

# The Irish Catholic

**DAVID QUINN**

Anti-Catholicism  
on the rise  
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**GROW YOUR FAITH**

An exciting new supplement to  
help deepen faith and spirituality  
Pages 29-34



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## ‘Great relief’ as councils drop new tax on churches

**EXCLUSIVE**

**Ruadhán Jones**

There is “great relief” among parishes across the country, as local councils drop a new tax on churches that could have cost Mass-goers thousands every year on top of the rising costs of running places of worship.

Dioceses are pouring over maps released by local councils earlier this month, which places some churches in areas that would leave them liable for a new Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT). *The Irish Catholic* understands.

However, *The Irish Catholic* understands that many of the churches may have been included by mistake and will be quietly rezoned.

Fr Tom McDermott Adm. St Colman’s Cathedral, Co. Cork, said it is “a great relief to hear the plans [to tax churches] are being reassessed”.

The cathedral, which was included for taxation in Cork County Council’s draft map, could have faced bills in the tens of thousands every year. However, Cork County Council told this newspaper that they will now be refining and updating the map, so that “While some churches may have been included on the map, existing church buildings are not subject to the RZLT”.

While expressing relief, Fr McDermott said he was disappointed that

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‘Every knee shall bow...’



Ecuador’s players celebrate the second goal in their 2-0 victory over Qatar in the 2022 world cup’s first game, Sunday November 20. The predominantly-Catholic team often celebrate after scoring by kneeling together and giving praise to God.

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# Our contribution to deepen Faith

Writing to early Christians in Asia Minor nearly 2,000 years ago St Peter urged believers to: "always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" (1 Peter 3:15).

The Christians were a minority at the time often facing persecution, and St Peter referred to their experiences as "the time of your exile".

Mercifully, Christians in Ireland do not today face persecution – at least in the traditional sense. Though ridicule, scorn and rejection are often par for the course for people of Faith today in contemporary Ireland.

Belief in God is no longer axiomatic, in previous generations we could take for granted a certain basic reception of the Catholic Faith in Ireland – that is no longer the case.

The scandals have shaken the faith of many people with some parishioners reporting that they are only clinging on by their fingertips.

Secularism, scepticism and what is often loosely termed the 'new atheism' also challenge the proposition of faith in a way not seen in previous generations, at least in Ireland.

### Model

And if we're honest, the traditional model of Irish Catholicism has left us woefully unprepared for the challenge of articulating a thinking faith in contemporary society. The recent national synthesis gathering together the diocesan synod reports noted that: "Adult faith development, resources for lay ministries and collaborative decision-making was flagged as poor or non-existent."

"Clergy acknowledged that in many contexts they are too tired and weary to engage in these developments," the report added.



**Editor's  
Comment  
Michael Kelly**

It went on: "there is a felt need among many respondents for safe and dynamic spaces where people can come together to talk deeply about their faith and increase their knowledge of it."

"One submission stated: 'Our spiritual growth is stunted. As adult members of the Church, we are not sufficiently grounded in our faith, and do not have the confidence in speaking about our love of God.'"

One submission outlined that "there is a crisis in transmission of faith, rather than a crisis of faith and that we are unsure about how to evangelise in the modern world. This problem can only be addressed with the deployment of significant resources into programmes for those who wish to deepen their own faith, spirituality and understanding of Scripture at a personal or academic level".

Irish Catholicism, for all of its dominance and greatness, has not over the past century and a half emphasised the importance of a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Faith. Probably borne out of persecution, there was a sense that the Irish had the Faith – and had held it despite 'dungeon, fire and sword' – and did not need to bother with engaging with it at a deeper level.

The evidence, at least on the surface of it, seemed to back that up. Until relatively recently, most people went to Mass – we seemed to have the idyllic Catholic culture.

And then the house came crashing down – like the veritable house of cards and it seemed like it was all built on sand and we were scattered.

But, what to do? Better to light a candle than curse the dark, they say. And so this week

we unveil a new and emerging section to *The Irish Catholic*; 'Your Faith' (see page 29).

This is an ambitious contribution and part of our calling as a Catholic newspaper to help us all deepen our Faith. When I go around parishes speaking at novenas and the like, many people articulate to me that they feel they lack the tools to speak openly about their faith. They sometimes feel embarrassed about that – like they have developed every other part of their life and that while they have a deep spirituality, they feel under-informed and under-stimulated about the Faith.

### Embarrassed

Of course, they needn't feel embarrassed, for most people their faith formation stopped even before they were a teenager at the time of their Confirmation.

Faith is an exciting journey, a journey of discovery and newness.

I hope that as 'Your Faith' continues to strengthen and grow people will find in it stimulation, nourishment, challenge and fruit for reflection.

We will aim to help lift the veil and penetrate the depths of the Faith whether it is spirituality, Scripture, theology, catechesis, Christian literature or the lives of inspirational people – I hope people will feel themselves enriched.

I also hope that this new section will be a dynamic space for dialogue that is truly interactive. To that end, I would love to hear ideas from people who would like to write for 'Your Faith' or have ideas about what they would like to see in the section or what they feel we ought to cover or give added focus to. I would love to hear feedback from readers and would-be contributors. Please email me at [michael@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:michael@irishcatholic.ie)

I look forward to hearing from you as we set out on this new phase of a journey of faith.



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## 'Great relief' as councils drop new tax on churches

» **Continued from Page 1**  
the council didn't consult or "give more thought to the potential effects" on churches, at a time when they are already being squeezed by an energy crisis.

Meanwhile, Dublin Diocese are set to appeal the taxation of churches by Dublin City Council (DCC), with several active churches included in the council's draft map.

There is an added layer of complexity due to the presence of former presbyteries – priests' houses – on some sites, which will be included in the tax.

However, a spokesperson for the diocese said it is their understanding that churches will not be included in the new tax and a spokesman for the local authority told this newspaper that it is now re-examining the draft map.

Churches and Church-owned buildings "are not specifically excluded from the tax", the Department of Finance spokesperson told this news-

paper, but they could appeal inclusion on the grounds of being "social, community or governmental infrastructure".

A number of councils confirmed to *The Irish Catholic* that they hadn't included Church premises in active use for exactly that reason.

Where churches were included, they must submit an appeal to their local authority by January 1, seeking to have the map updated and their land removed from the map.

If the local authority denied the appeal, churches could then appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

The tax would have charged churches 3% of the market value of the land, if they were on land zoned for residential or mixed use.

According to a release from the DCC, the new tax is aimed at increasing housing supply by activating zoned, serviced residential development lands (including land zoned mixed-use) for housing. The tax is a commitment under Housing for All, the Government's housing plan to 2030.

# Community left in dark about asylum seekers says priest

Chai Brady

While the local community has been stepping up and embracing newcomers, there is concern and "anxiety" in Wicklow Town due to the recent influx of asylum seekers, the local priest has warned.

Fr Donal Roche PP of Wicklow told *The Irish Catholic* that the community has been "very welcoming" to asylum seekers but that there has been no consultation from State agencies.

There are currently some 300 asylum seekers housed in Wicklow's Grand Hotel, with reports saying approximately 200 are lone males.

"The Church's role is to preach the Gospel and we have to be welcoming of people and I think Wicklow has done that very well over the last few years since the Grand Hotel became a centre for asylum seekers," Fr Roche told *The Irish Catholic*.

"I think we have been very welcoming but this latest influx of people has brought different challenges, I think mainly because up until now

we had a lot of families - a lot of women and children - and now a lot of the people who are arriving are single men, that's the situation in East Wall and we've had that here now in Wicklow as well," he said. "It does cause tension, people are nervous, they're anxious: who are all these people? Why are they in our community without any notice or consultation? There is an anxiety about it."

He said the parish can be a bridge between the community and asylum seekers but added that they have limited contact, with few attending the church.

## Protests

There have been several protests in areas where the Government plan to house asylum seekers around Ireland, most recently in East Wall in Dublin and Kill, Co. Kildare in the last week.

Fr Roche said it is the lack of information and consultation that is causing "genuine anxiety" adding that the issue is complex.

"Nobody has spoken to us about it. I'm as much in the dark as anybody else is. I know the Government is in a very difficult situation, they have to help people," he said.

"They arrive and they have to be placed somewhere but there's a very genuine anxiety about the fact that so many are being sent here to this community without the supports for them. I don't know what they have in the way of medical care.

"There's no consultation with us or any leaders, I'm not aware of anybody being asked to take any kind of role in this. It seems to be something that's been done to solve a problem for the Government but it does create problems here because we don't know what's going on, nobody has told us how many, who they are, where they're from: nothing," he added.

*The Irish Catholic* reached out to several priests in areas where asylum seekers are being housed but the majority were unwilling to comment.

## Direct flights to Holy Land launched

Staff reporter

Israel's national airline has announced that it is to begin direct flights from Dublin next year bringing a pilgrimage to the Holy Land one step closer.

Pilgrims on *The Irish Catholic*/Marian Pilgrimages trips in autumn 2023 to the Holy Land will be able to avail of the direct flight with El Al from Dublin-Tel Aviv, avoiding the layover in Istanbul.

Well-known Dominican friar and column-

ist with *The Irish Catholic* Fr Conor McDonough OP will lead a group departing Dublin on October 4. Meanwhile, Portlaoise-based priest Fr David Vard will lead a second group departing Dublin on October 8.

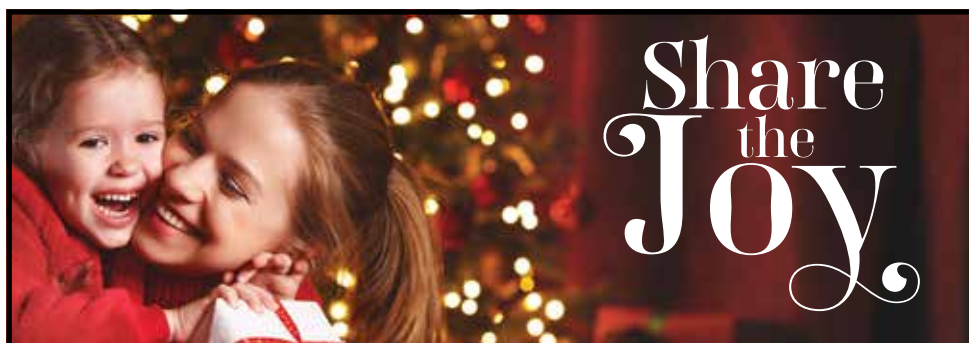
Both pilgrimages will be accompanied by Editor of *The Irish Catholic* Michael Kelly, who has written a well-received book *An Irish Pilgrimage Guide to the Holy Land*.

If you would like to join one of the pilgrimages, or for more information email [info@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:info@irishcatholic.ie)

## Sharing and caring...



Larry Duggan from Dublin Pike with Jodie Lynch, St Aloysius Secondary school, Daniel Prestwich, chair of the Share student executive and Jack Barrett, Presentation Brothers College, launch Share's 2022 campaign to raise funds for vulnerable elderly in Cork. The campaign starts with Yellow Day on Friday, November 25, when hundreds of Cork students will embrace the initiative to come together to combat loneliness in the elderly. Photo: Gerard McCarthy



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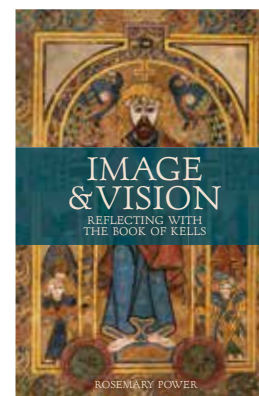
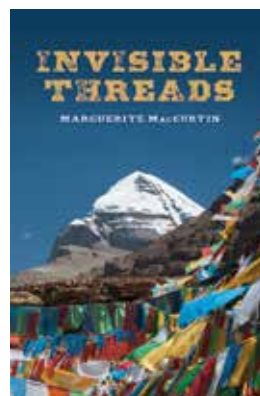
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# New Burren farming plan branded a 'step backwards'

Jason Osborne

Changes to the award-winning Burren Programme have been poorly received, and criticised as a "step backwards" and "unfeasible" by Columban and ecologist Fr Sean McDonagh.

Around 330 farmers currently participate in the Burren Programme, which is a local agri-environmental cli-

mate measure started in 2016, and is to be replaced by the new Agri Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) scheme.

The Burren Programme pays farmers located at one of the most sensitive landscapes in the country to practice and promote sustainable agricultural management.

The new scheme is expected to see the number

of farmers involved rise to around 1300. However, there are fears that farmers in the ecologically-valuable region will be paid less for carrying out environmental measures under ACRES than they were under the Burren Programme, lowering the incentive to fully participate.

Two leading scientists behind the scheme, Drs Brendan Dunford and Sha-

ron Parr resigned in protest at what they felt was a "hollowing out" of the scheme by Government.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr McDonagh said that he'd have been "very supportive of the work that had been done in the Burren", as that's the way that "we're going to have to bring agriculture around the world anyway".

"The reality at the moment is there are eight billion people on the planet... We have to change the way we eat, if we want a sustainable approach into the future," Fr McDonagh said.

He described the changes as "very, very serious" and said that the previous Burren scheme had been so well received, it was the model for similar ecological conserva-



tion systems being implemented in other places, such as Clare Island.

"They're trying to do the same on Clare Island," Fr McDonagh said, adding that

they're asking "how could they live in a sustainable way there? Not to destroy the land by throwing... ammonia on it, and bringing down the water [quality] as well."

## Govt's indifference as Christian persecution rises 'shameful', says ACN

Ruadhán Jones

The Irish Government's indifference on Christian persecution as it rises worldwide is "utterly shameful", Aid to the Church in Need Ireland have said.

Ireland has "totally ignored" the plight of "the most persecuted people on the planet, Christians", ACN Ireland director Michael Kinsella told *The Irish Catholic*.

Mr Kinsella called the Gov-

ernment's lack of action, despite holding a seat on the United Nations security council, "an outrage".

Given the opportunities available to speak up on Christian persecution, Ireland risks being "complicit" by ignoring the issue, Mr Kinsella continued.

His comments come as ACN's report on Christian persecution shows a rise in 80% of the 24 countries surveyed, most of which are in Africa and Asia.

The *Persecuted and Forgotten?* 2022 report warns that some African Christian communities are facing violence that "clearly passes the threshold of genocide".

There is a long way to go to ensure the protection of the liberty of Christians and other minorities around the world, says the report, which will be released soon.

This is not helped by the fact that a "cultural misperception" in the west continues to deny that Christians remain the most widely persecuted faith group, the report finishes.

The report has been submitted to the Irish bishops' conference.

See P14

## MPs told NI Catholics remain affiliated for political reasons

Staff reporter

Many non-practising Catholics in the North continue to identify themselves by their religion because of its "political significance", MPs at Westminster were told.

Open Learning tutor at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) Dr Kevin McNicholl told MPs that it seems when "Catholics stop their

religious observance they would still call themselves 'Catholic'; it's more of a cultural thing with political significance".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, sociologist at QUB Professor Gladys Ganiel said that Dr McNicholl's claim is essentially correct.

"In Northern Ireland, more non-practising Catholics continue to identify as Catholic, whereas people from Protestant backgrounds who don't practice are less likely to identify themselves as Protestant.

Most people who choose the 'no religion' category are from Protestant backgrounds."

This trend exists across much of the western world, Prof. Ganiel told this paper, adding that at the same time those who continue to identify as Protestant in these countries have higher rates of attendance, prayer and Christian beliefs than those who identify as Catholic.

"Cultural Catholicism is a Western phenomenon, not just an Irish/Northern Irish one," she said.

JOE WALSH TOURS

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## Outstanding in their field...



Clara Celin (11) and Millie Ruane (10), pupils of Loreto Grange Road Primary school and winners in the 2023 Dublin Bay UNESCO Biosphere Calendar Competition meet a old Irish goat in Howth. Almost 30 children from Dublin have been presented with the calendar, which features some of their own artwork. Photo: Damien Eagers

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Ronaldo keeps son's ashes in home chapel

Manchester United and Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo has revealed that he keeps his son's and father's ashes in a chapel in his house.

In the latest instalment of Ronaldo's TalkTV interview with Piers Morgan, the footballer said, "I keep [them] with me. They are next to my dad. I have a small church downstairs, a chapel, and I keep my daddy and my son there".

He had announced in December 2021 that he and his partner, Georgina Rodríguez, were expecting twins, a boy and a girl.

However, in April 2022 the couple announced their baby son had died.

It was "probably the worst moments that I passed through [in] my life, since my father died," he said.

### Irish Jesuit chosen to be head of international spirituality network

Fr Michael O'Sullivan SJ has been elected President of the international Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality (SSCS).

His appointment was ratified on November 19 to the society of scholars and practitioners from universities, third-level institutions and seminaries.

Fr O'Sullivan is the first Jesuit and only the third European to be elected president in the society's 33-year history.

He previously served as a member of the society's board of directors and holds a number of posts in the field of spirituality studies. These include Research Fellow of the University of the Free State and Director and Treasurer of the Spirituality Institute for Research and Education (SPIRE), which he co-founded.

# Be warned, hatred of the Faith is in the zeitgeist

There's a new musical group who are expected to sweep to success in 2023 bearing the name of 'The Mary Wallopers'. They are a trio of guys from Dundalk, and are already being compared, in the folk music tradition, to The Pogues and the Clancy Brothers.

And they're not just about music. They also have campaigning zeal to "get rid of the Church", in Ireland. Andrew Hendy and his brother Charles, leaders of the group, regard any bishop or priest as a "f\*\*\*\*\* b\*\*\*\*\*" (and they put politicians in that category too). They consider the Catholic Church an evil which should be erased from Ireland. "The damage the Catholic Church has done in Ireland is much larger than the harm the British Empire did in Ireland," they say.

According to reports, the lads (together with their friend Sean McKenna) are treated like heroes as they walk through their home town of Dundalk and people honk support from their cars.

I suppose in some ways they are on-trend, even though, when they get



Mary Kenny



The Mary Wallopers.

down to dissecting the history they profess to love, they are profound ignoramuses. For example, they claim that "fundamentalist" Christians were against allowing women the vote, and opposed reducing laws on child labour. In fact, it was Christians who first campaigned against slavery and child labour; it was Pope Benedict XV, who, after the First World War, urged every country to introduce female suffrage as a matter of justice. (The French left

withheld the vote for women *because* it was seen as something the Pope had championed.)

But there's little point in trying to drill down into historic facts with young men who hold shallow views based on their bias and ignorance, not on research and knowledge.

And, sad to say, their crass opinions are expressed elsewhere in the zeitgeist. Just previously, the former advisor to the Labour party, and for-

mer CEO of Barnardo's charity, Fergus Finlay, advocated the dissolution of religious orders in Ireland – rather as Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries, or Stalin pulled down Russia's beautiful churches.

Almost every Monday in *The Irish Times*, Una Mulhally, a star columnist, rants away about the 'evil' Catholic Church and all its works. Other columnists sound the same note.

Granted, people feel angry and dismayed about revelations of paedophile offences. Most Catholics I know are sickened – and bewildered – by these disclosures. But they are often nervous of saying that their experience of a faith education wasn't abusive – for fear of seeming to exonerate the offenders.

A correspondent of mine – just returned from Italy – has found the atmosphere in Ireland is now "very repressive... So many people of faith have lost their confidence and prefer to keep their head down. So many of these good

people are absorbing the new anti-Catholic narratives and end up experiencing that shame and stigma which these endless narratives are designed to produce."

## Ambition

The Mary Wallopers' ambition to "get rid of the Catholic Church" shouldn't be laughed off as a group of punk lads just saying outrageous things. They are amplifying what they are picking up in the culture. Be warned.

By the way, the Clancy Brothers, the original Irish folk troubadours, had been educated by the Christian Brothers (as had Tommy Makem, and the man who did so much to promote the group, Ciarán MacMahúna), and from his CBS background in Carrick-on-Suir, Liam Clancy developed an interest in literature, drama and music. In his last illness, he was nursed by the Bon Secours nuns in Cork – so it seems not everything Catholic institutions did was 'evil'.

● The French parliament has been debating whether to ban the bullfight, which is a feature of life in parts of south-western France. I'm not one for banning sports, but I think I'd make an exception for the cruel *corrida*.

## A cold spell

We are all being urged to do what we can 'for the planet', and with that in mind, when the weather turned nippy in late September, I wrote that I resolved to keep the heating turned off for as long as I could – if possible past November.

In my efforts to reduce energy use, I half-succeeded. I haven't switched on the central heating; but, from the middle of this month, I admit I have sometimes turned on a stand-alone heater for short periods.

Otherwise, it's been a recourse to old-style dressing: layers of wool and that great Irish traditional garment, the shawl. Bed socks too! Another useful accessory which I'd love to see revived are – fingerless mittens. (The National Museum of Ireland shop in Kildare Street, Dublin has a lovely collection of half-fingered mittens.)

We grew up without central heating, and you get accustomed to life in a colder climate. For the sake of the planet – and the bills!

# These are exceptional times

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David Quinn of The Iona Institute

# Pope offers prayers to Legion for centenary Mass



The centenary cake commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Legion of Mary was cut at a reception after Mass, Saturday November 19. Photos: John McElroy

## Ruadhán Jones

**P**ope Francis offered his “prayerful closeness” to the Legionaries gathered in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, for closing Mass of the Legion of Mary’s centenary year.

In a letter to Mary Murphy, the Legion’s

president, the Pope gave thanks to God “for the graces received by countless people in many parts of the world through the witness of faith and charitable efforts of the Legion”.

Cardinal Sean Brady celebrated Mass, with Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell, Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy and Archbishop-emeritus Diar-

muid Martin concelebrating, November 19.

They were joined by over 30 priests from around the world, while Members of the Legion travelled from Brazil, Argentina and Armenia to join 800 local members in the celebrations

The Legion of Mary is a lay apostolate in Ireland founded by Frank Duff in 1921.



