord gave his disciples to go and teach all nations. We are then on the downward slope into the irrational and then the totalitarian. The legislators who vote for

this bill will learn, when it is too late, that they have also undermined their own right to free speech and muzzled themselves.

I wonder if the shepherds will take this lying down.

Yours etc.,
Fr Richard O Connor
Rome, Italy



Reaching out to the alienated this Christmas

Dear Editor, This Christmas is a time to call on Catholics to return to their churches after the long winter of Covid and the pain it has wreaked, and the fear it has spread in parishes.

As Bishop Tom Deenihan said in your paper [*The Irish Catholic* – December 8, 2022] we must invite those who have stopped attending weekly worship to come back. The Christmas liturgies always have a high attendance, they can be used to reconnect and welcome with open arms. The age bracket of weekly Massgoers is on the upper scale which leaves them at a higher risk of bad infections, it is understandable they may be afraid and would rather watch Mass from home. However, with the right precautions taken the risk of contracting an illness is low. It is well-known and proven in various

academic studies that it is of upmost priority for those in later life to remain social and to be part of community. This is one aspect.

Obviously the more important issue is for them to retain a close relationship with Christ and his Church. The salvation of souls is of utmost importance and trumps everything else.

This is not a time to think this is a separation of the wheat from the chaff and continue with a smaller, more 'faithful' congregation. This exclusionary way of thinking is not the way of the Church and Pope Francis has emphasised this profusely with his focus on those alienated and on the margins. One soul is not better than another.

Yours etc.,
Geraldine Collins
Drogheda, Co. Louth

Our Lady loves both Ukrainians and Russians

Dear Editor, Pope Francis consecrated Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This means that the great, deep, wide, strong heart of Mary carries a love for both: the Russian people and the Ukrainian people.

Yours etc.,
Judith Leonard
Raheny, Dublin 5

facebook community

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

Religious symbols to be decided locally in ETB schools

All efforts being made to eradicate any sign of our Christian heritage which brought Europe out of its Dark Ages and made us the cradle of Western civilisation. – **Heath Swanson**

Discrimination against our own citizens. – **Bridie Carolan**

Tributes pour in for late Bishop Martin Drennan

Bishop Drennan was a wonderful priest and gentleman. When I began my formation for diaconate I and my colleagues had the privilege of his company during one of our retreats. It was in Myross Woods. The lead up to Palm Sunday was special. As we prepared for Sunday he invited all of us to avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That was special. Then we had palm crosses which I had brought from my own parish. Eighteen of them. When he blessed the palm on Sunday. Not only did he give each of us a single palm cross, he personally signed each one of them as a memorial of our retreat. What a wonderful touch. I still have my cross eight years after. May Jesus and his Angels take special care of a wonderful man. Rest in peace Dr Drennan. – **Brendan Gallagher**

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

Welcoming call for synod on Catholic education

Dear Editor, Prof. Eamonn Conway's call [*The Irish Catholic* – December 1, 2022] for an Irish Synod on Catholic Education has much to commend it. Among other matters it would provide all education stakeholders the opportunity to consult on the Congregation for Catholic Education's latest document entitled *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*.

Interestingly the document reminds bishops of their responsibility to visit personally at least once every five years every Catholic school in their dioceses. It would be good if on these occasions bishops copied the Department of Education practice of meeting with parents.

Meanwhile the National Curriculum Assessment Council is busy producing Relationship and Sex Education policies that it clearly intends being imposed upon students in Catholic schools at all phases. Some of the ideology underpinning these policies are very much in conflict with Catholic understanding of the 'gift of sex' and the 'theology of the body'.

Another interesting development reported in the same Irish Catholic edition is the creation of a new ethos document for State schools including the many with partial Catholic patronage. This again might be a useful topics for synodal consideration.

Yours etc.,
Alan Whelan

President Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association
Killarney, Co. Kerry

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.

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, December 15, 2022

Noel Keating

Giving birth to Christ in our hearts

Page 32



Invoking God in the highs, lows and everything in between

Liturgy' is the public prayer of the Faithful, but it takes many forms. Whether it's in Mass or the Liturgy of the Hours, liturgy gives structure to our collective prayer as the people of God. It also marks the passage of time, and key moments throughout the year in our collective and personal life.

If we cast our minds back to March 2020, we might remember it as a time of panic and flux; the world as we knew it was melting away as Covid spread across the globe. Situated in one of the global 'epicentres' of the pandemic, writers Audrey Elledge and Elizabeth Moore watched as



New York-based authors Audrey Elledge and Elizabeth Moore have found safe harbour in the practice of inviting God into every moment of modern life, writes Jason Osborne

chaos descended on New York, and they longed for a peace that only a liturgical form of prayer could give them.

Out of this was born their book – *Liturgies for Hope: Sixty Prayers for the Highs, the Lows, and Everything in Between* – which seeks to give people some solid ground to stand on amid the noisy, ongoing revolution of contemporary

living. Speaking with *The Irish Catholic*, the authors told me of their desire for stability at that time, and how they found a regular way to invite God into their lives, which they wanted to share with others.

"Elizabeth and I were really observing just chaos around us and confusion and weariness and a lot of people just unsure of what the future held, and so I

think in that moment, there was just a lot of loud noise and we both were searching for something steadier and slower and something that we could repeat over ourselves, like the truth of Scripture," Ms Elledge tells me.

That led to the form of their offering, written prayers of hope that people could "repeat over themselves".

"Their purpose was to be given to our church, just as an artistic offering. So we gave them over and I think our greatest hope was that they would meet readers exactly where they were, in the middle of the Covid chaos, but also like the steady, slow nature of these poetic prayers we hoped would centre people and give them

something they could repeat, just like a liturgy is meant to be repeated in a service," Ms Elledge continues.

Noting that modern life is characterised by a certain fluidity, Ms Moore says that they both noticed a desire among their generation for more structured – liturgical – ways.

"I was thinking this when Audrey was talking, that around Covid time, we were just seeing this increase in interest around liturgy with different believers, people of faith, people of our generation specifically who maybe were raised like we were in contemporary Church traditions, which let go of a lot of the rules but now we're craving them again," Ms Moore says.

» Continued from Page 29



"I just think it's this interesting back and forth maybe, that might just occur naturally to humans as generations go by, but I do think that yes, probably because post-modernity has been so fluid that there's this aching for liturgy. There's an ache for stability and for someone to give us some guardrails or for someone to give us a track to run on because it can be exhausting to be your own master and to be your own source of everything. It feels freeing at first, I think, but yeah, I do think ultimately we need stability outside of ourselves and that's what liturgy and prayer can offer."

Liturgical nature

The liturgical nature of their prayers lies in the fact that they're

intended for a plethora of ordinary situations, ranging from joyful to sorrowful. Their book is split into sections covering vocation, health, relationships, wonder and mystery among others. The prayers they've penned fall under these different categories and cover a wider expanse of human activity than you may think.

“We just feel like there’s beautiful intimacy with God that’s cultivated in that space”

"Elizabeth and I were writing both from personal experience and also just like, seeing the world and seeing the moments that make up our days and thinking, 'How can we write a prayer for this thing?' So there is a liturgy for a lunch break, a liturgy for commuting, but then there's also liturgies for these bigger things like a liturgy for waiting for a dream to come true. A liturgy for contemplating a breakup. A liturgy for falling asleep," Ms Elledge explains, continuing, "These things that are both mundane but also so important in the human experience and I think our goal is to help people realise that there's nothing too big or too small that you can't bring to God. "So, really, anything in your day can be a source of prayer, so if you're just sitting down to



Audrey Elledge.

eat lunch, invite God into that. If you're falling asleep, invite God into that. If you're dealing with relationship struggles, invite God into that. If you're going on a walk, invite God into that."

They're not seeking to replace anyone's prayer life, Ms Elledge insists. Instead, they'd rather people be inspired when they see the table of contents, find the prayer that matches "the exact season they're in or what they're feeling just that day".

This form of prayer isn't just intended for the good times, but for the bad, too, Ms Moore says. Taking a regular, liturgical approach to prayer should see God invited into every moment of life, and that absolutely includes those "big, massive, scary things like a breakup or like being deprived of touch".

"You know, he [God] wants us to be honest about these things that I think maybe in the past have felt a little bit shameful or



Elizabeth Moore.

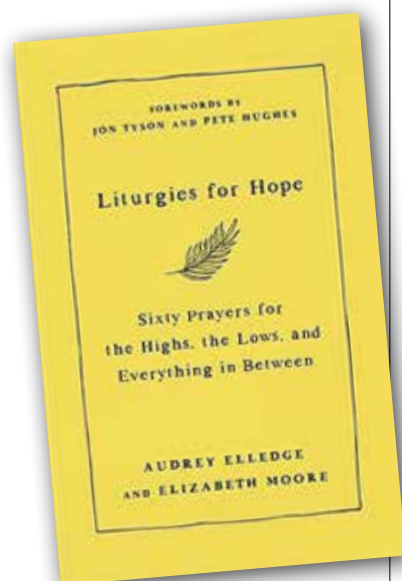
a little bit taboo to speak about. Yeah, because they're just like messy, fleshy human experiences, like, 'Oh, I'm single and I actually desire and need physical touch and I'm not getting it,' so we think – not like the solution to it, but a way to navigate that is to invite God in and just see what he has to say," she says.

