

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY

Simplicity is the key to wedding success
Page 5



KINGSCOURT

Couples renew wedding vows for St Valentine's
Pages 8-9



NUALA O'LOAN

Synod is not just another listening exercise Page 10



Thursday, February 17, 2022

€2.50 (Stg £2.20)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

@IrishCathNews

www.irishcatholic.com

Archbishop calls for well-off to gift energy subsidy to SVP

Jason Osborne

The Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell has pleaded with people who don't need new Government subsidies aimed at tackling the spiralling cost of living to gift it to their parish St Vincent de Paul group.

It comes amidst fears that some families and older people are being faced with the stark choice to eat or heat their home in the face of rising prices.

SVP research and policy officer Marcella Stakem said that the financial hardship facing many people, especially jobseekers, lone parents and renters, is "unprecedented".

Dr Farrell appealed to well-off people to forgo the Government's €200 energy subsidy. He said people in this circumstance "have the opportunity to direct it to those in greater need".

"I urge those who can to donate some, or all of that rebate, to the Society of St Vincent de Paul, or other charities, who are supporting the many who are not so fortunate," Dr Farrell said.

Meanwhile, Bishop Michael Router has warned that young couples are facing what can seem like "insurmountable obstacles" raising their families. The auxiliary bishop of Armagh highlighted insecure

» Continued on Page 2

A whole lot of love



Sr Dominic, Sr Therese and Sr Canice of the Poor Clare Sisters, Carlow, are pictured with a big St Valentine's day card and even bigger smiles, February 14.

DAVID QUINN

The Lord of the Rings goes 'woke'

PAGE 13



JASON OSBORNE

100 years of the Loreto Sisters in Africa

PAGES 20-21



ANDREA GAGLIARDUCCI

Diplomatic relations between Vatican and Beijing on the horizon?

PAGE 27



ENSURE HOSPICE CARE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY.
Please make a donation to St. Francis Hospice Dublin.
Call 01-8327535 or 01-8294000 or online www.sfh.ie
Thank You.

Charity Number 10568 Registered Charity Number 20027193



Inside this week

Peter Costello

An unusual exhibition of religious art in the National Gallery

Pages 36-37



Fr Silvester O'Flynn

Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate

Page 12



Family feature

The role of Ordinary Time and the seasons in Church life

Page 31



Managing Editor: Michael Kelly, editor@irishcatholic.ie

Deputy Editor: Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie

Northern Correspondent: Martin O'Brien, martin@irishcatholic.ie

Multimedia Journalists: Ruadhán Jones, ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Jason Osborne, jason@irishcatholic.ie

Newsroom: news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

Books Editor: Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

Advertising: advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874094

Accounts: accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874020

Magnificat: magnificat@irishcatholic.ie

Shop: shop@irishcatholic.ie

Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €165. Airmail €250. Six months €85.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Cork.

Place an Advert

Phone 01 687 4094 or advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Archbishop calls for well-off to gift energy subsidy to SVP

» Continued from Page 1
employment, "the ever-increasing cost of living, the scarcity of affordable housing and the cost of childcare".

Ms Stakem insisted that recent research by SVP revealed that nearly one in five people are cutting back on basic essentials like food due to rising energy prices.

"Last year we received a record number of calls, up around 200,000 calls - that's extraordinary...we've never received that number before, so I think that shows the level of need and worry out there," she said.

Inflation and the rising cost of living are "deepening poverty" and "eroding the living standards" particularly of low-income households, Ms Stakem said.

Both Archbishop Farrell and Bishop Router encouraged the Faithful to do what they can to support "the needs of the most vulnerable", with Bishop Router saying it "incumbent on all of us" in parishes to support engaged and married couples by trying to create a society where wealth and possessions are not considered to be the most important of goals.

When a Government creature turns on...the Government

Female Government TDs cut a pathetic figure at the weekend lining up to express their sadness at not being invited to the latest come-all-ye. You see, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) - a group funded by successive governments from taxpayers' money to lobby said governments - is organising a campaign to ensure that "no woman is left behind". To press the case, the NWCI is organising a rally outside the Dáil to mark International Women's Day. What, you might ask, has the Government TDs so upset? Well, the NWCI - which prides itself on being inclusive - has decided not to invite any members of the three parties in coalition. Elected members of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party have been set aside in favour of a variety of speakers from hard-left groups such as ROSA. Speakers will include people like former TD Ruth Coppinger who was rejected by the electorate the last time she sought re-election to the Dáil.

"The NWCI has long held a position in favour of abortion, despite the fact that a significant number of women oppose abortion"

Government TDs spent the weekend saying they were upset that the NWCI is "narrowly partisan". Really? This has only occurred to them now?

Fortune

It is a long time since the women's council - which claims a fortune of taxpayers' money to lobby on behalf of women - has even pretended to work on behalf of all women. Women perceived as not being sufficiently hard-left are just the latest casualty of the narrow tunnel in

"The NWCI - which prides itself on being inclusive - has decided not to invite any members of the three parties in coalition"



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



No woman left behind? Unless one has the wrong opinions.

which the hierarchies of that organisation operates.

The NWCI has long held a position in favour of abortion, despite the fact that a significant number of women oppose abortion. The women's council played a major role in the abortion referendum while claiming to be the voice of women.

Women who are pro-life have long experienced a cold shoulder from the NWCI while some of the politicians who are now expressing their hurt cheered along. There is something odd in the human condition that we often don't mind exclusion when it's people that we don't like being excluded. It becomes a different matter when the focus shifts and one finds oneself part of the excluded group.

Danger

That's part of the danger in running with mobs - the day inevitably comes when the mob turns on those who were once fellow travellers and they too find themselves no longer part of the cool club.

How sad it must be for Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party - all enthusiastic supporters (and spenders of taxpayers' money on) of the NWCI.

But, the NWCI is just one of a vast empire of paradoxically-named non-gov-

ernmental organisations (NGOs) that are funded by the Government to lobby the Government.

"Government TDs spent the weekend saying they were upset that the NWCI is 'narrowly partisan'"

An investigation last year by Gript.ie revealed that Ireland has an extraordinary 32,841 NGOs. They are funded out of the public purse to the tune of almost six billion euro annually. At a cost of €5.9 billion every single year, that is six times the budget of the Department of Defence at a time when frontline soldiers and their families are forced to turn to charities and food banks to make ends meet due to the paltry remuneration in the Defence Forces.

There is no doubt that a huge number of NGOs - particularly smaller ones - do sterling work. Their presence in local communities is often the difference stopping people falling through the cracks or being failed by services that should be provided by the State.

At the same time, there are a large number of NGOs that have effectively become branches of the Government. Often left-wing parties have achieved via a takeover of the NGO sector what they have never been able to achieve electorally.

There is an army of thousands of taxpayer-funded lobbyists and campaigners working away to change Government policy far away from the lens of democratic accountability.

Misnomer

The idea that these groups are non-governmental is a misnomer while their very existence is predicated on funding allocated by the State.

When it comes to the women's council, the parties of Government have fallen victim to a creature of their own making. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child," as Shakespeare observed.

i To join Friends of The Irish Catholic and support Catholic journalism, please phone the office on 01 6874094 for more information or to make a contribution.

❖ Capuchin Day Care Centre ❖ 29 Bow Street, Dublin 7



Every day The Capuchin Day Care Centre provides 600 Meals for people who are homeless and each week 1000 Food Parcels for those on the poverty threshold.

Help Bro. Kevin continue providing this caring service.

Bro. Kevin or Therese 01 8720770
www.homeless.ie

No plans to reinstate Sunday obligation in Ireland currently

Jason Osborne

There are currently no plans in place to reinstate the Sunday obligation across the island of Ireland with a bishop citing a "still high infection rate" as the reason.

The Irish Catholic understands that, as of the time of writing, the move is considered to be premature in light of the present Covid-19 situation.

Corresponding with this newspaper, Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan confirmed that the bishops had decided to postpone discussion on this issue "for the time being" due to the current coronavirus infection rate.

This is despite the widespread re-opening of many sectors of society, with the majority of restrictions being dropped on both indoor and outdoor activities.

Health officials have also largely deemed public worship to be safe at present with the current sanitary precautions in place.

As of the time of writing however, this paper also understands that the bishops

intend to meet in coming weeks, "when things improve", to reconsider the issue of the reinstatement of the Sunday obligation.

This comes following the decision by neighbouring Scotland to reinstate the Sunday obligation come March 6, with the bishops of Scotland saying that come March 6, Catholics will be expected to attend Sunday Mass.

Easing

"Given the easing of restrictions in every other walk of life, the Church looks forward to welcoming Catholics back to Holy Mass," Bishop of Aberdeen Hugh Gilbert said.

However, they maintain that the Sunday obligation will not apply to those who "are sick and their carers or to those aware of their greater vulnerability to the virus".

The Irish Catholic received no response to its question put to a number of bishops via email as to whether the continued postponement of the reinstatement of the Sunday obligation might diminish its value in the public's eyes.

Priest laments 'harrowing' death of child in Limerick

Staff reporter

A priest who gave Last Rites to a 12-year-old boy killed in a collision with a truck in Limerick last week described it as "terribly harrowing".

Wiktor Chojewski (12) was driving the car on the N21 near Adare when the incident occurred just before 2am. It's believed he took the vehicle

while family members were sleeping.

"It was obviously terribly harrowing for everybody. The guards and emergency responders are accustomed to something like this, but they were all just in shock. There was such terrible sadness around the place," Adare-based Msgr Daniel Neenan told the *Irish Independent*.

"In my last parish in Limerick, there was such a strong local Polish community and they were so good in getting involved in supporting what was going on in the parish, and also so supportive of one another. And I have no doubt that the Polish community will come out and support each other now in this awful time for them all."

Parish 'delight' for Kilcoo GAA champions



Kilcoo joint-captain Conor Lavery lifts the Andy Merrigan cup after his side's victory in the AIB GAA Football All-Ireland Senior Club Championship Final. Photo: Piaras Ó Midheach.

Chai Brady

The parish priest of the Kilcoo GAA team who won the All-Ireland senior club final after a tense finale said the community is "delighted" for them.

Fr Denis McKinlay, who is based in the nearby Castletewellan in Co. Down told *The Irish Catholic* that the small parish is "totally committed to the football".

"They live for the football, that's the only sport

they have and they love it. Traditionally they've been very good at various championships but the All Ireland really takes the biscuit, that's the one," he said.

"I said Mass for them before they left and wished them well and told them to play with passion and skill that they all have," he said.

The end score was Kilcoo 2-8 to 0-13 Kilmacud Crokes after extra time, with a late goal from Kilcoo securing their victory.

Fr McKinlay sent the team "many, many congratulations".

"The flags were out, the place was festooned in black and white... they deserve it and they've worked so hard for it," he added.

Describing Kilcoo, which no longer has a resident priest, Fr McKinlay said: "It's one street and if you blink on your way through you could miss it. There's one shop, a church, a school, there's a couple of little estates and that's it. But football daft."

THE JOURNEY

SAINT PATRICK'S CAMINO

MARCH 28th-31st 2022

the Saint Patrick Centre

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stay in an Irish Monastic Retreat for four nights.
- All meals included.
- Complete three guided walks on Ireland's Camino - Saint Patrick's Way and a canoeing experience.
- Journey with our expert Guides who were Sisters of Adoration.
- Enjoy a private audience with Benedictine Monks who will chant praises and bless your journey.
- See the places where St Patrick started his mission in Ireland, the place of his transformation.
- Learn about Celtic Spirituality from local monks and the art of monastic meditation & journaling.
- Receive a Pilgrim's Journal & Pilgrim's Passport.
- All bedrooms en-suite.

**4.5 Days
4 Nights**

Cost £798 / €933
all inclusive of accommodation,
transfers, meals and activities.

WWW.SAINTPATRICKCENTRE.COM
TEL: +44 (0) 28 4461 9000

Accord-ing love its due...



Fr Eugene O'Neill, an Accord priest-director in the Diocese of Down and Connor, welcomes engaged couple, Michael McMenamy and Clare McCrudden to St Patrick's Church, Belfast for a special St Valentine's Blessing, in preparation for their marriage on 9 April. Photo: Liam McArdle.

Former master of Rotunda praises hospitals founded by religious

Chai Brady

The former master of the Rotunda hospital has described his relationship with the HSE as “quite toxic at times” and praised voluntary hospitals, the vast majority of which were founded and run by religious orders in Ireland.

In his new book, *Delivering the Future: Reflections of a Rotunda Master*, Sam Coulter-Smith spoke of the need and benefits of voluntary hospitals which he believes are under existential threat.

Speaking to the *Irish Independent*, he said:

“The cyber attack and Covid-19 have helped the HSE realise that there is a lot of good in voluntary hospitals. Paul Reid, who I interviewed for the book, said as much: they didn't know what they had.”

In his book, Mr Coulter-Smith argues that voluntary hospitals can avoid HSE bureaucracy, more easily innovate and respond to emergencies quicker.

“Pretty much everything good that has come out of the health service in Ireland over the last 300 years has come out of the voluntary health service,” he states in the book.

While praising the work of voluntary hospitals, whose network was founded and run

by religious orders, he doesn't believe religion should be involved in hospitals, saying “absolutely no way that there should be religious interference in medicine”.

“But just because you want to end religious interference doesn't mean you should want to end voluntary hospitals,” he said, adding the new National Maternity Hospital should be an independent voluntary hospital.

Mr Coulter-Smith also said that better oversight and governance in voluntary hospitals can serve to avoid problems seen in HSE-run hospitals. Their boards can step in and find funding from private healthcare sources which he says are extremely important for

maternity services which have been “starved of funding”.

He also states in his book that women are “putting off having babies until they are in their thirties, and then they are surprised when they have miscarriages”.

Asked about this, he told the *Irish Independent*: “There is no doubt as you get older, your fertility does drop off and the rate of miscarriage goes up because the anomaly rate goes up a little bit. It's a gradual process. There is a consequence to that choice, which maybe people don't fully, fully understand. And that's not being in any way critical, it's just a fact of life.”

New Catholic-run rehab clinic to open in Waterford

Ruadhán Jones

Waterford Council has granted permission to the Refuge of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (RIHM) to found a female-only post-detoxification treatment centre in west Waterford.

The RIHM is a Dublin-based collective of individuals from several Catholic organisations across the country, while the nuns are members of the Argentine-founded Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara.

The project has been endorsed by the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus Cullinan.

The centre will accommodate up to nine residents in the early stages of recovery and whose detoxification has been confirmed by a medical professional.

The facility will be donation-driven and operate as a closed community, with no medical personnel on-site.

Almost 50 objection points had been raised by locals, but project director John Carlin told *The Irish Examiner* that the centre will “be a blessing

for Clashmore, for Waterford, and for the country”.

Neither the HSE nor HIQA will have involvement because, “there is no need” Mr Carlin said.

Mr Carlin, a former director of Knock's Cenacolo rehabilitation centre, added that they have “considerable experience” of rehabilitation programmes internationally, including in Syria, Gaza, and Ukraine.

“We just want to help people enjoy better lives. Everything revolves around giving hope,” Mr Carlin said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Catholic Grandparents Association announce date of Knock pilgrimage

The Catholic Grandparents Association have announced that their annual pilgrimage to Knock Shrine will take place July 24.

The recently appointed Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy, who is the CGA's new patron following Dr Michael Neary's retirement, will be the chief celebrant for the grandparents' Mass.

In their monthly newsletter, the CGA offered Dr Duffy their “congratulations and prayerful good wishes”.

They also encouraged grandparents around the world to get involved in the synodal process, following their January Faith Café with Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey. Bishop Dempsey's talk is available on the CGA's website, www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.org.

Apologetics conference to tackle modern clichés about religion

A conference held by Evangelium Ireland hopes to tackle the importance of apologetics in Ireland today and also how to deal with modern clichés about religion.

Evangelium's first conference in three years takes place March 26, with a number of Irish and international guest speakers.

These include Fr Brendan Kilcoyne, founder of Immaculata Productions, Fr Morgan Gavin, whose talk will be focused on the Gospels and Dogma, along with the Dominicans of St Cecilia who will be giving a talk titled “Jesus, Yes! The Church, No! Answering a Modern Cliché.”

Tickets cost €38 and can be purchased at www.eventbrite.ie/e/evangelium-ireland-2022-conference-tickets-264382303587

Church's marriage care service sees large increase in engagement with courses

Bishop Michael Router blesses engaged couple Heather Andrews and Josh Warde who live in Maynooth at the Shrine of St Valentine in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Whitefriar St on Saturday. Photo: John McElroy



Brandon Scott

Accord, the Church's marriage care service which provides marriage preparation courses for Catholic couples, has recently encountered a sizeable increase in engagement with its

services during the pandemic, with over 50% more couples availing of its marriage preparation course in 2021 when compared to 2020.

According to the latest figures released by Accord, more than half of all Irish couples marry in the Catholic

Church and a further 12,748 people attended its marriage preparation courses across the island of Ireland during 2021, which reflects a 53% increase when compared with figures from 2020.

Although impacted by the pan-

demic, Accord adapted to the prevailing climate and continued to hold its courses online. Accord also saw bookings for its prospective marriage preparation courses jump 39% in January 2022, compared to figures relating to January 2021.

Simplicity is the key to wedding success...

How nice to see – now that restrictions are lifting – couples returning to their wedding plans, which so many put on hold during the course of the pandemic.

And although church weddings have fallen in Ireland, they haven't fallen at all as much as in neighbouring nations. Fewer than a quarter of weddings in England and Wales are now religious ceremonies – just 22% – being the lowest percentage ever recorded. British church weddings fell by nearly half over the past 20 years.

Church weddings are more than double in Ireland, where 50.2% are still religious ceremonies. And Accord, the Catholic marriage advisory service reports that churches are booked out for forthcoming post-pandemic nuptials. Impressive to learn, too, that in 2021, Accord's sacramental marriage preparation course attracted nearly 13,000 people.



Mary Kenny

Well done – preparation pays!

But here's another useful piece of intelligence about wedding lore: according to the Marriage Foundation in Britain, a cheaper wedding is often a better guarantee of a successful conjugal life than a very lavish one. The Foundation's research disclosed that one in ten weddings which cost over £20,000 (€23,900) were heading for divorce after three years, whereas those done on modest budgets were more likely to last.

Sir Paul Coleridge, a retired High Court judge who started the Marriage Foundation to help support marriage – after witnessing so many distressed broken families in court – encourages people to consider having less expensive weddings. The huge wedding often “places

a strain on finances before the wedding starts” and possibly puts the emphasis on the party rather than on the substance of marital understanding.

Back in the day, it was quite acceptable for a bride to be married in a simple, but well-tailored costume, and many a happy union started in such simplicity.

Obviously, we can't generalise, and there are some lovely big wedding parties where families have provided a fabulous day for all.

On marriage preparation, my mother had just two pieces of advice for daughters embarking on matrimony. One: “never let the sun go down on your anger” – a Biblical counsel. And two: “Never give a man bad news on an empty stomach.” Both very sound!

Humility and peace.

More than five years after he was murdered while saying Mass, the French priest Fr Jacques Hamel is being advanced as a candidate for sainthood. His parish at St Etienne-du-Rouvray, in the Rouen diocese, has become a place of pilgrimage for those who regard Fr Hamel as a martyr.

The 85-year-old died on the altar, knifed by two members of a fanatical Islamic group, on July 26, 2016. The assassins were themselves then shot by French police, but a trial is under way in France to establish accomplices.

Yet Fr Hamel's sister has approached the family of one of the Islamicists to open up a



People hold a banner with a picture of French priest Fr Jacques Hamel, which reads, “Where there is hatred, let me sow love,” after his murder. Photo: CNS

dialogue of peace and reconciliation.

Jacques Hamel has become a national figure in France, and a spiritual biography *Prier quinze jours avec Jacques Hamel* (A fortnight's prayer with Jacques Hamel) by Paul Vigoureux has just been pub-

lished. He is described as a very humble priest, who lived quietly and reflectively.

A dossier of 11,496 pages, with 2000 letters received after his death, and interviews with 56 witnesses, has been submitted to Rome for Jacques Hamel's cause.

● Asked to name her current favourite reading, the Cork-born actress Fiona Shaw selected Fintan O'Toole's *We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland since 1958*. Ms Shaw, born in 1958, wrote: “It has been a traumatising pleasure, like therapy, to revisit the decades of my early life when we as children berated our parents about the Church and its hypocrisy and the State and its shabby leadership... The book explains the synaptic jump of the corrupt religion to the corruption of the state, and the obedient population who could not see what was in front of their faces.”

I find this assessment disproportionate and snobbishly patronising. All states, and all religions, have human failings. Injustices occur, errors are made, and power can be arrogant. But that is not the whole picture. Ireland was not a corrupt country – it remained a functioning parliamentary democracy with an admirable civil service. Catholic Ireland produced many sincere and unhypocritical individuals, from Mother Mary Martin, foundress of the Medical Missionaries, to Fr Michael Sweetman, devoted to the Dublin homeless; from the economist who led Ireland into modern times, Ken Whitaker, guided by his Catholic conscience, to Seán MacBride, who launched Amnesty International and the human rights movement.

Neither were the people stupid, as Ms Shaw implies.

Thespians are sometimes criticised for being superficial. Fiona Shaw's shallow words feed into that particular prejudice.

● Peadar Kirby's letter last week brilliantly explained the religion and history of Ukraine. Although I never knew 'Uniate' was disparaging – it's found in many books.

"Today the visibility of faith has for all intents and purposes vanished"

- Archbishop Dermot Farrell

Keep the flame of faith alive in modern Ireland.

Subscribe to *The Irish Catholic* today.

Featuring news and analysis that represents your voice on the national stage, regular contributors who provide commentary on hot button issues and local voices highlighting the ongoing work of parishes and communities throughout the country.

The Irish Catholic

DIGITAL EDITION

3 MONTHS FOR ONLY

€9.99*

*REGULAR PRICE €20



WWW.IRISHCATHOLIC.COM

Coveney's visit to Iran 'window dressing' as persecution of Christians not mentioned

Ruadhán Jones

The Minister for Foreign Affairs' visit to Iran was political "window dressing", as substantive human rights issues such as the persecution of Christians were not discussed, TD Mattie McGrath has said.

Deputy McGrath told *The Irish Catholic* that its "shameful" that the Government won't address the

issue, calling their actions political "window dressing".

"Christian values don't mean anything to our leaders," Mr McGrath said. "And that feeds into their lack of attention to persecuted Christians."

Minister Simon Coveney visited Iran on Monday, February 14, where he met the country's president and foreign minister to discuss a nuclear deal and other issues as part of Ire-

land's role on the UN Security Council.

During the visit, Minister Coveney did not raise the persecution of Christians in Iran, despite the level of persecution there being described as "rising" and "insidious" in Aid to the Church in Need report.

Dr Michael Kinsella, head of ACN Ireland, described Minister Coveney's visit as "political theatre".

"It's a way for politicians to con-

vince electorates that their mandates are being exercised for something fruitful," Dr Kinsella continued.

"The topic of persecuted Christians doesn't track well with the majority of people in Ireland, so politicians don't pay attention."

Ireland's position on the UN security council is a "farce", Dr Kinsella added, saying that "we are provided a script by the UN or the EU and we stick to it".

"This is why Ireland's seat on the security council is a farce. We are not bringing anything original or unique to the position, we are not doing or saying anything that couldn't be provided by any other western EU country," he finished.

At the time of going to press, *The Irish Catholic* was awaiting a response from a DFA press spokesperson regarding the Minister's meeting in Iran.

PLC says exclusion zone bill a smear against pro-lifers

Jason Osborne

The Pro-Life Campaign has described Sinn Féin's exclusion zone bill as a "smear" against the pro-life movement.

It said that if the bill was enacted, it would set a "very dangerous precedent" for free speech, expression and assembly.

The *Safe Access to Termination to Pregnancy Services Bill 2021* is currently before the Seanad, and seeks to "protect individuals providing or facilitating" abortion from harassment.

Commenting on the bill, Eilís Mulroy of the PLC said that it would

"single out and curtail the fundamental rights of pro-life supporters which would be undemocratic and highly discriminatory".