Ruth, Caragh and Dylan Byrne from Co. Louth attended the Legion of Mary’s closing Mass for their centenary year on November 19.



Lorraine Lorenzo, Aidan Pidgeon and Sylvia Prokopiak.

# The 3-day wait means 1,000 fewer abortions

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## Call your TD NOW to keep the 3-day wait



Like many people, you may be shocked at the huge rise in abortion in Ireland. 6,666 in the first year alone.

In 2018, Tánaiste Simon Coveney promised voters that abortion would only be legal under “strict guidelines” including a 3 day period of reflection for a woman seeking abortion.

**In fact information released to TD Carol Nolan shows that up to 1,000 women every year change their mind in those 3-days. Women need that time to think.**

But now abortion campaigners want to **SCRAP** the 3-day wait. Why would we scrap a law that might HELP women keep their baby?

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A large representation of Brazilian legionaries who attended the Mass.



Mary McAndrew (Ballina) and Ione Cooper (Dublin) are pictured in the Gresham Hotel after the Mass.



Lita Madrigal (Dublin) and Paddy Fay (Dublin).



Bishop Brendan Leahy, Archbishop Dermot Farrell, chief celebrant Cardinal Sean Brady and Archbishop-emeritus Diarmuid Martin before Saturday's Mass.



Katie McGrahan (England), Paul Cole (Rostrevor) and Breege Morris (Roscommon).



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# Voters called to push TDs to retain 3-day wait period before abortion

**Chai Brady**

A pro-life group has called on voters to urge their TDs to retain the 3-day waiting period before women can undergo an abortion.

The Life Institute said the waiting period gives women a period of reflection before the procedure, adding that it has proven to reduce the number of abortions taking place in Ireland.

More than 1,000 women changed their mind during the reflection period after their first consultation, according to data released by the HSE to Carol Nolan TD.

In 2021 there were 8,284 initial consultations charged by GPs and other clinics, while the Department of Health estimated that almost 6,700 abortions took place.

Life Institute spokeswoman Megan Ní Scealláin said: "That suggests that more

than 1,500 women changed their mind during the 3-day period. It also shows that the 3-day waiting period may help women by giving valuable time to them to access support and help before making an irreversible decision."

Data for previous years held similar results. There were 8,057 initial consultations in 2020 while 6,577 abortions were recorded that year. In 2019, some 7,536 initial consultations were provided while 6,666 abortions took place.

This points to an increase in the number of women changing their mind during the 3-day waiting period.

Ms Ní Scealláin said: "Some 870 women did not return for an abortion in 2019, while that number climbed to 1,400 in 2020 and now more than 1,500 in 2021."

"It would be reprehensible for the Government to scrap the 3-day waiting period and

take that time to think away from women. They would be dramatically increasing the abortion rate and breaking the promise they made in 2018 to voters on abortion," she said.

"In 2018, leading figures like Simon Coveney and Leo Varadkar made promises that a 3-day period of reflection would be part of abortion provision in Ireland. They made those promises to reassure voters and to per-

suaude middle-ground voters in particular to support the abortion proposal," Ms Ní Scealláin said.

"Now just 4 years later, even as the rise in the number of abortions continues to shock people, TDs must be told that this promise cannot be broken – because it would deprive women of this important time to think, and lead to another rise in the abortion rate," she said.

## Majority of unborn with Down Syndrome diagnosis aborted

**Jason Osborne**

Up to 95% of unborn children diagnosed with Down Syndrome at the Rotunda Maternity Hospital are being aborted abroad, Master of the Rotunda hospital Professor Fergal Malone has said.

Speaking to the *Independent*, Prof. Malone said that the "vast majority" of patients who receive a pre-

natal diagnosis of Down Syndrome at his hospital decide to travel abroad to end the pregnancy.

Prof. Malone said that while they see between 30 and 40 women a year in the Rotunda who are provided an abortion on the grounds of a fatal foetal abnormality diagnosis, they have between 10 and 20 more women going to the UK

"with very serious prenatal diagnosis, but not quite in keeping with the fatal foetal description".

### Front line

He added that as doctors on the "front line" at the Rotunda, which has the busiest prenatal diagnosis service in the Ireland, they would like to see the current abortion laws loosened

so that unborn babies with serious, but not life-threatening disabilities would also be eligible for abortion.

Prof. Malone told the *Independent* that the "nub"

of the issue was that he did not see a way to relax the law for serious and fatal diagnoses without legalising abortion access on the basis of disability and that based on

the results of the 2018 referendum "there was a concern that the population would not favour termination on grounds of disability".

## Interfaith conference hears religion key to achieving social peace

**Staff reporter**

Fear is the greatest threat to peace in our world and religions have a key role to play in combatting it, an interfaith conference was told in Galway on Sunday.

The 14th National Interfaith Conference was hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and Jesuit education specialist Fr Jacob Sunny SJ told those assembled that dialogue between religions in Ireland was essential for peacebuilding going forward.

The theme of the event was 'How belief in God can influence humanity and bring about universal peace'.

"Spiritual therapy" is the only way to root out the seeds of war from people's minds, Fr Sunny said, adding that "spirituality and religiosity must be committed to leading the world to peace."

"We need to find effective multi-religious responses to conflicts and wars. We believe ambitious goals and complex problems can best be tackled when different faith communities work together."



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Students from Killeslin National School, Co. Laois, show off some of the 150 boxes donated to the Team Hope Shoebox Appeal, which are now on the way to vulnerable children. Along with the shoeboxes, the school community donated money that will go directly to the cause.

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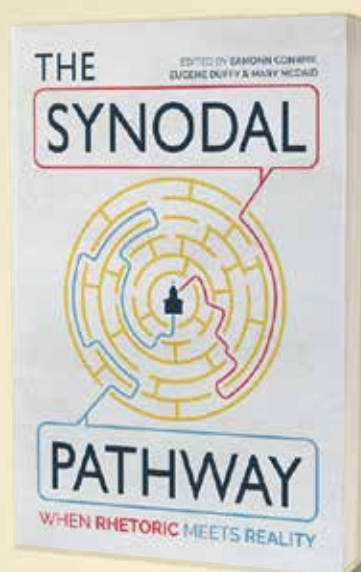
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## ‘Loss and damage’ agreement bright spot in underwhelming COP climate meeting – Trócaire

**Ruadhán Jones**

The “landmark” agreement to establish a ‘Loss and Damage’ fund for developing nations was a bright spot at the “underwhelming” COP27 gathering, Trócaire have said.

The Loss and Damage fund will provide “vital” financial support to the millions affected by climate change in developing countries, the Irish bishops’ conference overseas aid agency said.

The agreement is “a landmark moment... achieved after years of demands from communities who have been suffering the damaging impacts of the climate crisis, and the injustice of being pushed into debt to pay for a crisis not of their making,” said Trócaire Head of Policy and Advocacy,

Siobhan Curran.

Richer countries had been “holding out” against the demand to support countries most impacted by the effects of climate change.

“After years of delay we are seeing some commitment by richer countries to pay our ecological debt,” Ms Curran said, adding that there is still much to be worked out.

However, the failure to agree to phase out fossil fuels by the nations who gathered for the UN conference on climate change was “deeply disappointing,” Ms Curran continued.

“If states don’t deliver on emissions reductions, losses and damages will escalate beyond the scope of any fund,” she warned.

The Loss and Damage fund cannot “operate in isolation”,

Trócaire said, adding it is part of a package of climate change solutions including cutting emissions and adaptation.

“A lack of progress on climate finance is also disappointing,” Ms Curran said.

“No delivery plan was agreed for doubling of adaptation finance by 2025 as per the COP26 Glasgow dialogue.

“After years of broken promises on climate finance the failure to agree clear commitments for delivery is a let-down for communities facing the worst impacts of the climate crisis.”

The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more commonly referred to as COP27, was the 27th United Nations Climate Change conference, held from November 6 until November 18.

## Head Irish and British chaplains hail sainthood cause of Fr Willie Doyle

**Chai Brady**

The heads of the Irish Defence Forces and British Army chaplaincies have said Fr Willie Doyle SJ, whose cause for sainthood was opened on Sunday, is a role model for modern army chaplains.

Fr Doyle was killed in World War I while helping soldiers. He was known for assisting anyone who needed him regardless of denomination.

Ireland’s head chaplain, Fr Paschal Hanrahan – who previously served as a chaplain in the British Army – said he found the ceremony held in the Cathedral of Christ the King in Mullingar “incredibly uplifting”.

Fr Hanrahan said: “I think he [Fr Doyle] would certainly be a role model for chaplains in the Defence Forces absolutely: the level of sacrifice, the ability then for self-deprecation and making fun of himself, that dark humour that soldiers have and they certainly relate to and the joy that

he brought, everywhere he went he was greeted with a smile.

“Folk responded to him because of his innate goodness and joy and if we can do that has Defence Forces chaplains it would be a great place to start.”

The Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain of the British Army, Fr Ian Stevenson, said after the ceremony that what Fr Doyle was doing 100 years ago “is effectively the job that we do today”.

“The role that I have within the army is an ecumenical role. I have responsibility for chaplaincy services in Scotland, so I have Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, and Church of Scotland, I have them all. I believe what we hear and what we’ve witnessed of his life is more important today than it was then,” Fr Stevenson said.

**i** See pages 18-19

## Carols from the cathedral...



Members of Kerry Concert Choir rehearse for their first Christmas concert, ‘Carols from the Cathedral’, with Choral Director Dr Sharon Lyons (centre). The concert takes place in St Mary’s Cathedral, Killarney, on Sunday, December 4, at 7pm. Tickets are €20, with the proceeds going to Down Syndrome Kerry, and are available at St Mary’s Cathedral on the night, or from [eventbrite.ie](http://eventbrite.ie). Photo: Valerie O’Sullivan

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# Why anti-Catholicism seems to be on the rise



The polarising effect of social media has heightened anti-Catholic sentiment, writes **David Quinn**

**I**s anti-Catholicism a thing, and does it exist in Ireland? The answer to both questions is an emphatic yes. Just as it is possible to be anti-communist or anti-EU or anti-American, it is also possible to be anti-Catholic.

How do you know when

someone has crossed over from being merely critical of something to being opposed to it in principle? I think there are certain tell-tale signs. An obvious one is when they simply admit it.

I have noticed in the last couple of years that some people are more willing than they used to be to admit they are anti-Catholic. On social media, it was common enough even for the Church's fiercest critics to deny this, but increasingly this is no longer the case. Now they say anti-Catholicism is justified given some of the things the Church teaches, quite apart from the scandals, and other crimes committed in the name of the Church down the centuries.

But when a person is not willing to admit they are anti-Catholic, how do you know they really are? One sign is that they are relentlessly critical of the Church. Another is that they want its swift demise. A further one is that they never or rarely give it any credit for anything. All we ever hear is the case against it.

Someone who is anti-American, for instance, will exhibit all these traits. They will continually highlight, and quite likely exaggerate, the faults of American society. They are also very likely to discuss the sins, real or imagined, of American foreign policy. They may even want the complete overthrow of the American system, seeing it as a bastion of oppression and capitalism that cannot bring justice in its present form.

**“In Ireland, Britain is still regarded as the author of many of our misfortunes, historically speaking, and this is obviously true”**

They are likely to highlight slavery and claim that America was founded on systematic racism which has still not been properly washed out of American society. They will probably talk about ‘white supremacy’.

Such a person is also very likely to be anti-Western civilisation in general, accusing it of all the same faults as America.

They might highlight the sins of British history, for example. I heard a speaker recently discuss this, and how there is a growing push to ‘decolonise’ the British curriculum at all educational levels, because at present (they say), it still exhibits too many signs of the glorification of British history and racist attitudes.

This speaker, (Prof. Nigel Biggar of Oxford University), acknowledges the crimes of the British Empire, but on balance still regards Britain as a force for good in world history. For example, it has helped to spread parliamentary democracy and it fought very hard, and mostly successfully to abolish the slave trade.

In Ireland, Britain is still regarded as the author of many of our misfortunes, historically speaking, and this is obviously true. But despite an upsurge in anti-British feeling (or maybe simply anti-English feeling) since the Brexit vote, we have a more balanced attitude towards Britain than was the case a few decades ago. The one-eyed nationalism of the past is seen as a sign of social immaturity, even if some of that is returning.

The Catholic Church is now seen as the big villain in recent Irish history. If in Britain, many (especially on the left) seek to demonise British history, in Ireland we are doing the same to Catholicism.

I thought anti-Catholicism would be abating somewhat



as the influence of the Catholic Church in the country wanes. But it seems to be getting worse.

Is it because of the scandals? That is one part of the answer, but the child sex abuse scandals first came into public view almost 30 years ago and the actual incidents happened mainly in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Church has put in place very robust child protection systems, and the dioceses and religious orders have been thoroughly vetted to ensure these systems are working. The Church probably has the best child protection procedures in the country at this stage.

## Revelations

The latest revelations about abuses in Spiritan, Jesuit, and Vincentian schools are not really new as such, not in the broader sense, although some victims had not previously told their stories. Reports into how those orders dealt with abuse allegations were produced 10, 7 and 8 years ago respectively and covered in the media at the time.

But if the cause of anti-Catholic feeling was the scandals alone, then why does the level of hostility seem to be increasing?

Certain teachings of the Church, especially around sexual morality, are another source of anger. But those

teachings haven't changed, and the Church tends to speak little about them, which might be one reason why Fr Sean Sheehy's sermon in Listol recently caused such a backlash among some people.

The chief causes of anti-Catholic feeling remain the same as before, namely the scandals and the teachings liberals object to, and have always objected to.

So again, why does anti-Catholicism seem to be deepening when the chief causes of it are not new and the Church is a fading force in Ireland?

I think one reason is social media which seem to have worsened the tone of all debates. It is an extremely polarising influence and incites people to outdo each other in their expressions of outrage at the things they dislike, the Catholic Church being one of them.

**“Many people prefer to say nothing rather than risk their careers and/or social standing”**

A second reason, not unrelated, is the rise of ‘cancel culture’ which seeks to silence whatever it opposes. In particular, ‘cancel culture’ targets what it sees as sources of

injustice, real and perceived, and the Church is definitely regarded as one of those.

We have seen columnists and radio presenters lose their jobs because of ‘offensive’ things they have said or written. (Sometimes they have simply been misinterpreted or misrepresented).

Academics and writers find themselves in trouble. You can very quickly be yourself accused of ‘racism’, ‘sexism’, ‘transphobia’, ‘Islamophobia’ and so on. Many people prefer to say nothing rather than risk their careers and/or social standing.

Those who believe they are fighting for justice feel totally justified in cancelling and stamping out their opponents and are becoming ever more militant in their tactics.

It is in this atmosphere that anti-Catholicism in Ireland appears to be on the rise, rather than diminishing as we might have expected with the decline of the Church.

Many will be tempted to simply keep their heads down until the storm passes. But I'm not sure it will pass, not until the Catholic Church is all but vanished from the country.

There is no easy answer, but one part of it is to publicly call for a more balanced assessment of the legacy of Catholicism, and that will take more courage than is currently on display.

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# Christian persecution worsens post-Covid



Christians in parts of Asia and Africa are at risk of genocide, writes  
**Ruadhán Jones**

**T**he latest report on Christian persecution from Aid to the Church in Need makes for grim reading. Persecution and oppression in 75% of the 24 countries surveyed is on the rise. Christians face threats from Islamist terrorism, from state-authoritarianism and religious nationalism.

Covering the period from September 2020 to October 2022, the executive



A woman is pictured in a file photo praying at St Anthony Church in Yangon, Myanmar, where a new report says Christian persecution has worsened. Photo: CNS/Jorge Silva, Reuters

summary of the *Persecuted and Forgotten?* 2022 report shows that in Africa, there was a sharp increase in genocidal violence from militant non-state actors, including jihadists.

In the Middle East, continuing migration deepened the crisis, threatening the survival of three of the world's oldest and most

important Christian communities.

And in Asia, Christians in Burma (Myanmar), China, Vietnam and elsewhere have faced oppression from state-authoritarianism. "At its worst," the report says, "freedom of religion and conscience is being strangled, as in North Korea." There is a twin

threat in Asia, as religious nationalism has also caused increasing persecution in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and elsewhere.

## Africa

Christians across the continent of Africa face the threat of rising Islamist extremism, the report states bluntly. Nigeria has been particularly affected. "Jihadism is one reason why Nigeria teeters on the brink of becoming a failed state," ACN's report warns, "with kidnappings, priests killed and deadly attacks on churches becoming increasingly regular."

**“The threat to the survival of some of the world's oldest Christian communities had significantly deepened”**

However, jihadism is not the only threat. State actions have also had a detrimental effect. For instance in Sudan, early signs are that the 2021 military coup will not change the country's increasing Islamism. Meanwhile, both Eritrean and Ethiopian troops have attacked clergy and church buildings in the Tigray region.

## Middle East

The Middle East is the cradle of Christianity, but it is also one of the regions most severely affected by

persecution. Despite the fact that the Daesh or ISIS occupation has ended, there are signs that the situation has worsened since.

"The threat to the survival of some of the world's oldest Christian communities had significantly deepened," the report states. "The decline is most marked in Syria where, within a decade, Christians have plummeted from 1.5 million (10% of the population) in 2011, before the war began, to perhaps 300,000 (less than 2% of the population)."

Of the seven Middle East countries in this review, Iraq was the only one to see an improvement. A comprehensive post-ISIS stabilisation programme involving the rebuilding of Christian towns and villages, homes, schools, churches and other public facilities was "crowned by the long-awaited Papal visit of March 2021".

However, five years on from the military defeat of ISIS, the "threat of a full-scale resurgence" has by no means disappeared. A revival of jihadism has the potential to "deliver a knock-out blow for Christianity in its ancient heartland". Fragile confidence and the absence of security means that an already small population is further depleted by migration.

## Asia

State attempts to regulate religious believers' practice is not limited to Asia, but they are characteristic of a number of countries in the

region. In the likes of China and Burma, Christians are continually harassed by governments who demand they step into line. The situation has worsened particularly in Burma, where the military Junta has led renewed persecution.

Religio-nationalism has also played a "significant role in repressing Christianity and other minority faith groups". Afghanistan is the worst offender, an unsurprising development given that the Taliban has imposed a hard-line interpretation of Shari'a law on society. In Afghanistan, and the Maldives, it is impossible to estimate the Christian population.

**“On the whole, the indications are that persecution of Christians continued to worsen as the Covid period wound down”**

In India, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka, a climate of "othering" minority faiths like Christianity has been reinforced and encouraged by the dominant political parties. The advent of Covid-19 exacerbated the problems, as state violations of religious liberty ranged from "well-intentioned but draconian to the calculated and outright repressive".

## Persecution

On the whole, the indications are that persecution of Christians continued to worsen as the Covid period wound down. Systematic violence and a climate of control meant that the Faithful "suffered some of the world's most vicious campaigns of intimidation".

Africa remains of particular concern, ACN says, as extremism threatens previously strong Christian communities. "In Nigeria," the report says, "and other countries this violence clearly passes the threshold of genocide."

There is a long way to go to ensure the protection of the liberty of Christians and other minorities around the world. This is not helped by the fact that a "cultural misperception" in the West continues to deny that Christians remain the most widely persecuted faith group, the report finishes.

**“Persecution and oppression in 75% of the 24 countries surveyed is on the rise”**

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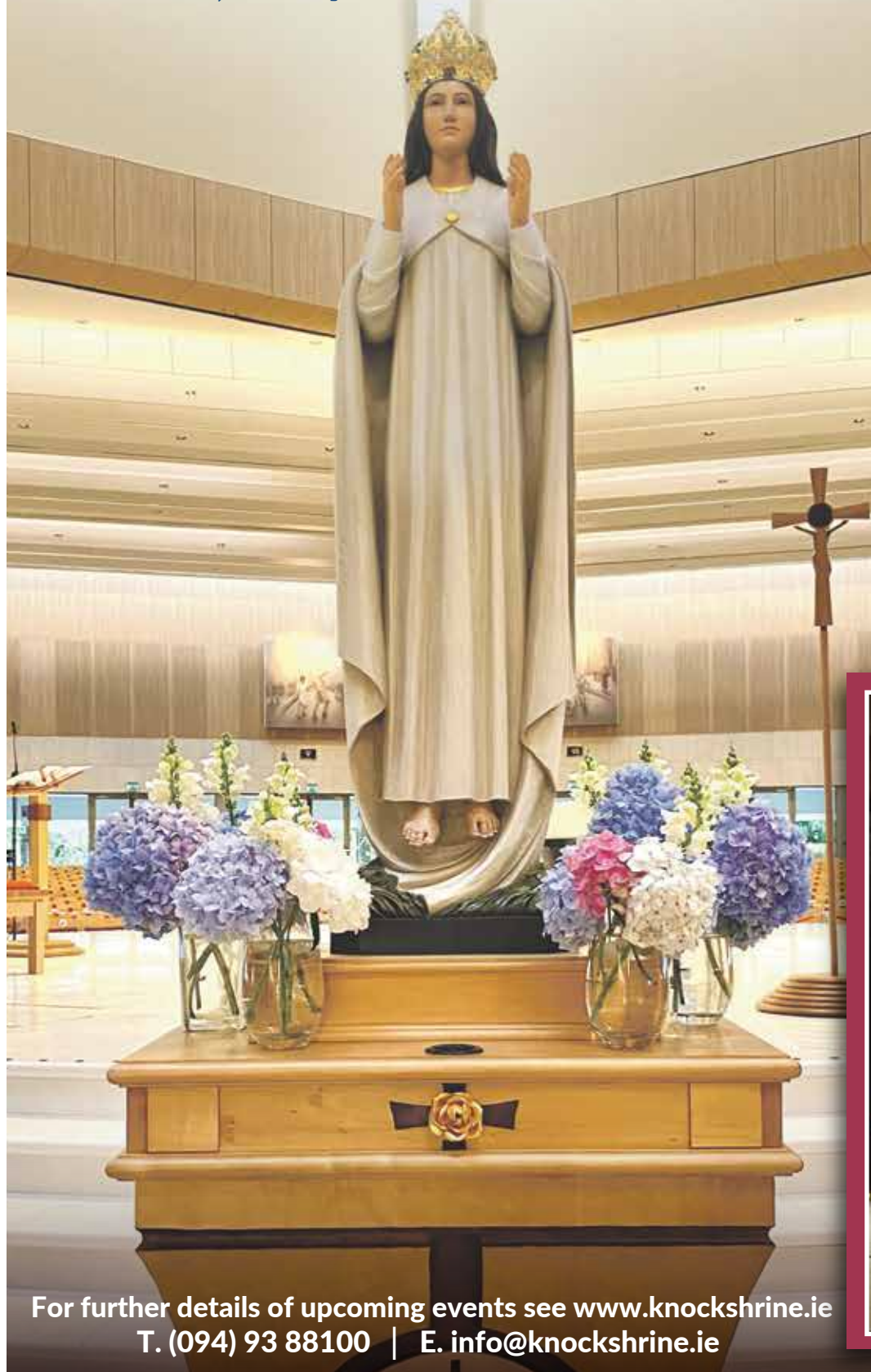


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# Upcoming Events at Knock Shrine

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## Advent Reflections Series

Join us as we travel through Advent; a time of preparation and waiting for the birth of the Christ child. Together, we will go on a journey through the themes of Advent, relating them to everyday experience.