“So, really, anything in your day can be a source of prayer”

"We just feel like there's beautiful intimacy with God that's cultivated in that space. So, maybe it's not like God provides, like, 'Great,

I'll send you a boyfriend tomorrow. Problem solved,' but instead, God is like, 'The more important thing, more important than your desire for physical touch or more important than your desire for a partner, is intimacy with me, God, your Creator'. And so God is like, I want you to invite me into this wrestling so that you and I can develop deeper intimacy that will sustain you through these life struggles that just happen and these griefs and aches and pains and relationship stuff, mental health stuff, whatever it is."

These struggles don't often "go away with the snap of fingers or with a prayer", but Ms Moore insists that we can be sustained by intimacy with God, by inviting him into those things in a regular, liturgical fashion.



'Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another'

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

It delights me that *Babette's Feast* is one of Pope Francis' favourite films. It is a lovely film and quite subtle, deserving much more than the small, but devoted following it had previously.

Set in a small community in Denmark, with its particular virtues and expectations, it is about how these can both elevate and trap a person. There is a tension between the worldly and the heavenly, which is ultimately resolved in the eponymous feast. Despite being set in the midst of a strange and ascetic Protestant sect, it is a deeply sacramental film.

“The first is a young soldier who is banished to Jutland for his dissolute ways”

The heart of this unnamed Protestant community are the two sisters, Filippa and Martine. They provide much of the warmth and love the community offers, and are also symbolically the heart, emblematic of a kind of heavenly grace and charity.

Two men of the world recognise this about them. The first is a young soldier who is banished to Jutland for his dissolute ways. He glimpses the heavenly in Martine, recognising not only her human warmth, but also something that is good and beautiful, and would define his life as such. But she doesn't return his love and he leaves determined to forget her and to make of himself a great man and a great career.

The second man is a world-

Stephane Audran as the eponymous hero of *Babette's Feast*, Pope Francis' favourite film.



renowned singer, who rests for a time in Jutland. He is captivated by the beauty of Filippa's voice and begins to teach her. He wants her to come away with him, knows she will be a great artist – but again, the sister rebuffs him. He returns to his career, forlorn.

Earthly goods

The two sisters turn their backs on earthly goods, of motherhood and of artistry. The two men turn their backs on the heavenly goods, of charity and beauty. Both end up disappointed in their choices. By the time the two sisters reach old age, they remain charitable, but the island is the image of a religion without life.

On the other side, the old artist is abandoned by his fans and dies alone. The soldier, who returns to the island late in the film, finds that his ambitions and pride are all as naught. Heaven and earth have not

met in any fruitful or meaningful way. They appear to be set on different paths, never to meet.

“They are partaking in perpetual fast to turn their eyes to Heaven”

Enter Babette – friend of the French singer, a chef and refugee from the French Revolution. Her arrival enlivens the small community as, at first, she quietly works her way into their hearts. She does so through the excellence of her cuisine. But when she produces a massive and opulent feast, the ascetic little Protestant community fear it will corrupt them.

They are partaking in perpetual fast to turn their eyes to Heaven. But they have forgotten how the fruits of the world presage the

fruits of Heaven. And that is what they are to learn during the course of the film.

On the other side, you have the worldly soldier, who joins the community for the eponymous feast. As he tells himself before travelling to the small island, this visit will prove whether he was right as a young man to strive for worldly success and abandon his love for Martine.

Community

When the feast finally comes around, the aged community are amazed. Their eyes are opened to the beauty and goodness of the food. They come together to feast on the fruits of creation and the work of human hands. Old grudges fade away, a warmth close to grace enters them through the meal. They are a community again. For them, it is a chance to rediscover the goods of creation, to be filled

by them.

For the soldier, who is amazed to feast on a meal the likes of which you would only get in the best Parisian restaurants, it's a surprising reminder of what he left behind. He sees suddenly his career and its blandishments were worth nothing.

He delivers a speech so lovely that I am going to cheat and reproduce it verbatim:

“Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another. Man, in his weakness and short-sightedness believes he must make choices in this life. He trembles at the risks he takes. We do know fear. But no. Our choice is of no importance. There comes a time when our eyes are opened and we come to realise that mercy is infinite.

“This speech is essentially a Eucharistic prayer, hinting at quotes from the Psalms and elsewhere in the scriptures”

“We need only await it with confidence and receive it with gratitude. Mercy imposes no conditions. And lo! Everything we have chosen has been granted to us. And everything we rejected has also been granted. Yes, we even get back what we rejected. For mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another.”

This speech is essentially a Eucharistic prayer, hinting at quotes from the Psalms and elsewhere in the scriptures. It also points back to the words of the austere pastor who founded the community, unifying the General's worldly experience with the Pastor's otherworldly. It is a beautiful end to a beautiful film – the last word of which is “Alleluia”!

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



A sculpture of St John of the Cross. Photo: CNS.

St John of the Cross: A mystic doctor of the Church

A doctor of the Church, St John of the Cross is also one of its great mystics and poets. Born Juan de Yepes de Alvarez in Spain, he was the son of poor parents from Castile, near Avila, but was mostly raised by his mother after his father died early in his life.

In 1563, he was only 18 when he left the Jesuit College of Medina del Campo where he had received his education in the humanities, classical languages and rhetoric. Not long after this he met (then-saint in progress) Teresa of Jesus, or Teresa of Avila as many know her today.

It was an encounter that changed both of their lives forever. Already a priest at this stage, John was intrigued by Teresa's plans to reform the Carmelite Order – including the male branch. Working together, they opened the first house of Discalced Carmelites in 1568 in Duruelo, in the province of Avila.

It was then, when he, along with others, created the first reformed male community, that he adopted the new name, “of the Cross”, which he has of course come to be known by the world over. St John and St Teresa's close collaboration was to

continue, as a few years later, at the end of 1572, John of the Cross became confessor and vicar of the monastery of the Incarnation of Avila at Teresa's request, of which she was prioress.

It wasn't smooth sailing, though: the reforms led to St John being imprisoned for months following unjust accusations against him by Carmelite friars opposed to the reforms. During this time, he was jailed, kept in isolation and publicly lashed on occasion. It was also during his imprisonment that he composed a good deal of his *Spiritual Canticle*, one of his most famous poetic works.

Escaping through a window in a room adjoining his cell about eight months after he was first imprisoned, St John managed an adventurous escape. Aided by his close friend, St Teresa, he was nursed back to health by her nuns in Toledo. Regaining his strength, he continued to implement reforms until his death, between December 13 and 14, 1591.

He died following a difficult struggle with illness, as his religious brothers were reciting the morning Office in a convent near Jaén. His last words were reportedly: “Today I'm going to sing

the Office in Heaven”. His remains were transferred to Segovia and he was ultimately beatified by Pope Clement X in 1675 and canonised by Pope Benedict XIII in 1726.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke of St John as “one of the most important lyric poets of Spanish literature”, saying that he “describes a sure path to achieving holiness, the state of perfection to which God calls all of us”.

St John envisioned the spiritual life as being like climbing a mountain, an adventure that takes courage and patience and leads to a “purification” of the senses and of the spirit. It was not just about being deprived physically of things – St John understood that what the soul needs is the elimination of all disordered dependence and a total focus of everything on God as the only purpose of life.

One of St John's lasting phrases is: “To reach where you are not, you have to go through where you are not. To achieve everything, do not want to own anything. To come to be everything, not wanting to be anything.”

Giving birth to Christ in our hearts



Noel Keating

Meditation awakens the heart to the spirit who dwells within every person. Each of us is called to continually renew that spirit as we follow our life's path. We might express this in another way by saying that we are each called to give birth to Christ in our hearts just as Mary did in her life. Reflecting on her journey can offer us helpful signposts for our own journey.

Labour ward

As every mother knows – and most fathers too – giving birth is not a simple matter of delivering a child in the labour ward. Ideally, the journey that gives rise to the birth of a child begins in love. It begins with the desire of a couple to commit to one another in marriage with the clear understanding that this may lead to a larger family unit.

At some stage a couple may choose with careful deliberation that the time is right to grow their family. Or they may be unexpectedly blessed to discover a child is on the way. But while becoming

pregnant may be easy for some, for others, getting pregnant may involve a long and tortuous journey as the longed-for pregnancy never arises or results in the pain and tragedy of a miscarriage. For some, contemporary medical interventions are needed to enable their desire for a family be realised. To bring a baby into the world is no easy matter and it can involve pain, discomfort and great uncertainty.

Giving birth spiritually is no different – it too is a dynamic and creative process that brings with it great uncertainty, much doubt and spiritual discomfort and pain. It involves surrendering our wilfulness and becoming willing, open to however we are being called to become.

“Mary’s ready response calls each of us to ask how do we respond when we experience God’s call in our hearts”

If we are to give birth to Christ in our hearts, then we too, like Mary, need to be attentive to what is being asked of us and to respond with a willing ‘Yes’. In the story of the Annunciation, the Gospel of Luke recounts how the Angel told Mary that she was invited to conceive a son through the Holy Spirit she replied ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word.’ Because

she had already cultivated a deep and abiding relationship with the Divine, she was able to make that tremendous commitment without perhaps fully understanding what it would entail; certainly having no idea it would lead to his untimely death as a young man.