This bill is proceeding despite a recent investigation by *Gript* media which found that maternity hospitals say they have no record of complaints regarding pro-life vigils.

Receiving a response from 16 of 19 maternity hospitals, all confirmed that none had ever received a formal complaint from any member of their staff or from patients regarding the protests.

Addressing this, Ms Mulroy said that the bill is not motivated by a

concern that censorship zones are needed.

"The motivation behind the bill is about something entirely different. Pro-choice groups have taken to smearing pro-life people and are constantly making baseless claims about totally peaceful people who are simply exercising their democratic right to assemble in public to make their point," she said.

"It's very easy to seize on one or two images and use them to caricature and falsely depict an entire group of innocent people. But it is grossly unfair and unacceptable to behave in such a way."

Faith on firm foundations



Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin lays the foundation stone for the extension works at the Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Dundalk, Co. Louth, February 12. The present seminary had been renovated and officially opened in November 2016. However with the sustained growth of vocations there is an urgent need to extend the existing building. Photo: John McElroy.

Gardaí investigating after satanic vandalism of Kenmare church



The symbol and message painted outside the Holy Cross Church in Kenmare. Photo: Patrick Connor-Scarteen.

Staff reporter

Gardaí are investigating an act of criminal damage after a Kenmare church was sprayed with a pentagram and black writing.

Parishioners were "shocked and outraged" to see the graffiti on the Holy Cross church when they arrived for Sunday Mass, February 13, according to a local councillor.

Patrick Connor-Scarteen – a local Fine Gael councillor in Kerry – told Kerry radio that the parishioners "couldn't believe such a vile act could be done on our holy ground and our lovely church."

"People are just very upset and

angry over it," Cllr. Connor-Scarteen said.

"It was quite a large symbol... I believe it's known as a satanic inverted pentagram."

Consecrated in 1864, the church was built after the famine, and is a "stunning structure built with the best of materials", Cllr. Connor-Scarteen continued.

"At the moment, there's a criminal investigation going on... we just hope the perpetrator is brought to justice."

Parish priest Fr George Hayes has also now asked experts to restore the facade and remove the graffiti safely.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Death of prominent Dublin-based monsignor

Monsignor Donal O'Doherty, who was retired PP of Holy Cross Parish Dundrum, died on Monday at Orwell Nursing Home, Dublin. Originally from Glenbeigh, Kerry, his death follows the recent death of his brother, Canon Micheál O'Doherty who passed away last month in Killorglin, Co. Kerry.

Nominated as a monsignor in 2007, Monsignor O'Doherty immediately dismissed notion of the award defining his ministry. "I won't

be using the title," he said, although he admitted that the honour surprised him.

"As a Kerryman, I grew up in a scene where there was only one thing that caused celebration and that was Kerry winning the All-Ireland final! I don't know what Benedict XVI would think of that scale of values!", he said.

Monsignor O'Doherty's funeral Mass will take place on Thursday at Holy Cross Church, Dundrum.

“A legacy of *incredible* humanitarian significance”



Fr. Aengus Finucane.

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

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

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

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

An Irish effort

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

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

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

With his commitment and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fr. Finucane's legacy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The devastation of climate change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

People like Yona Lambiki and his family.

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



Crops destroyed by Cyclone Idai.

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

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

Help for now and the future

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

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

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



Photo: Jason Kennedy / Concern Worldwide.

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

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

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

providing support for years – possibly decades – to come.

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

Will Fr. Finucane inspire you too?

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

How? By leaving Concern a gift in your Will.

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

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

– Dominic MacSorley, CEO, Concern Worldwide

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Love is in the air for Kingscourt couples



Philip and Eva McCabe of Kingscourt Parish, who are celebrating 65 years of marriage this year.

Ruadhán Jones

Many couples of Kingscourt Parish, Co. Cavan, renewed their wedding vows at a special Mass February 12 ahead of St Valentine's day.

Parish priest Fr Gerard MacCormack celebrated the Mass, which included one couple, Philip and Eva McCabe, who were celebrating the 65th anniversary of their marriage this year.



Evelyn and Francis O'Reilly.



Paraic and Irene White.



Pat and Teresa McEntee.



Jackie and Ken Campbell.



Patrick and Marian Farrelly.



Shane and Michelle Smith.



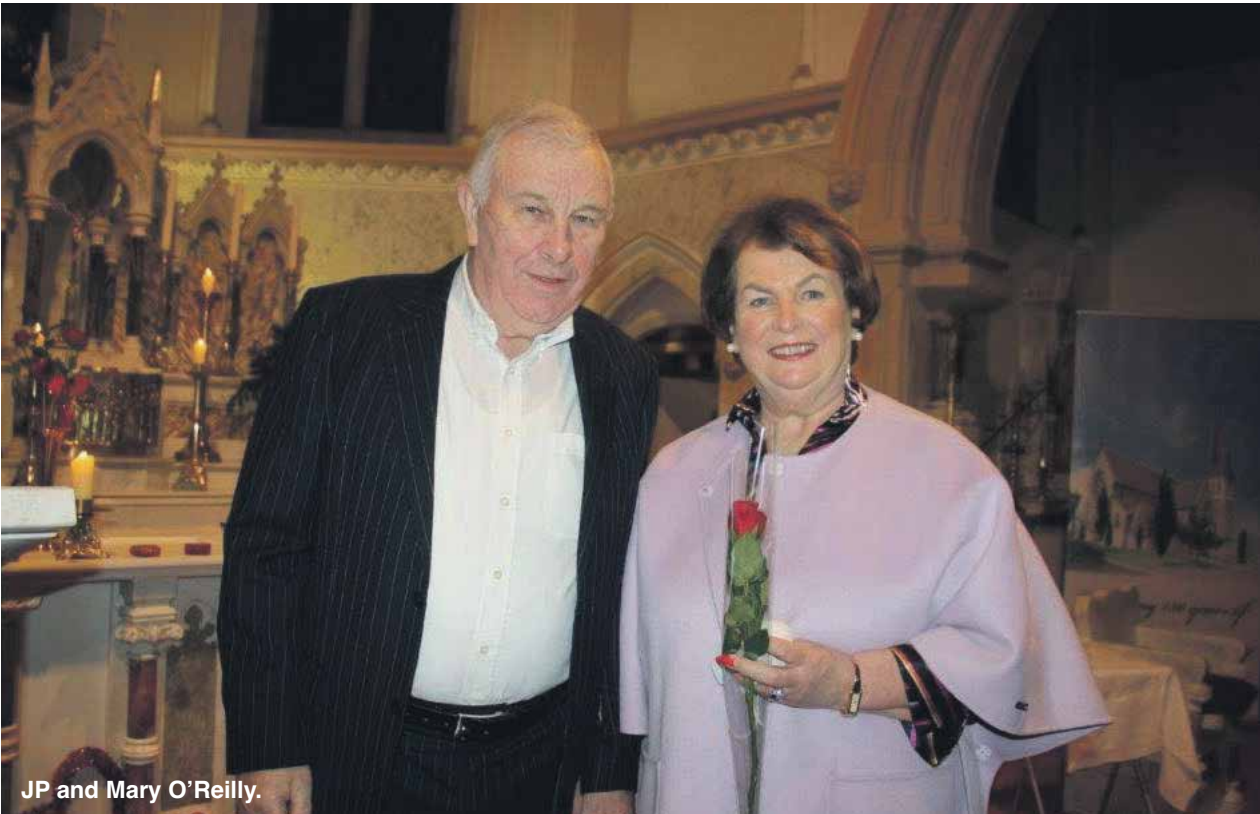
Lynn and
Colin McCabe.



Brian and
Fiona Caffrey.



Fintan and Fiona
Wooley.



JP and Mary O'Reilly.

Nuala O'Loan

The View



Synod is a real opportunity – not just another listening exercise

In March last year the bishops announced a new synodal pathway leading to a national synod assembly or assemblies. The purpose of that process was to answer one question – “What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?”

Some 500 people or groups wrote in to answer the question and the process is continuing towards a national synod in 2025.

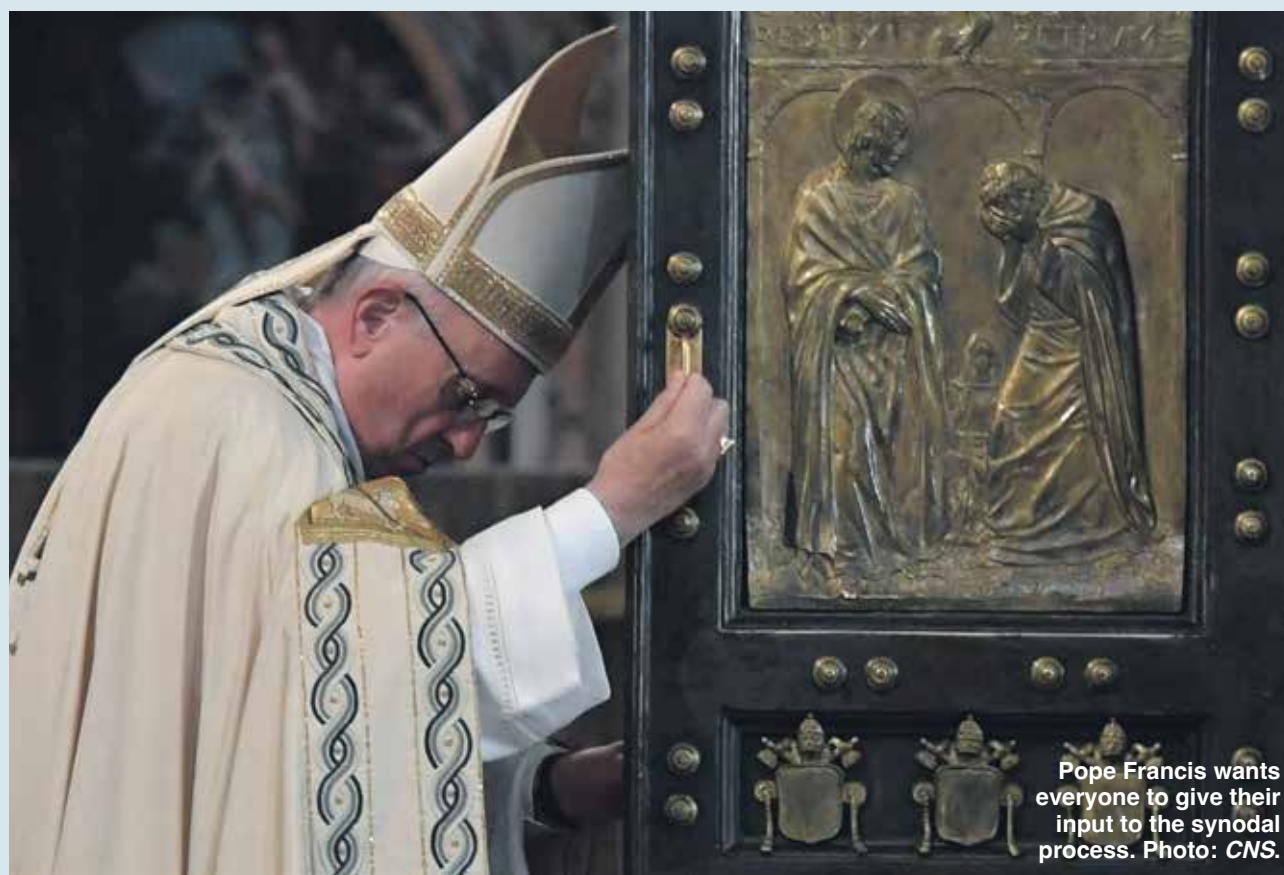
Then in October 2021, Pope Francis announced the global synodal pathway initiative in which the whole Catholic world is currently engaged – its purpose being to create “a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission”. A synodal Church has been described as a Church which gathers together and contemplates its whole way of being, which ponders on “the experiences of mourning and suffering that have unmasked many false certainties”, and “cultivates hope and faith in the goodness of the Creator and his creation”. We must face the lack of faith and the corruption which is part of our Church: the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people “due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.”

Lack of faith and corruption can also be the consequence of how laypeople function. Children and vulnerable women suffered in institutions in Ireland and elsewhere, not only because of the actions of clergy and religious, but also because of the complicity and failure to challenge of families and society generally.

Synodality

Through synodality, in the context of the three great themes: communion, participation, and mission, we are to find the way “as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit”.

Writing of this, Pope Francis said that “synodality is more than just a word or a slogan. Synodality is an expression of the very nature of the Church – the process of discerning how the Spirit is moving us, so that we may continue to fulfill



Pope Francis wants everyone to give their input to the synodal process. Photo: CNS.

our mission to evangelise in the world”.

That may seem a very simple concept. Indeed, it is simple: but how do you conduct a global process involving 1.3 billion people? How do you make it constructive, honest and effective?

“Through synodality, in the context of the three great themes: communion, participation, and mission”

There can be no doubt that there is, among other things, a sense of mystification as to what we are supposed to do and even what we are to talk about. It has been described thus: “many of the Faithful perceive the synodal process as a crucial moment in the Church’s life, as a learning process as well as an opportunity

for conversion and renewal of ecclesial life. At the same time, various difficulties have also emerged. In fact, fears and reticence are reported among some groups of the Faithful and among the clergy. There is also a certain mistrust among the laity who doubt that their contribution will really be taken into consideration.”

Natural

Perhaps the mystification is natural – what we are involved in is a global exercise of discernment of what the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to in the world today, and there is an inevitable uncertainty about where and to what the Holy Spirit will lead us.

There is also clarity though. Perhaps the first clarity is that synodality is something with which the Church has engaged since it was founded by Jesus Christ. When the early Christian communities needed to resolve certain practical problems or pastoral ques-

tions, they held an assembly of believers, called on God’s intercession through the Holy Spirit and discussed with those in positions of leadership. That process has continued in different forms over the centuries. For the most part though the ordinary people have not been involved.

“The first clarity is that synodality is something with which the Church has engaged since it was founded by Jesus Christ”

The second clarity emerges from the destiny to which we are all committed in this global process – it is a pathway to a synod of bishops in Rome in October next year. The bishops will meet to discuss the products of the

discernment which will take place between the ordinary people. It is to be hoped that the synod will have structures to enable the voice, not only of bishops and religious but also of the laity to be heard. Then we will enter into an implementation phase during which the products of our discernment, which will hopefully include a greater understanding of our call to holiness, will be given life within the Church. The Irish national synod in 2025 will be part of that process.

Renewed

What we are trying to create is a Church which is renewed and which goes forward in that spirit of listening and understanding, so that synodality, the process of journeying together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, becomes an ongoing reality.

The third clarity is to be found by looking at the timeline for the synodal Pathway. During the next two years

The fourth clarity lies in the proclaimed destination. We have to create a Church which ensures that the voices which were too long silent are heard and responded to. A Church which really is focused on the living relationship of each individual with God, and which knows the presence of God in the world living within each of us (whether part of our Church or not: we are called during this process to engage with our brothers and sisters who are not Catholic and to listen to and learn from their discernment about our Church), so that we definitively accept and respond to the presence of God in our world, manifested in the goodness and love, the empathy and compassion which is part of each of us. We must be a people of God focused on that presence of God within our world, living the way of the cross with each other.

“What we are trying to create is a Church which is renewed and which goes forward in that spirit of listening”

As part of this, we must ensure that the Church no longer covers up that which is wrong, whatever form of abuse of power is involved, creating as a consequence of the global synod and then later the Irish national synod, a robust structure to ensure that the Church does not fall into that trap of institutional protection which is the manifestation of corruption.

Each of us is called to engage through parish, diocese and other routes on this synodal pathway on which we hope to become the people we were created to be, walking the journey of service of others for which God created us: living in love.

We can answer the call and continue on the journey with the whole Church, or we can decry it as another listening exercise which will go nowhere. It will take faith, courage, commitment and above all honesty but we can do it if we but move forward in faith.

“Lack of faith and corruption can also be the consequence of how laypeople function”

GOAL – How it all began...

GOAL's journey, like so many others, started out as the determination of one person. Upon visiting Calcutta in 1977, John O'Shea – our founder, simply couldn't countenance the poverty and suffering he saw. A year later, and having founded GOAL, this former sports' journalist secured the agency's first donation of IR£30,000 from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs which was used to build a training centre for mothers on the outskirts of Calcutta. John had met doctors on his first visit to Calcutta, when they impressed upon him the importance of mother and child health care and the dire need for a training facility where young mothers could be taught the basics of looking after themselves and their babies properly – such as the correct feeding of infants, the importance of always using clean water and child immunisation. The mothers would then return to their towns or villages and catalyse behavioural change by sharing what they had been taught.

His companion for the journey was Mother Teresa

When John O'Shea arranged to visit the project, he was first invited to a small mass service hidden in the midst of Calcutta's slums which began at 4.30am. Thereafter, he was promised a lift with the Missionaries of Charity to the facility, some three hours outside the city. It was a journey that would remain with him for the rest of his life.

With the mass concluded, he hung around in the yard outside waiting for his lift, concerned about what an Irish sports journalist would have to discuss with an Indian nun for three hours in a car. However, as the transport arrived his concern turned to whether three hours would be enough: His companion for the journey was Mother Teresa.

He spent the rest of the day magnetised by the charisma of this small, saintly woman. Against the backdrop of what seemed like an unending tide of misery, he could



GOAL's Founder John O'Shea

not help but feel palpably uplifted by her extraordinary compassion and kindness, allied to her ironclad faith. Most of all, he was astonished by how at ease she was with everyone she met.

As the day lengthened, it was difficult not to feel desperate at the sight of so much poverty: Street after street, neighbourhood after neighbourhood, lay more suffering, more gut-wrenching human misery. He asked her, "When you work in these conditions every day, surrounded by so much suffering, do you ever wonder if you're making some kind of impact on this

poverty?" She turned and smiled, saying: "Every day of my life in Calcutta, I make it my business to lift a leper or a dying person or a child in desperate need and hug and kiss that person. I don't know whether that is the best thing to do for that person but I do know it's the right thing to do". Amid the dirt and the dying in Calcutta's slums, in the depths of the most appalling poverty, she harnessed the power of love, and its ability to light up even the darkest places.

Today, GOAL continues to bring that hope and love to some of the darkest corners in the world. We are operational in 14 countries, tending to some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities around the world. Since our inception work in India, GOAL has responded to almost every major humanitarian disaster of the time: From the Horn of Africa Famine, to the Rwandan Genocide, and from the Stephen's Day tsunami, to the Ebola crisis in West Africa, GOAL has been one of the first agencies on the ground responding to the needs of beleaguered communities. Our programmes range from emergency response (shelter, water, food and sanitary items), healthcare, water & sanitation, and sustainable livelihood opportunities, with over 14.3 million vulnerable people reached in 2020.

45 years on, thanks to people like you we continue to save lives

45 years on, thanks to people like you, we continue to save lives and alleviate the suffering of those affected by poverty and inequality.



A note from Mother Teresa takes pride of place in GOAL's reception area. It reads: *Dear GOAL Volunteers, Keep the joy of loving God and share this joy with all you come in touch – specially your family. God bless you. M. Theresa.*

There are many ways to support GOAL's work, but perhaps the most profound and far-reaching way is to leave a gift in your Will, once your own loved ones have been looked after.



GOAL has partnered with a local law firm to provide a confidential & professional will-writing service *free of charge*. There is no obligation to leave a gift to GOAL but doing so can transform lives. Visit goalglobal.org/freewill to find out more or contact Courtenay in confidence.

You may also request your free, no obligation brochure. Please contact Courtenay Pollard, GOAL's Legacy Manager, in complete confidence:

Phone: 01-2809779 or email: cpollard@goal.ie



Legacy Manager, Courtenay Pollard visits GOAL's Drop in Centre for street connected children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate

This Sunday our Gospel (Luke 6:27-38) picks up from last Sunday when we were introduced to the Sermon on the Mount which is the charter of Christian living. This charter is inspired by a new revelation of God's relationship with us. God is revealed as our Father in a way never previously known. In the entire Old Testament, God is called Father fourteen times, not in the sense of a personal relationship but as creator of all, and father-protector of his chosen people. In the Gospels, Jesus calls God as Father more than 177 times, 15 times in the Sermon on the Mount alone. This is where there is a massive advance from the Old Testament to the New. Jesus came down to share in our humanity so that we might share in his divinity as children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus taught us to pray not just to his Father but to our Father. "To all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:14). Becoming a child of God, growing in the likeness of God, is a lifelong ideal to reflect God's love.

“The ideal that Jesus sets before us is that we should be mirrors of God's compassionate love”

Ideals are like stars: we may never reach them but we chart our course by them. Certainly, some of the ideals of Christ are beyond our natural powers. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly." Jesus did not allow the wrongs of others to contaminate his love. He prayed for those who were crucifying him. The greatest proof of authentic Christianity is being willing to forgive.

Supernatural power

Forgiveness is not easy. In fact, you could say that forgiveness is not natural. It has to come from a supernatural force...what we call grace. When we are faced with a problem of forgiveness, what can we do? Bitter memories, anger and maybe the desire for vengeance will burrow their way into the memory and heart. Darkness envelops our thinking and a hard shell grows around the heart.

There is no point in saying to someone, "Ah, forget it!" You cannot switch off memory like a tap. We do not have the option of remembering or forgetting. But the option we do have is

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



how we remember. We can remember with bitterness or we can implore God to lift us up to a higher plane of thinking where our remembering will be more compassionate and forgiving. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers this advice: "It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offence, but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming hurt into intercession." The Holy Spirit can lift us up to the bigger picture. We begin to see that it was sickness of character that caused the offender to do wrong. I met an old lady who had just been robbed of her purse by a young man. Her immediate reaction was to pray for that sick person who would attack an old lady. Pity for any sick character turns hatred into compassion. And prayer for that sick mind replaces words of bitterness. Never forget the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

In his famous book, *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm says that love is more than infatuation, attraction or compatibility of character. Love resides in the will. It is a decision to be positive. It is a stance one takes for life. True Christianity is a powerful river of love that refuses to be polluted by the wrongdoing of others.

Unconditional love

The ideal that Jesus sets before us is that we should be mirrors of God's compassionate love. "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." St John tells us that God is love. That means that God's love for all his creatures is never less than 100%. God's love is unconditional. It is not limited by any conditions. Even the worst of sinners are still loved by God although their sins are despised. "But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike" (Matthew 5:44-45).

It was a message taken to heart by a young Jewish woman in Holland, Etty Hillesum, at a time when she was facing inevitable arrest and transportation to a concentration camp. In her diary she wrote about those who would one day arrest her:



Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*.

"They are merciless, totally without pity. And we must be all the more merciful ourselves. That is why I prayed early this morning." She knew that only prayer and the grace of God could overcome the natural instinct to respond to hatred with more hatred. And she wrote that every atom of hatred that we add to the world makes it still more inhospitable. By the grace of God, she refused to be contaminated by the evil hatred she would face. Surely, the mind and heart of a saint.

Dream of Jesus

The dream of Jesus was for a world where the Father's unconditional love would be reflected in the lives of his children on earth. He saw the barriers of distrust removed and the walls of hatred dismantled. He saw

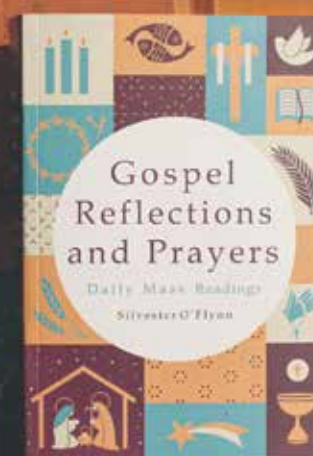
the hurts of life healed by compassion and the wounds of remembrance healed by forgiveness. The ideal he set before his disciples is to "love one another as I have loved you". Where will this supernatural power come from? Saint Paul has the answer. "Hope will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of your faithful. Enkindle within us the fire of your love. May the heat of this fire melt all hardness of heart and mould us into the likeness of Christ. Fill us and use us to be instruments of forgiveness, peace and compassion.