Each reflection will take place during mass at 7.30pm in the Parish Church, Knock Shrine.

All are welcome to attend.

**FRIDAY 2ND DEC** – Fr Eugene Duffy  
'Vatican II, 60 years On'

**FRIDAY 9TH DEC** – Trish O'Brien  
'Advent, Waiting in Hope'

**FRIDAY 16TH DEC** – Fr Vincent Sherlock  
'Responding to the Christmas Invitation'

## All-Night Vigil

**WEDNESDAY 7TH DECEMBER**

*Celebrating and Honouring the Feast of the  
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The Vigil begins with Confessions in the Chapel of Reconciliation from 10pm until Midnight on the night of Wednesday 7th December. The Vigil will continue in the Basilica from Midnight with Rosary, Holy Hour, Reflections and Private Prayer, concluding with Mass at 4am.

## Carols By Candlelight

**SUN 18TH DECEMBER, 8PM**

Spark the joy of Christmas with loved ones with Carols by Candlelight at Knock Basilica.

Featuring Featuring Schola Cantorum Basilicae, together with ConTempo String Quartet and Organist Mark Keane.

The evening will include a collective of classic Christmas Carols such as 'O Holy Night', 'Joy to the World', 'In the Bleak mid-Winter', 'Christmas Lullaby' and many more well-known festive favourites.

*This event is free of charge. Attendance is on a first-come, first-served basis. Concert begins at 8pm sharp.*



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# Cause of pioneering Kerry nun opened in US



**Pioneering Mother Murphy shared God's joy with the black community in Texas, writes Ruadhán Jones**

**“B**lack in San Antonio were largely ignored both by the state and the Catholic Church until a wealthy, Irish-born, 54-year-old widow, Margaret Mary Healy-Murphy, moved to San Antonio in 1887 and heeded the call of the bishops in Baltimore for all Catholics to aid their fellow men and women,” wrote historian and researcher, the late Dr Philip Lambe in a posthumously published article.

Well, the above named wealthy Irish widow has now been confirmed on her path to sainthood by the United States' bishops conference (USCCB). Mother Murphy, as she was later known, was one of three recent causes of beatification and canonisation the conference supported to go forward at diocesan level.

## Blessed

“Today we are blessed to hear about three women, each of whom followed unique paths,” Archbishop Jerome Listeecki of Milwaukee told his fellow bishops in their Autumn general assembly last week.

He added: “But each used their individual gifts to serve others – sometimes during great suffering and adversity – but who allowed themselves to be transformed by the love of God and which moved them to share the Lord's joy and peace through the ordinary circumstances of their lives.”



In Mother Murphy's case, she suffered through a great deal of discrimination in her efforts to minister to the black community in Texas. In 1887, responding to a plea in a letter from the bishops read from the pulpit, she was inspired to use her own finances to build the first black Catholic Church and school in the city, according to a biography given to the USCCB.

In the letter, the bishops called on Catholics in the South to minister to the post-Civil War African American population, her order's website details. With racial prejudice prevalent, she struggled to secure finances to sustain her project and maintain a stable faculty. In 1893, with the blessing of Bishop John Neraz, Margaret founded a new religious congregation, the Sisters of the Holy Ghost, now known as the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate.

These sisters supported Mother Murphy's mission of working with the poor and people of colour. Mother Murphy died on August 7, 1907, leaving behind 15 sisters, two postulants and three missions.

This life and mission in the States must have seemed impossible to Margaret's parents Jane Murphy and Richard Healy when their daughter was born on May 4, 1833, in Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry. But when she was only five years old her mother died in childbirth, and over the next few years, Margaret watched her family and the rest of Ireland struggle to survive the ravages of famine.

**“After the war, Margaret volunteered at St Patrick's Parish, even as the Yellow Fever epidemic reached the city”**

Following the path of many Irish families of the time, Margaret emigrated to America with her father when she was 12. Her father died shortly after their arrival. It was at this time the young Mother Murphy first met African Americans slaves, according to American publication the *Black Catholic Messenger*. She accompanied her brothers, aunts, and uncles when they made their way across several southern states and eventually to Mexico, where they operated a hotel.

Upon marrying John Bernard Murphy in 1849, Margaret and her family moved to Texas. While her husband was traveling for business, Margaret ministered to the pastoral and material needs of her neighbors, reportedly even riding 35 miles on horseback to secure medicine for Yellow Fever victims.

With the Civil War brewing and her husband away, most likely for safety, Margaret moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, helping her neighbors with chores and cooking meals for those in need. Her husband worked as a lawyer and served as mayor. According to



Mother Margaret Mary Healy Murphy is seen in this undated photo. Mother Murphy in 1893 founded the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate, the first order of women religious in the state of Texas. The congregation was started after Mother Murphy, a native of Ireland, spent years helping the poor and serving African Americans and Mexican Americans as a laywoman. Photo: CNS/courtesy Archdiocese of San Antonio

the *Black Catholic Messenger*, the well-to-do couple owned slaves.

After the war, Margaret volunteered at St Patrick's Parish, even as the Yellow Fever epidemic reached the city. One of the patients Margaret tended to – Mrs Delaney – entrusted her daughter, Minnie, to Margaret's care. Margaret and John Bernard, who had no children of their own, adopted Minnie and sent her to a boarding school in New York with the Sisters of St Mary of Namur.

## Adoption

They also adopted Margaret's god-daughter, Lizzie, who had lost her mother as well. In all, they adopted three young girls, with Lizzie and Minnie entering religious life with the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament Sisters.

Following the death of her husband in 1884, Margaret operated a tuberculosis hospital in Corpus Christi. After a few years, she moved to San Antonio. It was

here that her ministry to the black community began, inspired in part by another Irish native, Fr John Maloney OMI, who read out the letter that sparked Mother Murphy into action.

**“Following the death of her husband in 1884, Margaret operated a tuberculosis hospital in Corpus Christi”**

Although emancipation had come to the black community after the American Civil War, they had been abandoned by the state and local community. Responding to their needs, in 1887, she funded construction of the first Catholic free school and church for African Americans in San Antonio. It was dedicated a year later.

Facing constant criticism and racial prejudice, she struggled to maintain a teaching staff, and the local bishop suggested that she start a religious congregation to help. That's when, in 1892, she and three other women became novices with the Sisters of St Mary of Namur, the website details.

## Vows

A year later, the four women made their first vows and the Sisters of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate began. It was the first order of women religious in Texas, proving that Mother Murphy was a trail-blazer in more ways than one.

On June 28 of this year, Archbishop García-Siller announced his intention to formally open the diocesan phase of investigation into the life of Mother Murphy. His brother bishops concurred, confirming that the cause of the Kerry-born pioneer in ministry to the black community can go forward at diocesan level.

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# Family delight as ‘extraordinary’ Fr Willie Doyle cause is opened

Chai Brady

Relatives of army chaplain Fr Willie Doyle SJ have described their joy after his cause for sainthood was officially opened in Co. Westmeath over the weekend.

Fr Doyle died in 1917 at the Battle of Passchendaele during World War I. The courageous priest is known for ministering to all who needed him, despite their creed or nationality. He served in the 16th Irish Division of the British Army.

The opening of his cause took place in the Cathedral of Christ the King in Mullingar on Sunday. Fr Doyle's grand-nephew Hugh Cumisky told *The Irish Catholic* he found the ceremony “very moving”.

He said: “We were a traditional family, always said the family Rosary, it took 5-6 minutes but the trimmings that my father put on took about 10. I remember as a child praying, and I can recite from memory the prayer for the canonisation of Fr Willie, back in the 1940s, when he was quite well known. It's extraordinary, but I do think he was an extraordinary man.”

Mr Cumisky added that he does not believe Fr Doyle “could have withstood all the privations he did unless he was a saint”.

Grand-niece Madeleine Edwards, from Dún Laoghaire in Dublin said she has been “praying all my life for this”.

“When we were all growing up as a family we always had a Rosary at night time

and we always ended up saying a prayer to Fr Doyle and that's going back 70 years. All my life I've been praying that it would happen. He was just an incredible person. It will come to canonisation I'm absolutely convinced of it,” she added.

The officials who will undertake the inquiry into Fr Doyle cause, under guidance from Bishop Tom Deenihan of Meath diocese, are Fr Joseph Gallagher, Fr Michael Cahill, Fr Paul Crosbie and Fr John Hogan.

In his homily at the event, the provincial of the Jesuits, Fr Leonard Maloney said: “The life and death of Fr Willie Doyle is a stark shining witness to the radical and demanding call that our Christian Faith makes of us.

“We tread different battlefields but are similarly charged to live by the standards that much of the world does not value. To walk in solidarity with the poor, to give hospitality to the stranger and to the migrant, to ensure justice and atonement for survivors of abuse – such a painful reality in part of our Church history – and also to visit the sick and to forgive our enemies whoever they may be. It is a tough call but people like Fr Willie Doyle can be our inspiration,” Fr Maloney said.

Fr Doyle's path towards canonisation is the first to be opened in Ireland in more than 25 years, with Frank Duff's cause – the founder of the Legion of Mary – being opened in 1996.



Members of Fr Willie Doyle's family on Sunday after the opening of the diocesan inquiry at the Cathedral of Christ the King Mullingar. Photos: John McElroy



Bishop Tom Deenihan swears his oath as Bishop of Meath. The cause will be pursued under his guidance.



Fr Leonard Maloney SJ, Provincial of the Jesuits, giving the homily on Sunday.



Ann and Ken Doyle.



Postulator of the cause Fr John Hogan, Fr Paschal Hanrahan, Head Chaplain of the Irish Defence Forces, Fr Ian Stevenson Principal Catholic Chaplain of the British Army, Hugh Cumisky, Grand-nephew of Fr William Doyle, Fr Damian Farnon, Irish Defence Forces chaplain, Fr Robert McCabe CC Navan and Dermot O'Connor Royal British Legion, Claddagh Branch.



Josephine Eakin, Anne Hayes and Katherina Pettit having a cup of tea on Sunday after the opening of the diocesan inquiry at the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar.



A picture of Fr Willie Doyle is seen at the ceremony.



Prelates attend the solemn vespers for the solemnity of Christ the King and the opening of the diocesan inquiry into the cause for beatification, canonisation of the servant of God Fr Willie Doyle SJ by Bishop Tom Deenihan in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar.



Tom Halpin, Abigail Halpin and Mark Caffrey.



Mary Smith, Imelda Flanagan and Diane Bohan.



Benedictine Fr Dom Cassian, Sr Gabriella Louka (Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt), Sr Philomena Doss (Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt) and Fr Dom Chrysostom (Benedictine).



Chancellor of the Diocese of Meath Fr Paul Connell, Sr Immaculata RSM and Phyllis.



Pamela Cumisky and Sarah Grimes.



Sarah Hayes, Roisin Hayes, Rachel Kenny, Emily Toma, Joseph Kenny, William Kenny, Marian Kenny and Teresa Kenny.

# Learning from the Fr Sheehy controversy



The Government betrays an alarming lack of the sophistication needed to oversee hate crime legislation, writes **Fr Andrew McMahon**

**“N**obody talks about sin anymore” is a comment still heard in parish life in Ireland – though typically from those of advanced years. One senses that the area of sexuality and relationships is uppermost in the minds of those making the remark, with the implication that few in traditional leadership roles address this area of morality in a way that is adequate for today.

The fall-out from the recent homily of Fr Sean Sheehy in Listowel indicates very graphically the cost of addressing certain matters of ‘sin’, especially if done in a manner reminiscent of the style of yesteryear. Few people nowadays warm to sermons which seem harsh or judgmental, while this can be especially off-putting in the setting of a Church where clerics themselves have been guilty of sexual wrongdoing.

**“It was precisely his background as ‘outsider’ which enabled the priest to speak with a frankness untypical in Irish Church life today”**

Yet there remains a concern among some number of the Irish Faithful – committed younger Catholics often among them – that homilies should embrace “talk about sin”, and sexual sin where necessary, if preaching is to be integrated and authentic. This was likely at the root of the various expressions of support for Fr Sheehy, on social media forums and even in the letter columns of some daily newspapers. That support probably grew stronger when many witnessed the hysteria visited upon the priest, considerably in excess of anything genuine hurt could have justified. The rallying to Fr Sheehy’s cause was only intensified, meanwhile, by the perception that a well-intentioned bid to assuage those offended, on the part of the local bishop, had



Fr Sean Sheehy who delivered a controversial homily in Listowel, Co. Kerry.

the effect of abandoning the priest to the mob.

## Not alone

The bishop, however, was not alone in distancing himself and priests who commented publicly largely appeared to do the same. Stressing his years in Louisiana, certain clergy affirmed a media portrayal of Fr Sheehy as something of a brash ‘Yank’, oblivious to the sensitivities of a transformed Ireland and lacking the pastoral nous of Irish clergy today. He was – this narrative continued – out of place in his approach to a typical congregation and ill-suited to presiding at Mass here. It seemed especially ironic that the spokesman for one priests’ group, which has done valuable work in supporting ‘silenced’ clergy, appeared to urge the marginalising of this particular priest.

While correct in highlighting Fr Sheehy’s status as a ‘returned’ native, his critics generally misread its real significance in what had happened. It was precisely his background as ‘outsider’ which enabled the priest to speak with a frankness untypical in Irish Church life today. He had, it seemed, no inhibitions about relaying a mum’s concern at her

17-year-old being supplied with a condom on a night out. Nor was he was persuaded of the view that this would be inappropriate for families present to hear.

**“We witnessed the cliched media ‘grouphink’ which inspires little confidence in the potential for objectivity around Irish public discourse”**

It might be added, moreover, that – in both Government and Catholic Church policies – the daughter in question is still classified as a child. Yet safeguarding agencies, in neither Church nor State, appear to have acknowledged the implications of what reportedly occurred.

It remains, similarly, a concern to many in Ireland, that these same agencies appear silent as to the potential dangers to children and young people of certain approaches to transgenderism – approaches which could impact adversely upon their lives in serious and long-lasting ways. Again, Fr Sheehy had

no such difficulty in stating the obvious.

His lengthy US experience, meanwhile, would have attuned the priest to a pro-life culture where voicing concern at something like Ireland’s escalating abortion rates would be considered the duty of a responsible pastor. Moreover, the separation of Church and state so embedded in that culture would allow a pastor to strongly articulate teaching around marriage and sexuality, without fear of censure from government figures.

## Pluralism

The primitive state of Ireland’s pluralism – in contrast – was again laid bare, with the staff of a Tanaiste in talks abroad, and a Foreign Minister on business up north, taking time to address a priest’s Sunday homily. Simon Coveney’s stance appeared particularly partisan, insisting that Fr Sheehy’s comments “be withdrawn” and that “there should be an apology”. Like Zacchaeus, however, in the gospel of the Sunday concerned, this priest “stood his ground” and refused to recant.

This, in turn, provoked ever more extreme reactions, with a Kerry Sinn Féin councillor proposing – somewhat intriguingly – that it was because the country was “a

republic” that “people with these views aren’t welcome in our state”. As an American president once remarked, when asked his response to an opponent’s outlook: “Well, you know, it would be funny if it weren’t so serious.”

**“His media detractors did stress, nevertheless, that – however heartlessly they believed it had come across – Fr Sheehy was merely summarising the doctrine of his Church on the matters he’d raised”**

It is, of course, very serious. Anxiety is already high at the implications for free expression of the newly published Hate Speech Bill. For all the talk of its protection for religious discourse, the response to Fr Sheehy – from cabinet minister to county councillor – betrays an alarming lack of the sophistication needed to oversee such legislation discerningly. While, yet again, we witnessed the cliched media ‘grouphink’ which inspires little confidence in the potential for objectivity around Irish public discourse. It seems worth noting, in this context, a *Sunday Independent* editorial on the priest, which spoke of “public revulsion of his hateful rhetoric”. Written with every awareness of the impending legislation, the choice of such language was telling – even ominous.

## Detractors

His media detractors did stress, nevertheless, that – however heartlessly they believed it had come across – Fr Sheehy was merely summarising the doctrine of his Church on the matters he’d raised. Given this, did the resulting uproar come not so much from what was said, or even how it was said, but from the fact that someone had the audacity to say it at all? Was Fr Sheehy’s own ultimate ‘sin’, for either journalist, politician, congregant or bishop, his breaching of an ‘understanding’ that we don’t really talk about these things anymore? If so, did he explode a central myth concerning new ‘tolerant’ Ireland, while pointing to something potentially hollow about Catholic pastoral practice today?

However unwelcome it may have been for many, the Fr Sheehy controversy has arguably been very revealing. Not for the first time, the ‘outsider’ has broken a taboo and certain pretences within Church and society have, perhaps, been exposed. In anger or embarrassment, we may be tempted to dismiss him, seek to ‘move on’ and avoid reflecting further on the deeper issues raised. That would seem a pity indeed. Moreover, the God Zacchaeus came to know is surely calling us all towards something more honest and far-seeing.

**“While correct in highlighting Fr Sheehy’s status as a ‘returned’ native, his critics generally misread its real significance in what had happened”**

# Out&About

## Blessed are the pure in heart...



**DUBLIN:** The Pure in Heart 'Planning Your Future' conference took place in Merrion Square on November 12-13. Guest speakers David DiNuzzo from True Manhood Ministry and his wife Catherine DiNuzzo (Sacred Heart Mental Wellness Ministry), both from Kansas, USA, are pictured with those who attended the conference.



**KILDARE:** Sr Gabriella Reham Louka and Sr Philomena Rania Doss, are pictured with Bishop Antony of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Chancellor of SPPU Archbishop Eamon Martin and Lecturer in Systematic Theology Fr Neil Xavier O'Donoghue, after they graduated from St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth with First Class Honours in the MTh programme, November 13.



**TIPPERARY:** Fr Patrick Cahill of Holy Family Mission, Glencomeragh, is pictured with newly commissioned members of the lay community on Sunday, November 13.

### IN SHORT

#### Armagh cathedrals meet NI Minister of State

Clergy and volunteers from the Catholic and Church of Ireland cathedrals in Armagh met with the Minister of State for Northern Ireland Steve Baker MP, on November 14.

As part of an official visit by the minister to the city, he saw both cathedrals and met with local representatives, including Fr Peter McAnenly Adm. St Patrick's Cathedral, the Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell and Dean Shane Forster.

The visit started at the Catholic cathedral where Minister Baker met with clergy, members of the Cathedrals' Partnership, and others involved with local churches and the community.

In a wide-ranging question and answer session, the minister addressed many current political issues and also was interested to find out more about ecumenical relations and cross-community work.

The minister then travelled the short distance across the city to visit Armagh Robinson Library and St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, and was welcomed by Dean Forster and Archbishop McDowell in the Cathedral.

#### Listening Church must distinguish fair and unfair criticism

The Church must distinguish between those who criticise it fairly and those who attack "us because we speak uncomfortable truths", the bishop of Derry has said.

Bishop Donal McKeown said we must consider the sources of opposition to the Church today, adding that he has no problem with individuals who are opposed to it.

However, Dr McKeown said he is "intrigued" when political parties are "committed to pushing faith leaders away from any role in society and specifically from any influence in education".

"When the strong want Church people out of social structures, I suspect that we may be saying something right that they do not like," he said in a November 13 homily.

#### St Angela's-ATU make submission for integration

Catholic university St Angela's College, Sligo, and Atlantic TU have officially lodged a joint submission to the Minister for Further and Higher Education for the integration of St Angela's into ATU.

This marks another milestone in the incorporation process, a spokesperson for St Angela's said in a statement, since Minister Simon Harris formally approved the potential integration in November 2021.

This next phase will see an international panel engaging with both institutions to examine the various academic and structural implications of St Angela's joining ATU.



**DUBLIN:** Dames and Knights of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Lieutenancy of Ireland attend Mass celebrated as part of their annual day of reflection in the Dominican Retreat Centre, Tallaght, November 12.