Mary’s ready response calls each of us to ask how do we respond when we experience God’s call in our hearts. When the mystery of God’s love breaks through into my consciousness, do we run from it? Or are we, like Mary, able to respond from our deepest, truest self, and leave ourselves open and vulnerable to being changed in ways we cannot imagine? Can we imitate Mary’s example and say, like her, “Let this happen to me according to your wish? If we can, if we can truly let the word take root in us, then we are truly ready to celebrate Christmas.

I wrote a simple prayer some years ago which I sometimes say before meditation and at odd, brief moments of silence throughout the day – it is a prayer designed to ground me in a state of willingness:

Abba Father, Open my heart – so your word may find a home in me.

Jesus Lord, I am blind – make me aware that I may see.

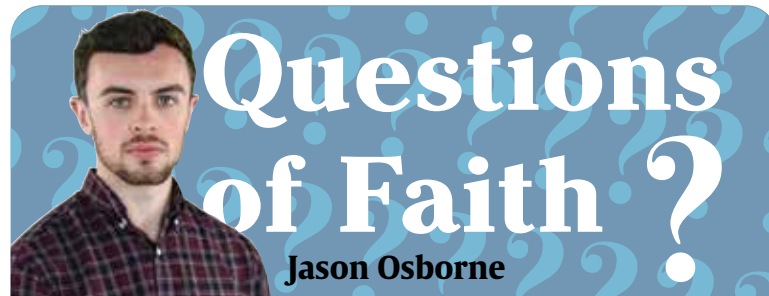
Holy Spirit, awaken me – so as you wish I may be.

Little prayer

This little prayer acknowledges that bringing Christ into the world where I live today will require an ongoing commitment that will involve discomfort, even pain; willingness as against wilfulness and letting go as against accumulation of prestige, possessions and power. This is God’s invitation to all of us. We are called to incarnate Christ in our lives, so that people can see him in us, touch him in us, recognise him in us. As Christmas approaches each year it is an ideal time to reflect on our own response to that invitation.

Giving birth requires a period of gestation – it doesn’t happen in an instant but is a process of slow and sometimes difficult growth. Like Mary, we must give our full attention to what is growing inside of us and we must nurture and protect it until it is strong enough to burst forth into the world. But, as every Mum and Dad knows, birth is just the beginning. Mary spent many years, with Joseph, nurturing and raising him from a vulnerable infant to a strong, independent adult. In other words, the infant in the crib at Bethlehem is not yet the One who preaches, heals, and shows us how we can live to the full.

Almost all parents find they have no training for the role of child-rearing so at times they feel helpless and deeply uncertain of the best way to proceed. Parenting involves uncertainty, learning to live with the tension of knowing yet not-knowing. The Gospels record that “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:51). Meditation, as a way of deep prayer, awakens the heart to this way of being in the world.



How do we know that Jesus is the Messiah?



The first half of Advent sees us praying, watching and waiting for the coming of Christ at the end of time. The second half of Advent, though, focuses on the coming of the Messiah at Christmas – in the form of a newborn baby; innocent, defenceless and totally dependent.

Right at the beginning of the Gospels, Jesus is identified as the one Israel has spent so long waiting for. Matthew 1:16 says, quite plainly, “Jesus was born, who is called Christ”. ‘Christ’ means ‘Messiah’ or ‘Anointed One’ – the person the Jews of the day expected to deliver Israel by overthrowing Roman rule and establishing an earthly kingdom with God’s blessing.

Naturally, there’s more than a slight clash between the details of this expectation and the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into the world in a state of total defencelessness, lived a life of poverty and simplicity and died tortured to death on a Roman cross. It wasn’t until after Christ’s resurrection that the disciples began to have an inkling of what the Old Testament prophecies meant when they spoke about what the Messiah would do.

What does the Old Testament say about the Messiah, though? After all, there’s still plenty of sin and death here on Earth – how can we be sure that Jesus is the Messiah that we celebrate the coming of at Christmas? While this would take many columns to go through fully, there are a number of key prophecies in the Old Testament (written long before the coming of Christ) that were fulfilled by Jesus’ birth and life.

There were a number of things that the Jewish people expected the Messiah to be based on numerous Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah prophesied that he would be a Hebrew man, born of a virgin and that he would be a king who would suffer before entering

into his glory. The prophet Micah said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, while Deuteronomy said he would be a prophet after Moses and the Psalms that he would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

There’s an awful lot in that, but suffice to say that the circumstances of Christ’s birth and life ticks all of the boxes. He was born in Bethlehem, to the Hebrew tribe of Judah (the kingly tribe), and indeed to the Virgin Mary. Jesus is a prophet like Moses – but greater than Moses, in that while Moses led Israel from slavery, Jesus leads those who follow him from the captivity of sin and death.

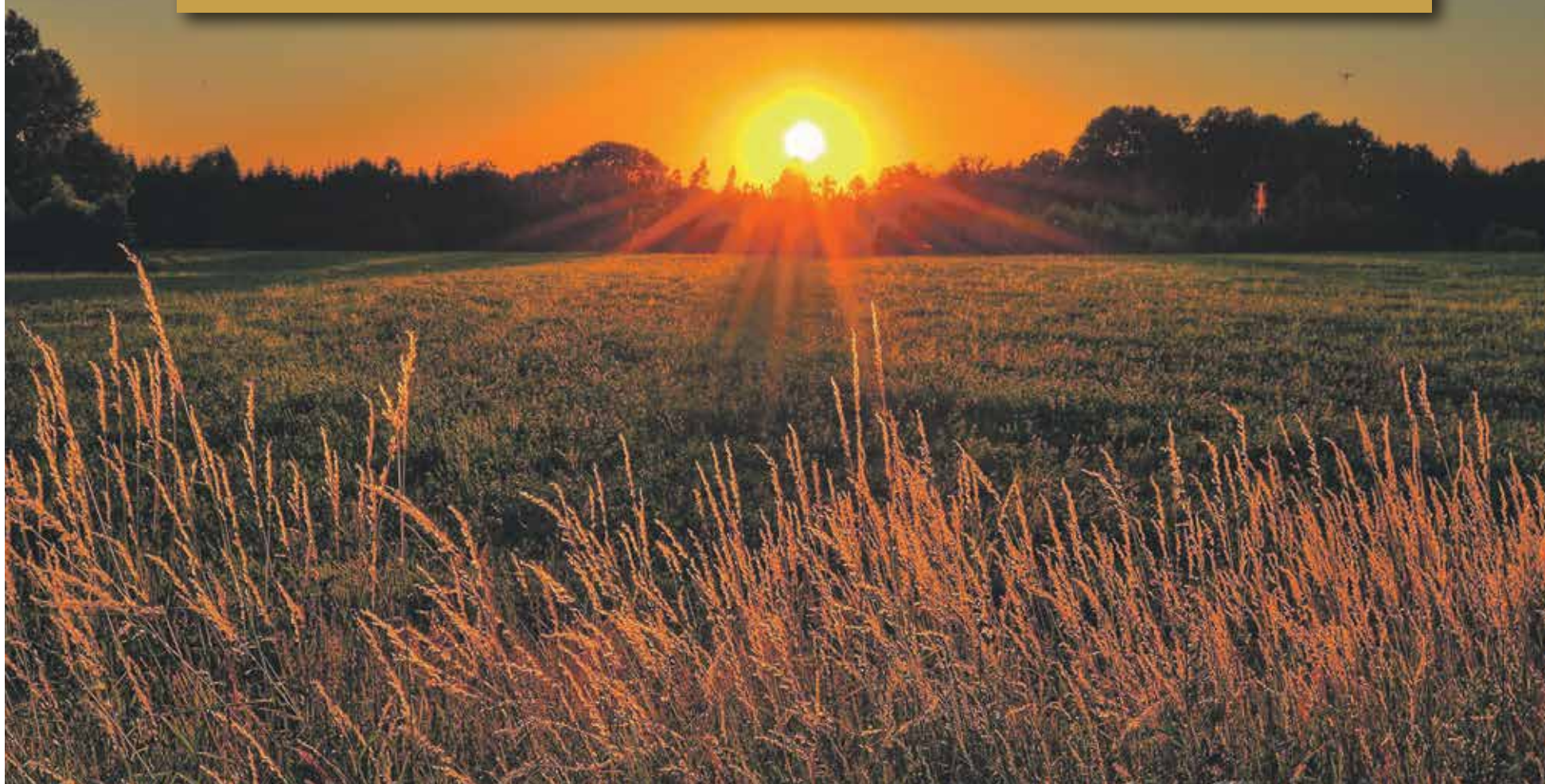
Many of those who didn’t accept Jesus as the Messiah rejected him because they didn’t expect a Messiah bearing spiritual salvation. They were waiting for a Messiah operating purely on earthly terms, who would deliver their people from the oppressive power of successive empires, whether that be the Babylonians, the Persians, the Romans or otherwise. They didn’t expect, and many didn’t accept, a Messiah promising deliverance from sin. Many would have preferred to be saved from Rome, and they didn’t see how the lowly and impoverished Jesus could provide that.

As mentioned above, though, Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies the Messiah was supposed to, albeit in a way that people didn’t expect. As he said himself in the Gospel, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matthew 5:17).

God rarely does things as we expect him to, either on a global scale nor in our personal lives. Despite that, he truly is the Messiah and saviour of those who accept his invitation to follow him.



Staring into the light...



In her book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom, Stories That Heal*, medical doctor and writer, Rachel Naomi Remen shares this story.