More of Fr Silvester's Gospel Reflections

ARE AVAILABLE



**ORDER
Gospel
Reflections
and Prayers
TODAY**

€19.99
+€4.50 P&P

columba BOOKS

Phone 01 6874096 | Visit www.columbabooks.com



Remaking classics to fit in with modern feminist sensibilities violates the spirit of Tolkien, writes David Quinn

The first *Lord of the Rings* movie, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, was released 20 years ago in December. Directed by Peter Jackson it was a faithful adaptation of the book of the same name by JRR Tolkien and proved a huge hit with cinema-audiences winning multiple awards.

It was followed in successive years by movies based on the two other books in Tolkien's trilogy, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*.

Mr Jackson then made three movies based on *The Hobbit*, a much smaller work than *The Lord of the Rings* and it suffered (in my opinion), by being too stretched out. Mr Jackson and his writers had to make up plenty of material to make it run as long as the nine-hour combined running time of the three *Lord of the Rings* movies.

But at least Mr Jackson attempted to remain true to the spirit of *The Hobbit*. Anything he added to it, seemed to belong there. He was faithful to the book, to its millions of fans, and to Tolkien's vision for his creation, just as he was true to *The Lord of the Rings*. Why change something that is wildly popular? *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the best-selling books of all time, and regularly makes the top of readers' choice lists.

“The new Amazon series, on the other hand, takes the character of Galadriel, the Elf-Queen in *The Lord of the Rings*, and turns her into a warrior”

In fact, it would have been a risk for Mr Jackson to have interfered with the books too much. If the fans didn't like what he had done, they would have stayed away from the movies, and they would have flopped, losing tens of millions of dollars in the process.

Well, the makers of an upcoming TV series set in Tolkien's world don't seem to care about that risk. It is to be called *The Rings of Power* and is due out on Amazon Prime (a TV streaming service like Netflix) in September.

It is set in an earlier era than *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR). Tolkien wrote many stories set in his mythi-

The Lord of the Rings goes ‘woke’



Gandalf (Ian McKellen) wields a sword in battle during a scene from *The Return of the King*, the finale in the *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. Photo: CNS

cal world. Some of them are gathered together in a volume called *The Silmarillion*. The upcoming Amazon series draws on those.

Images from the series were released last week and fans are up in arms about them because it appears the makers are departing in a serious way from the spirit of the Tolkien books. They appear to have taken modern, multi-cultural, ‘woke’ ideology and super-imposed it on Tolkien's world.

Mythology

That world is based on northern European mythology. The setting is something like northern Europe in the early Middle Ages, although more southern and eastern regions feature a little, where other, non-European style races come from.

As such, we have a definite vision of Tolkien's world in our minds. It is not far removed from what we think of when we imagine the world of Norse mythology, or that of King Arthur and the Knight of the Round Table. What we imagine is not multi-cultural. It is also a world in which nearly all the warriors are men because it would have been deemed cowardly and dishonourable to risk women in battle.

The new Amazon series, on the other hand, takes the character of

Galadriel, the Elf-Queen in *The Lord of the Rings*, and turns her into a warrior, literally a knight in shining armour.

Although female dwarves barely feature in Tolkien's world, the series will have a black, dwarf princess. This seems tokenistic.

One of the advisors to the series is feminist academic, Mariana Rios Maldonado. One of her areas of research is the works of Tolkien. She aims to move Tolkien's characters beyond “binary male/female gender paradigms”, in other words his traditional depiction of the sexes.

Tolkien was, of course, a devout Catholic and firmly traditional in his views. He was extremely well acquainted with the mythologies of northern Europe and wanted his own creation to be faithful to them. It would hardly have occurred to him to interfere with their spirit. If you were going to do that, come up with something completely different.

Modern

If he wanted his world to look like modern, multi-cultural London or New York, he would have depicted it that way.

If he wanted women to be fighters just as much as men, he would have done that too.

But if he had done either of those things, then his world would not have seemed much like a mythical version of early, medieval Europe. It would have seemed like something else entirely.

“Tolkien was, of course, a devout Catholic and firmly traditional in his views”

Interfering with his world, and remaking it to fit in with modern, multi-cultural and feminist sensibilities violates the spirit of Tolkien.

It is equivalent to basing a series on a book set in (say), a mythical version of China or Japan, but making it look like neither of those places. Why would you do that? People would be entitled to feel annoyed.

It is also equivalent to taking the Arthurian legends and deciding they are not multi-cultural and feminist enough and therefore making King Arthur himself a Hispanic character, and half the Knights of the Round Table men, and the other half women. They would come from numerous ethnic groups.

You could do that, but why would you? Again, you end up with a series

set in very different looking world from the original story, and again, fans would be entitled to feel angry.

Needless to say, the makers of *The Rings of Power* are accusing their critics of ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’. This is incredibly lazy.

Radical

How would they feel if someone took the feminist, science-fiction classic, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and instead of the villains being Christian fundamentalists, they were radical Islamists, and the setting was altered so it no longer seemed like a futuristic America? There would be uproar from fans.

Or closer to home, suppose someone decided to remake *The Quiet Man* but the west of Ireland of the 1950s had modern multi-culturalism imposed on it? The Maureen O'Hara character might be from Lithuania, and the John Wayne character from Brazil.

That might work if you set it in modern-day Ireland, but it would be completely against the spirit of the much-loved original story and setting.

The makers of the new Amazon series should have left well enough alone. People love the Tolkien books as they are, and the Jackson movies as well because they are true to them. It is a winning formula. Turning them into something else is putting ideology above art and fans are right to rebel.

We can only be thankful that Jackson made his movies two decades ago. If he was doing it today, he would be forced to go ‘woke’, and they would almost undoubtedly have flopped.

“Although female dwarves barely feature in Tolkien's world, the series will have a black, dwarf princess. This seems tokenistic”

Debates about assisted suicide must focus on life's value – bishop



People are not something less when they are sick or injured and must be given every assistance to live life to their fullest, Chai Brady hears

For the 30th World Day of the Sick, Pope Francis highlighted the importance of a pastoral presence for those who are suffering due to sickness, particularly mentioning those whose last moments on earth were experienced without their loved ones by their side because of pandemic restrictions.

He hailed Catholic healthcare institutions, saying “their presence is a blessing” and they must be treasured and protected, adding: “At a time in which

the culture of waste is widespread and life is not always acknowledged as worthy of being welcomed and lived, these structures, like ‘houses of mercy’, can be exemplary in protecting and caring for all life, even the most fragile, from its beginning until its natural end.”

Legalisation

The Pope’s message comes at a time when debates intensify regarding the legalisation of assisted suicide in Ireland. For example, earlier this month a pro-euthanasia group called Exit International, who advocate for there being almost no limits to euthanasia, launched an Irish branch.

While the ‘Dying with Dignity Bill’ which sought to legislate for assisted suicide did not proceed to Committee Stage due to “serious technical issues” found by the Joint Committee on Justice – published in a July 2021 report – a more detailed bill will certainly be introduced.

The theme of this year’s World Day of the Sick is ‘Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful’ (Luke 6:36). It took place on February 11.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the chair of the Council for Healthcare of the Irish bishops’ Conference, Bishop Michael Router, said the World Day of the Sick – established by St John Paul II – aims to encourage people “to focus on the sick to some degree and to provide what-

ever support and care we can for them”.

“Sometimes medical intervention is not going to be enough to cure a person but we believe that the person is more than just the illness itself, more than just flesh and bone as we have the spirit as well. This year’s World Day of the Sick was aiming to get people to focus on that, that pastoral care of others is very important as well,” he said.

“The spiritual care that we give to people, that can be very healing. It might not cure the person of their physical illness but it can be healing on so many different other levels.”

“They suffered physically but also emotionally, mentally and spiritually as well as a result of that”

Bishop Router said that the Pope, in his message, stated that for the people Jesus encountered, illness was something which isolated them from the community, particularly with contagious illnesses such as leprosy.

“People had to live outside of the community, to live on their own or to live as

a small community of other people who suffer from the same illness but it was very, very isolating and people suffered on a different level. They suffered physically but also emotionally, mentally and spiritually as well as a result of that.

“That can still happen to a degree today even though we’re very advanced medically, the people who are sick or elderly they can be isolated by their infirmity and it’s part of our role to reach out to those people in love and mercy, to bring them into the community as such and to provide them with the care they need on several different levels, not just the physical level.”

Assisted suicide

Speaking on the issue of assisted suicide, the bishop said that no matter how restricted a person’s life may be by illness or disability, it must be valued.

“Life has a purpose, we have to try and focus on that and give people the resources to be able to live life to the full no matter what is happening to them and to value their life and their contribution to society, so that they are not isolated,” he said.

“We have a very strong hospice movement in this

country and there’s such wonderful experience there, of people being helped in the final weeks and months of their lives. I think in the first debates that have happened in the Oireachtas there has been, in the medical profession, quite a strong support for our position that life is sacred until the end.

“Prepare them for the next step in their eternal journey which we believe in as Catholics”

“It’s not just about physical health and well-being which is often the focus in the modern world. We’re something less than we should be if we’re sick, or injured or disabled in some way.”

Bishop Router said that it’s very understandable when people find themselves in great pain and restriction, they will look for a way to deal with it “in what they consider to be a dignified way”.

“But we promote something else as Christians, as Catholics, we promote that the very best can be done for

every person in that situation in their life so that they don’t have to suffer pain, that they don’t have to suffer unduly and that they’re given the emotional, psychological and spiritual help to cope with the very terrible issues that sometimes they are faced with,” he said.

He added that even when there’s nothing medically that can be done for those who are dying, the spiritual help that afforded to people can bring a real sense of healing and “prepare them for the next step in their eternal journey which we believe in as Catholics”.

Diagnosis

“And it may help to heal some of the hurts of the past, to look back and to heal those as well and to come to terms with what’s happening to them and maybe issues which have happened in their lives so it’s a very important time in those weeks and months after a person has received a terminal diagnosis.

“We feel the whole debate on euthanasia doesn’t recognise that, the importance of that period between diagnosis and natural death and I think any of us who worked in pastoral ministry, who worked as parish priests or hospital chaplains or nurses or doctors, we do appreciate the value of that time and how important it is.”



Bishop Michael Router.

Church reform continues as Bishop Duignan to also lead Galway Diocese

Staff reporter

The Vatican's reform of structures in the Church in Ireland took another step forward on Friday with news that Bishop of Clonfert Michael Duignan is to take over the running of the neighbouring Diocese of Galway.

It is the first move in reforms that are expected to see a dramatic reduction in the number of bishops in Ireland.

This had been widely expected since November when the Pope's representative in Ireland Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo announced that when Bishop Brendan Kelly of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora retired the two dioceses would be united under one bishop.

Officials are at pains to point out that it is not an amalgamation and that both dioceses will retain their individual structures.

This paper reported in November that there was huge resistance to formal amalgamation from Irish bishops, so the decision was made to unite the two dioceses instead while both retain their individual identity and separate structures.

The move by Pope Francis to put two dioceses in the west under the leadership of a single bishop is just the first phase of structural rationalisation in the Church in Ireland, *The Irish Catholic* understands.

It is believed further consolidation will follow. A source close to the talks indicated to this newspaper that the Vatican was not keen to impose solutions but instead wanted local dioceses to come up with proposals. However, the source also said that Rome's patience would "not be eternal in the absence of local solutions".

The source added that amalgamation and the subsequent unifying of structures and resources "was not the top priority". However, they said that it was likely the most inevitable end in most cases.

"The Holy See wants to be flexible, the Irish bishops know what is best for Ireland but we need fewer dioceses," the source said.

Pope Francis has now accepted Bishop Kelly's retire-

ment which was submitted last May. Fifty-one-year-old Bishop Duignan has led Clonfert, one of the country's smallest dioceses with just 24 parishes and fewer than 40,000 Catholics, since 2019.

Speaking in Galway on Friday Bishop Duignan paid tribute to Bishop Kelly and said: "There is no doubt that today is a historic day for the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. It is also a historic day for the Diocese of Clonfert and indeed for the Catholic Church in Ireland.

"Under the guidance of St Peter himself in the person of Pope Francis – we have been nudged together to do something genuinely new," he said.

He said that "we begin a new stage in our journey. A stage that I hope will be in the best sense of the term deeply 'synodal'.

"Over the next months and years, there is much to be worked out and work it out we will together. It will require patience and generosity from all of us, from our parish communities and our dioceses. It will mean both listening to each other and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

"In the process, we are called to prayerfully discern how we, as a people of faith, are to walk together into the future. A future that will require all of us – bishop, priests, religious and laity to work shoulder to shoulder, to renew in our own hearts a lively sense that life is better not worse when lived with Christ.

"With our hearts renewed, perhaps our greatest challenge will be to respectfully show forth in deed and word the value of knowing Christ. To unlock the life-changing potential of the Gospel, especially for those who lie hurt and broken, feeling rejected, on the edges of our Church and our society," he said.

A native of Athlone, Co. Roscommon, Bishop Duignan is the eldest of six children. He was ordained to the Priesthood for the Diocese of Elphin on 17 July 1994.

The Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora includes portions of counties Galway, Mayo and Clare. The Diocese of Clonfert includes portions of counties Galway, Offaly and Roscommon.



Bishop Michael Duignan (right) has been announced as the new Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora, to replace Bishop Brendan Kelly (left) who is to retire, having reached his seventy-fifth birthday. Photos: Mike Shaughnessy



Papal Nuncio Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo preaches during Mass, alongside Bishops Michael Duignan and Brendan Kelly.



Pictured is Bishop Michael Duignan, congratulated by Fr Diarmuid Hogan following the Mass in Galway Cathedral on Friday.



Bishop Duignan receives flowers following his announcement as bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora.



Pictured is Samuel Olasak with his mother Ivana attending the Mass in Galway Cathedral on Friday.



Bishop Duignan is pictured alongside local schoolchildren following his appointment.

It's Saints that offer the secret to successful synodality



Cardinal Newman, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus have a lot to teach us about synodality, writes Kingsley Jones

In a time of confusion and division in the Church, to whom should we go? We could try St Irenaeus, whom Pope Francis has recently declared the Church's Doctor of Unity, or perhaps Bishop William Creen of Cloyne's nominee, John Henry Newman or maybe my own candidate St Justin Martyr. So, let me explain why these three saints matter now.

It's tempting to believe that we are living in the age of Newman, in the shadow of his subtle thought and under the influence of his sanctity. Certainly, Bishop Creen thinks so: he launched the synodal process in his diocese, on October 17, 2021, by invoking Newman's notion of the infallibility of the people of God, that *sensus fidelium* that Pope Francis hopes will inspire his synodal process.

This invocation of the spirit of Newman is appropriate, for not only did he champion the infallibility of the people of God, but he also advocated another truism of the synodal process, the necessity of development in Christian doctrine and practice.

But Newman was not only the prophet of the laity and the exponent of the priority of change: he was also a Church historian whose theology was grounded in the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. From them, Newman learnt that though the Church needs change, not every change preserves its tradition, and thus it needs an authority to guide it.

Newman also believed that the Church is a tradition of a special kind. He noted drily in his *Development of Christian Doctrine* that if we believe the Church faces an unprecedented crisis because it is under siege from enemies within and without, we would be mistaken, for crisis is the essence of the Church's identity. Newman believed the Church must always be in conflict with the world – with its rulers, its sages and its institu-

tions. If conflict is the mark of the authentic Church, then, Newman argues, it must have leadership, and that leadership has always come from the Pope. How appropriate then that Pope Francis is offering the Church a way out of its current crisis through his synodal process.

He did so with the following stirring words "May we be pilgrims in love with the Gospel and open to the surprises of the Spirit. Let us not miss out on the grace-filled opportunities born of encounter, listening, and discernment. In the joyful conviction that, even as we seek the Lord, he always comes with his love to meet us first."

Striking sentiments

These striking sentiments, full of confidence and hope, are characteristic of Pope Francis' pastoral papacy. He is eager to revitalise the Church and its mission and impatient of the 'clerical Church', of those dogged by the desire to maintain doctrinal orthodoxy and traditional structures. In contrast, he urges us to find new methods for transcending old conflicts, using a new set of tools: encounter, listening and discernment. Thus, he expects to awaken the slumbering giant, the *sensus fidelium*.

But if we are to embrace Newman's *sensus fidelium* through a process of encounter, listening and discernment how are we to reconcile this with his vision of a Church perpetually in crisis? Has the *sensus fidelium* ever flexed its muscles in a period like our own?

If we are looking for a period in which through the efforts of both clergy and laity, the Church withstood external and internal opposition, the second century Church presents a good example. In a time of persecution and doctrinal confusion, the Church was saved by the first representatives of the *sensus fidelium*, the apologists, who explained and defended the Church.

At this time, Christians were a reviled minority, discriminated against by the powerful Roman Empire and shunned and ridiculed by their numerous pagan neighbours. Brutal repression was never far away. The second century Church was also plagued by a vociferous minority who boldly proclaimed their deviation from her orthodox teaching, offering

their disciples instead a knowledge (*gnosis*) of higher things.

In response, there emerged fearless teachers and controversialists prepared to engage opponents on their own ground. Today, apologists like Marcius Athenagoras, Tatian, St Hippolytus and St Apollonius are forgotten, while others, such as Tertullian, are merely names in textbooks, but the name of a St Justin is still familiar and his near contemporary, St Irenaeus, is the Church's newest doctor. Some defended the Faith against outrageous accusations of atheism, incest and cannibalism while others guarded the Faithful from the blandishments and seductive teaching of the Gnostics.

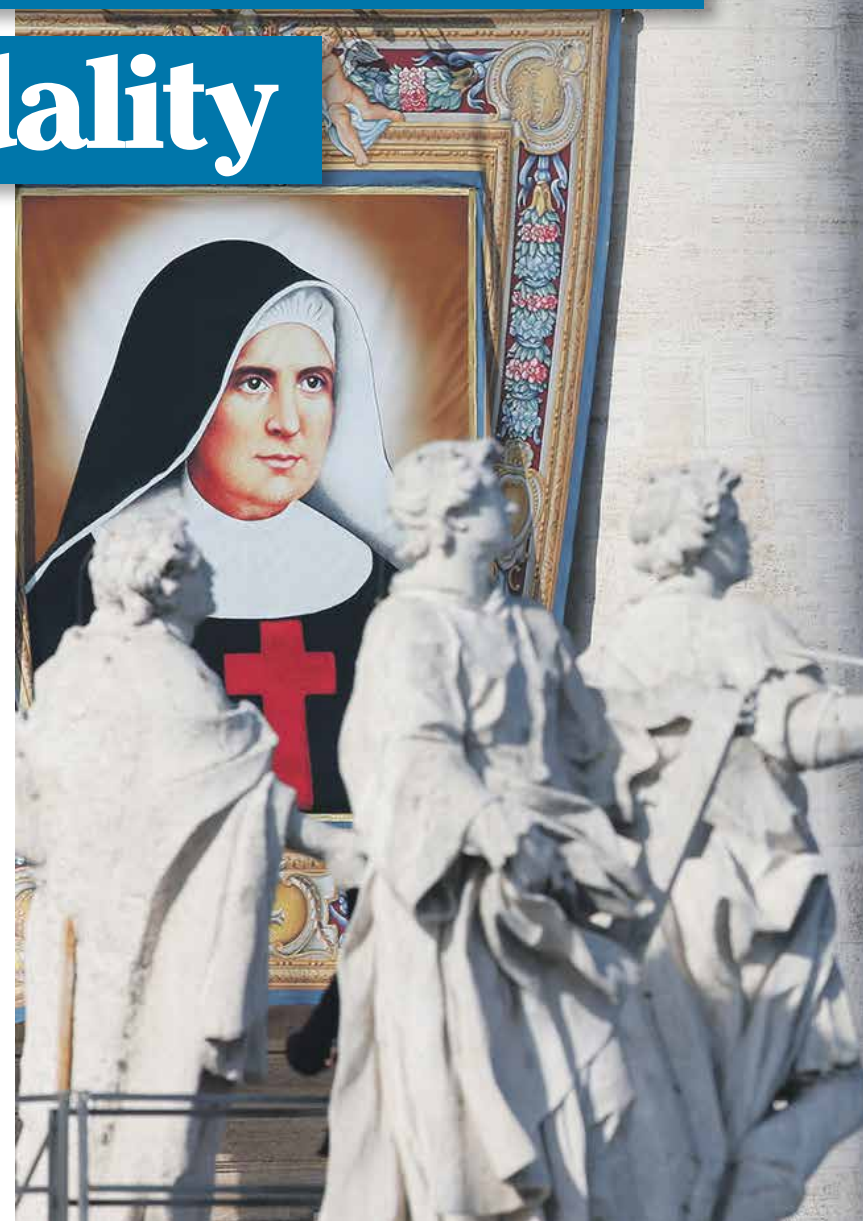
These apologists had a firm grasp of their faith, had the boldness to defend it no matter how unpopular that was and were un-intimidated by the task of using the radically different values of Christianity to reproach the dominant culture.

“St Justin was equally forthright and fearless in defending the Faith and, where necessary, in attacking the ideological foundation of the Roman state and its social order”

We can more readily appreciate their boldness when we recall that these Christians had more than one option for dealing with the dominant culture: they could have entirely rejected it and retreated into an unyielding Christian purity; or they could have engaged with it, both critically and sympathetically, showing, above all, how it needed Christianity; or they could have acknowledged its superiority and adjusted the Faith accordingly.

There were Apologists and teachers for each path and their various fates teach important lessons: for those who chose the paths of complete rejection or complete assimilation tended to fall away, while those who took the path of engagement stayed in the Church and defended the Faith.

Tatian is a prime example of an apologist who took the first path. Although he was a pupil of St Justin,



his writings disclose an unrelenting hostility towards Greek culture and a sustained rejection of its role as the cultural foundation of the Roman state. This reflected the particularly puritanical stance he took towards nature in general, a Gnostic pessimism that led him eventually into heresy, for in rejecting this world he rejected the foundation of Christian hope, the Incarnation.

St Justin was equally forthright and fearless in defending the Faith and, where necessary, in attacking the ideological foundation of the Roman state and its social order. However, he combined this uncompromising zeal with a willingness to seek out common ground with opponents and to appeal to the reasonableness of Christian beliefs in terms that would have been familiar to them.

But even as St Justin articulated the orthodox case for Christianity, assimilating to it all that was best in the dominant culture, others were

working from within to undermine the Christian faith for the sake of that culture. These 'Gnostics', men like Valentinus and Marcion, wanted to subordinate Christianity to the exigencies of contemporary pagan belief.

Gnostic teachings

It was Pope Francis' new Doctor of Unity, the Greek bishop of Lyons, St Irenaeus, who, towards the end of the second century, in his *Against the Heretics*, defended the Faith by providing a very detailed critique of these Gnostic teachings. He begins his work with a warning: cunning teachers were falsifying Christian truth and drawing away the unwary by their sophistries. He then demonstrates that the Gnostics wanted to substitute an intellectual division of the enlightened from the ignorant for the core of Christian belief, the drama of sin and redemption.

Against this theological innovation, Irenaeus asserted that the Church's teaching has always been the same, founded on the uniform testimony of the Prophets and of the apostles and their chosen successors, the bishops. It was a testimony to the perfection of the Christ and to the activity of the Spirit in the Church, and the strongest argument for its truthfulness was the fidelity with which the

“This invocation of the spirit of Newman is appropriate, for not only did he champion the infallibility of the people of God, but he also advocated another truism of the synodal process, the necessity of development in Christian doctrine and practice”



Church had professed the same faith, unity and hope everywhere.

This, Irenaeus insisted, is the plan of salvation, 'the Gospel', and Christians derive their faith from it because the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have bequeathed it to those they ordained as their successors. It is the rule of faith: one Father, one Word, one Spirit and one God by whom and through whom this world was made and is governed.

“Nevertheless, they were a perennial temptation for second century Christians and thus a threat to the Church”

Irenaeus declared that only through one Church is this hope accessible to believers, so that anyone who follows the Gnostics in trying to replace this rule of faith with a system of their own, cuts themselves off from this hope. The mark of this hopelessness will be disunity: the factiousness that the Gnostics displayed when they vied with one another for followers and denied the authority of the apostles. In doing so, they denied themselves access not only to the truth but also to salvation.