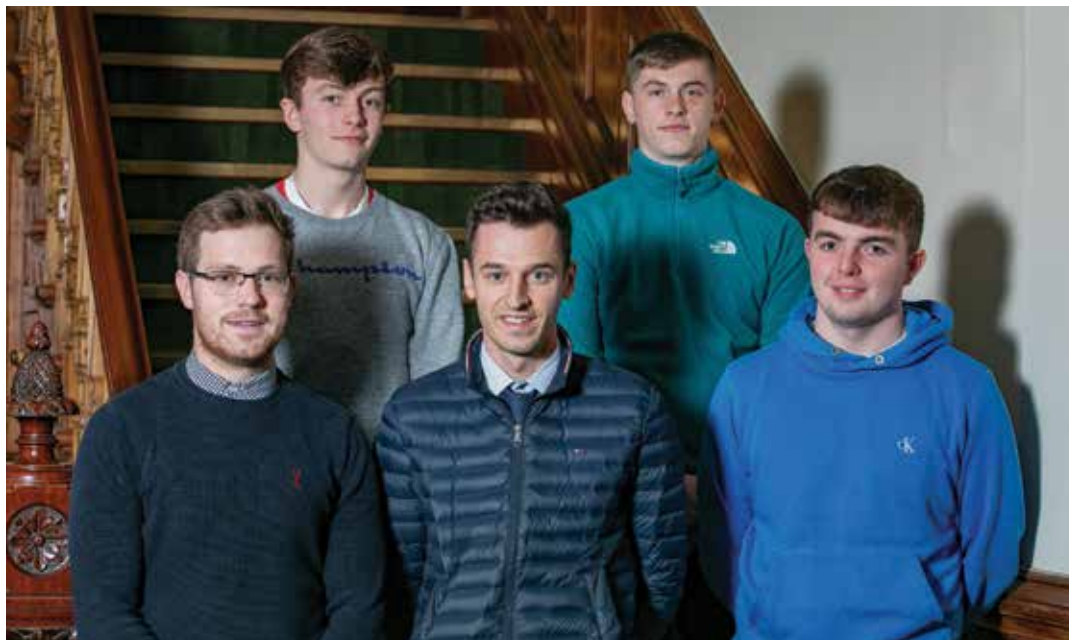
**KILDARE:** Graduates from St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, celebrate at the conferring on Saturday, November 12.



**SLIGO:** Graduates from St Angela's College, Sligo, wait in anticipation to confer from the college, Saturday November 12.



**WATERFORD:** Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus Cullinan is pictured with Avril Halley, who is moving on from her work in the diocese, at a safeguarding day at St John's Pastoral Centre. Also pictured are members of the diocesan safeguarding committee: Fr John Harris ADM, Stephen Plunkett and Nodlaig Lillis.



**BELFAST:** Members of the business studies department of St Mary's University Belfast welcomed past students, Niall Kerr, St Patrick's College Dungannon, and Conor Gilmore, St Colman's College, Newry. They provided helpful hints and tips on studying at St Mary's, life in the workplace and a look at their career to date, November 15.



**ARMAGH:** Clergy and volunteers from the Catholic and Church of Ireland Cathedrals in Armagh meet with the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Steve Baker MP, on Monday, November 14.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

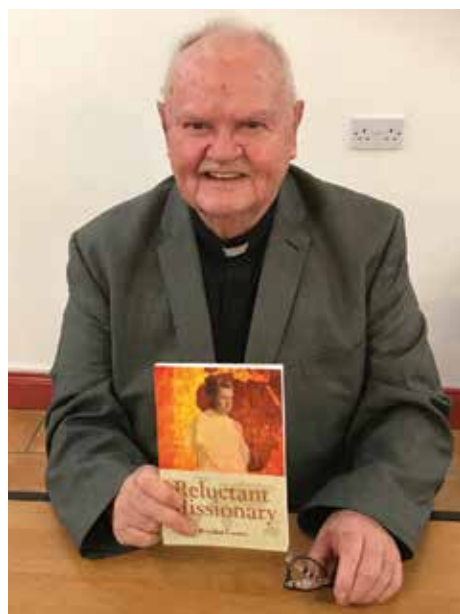
Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**DUBLIN:** Emma Rothwell, Education Officer at the Chester Beatty Library, welcomes students from the undergraduate module in Medieval Theology, on a recent Library visit with Dr Fáinche Ryan. Ms Rothwell, a graduate of the MPhil in Christian Theology, gave an informative tour of the Chester Beatty's current exhibition 'First Fragments: Biblical Papyrus from Roman Egypt'.



**CAVAN:** Seamus Rooney with his daughters Noeleen Dymbrow, Fiona Byrne, Ann Rooney and Pauline Byrne with the rock hewn from their lands to mark the 150th anniversary of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt.



**MONAGHAN:** Fr Brendan Cooney returned to his roots when he launched his book *Reluctant Missionary*, in the workhouse, Carrickmacross. The book was officially launched by Bishop of Clogher Larry Duffy. Fr Cooney is a native of Dublin but his family originate from Referagh, Co. Monaghan. He is a member of the Kiltegan fathers.



**DUBLIN:** Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell congratulates Norvil Caguioa at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, on Monday after Mass. During the Mass, Mr Caguioa received the ministry of reader from Archbishop Farrell.

## ANTRIM

An Advent retreat to prepare hearts for Christmas takes place on the four Sundays of Advent, beginning November 27 from 1-8pm in the Belfast Jesuit Centre, Donegall St. To register contact belfastjesuitcentre@gmail.com

## ARMAGH

Armagh cathedrals partnership advent celebration will take place in the Market Place Theatre on December 13 at 7.30pm. The guest speaker will be Dr Heather Morris, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland, recently appointed an Ecumenical Canon in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral.

## CARLOW

Graigecullen-Killeslin's annual bereavement Mass takes place Friday November 25 at 7.30pm. Candles for all parishioners who died in the past year will be lit at Mass each Sunday and will be presented to the families at the bereavement Mass.

## CAVAN

Kingscourt parish will celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving and blessing for the newly installed stained glass windows on Sunday, December 4.

## CORK

Sisters of the Bon Secours, College Road, are hosting a weekly night of prayer and reflection for young adults throughout Advent, December 1 to December 22 at 7pm. Contact eavopost@gmail.com to register.

Medjugorje prayer meeting every Wednesday at 8pm in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay, Cork city.

## DERRY

On the first Saturday of each month, after 11am Mass in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, there is adoration and rosary, ending with Divine Mercy and Benediction at 3pm. On Thursdays, there is a Holy Hour for the unborn and for expectant mothers in Our Lady's Chapel, within St Joseph's Church building, Galliagh, starting at 7pm.

## DONEGAL

God's Mercy in the Gospel of John, a silent retreat,

takes place in the Divine Mercy Centre, Letterkenny, November 25-27. To book or for more information contact 074 916 9934 or dvmletterkenny@gmail.com.

## DUBLIN

Newman University Church's annual Newman lecture takes place Wednesday, December 7 at 6pm. Prof. William T. Cavanaugh will deliver a talk titled 'Is secularism more reasonable than faith? The enchantment of the Secular' in the Notre-Dame Centre for Faith and Reason on St Stephen's Green.

## GALWAY

A weekly gathering for young adults (16-35 years) takes place on Wednesdays at 7.30pm in the Cathedral. An opportunity for adoration, silence, prayer, music, Scripture and reflection, followed by refreshments. Contact youth@galwaycathedral.ie for more information.

## KERRY

Killarney 'memory tree' at Holy Cross Mercy school will be lit again for its 10th Christmas Season on Monday December 5 at 7pm with prayer and festive carols by candlelight. Mass will be offered for all loved ones remembered on Wednesday December 16 in St Mary's Cathedral at 12 noon.

## KILDARE

Youth 2000 national Christmas retreat takes place December 9-11 in Newbridge College. Booking to open soon. Visit youth2000.ie for more information.

Maynooth parish YA group retreat, a time of prayer and reflection for advent, takes place December 2-3 in the Céilí Community, Westmeath.

## KILKENNY

Eucharistic adoration takes place every Wednesday morning in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Ferrybank Church from 10.30am to 12 noon and in Slieverue Church from 2.30-3.30pm.

## LAOIS

Christmas Fair in Ballyfin in aid of Mary's Meals will be held in Ballyfin Community Centre Sunday, December 4, from 11am to 3pm.

## LIMERICK

The Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies from Mary Immaculate College is offering an Advent day of recollection, facilitated by Sr Therese Fitzgerald, in Glenstal Abbey on Saturday, November 26, from 10.30am to 4pm. Suggested contribution €40. Register: www.surveymonkey.com/r/AdventWaiting.

## LOUTH

Mass for the African Community takes place in St Nicholas' Church the third Sunday of each month at 2pm.

## MAYO

Pilgrimage of the Immaculate Conception takes place Tuesday December 6-Thursdays December 8 for the sanctification of Ireland's bishops and priests. To book, contact Kay at 087 991 2047.

## SLIGO

A Youth 2000 prayer meeting for 16-35 year olds takes place the first Monday of every month in the side chapel of St Anne's Church at 8pm. Adoration followed by chat.

## TIPPERARY

Night vigil for Our Lady's intentions takes place first Monday of Each Month at Glencomeragh House. Rosary at 7.30pm, Mass at 8pm. Vigil begins after Mass and ends after 3am, the Hour of Mercy, with prayers of Our Lord's Passion. For further information: Imelda (085) 8509715.

## TYRONE

Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group meet in the Pastoral Centre on Thursday evenings with Rosary at 7.40pm, followed by prayer meeting at 8pm.

## WATERFORD

Advent reflections take place in the Pastoral Centre in Waterford. First evening of reflection, November 29 at 7.30pm, is titled 'Perceiving life through the window of the soul', led by Sr Antoinette Dilworth RSJ.

## WEXFORD

Wexford Sinfonia winter concert takes place Sunday November 27 at 4pm in the Church of Immaculate Conception, Rowe Street. Tickets available for €20 on the day.



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Bishop Barron reconsecrates vandalised cemetery

● Bishop Robert Barron of Rochester, Minnesota, has reconsecrated the diocese's Calvary Cemetery after one or more vandals damaged the grounds with obscene and satanic graffiti.

"Halloween night, this place was desecrated with some really obscene graffiti," he said ahead of the ceremony November 11. "Even the name of Satan invoked. I found that outrageous."

Five memorial walls in the cemetery were heavily covered with blue and brown graffiti, the Diocese of Rochester reported. Two grave markers, a statue of Christ, and a cross were covered in graffiti. The cleanup and repair costs could go as high as \$8,000.

### Italian bishops release abuse prevention report

● Catholic bishops in Italy released a national report November 17 evaluating the recent implementation of diocesan services to aid victims of abuse across the country.

The report provided data from 90 listening centres and on the establishment of other resources for the protection of minors within Italy's 226 Catholic dioceses. Its scope was limited to the two-year period from 2020 to 2021,

years when lockdowns in Italy restricted movement and in-person gatherings.

At a press conference in Rome on the day of the report's release, Archbishop Giuseppe Baturi of Cagliari said that 613 files with reports of abuse by members of the clergy in Italy had been sent by Catholic dioceses to the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith in the last 20 years.

### US advances gay marriage bill amid religious freedom concerns

● The US Senate voted 62-37 November 16 to pass a bill that would federally recognise same-sex marriage and provide legal protections for interracial marriages.

The Respect for Marriage Act (RFMA), if ultimately signed into law by President Joe Biden, would repeal the Defence of Marriage Act (DOMA), a 1996 law signed by President Bill Clinton that defined marriage federally as the union of a man and a woman, and permitted states not to recognise same-sex marriages contracted in other states. DOMA was already effectively nullified by the 2013 and 2015 Supreme Court decisions *United States v. Windsor* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

The present bill would not require any state to allow same-sex couples to marry but would require states to recognise any and all marriages — regardless of "sex, race, ethnicity, or national origin" — contracted in other states.

### Vatican willing to do 'whatever possible' for Ukraine cease-fire

● The Vatican is willing to do whatever it takes to broker a cease-fire and bring an end to the war on Ukraine, Pope Francis said. "We are continually watching as the situation evolves" concerning ways the Vatican's diplomatic efforts could help, he said in an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*.

Vatican News published the interview November 18. The Vatican Secretariat of State is working diligently every day, looking at every possibility and "giving weight to every opening that could lead to a real cease-fire and real negotiations," he said.

"The Holy See is willing to do everything possible to mediate and end the conflict in Ukraine. We are trying to develop a network of relationships that will foster a rapprochement between the parties, to find solutions.

"Also, the Holy See does what it must to help the prisoners," he said, as well as provide humanitarian support "for the people of tormented Ukraine, whom I carry in my heart along with their suffering".

## Nicaraguan bishops express concern for thousands fleeing their country

The Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference (CEN) expressed its concern for the thousands of people who are migrating because of the crisis in the country and said that "it's a reflection of a human drama that challenges us".

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) indicated that "the political instability that has prevailed in Nicaragua since April 2018 has forced around 200,000 people to flee persecution and human rights violations".

"Most of these people (150,000) have gone to Costa Rica, a neighbouring country. The number of Nicaraguans who have requested protection in Costa Rica since 2018 exceeds the number of people who fled the Central American civil wars in the 1980s," the UN agency said on its website.

In its Advent message, the conference said that the joy that the time of preparation for Christmas brings doesn't prevent the bishops from "acknowledging the concerns we have about the social, political, and economic events of our homeland".

"Especially, among others, the migratory crisis, which is a reflection of a human drama that challenges us," the bishops said.

The prelates assured that "even in the midst of uncertainty and suffering, the kingdom of God is present in our history and multiple signs of a new world are manifested among us".



A Nicaraguan couple living in the US kneel in prayer in Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Indianapolis. Photo: CNS/Sean Gallagher, *The Criterion*

They pointed out that in Nicaragua "we must all journey together; no one should be left behind".

"We must all have the possibility of developing ourselves and making Nicaragua a country of brothers. Let us always seek to do good, so that we speak more and more as brothers and set aside individualism," they added.

The bishops therefore encouraged the population to participate in the search for personal conversion. In the case of Catholics, "as a Church to be up to the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us".

The migratory situation of Nicaraguans is worsening with the recent announcement by the president of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Chaves, who said that he will take measures to stop the arrival of more people from that country.

The president said that these people enter claiming to be "political refugees" when in reality they are "economic refugees" fleeing the crisis in the neighbouring country, led by the dictatorship of Daniel Ortega.

Lawyer and researcher Martha Patricia Molina revealed in a new report that

in recent years the Catholic Church in Nicaragua has suffered almost 400 attacks.

*Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?* is a 228-page report recording a total of 396 attacks against Catholics.

The document presents the hostilities suffered by the Church in Nicaragua under the dictatorship of Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, from 2018 through 2022.

It also shows a detailed record of the desecrations, sacrileges, attacks, robberies, threats, hate speech, and priests in exile, "the result of government persecution".

## Church in Cuba to have Communion hosts again

The Carmelite nuns in Cuba announced that thanks to the donations of wheat flour they have received in recent days, they will again be able to make the Communion hosts to supply the island's churches.

In a November 14 statement, the Discalced Carmelite Sisters of Havana expressed their joy for having "experienced once again that the barque of the Church is the Lord who leads it".

The Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites of St Teresa in the Cuban capital

had informed all the dioceses November 2 that it could no longer produce any more hosts because it had run out of wheat flour, a product that has been in short supply for months in the island.

Just days later, Fr José Luis Pueyo of the Diocese of Villa Clara told the newspaper *14ymedio* that they would have to break their remaining hosts into several pieces in order to provide for the faithful.

However, on November 15, the nuns expressed their surprise to see that the news of no flour had gone viral, even

reaching remote places.

"The impressive thing about all this is how it has moved the hearts of so many people of goodwill who, like the widow in the Gospel, have offered little or much so that the work can continue," the nuns said in the statement published in *Vida Cristiana*, a Jesuit-run weekly.

"Flour has come to us from our simple townspeople, from institutions, from Miami, Puerto Rico, Spain, and also the allocation that we have from the State," they reported.

## Nigerian bishop: West must act to stop terrorism

Nigeria is at risk of following the fate of Afghanistan and being overrun by Islamist insurgents unless the West acts firmly to prevent terrorist violence there, an African bishop told British politicians.

Bishop Jude Arogundade of Ondo, Nigeria, said the Christians of his country are suffering persecution so

intense that it bordered on genocide.

"The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has spoken against the unprecedented insecurity situation in Nigeria repeatedly but to no avail," he said in a November 16 speech in a committee room of the Houses of Parliam-

"We have walked for life, protested and even called the President (Muhammadu Buhari) to resign if he is incapable of fulfilling the basic purpose of government — the security of lives and properties of citizens. Even at that, nothing has changed," he said.

"With 3,478 people killed as of June this year and

the increased cases of terror thereafter," he said he strongly wished to appeal to the UK government and "all people of goodwill to compel the Nigerian government to stop the genocide. Or, in the least, ask for help from other countries before Nigeria is overrun, as is the case of Afghanistan."



Edited by Jason Osborne  
jason@irishcatholic.ie

## Kicking off the world cup



Drones in Doha, Qatar, display welcoming words above the skyline November 14 ahead of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Photo: CNS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh, Reuters

# Bishop calls for 'critical look' at situation of Christians in Qatar

Ahead of the kick-off of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, the "sports bishop" of the German Bishops' Conference called for a critical look at conditions in the competition's host country, including the situation of Christians.

The international soccer competition kicked off on Sunday, November 20, in the State of Qatar, an emirate on the northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

Bishop Stefan Oster of Passau, who is the current sports commissioner of the German Bishops' Conference, said in a statement published November 17 that he did not want to give soccer fans "a bad con-

science," even if people were "asking how it came about that Qatar, of all places, was chosen by FIFA as the host country 12 years ago".

"Enjoyment of sports, including worldwide mega-events, has its own right, even if it may be clouded by the extreme commercialisation of soccer in particular. But it is nevertheless right to take a critical look at the political and social conditions in Qatar."

Bishop Oster noted that the emirate applied for the 2022 World Cup to underscore its international importance and reputation. "So it is only appropriate that the spotlight of the public is directed on the country these days and that

the problematic aspects are also illuminated."

He said the emirate had been "catapulted into a new era in recent decades by its oil and gas wealth. Today, a conservative-traditional Islamic society and an economic hypermodernity coexist. It would be unfair to ignore this special situation in the necessary criticism of questionable conditions. But it would also be inappropriate to gloss over limited human rights."

"Non-Islamic religions, including Christianity, which are strongly represented among migrant workers, are granted freedom only to a limited extent," the German prelate said.

Bishop Oster also said the role of women was "set back" and sexual minorities were persecuted.

"Experience shows that major sporting events such as world championships and Olympic games do not usually improve the social and political situation in the host countries in the long term," he added.

"For this very reason, it remains the task of the international community to continue to support the reform forces in the country even after the conclusion of the World Cup in Qatar and not to let up in its attention to human rights."

## Retired French archbishop admits 'inappropriate gestures' toward woman

The retired archbishop of Strasbourg, France, admitted making "inappropriate gestures" to an adult woman when he was a Franciscan priest in the 1980s.

Archbishop Jean-Pierre Grallet issued a public statement November 15. He said both a criminal investigation and canonical investigation were underway and that he would withdraw from speaking publicly during the investigations.

He also said that, earlier this year, when he learned the woman had come

forward, he apologised to her and sought forgiveness from her and her family.

In a separate statement, Archbishop Luc Ravel of Strasbourg said the abuse dates back to the fall of 1985, and he learned of the allegations from the victim last December. He said that in January, he reported the case to the Strasbourg public prosecutor; he also notified Vatican authorities. He said civil and canonical inquiries were ongoing.

Archbishop Ravel repeated his com-

passion for the victim and her family and added, "I share the shock and sorrow of all the priests and Faithful of the diocese, in particular those who may have known Archbishop Jean-Pierre Grallet or worked with him."

During a news conference November 7, Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims, president of the bishops' conference, said 11 bishops or former bishops are being or have been investigated by Church or judicial authorities for abuse.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope Francis travels to share special meal with his cousins

● Pope Francis travelled to northern Italy on Saturday to celebrate the 90th birthday of his second cousin Carla Rabezzana with his Italian relatives.

The 85-year-old Pope arrived by helicopter in the Italian province of Asti, 30 miles east of Turin, just before noon on November 19.

The Pope made a brief stop to pray at a local church before greeting Ms Rabezzana at her home in the town of Portacomaro, where they were joined by five other relatives and their families to share a home-cooked lunch with local delicacies from the Piedmont region.

Ms Rabezzana, who turned 90 on November 8, told Vatican News ahead of the visit that she was looking forward to embracing her cousin (the Pope) because they had not seen each other for three years because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

She said: "And then we'll have a chat, as we do at least once a month on the phone with relatives who love each other. I'll ask him about his knee, which is hurting him now. He talks to me about it when we talk on the phone."

### Cardinal: Gender theory confusion shows need for papal encyclical

● Extreme forms of gender theory have become so influential that a papal encyclical should address the topic, Dutch Cardinal Willem Eijk of Utrecht has said, noting Pope Francis' previous teachings on the topic.

"I asked whether it wouldn't be good if the Pope issued an encyclical on gender theory," he said during a press conference, the Dutch daily *Nederlands Dagblad* reported.

"Gender theory is being pushed in all kinds of organisations and we as a Church have not said much about it," said Cardinal Eijk, who has authored a new book on marriage and sexuality.

The cardinal has previously called for an

encyclical or other Vatican document on the subject of gender theory.

Gender theory in its radical forms presents gender as a social construct entirely separate from human biology. Its influence in academic circles has widened to the broader culture in many countries. Among other trends, it has helped provide an intellectual basis for the promotion of transgender beliefs and sex-change procedures as well as policies and laws that implement them.

"The gender roles of men and women can change culturally," the cardinal said, adding that there also is "an essential relationship between biological sex and gender role."