When she was 14 years old, she took a summer job working as a volunteer in a nursing home for the aged. This wasn't easy for her. She was young, shy, and mostly afraid of elderly persons. One day she was assigned to spend an hour visiting a 96-year-old woman who had not spoken for over a year and suffered from severe dementia. Rachel carried a basket of glass beads with her, hoping that she could engage the elderly woman into stringing beads with her. It was not to be.

“She went on to become a medical doctor, a paediatrician, who helps deliver babies”

She knocked on the door, received no answer, and entered to see the woman sitting in a chair, staring out of a window. She sat in a chair next to the old woman and, off and on, for the next hour attempted to draw her attention. She never succeeded. In her words, “the silence in the room was absolute”. The woman never once acknowledged her presence, never even looked at her, and simply continued to stare out of the window.

When a bell rang to signify that her hour with this woman was



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

over, Rachel got up to leave, turned to the old woman, and asked, “What were you looking at?” The woman turned to her and said, “Why, child, I was looking at the light.” Rachel was momentarily stunned, not by anything extraordinary in those words, but by an extraordinary expression, a sort of rapture, in the old woman's face. As a 14-year-old, Rachel had no idea what lay behind that extraordinary facial expression. It would take her years to find out.

She went on to become a medical doctor, a paediatrician, who helps deliver babies. When she helped deliver her first baby and the newborn opened its eyes, she saw in the face of that baby that same expression she had seen all those years before in the face of the old woman. That baby too was looking at the light – uncomprehending, mute, in a kind of

rapture, fixated on a light it had never seen before.

What's the parallel between the expression of a newborn opening its eyes for the first time and the expression of an elderly person staring into the light? Rachel Remen's image captures it.

Old ways

In essence, if you live long enough, there will come a time when your old ways of knowing will no longer serve you, your heart will be forced to look beyond its wounds, your old securities will all fall away, and you will be left staring into a very different light. This will radically shift your gaze, strip you of most everything that used to make sense, render you infantile again, and leave you mute, staring silently into the unknown, into its beckoning light. Why? What's happening here?

When a baby is born, it leaves a

place that is small, confining, and dark, but protective, nurturing, and secure. It also leaves the only place it has ever known, and it can have no idea of what awaits it after birth. Indeed, could it think consciously, it would no doubt find it difficult to believe that anything, including its mother (whom it has never seen), exists outside the womb. Hence, a baby's facial expression when it first opens its eyes and looks into the light – awe, bewilderment, rapture.

“The womb in which we are living is providing enough light”

We are born out of one womb into yet another. We live in a second womb, our world, which is somewhat bigger, somewhat less confining, and somewhat less dark, and which like our mother's womb offers protection, nurturing, and security. For most of our lives, this second womb serves us well, giving us what we need. When we are young, healthy, and strong, there

seems little reason to shift our gaze towards any other light. The womb in which we are living is providing enough light. As well, it's the only place we know. Indeed, left to nature and ourselves, we have no assurance that there is any place beyond it.

Womb

Moreover, we share this too with a baby in the womb. From the moment of its conception, a baby already has the imperative for its impending birth encoded in its body and soul. There comes a time when it must be born into a wider world. So too for us. We also have the imperative for an impending birth from our present womb encoded in our body and our soul. Hence, along with an unborn baby in the womb, we too share a certain “insanity” for a wider light.

In a poem entitled, *The Holy Longing*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe expressed this poetically:

“Now you are no longer caught
In the obsession with darkness,
and a desire for higher lovemaking
sweeps you upward.

“Distance does not make you
falter, now, arriving in magic, flying,
and finally, insane for the light,
you are a butterfly and you are
gone.”

“Rachel carried a basket of glass beads with her, hoping that she could engage the elderly woman into stringing beads with her”

News of great joy

Children are counting down the days. Only 10 more days till Christmas. I am really taken by the television commercial where the little boy keeps asking "Will he really come?" Of course, we think that it refers to Santa Claus. But no, it is Grandad. "I knew you would come."

It's a story of expectation and joy, a story of Advent and Christmas.

"Will he really come?" Many Jewish children must have asked that question as their elders recalled the story of the original fall and the promise that someone would come. Immediately after the fall, God told the devil that there would be a woman whose offspring would crush the head of evil.

“An unknown village for migrant workers employed in one of Herod's great building schemes”

Years, centuries, went by but the story of hope was passed on from one generation to the next. The great prophet, Isaiah, spoke of a time of peace and reconciliation between traditional enemies, the wolf and the lamb would lie down together and a little child would lead them. Furthermore, this child would be of the stock of Jesse, in other words of the line of David. David was the shepherd boy who became the king who united the twelve tribes of Israel.

"Will he really come? When will he come?" The story continued to be passed on. Surely, when it would eventually happen it would be with important people in important places.

But the God of surprises acted differently. The news of great joy was announced in Nazareth! An unknown village for migrant workers employed in one of Herod's great building schemes. Nazareth, never even mentioned in the writings we call the Old Testament. And the person to whom the message of motherhood was announced was the most unlikely person, a consecrated virgin! "How can this come about since I am a virgin?" She is told, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow." The Jewish holy books frequently spoke of a cloud or shadow over a holy place indicating the presence of God. We still have the gesture at Mass, when the celebrant's hands overshadow the bread and wine

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn
OFM Cap.



while invoking the power of the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

Luke's Gospel relates the annunciation of the angel to Mary while Matthew, whose Gospel we read today, recalls the predicament of Joseph as he knew that he could not have been the father of this child of Mary to whom he was betrothed. By Jewish law he was bound to make this known but before he could do so, he too received an annunciation from an angel. "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home for she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit."

Both writers, Luke who was a physician, and Matthew, went out of their way to write unequivocally of the virginity of Mary and the non-involvement of Joseph. Surely, they were aware that it would raise medical or scientific questions but the role of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God are beyond the scope of science. The same is true of the Resurrection of Jesus and the transubstantiation of the Eucharist. Scientific analysis does not deal with the supernatural.

Conception

The virginal conception is a story of divine intervention because the child of Mary is a person who already existed. "In the beginning was the word... and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Joseph could not have fathered a person who already existed. St Augustine marvellously summed up the theological arguments thus: "If a God had to be born, he could only be born of a virgin and if a virgin had to give birth, she could only give birth to a God."

René Laurentin, a great Marian scholar, made the comment that those who wanted to eliminate the virginity of Mary have generally, at the same time, and to the same degree, lost sight of the divinity of Jesus. Many people today are so set with their own agenda that they overlook the presence of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth.

"Will he really come... are you sure he will come?" asks the little boy on the television.

The answer is that he has



The icon of the Holy Family of Divine Will of Unity and Peace inlaid with relics from the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth. Photo: CNS

come 2,000 years ago and we will celebrate his birth on Christmas Day. But that's not all. The good news is that he continues to come to us, every day in fact. In today's first reading the prophet Isaiah gives encouraging news to King Ahaz. "The maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with-us".

The artist, Holman Hunt, did several paintings of Jesus holding a lamp in one hand

and knocking on a door with the other hand. An unusual feature is that there is no handle on the outside. It has to be opened from inside.

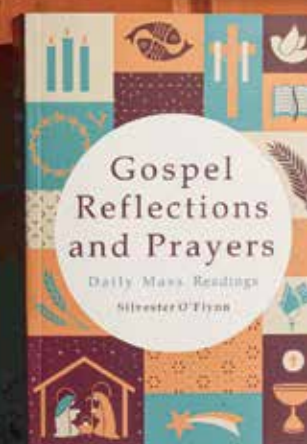
"Will he really come?" Yes, he has come and he wants to come to us each day. We have to open the door, especially through time for reflection and prayer. Make sure that amidst all the bustle of Christmas, you will find the quietness where you will hear his knocking.

Prayer

The divine child to whom Mary gave birth is the fulfilment of every hope, expectation and need. Jesus-Emmanuel is the presence of God to our desert-emptiness, power in our weakness, bread to our hunger, water to our thirst, companion to our loneliness, forgiveness to our sins, and eternal life in our dying. Come, Lord Jesus.

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CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

Pick of the Season

CLIFF AT CHRISTMAS

BBC Two, Saturday
December 17, 9.35pm
Cliff Richard is joined by special guests for this festive TV show from Hackney Church in London. The multi-award winning artist performs some of his Christmas classics.

A CHRISTMAS HISTORY OF SACRED MUSIC

BBC 4, Saturday (night)
December 17, 1.50am and
Tuesday night 2.15am
Simon Russell Beale takes a journey through Italy, Britain, Germany and Austria as he explores how the sound of Christmas has evolved in response to changing ideas about the Nativity.

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One, Sunday December
18, 1.15 pm
Claire McCollum enjoys the Christmas lights at Anne Boleyn's childhood home of Hever Castle in Kent and visits a local school as they prepare for Christingle.

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT FROM KNOCK SHRINE

EWTN, Sunday December
18, 8pm and Wednesday
December 21 6am
Experience the sights and sounds of Christmas from the Marian Shrine in Knock.

THEATRE OF THE WORLD

EWTN, Sunday December 18,
9.30pm
Several one-act performances on the Christmas spirit presented by the Morning Star Players and other actors from the Theatre of the Word.

KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS, A CATHOLICS COME HOME SPECIAL PRESENTATION

EWTN, Monday December
19, 10am and Christmas Eve
10.30pm
A tour behind the scenes of the making of Santa's Priority, a Christmas evangomercial and discover what a small group of Catholics are doing to combat the secular war on Christmas and to glorify Jesus, the reason for the season.

A CHRISTMAS POSTCARD: THE HISTORY OF THE NATIVITY STORY



Brendan O'Regan

RTÉ Lyric FM, 12.30pm daily,
Christmas Week

This series explores the story of the Nativity, through dramatisations of Biblical and medieval devotional texts, with documentary contributions and original music. Original music by Mark Wilkins. Topics include St Francis and the first crib, the Wise Men and the gifts, the Nativity in art.

FILM: A CHRISTMAS CAROL GOES WRONG

BBC One, Tuesday December
20, 4.25pm
(2017) Blacklisted by the BBC, the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society do not take their ban lying down and force themselves back on the BBC by hijacking a production of *A Christmas Carol*. With Derek Jacobi and Diana Rigg.

MICHAEL BUBLÉ'S CHRISTMAS IN THE CITY

RTÉ One, Wednesday
December 21, 11.35pm
The Canadian singer celebrates the 10th anniversary of his chart-topping album *Christmas* with a festive special featuring a mix of comedy, music and special guests.

IN CONCERT: THE KING'S SINGERS – CHRISTMAS

EWTN, Thursday December
22, 9am
One of the world's most celebrated ensembles performs traditional Christmas classics such as *Stille Nacht*, *Veni Veni Emmanuel* and many others.



Ebenezer Scrooge, voiced by Jim Carrey, is seen in the animated movie *A Christmas Carol*. Photo: CNS



An old reliable: Julie Andrews sings in the 1965 musical *The Sound of Music*.

ANGELA'S CHRISTMAS

RTÉ Two, Friday December
23, 2.20pm
Set in Ireland in the early 1900s, a funny, heart-warming and poignant story about the power of family and the innocent desire of a child to ensure everyone is loved at Christmas.

HANDEL'S MESSIAH

RTÉ Lyric FM, Friday
December 23, 7pm
The National Symphony Orchestra, chorus and soloists under conductor Nicholas McGegan perform Handel's powerful oratorio, which had its premiere in Dublin.

THE LEAP OF FAITH

RTÉ Radio One, Friday
December 23, 10pm
With only one more leap until Christmas, Siobhán Garrigan and guests offer a festive mix of warmth, music and reflection.

COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

BBC 4, Friday December 23,
11.15 pm
Country Music Christmas 2022, hosted by Carly Pearce, brings some of country music's most beloved artists together for an intimate night full of festive classics.

HEAVEN MADE

BBC Two, Christmas Eve,
6.05am
Following the nuns and monks at three Benedictine abbeys in England and Ireland as they craft traditional gifts for the upcoming Christmas

festivities. (Episode 2 Christmas Day 6.20am)

SOLEMN MASS OF CHRISTMAS IN ROME – MIDNIGHT MASS

EWTN, Christmas Eve, 6.30 pm
Live from St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, the Holy Father celebrates Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Birth of Our Lord.

IN CONCERT: CHRISTMAS IN VIENNA

EWTN, Christmas Eve, 9pm
Celebrate Christ's birth with a special concert of international music by the Vienna Symphonic Orchestra, Singing Academy, and world-famous Vienna Boys Choir performing Christmas songs from around the world.

MIDNIGHT MASS

RTÉ One, Christmas Eve,
11.10pm
Archbishop Eamon Martin, Primate of All-Ireland, celebrates Christmas Vigil Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, in a broadcast shared across Europe. Music led by the cathedral choir.

CAROLS ON ITV

ITV, Christmas Eve, 11.40pm
One of the nation's best loved entertainers, Jane McDonald, hosts a traditional Christmas Eve celebration from St Elisabeth's Church in Greater Manchester.

VOX NOSTRA WITH VLAD SMISHKEWYCH

RTÉ Lyric FM, Christmas Day,
7am

Join Vlad for 'Centuries of Christmas', his annual millennium of music. He'll explore the roots and branches of the heart-warming musical traditions around the Christmas celebrating-world, providing a magnificent musical accompaniment to your own celebrations.

CHRISTMAS IN THE CASTLE

RTÉ One, Christmas Day,
7.30am
Dáithí Ó Sé and Sinéad Kennedy deck the halls of Dublin Castle for this gorgeous festive celebration, featuring Nathan Carter, Jack Lukeman, Shobsy, Erica-Cody, Emma Langford, and Ryan Sheridan.

A CHRISTMAS LEAP OF FAITH

RTÉ Radio One, Christmas
Day, 8am
It's not only the twelve Lords-a-leaping, as Siobhán Garrigan brings festive joy, musical treats and plenty of inspiration, in the company of a variety of guests on this Christmas morning.



Pope Francis will deliver his traditional Christmas message and blessing.

MASS FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

RTÉ One and RTÉ Radio One
Extra/LW252, Christmas Day,
10am
Bishop Jean-Luc Hudsyn, Auxiliary Bishop of Mollnes/Mechelen, celebrates Christmas liturgy in Santa's own parish, St Nicolas de La Hulpe, in Belgium, with commentary and translation by Lydia O'Kane.

URBI ET ORBI

RTÉ One, Christmas Day,
11.45am
Pope Francis delivers his Christmas message and blessing "to the city and the world" in St Peter's Square, Vatican City.

THE ARCHBISHOPS' CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

RTÉ One, Christmas Day,
12.10pm also Radio One,
1.05pm
The Catholic and Church of Ireland Primates of All-Ireland, Archbishops Eamon Martin and John McDowell, offer their traditional message, of peace, faith and love. This year, they travel to Dundalk, where their focus is on the challenges presented by the cost-of-living crisis and the invasion of Ukraine.

ANGELA'S CHRISTMAS WISH

RTÉ One, Christmas Day,
12.15pm
With her father working far away in Australia, a determined Angela makes a plan to reunite her family.

CHARLES DICKENS AND THE INVENTION OF CHRISTMAS

BBC Two, St Stephen's Day,
8.15am
Griff Rhys Jones reveals how Dickens created the idea of a traditional family Christmas through one of his best-known books, *A Christmas Carol*.

FILM: THE SOUND OF MUSIC

RTÉ One, St Stephen's Day,
2.40pm
(1965) Maria, an aspiring nun, is sent as a governess to take care of seven motherless children. Soon her jovial and loving nature tames their hearts and the children become fond of her.

75 YEARS IN JAPAN

RTÉ One, Thursday (night)
December 29, 2.35am
Excellent documentary film about Sr Paschal O'Sullivan, one of Ireland's last missionary nuns. It tells her personal story from her youth in Ireland through the 75 years she spent in Japan.

Nota Bene: times may be subject to change due to World Cup and regional variations.

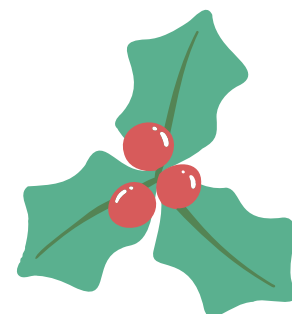
BookReviews

Peter Costello



Christmas Books

Selected by the book's editor



The Granite Coast: Dún Laoghaire, Sandycove and Dalkey

by Peter Pearson

(The O'Brien Press, €35.00)

Explore Dún Laoghaire and its coastal surroundings as Peter Pearson reveals the story behind its transformation from rocky granite shoreline to grand Victorian 'watering place', to the bustling town it is now. With over 250 illustrations, this is a fascinating journey through the history and heritage of Dún Laoghaire, Sandycove and Dalkey, in fact South Dublin generally, written by a leading heritage expert.

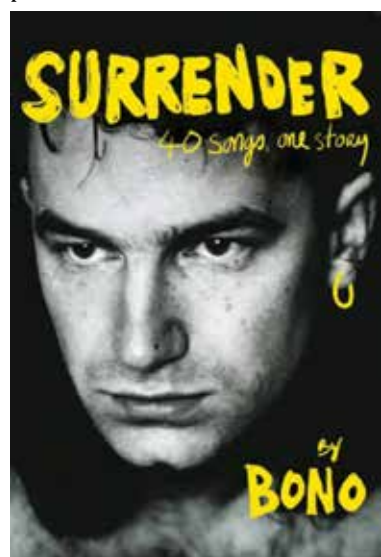
The Translations of Seamus Heaney

edited by Dr Marco Songozi

(Faber and Faber, €34.99)

The first ever collected volume of Seamus Heaney's translations from languages including Old and Middle Irish and English, Medieval Italian, Classical Greek and Latin and Modern Italian, Spanish, French, Romanian, German and Greek.

As editor, Marco Songozi frames the translations with the poet's own writings on his works, drawing from various introductions, interviews and commentaries. Collectively we are brought closer to an understanding of the remarkable extent of Heaney's talent, a genius for interpretation and transformation that distinguishes him as one of the great poet-translators of all time.



Surrender, Forty Songs, One Story

by Bono

(Hutchinson Heinemann, €24.99)

This is the singer's own story of

his life, partially recounted perhaps, but which nevertheless will be of immense interest to those who have been affected not only by his music but by his activism in the matters of AIDS and world-wide poverty. But Dubliners will wonder at the use of his fortune to promote property developments in Dublin, a matter which has caused much trepidation.