Irenaeus averred that, in con-

trast, true Christian teachers will not search for another God, invent a different Christ or discern a new Spirit; nor will they proclaim anything other than the rule handed down to us by the apostles. They will search for the truth revealed by God, and when they find it, they will expound it faithfully and they will conform their behaviour to it.

Vantage point

From our vantage point, we may find it difficult to understand how anything as archaic, outmoded, torturous and self-contradictory as these Gnostic teachings could have proved so seductive to large numbers of Christians. Nevertheless, they were a perennial temptation for second century Christians and thus a threat to the Church.

But we can understand the enduring appeal of gnostic ideas for their classical audience when we grasp that the gnostic doctrines were the last stand of pagan Greek culture. By appealing to ideas that were deeply ingrained in the cultural inheritance of pagans, the gnostics made the novel doctrines of Christianity seem more plausible and more acceptable. They sought to domesticate the wild Christian beast, and to transform the Church in Rome into the Church of Rome.

In Newman's case, his departure from the Church of England was precipitated by his realisation that the Church of England was no more than the modern renewal of that same gnostic project, the creation of a Church of England to replace the Church in England. This new Church existed to accommodate Christianity to whatever was the national spirit of the time; whereas the Catholic Church remained what it had always been, the community of the Faithful, united by the Gospel and boldly proclaiming it.

“This was the lesson Newman learned from the apologists”

Newman had understood that the living tradition of the Church enables it to elaborate its doctrines and practices in accordance with their spirit and to resist efforts to deviate from them, and that it does so by the hand of a guiding authority. He argued in his *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* that one of its tools for doing this was the *sensus fidelium*, but clearly he believed in the *sensus fidelium*, not in the spirit of the times.

This was the lesson Newman learned from the apologists. They were confident that the Church has

“But all of this begs the question: what happened to this fidelity, unity and courage in the modern Church in Ireland?”

a message that the world needs to hear, whether it wants to hear it or not, a message proclaimed as much in the lives of its most humble members as by its visible hierarchy. It was this confidence which gave them their remarkable fearlessness, their indefatigable willingness to contest the ideology of the world in which they lived and their unyielding determination to root out those within the fold who were attempting to undermine the proclamation of those truths.

Controversies

There is also a very obvious contemporary resonance to these controversies, for since Vatican II the Church has been divided by partisans of the very same positions, on the one hand traditionally-minded Catholics who have wanted to retreat within the redoubt of traditional teachings and practices and to give no quarter to the culture by which the Church finds itself surrounded, and on the other, radicals

who find the influence of contemporary culture irresistible and who see no compelling reasons to resist it.

But I hope it is clear by now that I am arguing that if we want to complete the Pope's project of synodality, our orthodox tradition testifies that to the virtues of encounter, listening and discernment we must add the traditional Catholic virtues of fidelity, unity and courage, the very virtues displayed by Saint Justin when he cajoled the pagans, by Bishop Irenaeus when he defended his flock against the Gnostics and by John Henry Newman when he crossed his Rubicon. We cannot retreat or simply concede defeat, we must take that path of engaging positively but critically with those within and without the Church who proclaim the infallibility of contemporary culture.

But all of this begs the question: what happened to this fidelity, unity and courage in the modern Church in Ireland?

Addressing the ‘huge escalation’ of gender-based violence



Faith leaders can play a transformative role in tackling violence against women and girls around the world, Trócaire tells Chai Brady

While gender-based violence has always been a plight across the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a major increase with many countries unable to respond due to a lack of resources or training, activists say.

Now, the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (ICGBV), which is made up of 13 NGOs and State bodies, has warned that violence against women is a “pandemic within a pandemic”.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Caoimhe de Barra, Chair of the ICGBV and CEO of Trócaire, the overseas development arm of the Church in Ireland, said that gender-based violence is “a shadow pandemic” which has “escalated hugely”, impacting millions of women and girls around the world due to Covid restrictions.

She said that the increase in reports of domestic violence during the pandemic in Ireland

is mirrored in every country Trócaire works, saying: “We’ve seen an intensification of violence against women and girls. Where you have situations where people have been affected by lockdown – what we call the secondary impact of Covid – there are things like economies going seriously downhill, where you have high rates of inflation, where food prices are increasing, where people have struggled to continue to maintain a livelihood and maybe have depleted their assets, they’ve had to sell assets as a result, so that builds up stress and pressure within a household which is one of the huge contributing factors to domestic gender-based violence.”

Strategic plan

Speaking at the launch of the ICGBV’s new strategic plan for 2021–2026, Ms de Barra called on the Government to leverage its political and leadership capital around the world to address gender-based violence and advance gender equality at the international level.

Asked about Trócaire’s particular expertise in the area compared to the others players in the consortium, Ms de Barra said their response to gender-based violence is particularly focused on situations of conflict and emergencies.

“We have a very high level of expertise in what – in our sector – we call protection. It is a very broad term but in essence what we do a lot of work on is how to ensure, that women and girls in particular, their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence in a situation of emergency is reduced to the greatest degree possible and that if gender-based violence occurs, that women and girls have access to the services and supports that they need as survivors. We work in this area

across a very large number of countries,” she said.

In this regard, Trócaire focuses on several conflict areas around the world, including some in East Africa, where ongoing conflict has led to horrific instances of gender-based violence.

Ms de Barra said: “We bring that particular expertise to the table, to the consortium, but every member of the consortium brings their own expertise to the table and that’s what makes it so valuable, we learn from each other, we share, we collaborate, we carry out joint research, we carry out analysis and advocacy together.”

“We are unique, there is no other entity that we are aware of globally that combines the forces of NGOs, the Government of Ireland, plus the Defence Forces in working on this together and that’s really important because we’re often working on the ground in the same context.”

“Patriarchal attitudes and beliefs are justified by traditional and religious norms and reinforced by anti-democratic and conservative political agendas”

She added that the Irish Defence Forces, are “rightly proud” that they have had the longest continuous contribution of peacekeepers to UN missions of any UN member state.

“You have peacekeeping missions that include an Irish contingent in countries where maybe

“This was made possible due to the message being delivered from diocese, to parish, to small Christian community level”

Trócaire, maybe Goal, maybe Concern and maybe other members of the consortium are also working and they have a particular role to play,” Ms de Barra said, “so we support each other in trying to ensure that standards are strong, they can be strong on paper but whether they’re strong in implementation is the big question, so we work together to make sure that the global standards around protection of women and girls in particular from gender-based violence in emergency and conflict situations is as strong as it can be.”

In the ICGBV strategic plan, called ‘Amplifying women’s voices’, it states that religious norms can perpetuate gender-based violence, saying gender-based violence is rooted in “deep societal norms of gender inequality that are underpinned by patriarchal socio-cultural attitudes and unequal power relations. Patriarchal attitudes and beliefs are justified by traditional and religious norms and reinforced by anti-democratic and conservative political agendas”.

Religion

Asked about the role of religion in gender-based violence, Ms de Barra said that working with faith leaders can play a “hugely positive role” and is “tremendously transformational” in tackling gender-based violence.

“Faith leaders, because of their ability to shape and influence norms, have this incredibly positive role they can play, that’s the really key message that we need

to get out,” she said.

“I think sometimes people shy away from engaging with faith leaders, it is certainly something that takes time but it is something that is hugely worth the investment and that’s been Trócaire’s experience, that when you make the investment to engage with faith leaders across the multiple faiths then actually you can achieve huge transformational change.”

“She added that because of this faith leaders have been ‘absolutely pivotal in shifting norms’”

“I don’t think that centring negativity around religion is helpful. I think it’s much more helpful, and that’s been our experience, to look at faith leaders and the community that they lead, how can you support them to understand and to tackle this issue through their values base.”

In Uganda, Trócaire worked with Church leadership and the leadership of the Islamic religious congregations and went through a process aimed at supporting them to become aware of what was happening within families in their communities.

Ms de Barra said that “once awareness was built, it actually became incredibly powerful

because one almost universal truth is that faith leaders have incredible influencing power and authority in many of the countries that we work in so if you can work with faith leaders and have faith leaders speaking out against domestic violence and speak about the importance of human dignity and the protection of rights of every individual to have freedom, to be respected, then that is a norm changing scenario which we're privileged as a Catholic organisation to be able to be part of".

She added that because of this faith leaders have been "absolutely pivotal in shifting norms".

The work with the Church and Islam in Uganda led to a long-running programme which delivered a "tangible impact in terms of the reduction of domestic gender-based violence", Ms de Barra explained.

This was made possible due to the message being delivered from diocese, to parish, to small Christian community level.

The message "allows people to reflect on their own faith and their own values and the inherent dignity of the human person and reflect on behaviours that are inimitable to that and very clear messaging from, for example, the bishops of Uganda around domestic violence being unacceptable and not tolerable, that has been a gamechanger in terms of social acceptance of violence".

Promotion

In the consortium's strategic plan, it identifies three of their priorities to address gender-based violence:

The promotion of gender-based violence prevention program-

ming and gender equality: This requires addressing the power imbalances between males and females, as well as the social and gender norms that justify gender inequality;

- Advancing gender-based violence risk mitigation within humanitarian and development work. This requires compiling and distributing standards for risk mitigation, building/strengthening technical capacity in humanitarian organisations, and advancing learning between global and local contexts;

“Ms de Barra says that there's a huge investment needed around prevention, and there are common issues across all cultures”

- Strengthening the response to gender-based violence: This includes improved access to security and justice, psychosocial support, safety and risk mitigation, and health care in humanitarian crisis and development work;

Regarding the differences in tackling the issue in other parts of the world in which Trócaire work compared to Ireland, Ms de Barra said the main issue is a lack of resources.

"I lived and worked in Malawi for three years and a lot of my work was on gender-based violence and there were really

basic issues. Such as within the police structures, there was a very strong will to provide services to survivors of gender-based violence but they didn't have basic things in place and available to them such as a charge sheet that dealt with a gender-based violence assault," she said.

"We, at that time, were involved in setting up one-stop-shops in hospitals for people who are survivors of gender-based violence, but even things as basic as getting a computer, getting access to staff from the medical and police forces who would be available in an incredibly stretched institutional environment when a survivor needs their support and survivors of gender-based violence need support immediately: you need to take tests, you need to take evidence immediately in order to have any chance of being able to put forward a reasonable case.

Training

"Even things like training of magistrates, judges at the district level, which is where, as in Ireland, these cases might first come to the fore. Having adequate training in places within the judicial system so that cases of gender-based violence could be taken in a very survivor-centred way, that is something which is a huge challenge within these very poorly resourced institutional structures."

Ms de Barra says that there's a huge investment needed around prevention, and there are common issues across all cultures.

"Prevention means behaviours and attitudes at a very early age, you need to start in the educa-

tion system and you need to have – exactly like what we've been talking about here – a really coherent policy environment around prevention, mitigation, and response.

"Here it's been really positive that the Department of Justice has stepped up and said it's the Department of Justice that will be the lead and coordinating department, that's absolutely pivotal, we need to see that across the board, we need support for government, for civil society, for the service sectors in poorer countries that mirror what we now know we need here in Ireland because it's a parallel pandemic, the pain and the devastation caused to any person here in Ireland is the same as it is to any person in any of the countries that we work in.

“Sometimes there is a backlash against people who have been assaulted, who have been violated, and who are seeking support or seeking justice”

It's a human experience you would not want anyone to go through but the systems for response in the countries we work in are much, much weaker."

Asked about the best possible response needed for a person who has experienced gender-based violence, Ms de Barra says the

universal approach should be a survivor-centred approach.

"This means putting the person who has experienced the violence at the very centre of all of the processes. It means respecting and protecting that person and their dignity and their rights and that means that that person – what they want to happen – must be taken fully into consideration and their protection and safety must be taken fully into consideration.

"Sometimes there is a backlash against people who have been assaulted, who have been violated, and who are seeking support or seeking justice. All systems need to be built in such a way that the survivor is at the very heart of the interest of the system and that can require a shift in mindset, a shift in processes, a shift in systems but every support should be oriented towards the survivor and what their needs and their priorities are," she says.

Irish human rights

The Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence is an alliance of Irish human rights, humanitarian and development organisations, Irish Aid and the Irish Defence Forces. The consortium was formed in 2005 to address the high levels of sexual violence perpetrated in international conflict and crisis situations.

It is made up of 13 State bodies and NGOs: ActionAid Ireland, Christian Aid Ireland, Concern Worldwide, Irish Defence Forces, GOAL, IFRAH Foundation, Irish Aid, Irish Red Cross, Oxfam Ireland, Plan International Ireland, Self Help Africa, Trócaire, World Vision Ireland.



The Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence.

100 YEARS

of Loreto service in East Africa



A student works in the classroom at a Loreto School in Rumbek, South Sudan. Photos: CNS.



Sr Caitriona Kelly speaks of the Loreto Sisters' service of God and women during their 100 years in the Eastern Africa province, writes Jason Osborne

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, better known as the Loreto Sisters, celebrated January 29th 100 years of God's faithfulness in their mission to the Eastern Africa Province.

The Loreto sisters established themselves in 1921, at the invitation of the then-Vicar Apostolic of Zanzibar, Monsignor John Gerald Neville. The first years of their mission took the shape of a school, Loreto Convent Msongari, in Nairobi, Kenya, which continues to provide a quality education for its female students to this day. Starting in 1921 with 17 students, by 1971 there were over 700 students, and now between 800-1000 benefit from the mission started over one hundred years ago.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, one of just the last four Irish Loreto sisters based in Kenya, Sr Caitriona Kelly, 80, tells of her arrival there in 1964, having been impressed by the "zealous" faith of the young, missionary priests she encountered in her youth.

"I had the privilege as a child, when I was still in a very rural primary school – I've no idea what congregation, it probably was the Kiltigans or the SMAs – but this young and zealous priest came and showed us photos about Africa," she recalls.

Deep pain

"I don't remember which country. He showed us how people needed care and how above all, how they didn't know about Christ. I remember as a child, I couldn't have been more than seven or eight, but I must have had some sort of deep faith, because that was a deep pain for me. I remember that very well."

Her exposure to the Loreto Sisters would go on to shape the rest of her life, and this happened through her schooling in Loreto Bray.

"I went to Loreto Bray, though I'm a northerner by birth, but my mother was a Loreto Bray past student, so she sent her daughters to Loreto Bray. Of course, I was exposed to the Loreto worldwide missionary world. I also remember we had a very forward-looking mother superior at that time, and she used to let us go to the theatre...but the other thing she had was, when the Holy Ghost Fathers had their mission day, we were allowed to go to that."

"I was fascinated by all the countries in need and places of need, and these young men so willing to leave everything for God. So I suppose eventually, my own voca-

tion matured and finally I felt God wanted my heart and I met these women from Kenya, the same Loreto sisters, and they were so passionate about their lives and mission. Now, we had no choice over which country we would be sent to, but I ended up in Africa and in Kenya by God's providence. I think it was a good fit for me."

"I suppose first of all, thanks be to God maybe, they are a more spontaneous, innately natural culture"

Sr Caitriona herself and many of her Irish sisters were in for a culture shock, with Kenyan and Irish society expressing themselves very differently – not the least of which is in how each society celebrates the Faith.

"I suppose first of all, thanks be to God maybe, they are a more spontaneous, innately natural culture. Especially, they have such innate giftedness in song and dance. I mean, it still fascinates me. If you've some children two years of age or two and a half, and you put on music, they'll spontaneously dance," she says, laughing.

"But I think in terms of, you know, just their pure joy at dancing and music, and I think when they bring that and bring it to Church worship, our liturgies are so alive, so full of joy, and of course, very long. Which is not quite the western mode."

Despite the initial differences in culture, the Loreto sisters have integrated and become a key, prized part of the eastern African faith landscape, with around 1000 people

attending the recent centenary celebrations; celebrations that were full of "young, vibrant, happy women," Sr Caitriona says.

The landmark celebrations have seen the current sisters, Sr Caitriona included, reflecting on the conditions and circumstances the earliest missionary sisters encountered themselves upon arrival.

First generation

"I have to give credit to the first generation of women. They arrived here – serge was a woollen material – to think of arriving in Mombasa in the humidity in wool, and how they even survived those exterior limits," Sr Caitriona says, continuing, "Their dedication to mission...this commitment to the education of African women began, because up until independence, Kenya was technically apartheid. We were running street-systems of schools."

"It couldn't have happened without the total dedication of the generation before me, who in those days, left Ireland for life. Like emigrants, they knew they would never come back. But that commitment to what God wanted – they responded to the changing political situation and their dedication to education was exceptional. Their fidelity to the religious life and their dedication to their people. I think it's God's providence of the moment of time that we arrived in Kenya, and we came to a stable country that embraced us."

"The women are so alive now,

that our small contribution is probably a drop in the ocean relative to others. It was significant, though, because of the historic moment," she says.

While the Loreto sisters are most widely known for their work in education, Sr Caitriona says that their time in Kenya has seen them responding to whatever the needs of the people are, which has naturally seen them branch out beyond education – namely into social work and healthcare.

"100 years on from the order's arrival, Sr Caitriona figures their sisters will be long-needed, albeit in a different, and transforming, way"

"Then over the years, like over the last 30 or 40 years, as well as formal schools, responding to the signs of the time, some of our sisters branched out to the informal sector and did a lot for...the street children of the slums. Then another was ministry to the orphans at the time of the aids crisis, when there was so much stigma, and worked a lot on that," she says.

Srs Betty White and Mary Owens, are to be credited with pioneering the care of "street children", opening the Nyumbani Children's Homes in



Sr Caitriona Kelly.



An Irish sister, Rosemary Gallagher, works with students in a Loreto school in eastern Africa this 2017 photo.

Nairobi, Kenya and caring for them in multiple ways, Sr Caitriona says.

"Betty White, who's now in her early nineties, our most senior Irish missionary, was a pioneer of getting what we call the children from the informal settlements, pejoratively called 'street children'. She was one of the pioneers of those programmes.

"Mary Owens also pioneered the whole lobbying for the right for children with HIV to go to ordinary schools, and would have worked against the stigmatisation of HIV. She also developed and lobbied a lot for getting the right for viral drugs and so on. Then we had other sisters move into the social side and into the medical side.

"So, our young African sisters, who are nurses – one is in Rumbek, with the Irish project in Loreto Rumbek in South Sudan, and two of them are gone to start a hospital in conjunction with the government in a very remote part of Zambia, a mission already set up by South Africa and Australia," Sr Caitriona says.

"Then another one of our sisters from Kenya, twenty or thirty years ago went to Tanzania, so we have a good number of them in education there. It's this Loreto quality transformed a lot of the young women. But now, the government sector is coming up in Tanzania. Also, we did an outreach to Ghana, which was much needed."

Long-needed

100 years on from the order's arrival, Sr Caitriona figures their sisters will be long-needed, albeit in a different, and transforming, way.

"We've young women from other cultures now, with a variety of gifts, bringing the dream of Loreto into the 21st Century, which needs new expressions. Some are trained in media, they'll sing songs for YouTube; you know, they're being contemporary, and then they're aware still that the reality is so many of our people live in severely disadvantaged areas.

"Especially in, the word we use is, the slums. The informal settlements. They're increasing, but that's a world phenomenon; the gap between the rich and the poor, the lack of employment, and so on. Our formal sector of education, we're well-known for, but

people aren't so aware of the informal, in that we have programmes to facilitate young women at third level who can't manage to get to school, trying to get sponsorships for them and mentoring them."

Some of the "joy" of their vocation, Sr Caitriona says, is seeing the mission live on in new and "creative" ways, such as they're seeing at the moment.

The government is taking more and more responsibility for education in countries

"We have sisters lecturing in university, we have sisters working with UNESCO and in education research for Africa, so we have different outreaches as well among our younger sisters now coming up. We have sisters from Kenya, of course the majority, then Tanzania, then one or two from Uganda and two from Ghana. We have even one from Ethiopia, so our hope is that that African face will grow over the next decades," she says confidently.

The Loreto Sisters are best known for education, but as the world changes, Sr Caitriona says the order is looking at the "emerging needs" of the day, and a couple stand at the forefront.

"Our vision for the future would be, we'll keep exploring where is the greatest need? Where are our sisters needed most in the world...We have joined a group, 'Religious against human trafficking', so we're taking a big commitment to that and we're going to be with others, working on a big project for awareness, because the issue of human trafficking is huge, and we're a hub.

"Nairobi and Mombasa are hubs. We have younger sisters with social training, transformative social training, very good programmes here, and one of them would be involved specifically in that for the next couple of years, and that will be at national level, networking with others and so on."

As well as this change from their

traditional operations, Sr Caitriona says the government is now stepping up to provide more of the services that typically would have been provided by religious – such as the Loreto sisters. As a result, she says, they're having to look to new horizons in order to accompany the poor and the marginalised.

Responsibility

"The government is taking more and more responsibility for education in countries. Where then is there a greater need for us? Where are the marginalised? Where are the poor? I think that'll be much more where our sisters go; I mean, that was why they were sent to Zambia, to a very remote area, where the healthcare system is practically non-existent, so they're trying to set up a nursing school in conjunction with the government and the diocese.

"I think our vision has to be today, as the Pope says, coming home with the smell of the sheep on our bodies. We have to go where the people are. I think we'll be doing things, hopefully, with equal passion, but with new insights," she says.

The Irish chapter of the Loreto mission in Kenya perhaps coming to a close in coming years, Sr Caitriona says they're all determined to see out the rest of their lives in the land God sent them to

Making such efforts to provide essential care and help to the world's poorest, Sr Caitriona emphasises that the Loreto Sisters haven't lost sight of the reason for their mission: to communicate God and his love to the world.

The challenge is then, how do we continue to form people with deep value systems – human values and Gospel values and Christ values. How do we penetrate our world?

"The core message of bringing Christ to the nations won't change, and Pope Francis is very strong on that. But our perception of God has to expand, our theology has to be much richer, to see every human person, I call it – this was my language before the Pope, when I was dealing with young people, even in very harsh circumstances – you're a love-dream of God, and if there's any potential within you, we'll try to work and develop that," she says.

"Commitment to the marginalised was always in the Church. Care for the poor, too. Even when we came, we were caring for the poor, but it was through education, helping them get educated...The challenge is how to be present when governments take over what missionaries began. When we began our schools, there were only one or two government schools for the African population. The religious came in and pioneered the health systems and pioneered the school sys-

tem, but now the government can do a lot of it. The challenge is then, how do we continue to form people with deep value systems – human values and Gospel values and Christ values. How do we penetrate our world?"

Sr Caitriona says this is the mission Irish women have given their lives for. She mentions a span of six months at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021, during which three of the remaining Irish sisters in Kenya died, leaving them with just four in Nairobi. Srs Bríd Cunningham, Colombiere Kelly and Philippine Stamp may have left Kenya, Sr Caitriona says, but their love, service and dedication continues to inform the Loreto Sisters' work.

Love and dedication

"I think it's not our work. It's the way we work. Do the children feel loved? Do the people feel respected? So, these women were of the generation that came out just after the second world war, '47 and '48. In those days, they came never to return...they came, and they still have that love and dedication and gratitude to God for their lives in their diminishing years. These and the others who went before them, I have to pay tribute to them as being women who greatly inspired me," Sr Caitriona says.

The Irish chapter of the Loreto mission in Kenya perhaps coming to a close in coming years, Sr Caitriona says they're all determined to see out the rest of their lives in the land God sent them to.

"We have the option, if you like, of returning to Ireland, maybe for health reasons. Many have opted to return because of the health system and how low cost and all that it is. But thank God, for those of us remaining, we feel if God wills, we can stay the course and finish our lives in Africa, in Kenya."



Loreto Sister Orla Treacy, principal of Loreto Girls Secondary School in Rumbek, South Sudan, walks outside the school with children in 2017.

Out&About

The gold standard



MEATH: Bishop Tom Deenihan is pictured with students from the Diocese of Meath who received Pope John Paul II awards. The ceremony took place in St Patrick's Church in Trim. Also pictured are Fr Paul Crosbie PP of Trim and Fr Brendan Corrigan PP of Kilbeggan.