### Vatican is advancing cause of Brazil's Hélder Câmara

● The Vatican has advanced the sainthood cause of the late Archbishop Hélder Câmara of Olinda and Recife, who may soon be called "venerable."

Archbishop Fernando Saburido of Olinda and Recife made the announcement during the closing ceremony of the 18th National Eucharistic Congress.

Archbishop Câmara, one of the founders of the Brazilian bishops' conference, was named to Olinda and Recife in 1964, three weeks before the beginning of the military coup that started the 20-year dictatorship in Brazil.

Days after the coup, the archbishop released a manifesto supporting the Catholic workers' action in Recife. The new military government accused him of being a demagogue and a communist, and he was forbidden to speak publicly.

"If I give bread to the poor, everyone calls me a saint. If I show why the poor have no bread, they call me a communist and a subversive," the archbishop is said to have said during that time.

Dom Hélder, as he was known, remained a strong critic of the regime, denouncing human rights violations committed by police authorities.



# Letter from Rome



Elise Ann Allen

**J**ust a week after the Vatican's first auditor general and his deputy filed a \$9.6 million lawsuit for wrongful dismissal, the Vatican's legal system has seemingly sought to hamstring the claim by refusing to certify the plaintiffs' chosen lawyer.

Speaking to journalists November 17, Libero Milone, the Vatican's first auditor general, who appointed in 2015 and fired in 2017 along with his deputy Ferruccio Panicco, said that a week after filing their suit, their lawyer had been rejected by officials in charge of certifying attorneys to appear before Vatican courts.

The request to initiate legal proceedings against the Vatican's Secretariat of State was filed with the Vatican tribunal November 9, and made public a day later.

Mr Milone said he met with the Vatican's chief prosecutor Alessandro Diddi on Monday, November 14, to discuss the case, and two days later he was informed that his lawyer, Romano Vaccarella, had not been authorised. Mr Vaccarella is a veteran Italian jurist and a former judge on the country's Constitutional Court, who's also represented former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in numerous civil cases.

## “Mr Milone was hired by Pope Francis in 2015 as the Holy See's first-ever auditor general”

By rejecting Mr Milone's attorney, in effect the Vatican has made it harder for the lawsuit to proceed. Mr Milone provided a copy of the letter of request submitted by Mr Vaccarella to the relevant Vatican official with a handwritten note “not authorised” at the bottom.

Mr Milone was hired by Pope Francis in 2015 as the Holy See's first-ever auditor general, with the promise of direct contact with the Pope and his top aides, and with broad access to the Holy See's various accounts and portfolios.

In the lawsuit, made against various parties in the Vatican's Secretariat of State, Mr Milone had argued that when he and Mr Panicco were forced out in 2017, just two years into a 5-year mandate, they were extorted by the then-head of the Vatican gendarmes, Domenico Giani – who would later himself be forced out over a high-profile London real estate scandal – and forced to resign or risk arrest

## Vatican officials seek to hamstring former auditor's \$9.6 million lawsuit



Pope Francis greets Libero Milone, then the Vatican's auditor general, at the Vatican April 1, 2016. Mr Milone and his deputy are seeking damages from the Vatican, claiming they were forced to resign after discovering irregularities and corruption. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters

and legal repercussions for their investigations and auditing of Vatican finances.

Mr Panicco was also seeking \$3.6 million in damages for health reasons, saying Vatican police while raiding the auditing office in 2017 confiscated personal medical records containing diagnostic tests related to a cancer diagnosis, which he then had to redo, setting back his treatment by months, after the Vatican refused to return the records.

### Point

In the past, Mr Milone has repeatedly pointed the finger at Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu, former sostituto of the Vatican Secretariat of State, a role similar to chief of staff, saying Cardinal Becciu not only resisted but thwarted his efforts to conduct the external audit of the Secretariat of State's asset portfolio, worth over \$600 million.

Cardinal Becciu himself is currently on trial for various financial crimes alongside nine others for over the Holy See's now infamous investment in a London property that went south, costing the Vatican millions.

In his press conference, Mr Milone again accused Cardinal Becciu and a handful of other Vatican characters who are also on trial for the London property deal of orchestrating his ouster.

Speaking to journalists, Mr Milone said they uncovered various instances of financial misconduct, including personal withdrawals from Holy See accounts; money laundering; the withdrawal of Vatican money for private use and the renovations of private apartments; and the illicit financing of Italian parties for the 2013 elections using money from the Vatican-run Bambino Gesù children's hospital.

## “In the past, Mr Milone has repeatedly pointed the finger at Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu”

Mr Milone insisted that he never acted outside of the parameters of his office, saying he has documentation proving he acted within his competence, and said his efforts to conduct the audit were consistently blocked.

Notably, he referred to an inquiry he attempted to make of the Secretariat of State's investment portfolio in March 2016 in which he was shown a Microsoft Excel file containing a list of real estate investments worth millions, including the now-infamous London property at the heart of the Vatican's ongoing trial.

When he asked for documentation outlining the financial paper trail on these properties, Mr Milone said the request went unanswered, and he pointed the finger at lay Italian businessman Fabrizio Tirabassi and Italian Msgr Alberto Perlasca, both of whom are defendants in the current trial.

### Balance sheet

Mr Milone also said that his requests for a balance sheet on Vatican-owned property in Rome were ignored, and he reported numerous conflicts of interest and instances of Vatican officials approving their own requests.

He said that when he and Mr Panicco were fired, they were accused of spying and were told that they had been the subject of a 7-month investigation by the Vatican gendarmes, who had compiled a briefing on their alleged misconduct.

However, Mr Milone said neither he nor Mr Panicco ever saw the briefing supposedly outlining the details of what they did wrong, as it had been placed under the pontifical secret, meaning it was illegal to reveal its contents.

Since his 2017 ouster, Mr Milone said he has written to Pope Francis seven times asking to be heard to defend himself, but none of these letters have been answered, and he does not know if the Pope read or even received them.

After meeting with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin – who Mr Milone said had been unaware of his ouster until after it already happened – earlier this year, Cardinal Parolin said he would seek to have the pontifical secret from the briefing lifted. However, Mr Milone said he has so far heard nothing.

## “Mr Milone also said that his requests for a balance sheet on Vatican-owned property in Rome were ignored”

He also hit-back against allegations that he contracted an external firm to collect information on the private lives of Vatican personnel, saying Italian laywoman Cecilia Morogna, who like Cardinal Becciu is also from Sardinia and who is also standing trial over the London property, was charged with this task after being brought in by Cardinal Becciu.

Asked whether he believes the Vatican is ever capable of conducting a true Vatican reform, Mr Milone voiced doubt, saying that as far as his case is concerned, “we can't know what will happen tomorrow,” but that if one wants to do business inside Vatican walls, “normal” rules and international standards don't apply.



Cindy Wooden

**T**he German bishops' meeting with officials of the Roman Curia was not a "show-down," but it did make clear the Vatican's strong concerns about Germany's Synodal Path, especially regarding its support for official ministries for women and for a change in Church teaching about homosexuality, said the president of the bishops' conference.

Coming at the end of the bishops' weeklong *ad limina* visits to Rome, the meeting November 18 with the heads of Vatican offices was "a serious test of synodality," Bishop Georg Bätzing told reporters the next day.

In that meeting, "it was important to me to make it clear that the uncovering of abuse and structures that facilitated abuse in the Church have so shattered trust and called into question the authority of the bishops to such a degree that new paths are necessary in order to confront the crisis in the Church," he said.

The German bishops promise to reflect on what was said and heard, he said, but that reflection and the continuing dialogue with the Curia must involve those who "make up the largest part of the people of God: the laity."

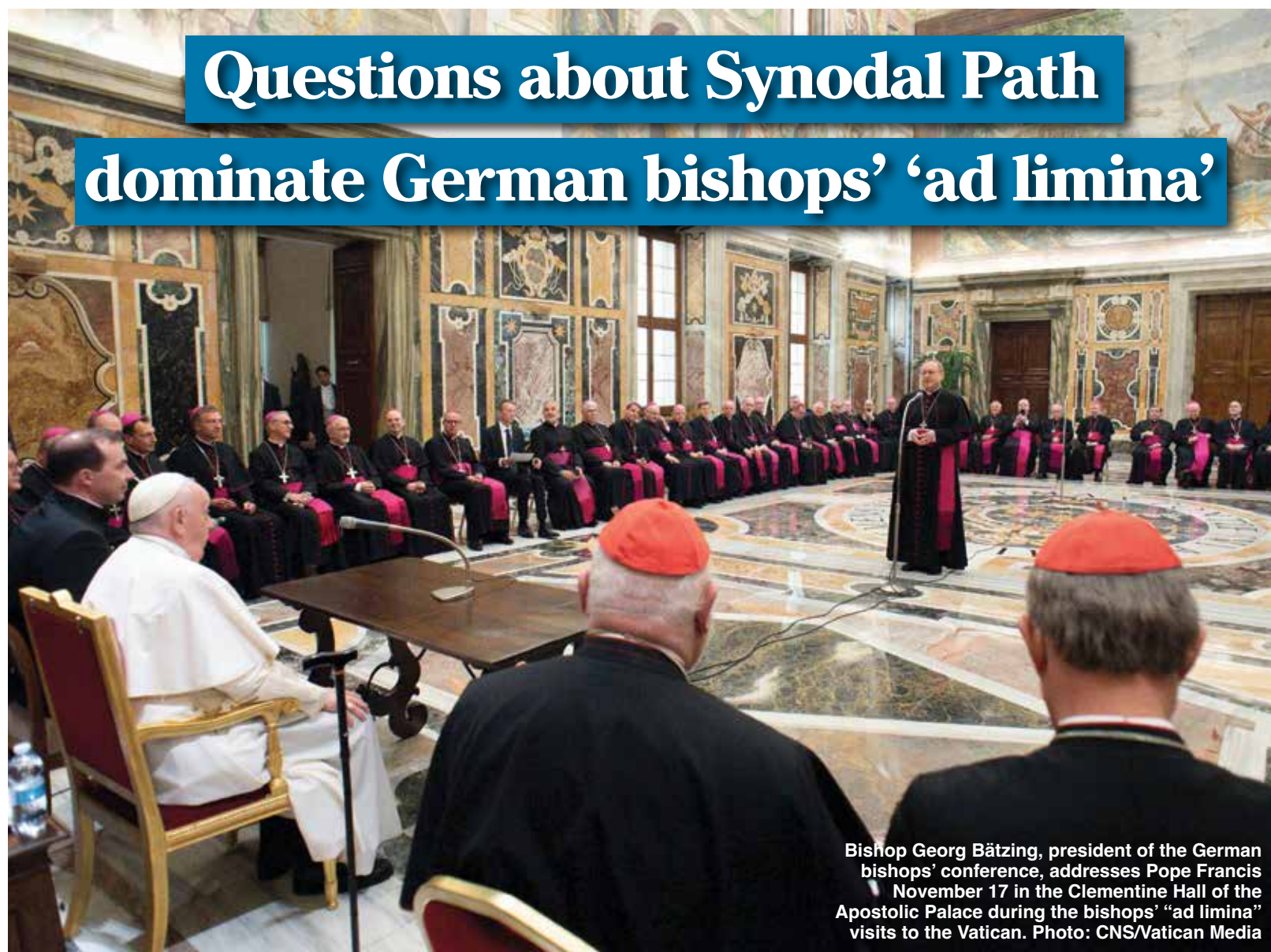
"We are Catholics, and we will remain Catholics, but we want to be Catholics in a different way," Bishop Bätzing said. Claims that the German Church is moving toward a schism "are said from outside and meant to intimidate us".

A joint statement published late November 18 by the bishops and the Vatican said the meeting with Curia officials was chaired by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. Formal presentations were made by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, and Cardinal Luis Ladaria, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, "who frankly and clearly entered into the concerns and reservations regarding the methodology, content and proposals of the Synodal Path".

### Perspective

"In the perspective of open and fraternal sharing," the statement said, "some proposals were put forward, such as that of applying a moratorium to the German Synodal Path, which was not accepted, and that of favouring an additional reflection and mutual listening in light of the perplexities that have emerged."

Bishop Bätzing told reporters Cardinal Ouellet said he had accepted the role of the "bad



Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, addresses Pope Francis November 17 in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace during the bishops' "ad limina" visits to the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

guy" and proposed the moratorium.

"He said he was very worried, very worried that the synod in Germany could be a forest fire that spreads everywhere," the bishop said.

### “Expanding women’s ministries ‘is the most urgent question and the one that separates us most’”

The joint statement also said in the contributions of the Vatican officials "the importance and also the urgency of defining and deepening some of the issues highlighted emerged, for example, those referring to Church structures, sacred ministry and access to it, Christian anthropology, etc."

The three apparently refer to the Synodal Path's: approval of a permanent "synodal council" of bishops and laypeople "to advise on major developments in the Church and society"; its call for women to be admitted to the diaconate and for a consideration of allow-

ing women priests; and its call for a revision of Church teaching on homosexuality and its approval of blessings for persons in committed same-sex relationships.

### Women’s ministries

At the news conference, Bishop Bätzing told reporters the role of women in the Church and the possibility of expanding women's ministries "is the most urgent question and the one that separates us most" from the Curia officials. "Women have put up with so much and are getting impatient. Many younger women say that a Church that denies all of this cannot be my Church."

As for allowing the blessing of gay couples, the bishop said members of the Synodal Assembly are continuing their discussion. "But for me, as a bishop, these blessings for people who ask God's blessing for their committed relationship, I would not take that away from them."

In the wake of the clerical abuse scandal and with the release of a major study of its causes, the German bishops' conference and the Central

Committee of German Catholics launched the Synodal Path in 2019. The process began with forums to discuss issues in the four areas the study identified as containing the "systemic causes" of sexual abuse and its cover-up: the exercise of power in the Church; sexual morality; priestly existence; and the role of women in the Church.

At the news conference, Bishop Bätzing told reporters the bishops and the central committee are committed to concluding the Synodal Path with a fifth assembly in March. "A moratorium would mean stopping, it would mean not continuing work on these themes and texts. Here it was very clear, and I'm glad it was in the communiqué, that this is not an option."

### Approach

The Synodal Assembly meets to pray and discuss proposed documents setting out a theological approach to each of the four areas of study and separate documents making concrete suggestions for ways to address the concerns. After a first reading and debate on the documents, they are amended.

After a second reading, members of the assembly vote on them. To pass, the documents must be approved by two-thirds of the German bishops and two-thirds of the laity, priests and religious in the assembly.

### “The bishops’ communication office said the meeting with Pope Francis was an open forum”

The recommendations in some approved texts can be adopted without approval from Rome, but others must be referred to the Vatican before implementation.

In his introduction to the meeting with the Curia, in a text released by the bishops' conference, Bishop Bätzing told the Vatican officials that "the issues we are dealing with in the four forums and at the synodal assemblies are also being discussed in other parts of the Church," as is clear from the contributions national bishops' conferences have sent in

as part of the process preparing for the world Synod of Bishops.

While the Synodal Path was mentioned November 17 during the two-hour meeting the 63 bishops had with Pope Francis, Bishop Bätzing said it was not treated in depth because the Pope was scheduled to attend the meeting the next day with the heads of the Curia offices.

"It was irritating at first" that Pope Francis was not there, the bishop said, and no one from the Vatican explained his absence. "But now I would say the Pope is a shrewd Jesuit and he allowed us to have this debate among brothers."

The bishops' communication office said the meeting with Pope Francis was an open forum "during which the bishops were able to raise their questions and issues, and the Pope responded."

While "aspects of the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany and the worldwide synodal process" came up, the office said, the discussion also included providing pastoral care to people in changing times, understanding priestly and episcopal ministry, the involvement of laypeople in the Church and the challenge of evangelisation in an increasingly secularised culture.

"Political responsibility, social cohesion and prospects for peace in the face of global and regional conflicts" also were discussed, the bishops' conference said.

**“We are Catholics, and we will remain Catholics, but we want to be Catholics in a different way”**

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### A distinction between disciples and the crowds

**Dear Editor,** Dr Tom Finegan [*The Irish Catholic* – November 10, 2022] puts us all in his debt by drawing our attention to a fault line in our thinking as Catholics. Like a geological fault line it is all the more dangerous for being unsuspected.

We don't think it is possible for us to imitate our Saviour in acknowledging that someone has seriously sinned and at the same time that they can be called to repentance (Jn 8:1-11). We are unable to get our heads around this double Gospel truth; so we opt, instead, for being inclusive without being aware that we are falling into a trap.

St Matthew's account of the ministry of Jesus draws a sharp distinction between the crowds and the disciples,

that is, between those attracted to him but uncommitted, and those who have left the crowds and are willing to be publicly identified with him – in his teaching and way of life. Disciples have taken a courageous and costly step; the crowds remain sitting on the fence – for the time being. The question of inclusivity cannot arise in that scenario.

The French philosopher Louis Lavelle pinpoints our human tendency to live on compromise, always ready to give way before the opinion of others, thereby being untrue to our own deep convictions: "For us it is a mark, not merely of courtesy but even of charity, to tone down our feelings, to restrain our nat-

ural impulses, and to dress reality in a cloak of artifice which we think serves to protect everyone and yet deceives no one." We do this because we stand in fear of opinion, since it seems to bring truth into derision. And we want to be inclusive at all costs. We lose sight of the wide gap between disciples and non-disciples. Dr Finegan writes: "Basking in the warm feeling of being inclusive can even work to place barriers in the way of persons' real incorporation into Christ, as happens when they are encouraged to think that God loves you means that you love God."

*Yours etc.,  
Fr John Joyce SPS  
Kiltegan, Co. Wicklow*

## Presumption of near-universal salvation

**Dear Editor,** Your correspondent Fr Morty O'Shea SOLT [*The Irish Catholic* – November 10, 2022], in criticising the current presumption of near-universal salvation, is only echoing the teaching of the Gospel. In the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), the unprofitable servant received a most dire punishment, not for an obvious sin of commission, but simply for a sin of omission, namely, for not having employed in his master's service all that the latter had entrusted to him, and thus for the equivalent of spiritual neglectfulness and inactivity in this present life. For this, he was cast forever into "the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth".

No wonder St Augustine wrote, *Terret me Evangelium* ("The Gospel terrifies me").

*Yours etc.,  
Alasdair Mackenzie  
Tralee, Co. Kerry*



## Overcoming Blackrock evils with Jesus

**Dear Editor,** All the wall-to-wall coverage of the abuse in Holy Ghost Father schools has neglected to mention Jesus Christ, the only one who can bring good out of this evil.

Calls for an inquiry, apologies and compensation can-

not restore what has been taken away.

Trauma (sin) is an attack upon the very essence of our life – that we have been loved into existence and only find fulfilment when we love. It can only be overcome by a greater power; through

the process of forgiveness.

The Restorative Justice initiative announced by the Spiritans is to be welcomed. Let's not dismiss and derail it, by clinging to a self-righteous culture of blame, that only keeps both the perpetrators and the victims imprisoned,

while at the same time our society remains blind to those evils perpetrated today, against our most vulnerable, all in the name of convenience, consent, and choice.

*Yours etc.,  
Gearóid Duffy,  
Lee Road, Co. Cork*

## Has Ireland learned? Sadly no

**Dear Editor,** There are some anomalies that do not make sense – for example:

When a little baby is murdered by a parent we are all appalled, and the Department of Justice go to great lengths to bring the perpetrator to justice. Sadly however, there are circumstances, when serious mental illness excuses a mother or a father.

However, if a baby's life is artificially 'terminated', where it should be in the safest place in the world, its mother's womb, our 'modern' Government have given approval to this procedure by drugs or lethal injections.

Seven thousand babies end their development in this way every year. There are a few circumstances where a mother and her

baby may not survive the birth, and termination in this case may be required.

In the past these babies were cared for by religious orders of caring sisters who worked tirelessly without pay and with little support from the Government of the day. Disposable nappies were not in vogue at the time, and as all mothers know cloth nappies laundering was a chore each day even for one baby: as there were so many babies and their mother's laundry, bed linens etc, a laundry service was set up. To help set up dormitories of cots, mothers' day to day clothes and substantial meals for expectant mothers, the sisters extended the laundry to earn some much-needed assistance.

Vaccinations for viruses, smallpox, measles, pneumonia, for babies were not in operation then so due to the large dormitories of baby cots close together a virus could take the lives of all babies in a matter of days.

We even see as the Covid virus spread so rapidly in nursing homes where all precautions were adhered to and sadly many lives were lost. Babies had to be buried in consecrated grounds at the convent as spaces in the parish graveyard were not available at short notice. Sad times in Ireland, but have we learned anything? Sadly no.

*Yours etc.,  
Breege Murray  
Adare, Co. Limerick*

## facebook community

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

### Concerns raised over proposed hate crime law reform

One can be counter to any prevailing culture without becoming a hate spouting bigot. As a child I was given the advice "if you have nothing good to say then say nothing". This advice has stood me in good stead in my life. It gives one pause when framing what you want to say, to consider the impact it will have on the hearer. Constantly 'othering' certain groups isn't good for any community, secular or religious. – **Lorna Downey**

Does it not seem strange for Christians to be worried about hate crime laws, when love your neighbour is at the heart of the faith? I get about not wanting to interfere with religious freedom but at same time words have to be chosen carefully? If clergy could focus on what they support rather than what they oppose, might be helpful, as Bishop Comiskey said years ago. – **Declan McSweeney**

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

## Pray bishops and priests will defend Catholic teaching

**Dear Editor,** St Oliver Plunkett Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland was executed at Tyburn on July 1, 1681. He was hanged, drawn and quartered, a grotesque way to die. He was an innocent man and he died for his Catholic faith.

Charles II the reigning king was a Protestant monarch with strong Catholic sympathies. He was anxious to save the life of Oliver Plunkett but didn't do so. England's laws and culture were deeply anti-Catholic, and he was afraid of a Protestant backlash.