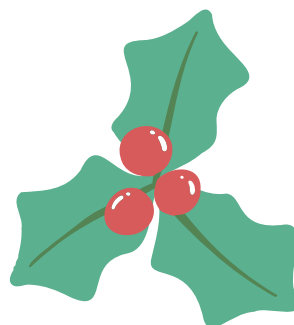
An Emotional Dictionary: Real Words for How You Feel, from Angst to Zwodder

by Susie Dent

(John Murray, €18.99)

Susie Dent is a familiar face on TV and in magazines as a word

to a constant state of warfare in parts of the world. These words of Voldomyr Zelenskyy will be read in the future in a way the great speeches of that past are today.



some cooks sees it differently.

All too many cookery books, however, are still aimed at presenting flash food for entertaining, when what so many people really need are skills that enable them to present family meals three times a day, and avoid the horrendous cost and poor quality of on-call catering. Unlike some of his rivals Neven Maguire keeps in mind the basic needs of family life. These midweek meals are aimed at feeding the kids and wider family.

Ireland's Islands

photographed and written by Carsten Krieger and Richard Creagh

(The O'Brien Press, €24.99)

A Gift of Joy and Hope

by Pope Francis

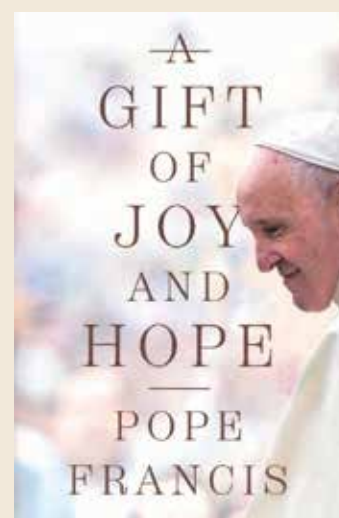
(John Murray Press, €19.99)

In response to the devastating loss the world faced during the pandemic, Pope Francis was inspired to write a book to help people find hope and meaning. God is joyful, he writes. And God's compassion is no less than the deepest expression of God's joy, and the heart of all Christian preaching.

The liberating revolution of the Gospel is encapsulated here. We are not supposed to carry burdens heavier than those we

already have, but to bear witness to a new, beautiful and surprising horizon: to share a joy that has been prepared for everyone.

From the anxieties of the age to the importance of nature, *A Gift of Joy and Hope* encourages readers to look outside themselves to embrace authentic beauty, change attitudes that exclude others, overcome life's challenges with courage and trust that joy and hope are still possible, even in challenging times; for joy has the last word – always.



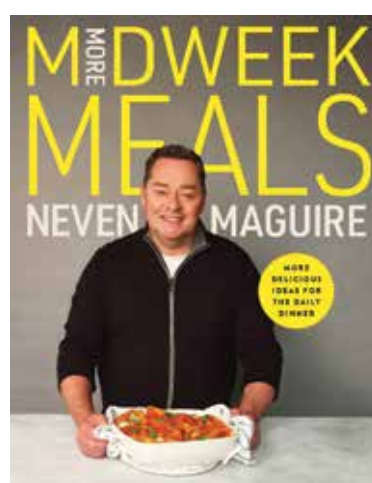
expert. This book, she says is the one she has always wanted to write, and her one million followers on Twitter will doubtless devour it. A book that will fill many an adult stocking this Christmas.

Message from the Ukraine: the speeches of Voldomyr Zelenskyy

(Hutchinson Heinemann, €11.99)

The daily evening talks and more formal speeches of the president of Ukraine have formed an important aspect in his nation's resistance to the invasion and Russian efforts to simply eliminate the very idea of Ukrainian culture.

Putin seems to have forgotten Prussian general von Clausewitz's axiom that all war is the continuation of diplomacy by other means. But all wars have to end in a diplomatic response: the United States found this in Vietnam. Its neglect in other areas has led



More Midweek Meals

by Neven Maguire

(Gill Book, €22.99)

Once cooking was seen as a practical domestic art, the preserve of girls, only it has more recently become a skill now taught to boys as well. And rightly so. But the celebrity world of

Take a photographic journey around Ireland's coast and explore the landscape, history, heritage and wildlife of the offshore islands. From rugged cliffs thronged with seabirds to tranquil bays, and from quiet strands to bustling villages, Carsten and Richard's words and images bring to life the uniqueness of these small, sea-locked worlds.

The *locus classicus* of Irish island books is Thomas Mason's *The Island of Ireland*, published by Batsford back in the 1930s. The remarkable contrasts of the two books shows just how far we have changed over that time.

An Irish Folklore Treasury

by John Creedon

(Gill Books, €19.99)

Broadcaster John Creedon has brought together a selection of extracts from the *Schools Collection* in the Folklore Department of UCD, the successor agency to the

Government bureau charged with the collection of folklore, legends and practises.

This was done by issuing some 400 or so booklets to the National School system and encouraging the teachers to get the students to ask their grandparents about the old days. The children wrote down the replies in their own words and best writing and they were sent into the professional folklorists. The whole collection is available online, a great reading it is.

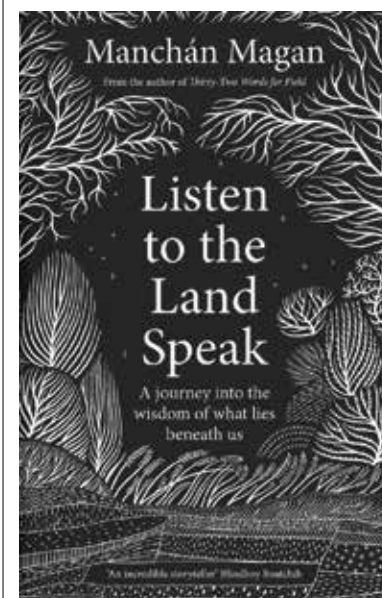
So the publishers claim that this is their *first* publication is not quite exact. But this book and the archive are well worth visiting as any real knowledge of our rural past is quickly fading away in the age of the internet. A must have book for any student of Irish life and tradition.

Listen to the Land Speak

by Manchán Magan

(Gill Books, €22.99)

In this illuminating new book, established writers about Irish nature traditions, Manchán Magan sets out on a journey, through bogs, across rivers and over mountains, to trace our ancestors' traces. He uncovers the ancient myths that have shaped our national identity and are embedded in the strata of land that have endured through millennia – from ice ages through to famines and floods.



The Guardians: 100 Years of An Garda Síochána 1922-2022

by Stephen Moore

(The O'Brien Press, €22.99)



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.

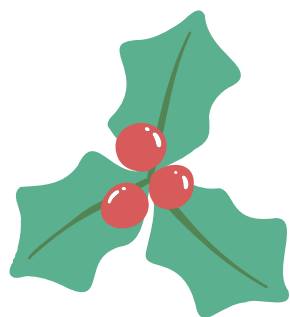
On my first visit to Belfast as a child I was heavily struck by the sight of armed police on the streets of Belfast. Citizens down here never give a thought to how lucky they are to be living in a state with an *unarmed* police force.

Our police force is a very exceptional organisation and we should all be proud of it. The new state in 1922 wanted to make a clean break with the old Royal Irish Constabulary, the armed rural gendarmes of the past. Here is an excellent history of how this was achieved, despite factors weighing against it.

Abandoned Ireland
by Rebecca Brownlie
(Irish Academic Press, €27.95)

This illustrated book travels the length and breadth of the island of Ireland discovering and documenting our forgotten buildings, highlighting their social importance, and bringing their stories back to life through the medium of photography.

From Big Houses to humble cottages, schools to prisons, churches to dance halls, these buildings may now be abandoned, but they are far from empty. As a photographer, Brownlie's instincts are remarkable. In the seemingly ruined and mundane she finds diamonds in the rough; her images of the ordinary ephemera of past lives – dusty love letters, rusting spectacles, photographs yellowed and curled with age – paint the pictures of real people and full lives.



The Story of Russia
by Orlando Figes
(Bloomsbury, £25.00)

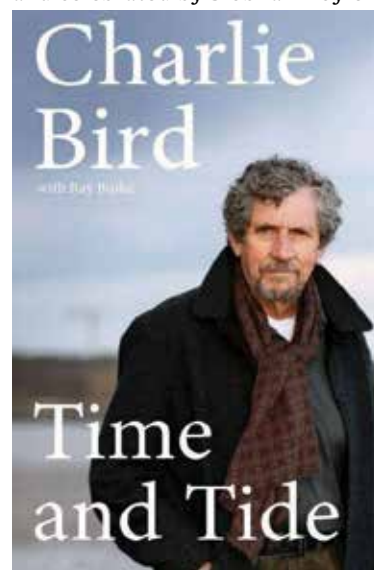
Author Figes has long been one of those few historians whose skills as a writer bring their vast range of scholarship clearly before the public. This book is, at this moment, of exceptional importance.

President Putin is given to making large claims about the glories of the Russian past. Figes, the leading modern scholar on Russia today, places these claims, and an account of what really passed over the centuries, in a realistic perspective. Not perhaps a 'book for Christmas', but certainly one for the coming year.