ARMAGH: The Primate of All Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin and members of the Armagh Vocations Commission join with students from St Patrick's Grammar School to launch a 'Weekend of Prayer for Vocations to Priesthood' which will take place in all parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Armagh from March 25-27.



DONEGAL: Family and friends came together for long-time parishioner Brigid McPhelim in the Franciscan Friary in Rosstown to celebrate her 100th birthday on February 6.

IN SHORT

Meath diocese celebrates 'inspiring' PJPII Award recipients

Bishop Thomas Deenihan of Meath presented awards to students from the diocese who had completed the Pope John Paul II awards at bronze, silver, gold and papal cross level, hailing them as "inspiring".

The ceremony took place in St Patrick's parish church, Trim, Co. Meath after the vigil Mass which was celebrated by Bishop Deenihan and in which the students and their families participated.

Bishop Deenihan in his homily praised the students and their families for the commitment and dedication they had shown in participating in the programme and noted in his homily that "the tasks undertaken for the award were an inspiring chronicle of faith in action in local communities and a powerful testimony of the selflessness and vision of our young people".

Information about the awards in the Diocese of Meath may be found on the diocesan website <https://www.dioceseofmeath.ie/> or by contacting Sean Wright, Diocesan Director of Catechetics, Chaplaincy and the John Paul II Awards at meathjp2@gmail.com

Charity calls for more rights for renters

Focus Ireland have said that successive Governments have got the balance wrong between the rights of tenants and landlords at last week's Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The charity said the failure to extend the eviction embargo along with rising rents and the increased cost of living is also resulting in rising homelessness.

Focus Ireland Director of Advocacy Mike Allen said: "Our staff are seeing

more families & individuals facing eviction from Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancies due to soaring rents. Rents have risen but HAP payments have not. Tenants must pay the rent shortfall themselves – on top of the share of rent they already pay. HAP tenants need the same protections as people in secure social housing, such as earlier warnings on arrears and more time to resolve the situation when they find themselves in arrears."

The charity welcomed the Government's commitment to end homelessness by 2030 made in its 'Housing For All' strategy and said that the next steps need to be to set out in a series of milestones to reach this target.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



KERRY: St John’s parish Tralee awarded the Pope John Paul II International Youth Award to 10 young people. Five members of the parish’s youth group 2020/21, Jake Carroll, Mercy Secondary School Mounthawk, Megan Diggins, Clodagh Hickey and twins Isabella and Scarlett Bright, Presentation Secondary School Tralee, were awarded gold medals for “outstanding work” during the last year.



KERRY: Twins Gráinne and Aoife McHugh along with Anna Lynch from Presentation Secondary School Tralee were awarded the Pope John Paul II silver medal for their work cleaning and sanitising St John’s Church Tralee during the Covid months. The medals were awarded by Fr Tadhg Fitzgerald along with their Youth Ministry Volunteer Aisling O’Donnell.



LONGFORD: Parishioners in St Mel’s Cathedral were invited to remove the ribbons which cordoned off pews at the beginning of spring after the majority of Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

ANTRIM: Sr Helene, of the Little Sisters of Jesus, cuts the cake at celebrations to mark her Golden Jubilee after Mass in Corpus Christi Church, Belfast, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, February 2. Also pictured is Sr Emiko.



KERRY: Eva Fogadic, Presentation Scondary School Tralee and Gráinne Walsh, Presentation Secondary School Listowel, received bronze awards for their work as Youth Ambassadors leading summer tours of both St John’s Church, Castle Street and St John’s Church (Church of Ireland), Ashe Street.



DUBLIN: Karen Van Vlierberge, the Ambassador of Belgium to Ireland, was welcomed at the Archdiocese of Dublin by Archbishop Dermot Farrell. Ms Van Vlierberge said they had a “rich discussion on the future & challenges of the Catholic Church”, adding she was looking forward to “building upon the strong historic religious relations” between Ireland and Belgium.

Events

● In the current Covid-19 crisis, it is clear that most (and perhaps all) Church events, other than some Masses, are suspended. Consequently, we are withholding the popular Events Listing column until normal activities can resume in our parishes. However, please do email us if you know of any parish event planned and we will publish details.



World Report

IN BRIEF

French Catholic nun turns 118

● Sister Andre Randon, a French nun, celebrated her 118th birthday on February 11. This milestone makes her the second-oldest living person in the world and the oldest living person in Europe, according to the Gerontology Research Group, which validates details of people believed to be 110 or older.

In anticipation of the big day, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, sent the beloved nun a greeting.

Born Lucile Randon on February 11, 1904, in Alés, France, she converted to Catholicism at 19-years-old from Protestantism. She served young children and the elderly at a French hospital until she became a nun at the age of 40.

Minor seminary in Burkina Faso attacked

● Saint Kisito de Bougui, a minor seminary in Burkina Faso, was attacked overnight, the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need announced Friday.

No lives were lost in the attack, which took place the night of February 10-11, though "there was a lot of material damage".

Saint Kisito de Bougui

is located in Bougui, about five miles east of Fada N'gourma. It is home to seven formators and 146 minor seminarians.

ACN said that it had been informed by local partners "that the jihadists came by motorbikes" late in the evening of February 10, and stayed at the seminary for an hour.

Number of Catholics worldwide rose by 16 million in 2020

● The number of Catholics worldwide increased by an estimated 16 million in 2020 to 1.36 billion, according to statistics released on Friday by the Vatican.

The rise was in line with global population growth in the year that the coronavirus pandemic swept the planet, reported Vatican News. Catholics continued to account for 17.7% of the total world population.

The figures for 2020 — the most recent year where numbers are available — come from the 2022 edition of the *Annuario Pontificio* (Pontifical Yearbook) and the 2020 *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae* (Statistical Yearbook of the Church), compiled by the Vatican's Central Office of Church Statistics.

Thieves rob Franciscan church in Chile

● Unidentified persons broke into the Franciscan Recollects church in Santiago, Chile, February 9 and forced open the tabernacle, scattering the consecrated Hosts.

During the early morning hours, a group of six

individuals forced open the main door of the church and went to the sacristy to steal the sacred objects used for the celebration of Mass.

In addition to desecrating the tabernacle, the criminals stole sound equipment.

US priest makes bike pilgrimage for Ukraine

● As Ukraine faces a fierce challenge to its young democracy from more than 120,000 Russian forces stacked on its borders, poised to invade at any time, a Rhode Island priest is showing solidarity with the plight of the people of the overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian nation.

"Russia is surrounding the Ukraine with troops. What else can I do but pray?" said Father Thomas O'Neill, 79, a senior priest of the Diocese of Providence.

Fr O'Neill embarked on a pilgrimage of prayer on a morning where the mercury hovered at 15 degrees Fahrenheit as he rode his bicycle from his home in Middletown, NY, to St Patrick Church in Providence, Rhode Island.

He stopped at churches along the way to offer prayers for peace in the region.

More than 800 anti-Christian incidents reported in France in 2021

More than 800 anti-Christian incidents were reported in France in 2021.

The provisional figures were announced on February 10 as part of an ongoing study of anti-religious acts in the Western European country, which has a population of 67 million people.

Investigators have so far identified a total of 1,659 anti-religious acts last year, with 857 relating to Christianity, 589 to Judaism, and 213 to Islam.

The statistics were presented by the ministerial mission on anti-religious acts following an initial assessment last December by Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, reported the French Catholic daily *La Croix*.

Prime Minister Jean Castex has asked two members of the French parliament, Isabelle Florennes and Ludovic Mendes, to investigate anti-religious incidents. They are expected to submit their final report in March, ahead of the French presidential election, after conducting hearings and field trips.

A 2019 survey found that 48% of the French population identified as Catholic, 4% as Muslim, and 1% as Jewish, with 34% describing themselves as having no religion. But other studies suggest the percentage of Muslims is higher.

France is sometimes described as the "eldest daughter of the Church" because the Frankish King Clovis I embraced Catholicism in the year 496.



French President Emmanuel Macron walks during a recent visit to Nice with Nice Mayor Christian Estrosi as they arrive at St Roch Hospital. Photo CNS.

Catholic churches are frequently targeted by vandals. The Paris-based *Observatoire de la christianophobie* (Observatory of Christianophobia) meticulously documents anti-Christian acts.

Last year witnessed two widely reported incidents concerning Catholics. In August 2021, the Catholic priest Father Olivier Maire was murdered in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, a commune in the Vendée department in western France.

In December 2021, Catholics taking part in a Marian procession in the western suburbs of Paris were subjected to threats.

France has witnessed numerous terrorist attacks in recent years. Some have specifically targeted Catholics.

An Islamist killed three people at the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Nice in southeastern France in 2020.

France's Interior Ministry recorded 996 anti-Christian acts in 2019 — an average of 2.7 per day.

Gérald Darmanin suggested in December that there was a 17.2% decrease in anti-religious acts in 2021 compared to 2019.

In January, he said that incidents related to the Catholic Church fell by 20% in 2021.

Meanwhile, four alleged accomplices in the murder of 85-year-old French priest, Fr Jacques Hamel, will go on trial in Paris.

Fr Jacques Hamel was attacked at the foot of the altar while celebrating mass on 26 July 2016, at his church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, a working-class suburb of Rouen in northwest France.

The two 19-year-old assailants, Adel Kermiche and Abdel-Malik Petitjean, also seriously injured one of the worshippers they took hostage before being killed by police as they tried to leave the church.

Pope says Holy Year 2025 should 'fan flame of hope'

The Holy Year 2025 should focus on "restoring a climate of hope and trust" after the coronavirus pandemic and helping people repair their relationships with God, with each other and with the Earth, Pope Francis said.

"We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision," the Pope wrote in a letter formally entrusting preparations for the Holy Year to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation.

Held every 25 years since 1470, a holy year or jubilee is a time of pilgrimage, prayer, repentance and acts of mercy, based on the Old Testament tradition of a jubilee year of rest, forgiveness and renewal.

A formal "bull of indiction" proclaiming the Holy Year will be released closer to 2025.

Writing to Archbishop Fisichella, in a letter released February 11, Pope Francis noted that "in the last two years, not a single country has been unaffected by the sudden outbreak of an epidemic that made us experience first-hand not only the tragedy of dying alone, but also the uncertainty and fleetingness of existence, and in doing so, has changed our very way of life. Together with all our brothers and sisters, we Christians endured those hardships and limitations," he said.

Quebec bishops lament gov's Covid restrictions on Mass

The Catholic bishops of Quebec, while registering their opposition to the province's imposition of Covid-19 vaccine passports as a requirement to attend religious services, said this week that they accept the requirement for now, and continue to

petition the government to end it.

"[I]t seems reasonable to us in the present circumstances to accept certain compromises that contribute to the safety and health of all," the bishops wrote in a recent statement.

"For the moment, we accept that vaccination passports are required to access worship spaces, even if this measure upsets us deeply. However, we remain in contact with government authorities to remind them that this requirement goes against our beliefs and to

ensure that it will be lifted as soon as it is safe to do so."

Quebec's vaccine passport system, whereby an electronic record functions as a pass for vaccinated individuals to access certain places or activities, has been in place since September 1, 2021.



Edited by Jason Osborne
jason@irishcatholic.ie

Sliding to success



Lindsey Jacobellis of the United States reacts after winning the women's snowboardcross at Genting Snow Park in Zhangjiakou, China, during the Winter Olympics. Photo: CNS.

Cleric warns of religious repression in Hong Kong

Speaking anonymously during an online discussion, a Christian cleric in Hong Kong said he thinks it is likely that greater repression by the Chinese government of religious freedom in Hong Kong, particularly the freedom of religious schools, is about to occur.

The cleric, identified only as Reverend L, told the Hudson Institute's Nina Shea February 10 that the Chinese Communist Party appears to be using ideological tactics, such as education, to chip away at the freedom of religion in Hong Kong, which came under Chinese control in 1997.

"In terms of restricting the

rights of religious freedom, the CCP is doing it step-by-step," Reverend L said, noting that China has in recent years imposed serious restrictions on the rights of assembly, press, and speech in Hong Kong.

"Freedom of religion is the only remaining freedom in Hong Kong at this moment," he said.

Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China, whose citizens have historically enjoyed freedom of religion, "comparable to any country in the free world," Reverend L said. In contrast, on the Chinese mainland, religious believers of all stripes are routinely restricted, sur-

veiled, and oppressed by the communist government.

However, Reverend L says that religious freedom has been particularly eroded in Hong Kong since 2019, thanks to the CCP's efforts to control the populace through an "ideological war."

Reverend L pointed to a Reuters report from late December documenting an October meeting at which Chinese bishops and religious leaders briefed senior Hong Kong Catholic clergymen on President Xi Jinping's vision of religion with "Chinese characteristics."

Reverend L opined that the meeting sounded like a "brainwashing session" to

attempt to make the Faith more Chinese, and thus more expedient for the CCP.

At the end of January 2022, the Chinese-language newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*, which Reverend L described as a CCP propaganda publication, published four articles about Catholicism in Hong Kong, one of them about Hong Kong archbishop emeritus Cardinal Joseph Zen.

The newspaper article categorized Zen as an enemy of the CCP in the same vein as Falun Gong, a highly persecuted religious minority in China.

French abuse report authors respond to critics

The authors of a landmark abuse report responded this week to critics who argued that they overestimated the number of victims in the French Catholic Church.

The Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE) issued a 53-page response on February 7 to a 15-page critique signed by eight members of the prestigious Académie catholique de France that was reportedly

sent to the Vatican.

The commission's final report, published on October 5, 2021, said that an estimated 216,000 children were abused by priests, deacons, monks, or nuns from 1950 to 2020.

It added that when abuse by other Church workers was also taken into account, "the estimated number of child victims rises to 330,000 for the whole of the period".

In a critique published last November, the eight academy members questioned "the methodology of the quantitative survey that led to the figure of 330,000 victims" and accused the report of lacking "scientific rigor".

Alongside its detailed response to the academy, CIASE published a 12-page summary, as well as a note and expert report on the statistics it had cited.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis to visit Malta for apostolic visit in April

● Pope Francis will travel to the Mediterranean island nation of Malta for an apostolic visit in April.

A Holy See Press Office communiqué said that "Accepting the invitation of the President of the Republic of Malta, the civil authorities and the Catholic Church of the country, His Holiness Pope Francis will make an Apostolic Journey to Malta from 2 to 3 April 2022, visiting the cities of Valletta, Rabat, Floriana and the island of Gozo."

The programme and further details of the journey will be announced in the near future.

The Pope had originally been scheduled to visit Malta on 31 May 2020, but that apostolic journey was postponed due to the situation of the coronavirus pandemic.

The theme of the apostolic journey is: "They showed us unusual kindness." It is meant to highlight the plight of the migrants who traverse the Mediterranean toward Europe and be a source of encouragement for new evangelisation in the island nation.

Vatican Observatory announces discovery of 'trans-Neptunian object'

● The Vatican Observatory recently announced the discovery of an object orbiting the sun at a distance of between 3.3 and 4.8 billion miles, which could help to aid scientists in understanding more about the origins of the solar system.

The object, which was first detected in early December last year and announced last week, is classified as a "trans-Neptunian object" because it orbits the sun at a distance greater than that of Neptune, the furthest planet from the sun.

Chris Graney, an adjunct scholar at the Vatican Observatory, told CNA in an email that TNOs are thought to include remnants

of the original materials from which the planets of the solar system formed, and therefore TNOs hold clues for scientists about the early solar system and its formation.

"This one TNO is just a piece of the puzzle – but we at the Vatican Observatory are happy to add this piece," Mr Graney told CNA.

The Vatican Observatory operates the Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope, located in rural Arizona about 200 miles southeast of Phoenix, Arizona. It was this telescope that made the discovery of the TNO, which has been dubbed 2021 XD7.

Pontifical Academy for Life calls for increased palliative care

● Pope Francis' call for palliative care rather than euthanasia or assisted suicide during the General Audience came on the first day of the Pontifical Academy of Life's webinar to improve, support and disseminate palliative care in the world.

Speaking last Wednesday during his catechesis, the Pope expressed gratitude for palliative care, which seeks to accompany and support people at the end of life.

"I would point out that the right to care and treatment for all must always be prioritised, so that the weakest, particularly the elderly and the sick, are never discarded," he said.

The event was inaugurated by the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia who stated that "palliative care is a right and it is positive that this awareness is spreading".



Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

New Catholic numbers: an 'imponderable' movement shaping history

An old saying has it that "journalism is the first draft of history". Frankly, I've always been a bit dubious about that claim. In my experience, and to paraphrase John Lennon, history often seems to be what happens while journalists are talking about other things.

Here's a quote from historian Arnold J. Toynbee in his book *Civilization on Trial* which I try to take to heart:

"The things that make good headlines are on the surface of the stream of life, and they distract us from the slower, impalpable, imponderable movements that work below the surface and penetrate to the depths. But it is really these deeper, slower movements that make history, and it is they that stand out huge in retrospect, when the sensational passing events have dwindled, in perspective, to their true proportions."

In the spirit, let's focus here not on a sensational passing event, but let's try to prove Toynbee wrong by pondering one of those slow, deep movements he called "imponderable".

On Friday, the Vatican published the latest edition of the *Annuario Pontificio*, a big thick red volume that's a combination between a statistical yearbook and a personal directory, as well as the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae*. Among other things, these books record changes in Catholic population over the past year, which allows observers to track demographic movements in the Church over time.

Taking a look at the new set of numbers is instructive.

“The Catholic population grew in Africa and Asia in 2020, by 2.1% and 1.8% respectively”

For one thing, the *Annuario* notes that Catholicism added 18 million new members in 2020, the latest year for which statistics are available. Granted, that meant the Church did no more than keep pace with overall global population growth, but it's still significant at a time when most western perceptions are that the Church is shrinking due to the fallout from the sexual abuse crisis, various scandals at senior levels, bitter political infighting, increasing irrelevance to younger generations, and any number of other alleged failures.

For sure, if you live in western Europe or in some parts of the United States, where parishes are closing or consolidating and Mass attendance seems in free fall, those perceptions are understandable. Yet the reality is that on a global level, Catholicism

enjoyed the greatest expansion in its history over the past century, more than tripling from 267 million in 1900 to 1.045 billion in 2000 and 1.36 billion today.

Consider that 16 million is more than the entire Catholic population of Canada, and the Church added that number of new followers in one year alone. Today, Catholics represent a robust 17.7% of everyone on earth.

Decline

In other words, the dominant Catholic story today is not decline, it's breakneck growth.

Second, it's notable that the vast majority of this growth is outside the western sphere. The Catholic population grew in Africa and Asia in 2020, by 2.1% and 1.8% respectively. The share of the world's Catholics who live in Africa has been climbing steadily over recent decades. Africa alone shot up from 1.9 million in 1900 to 130 million in 2000 and an estimated 236 million today, representing almost 20% of the global total.

Catholicism, in other words, is already a non-western religion, at least at the grassroots, and it will be

increasingly more so as time wears on. By the middle of this century, three-quarters of every Catholic man, woman and child will live outside the west. Trying to understand the Church exclusively through the prism of western preoccupations and priorities, therefore, is a fool's errand, yet it continues to be how most of us in the press cover the Church.

Third, the data also reveal a serious mismatch in how Catholic personnel are allocated around the world, one that's been clear for years but continues to grow steadily worse, either by conscious choice at the leadership level or a simple lack of imagination about how to fix it.

Priests

In 2020, there were 410,219 Catholic priests in the world, with 40% living in Europe and just about 13% in North America and Australia/New Zealand, meaning that over half the world's priests live and minister in the west at a time when more than two-thirds of its population is someplace else.

This is not, by the way, because the west is brimming with new

vocations to the priesthood. Like everything else, the new vocations and seminarians these days come disproportionately from Africa and Asia, who now provide 60% of all seminarians worldwide.

“The priest-to-Catholic ratio in Europe is 1 to 1,746, and, if we consider the 'real feel' index, like weather guys, that ratio feels even closer”

If the Church in the US tomorrow had to kick out all the Mexican, Colombian, Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, Nigerian, Ugandan, and Congolese priests serving in American dioceses, not to mention all the religious women from those places, it might as well put a 'going out of business' sign on the front door of almost every diocesan cathedral in the country.

If the Catholic Church were a well-run business, it would reallocate personnel to serve the area of

greatest market growth. Consider that at the moment, the priest-to-Catholic ratio in Europe is 1 to 1,746, and, if we consider the 'real feel' index, like weather guys, that ratio feels even closer because relatively few of those Catholics actually show up at church wanting pastoral care. In Africa it's 1 priest for every 5,089 Catholics, and most of them do show up.

Consider that North America has almost the same number of priests as all of Africa, despite the fact that there are 84 million Catholics in the US and Canada and more than three times that number in Africa, at 236 million.

It doesn't take a Harvard MBA to figure out something's wrong with this picture. Not only are Church authorities not doing anything to correct the situation, they're actually making it worse by signing off on transfers of personnel from south to north rather than the other way around.

Auguste Comte, one of the fathers of modern sociology, famously said that "demography is destiny". What the demographic data seems to suggest right now is that the Catholic Church has much to celebrate, but also an urgent need to get its act together to ensure a more deeply global perspective and a fairer distribution of personnel.

Otherwise, the Church risks finding that its destiny is one for which it's woefully unprepared.



Christians in Nairobi, Kenya, attend a Christmas Eve service, 2021. Photo: CNS.

“What the demographic data seems to suggest right now is that the Catholic Church has much to celebrate”

Diplomatic relations between Vatican and Beijing on the horizon?



Andrea Gagliarducci

According to Vatican sources, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Beijing is not on the horizon, despite what some recent appointments might suggest.

On January 31, the Vatican said Msgr Arnaldo Catalan, its representative in Taiwan, was being posted to Rwanda, where he will serve as apostolic nuncio.

Days later on February 5, Msgr Javier Herrera Corona, head of the Holy See Study Mission in Hong Kong, was named apostolic nuncio to the Republic of the Congo and Gabon.

The appointments leave two Vatican diplomatic missions that deal closely with China with no top officials, prompting the question of whether the Holy See is changing its diplomatic strategy.

The Holy See did have a nunciature in Beijing. But in 1949, when Mao Zedong took power, China and the Holy See broke off relations. The apostolic internuncio Archbishop Antonio Riberi took refuge in 1951 in Hong Kong, then a British protectorate, and from 1952 in Taiwan.

Internunciature

In 1966, the internunciature was elevated to a nunciature, which was officially known as the apostolic nunciature of the Republic of China, the official name of Taiwan.

In 1971, the United Nations decided to replace the representatives of Taiwan with those of the People's Republic of China. Since then, the Holy See has no longer appointed nuncios to Taipei. The nunciature has always been led instead by a *chargé d'affaires*, who is one rung lower than a nuncio. (Msgr Catalan was, therefore, the highest-ranking Vatican diplomat in Taipei.)

Vatican diplomacy also observes China from a "study mission" based in Hong Kong, linked to the nunciature to the Philippines. In 2016, the Pontifical Yearbook reported in a footnote the address and telephone number of this mission for the first time.

Therefore, the departure of Msgrs Catalan and Herrera Corona seemed to suggest that change was afoot in both Vatican-Taipei and Vatican-Beijing relations. For if the Holy See were to establish diplomatic ties with Beijing, it would first have to disavow Taiwan, which for the People's Republic of China is only a rebellious province. (The Holy See is one of just 14 states that still recognises Taiwan.)

But according to a source familiar with papal diplomacy, it is "rather unlikely" that formal diplomatic relations with Beijing will soon be established.



The Chinese national flag is pictured in a file photo in front of a Catholic church in the village of Huangtugang. Photo: CNS.

First of all, both Msgrs Catalan and Herrera Corona "have been running for a promotion for some time." Their almost simultaneous nomination as apostolic nuncios is "unfortunate, but not part of any kind of plot or plan," the source maintained.