Sadly, in Ireland today most of our Church leaders, like King Charles II are afraid. This fear was highlighted recently when none of our bishops stood up to defend Fr Sheehy and Church teaching.

I am humbly calling on all faithful Catholics to invoke the intercession of St Oliver and pray for our bishops and priests that they will find the courage and strength to stand up and fearlessly defend and proclaim Catholic Church teaching.

*Yours etc.,  
John Reilly  
Farnham, Co. Cavan*

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, November 24, 2022

**Dr Noel Keating**

Deepening our intimate relationship with Christ

Page 32



## Embracing the lifelong challenge to renew our faith

One of the key themes to emerge from the Church's synodal journey so far is the need for comprehensive, ambitious faith formation. Many of those who've turned out have expressed a deep desire to better know and understand their faith. At the local, national, and international level, the necessity of better resources and more opportunities for faith formation has been highlighted, with expressions of this need voiced throughout the latest continental synodal document.

Why is this desire being given such voice now, from so many different people in so many different places? There are doubtlessly many reasons for this, but put plainly: for a long time, for many people, the Catholic Faith has sim-



**Synodal cries for faith development must not go unanswered, writes Jason Osborne**

ply been the done thing. Whether people had questions or not, little explanation of the same faith that we hold today was forthcoming. And questions are absolutely valid, as Catholicism makes bold claims that, in today's world, aren't self-evident and require explanation.

At the same time, our hearts have never stopped yearning for God. The first chapter of the Catechism tells us that, "The desire for God is written in the human heart,

because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself.

"Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for," it reads. Whether we understand fully the Church and its teachings or not, the same desire for God and spiritual satisfaction pulls undeniably at everyone's heart. Far from leaving the Church just because we're not perfectly clear on everything

it stands for, many of us with questions remain out of a desire to receive the things the Church promises: God's love, his healing touch, prayer, community and more.

The clash between our longing for a home in the Church, though, and our questions is coming to a head. As the positions the Church takes grate against commonly-held opinion, the unformed image of God, his Church and all of its teachings that many of us hold are seeming less and less up to scratch.

Where is heaven, when our telescopes show us the endless expanse of space stretching out seemingly forever? How are we to rise from the dead when we die and our bodies decompose in the ground? Why does the Church insist on resisting much of the

social change that so many of our family and friends support? The answers to all of these questions and more are there to be found, as greater minds than ours have grappled with variations of the same in their own times.

It's with this in mind that *The Irish Catholic* presents its new section for faith development, 'Your Faith'. Each week will see columns from a variety of new and familiar voices seeking to answer common questions about the Catholic Faith and spirituality, as well as explaining long-held but difficult to understand practices and traditions the Church encourages. It will give us glimpses at the place of faith in our culture, our history and more. May God bless our efforts to grow closer to him and one another!

# The origins and intentions of the Order of Preachers in Ireland



The Dominican tradition grew out of a desire to know and love the truth, writes **Fr Conor McDonough OP**

**D**ominican friars, also known as friars preachers, belong to a global movement with roots stretching back to the 13th century. In 1216, in response to widespread confusion in the south of France concerning the truth of the Catholic Faith, St Dominic founded a community of preachers, men who would live together as brothers, making it their mission to preach the Gospel in its fullness to all sectors of society, focusing on those furthest from the life of the Church. From the beginning, these friars were part of a spiritual family which included contemplative nuns, apostolic sisters, and laypeople who associated themselves with the mission of the friars.

What marked Dominican friars out from other movements at the time – and ever since – was their focus on study and on cities. Unlike monks, who tended to live in the countryside and dedicated themselves to manual labour and the praise of God, Dominican friars would base themselves in urban centres, especially university cities, and would dedicate themselves to study for the sake of preaching. The early Dominican friars took seriously the problems of their time and the doubts of their contemporaries, and their own intellectual work was aimed at addressing these concerns. The friars engaged in study so that they could better present the truth of the Catholic Faith as coherent and attractive. They thought carefully about precisely how to communicate too: how to structure sermons, how to incorporate entertaining stories in their preaching, how to help congregations memorise important points, and how to lead people to repentance for their sins.

## Reflection

This combination of popular outreach and intellectual reflection was a powerful formula, and the friars spread rapidly from their original foundation, founding priories in major cities and at the margins of Christendom. Within the first ten years of foundation there were

Dominican priories as far afield as Denmark, Damascus, and Dublin. The Dominican friars who arrived in Dublin in 1224 – the first arrival here of any order of friars – made their home at the northern end of the bridge over the Liffey, outside the city walls, but they were quickly taken into the citizens' embrace, receiving grants of alms, land, and even a supply of water. From Dublin the friars spread rapidly through Ireland, initially in areas of Anglo-Norman influence, but they very quickly received patronage from Gaelic aristocrats too. At this early stage the friars ministered across ethnic divisions by means of three languages – English, French, and Irish – and they prayed, of course, in Latin.

Wherever they were – whether in Tralee or Toombeola, Kilkenny or Kilmallock – the Dominicans were engaged in popular communication of the Christian faith. Generation after generation, with the support of a large network of lay partners, the friars prayed in their priories, and preached on the road, calling each generation of Irish people to share in the life-giving sacraments, above all Confession and the Eucharist.

**“The early Dominican friars took seriously the problems of their time and the doubts of their contemporaries”**

This flourishing movement was dealt a near-fatal blow at the Reformation, when the friars were expelled from their ancient priories, and forced to find new ways of ministering – often in secret – to the beleaguered community of Irish Catholics. The following centuries – up to Catholic Emancipation in 1829 – was a time of extraordinary faithfulness and perseverance, and a time of many martyrs. Even amid all these challenges, however, the friars maintained their commitment to study, establishing new centres on the European continent where friars would be trained for the dangerous mission in Ireland. And wherever penal laws were not strictly enforced, the friars would take every opportunity to communicate widely, using the same mixture of erudition, humour, and creativity that characterised earlier centuries of preaching.

After the confident reconstruction of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Church in Ireland now finds itself in an entirely new situation, and a new crisis. For a wide variety of reasons many Irish Catholics have ceased to practise their faith, and belief in the central tenets of Christianity is at a historic low. Some customary attachment to the sacraments remains widespread, but this is rarely allied with understanding of, or even curiosity about, the central elements of the Christian faith. And while scandals in the life of the Church repel many from the



Dominican Sisters pray the rosary during a Marian procession in 2017. Photo: CNS/James Ramos, Texas Catholic Herald

Church, messages conveyed via the new media attract many towards lifestyles and attitudes inconsistent with Christianity. In the face of all this, those who are committed to Christian faith and life often feel isolated.

## Crisis

All this means that Dominicans are uniquely placed to respond to the current crisis in Irish Christianity. We aim not at blind custom, but at true understanding; we are not inwardly focused, but seek to communicate with those at a distance from the Church; we seek by all means, including the new media, to present the Christian faith in all its rich, attractive beauty. From parish missions to the Priory Institute, from Instagram to the St Martin Magazine, this is our goal.

It's no accident, then, that the Dominican Order in Ireland has been attracting so many vocations. The young men who have taken the Dominican habit in contemporary Ireland understand very well the challenges facing the Church, and they have, with the help of God, identified in the Dominican way of life as a means to face up to these challenges wisely and well. They recognise in the Dominican vocation a means of giving birth to communities of faith that are truly alive: not just 'carrying on', but creative, thoughtful, and growing.



More than 20,000 people form a black and white Dominican cross on the grounds of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila in 2010 in an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the 'Largest Human Cross'. The Dominican Order has spread all over the world. Photo: CNS/Cheryl Ravelo, Reuters

# What we must do out of love for God

## Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

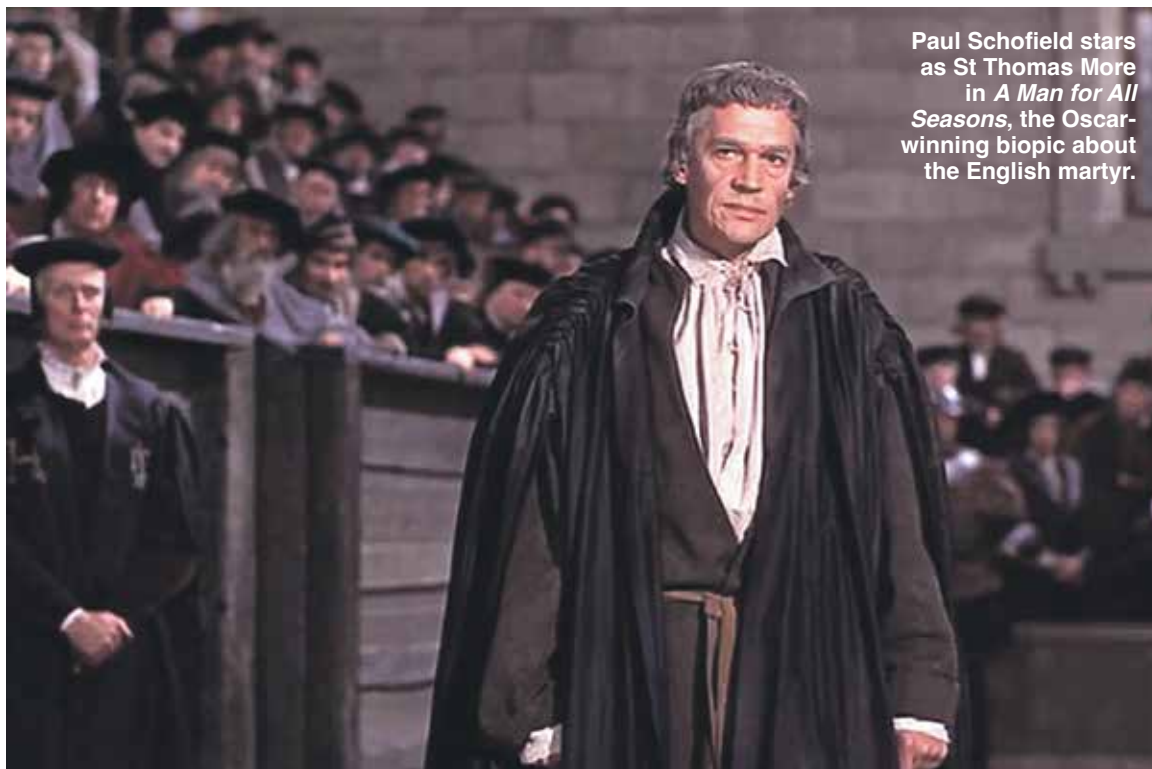
Films are, first and foremost, meant to entertain us. We go to the cinema – or more often, watch on our TVs or phones – to laugh and to cry, to be inspired and overawed, to fall in and out of love.

But that's not a film's only purpose. From its birth, the "big screen" has been "the mirror of the human soul in its constant search for God, often unknowingly," Pope St John Paul II told a gathering of the Vatican's Council for Culture in 1998. The pope – himself a playwright and poet – had a great deal of respect for the art of film.

**Released in 1995 to mark the 100th anniversary of cinema, the Vatican's list of 45 films is divided into three categories, religion, values and art**

"With special effects and remarkable images," he went on to say, "it can explore the human universe in depth... And when it reaches the heights of poetry, unifying and harmonising various art forms – from literature to scenic portrayal, to music and acting – it can become a source of inner wonder and profound meditation."

At its best, film entertains and inspires, offering us an avenue to the soul. But there are more films that miss that mark than hit it. We



Paul Schofield stars as St Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*, the Oscar-winning biopic about the English martyr.

have to be judicious in our choice of what to watch, and while that can be hard to do, in this column I hope to make your job a little easier by highlighting films that mirror the human soul in its search for God.

I'm going to begin by choosing a film from the Vatican's own list of 'great films'. Released in 1995 to mark the 100th anniversary of cinema, the Vatican's list of 45 films is divided into three categories, religion, values and art.

### Modern films

It's a varied list, including anything from well-known modern films like *Schindler's List* to one of the earliest depictions of Christ on-screen, the 1905 *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. For the first in these regular 'faith on film' reflections, I'm going to split the difference with the 1966 classic *A Man for All Seasons*, an entry in the Vatican list under the 'religion' category.

This Oscar winning biopic of St Thomas More, the English nobleman martyred by Henry VIII, is well acted, excellently filmed, moving and amusing. It is also theologically profound, surprisingly so for a Hollywood movie.

**At the heart of our contemporary dismissal of human nature is a rejection of our Creator**

I'm giving away no secrets when I say, More dies in the end. A wise and pious man, he was a lawyer of great standing who was elected Lord Chancellor by King Henry VIII. But when King Henry declared himself head of the Church in England, More was forced to choose between his loyalty to the king and his loyalty to the Church. He refused to capitulate and was beheaded for treason. On this

refusal hangs the great drama of the film.

At the heart of our contemporary dismissal of human nature is a rejection of our Creator. We like to see ourselves as god, masters of truth in our lives. The life of St Thomas More was built on the rejection of just such an ideology.

### Man's pride

The theme of man's pride and its distortion of our nature is established in the opening shots; images of gargoyles, grotesque representations of nature, are followed by a shot of the chain worn by the Lord Chancellor, a symbol of worldly power.

These grotesque representations contrast the great natural beauty often surrounding More. For instance, when the English martyr and Henry VIII converse in a beautiful garden, Henry appears to be a force of nature. But his posturing and opulent dress are out of

place in the surroundings, whereas More's humility is perfectly in keeping. He reflects that which is good and beautiful in man's nature, a contrast to the distorted image of man wrapped up in worldly things.

More's conduct is shaped by his belief that he is "his majesty's good servant, but God's first". This including his actions as a statesman, where he follows the guidance of his God-given conscience. In a comment that could easily have been intended for our own public representatives, More reflects that "when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their public duty, they lead their country by a short route to chaos".

**A Man for All Seasons is a beautifully crafted reminder of what we are called to do for the love of God**

More suffers for his commitment, being locked away from his family in a dingy cell. The most moving and poignant scene in the film comes when his wife and daughter visit, pleading with him to swear the oath of loyalty to the king as head of the Church.

Memorably, More responds that "When a man takes an oath, he's holding his own self in his own hands like water, and if he opens his fingers then, he needn't hope to find himself again".

His wife, in tears, asks him bitterly, "Haven't you done as much as God can reasonably want?" It is interesting to note at this point that More has done all he possibly can to preserve his life, to escape martyrdom. But he knows that there is a point where, "finally, it isn't a matter of reason," as he tells his wife. "Finally, it's a matter of love."

*A Man for All Seasons* is a beautifully crafted reminder of what we are called to do for the love of God.

## Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



St Andrew Dung-Lac depicted in stained glass. Photo: Nheyob

## Saintly lives laid down in brutal Vietnam persecution

November 24 sees the Church remember and celebrate 117 martyrs, killed for their commitment to the Catholic Faith in Vietnam between the 17th and 19th Centuries.

Fr Andrew Dung-Lac, a priest, gives his name to the feast, and the 116 other martyrs he's remembered alongside stand in for a multitude. Among them are bishops, priests and laypeople – including women and children – who gave their lives for Christ throughout the aforementioned period.

96 of the 117 were native Vietnamese and with them were 21 Spanish or French missionaries who had lived in and loved Vietnam. The group of 117 was canonised together by Pope John Paul II in 1988, and represents a nameless host estimated at between 100,000 and 300,000 martyrs, a "great cloud of witnesses" whose blood was the seed of a flourishing Church in Vietnam.

Fr Andrew Dung-Lac, who lends his name to the feast and to the group, was born Dung An-Tran to a normal, poor family who followed the traditional religion of the region in northern Vietnam towards the end of the 18th Century.

However, when An-Tran was 12, his fam-

ily moved to Hanoi in search of work, where he encountered a Christian catechist who housed him and introduced him to Christ and his teachings. An-Tran was baptised with the name Andrew, and in 1823, was ordained a priest – one whose simple lifestyle and preaching appealed to many in the region, who decided like him to convert to Christianity.

However, in 1832 Vietnamese Emperor Minh-Mang banned foreign missionaries and commanded Vietnamese Christians to publicly trample on crucifixes in order to renounce their faith before all. While many did, many did not, and as in other countries, during other persecutions, the Faithful took big risks to continue practicing their faith, including housing and hiding priests and undertaking covert religious practices.

Violent punishment and execution befell those the authorities managed to seize, though, including beheading, suffocation, flogging and public confinement to cages until death.

Fr Andrew was first arrested in 1835, but his parishioners managed to ransom him.

He changed his last name to Lac and moved to a different part of Vietnam to avoid persecution, but

to no avail. In 1839, he was arrested again along with another Vietnamese priest, Fr Peter Thi, whom Fr Andrew had visited in order to go to Confession. Both were ransomed once more, before they were finally re-arrested, tortured, and beheaded in Hanoi on December 21, 1839.

The persecution continued after Frs Andrew and Peter's deaths, but despite its viciousness, it was powerless to stop the staying power of the Church. By the end of the 20th Century, around 10% of the population of Vietnam was estimated to identify as Catholic.

When Fr Andrew and his martyred companions – 117 named and hundreds of thousands unnamed – were canonised, the then-communist government of Vietnam didn't permit a single official representative to attend the ceremony. However, around 8,000 Vietnamese Catholic diaspora were there to celebrate the occasion, and it is on the November 24 every year that the global Church joins with them in remembering and celebrating the remarkable faith of those many saints from Vietnam.

# Deepening our intimate relationship with Christ



Noel Keating

*He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

In any important relationship we pay attention to the other person and to what they have to say to us, through words or otherwise. In meditation, by bringing our attention to our mantra, we leave ourselves open and vulnerable to a graced encounter with Christ.

**“Practices such as Lectio Divina and meditation help us to deepen our relationship with Christ and make it ever more personal”**

Another vital aspect of deepening a relationship, of moving towards intimacy, is that it calls us to be vulnerable in the presence of the other person; to be open to revealing something of our inner selves – especially how we feel about this relationship; perhaps about our fears about committing ourselves more fully to it or our fear that we may want it more than the other person; perhaps a worry about potentially losing our independence, of letting go some

of the freedoms of the single or solitary life. We need to be able to speak about the things that matter most to us in life, even if we are uncertain about them and we don't really know how to articulate them. We need to be willing to think out loud and be open to the responses of the other as they struggle to understand us better and to help us figure out how we might grow into relationship together. Sometimes we discover that the other person knows us better than we know ourselves and the two-way conversation is really about getting to know ourselves better!

So, we speak to them, not as you might address a large group, in broad, semi-formal terms but we speak informally, openly, from the heart, taking the risk that they may not like what our inner thinking reveals about us. We let them see behind the facade of the persona we present to the world. Every time we enter into a personal relationship with someone – every time we recognise and pay attention to them from the depths of our being – we leave ourselves open and vulnerable to being changed. We can say, in Christian terms, that we truly encounter Jesus in and through them; and, we hope, they may experience him in and through us. Our period of meditation then, is a period when we let go of our everyday pre-occupations, of our existential uncertainties, and steep ourselves in his presence by bringing our attention to our sacred word.

## Lectio Divina

We can also pay attention to Jesus by being attentive to his word and taking the time to savour it. The practice of contemplative reading of Scripture, Lectio Divina, can help us to move beyond simply hearing the word to relishing it, to allowing it to touch our hearts as if it was spoken,

not to others over 2,000 years ago but directly to me by Jesus today. When we give that kind of attention to his word, we begin to internalise the essence of his teaching. We make a home for his word in our hearts and come to understand what that might be asking of us right now.

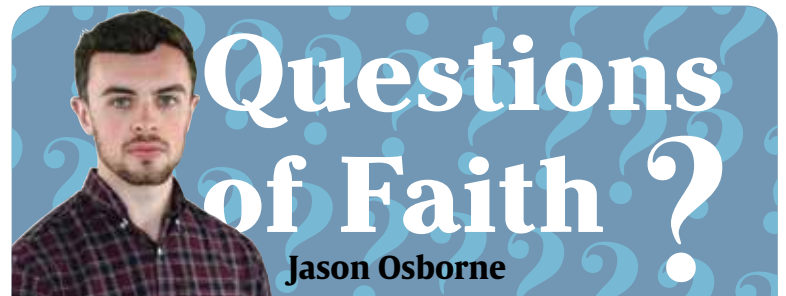
But we must also be willing to speak back to Jesus in our hearts about how such dawning understanding makes us feel; about how sometimes, perhaps often, we resist that call; how we seek to avoid the personal action it requires of us.

Practices such as Lectio Divina and meditation help us to deepen our relationship with Christ and make it ever more personal. Personal here does not mean becoming more individualistic; on the contrary, the more deeply we follow his way, the more we realise that we are one with all of creation and with all of humanity. We come to know that we inter-are, all dwelling in God in whom we all live and move and have our being. We begin to apprehend, if not fully comprehend, the mystery of our being in Christ and Christ being in us. And our relationship with him becomes ever more deeply personal.