After the Storm
by Damian Lawlor
(Black and White Publishing, €17.99)

Throughout that dark time, the GAA was at the epicentre of the country's fight back against Covid-19. Some 20,000 volunteers helped out 35,000 vulnerable neighbours and friends with food and medicine deliveries during lockdown. Croke Park and other major stadia transformed into testing centres, the Association went online to keep people connected and the GAA became a beacon of hope. The life of rural Ireland in some important sense was preserved to continue into the future.

cap, all corners of the GAA world, personal and official, are explored and celebrated by Siobhan Doyle



Time and Tide
by Charlie Bird
(HarperCollins Ireland, €16.99)

long-time friend and fellow journalist Ray Burke, this is a candid and unforgettable story about the triumph of the human spirit and, ultimately, what it means to be alive.

Never Better
by Tommie Gorman
(Atlantic Books, €18.99)

From modest beginnings as a local reporter at the *Western Journal*, where his deadlines were dependent on the bus schedule, Tommie landed at RTÉ, taking up the post of North-West correspondent in 1980. Over the next four decades he became a familiar presence in Irish homes.

In this insightful and generous book, Tommie takes readers behind the scenes and shares some of his memories from Sligo to Stormont, via Brussels and Sweden, as he recounts 40 extraordinary years of Irish history from his front-row seat and looks at what may lie ahead for the island.

The Great Lighthouses of Ireland

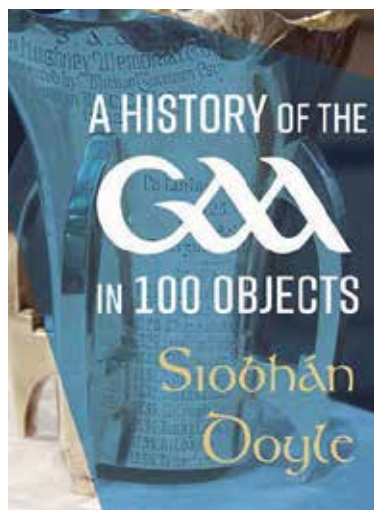
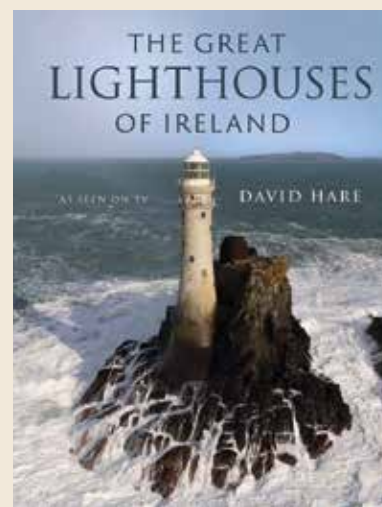
by David Hare
(Gill Books, €22.99)

The appealing book is a collection of striking images and fascinating stories about the lighthouses around Ireland's coast and the extraordinary men and women who lived and worked in them.

The book is topically wide ranging, covering many aspects of the heritage of our shore line, especially the Wild

Atlantic Way, including many curious tales such as a raid on the Fastnet by the IRA, Ireland's nuclear-powered lighthouse, and the heroic rescue of the Daunt Rock lightship.

With more than 300 stunning images and archive documents, this beautiful book brings to life the romance and history of the lighthouses that have provoked fascination for hundreds of years.

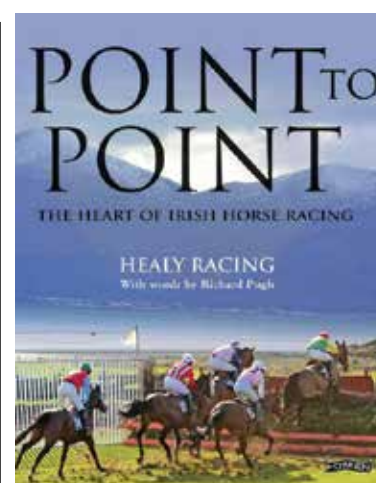
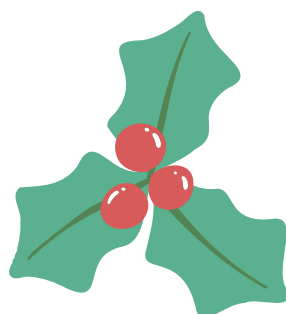


A History of the GAA in 100 Objects
by Siobhan Doyle
(Irish Academic Press, €24.99)

This fascinating book offers a new perspective on the GAA by assembling a range of objects from every county in Ireland, as well as overseas, to present a chronological history of the GAA that also functions as a social history of the people who have been involved in it. From a 15th Century horse-hair *sliotar* to a tweed camogie dress, Trevor Giles's sleeveless jersey and Brian Cody's baseball

A poignant and introspective memoir from broadcaster Charlie Bird. In 2021, Charlie Bird was diagnosed with motor neurone disease – a man whose voice was so synonymous with his career faced losing it completely. Yet knowing he had just a short time left with family and friends, what emerged was a great sense of resilience and motivation to take advantage of every moment.

Here, Charlie reflects on his life and phenomenal broadcast career through the lens of his diagnosis, as he ponders the big questions and takes stock of the small moments that we so often overlook. Written over the course of 2022 as his health deteriorated, with the help of

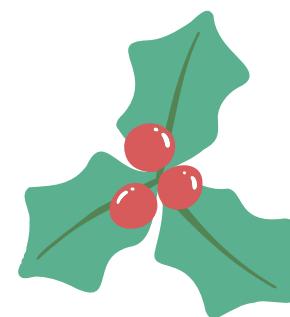


Point to Point: The Heart of Irish Racing
by Pat Healy and Richard Pugh
(The O'Brien Press, €24.99)

The true grassroots of Irish horse racing, point-to-point tracks are transformed from farmland by dedicated volunteers into temporary racetracks. Photographer Pat Healy and writer Richard Pugh introduce the riders, handlers, venues and famous horses that give Irish point-to-pointing such a unique spirit. Here as an Irish sporting tradition from which so much has sprung, that goes back to the 18th Century.

The Ship Beneath the Ice: The Discovery of Shackleton's Endurance
by Mensun Bound
(Macmillan, €18.99)

On November 21, 1915, Sir Ernest Shackleton's ship, *Endurance*, finally succumbed to the crushing ice. Its crew watched in silence as the stern rose 20 feet in the air and then, it was gone. The miraculous escape and survival of all 28 men on board have entered legend. The iconic ship that bore them to the brink of the Antarctic was considered forever lost. A century later, an audacious plan to locate the ship was hatched. *The Ship Beneath the Ice* gives a stage-by-stage account of the two epic expeditions to find the *Endurance*. These voyages



were filled with intense drama and teamwork under pressure. In March 2022, the *Endurance* was finally found wonderfully preserved under the icy waters.

The Madness: A Memoir of War, Fear, and PTSD
by Fergal Keane
(William Collins, €17.99)

In this powerful and intensely personal book, famous Irish war correspondent Keane interrogates what it is that draws him to the wars to which he devoted his career, what keeps him there and offers a reckoning of the damage done.

PTSD affects people from all walks of life. Trauma can be found in many places, not just war. Keane's book speaks to the struggle of all who are trying to recover from injury, addiction and mental breakdown. It is a survivor's story drawn from lived experience, told with honesty, courage and an open heart.



Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.



To join in Sr. Stan's vision please contact cian.dikker@focusireland.ie or phone 01 881 5962

FOCUS
Ireland



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Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20054588 Revenue Number: CHY 1566

By remembering Operation Smile in your Will, you are leaving the gift of a lasting smile for a child born with a cleft condition.

Operation Smile envisions a future where health and dignity are championed through safe surgery.

Get in touch with Natalie Madden, Legacy & Fundraising Manager, on

01 667 6659 or natalie@operationsmile.ie or visit operationsmile.ie/LastingSmile



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the flame
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By choosing to leave a gift or a donation at any time, you are choosing to share God's love with those who need it most.

To learn more about the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission, call Fiona on 01 497 2035 or visit www.missio.ie



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For more information, please request your free copy of Concern's legacy guide. Contact Siobhán on 01 417 8020, email siobhan.oconnor@concern.net or visit www.concern.net/legacy - finding out more does not, of course, oblige you to leave a gift.

Concern Worldwide, a company limited by guarantee, Registered Company Number: 39647, Registered Revenue Number: CHY 5745, Registered Charity Number: 20009090, Registered in Ireland, Registered address is 52-55 Lower Camden St, Dublin 2

Image: Roga Wavio (29) of Kalacha, Marsabit, Kenya holds produce she has grown with support from Concern. Photographer: Jennifer Nolan / Concern Worldwide

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CENACOLO is a residential community offering FREE help for men and women with addictions. Visit www.communitycenacolo.ie or phone 094 9388286.

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JOHN IN MY SIXTIES, single, non smoker, practicing Catholic WLTm a lady for friendship who believes in Catholic values from the age of 50 to 60 in a radius of 50km from Drogheda. Please reply to Box #5073 with photo and phone number.

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Please print your advertisement in the coupon, placing ONE word in each space. Below, please print your name and address. Do you require a Box Number? YES ☐ NO ☐ (Please tick ☒ Box Number €6 extra.

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| 6 | | | | | €24.60 |
| 7 | | | | | €29.52 |
| | | | | | €34.44 |

Name and contact detail form MUST be filled out

Name

Address

Landline Mobile

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I enclose Cheque/PO: €..... I wish to pay by Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Laser ☐

My Visa/Mastercard/Lasercard number is:

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Phone: 01 687 4094

STATE UNDER WHICH HEADING YOUR AD IS TO APPEAR:

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No. of insertions: weeks

Miracle Prayer €40

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A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at
anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie
or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie



Your heart for the homeless

Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You may wish to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake, made by a client, for you.