It is indeed necessary for the Pope to appoint new nuncios, and several more moves can be expected in the coming months. For example, before the appointments of Msgr Catalan as nuncio to Rwanda and Msgr Herrera Corona to Congo and Gabon, there were 14 nunciatures without a nuncio to lead them. Now, 12 vacant nunciatures remain. Some are very important, such as Mexico, Venezuela, and the European Union.

The nunciature in Taipei and the study mission in Hong Kong will have new leaders

The Vatican has 180 diplomatic missions abroad. Of these, 106 are resident missions. In addition, the Holy See has nuncios accredited for multiple countries. The Vatican often also opens an office of the nunciature in countries where a permanent representative is needed. (The last one was opened in Armenia, although the nuncio is resident in Georgia and represents the Holy See both in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, and the Armenian capital, Yerevan.)

Roughly 10% of resident missions are currently vacant. So it is not surprising that there will be further moves in the coming months because they are planned and necessary shifts.

The nunciature in Taipei and the study mission in Hong Kong will have new leaders. But that doesn't mean

that they are vacant at the moment. The *chargé d'affaires* left Taiwan, but Msgr Pavol Talapka, the first secretary of the nunciature, remained. In Hong Kong, the Argentine Msgr Alvaro Izurieta y Sea arrived in 2020 as deputy head of mission and remains there.

The Vatican source maintains that currently China would have no interest either in having diplomatic relations with the Holy See or having the Vatican break off ties with Taiwan.

Holy See

This is because, the source explains, that "despite China being very harsh in public with Taiwan, there is a large amount of trade between Taipei and Beijing. About one million Taiwanese move towards mainland China to work and then return to Taiwan."

Should the Holy See break off relations with Taiwan, China would be "forced to give some follow-up to the threats against Taiwan, thus also putting its commercial partnerships at risk."

Furthermore, the priority in Vatican-Beijing talks is to renegotiate the deal on the appointment of bishops first agreed in 2018 and then renewed for another two years in 2020 on an experimental basis. After that, China and the Holy See will have to decide whether to confirm the agreement, modify it, or drop it.

Since the agreement was signed, there have been five bishops appointed by the Holy See with the approval of both Rome and Beijing. But the new bishops' names have not yet been included in the Pontifical Yearbook, although the bulletin of the Holy See press office publishes the obituaries of China's bishops.

According to the Pontifical Yearbook, China is divided into 150 archdioceses, dioceses, and apostolic prefectures spread over 20 ecclesias-

tical provinces. But this picture dates back to 1950 because, since Mao Zedong seized power, papal yearbooks have not been updated. Chinese dioceses were considered vacant, except those of Macao and Hong Kong, which were in different political situations.

The Hebei bishop also said he was 'optimistic' about the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Beijing

The division of dioceses is different as far as the Chinese authorities are concerned. In a March 2021 interview with Radio Hong Kong, Bishop Fang Jianping of Hebei, vice president of the Chinese bishops' conference, noted that China has 97 dioceses and that 40 were currently without a bishop. Therefore, he called on the country's dioceses to seize the moment, using the trust of Pope Francis to nurture possible bishops and then ordain them before the agreement expires.

The Hebei bishop also said he was "optimistic" about the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Beijing.

But the issue of diplomatic relations seems, for now, to be off the table. A wing of diplomats in the Vatican does, however, support diplomatic relations with China, even if it means leaving Taiwan.

For its part, Taiwan is seizing every opportunity to demonstrate its closeness to the Holy See. Its new slogan is "Friendly Taiwan - Fratelli Tutti," referring to Pope Francis' latest encyclical.

In recent years, the Taiwanese Embassy to the Holy See has been especially committed to supporting the institutions of the Holy See and the Catholic Church through humanitarian aid. Last October, for example, Ambassador Matthew Lee delivered 300 high-quality, multi-purpose sleeping bags manufactured in Taiwan to the director of Caritas Italy, in a ceremony attended by an official from the migrants and refugees section of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Indirect signals

The Holy See has also sent many indirect signals of closeness to Taiwan. In 2017, the international congress of the Apostleship of the Sea was held in the country. In 2018, a Taoist delegation from Taiwan visited Pope Francis. Also in 2017, the sixth Buddhist-Christian conference organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue took place in Taiwan.

On October 5, 2017, at a conference organised at the Pontifical Urbaniana University to celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Taiwan, Vatican "foreign minister" Archbishop Paul Gallagher told Ambassador Lee that "the Holy See will continue to be your committed companion in the family of peoples, supporting every initiative that contributes to dialogue, promotes a true culture of encounter, and builds bridges of brotherhood and peace for the good of all."

It is now a question of waiting for the new appointments for the nunciature in Taipei and study mission in Hong Kong, as well as monitoring the signals that will eventually lead to a renewal of the agreement between China and the Holy See on the appointment of bishops. If anything were to change, it would be seen from these events.

Letters

Letter of the week

An analysis of the roles of Church and State

Dear Editor, On the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul, 1959, Bishop Donal Lamont delivered a pastoral letter 'Purchased People' to the Catholics of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe.)

It is a wonderfully clear, courageous and concise work and deals with many different issues.

Relevant to our Western society today, is his analysis of the roles of Church and State in education and the obligations of bishops in a secularised world.

Below are two short extracts:

"Education is not, nor ever was the exclusive concern of the State. It belongs properly to all three societies: the family, the State and the Church because it moulds the person as a whole – the individual, the citizen of this world, the heir of heaven. Yet, according to present legislation, the State presumptuously assumes the right to control everything, in defiance of the rights of parents and in flagrant violation of the rights and traditional function of the Church."

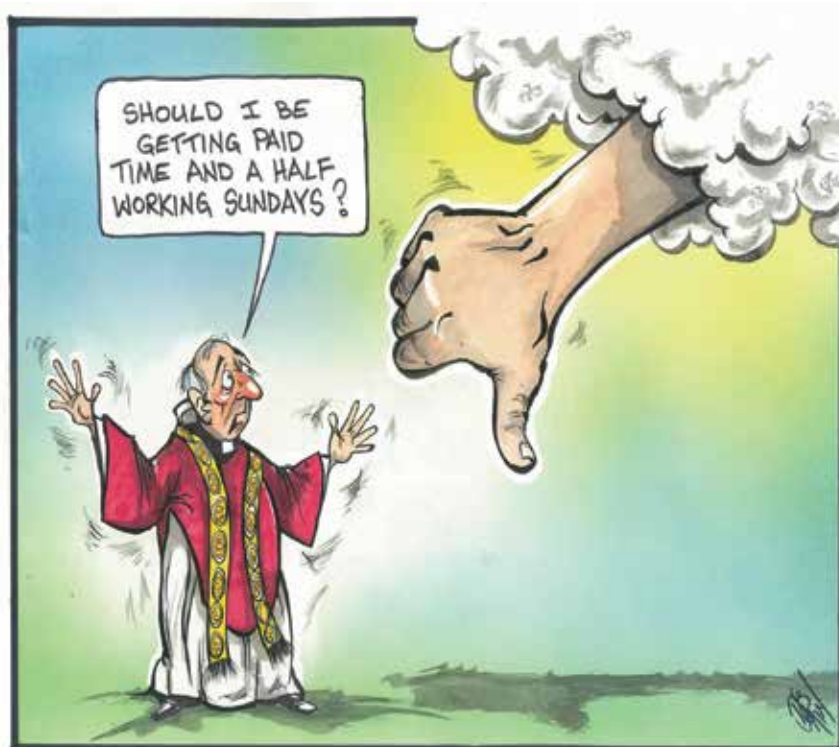
"Man and woman are not creatures of the State but of God... governments themselves are limited by divine law. I note with dismay a report in a newspaper of today, in which a Magistrate is quoted as saying that his judgement in a court case was delivered 'from a legal point of view and not from a moral standpoint' – as if law and morality had nothing in common!"

*Yours etc.,
Judith Leonard
Raheny, Dublin*

RTÉ livestreamed Mass 'a godsend'

Dear Editor, I wish to comment on John O'Riordan's letter [*The Irish Catholic* – January 27, 2022] regarding a boycott of RTÉ. If we are going to boycott every organisation that shows an anti-pro-life bias, let us start with most publications and periodicals. Then take in all the political parties, with the exception of Aontú. I have written to Roger Childs, who is in charge of religious affairs in RTÉ and complimented him and his staff on the great service they provide by streaming Mass, live, on RTÉ news, each morning at 10.30 am. This service has been available since Covid-19 began. I receive it on channel 21, and it's from a different church each morning. It is a godsend for those of us who cannot attend daily Mass in our local church. RTÉ is not there to push our views, we must keep up that pressure ourselves, but we should give credit where credit is due.

*Yours etc.,
Donnchadh Mac Aodha
Roosky, Co. Leitrim*



'Secretive' selection process for abortion review chairperson

Dear Editor, The review of the operation of the 2018 abortion legislation, as explicitly required by section 7 of the Act, has commenced.

The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, had promised to advertise through public tender for independent and suitable candidates to research and chair the review.

Alas, that has not happened. Instead of a public tender-

ing process, Minister Donnelly somehow identified a "small number of candidates" who he judged to be suitably qualified and who were invited to apply for the roles.

This selection process has resulted in the appointments of a chairperson and a research consultant who showed strong support for repeal of the 8th Amendment.

Such can hardly be consid-

ered independent or balanced appointments.

How can the public have confidence in this review of the abortion legislation when the selection process was conducted in a secretive and deceitful manner? Minister Donnelly has many questions to answer.

*Yours etc.,
Mary Fallon,
Lecarrow, Co. Roscommon*

Bemusement at vegan billboard

Dear Editor, It is with bemusement that I see an ad from campaign group Go Vegan World that announces 'Dairy take babies away from their mothers'. The same could be said about abortion.

*Yours etc.,
Brid Fitzpatrick,
Terenure, Dublin*

Church does not have conclusive teachings on all possible things

Dear Editor, Quoting Dr John Murray, Mary Stewart insists that "either we believe that the Church has correctly understood and interpreted Jesus' actions and words and intentions, and we commit to that; or we consider the matter to be a merely human invention and interpretation, one that is constantly open to reform because it is only human" [Articles on synod were very encouraging, *The Irish Catholic* – February 3, 2022].

Clearly implied here is that at some unstated point in the past the Church came to conclusive teachings about all possible issues.

How then are we to decide between the teaching of St Augustine of Hippo in 416 CE that those who disagreed with the rest of

the Church on any important matter could be subjected to repression by the state on matters of faith – and the teaching of Vatican II which insisted in 1965 that the truth can convey itself only by its own truth, i.e. without repression?

Like it or not the Church's current teaching on religious freedom was condemned by Pope Pius IX as late as 1864, and was not the Church's teaching during the centuries of Christendom, c. 500-1900. It is during that period that the greatest historical scandals of the Church occurred – including the Inquisitions, the approval of European Christian imperialism on other continents and the sanctioning of the enslavement of Africans and other non-Christian peoples.

In our own time that discernment cannot avoid reflection on the failure of the clerical Church, and especially of bishops, to protect Catholic children from clerical abuse – until Catholic families were driven to remind them of their duty in that matter, from the mid-1980s.

In the aftermath of that, to hold to the view that only ordained male celibate clergy and bishops can follow Christ fully and faithfully, and that, for example, Catholic parents cannot advise bishops on such matters, flies in the face of both reason and everyone's experience.

*Yours etc.,
Sean O'Connell
Coleraine, Co. Derry*

facebook community

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

Psychotherapist warns 'doomsday' news cycle is harming anxious adolescents

I only watch the bad news once a day. We should keep spreading the Good News of the Gospel to counteract it. – **John Corcoran**

When the HSE is involved, no-one is ever responsible

The usual excuse is "A systems failure" however systems only fail because of the person who set up the system. So therefore someone is responsible. – **John M Jeffers**

Tribute for popular author Colm Keane

I watched his funeral Mass online. It was the most beautiful, respectful, dignified send-off that I haven't seen for a long time. Class in life class in death RIP – **Carmel Hogan**
So sad to hear this. A wonderful writer. Condolences to his wife and co-author, Una O'Hagan. May he rest in peace. – **Rosemarie Downey**

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

NUI colleges and theology

Dear Editor, I read today the lead article in *The Irish Catholic* about parent's choice for Catholic schools and was encouraged by these findings [*The Irish Catholic* – February 3, 2022]. Faith instruction has been a part of Irish schooling from its origins in the national school system, with provision for both Catholic and Church of Ireland/Methodist-based schools. The same did not happen however for third level education.

While Trinity taught Church of Ireland-based theology and indeed continues to prepare students for Church of Ireland ordination by a wide variety of courses, UCD/NUI was prohibited from doing the same for Catholics. It was unnatural to uproot its teaching of theology from the curriculum as the origins of UCD were also Catholic, in both Newman's Catholic University of Ireland and Jesuit-run Royal University.

Such a law prohibiting theology would be similar if today, by some new legislation, theology/religion – Catholic or Protestant – were prohibited in the curriculum in Irish national schools. At the very least, and according to this research, parents would object. They would want the freedom to have Catholic/Church of Ireland schools in different districts for their children. The article therefore was encouraging in this regard, but since the 1908 Universities Act which legislated the NUI colleges, there has been nothing like teaching of theology available in any of the NUI colleges. This is an obvious imbalance which should be addressed in modern democratic Ireland.

*Yours etc.,
Dr Cormac O'Duffy
South Carolina, USA*

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

Around the world



▲ **CHINA:** Gold medalist Chloe Kim, a US snowboarder, celebrates during the 2022 Beijing Olympics flower ceremony at Genting Snow Park in Zhangjiakou, China. Photos: CNS.

◀ **VATICAN:** People in St Peter's Square attend the Angelus, led by Pope Francis from the window of his studio overlooking the square, at the Vatican.



USA: Firefighters in Whittier, California, respond to a fire, which destroyed two homes and damaged several others, February 10.



ETHIOPIA: A woman collects grain at a camp for the internally displaced people in Adadle in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. A United Nations report estimates that 22 million Ethiopians require humanitarian assistance.



FRANCE: An elevated view shows a giant crane near the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris February 9, as work continues to rebuild the roof and the spire destroyed by a fire in 2019.



UKRAINE: A member of the Ukrainian armed forces walks past combat positions near a line of separation between the troops and Russian-backed rebels outside the town of Avdiivka.



The death of chastity in our culture

The concept of chastity has fallen on hard times.

Several years ago, I was invited to speak to a group of students at a Catholic university. The invitation came with a request and a caveat. I was to speak on chastity, but ideally, I was to avoid using the word. The Dean of Theology, who had invited me, had appraised the situation this way: perhaps more than anything else, the students need a challenge to chastity, but they are so turned off by the word that if we mention it in the title, very few will show up.

“Outside of a constantly-shrinking number of select Church circles, the word chastity sets off mostly negative alarms”

His hunch was right on both scores, the need for chastity in their lives and their aversion to the word. That's also true for our culture.

For many today, the word chastity has negative connotations. Outside of a constantly-shrinking number of select Church circles, the word chastity sets off mostly negative alarms. Within our highly secularised and sophisticated world, for the most part chastity is identified with naïveté, with sexual timidity, with religious fundamentalism, with a toxic over-emphasis on sexual



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

purity, with a lack of sophistication, and with something that perhaps made more sense in another age. Commonly, the notion is ridiculed, even in some religious circles. Very few people today dare talk about saving sex for marriage or about chastity as virtue.

What's behind this? Why this negativity and disdain towards the word chastity?

Partly this is based on a number of popular perceptions. Chastity is often seen as grounded in a religious fundamentalism, which our culture today either disdains or pities ('Chastity for Jesus'). As well, the notion of chastity is seen as a product of the Church's long-standing, one-sided emphasis on virginity and celibacy and its failure to articulate a healthy, robust spirituality of sex. It's hard to argue with perceptions, except to say that the reasons for the

demise of the concept of chastity in our culture are much more complex than this.

Catechesis

Admittedly, our catechesis about chastity is part of the problem. My suspicion is that a good number of people are negative vis-à-vis the notion because of how the concept has been presented to them. Our churches and moral teachers have to assume some of the blame and admit that far too often the concept of chastity has been presented, however unintentionally, precisely as a naïveté, a repression, and as an over-emphasis on sexual purity. There's a parallel here to how atheism finds its ground. Just as so much atheism is a parasite feeding off bad religion, so too much of the negativity towards the concept of chastity is a parasite feeding off unhealthy religious teaching.

“There's a certain ennui and fatigue in an ultra-sophistication that believes all taboos may be broken, and there's a vibrancy and happiness that's felt in keeping your shoes off before the burning bush”

However, our culture's negativity towards the notion of chastity feeds off more than a less-than-healthy catechesis. The culprit? Sophistication as a virtue that is an end in itself. In short, our culture prizes personal sophistication above most everything else, and when sophistication is so highly prized, chastity easily looks like naïveté and ignorance.

“There's the over-emphasis on sexual purity and there's the dehumanising disrespect for others (that the #Me Too is standing up to)”

Is it? Is chastity a naïveté, an ignorance? At the end of the day, is the notion of chastity a sexual repression, an unhealthy timidity, a toxic over-emphasis on sexual purity, a religious fundamentalism, a pitiable pre-sophistication? Admittedly, that can sometimes be the case. However, here's the case for chastity.

In 2013, Donna Freitas, the author of a number of books on sexuality and consent, published a study entitled, *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused about Intimacy*. That title is the book in caption. Nowhere in the book (and for this she has been unjustly criticised by some church groups) does she ever say that what is happening in our

culture today in terms of soulless sex is wrong or sinful. She doesn't have to. She simply spells out the consequences – unhappiness, confusion, sexual depression.

A generation earlier, the renowned educator Allan Bloom, writing out of a purely secular perspective, came to the same conclusion. Looking at the bright, very-sophisticated young students he was teaching, he concluded that the very unbridled sophistication they so prided themselves in (which he termed “the absence of chastity in their lives”) had this effect in their lives: it left them “erotically lame”.

Chastity

And so I submit that chastity merits another look from our culture. There's first-naïveté (childishness) and there's second-naïveté (childlikeness). There's hook-up sex and there's soul-sex. There's religious fundamentalism and there's the wisdom of divine revelation. There's the over-emphasis on sexual purity and there's the dehumanising disrespect for others (that the #Me Too is standing up to). There's a certain ennui and fatigue in an ultra-sophistication that believes all taboos may be broken, and there's a vibrancy and happiness that's felt in keeping your shoes off before the burning bush. Note, in every one of these dualisms, chastity speaks for soul, for wisdom, for respect, and for happiness.

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, February 17, 2022

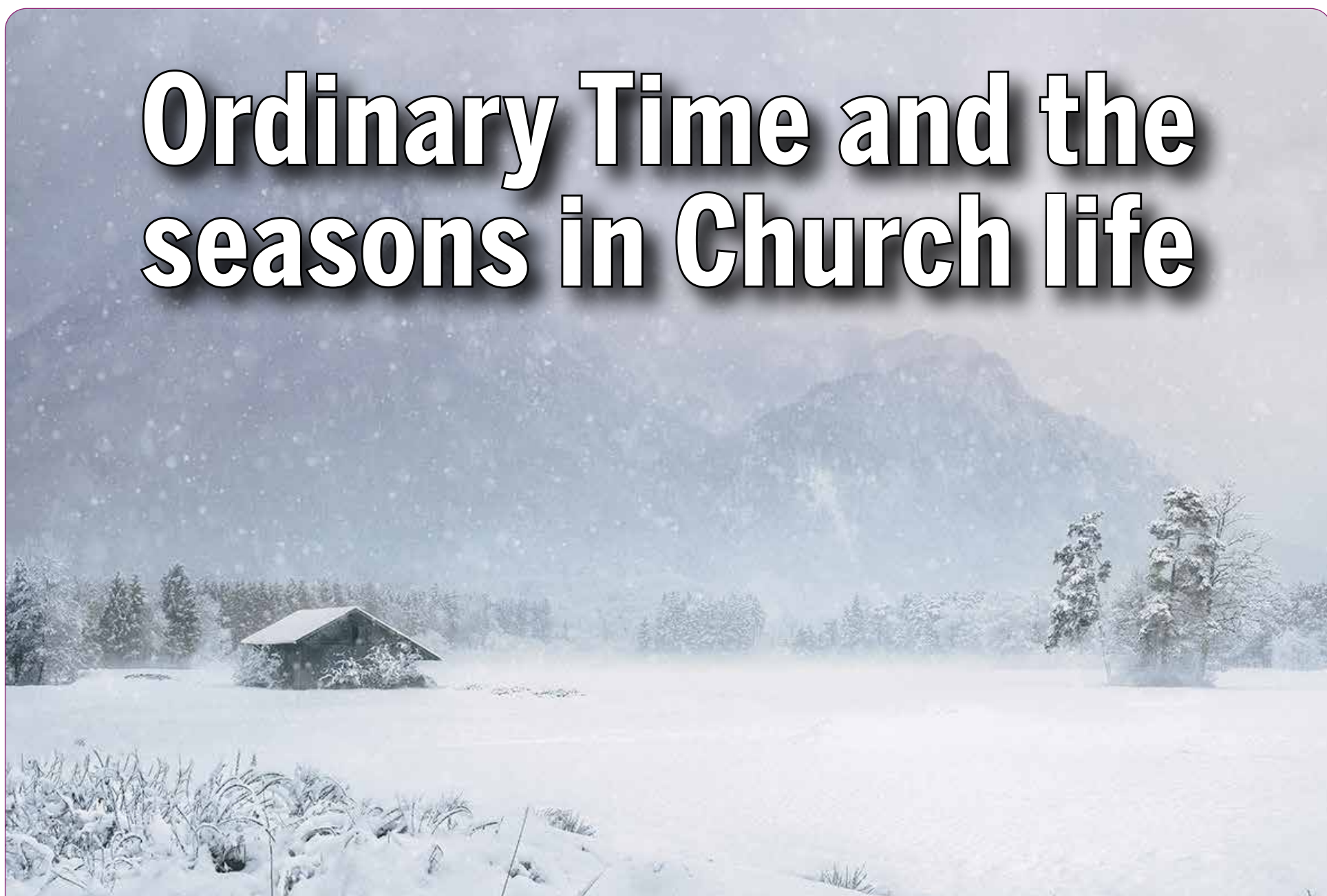
Personal Profile

A man of
many callings

Page 34



Ordinary Time and the seasons in Church life



We find ourselves a couple of weeks out from Lent yet, and smack in the middle of Ordinary Time in the Liturgical calendar. I think most of us are guilty of viewing Ordinary Time throughout the Church's year like a vast, empty desert: dull, featureless and without many notable landmarks. To many of us, it's simply a season to be endured.

However, the Church does nothing without purpose, and it's not without meaning that Ordinary Time is the longest of the Liturgical seasons. So what role does God intend this spell to play in our lives? A second question we might add to this examination of the various "seasons" in our spiritual lives is: what role do the seasons themselves



The role of Ordinary Time and the seasons in the Church year are often overlooked, but they have much to teach us, writes Jason Osborne

play in God's plan for the year?

Just as the Church does nothing without purpose, neither does God. The seasons and the liturgical year interact beautifully, emphasising and exaggerating each other. Think of the intersection between the triduum of All Saints' Eve, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day and its autumnal backdrop; the perfect setting for fruitful meditations on death and mortality. Think also of Easter's relation-

ship with Spring; while the Church celebrates Christ's rising, the Earth is reborn.

So while the 'big' Church celebrations of Lent, the Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, Advent and Christmas are the big occasions for a reason, it's neglectful of us to ignore the other seasons and their reasons for being. Back to the first question, though: What role is Ordinary Time supposed to play, spanning much of the year and many seasons as it does?

Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time, meaning simply 'ordered' or 'numbered' time, is celebrated in two segments: from the Monday following the Baptism of the Lord up to Ash Wednesday, and then from Pentecost Monday to the first Sunday of Advent. This ends up including the vast majority of the year!

The vestments are usually green during ordinary time, with breaks on special occasions; the priest donning red for a martyr's feast, for instance. Green is the colour of growth and hope, in the spirit of which the Faithful are supposed to encounter the 33 or 34 Sundays of Ordinary Time.