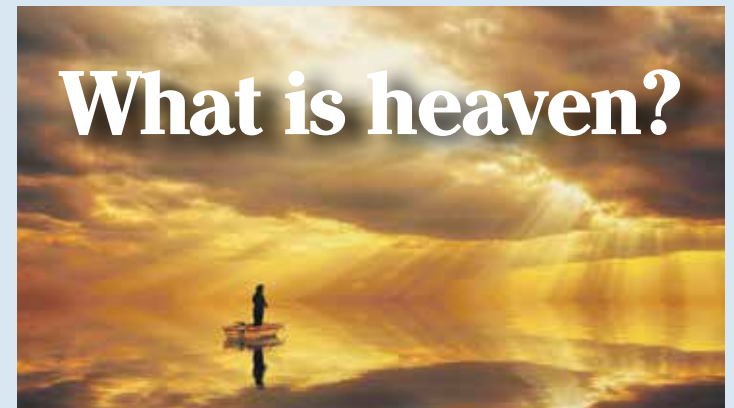
**“By committing to the practice of twice-daily meditation we strive to ensure that we are grounded in our true-self, that all of our actions arise from that ground”**

Over time, we come to appreciate its fruit in our life as we become more willing and less wilful, more compassionate and responsive to the call to be our true-self; to respond to life from that deeper awareness of union with God and with all of creation. Jesus says: “Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind.” (Matt 6:24) From a contemplative perspective we understand that this calls us to ensure our way of being in the world is not dominated by the ego, by our psychological and emotional conditioning, by our desire for power, prestige, and possessions. By committing to the practice of twice-daily meditation we strive to ensure that we are grounded in our true-self, that all of our actions arise from that ground. As Merton says: “We cannot love and live on our own terms.”

The other side of the coin to the question “Who do you say I am?” is to imagine yourself asking Jesus the question rather than the other way round! Asking Jesus “Who do you say I am?” And to hear the answer our faith gives us: “You are a beloved child of God. I dwell in your heart and you in mine.” And to live your life from that place of deep, intimate knowing.



Jason Osborne



Heaven is often depicted in movies and tv shows as a radiant, sunny respite in the clouds, where the dead gather like fleshy angels against the backdrop of a perfect blue sky to enjoy their white robes and harps forevermore. Is there any truth to this image? If so, where is it? After all, modern telescopes have pierced beyond the earth's atmosphere, scanned the stars and so far turned up nothing of the sort. That fact has naturally prompted many to question the existence of such a place, and that doubt has had all sorts of ramifications for how we feel about the world and live our lives.

So, what exactly is the Church talking about when it speaks of heaven? Before answering that question, it's very important to be honest and acknowledge: no one fully knows. As St Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). That's as true today as it was when St Paul wrote it. When it comes to speaking of the things beyond this life, certainty is a rare commodity indeed. However, that doesn't mean that we don't know anything about it.

To turn to the Catechism, the first things it says about heaven contain the seeds of what the Church thinks and teaches on the topic. CCC 1023 says that “those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they ‘see him as he is,’ face to face”.

The first, and most important thing, to understand about heaven is that it's life centred perfectly on God. CCC 1024 and 1025 define heaven in turn as “perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity” – a “communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed”.

Heaven is to be with Christ, to live in him and is “the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness”. It is also where we find our true

est identity, separated finally from sin and its effects as we are. That is heaven in its essence; full communion with God, his saints and ourselves. But how does this manifest itself? What will heaven be like experientially?

Scripture speaks of it in images, as it's impossible to convey the full reality in words: life, light, peace, a wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise. We know it will be an embodied reality, and that we won't just float around as pure spirits for eternity, as the resurrection of the body and the renewal of creation are another core tenet the Church espouses about – hopefully – our final state (more on that in another column).

Heaven won't take place in the sky, or on another planet – although both are natural misunderstandings. Heaven is a higher form of reality, and so it's natural to associate that with places that are “above us”. Rather, heaven is more akin to a new phase of existence, one in which evil and sin are left behind, and neither we nor the world bear the pain or suffering they entail anymore.

In 2010, Pope Benedict said: “All of us today are well aware that by the term ‘heaven’ we are not referring to somewhere in the universe, to a star or such like; no. We mean something far greater and far more difficult to define with our limited human conceptions” (General Audience, August 15, 2010).

In 1999, John Paul II made a similar comment: “In the context of revelation, we know that the ‘heaven’ or ‘happiness’ in which we will find ourselves is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit” (General Audience, July 21, 1999).

While there are few concrete images and concepts we can cling to in order to better understand heaven, perhaps the best thing to keep in mind is that of the loving embrace of our Creator, who knows us fully, and is welcoming us home to life as he intended it.



# You have less love in you now than when you were young

**T**he first chapter of the Book of Revelation contains a powerful challenge that's hidden within the overall esoteric language of that book. John, its author, speaking in the voice of God, says something to this effect: I have seen how hard you work, I have seen your fidelity and your hunger for the truth; but I have this against you: "you have less love in you now than when you were young." That stings!

**“The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right deed for the wrong reason”**

It's easy to be blind to this inside of ourselves. We change, we grow, we age, and sometimes we don't look at ourselves closely to see what those changes are doing to us. Hence, we can be dedicated, hard-working, truth-seeking, sincere persons, virtuous in most every way, except that this goodness has become encrusted inside an anger, bitterness, and hatred that wasn't so evident in us when we were young. As we age, it's easier to be committed to the right causes than to remain loving and not let bitter judgment and subtle hatred infect our character.

It's important to have the right causes and to fight for the right



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

truth, but as T.S. Eliot warns: "The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right deed for the wrong reason". If the author of the Book of Revelations came back today and scrutinised us, conservatives and liberals alike, I suspect, he might say the same thing he said to those Christians in Asia all those years ago; You are dedicated, that's good – but you have less love in you now than when we were young. Our causes may be right and our motives good, but there is also in us now some hatred of others and demonisation of them that wasn't as evident when we were younger. We need to own this.

Someone once quipped that we spend the first half of our lives struggling with the Sixth Commandment, with the fire of eros, and then spend the second half of our lives struggling with the

Fifth Commandment, with the fire of disappointment, anger, and hatred. When I was young and immature, I used to confess to having 'bad thoughts' (to do with the Sixth Commandment). Now, aged and more mature, I confess to having 'bad thoughts' (to do with the Fifth Commandment).

## Seminary

There is, I fear, less love in me now than when I was young. I went to the seminary at the age of 17 and for the next eight years lived in a large community (45 of us). We were young and immature, but our community life together was mostly wonderful. These were happy years. Today, all of us in that group are in our seventies and are mature. However, if we tried to live together now, we would kill each other. We are more mature – though

perhaps with less love in us now than when we were young.

Admittedly, this can be a simplistic judgment. Are we really less loving? Is love simply to be identified with warm energy, friendliness, and being nice to each other? It is more than that. Genuine love can also be prophetic, angry, and hard. Moreover, many things conspire to naturally callous our youthful sensitivity, exuberance, and energy, and harden our faces. Our spontaneity, bounce, and ease in hospitality are calloused simply through the natural loss of our naiveté and through the inevitable blows which life deals us: disappointment, failure, rejection, the death of loved ones, the loss of health, and the growing sense of our own mortality. Those things also take the bounce out of our step and make us less pleasant to be around than when we radiated youthful exuberance, and that isn't necessarily a loss of love.

Still, I'm haunted by an image Margaret Laurence gives us in the person of Hagar Shipley in her novel, *The Stone Angel*. As

Hagar ages, she grows ever more bitter and critical of others, without ever recognising how much she has changed. One day, ringing a doorbell, she overhears a little girl telling her mother "that horrible old woman is at the door." Hearing this, stung to her roots, she goes to a bathroom, turns on all the lights, and for the first time in years examines her face in the mirror and is taken aback by what she sees. She no longer recognises her own face. It has become something other than how she pictures herself. Her face now is that of a bitter, hateful old person.

**“Sadly, you will probably see there some hardening that is less attributable to natural aging than it is to bitterness, jealousy, and hatred”**

We need to do what she did, have a good look at our faces in a mirror. Better yet, lay out a series of photographs of yourself from childhood, through adolescence, through young adulthood, through middle age, to your present age and study your face over the years to see how it has changed from when you were younger. Sadly, you will probably see there some hardening that is less attributable to natural aging than it is to bitterness, jealousy, and hatred.

**“Are we really less loving? Is love simply to be identified with warm energy, friendliness, and being nice to each other? It is more than that”**

# Optimism is not the same as hope

**D**ark November will soon be past, and in the Church's calendar, today is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the new liturgical year. Advent means coming and it has three dimensions: the past coming of Christ at the first Christmas; the future coming of Christ at the end of life; and the everyday coming of Christ in a prayerful relationship.

## Christmas

In preparation for Christmas, the colourful street-lights and decorated houses cheer us up. Yet it is a pity that the commercial side of Christmas has devoured Advent because this is the season which offers the spiritual message which is most needed today, namely, hope in time of darkness. The repeated prayer-word of Advent is 'come'. As long as there is someone to whom we can say 'come', there is hope.

Advent is the most relevant liturgical season in these times when the Church is experiencing a winter of the spirit. Many of us can remember the fruitful days of autumn when churches were packed to capacity, seminaries and novitiates were building extensions, and family prayer was strong. Who could have foreseen this present winter of ageing congregations, very few in seminaries, closing religious houses, and clustering of parishes? Sadly, clerical abuse of minors is still coming to light. One prominent journalist is demanding the immediate suppression of all religious congregations, just as happened at the time of the French Revolution, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. You'd think that religious congregations never provided hospitals and schools, care of the sick, or provision for the poor. The Church is hardly to blame for the sick society where murders are almost a daily occurrence, the bonds of marriage unravel, addiction to drugs and alcohol is rampant, life in the womb is under threat and many are sleeping rough. No doubt, fruitful autumn is but a memory and our society is in the depths of winter. But, as the poet Shelley predicted, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind!" Advent is the season of hope.

It might seem odd that Advent's liturgy begins, not with preparation for the coming of Christ at

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



Christmas, but with his coming for us at the end of life's journey. The Church's liturgy sees time as a circle in which the line ends exactly where it started. As the poet, TS Eliot wrote,

"And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive at where  
we started

And know the place for  
the first time."

Life is a journey from God the Creator back to God our final destiny. When this circle of life is forgotten, life tends to become a directionless succession of unconnected moments. The digital watch represents the mind of many today as it displays no past or future but only the dancing digit of the present moment. Without roots in the past or vision of a future, one lives only for the present moment. And if this collapses, as in a broken relationship, or a failure or defeat, everything falls apart.

**“Optimism may be based on a false foundation such as a hunch or a superstition like believing that we always win in a year with a certain number”**

Three times, today's Gospel (Matthew 24:37-44) mentions the coming of the Son of Man. We are told to be on our guard and stay awake, because we never know when the time will come when our circle of life will reach completion. There are three great virtues that keep our eyes open to God: faith, hope and charity. These are known as the theological virtues because they are three ways by which we are rooted in God. Faith lets us know about God; hope draws courage from God; and love opens our hearts to God. Picture them as three sisters on a journey. We hear a lot about faith and charity, but rarely about hope. She is the little one in the middle, led along by the two bigger sisters. The journey is longer than expected. As darkness falls, faith is finding it hard to see and she begins to falter. The



In this church window depicting the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel appears before Mary to proclaim that she is to be the mother of Jesus. Photo: CNS/Crosiers

atmosphere gets colder and love finds it hard to keep going when relationships are cold. But hope emerges as the sturdy little one who keeps faith going through the darkness and enables love to overcome coldness. Hope is the virtue for Advent.

## Optimism

Optimism is not the same as hope. Optimism may be based on a false foundation such as a hunch or a superstition like believing that we always win in a year with a certain number. Hope is rooted in nothing less than God's continual coming even in the worst of times. In the Nazi concentration camps, Jewish rabbis kept hope alive with the slogan that the voice of the prophets is louder than that of the ranting demagogue, Hitler. One prisoner scratched these lines on the cell wall: "I believe in the sun even when I see it not; I believe in love even when I feel it not; and I believe in God even when he is silent."

The American poet, Emily Dickinson wrote an inspirational poem about hope. "Hope is the thing with feathers

that perches in the soul  
and sings the tune  
without the words  
and never stops at all".

**“Just like the bird, hope can keep the music going even when we feel powerless or wordless, because hope anchors us in God to whom everything is possible”**

Have you ever been at a party when somebody with a good voice makes the excuse that I haven't the words. When we have words, we have a certain control or power. Just like the bird, hope can keep the music going even when we feel powerless or wordless, because hope anchors us in God to whom everything is possible.

As long as there is someone to whom we can say 'come', there is hope. The prayers of Advent invite God to come into our winter experience.

## Prayer

We humbly ask for the light of faith to penetrate all forms of darkness in this season of spiritual winter. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Strengthen us with the virtue of hope to help us keep going when all is cold and dark. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Warm the fervour of our love, enabling us to cope with all feelings of hurt or rejection. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

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# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Finding some positivity amid head-wrecking controversies

In the middle of head-wrecking controversies it's welcome to come across a programme that front-loads positivity.

**The Leap of Faith** (RTE, Friday) was well timed as the COP27 Climate Change Conference was drawing to a close. It was good to hear positivity and optimism in a new book *The Parish as Oasis: An Introduction to Practical Environmental Care*, by Kevin Hargaden and Ciara Murphy of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice.

Presenter Siobhán Garrigan suggested their approach was not apocalyptic, rather "pragmatic but softly, softly". Ciara Murphy found this was a better way to tackle environmental care. There was plenty of evidence to frighten but that can be paralyzing, with people feeling they can't do anything. The authors wanted to guide people towards practical steps or 'experiments' where they can make an impact.

They saw value in community group action, getting passionate people together in communities. The Church could act institutionally, but it was important for parishes to be active – they suggested churches using their extensive rooves for solar panels, which made sense financially as well as environmentally. They instanced a school in Arkansas and a church in Monaghan that had gone down this road and made a



Marie Keenan, an expert on sexual abuse within the Church, gave a nuanced view to the debate on Joe Duffy.

great success of it.

I felt it jarred when the presenter introduced the sex abuse scandals into the discussion, suggesting that Church might be more parched earth than oasis. Dr Hargaden stressed the vision of the book was not a retreat into a "fantasy vision" or a reversal into the past, but an effort to "tend to the space in culture and society now", to

appeal to people struggling along with some kind of faith in the face of the tragedies.

Siobhán Garrigan suggested "there are relatively small numbers in parishes" but Dr Hargaden was optimistic – he said there was still a million showing up in parishes on Sunday mornings, three to four times higher than in continental Europe, with more children going to

church than to GAA.

There was also a positive and cheerful interview with Catherine Wolff about her book *Beyond: How Human-kind Thinks about Heaven*. From a Catholic background, she had thought a lot about the afterlife when immobilised as a teenager and had explored what many religions taught and thought on the matter. She came to be convinced that there must be "something out there beckoning us".

It wasn't all optimism and positivity last week as the fallout from the Blackrock College revelations continued to have impact. Early in the week, on **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1, Monday), Maeve Lewis, CEO of One-in-Four, an advocacy group for survivors, was asked about the need for an inquiry into the Spiritans in relation to child sexual abuse. She was more in favour of a broader inquiry to include other orders and organisations, for example Scouting Ireland and Swim Ireland.

On the same show on the Tuesday morning Noeleen Blackwell, CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre focused only on the religious orders. She wasn't pushing for an inquiry – the way forward had to be driven by those who were abused. Over the week, it seemed to me that RTÉ was pushing for inquiries into religious institutions only.

**LiveLine** (RTÉ Radio One)

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### MOVIE: RISEN

Film 4 Saturday, November 26, 6.55pm, also Friday, December 2, 6.55pm

(2016) Joseph Fiennes. Biblical drama. A Roman legionary officer investigates the Resurrection.

#### SUNDAY

BBC Radio 4 Sunday, November 27, 7am

In depth coverage of topical religious and ethical matters.

#### THE PASSION OF SAINT EDMUND CAMPION

EWTN Wednesday, November 30, 9.30pm and Friday (night) 12.30 am

The life of St Edmund Campion, a 16th Century Jesuit who enjoyed favour with English royalty, until he rejected Anglicanism and was arrested, convicted of high treason and hanged.

continued to pursue the story. Last Friday Joe Duffy said that the Spiritans were no longer co-operating with the programme, but were focusing on the 'restorative justice' initiative. Joe wasn't happy. From his reading he doubted that what was proposed fitted any description of restorative justice he had come across – (the perpetrators, most deceased, would not be present) unless, he said, the offending institution was "at fault for way they are structured" (rather than how they acted?) An expert in this area, Marie Keenan, was more nuanced – she said it could work if an institution accepted responsibility and attended the sessions in this context.

Her books referenced celibacy, chastity, papal infallibility and abuse being more

likely in "closed organisations", so Joe thought the logic of the process would be married priests, women priests, the end of papal infallibility and "the disbandment of the Holy Ghost order"!

Of course if chastity was practiced sexual abuse wouldn't happen, and I'd suspect people of faith would be more interested in radical reform than disbandment, if the problem is not already being dealt with properly. With so much awareness now about child safeguarding I hope there is little enough chance of this happening again on any wide-scale basis.

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[@boreganmedia](https://www.boreganmedia.com)



# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Bird's eye view of a unique theme

My ignorance of the pigeon world was almost absolute before I saw *Million Dollar Pigeons* (15A), an unusual documentary about the high-flying world of pigeon fanciers.

Gavin Fitzgerald's film goes all over the world. We see those at the top of the sport in America, South Africa, China and even Thailand. He starts with a Dubliner called John O'Brien, who operates at the lower end, and segues into the major figures who are willing to pay thousands of dollars – sometimes even hundreds of thousands – for birds likely to scoop the huge prize money on offer for the big races.

Pigeon training has changed significantly over

the years. Once the province of a few aficionados who kept them in their lofts, it's now a megabucks industry that has attracted those who are more interested in the money than the birds.

### Corruption

With wealth comes corruption. It's on this subject the film becomes a bit fuzzy. There are rumblings about missing earnings that aren't fully developed. CEO Sara Blackshaw, we're informed, declined to be interviewed for the film. But she speaks in the course of it. Are these not interviews?

Another theme that's touched on but not explored in any detail is the break-



A racing pigeon.

down of O'Brien's relationship with his partner. When the race the film has been leading up to for an hour eventually takes place, we see him casually making dough. Should he not be

glued to the screen? The drama of the film is killed at this point.

Neither do we see the pigeons starting the race. All we get is a few shots of them flying through the sky. We're

talking about hundreds of miles. Why wasn't this also exploited for its dramatic potential? There's no sense of a beginning, middle or end. Before we know it they've reached their destination. O'Brien is still making his dough. It's too lackadaisical.

### Race

Okay, so the pigeons don't know it's a race but neither do horses or greyhounds. Imagine a film about a horse race where the trainer was making dough as the horses reached the finish.

We don't see them being trained to race either. Winning can't all be in the genes. There has to be technique too. How is this developed? We're not told.

But this is still a worthwhile film about, as one character says, "the Lewis Hamiltons of the sky". And we do learn a lot about pigeons – how they're bred, how they're bid for at auctions, even how they're treated by a vet who's spent his life caring for them.

A lot of them died before the climactic race in Pattaya. This was apparently due to them not being vaccinated during 'quarantine'. Was it avian flu? Covid? Again we're not told. I kept feeling there was a better film trying to get out that would fill in these blanks.

At one point we're informed that pigeons are able to listen. That probably gives them the edge over us humans.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The word out from Maynooth

**Maynooth College reflects on facing Life's End Perspectives on Dying and Death**

edited by Jeremy Corley and others, with a foreword by Archbishop Farrell  
€14.95 / £12.95)

Peter Costello

This book represents, in my view, an interesting development in the teaching tradition of Maynooth, now of course a much larger and very different institution than it was back in the "traditional" 1950s.

When the college was founded originally at the end of the 18th Century by the British government it was intended to have an ameliorative effect on the difficulties arising in a new revolutionary situation across Europe. It used to be said that the first priests who came to teach in the college then espoused Jansenist ideas (or so I was told by the Jesuits who educated me, but then they may have been prejudiced against Port-Royal).

### Truth

Whatever the truth about all that and its affect on the outlook of the Catholic Church in Ireland, it is undoubtedly true that for the next century and half "Maynooth" became a convenient term to describe the collective outlook of the Catholic Church in Ireland, at least in the matters of faith and doctrine. This is less true today, though the mixed establishment

of Pontifical and National College has proved a great success over the decades. But there has been a sharp decrease in the number of clerical students.

### Model

However, this book provides a model of what the theological part of the college frame-work can achieve. Rather than teaching priests alone and issuing stern reproofs to the population, the contributors to this book are reaching out to the nation as a whole.

They are not all academics, but are associates so to speak of Maynooth with well-established reputations in their fields. They are keeping in mind the needs of that important group that Virginia Woolf called "the common reader".

**“There is a time in the lives of us all when a book of this kind will be found of comfort and great purpose”**

Death is a challenging subject, but the essays spread across not only pastoral and theological reflections but social, emotional and medical, on how funerals can be conducted in their complicated ways of faith and no faith, the loss of a child or young person and perinatal death. It moves from the purely spiritual, philosophical and theological to the essentially practical, not neglecting the "liturgy" of the Irish Wake. What will interest is some of the more intimate aspects of Irish sociology.

Reflecting on aspects of death enlarges our ideas of life. There is a time in the lives of us all when a book of this kind will be found of comfort and great purpose. It can be wholeheartedly recommended and an enlarging experience to read and absorb. It is a book which should be known, and widely used by all those involved in end of life care.

**The first great charity of this town: Belfast Charitable Society and its role in the developing city**

edited by Olwen Purdue (Irish Academic Press, €29.95/£24.99)

Felix M. Larkin

**T**he Belfast Charitable Society was established in 1752 for the purpose of raising funds to build a poorhouse and hospital for the poor of Belfast.

The result was the building known today as Clifton House, opened in 1774. As Sir Ronnie Weatherup, the current chairman of the Society, points out in the first essay in this volume, Belfast was then "a small town that relied on voluntary charitable action to develop an institution that would provide support for the sick and needy".

The town's mercantile, professional and industrial classes took the initiative in this, stepping in to fill the vacuum in the leadership of public life in Belfast that followed the departure of the local landlords, the Chichester family (Earls of Donegall), from the town after the burning of their castle in 1706.

This volume comprises 11 essays in which a range of scholars explore the history of the Society and its role in responding to social issues in Belfast. Its focus is on the first 150 years of the Society, a period when Belfast experienced phenomenal growth and rapid industrialisation.