This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering

Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email emma.murphy@mqi.ie

Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

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Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmisions.ie

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When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

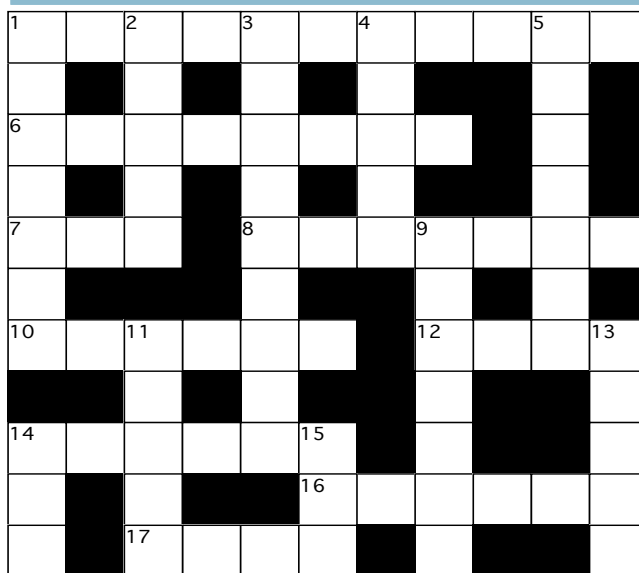
Trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 463



Across

- 1 You might use this as well as shampoo when washing your hair (11)
- 6 Healing cream (8)
- 7 Plant that grows up walls and trees (3)
- 8 What Americans may call rubbish (7)
- 10 Type of shoe you might wear in summer (6)
- 12 Signals 'yes' with the head (4)
- 14 Japanese way of fighting (6)
- 16 Huge people in fairy tales (6)
- 17 You ____ a painting on the wall (4)

Down

- 1 What Americans call biscuits (7)
- 2 Female goat (5)
- 3 A person who has come from another country to live here (9)
- 4 The opposite of outer (5)
- 5 Promised in marriage (7)
- 9 The skins of these may cause people to slip (7)
- 11 The opposite of South (5)
- 13 'I don't understand that - it makes no ____' (5)
- 14 Baby goat (3)
- 15 A bird lays it (3)

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 8

GORDIUS NO. 588

Across — 1 Immaculate Conception 6 Zinc 10 Photo 11 Decathlon 12 Ulysses 15 Style 17 High cross 18 Olga 19 Elect 21 Spotted 23 Litre 24 Ludo 25 Cosy 26 Right 28 Estella 33 Galloping 34 Upset 35 Rash 36 Polyhedron

Down — 1 Imps 2 Moonlight 4 Lodge 5 Tuck shop 7 Inlay 9 Stashed 14 Shuteye 16 Jolly Roger 20 Equaliser 21 Section 22 Exit 27 Gulls 29 Angry 30 Elude 31 Wino 32 Stan

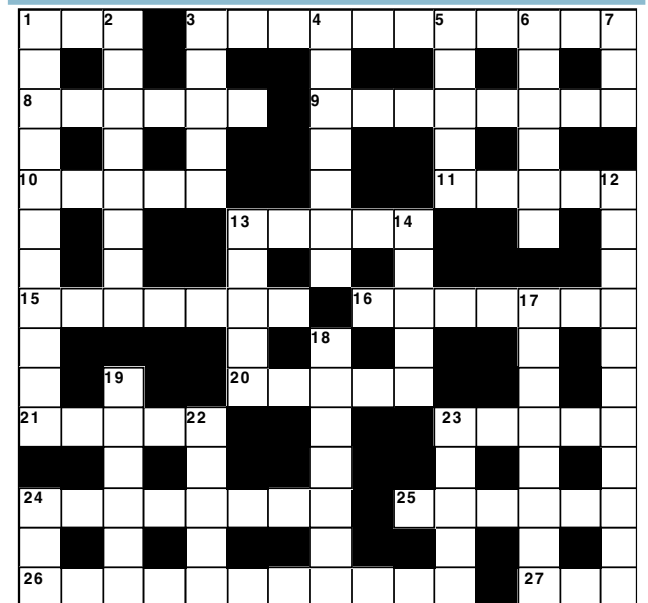
CHILDREN'S No. 462

Across — 1 Strictly 6 Echo 7 Alice 8 Auction 10 Ending 11 Arrows 13 Root 14 Idea 15 Wish 17 Year 18 Fire brigade

Down — 1 Scarecrow 2 Raindrops 3 Clean 4 Yesterday 5 Points 9 Uganda 12 Wizard 16 Hoe

Crossword

Gordius 589



Across

- 1 Archer's weapon (3)
- 3 Historic territories once controlled by the Pope (5,6)
- 8 Surgical stitch (6)
- 9 Footsoldiers (8)
- 10 Emblem you might pin on (5)
- 11 Get down on your knees (5)
- 13 Accommodate or erect (3,2)
- 15 Anarchic (7)
- 16 Creating lots of bubbles, as a shaken carbonated drink might be doing (7)
- 20 Ahead of schedule (5)
- 21 Freshwater fish, or where a bird might sit (5)
- 23 Stage of development that has one out of shape (5)
- 24 Prayer of intercession to Our Lady written in a strange, rare memo (8)
- 25 Fall (6)
- 26 Fitted the pieces of something back together (11)
- 27 Chap (3)

Down

- 1 Item of headgear from an American sport (8,3)

- 2 Take money from one's bank account (8)
- 3 Food that has been pressed through a strainer (5)
- 4 Nimbleness (7)
- 5 Express gratitude (5)
- 6 Wobble, stagger (6)
- 7 Bashful (3)
- 12 It occurs when there is a Bank Holiday Monday (4,7)
- 13 Cowboy group enlisted to help a sheriff in pursuit of criminals (5)
- 14 Somewhat expensive (5)
- 17 City formerly known as Byzantium and Constantinople (8)
- 18 Wise saying (7)
- 19 Black Sea peninsula, the scene of a Victorian war (6)
- 22 The devil is often depicted with these on his head (5)
- 23 UK unit of currency (5)
- 24 Spoil, impair (3)

Sudoku Corner

463

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 462

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

Last week's Hard 462

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

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



The orphan who knew Jesus would not abandon him

2022 HAS BEEN dominated by the dreadful war in Ukraine. Russia and its leaders have isolated themselves in the eyes of the world. As this year draws to a close, I want to share a true story from that part of the world which both highlights a painful reality and also captures something beautiful from the Christmas message.

In 1994 two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on Christian principles) in a number of public schools and a large orphanage. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run programme were in the orphanage. They relate the following story in their own words:

Christmas

"It was nearing Christmas, 1994, time for our orphans to hear for the first time the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they



listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

"Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me.

"Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was

cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

"The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat—he looked to be about six years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger.

Manger

"Quickly I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately—until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

"Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, 'And when Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mammy and I have no daddy, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much I thought maybe if I kept him warm that would be a good gift. So, I asked Jesus, 'If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?' And Jesus told me, 'If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.' So, I got into the manger and then Jesus looked at me and told me I could stay with him – for always.

"As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his

A Christmas prayer of thanks

I often forget to say thanks, to parents, friends, others who care for me. It's thoughtlessness: I don't appreciate them. Thank you, God, for sending Jesus. Thanks Lord Jesus, for you have come among us. Thanks for your message of hope, your words of sympathy, your life of love. For your life and death, thanks Lord, for your suffering and resurrection, thanks, Lord; for your presence among us always, thanks, Lord

head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him—for always."

Good intentions!

A kindly 90-year-old grandmother found buying presents for family and friends a bit much one Christmas, so she wrote out cheques for all of them, to put into their Christmas cards. In each card she wrote, "Buy your own present", and then she sent them off. After the Christmas festivities were over, she found the cheques in her desk! Everyone had got a Christmas card from her with "Buy your own present" written inside but without the cheques!



WILL YOU HELP RELIEVE THE PAIN OF HUNGRY AFRICANS AND SAVE LIVES?

Millions of people in many parts of Africa are suffering from hunger now. Somalia's situation is currently the most publicised but Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Sahel region are very badly affected also. One of the main causes is violence and civil strife which destroys crops. The war in Ukraine, climate change and the pandemic have caused food prices to skyrocket. Droughts have caused the death of livestock, the failure of crops and made water more scarce.

The Little Way Association is receiving many requests from missionary priests and Sisters urgently needing funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. Our Lord says, "I was hungry and you fed me."

Please send The Little Way Association whatever you can. Your donation, added to others, will be sent with no deduction for the relieving of hunger and malnutrition in Africa. Thank you.



"Our Lord does not look so much as the greatness of our actions, but at the love at which we do them."

~ St Therese

PLEASE HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the millions who die each year of hunger and disease in mission lands. Your donation will relieve the pangs of starvation, and every euro you send will be forwarded to a missionary priest or sister for food for the hungry.

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

In these fraught times, missionary priests rely more than ever on stipends for their daily subsistence and for helping the poorest of their communities. The Little Way Association will convey your stipends and your intentions to the clergy overseas.

We like to send a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass



Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **AFRICAN FAMINE**

€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **WELLS AND SANITATION**

€..... **MASSSES** (Please state no.)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
www.littlewayassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.