A large part of the spirituality of Ordinary Time is that the 'mundane' is good for us. Life on earth can't be spent in cel-

ebration and ecstasy. The proper maturation of Christ's people requires us to descend from the great, festive peaks of Christmas and Easter to rest in the fertile soil of Ordinary Time. Just as you'll find little enough time to reflect at a party or disco, the great feasts alone can be busy occasions for us. We need the safe pasture of Ordinary Time to implement and absorb the grace God is continually offering us.

Through our regular weeks, and regular series of Sundays, the "Pilgrim Church marks her journey through the *tempus per annum* as she processes through time toward eternity".

Scripture and Liturgy

"The liturgical year is to be revised

» Continued on Page 33

Family News

AND EVENTS

RED WINE AND BERRIES MAY IMPROVE PARKINSON'S LIFE EXPECTANCY

Recent research from Queen's University Belfast has found that people with Parkinson's disease who eat more flavonoids – found in foods like berries, cocoa, tea and red wine – may have improved life expectancy compared to those who don't.

The research followed over 1,200 people who had recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and showed that those who ate more flavonoids in their habitual diet had a lower chance of dying than those who consumed few flavonoids.

Parkinson's is the fastest growing neurological condition in the world, and currently has no cure. More than 10 million people worldwide are living with the disease. The disease is caused by the brain not making enough dopamine and leads to tremors, stiffness and problems with balance.

CROCODILE FREED AFTER SIX YEARS WITH TYRE AROUND NECK

A crocodile in Indonesia that had a motorcycle tyre stuck around its neck for six years was finally freed by a self-taught reptile rescuer last night.

"I caught the crocodile by myself. I was asking for help from people here but they were scared. It got caught in the trap I set up," said Central Sulawesi province resident Tili, 35, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

After capturing the reptile, Tili used a small saw to cut the tyre and posed for photographs afterwards.

The crocodile had been elusive, only rarely resurfacing in the water, Tili said.

He set up a basic trap with a rope tied to a log with live chickens and ducks as bait. After tracking the reptile for three weeks, it appeared as though the crocodile would best Tili, as it escaped his trap twice.

"Many people were sceptical about me and thought I was not serious [about catching the crocodile], but I proved [I could do] it," he added.

US OLYMPIAN WATCHES BIRTH OF FIRST CHILD VIA VIDEO CALL

US biathlete Leif Nordgren watched his wife give birth to their first child via video call from the Beijing Olympics the day before his first race, after being apart from her since mid-November.

His wife's due date was initially 4 February, the day of the opening ceremony.

"That was really cool," 32-year-old Nordgren said of watching the birth of his daughter.

"It was really nice to be on video chat and talking with my wife pretty much the entire time. A really special day for our family."

He came 87th in yesterday's 20km individual biathlon.

"I can barely handle how cute this girl is, and I can't wait to get home to meet her!! @caitlinnordgren we did good," he wrote on Instagram alongside a picture of his newborn daughter.

Meditation and marriage



My wife and I celebrated 45 years of marriage in August. I have made many commitments in my life, but two of them stand out as having shaped me, as having been deeply formative influences on the person I am today. Those two factors are marriage and meditation. While we married at a young age by today's standards, I have meditated for just more than one third of that time. Mary is a deeply contemplative person who doesn't meditate as I do but who finds solitude and great peace in gardening. I have no doubt that both of our contemplative practices have influenced our marriage relationship for the better.

Marriage and meditation share several key characteristics and I would like to reflect on some of them over these articles. Both are, ideally, lifelong commitments which call for daily faithfulness and both see love as an active verb rather than a passive noun. Both marriage and meditation involve inevitable periods of struggle which ultimately give rise to inner growth and can generate great joy. Those struggles are ultimately a positive dynamic which can change our way of seeing and being in the world. They have the capacity to generate a letting go of the egoic self, giving rise to an expanded sense of individual and collective being which is grounded in love.

Just as in marriage, the fruits of meditation arise from faithful commitment to the practice, not from occasional engagement with it. Both call for a daily commitment which places love at the centre.

All meditation traditions stress the need for twice-daily practice of 20-30 minutes for

Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



each period of meditation. When we first begin to meditate it is very easy to stray from that commitment because it can seem there are so many more important and urgent things that require our attention.

But, if we persevere, meditation quickly reveals how it is my preoccupations, my worries, my desires, my fears and my needs, that claim my attention and get in the way of my seeing clearly. We become keenly aware we do not see reality as it is but instead, we see reality as we are, as we have been conditioned by our familial and life experience to see it.

While that discovery can initially leave us agitated and defensive, over time we come to realise that our awareness of the problem actually helps to resolve it, or more accurately dissolve it; so that we begin to see more clearly and, as a result, instead of reacting out of our conditioning, we begin to respond as a given situation calls for.

The same is true of marriage as it is in any personal relationship. If we want a relationship to last, to succeed, then we must be prepared to work at it. When a new relationship appears on the horizon and we realise this is something we desire, we automatically find ourselves

paying great attention to the other person. We keep in regular contact, we treat them as a real person, not as an object, and we try hard not to take them or the relationship for granted. We set aside time for being with them and we engage with them fully when we are together. If we say we will call them or meet them at a given time, we make sure we do just that. And we expect that they will reciprocate. And, as a relationship grows, we begin to reveal more and more about ourselves at ever deepening levels. So, faithfulness to the other person and to the relationship is very important – it allows the relationship to grow and deepen. Commitment to our daily meditation is just the same.

It becomes even more important for a couple when they commit to one another through a marriage ceremony. There is, of course, the danger

with another person. But being faithful really means always keeping the marriage relationship at the centre and living out life from that perspective, both as individuals and as a couple.

Faithfulness, in marriage and meditation, calls on us to live life from the understanding that the commitment we have made is grounded in a love that is deeper than ourselves. It calls us to acknowledge, as John O'Donohue expresses it, that "there is nothing more intimate in a human life than the hidden inner landscape where Love anchors". That love is transformative when it is anchored in a quality of presence that transcends our sense of separateness.

Not alone is every person, each in their own unique way, a manifestation of love, but every married couple gives distinctive and diverse expression to this deeply mysterious love in which we all live and move and have our being.

Marriage and meditation help us to appreciate ever more deeply the mystery of our being and both inform our deepest sense of who we are. They both represent amazing miracles in my life.

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



that one party or both may begin, over time, to take the relationship for granted. And there is the danger that 'being faithful' may be misunderstood. After all, for centuries, the Christian Churches overemphasised that sin and being 'unfaithful' in a marriage merely applied to having sex

» Continued from Page 31



so that the traditional customs and discipline of the sacred seasons shall be preserved or restored to suit the conditions of modern times; their specific character is to be retained, so that they duly nourish the piety of the Faithful who celebrate the mysteries of Christian redemption, and above all the paschal mystery.

"The minds of the Faithful must be directed primarily toward the feasts of the Lord whereby the mysteries of salvation are celebrated in the course of the year. Therefore, the proper of the time shall be given the preference which is its due over the feasts of the saints, so that the entire cycle of the mysteries of salvation may be suitably recalled."

“Nonetheless, throughout Ordinary Time, the celebration of the feast days of Our Lady and of the saints are included, their lives testifying to the mystery of Christ”

So says paragraphs 107 and 108 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, one of the constitutions of the Second Vatican Council. The essence of these points is that the Church wishes to present the pre-eminence of Sunday, the Scriptures and the Liturgy, and Ordinary Time gives it the perfect opportunity to do just that.

The above paragraphs from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* also speak of the Church's desire to ensure that, the whole year round, pride of place is given to the mysteries of salvation over and above all else. Nonethe-

less, throughout Ordinary Time, the celebration of the feast days of Our Lady and of the saints are included, their lives testifying to the mystery of Christ.

St Pope John Paul II spoke of this in his apostolic letter, *Dies Domini*, saying that the relationship between the glory of the saints' and Christ's glory is built into the arrangement of the liturgical year, and expressed at its clearest in Sunday, the Lord's Day.

The reality of this arrangement is that Ordinary Time is utterly Christ-centred. We devote every Sunday to him, and hear about the day to day life of his public ministry and come to understand him as 'our daily bread' by our regular consumption of his body and blood.

The seasons

How do the seasons play into the rhythm of the liturgical year? Well, the hints above give us a sense, but there's more to it. As Jeffrey Mirus says in his article, *Seasons: The Lesson of Life*, "Man was made for sea-

sons, and seasons for man".

While nature's seasons are a little more general than the Church's, they provide suitable backgrounds for the liturgical and human drama playing out within them. Every age and every culture has recognised and acknowledged the powerful rebirth of spring, the strength of summer, the fall of autumn and winter's death. The incessant cycle impresses these basic realities upon us, no matter how far removed from nature we live.

“So rather than turn our noses up at, or more likely ignore, Ordinary Time this year, let us focus on these most basic times God has placed us in, both liturgically and naturally”

The immutable turning of the seasons has constant lessons for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. Who hasn't had their mood changed at some point by the season they're travelling through? A long, hard winter or a glorious, burning summer, however unconsciously, inform our souls of the real shape of the world – the true shape of which is to be found in the accompanying liturgy.

So rather than turn our noses up at, or more likely ignore, Ordinary Time this year, let us focus on these most basic times God has placed us in, both liturgically and naturally. Let's submit ourselves to the passage of 'ordinary time' and the lessons it holds for us.



Faith — IN THE — family



Christina Malone

For some reason the last week felt very long. When Friday night, February 4, finally came last week I found myself sitting at the kitchen table, in front of the laptop, watching the live stream from the synodal path in Germany.

It was the third out of four major gatherings taking place in Frankfurt/Main. I looked at the screen and there it was, 163 people voted in favour of women in the diaconate, 42 against and 6 abstentions. Looking at those numbers I was excited and at the same time I was shocked. They did it!

Straight away I thought about the Pope. Would Rome really accept this vote? That was not the only vote taking place that night. Others followed. In March 2019 Cardinal Reinhard Marx declared that it had been decided to follow a binding synodal path. Many in Germany and abroad talk about another schism being just around the corner.

I am not agreeing or disagreeing with the results of that Friday night but I like the path the Church in Germany chose, the fact it has an open debate with everybody having a voice: against or for changes. Everything is livestreamed. All minutes are available online within a short period of time. The synodal path started in 2019 even before Pope Francis called for a worldwide Synod on Synodality – a listening Church.

Driven by the shocking abuse report the German bishops' conference decided in March 2019 to bring everyone on a synodal path. This is not a new path for the German Church. In the early 70s the German bishops gathered in Würzburg to put the Second

Vatican Council into action. Documents on the role of laity, religious education followed and even back then the question about the ordination of women for the diaconate was debated. No doubt the Church has to respond to the signs of the times. However, the future of the German Church is uncertainty. Some are excited, others nervous, some have already given up a long time ago. The synodal path has another long way ahead. Twelve more months.

Like the Church in Germany, the Church in Ireland and indeed all over the world Pope Francis is inviting the people of God to take part in the synod. Many dioceses have already started this process, reaching out and organising listening sessions. However, many I encounter are tired and are struggling to find the energy to engage with it. Someone said to me: "Why should I believe that this time it is different? What difference does it make?"

I am not sure to be honest but I am hopeful that this time it will be different. No doubt many are looking over to Germany and wonder what is going to happen there. Some excited, some scared. Time will tell what's going to happen next and as parishes and communities get ready to listen to the voices of the people of God here in Ireland, I invite you to listen within yourself. We know about the past. We live in the present. What are your dreams for the future of the Church? We believe in the Holy Spirit. Let us continue to listen to each other, walk with each other and trust that the Holy Spirit is part of the journey ahead. There is no synod if the Holy Spirit is missing.



A man of many callings

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Recently ordained as a permanent deacon for service in Clogher diocese, husband and father Paul Flynn is another bridge over the perceived 'gap' between the Church and the world.

The ordination taking place earlier this month in St Michael's Church, Enniskillen, it was just the latest, major step on Deacon Flynn's faith journey – one that started in his father's shadow.

"I was my dad's shadow when I was little and he'd be going to the rosary and benediction and I'd be always tagging along. I always felt very at home in the Church. That little corner where we always were feels very cosy," Rev. Flynn tells *The Irish Catholic*.

Home

"I was drawn to that, that feeling of home. Then I got involved in serving and that. I was always very involved and got very broad experience then as a server. Then I went to Castleknock college in Dublin for secondary school. They're Vincentians, so I got a lot of exposure there.

"The Faith was very much part of school. That solidified an awful lot of my childhood experiences of Faith," he says.

As is the case for so many, college saw a drop in faith engagement for Deacon Flynn. Thankfully though, the flame kept burning, and it was music

ministry that helped to stoke it.

"I drifted away when I went to university a bit. I was studying music in Trinity College. I didn't drift away from Christianity as such, but I was singing in the Church of Ireland. I sang in Trinity College Chapel choir in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin," he tells.

"But it was actually through that I came back to engagement with Scripture. When you're singing words, you are articulating them and there's an act of will involved in that. It had huge influence on me and brought me back to my own tradition. Coming back, I was even stronger then."

A love of music rarely fades, and nor did Deacon Flynn's. Among his many duties as a husband, father and deacon, he still finds time to direct one of the choirs in the church of his ordination.

"I'm there since 2013. Other than

Covid, I've been very busy doing lots of things, weekly Mass and all the other liturgies throughout the year. This last couple of years for music trying to keep it going," he says.

Liturgy

Not only this, but Rev. Flynn also served on the diocesan liturgy commission for four years, too. Evidently, liturgy and music are passions of his.

"The Liturgy is very important for me. The music is one aspect. But worship, we're called to it. And I think music and the Liturgy go hand in hand. What we do in liturgy goes out into the world, as opposed to the world going into the Liturgy.

"So attention to liturgy is very important. While a lot of people may not be aware of how much work goes into liturgy. It's very important."

Many people would be satisfied

with this extensive level of involvement in their local parish or diocese (or perhaps feel overworked!), so where did the decision to go a step further come from?

"When I was younger, I thought about priesthood. I never pursued it as such because I felt the Holy Spirit in some way telling me to wait and see – don't jump yet. I sat with that for a while. I went off and did my studies and I met Angie, got married and all that," he says, continuing, "When I got married, that was still there, that kind of calling. I found that kind of confusing. But then, we moved here to Cavan, shortly after we got married and Bishop Leo O'Reilly launched the permanent diaconate in the diocese of Kilmore.

“However, these only served to deepen Deacon Flynn's certainty that he was on the right path”

"I picked up the pastoral letter and I read it and went, hold on a minute. This kind of makes sense. Because I had been called to the married life, but at the same time I was called to some kind of ministerial service. When I was younger, I didn't know what that was, but when I read the package, it sort of fit.

"So I sat with that for a while, and discussed it with my wife. I did my research, talked to priests who were involved in the diaconate. Then it brought me to where I am now."

It's not a simply hop, skip and jump into the diaconate, however, with your calling to it surely tested by years of study and spiritual preparation. However, these only served to deepen Deacon Flynn's certainty that he was on the right path.

"There's a propaedeutic year, a year of discernment where you do a few retreats and things like that. Then we did three years of study, which was

every second weekend, Fridays and Saturdays. I was up in Belfast," Rev. Flynn explains.

"So I was up in St Mary's with the Down and Connor group because it was only me from Clogher. It was pretty intense now, but it was wonderful, I have to say. It was quite a privilege to be able to study like that.

"The lads I studied with would also say that it would be great if every Catholic could have the experience of the study, because it really opens up one's eyes to the Faith. It's fantastic, and I'm still reading and I'm going to continue to study, because there's always something to learn," he says.

If Deacon Flynn is spiritually and intellectually prepared to go forth and tend to people's pastoral needs, he's also prepared on a practical level, too. As a married man and a father, he's sure he can bring a touch to ministry that hasn't always been there.

"Family life is something that I know first-hand that I can, you know, bring into the mix. Not to say that priests don't know what family life is like because they're all sons and brothers and uncles and the like.

"But the thing about deacons is that they're living in the world with others, while the priests are separate from the world. I think my role is bringing people, to be that bridge between laity and the clergy. Double jobbing, I suppose you could say. I can't think of a better term for it."

All that remains now is to get started. Rev. Flynn says he can't wait to get "stuck in", but acknowledges that it's a "daunting" prospect.

"Oh yeah, I can't wait to get stuck in. Now, it's quite daunting obviously. But I can't wait, we've been preparing so much and our ordination was delayed with Covid and that. There's been delays, which has meant the anticipation has been protracted significantly. But sure, that's the way things are at the moment."

Do you know someone who we should profile? Send an email to ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Sweet Treats

Kiley Britten



Chocolate choc-a-bloc cookies

These cookies are wonderful if you want something for dessert but don't know what to make. They are chewy, chocolatey parcels of goodness which you can customise to your own tastes. You can use pecans or walnuts, or your favourite nuts, and I would suggest using a different chocolate chip than the baking chocolate. For example, use milk baking chocolate and dark chocolate chips, or milk baking chocolate and white chocolate chips. You could even throw in some chopped pretzels for a sweet and salty contrast which would be absolutely delicious. Whichever way you make these cookies, they are sure to delight.

Ingredients

- 70g plain flour
- 35g cocoa powder
- 1tsp baking powder
- 170g cooking chocolate
- 110g butter
- 2 eggs

- 110g sugar
- 1 1/2tsp vanilla extract
- 200g pecans or walnuts
- 170g chocolate chips

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 190°C and grease two baking sheets. Combine the flour, cocoa and baking powder in a bowl, mix and set aside.
2. In a saucepan, melt the butter and the cooking chocolate over a low heat. Stir every now and then until the mixture is smooth. Set aside to cool down a little.
3. In the bowl of a stand mixer or using a hand mixer, beat the eggs and sugar together at a medium speed until it is a light yellow. Scrape the sides of the bowl to make sure everything is mixed together.
4. Using a low speed, add in the butter and



chocolate mixture. Once that is mixed in, add in the flour mixture and the vanilla. Increase the speed to medium and beat everything for two minutes.

5. Stir in the pecans or walnuts and the chocolate chips. The batter will be somewhat runny, so make sure it is all stirred through. Using a spoon or ice cream scoop, drop balls of the batter onto the baking sheets, leaving about 10cm between each cookie. Flatten the cookies down with the back of a spoon.

5. Bake until the tops are looking shiny and cracked, about 13 minutes. Rotate the cookies between the racks halfway through the baking time. Once they are done cooking, leave the cookies on the baking sheets for 10 minutes or so before transferring to a cooling rack to finish cooling.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



There is consensus behind lots of terrible ideas...

Few people like to hate, those who hate probably feel justified, and few would defend it in public discourse. And yet, though I'd have no truck with hate, I'm uneasy about the idea of 'hate crime'. Some crimes are motivated by hate, but the crime is still the crime and can be prosecuted as such. I fear this categorisation is intended to be, or may be, used to stifle opinions that don't meet with the approval of powers that are in the ascendancy, of agendas that are popular in media circles.

These thoughts were prompted by **Newstalk Breakfast** (Thursday) when John McGuirk of Gript.ie discussed impending hate crime legislation with Labour Party TD Ivana Bacik. In relation to crime McGuirk argued that it would be better to deal with what he called "horrendously lenient sentences", and he might have added effective enforcement and adequate policing as well. He saw the proposed legislation as creating a "crime of motive", whereas he thought the crime is what you did, not what you were thinking at the time you did it.

Ineffective

Bacik declared ('without evidence' as they say, sometimes, selectively) that the current legislation on incitement was ineffective. She



Russia's President Vladimir Putin attends the enthronement ceremony of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, 2009. Photo: CNS.

thought the harm done to a victim was aggravated if they were targeted because they were part of a particular group. She welcomed the cross party consensus on the issue, though it's worrying when there's such consensus on a controversial issue. McGuirk suggested that there was "consensus behind lots of terrible ideas". Bacik sought to argue from authority, citing her long track record in law, which seemed to irritate presenter Ciara Kelly who tried, twice, to bring her back to the issue under discussion.

I've written recently about how children so often suffer because of the ideologies and callousness of adults. They will suffer the most I'd suspect if the peace-makers don't prevail in relation to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. At the time of writing what seemed, if one took the relatively optimistic view, like posturing, sabre rattling and brinkmanship was becoming much more ominous, with several Western countries urging their citizens to leave Ukraine immediately. As if war was what we needed just as we

leave behind the worst of a pandemic.

On **David Lammy** (LBC, Saturday) the host, a Labour MP, was in a particularly grave mood, speaking of the "incredibly bleak" situation. He also spoke of the hectoring he and Sir Keir Starmer, Labour Party leader, got when they were barracked recently by a group of protestors near the Houses of Parliament. I'm uneasy about having currently serving politicians as hosts on current affairs shows. There's too much of a conflict of interest, and media balance and neutrality are already hard enough to find.

On **Sunday** (BBC Radio 4) Edward Stourton spoke to Prof. Marat Shterin of King's College, London about the relationship between President Putin and the Orthodox Church in Russia. He said Putin increasingly emphasises this relationship, and sees Russia having a mission to be a stronghold of traditional values rooted in Orthodox Christianity against "the corrosive influence of western secularism and liberalism" and to defend Russia as a unique spiritual civilisation "against western godlessness and moral decay".

Influence

Putin, he said, sees Ukraine as belonging historically to Russia's sphere of influence and the Orthodox Church sees

PICK OF THE WEEK

SERVICE

RTÉ One Sunday February 20, 11:10am

Fr Robert McCabe celebrates a prayer service in anticipation of Temperance Sunday with music from Ephrem Feeley, David Burke and pupils from St Joseph's Mercy Schola, Navan.

CATHOLIC VIEW FOR WOMEN

EWTV MONDAY FEBRUARY 21, 8AM AND WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 23, 10.30PM

A discussion on the growing concern over gender dysphoria in children and adolescents, especially young girls, highlighting the societal pressures that make kids question gender identity at an early age.

TURLEY TALKS

EWTV TUESDAY FEBRUARY 22, 11AM AND WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 23, 8.30PM

The Scottish composer, Sir James MacMillan, speaks to Kevin Turley about his vocation as a classical composer and the important role that Catholic artists can play in society.

Ukraine as part of its "canonical territory". Prof. Shterin saw a mutual benefit – the Orthodox Church benefits from Putin's patronage, and the Church's blessing is "crucially important" for Putin. It was a topic that needed further exploration, from a variety of perspectives.

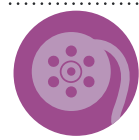
Also Russia related was the story reported widely of the Russian athlete accused of doping. She is only 15, and has been competing at the Winter Olympics. As presenter Jenny Kleeman suggested on **Times Radio Breakfast** (Saturday) this effectively amounts to child abuse as it is likely an adult persuaded, pressurised or forced her into this position.

Finally, I'd be tempted sometime to do a column

on what has NOT been in the media during the week. For example where is all the concern and outrage over the less than transparent appointments to head the three-year review of the abortion legislation? Where are the intrepid journalists and opposition party politicians asking the hard questions? It feels like the illusion of consultation all over again. I'd so love to be proven wrong on this, but won't hold my breath.

As quoted earlier, there is "consensus behind lots of terrible ideas".

✉ boregan@hotmail.com,
[@boreganmedia](https://www.boreganmedia.com)



Film

Aubrey Malone



Real lives and reel lives under the spotlight

Nice to see that Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez have got back together again but does the news deserve the buzz it's been getting from the tabloids?

They were a joke last time they were together, around the time they made *Gigli*. Now the prospect of them going up the aisle has got the paparazzi so excited it's made the Russian ships amassing themselves along Ukraine seem like a triviality by comparison.

Is the prospect of an imminent global war less important than the question of whether 'Bennifer' will tie the knot? You have to be mega to merit that kind of hybrid. Remember Megxit? Hiddlestwit?

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie had one too - Brangelina. When

they split up there was talk of Mr Pitt going back to his former wife Jennifer Aniston. (Would this be 'Braniffer'?)

If it's all too much for you to take in you might prefer to check out J. Lo's latest rom-com, *Marry Me*. No, this isn't an imprecation to Mr Affleck to put a ring round her finger, rather one from her onscreen squeeze Owen Wilson. ('Oweniffer'?)