Ciarán McCabe records in his essay that the population of the town more than doubled from 18,000 to 37,000 between 1791 and 1821, and it continued to increase until it stood at 350,000 circa 1900. This, he points out, was "driven by inward migration from its rural hinterland and elsewhere in the north, largely of relatively poor persons". Belfast became a city only in 1888.

### Involved

Many of those associated with the Society in its earliest years were also involved with the Society of United Irishmen, founded in Belfast in October 1791. The connection between the Charitable Society and some of Belfast's more radical citizens at that time is discussed in an essay by Kenneth Dawson. Samuel Neilson, editor of the *Northern Star* newspaper, the organ of the United Irishmen, was a treasurer of the Society; and Henry Joy McCracken's sister, Mary Ann, was a key figure in the work of the Society throughout her long life of 96 years – albeit through the

## Serving the poor of Belfast for 270 years



Society's Ladies Committee. No woman served on the board of the Society until 1920.

Mary Ann McCracken is the subject of a separate essay by Cathryn McWilliams, drawing extensively on her correspondence. Towards the end of her life, Mary Ann lamented that Belfast had lost the revolutionary spirit that it had in her youth. She wrote in 1859 that "Belfast once so celebrated for its love of liberty is now sunk in the love of filthy lucre".

Mary Ann's cousin, Henry Joy – owner of the *Belfast News Letter*, founded by his grandfather in 1737 – was also a supporter of the Society. He described it as "the first great charity of this town", and that is the apt title of this volume. Incidentally,

the Belfast Charitable Society is nearly 40 years older than Dublin's oldest surviving charity, the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society. It, like the Belfast Society, was founded by merchants acting in a voluntary capacity to relieve urban poverty.

**“Mary Ann McCracken is the subject of a separate essay by Cathryn McWilliams, drawing extensively on her correspondence”**

Further essays set the work of the Society in the wider

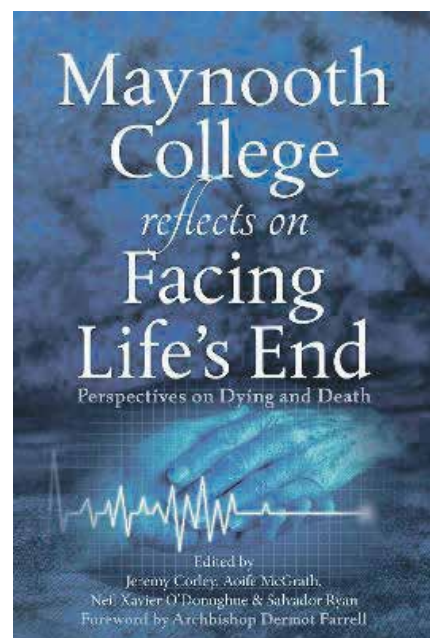
context of the social and economic history of Belfast. Apart from addressing problems of deprivation and sickness within the Poorhouse, the remit of the Society gradually expanded to take on responsibilities for matters normally dealt with by municipal authorities, including the regulation of begging, the supply of fresh water and provision for the burial of the dead.

### Assistance

In addition, it would provide "outdoor" relief – that is, assistance to needy persons who had not been admitted to the Poorhouse – and it opened a school to remove some of the poorest children from the streets and prepare them for work in the industrial town.

By examining these ancillary activities of the

**“Many of those associated with the Society in its earliest years were also involved with the Society of United Irishmen”**



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.



Clifton House, Belfast, home of the Belfast Charitable Society

Society, this volume makes an important contribution to Irish urban history – a sadly neglected field, as the editor of the volume, Olwen Purdue, reminds us in her introduction. She suggests that this is “the result of the tendency of Irish historians to focus on the political struggles of the past, but also because of Ireland’s overwhelmingly rural character”.

Clifton House – the Poorhouse built by the Belfast Charitable Society – is one of the finest buildings in Belfast. It continues to be the headquarters from which the Society directs its charitable work, but it has now been developed as a heritage site – with an interpretative centre which showcases its “interesting and honourable history” (the title of an earlier

history of the Society, by Jonathan Bardon).

As outlined in an epilogue to this volume about the Society in the present century, the Society recognises that it has a “custodial role” in relation to safeguarding the House and its archives – while, at the same time, working hard “to remain true to the original ethos and values of 1752”.



Mary Ann McCracken worked for Belfast's poor.

## Making a religion out of sport?



**Religion & the Rise of Sport in England**  
by Hugh McLeod  
(Oxford University Press,  
€34.00/£30.00)

**Peter Costello**

Prior to the World Cup which opened in Qatar on Sunday, letter which FIFA has sent to all 32 countries taking part asking them to “focus on the football” in Qatar rather than “every ideological and political battle that exists”, has been criticised by several recipients, in the face of the excesses of the host country in the field of human rights and employment.

FIFA wants football to be a value free zone, it seems. But no human action is value free. FIFA's attitude is certainly in contrast to the opinions of some of those who promoted sport in the late 19th Century, and its role in religion.

Late Victorian attitudes are at the heart of this new book by a well-known English historian of Christianity. Here in Ireland we are only too well aware of the social, moral and political entanglements of sport, as between “traditional games” and the playing of rugby and cricket, and the social implications of these.

This book deals with England, however, and not with Great Britain; and certainly not with the Celtic fringe, though Dr McLeod folds the football teams of industrial Scotland into his idea of “England”, so Celtic and Rangers and what these represent do find a place, but not the meaning of Liverpool or Manchester in Ireland.

Professor McLeod is now emeritus professor of Church History at Birmingham University and a reputed ecclesiastical historian. Attention is focused not so much on national identity and politics as might be the case here, but on an evangelical enthusiasm for a sport that developed in the later 19th Century, say from Arnold's Rugby to the decade before the Great War, which certainly has its own strong unity of culture.

Though there were professionals, in cricket for example – Clongowes employed

one every summer back in the late Victorian era – and the first commercial football teams emerged at this time, the period is suffused with the ideal of amateur love of sport, “play up and play the game”. A public figure such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle saw in amateur sport the moral integrity that would be the saving of the nation.

Others, however, saw the question from the point of “Christian manliness” promoted by Charles Kingsley (who was the especial opponent of John Henry Newman, whose loose claim that the Catholic clergy had no moral integrity prompted the writing of *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*). The East End vicar teaching his boys the art of boxing, the ideal of the Gospel message reduced to a violent purpose which Jesus might well not have approved of.

**“Late Victorian attitudes are at the heart of this new book by a well-known English historian of Christianity”**

This is an excellent book, but limited by seeing the subject in the British Isles from an English perspective, and from an largely Anglican and chapel point of view.

Yet it was a complicated situation, and perhaps this wide-ranging survey of the literatures will encourage other historians to investigate further on an even wider scale. In Ireland for example what contrasts can be found say between Tralee, Cork, Dublin and Belfast in this matter of sport.

But back then the love of amateur sport was very strong, especially Rugby Union. How different it is today. The whole of sport has been transformed; it is not for playing so much as to watch from the sofa. Global television connections allow a select number of teams largely in Europe and South America to dominate, and to receive huge fees from the

television systems.

Emma Raducanu is certainly a talented and amazing tennis player, and yet the media latch not so much on to her skill as her future earnings, her changing dress styles and her expensive new car. As some people become poorer and poorer, they are entertained by circuses (at a cost). But there is real bread only for a very few.

### Peace time

What we think of as sport began at the end of the Middle Ages as activities that in peace time trained for war: riding, archery, boxing wrestling, rowing. Games are still in a great way an alternative to war, though from time to time they have caused war, but not always with a Christian spirit.

McLeod could profitably have discussed a figure like Conan Doyle, on the secular benefits of purely amateur sport, an uncomplicated love of “the game” which prepared youth for the Great Game of Imperialism.

Or again, Rudyard Kipling, especially in *Stalkey & Co.*, that all so revealing book of school life at a college run not as a public school, but a limited liability company that prepared boys for the army or the Indian civil service. His three main characters take different views, M'Turk the Irish boy is keen on fox hunting back in the west of Ireland; all three like shooting, but not cricket.

They also loath professional patriots (“yellow-bellied flag-flappers”), not one of them has a Christian thought in his head (see the story entitled *The Moral Reformers*).

For Conan Doyle and Kipling sport was about a form of male comradeship, perhaps influenced by Free Masonry, not by any ideas of an ideal Jesus. More or less what FIFA believes today.

I suspect that the actual picture of what sport meant to the British ruling classes over the last three centuries is far more complicated than Professor McLeod suggests. Imperialism, with all the complications that entails, permeated it.



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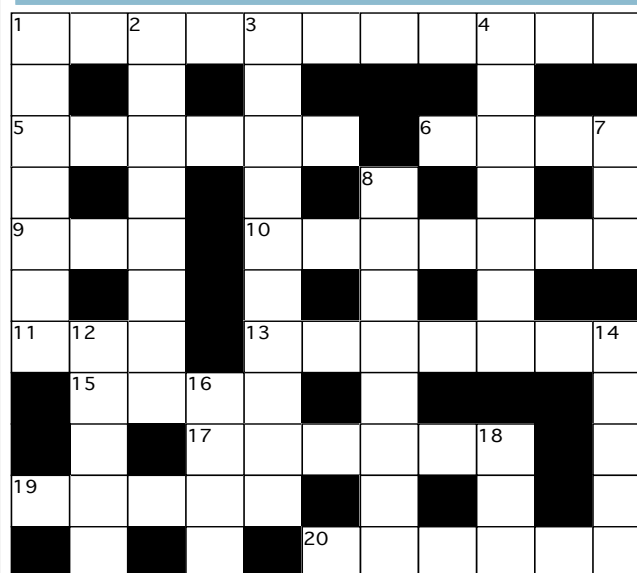
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# Leisure time

## Crossword Junior

Gordius 460



### Across

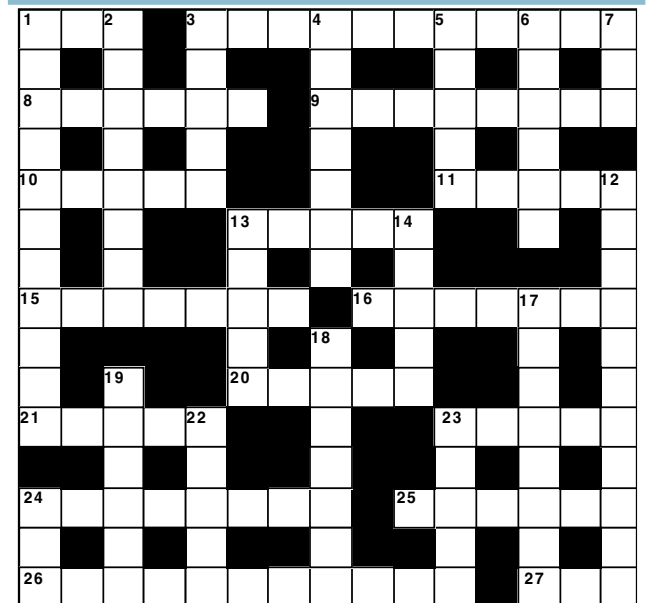
- 1 Fruit drink that is sometimes called 'OJ' (6,5)  
5 A dozen (6)  
6 Tumble (4)  
9 Peas grow in it (3)  
10 Put up your umbrella when it's doing this (7)  
11 We use 'he' for a boy and \_\_\_ for a girl (3)  
13 They can make pieces of metal stick to them (7)  
15 "\_\_\_ upon a time" (4)  
17 Cutting these may cause tears to come to your eyes (6)  
19 "Beauty and the \_\_\_" (5)  
20 Spies are sometimes called secret \_\_\_ (6)

### Down

- 1 Sea creature with eight tentacles (7)  
2 City in Scotland (8)  
3 The group of politicians we elect to be in charge of the country (10)  
4 Dream up (7)  
7 Large piece of wood for the fire (3)  
8 Another name for table tennis (4-4)  
12 Sweet food made by bees (5)  
14 Travels by boat (5)  
16 What's the price - how much does it \_\_\_? (4)  
18 It shines from the sky on a nice day (3)

## Crossword

Gordius 586



### Across

- 1 Precious stone (3)  
3 One who creates unnecessary alarm (11)  
8 Yearly publication (6)  
9 German breed of dog (8)  
10 Animated duck from the 'Looney Tunes' cartoons (5)  
11 & 13 With the currency used in Berne and Geneva, S wins scarf, strangely enough (5,5)  
15 Great unrest, confusion (7)  
16 American spirit or type of biscuit (7)  
20 Imbined (5)  
21 Automaton (5)  
23 Glow, radiate (5)  
24 Large Spanish estate (8)  
25 I creep about with cooking directions (6)  
26 A decommissioning of weapons (11)  
27 A person's 'six-pack', short for abdominal muscles (3)

### Down

- 1 & 14d Long case timepiece (11,5)  
2 Ship that's a woman of peace? Quite the opposite!

### (3,2,3)

- 3 Out of the sunlight or of dubious provenance (5)  
4 Historic British soldier, named for part of his uniform (7)  
5 Signs, portents (5)  
6 Chess strategy that involves the sacrifice of a piece (6)  
7 Sprinted (3)  
12 & 17d Huge church building in the Vatican city (5,6,8)  
13 Fired up, one cooked like this (5)  
14 See 1 down  
17 See 12 down  
18 Point a weapon at a target (4,3)  
19 Counting-frame (6)  
22 Belonging to them (5)  
23 Bonbon (5)  
24 Concealed (3)

## SOLUTIONS, NOVEMBER 17

GORDIUS NO. 585

**Across** — 1 Mad 3 Candlestick 8 Genial 9 Shrewdly 10 Inset 11 Stand 13 Bench 15 Curtain 16 Claudia 20 Great 21 Trust 23 Weave 24 Land mass 25 Killer 26 Water-pistol 27 Eid

**Down** — 1 Magnificent 2 Dinosaur 3 Coast 4 Destiny 5 Specs 6 Indian 7 Key 12 Disappeared 13 Bring 14 Holst 17 de Gaulle 18 Genesis 19 Punnet 22 Timer 23 Whirl 24 Law

CHILDREN'S No. 459

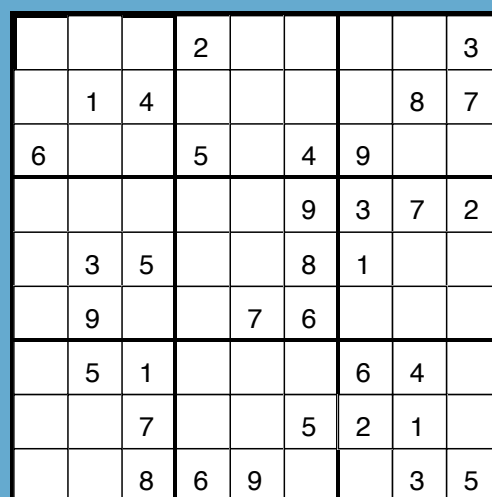
**Across** — 1 Hay fever 6 Hid 7 Moustache 9 Human 11 Urgent 13 Giggles 15 Gash 17 Tuna 18 Yard 20 Rain 21 X-ray 22 Shoe

**Down** — 1 Hamburger 2 Youngest 3 Eating 4 Each 5 Eden 6 Hem 8 Hungry 10 Age 12 Titanic 14 Saddle 16 Hurry 19 Arch

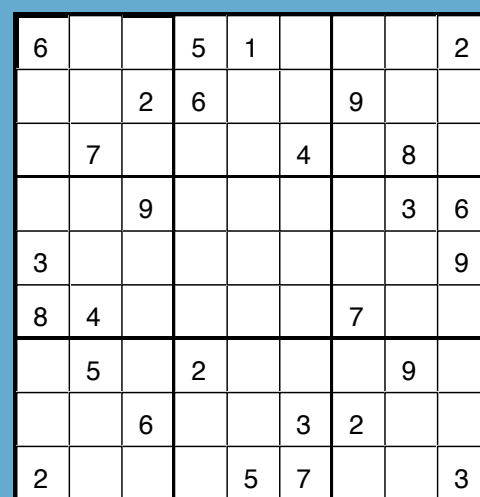
## Sudoku Corner

460

### Easy



### Hard



### Last week's Easy 459

8	7	2	9	3	4	6	5	1
6	3	4	2	1	5	9	8	7
1	9	5	8	6	7	2	3	4
9	6	1	8	7	3	5	4	2
7	4	3	1	5	2	8	6	9
5	2	8	4	9	6	7	1	3
4	8	6	3	2	9	1	7	5
3	5	9	7	6	1	4	2	8
2	1	7	5	4	8	3	9	6

### Last week's Hard 459

6	1	7	8	2	9	5	4	3
2	5	3	1	7	4	9	6	8
4	8	9	3	5	6	7	2	1
3	6	8	9	1	5	2	7	4
9	2	5	7	4	3	8	1	6
7	4	1	2	6	8	3	9	5
8	7	6	4	3	2	1	5	9
5	3	2	6	9	1	4	8	7
1	9	4	5	8	7	6	3	2

## Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



# Are we living in the end times?

## ANOTHER ADVENT SEASON

is upon us and another Christmas is just around the corner. The season of Advent has two halves – the first period focuses on hope for the coming of Christ in the future and second part (from December 16) concentrates on the coming of Christ in the past with his incarnation and the circumstances of his birth in Bethlehem. In the words of the Catechism: “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year...by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour’s first coming, the Faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming” (CCC, 524).

## Second coming

But how real is this ‘ardent desire’ among us for his second coming? The truth is that few of us give the second coming much thought. Yet, it was a very influential belief in the early Church – so much so that St Paul felt the need to dampen expectations that it was immanent when writing to Christians in Thessalonica. In the light of today, we seem to have gone from one extreme to another – from being overly excited about it to forgetting it. But reading the signs



of the times warns us against complacency. A few Sundays ago, Jesus made prophecies in the Gospel of Luke about a new age that he had come to inaugurate (Luke 21:5-19). When I read them, I began to see signs of how they are now being fulfilled in the age we are living.

Let’s listen carefully to what Jesus says: “Nation will fight against nation and kingdom against kingdom”. It’s not difficult to think here of Russia’s war against Ukraine. “Kingdom against kingdom” could also refer to the clash between East and West that forms part of the background to this conflict. “There

will be plagues, earthquakes and famines”. Plagues? Only one word and number needed – Covid-19. Earthquakes? There is always one just around the corner. Famines? Look at what is happening in the Horn of Africa. Vast territories turning into desert because of lack of rain caused by climate change. Mass migration of people and famine caused by drought. “Men will seize you and persecute you”. Christians every day are being persecuted, imprisoned and killed. A sobering fact is that in the 20th Century, more Christians were killed than in the previous 19 centuries combined.

## Vocation

So, are we living in the end times? Yes, but we know not the

day nor the hour. Our vocation is to stay faithful, to do what Christ asks of us, to be ready and place our hope once again in the Lord who will come to judge this world and establish his kingdom as he promised. There are clearer signs that humanity is incapable of saving itself. Only God can save us. For this he sent his Son. But will we listen and let him save us? Will we turn back to him? And when Christ comes again, will he find any faith on earth? Will he find faith in me, in us? None of us know when Christ will return but what we do know is that we need to repent and be ready. Stay faithful. Live the Gospel. Repent and believe. *Maranatha*. Come Lord Jesus!

## A bold Church

Pope Francis is always encouraging us to be brave and bold. Why? Because Christ was brave and bold. We see this with the recent celebration of Christ the King. Christ comes with his kingdom to do battle with evil and defeat the powers of darkness. Christ the king is a warrior, the new David, a soldier who goes into the belly of the beast. He did not shrink from the power of evil but came to meet it and defeat it. This is the boldness that we as a Church need today as we face dark elements of the past. We should act because it is the right thing to do, and not because we have to.

## Spiritual dementia

I celebrated a funeral Mass recently of a lady who had suffered from dementia for many years. But is it not true that all of us suffer from a certain ‘spiritual dementia’ where we forget important truths all the time? For example, when we rush to condemn others, we forget the times when we have sinned and failed. When we get too caught up in ourselves, we forget the poor, the hungry, the destitute and the dying. We are always forgetting that we are beloved children of God and so act as if we are not. And when we condemn past generations, we forget that one day future generations will condemn us for our failings too.



## WILL YOU HELP RELIEVE THE PAIN OF HUNGRY AFRICANS AND SAVE LIVES?

Millions of people in many parts of Africa are suffering from hunger now. Somalia's situation is currently the most publicised but Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, South

Sudan and the Sahel region are very badly affected also. One of the main causes is violence and civil strife which destroys crops. The war in Ukraine, climate change and the pandemic have caused food prices to skyrocket. Droughts have caused the death of livestock, the failure of crops and made water more scarce.

The Little Way Association is receiving many requests from missionary priests and Sisters urgently needing funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. Our Lord says, “I was hungry and you fed me.”

**Please send The Little Way Association whatever you can. Your donation, added to others, will be sent with no deduction for the relieving of hunger and malnutrition in Africa. Thank you.**



*“Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, but at the love at which we do them.”*

~ St Therese

## REMEMBER THE HOLY SOULS IN NOVEMBER

Remember the Holy Souls in November. The Little Way Association will be pleased to send your Mass intentions to missionaries.

In these fraught times, missionary priests rely more than ever on stipends for their daily subsistence and for helping the poorest of their communities.

**A minimum stipend of €6 or more is recommended for each Mass.**

## YOUR MASS IN THE MISSIONS

Our benefactors will be glad to know that in addition to the daily Mass offered for their intentions, Mass is offered each day for all deceased Little Way benefactors and friends.

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](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **AFRICAN FAMINE**

€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **WELLS AND SANITATION**

€..... **MASSSES** (Please state no. ....)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**