Of somewhat more moment is *The Real Charlie Chaplin*, a documentary about the man who was worshipped on screen for his depiction of the Little Tramp and vilified off it for rumours of paedophilia. It's at the Irish Film Institute from February 18.

Chaplin had a penchant for impregnating very young



Vicki Phelan features in a new documentary.

women and then marrying them. This problem, combined with his left-wing views, saw him leaving America for Switzerland in his middle age. By

then he was married (happily, for once) to Eugene O'Neill's daughter Oona. Eugene disowned her.

So, who was the 'real' Chap-

lin? Like many geniuses he had a cruel side. The documentary touches on this but mostly goes soft on him.

The Dublin International Film Festival is also on this month. There are a huge number of films showing. You can view them on the DIFF website. One that jumps out is *Vicki*, a documentary on the ill-fated cervical cancer victim Vicki Phelan. She's been high-profiled recently for her campaigning on this scandal. It's at the Light-house Cinema on February 24 at 6 pm.

If it's thrills and spills you're after, sample *The Batman*, yet another outing for the Caped Crusader. Or *Dog*. This concerns an Army Ranger (Channing Tatum) travelling

to a soldier's funeral with his canine. I think it's safe to say neither Mr Tatum nor the movie will trouble the Oscar podium.

Finally, two films which explore eschatological issues but in that Hollywood way which should hardly give us pause. First is *The Devil's Light*. Witness, if you will, a nun (not a priest) performing an exorcism which poses a personal danger to her.

Then there's *Here Before*, a disturbing film set in Belfast about a mother (the great Andrea Riseborough) who believes her dead daughter is reincarnated as a neighbour's child.

I would give both of these chillers a wide berth.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



Recent books in brief

Sacred Space for Lent 2022

(Messenger Publications, €4.95/£4.50)

The Sacred Space website, a mission of the Irish Jesuits, continues to be one of the most popular prayer sites, accessed worldwide, continuing some would say the ancient ambition of the earliest Christians in this country to spread the word directly to people.

Sacred Space for Lent 2022 maintains the straightforward but effective format of previous years with a Scripture reading, points of reflection, a weekly topic and six steps of prayer and meditation.

The small handy format, with a concise 96 pages of devotional material, makes this an ideal *vade mecum* easily carried, just the thing to read on the bus or Luas! We are never so busy that we do not have time for reflection and the cultivation of hope.

This Lent and Easter many minds will be focused on what everyone has been through over the last two years, on the lingering worries of many that all is not over, and rising hopes that we can learn something for ourselves and for society from passing through the pandemic, especially the need to embrace the benefits of collective action for the benefit of all even if sacrificing 'personal freedom'. Surely here is a misunderstanding of what the Gospel actually says about our care and concern for our neighbours. Our own 'liberty' cannot come at the cost of damage to others.

Hearers of the Word – Praying and Exploring the Readings for Lent and Holy Week: Year C

Kieran J O'Mahony OSA (Messenger Publications, €19.95/£18.95)

In the latest book in this series Fr O'Mahony maps the readings for Lent and Holy Week, drawing together the story of Jesus' final days with accompanying commentary, prayer guides and reflections.

This is the eighth book in this very popular series, and the final volume on the Lenten readings in this the third year of the liturgical cycle. The author explores the context and background to all three readings as a guide for personal prayer and as a preparation for taking part in the Sunday liturgy.

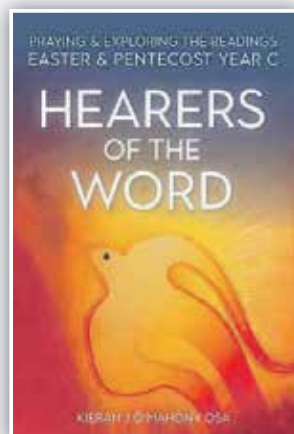
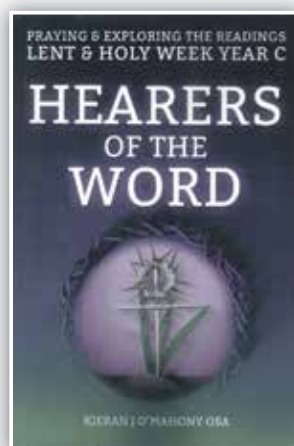
Hearers of the Word – Praying and Exploring the Readings, Easter and Pentecost: Year C

Kieran J O'Mahony OSA (Messenger Publications, €19.95/£18.95)

This volume, the companion so to speak to the book above, is the ninth and final volume in the 'Hearers' series, bringing to a close the series of Gospel reflections, covering the three years of the liturgical cycle.

Again with verse-by-verse commentary, a detailed explanation of the Old and New Testament background behind each reading, and suggestions for prayer and reflection, *Hearers of the Word* asks us to rejoice and go outside, because Christ is risen, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep!

Fr O'Mahony currently serves in a south Dublin parish which brings him very close indeed to the feelings and fears of ordinary Christians. What could be a more welcome and supportive message as the country is moved by a feeling that the pandemic is passing and that 'normal life' is returning. That at least is the hope of many, a hope still tinged with fear.



An unusual exhibition of religious art in the National Gallery

Christ and His Cousin: Renaissance Rediscoveries, curated by Dr Aoife Brady (Continues to 8 May 2022; Hugh Lane Room; free admission – no booking required)

Peter Costello

Currently the National Gallery is running a small but very interesting show in one of their smaller exhibition spaces focused on images of the child Jesus and his cousin St John the Baptist.

These have taken the gallery's head of conservation Simone Mancini some 15 years to conserve. Over the decades some of these have been hardly seen at all; but changing interests in art history have now greatly added to their interest, and the opportunity to see the paintings should be seized.

They and their scholarly presentation will greatly interest those concerned with the expression of faith in the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation.

“This theme can be seen in the other painting illustrated here, thought to be by Jacopino del Conte, though not as well expressed”

There are eight images in all, the finest of which is by general agreement that by Giovanni Antonio Sogliani, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist*. Here a pensive Madonna watches the interaction of the two children, Jesus with a hand raised in blessing, the infant John grasping a reed (symbolic of his future staff from the banks of the River Jordan), which is alluded to on the top left of the background. In the back on the right can be seen in the distance two figures in white thought to represent the adult Jesus and John walking together.

This painting focuses on two things: the prophetic soul of the Virgin Mary contemplating the distant pain that is in store for all three, and how the present joys of childhood will give way to the sterner demands to be made on them in later years.

This theme can be seen in the other painting illustrated here, thought to be by Jacopino del Conte, though not as well expressed. But all of them give glimpses

of family life in Renaissance Florence, then centre of Italian culture, which are very charming and delightful in themselves.

All these images are the work of Florentine painters. The devotion to St John the Baptist, seen as the forerunner of the Messiah to come, was very important in the city then. John the Baptist was the patron saint of the city, the original patron of the city being St Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin. So there was widespread devotion in Florence to these figures, and the feastday of his nativity on June 24, placed to balance with the nativity of Jesus, was the occasion for elaborate city-wide summer festivities.

Bourgeoisie

The pictures on show were probably not, from their size, intended for great churches, religious houses, or rich convents, but for the homes of middling prosperous Florentine bourgeoisie. The gallery is rich in images that come from those other institutions; these come from the private domestic scene, they represent the familial piety of ordinary people. Hence the warm and playful family life that they depict.

The traditional echoes in these images (and indeed in much religious art down to modern times) comes not so much from the Gospel narratives of the New Testament with echoes from Old Testament prophecies, as from the rich apocalyptic tradition, so important in Catholic folklore.

Dr Aoife Brady says *Christ and His Cousin: Renaissance Rediscoveries* “will explore the symbolism and traditions that underpin these playful and lively compositions, and encourage visitors to reconsider what are often dismissed as conventional and familiar images”.

The traditions behind these images come not from the Gospels themselves, but from beliefs generated from passages in the Old Testament prophets and the early Christians recorded in the early non-canonical apocrypha, such as the Gospel of James. Some of these books survive in the Catholic Bible, but are excluded from those of the reformed traditions.

Much of this and more was given form by Jacobus de Voragine (1230-1298), the Archbishop of Genoa. His compilation *The Golden Legend* (circa 1260) was one of the most influential books of the age, and its notions lingered on in the sort of things told to Catholic children by the nuns who began their education. Now the wondrous folklore of the high



middle ages has largely evaporated; yet its notions can be seen everywhere in European art, especially in the kind of devotional paintings to be seen in this exhibition. An encounter with these paintings will open up for many unfamiliar aspects of their heritage.

“The traditions behind these images come not from the Gospels themselves”

(Those who wish to learn more about what critical use can be made of these traditions should consult *The Legends of the Saints* by the Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye (Four Courts Press, Dublin 1991), a modern edition with a new introduction by the Dublin-born expert in this field, Fr Thomas O'Loughlin, professor emeritus of Historical Theology at Nottingham University.)

And while they are in the National Gallery visitors should explore the nearby rooms which are crowded with examples of religious art from the Renaissance and other periods. No matter how familiar we think we are with the collection there will always be unfamiliar images to catch our attention and open up new experiences for eye and imagination.

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.

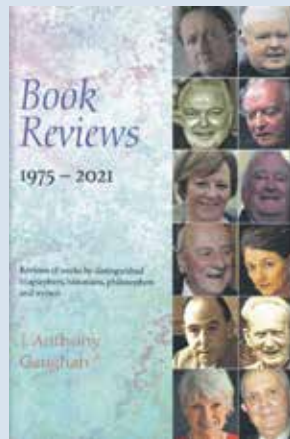


Giovanni Antonio Sogliani, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist*, 1620-1630. Oil on panel, NGI.4089. Photo: © National Gallery of Ireland



Attributed to Jacopino del Conte, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist*, c.1530 Oil on canvas, NGI.1080. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

The climate of the Irish mind over the last half century



Books Reviews
1975-2021: Reviews of works by distinguished biographers, historians, philosophers and writers

by J. Anthony Gaughan
(Kingdom Books,
€24.00/£20.00)

Peter Costello

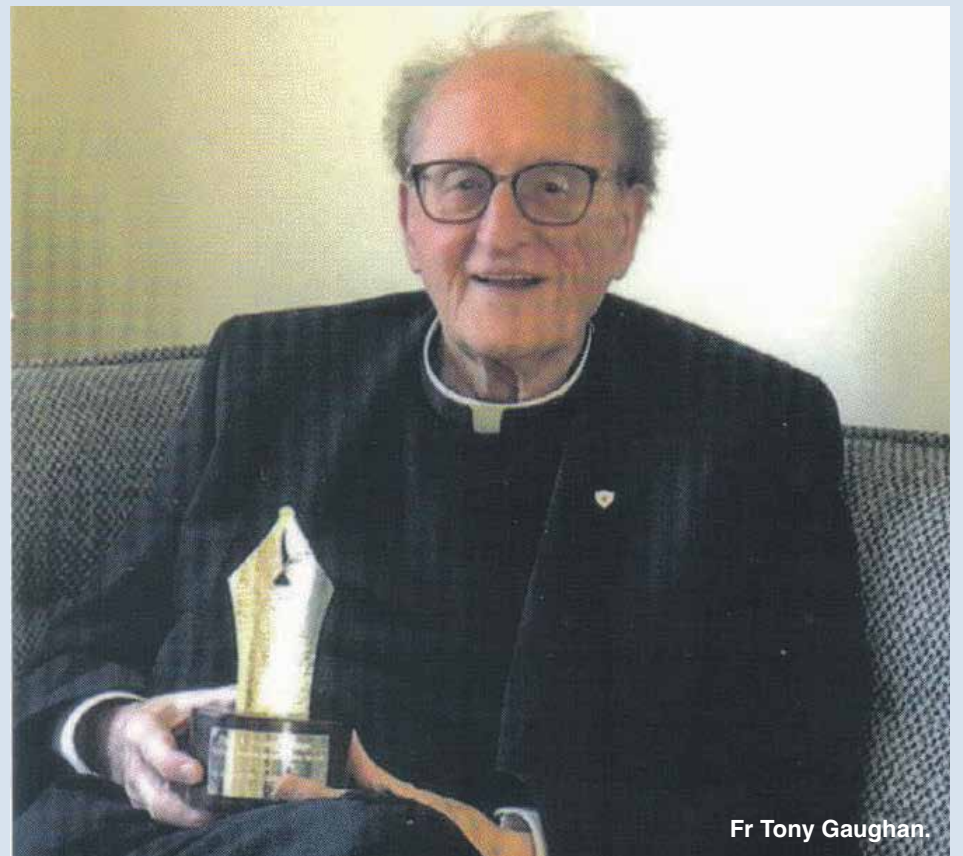
Fr Tony Gaughan, himself the author of many books ranging over philosophy, local and national history, and Irish social life since the middle ages, is one of this paper's most popular reviewers.

This compilation of his reviews going back over the last half century, gathers articles from some 14 assorted publications from the *Evening Herald* to *The Furrow*, by way of *Studies* and the *The Sunday Business Post*, an eclectic audience indeed. While the writer's opinions, like all opinions are endlessly debatable, the book has a much larger perspective. It reveals something of what was passing through the minds of Irish opinion-makers, intellectuals, and a very varied group of writers.

Opening it I was reminded of two century-old books on my shelves: *Adventures in Criticism* by 'Q' (Prof. Arthur Quiller-Couch) from 1898, taken from *The Speaker* (to which Yeats contributed too); and *A London Bookman*, by Frank Swinnerton (1928), which assembled some of his contributions over seven years from 1920 to the New York monthly *The Bookman*.

Remarkable

What these two books provide are remarkable side-lights on literary life over a long quarter century which you will not find in the writings of those academics who cling to the 'canon'. They range from an attempt at 'bookstall censorship' in 1895 by our very own firm of Charles Eason and Son (an attempt to suppress in Ireland Grant Allen's novel *The Woman Who Did*) down to the contemporary problem with 'spurious memoirs'



Fr Tony Gaughan.

in 1927 (which might have been plucked from today's headlines).

Leaving aside the opinions expressed by the reviewer this too is a literary chronicle of immense value covering a period of great social and political change in Ireland when the Irish publishing industry was going through a period of exceptional expansion, but which the perennial under-capitalisation from Irish sources has allowed British and international firms to reap most of the advantage.

But in contrast to say the Ireland of the 1930s and 1940s, the period covered was a period of intellectual ferment, religious and philosophical change, and a still continuing social revolution. This was the outcome largely of a vastly enlarged university graduate cohort in the country from about 1965 onwards, especially of women.

This heady brew is well reflected in Fr Gaughan's essays, from the actual publisher through the echoes of controversies that involved many people. Fr Gaughan, for instance, is doubtful of 'revisionism', and finds novel theories too often to be shallow and unprofitable. Well, these opinions divide the country still and his attitude is one widely shared.

But there is an overall point that should not be overlooked. For many years Fr Gaughan was Irish President of PEN, the international writers group that aims to preserve freedom of expression world-wide as a basic right, and not the gift of a generous government. Ireland was

active in this field in developing connections between scattered authors. In general our authors should be glad they live in a country which now has a level of freedom of expression which while not in the very top rank stands internationally at number 11. These reviews reflect indeed a freedom of expression which should never be taken for granted.

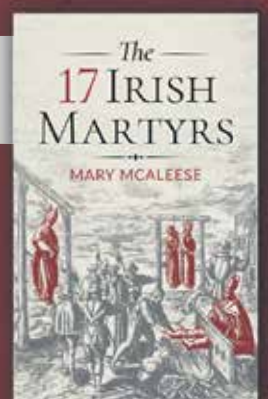
Delighted

Many readers, however, will also be delighted to be

reminded of, or to learn of for the first time, interesting and important books by excellent writers which have been hurried into oblivion by the practice of modern publishers of giving books only a few months to establish themselves, or producing them in ever smaller decreasing numbers (as low as 300 or 500 copies). I suspect that this compendium of Fr Gaughan's reviews will make many very thankful indeed for his ever-active pen.

AVAILABLE FOR PRE ORDER*

IN A PERIOD OF
INTERTWINED
RELIGIOUS AND
POLITICAL
UPHEAVAL, HOW
DO WE DEFINE A
MARTYR?



Price: €16.99
+€4.50 P&P

From Franciscan friars and bishops to diocesan priests and a single laywoman, the beatified 17 Irish martyrs provide the answers. Through a confident retelling of their inspiring stories, we discover that until very recently our divisions and wounds were not so dissimilar from theirs.

PRE ORDER TODAY, PHONE 01 6874096
WWW.COLUMBABOOKS.COM

*Shipping Late February

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



Please remember GOAL in your Will

45 years on we continue to deliver lifesaving support to the most vulnerable people in our world. Leaving a gift in your Will is priceless.

Contact Courtenay on 01 2809779 or via email at cpollard@goal.ie

Registered Charity No. 20010980; CHY 6271

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

Support Irish Missionaries



'NET helped me make my faith SO much stronger than it's ever been, and it's really helped me improve as a man of God.' — Michael (19), Dublin

Please help support young NET missionaries like Michael to minister to the youth of Ireland.

Phone 074 919 0606 to make a donation today.



By choosing to leave a gift in your will to Missio Ireland, 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

MISSIO
IRELAND

Hoping...
to be in a relationship?

Seeking...
someone who shares your faith?

Finding...
it difficult to meet the right person?

Call: 01 568 6568

 **heavenlypartners**

SACRISTAN WANTED

WANTED CORK CONVENT SACRISTAN for chapel services including early daily Mass, altar flowers, laundry, etc. Five and a half day weekly including Sunday. Please reply to Box No 5070.

CARER NEEDED

MATURE LADY SEEKS CARER, Dublin south side. Preferably lady in her 20's. For full details contact 087 9722754.

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

BOOK FOR SALE

THE CATHOLIC BULLETIN and Republican Ireland with special Reference to J. J. O'Kelly ('Sceilg') by Dr. Brian Murphy, OSB. 312p.p. €20 post free. 021 4676 029.



Follow The Irish Catholic on Twitter

IrishCathNews

Remembering
MEMORIAM CARDS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
CARDS & NOTELETS
BOOKMARKS

Samples / Information
KENNEDY PRINTERS
BANTRY, CO. CORK, IRELAND
Tel. 027 50102
www.kennedyprinters.ie
email: info@kennedyprinters.ie

Who will pass on the flame of faith?

For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland. Help up pass on the flame of faith, by remembering us in your Will.

Phone 01 6874028
in strictest confidence
The Irish Catholic



17th -22nd April, 2022, Tramore, Co. Waterford

Great Talks | Seminars | Holy Mass | Fun 4 all ages

Join us in Tramore for a conference with a difference as we invite families from across Ireland to

Celebrate Easter Together

and to dive deeper into our relationship with Jesus

To find out more and book your place go to www.arisefamilyconference.ie



The Conference is being organised by the Tine Network, in conjunction with the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore.



Classifieds:
01 687 4094

Notebook

Fr Conor McDonough



The inspiring story of a Dominican harp school

PICTURE THE SCENE: the Hill of Tara in August 1843, and a huge crowd has gathered for the largest of Daniel O'Connell's 'Monster Meetings' in support of repealing the Act of Union. The great man himself processed through the thronged masses accompanied by a harpist, but there were other harpists there that day – five boys from Drogheda – and their story is a fascinating one.

It begins in the priory of the Drogheda Dominicans. With the easing of persecution, and especially in the wake of Catholic Emancipation, this community was growing in confidence, and seeking to use its influence in the social life of the town. Alcoholism was constantly undermining public and domestic happiness, so the friars threw their weight behind various local movements promoting teetotalism.

Abstinence

Total abstinence from alcohol is sometimes associated with a certain puritanical primness, but that was far from the case in Drogheda. Abstinence campaigners actively sought to promote rich and satisfying alternatives to drunkenness. They set up a lending library, for



example, and ran Irish language classes, literary events, and musical entertainments. Thomas V. Burke OP – not to be confused with the more famous Thomas N. Burke

OP, of Galway – was president of the Drogheda Total Abstinence Society and he explained thus the value of such events: vice was something that could excite the passions, but virtuous activities like these could also 'awake the better feelings of our nature and elevate national morality'.

It was in this context that the same Fr Burke established the Drogheda Harp Society in 1839. In an 1843 report on the Society's activities, entitled 'Temperance and Minstrelsy', Fr Burke explains that the harp was chosen because of its religious significance as well as its national significance. The harp was David's instrument, mentioned often in the Psalms, but it was played also in ancient Ireland: 'the harp is associated with all our ancient greatness'.

Founding a harp society, then, meant 'reviving the harp of Sion and of Tara', aiding in the upbuilding of national and religious confidence after centuries of subjugation.

Greatness

What better way to hand on this 'ancient greatness' to future generations than to set up a harp school? That's precisely what Fr Burke did, with the Belfast harpist Hugh Frazer as teacher. By 1843 there were 15 students, some of them blind. It is from among their number that the five boys were chosen to play the harp for O'Connell at Tara in 1843. Not only did they play here and at musical evenings, but joined their playing also to the singing of the Dominican friars in the divine office.

Revival

The Drogheda Harp Society, along with so much of the Irish cultural revival then beginning to blossom, did not survive the long winter of the Great Famine, but the generous, joyous, and democratic vision of its idealistic founder is inspiring still for all who love beauty, Ireland, and the Catholic Faith: "To adorn the virtue and to enhance the charms of the children of Erin, by placing within the means of all the music and accomplishment of kings, is an object of our labours, that the cottage of the peasant may be as full of social joy as the hall of the noble; that public virtue and domestic happiness may triumph with our cause, until Ireland shall be an island of saints, and the notes of the harp be heard in every village, blended with the voice of beauty and virtue."

A poetical-musical soirée

One fascinating insight into the circle around Fr Thomas V. Burke comes from a German travel writer, Johann Kohl, whose *Travels in Ireland* tells of his journey around the island in 1842. In Drogheda he experienced what he called a "poetical-musical soirée", hosted by Fr Burke. The first performer was a friend of the priest's, an old man with a head full of stories and songs. He recited a number of pieces in Irish, including long stories about Cúchulainn, and the German visitor was afterwards provided with a translation. Some of the stories made

Kohl think of comparisons with German and Hungarian legends he knew. Then a blind young man, a student in Burke's harp school, played some pieces on the harp, beginning with 'Brian Boru's March', followed by Carolan's 'The Fairy Queen'. Kohl described the harper's playing as "soft, enchanting, wild, sportive, and playful". It's not a bad idea to look for recordings of these two pieces online, and to relive that evening, imagining the joy of a people coming out of subjugation and falling in love once again with their culture.



PLEASE HELP TYPHOON VICTIMS IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Montfort Missionaries have written to The Little Way Association appealing for urgent help for the victims of typhoon Odette which hit the Philippines in December 2021.

The Fathers have been sheltering homeless victims, and urgently need funds to continue feeding the homeless families, to repair the community's own properties and to build the people new houses.

Fr Norwyn Baydo SMM writes: "The typhoon made landfall in different provinces. Our community in Minglanilla have opened their house to twenty families, though our own building was itself damaged by the typhoon. On Kinatarran island, our house was used as an evacuation site for 10 families. The community members are all safe and are serving the people in providing shelter and for their needs.

"I'm asking on behalf of the victims for financial help to support our relief operation and also for the rebuilding of their houses. Please help us to continue our relief work. God bless you."

Funds sent to The Little Way Association for the homeless are conveyed to religious such as the Montfort Missionaries without deduction of any kind. Please be generous and particularly remember the families with small children.

Typhoon Odette left families in the Philippines homeless and destitute. You can enable missionaries to help rebuild the victims' lives.



"It is love alone that matters."
- St Therese

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends are gratefully received and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass. Our benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions.

WELLS NEEDED

Missionaries constantly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

Can you help provide a well?



Little Way Sisters providing refugees with food, medicines and accommodation, and bringing them the love, care and compassion of Christ.



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:

€..... **PHILIPPINES TYPHOON APPEAL**
€..... **HUNGRY, SICK & DEPRIVED**
€..... **WELLS AND CLEAN WATER**
€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
(Please state no. of Masses.....)
€..... **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.**