

# The Irish Catholic

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## Deacon who battled Covid in ICU backs call for Easter return to Mass

**EXCLUSIVE**

Jason Osborne

A Dublin-based deacon who spent six weeks in hospital fighting for his life battling coronavirus has thrown his weight behind a call for a return to Mass for Easter.

Deacon Don Devaney – who is well-known as the organiser of the Divine Mercy Conference – spent much of his time in intensive care on a ventilator fighting the deadly virus admitting he was close to death.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Rev. Devaney (67) said he was “absolutely, 1000% supportive” of an Easter return to Mass as the churches are “so well managed” and “organised” to keep people safe.

It came after the four archbishops met with Taoiseach Micheál Martin at the weekend to press for a return to Mass at Easter in the Republic if the numbers of people infected continue to fall and the vaccine roll-out for the vulnerable continues.

Rev. Devaney was hospitalised early in the first wave of the pandemic in March,

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### Letters from the Kingdom




At the Franciscan Friary, Killarney, Bro. Pat Lynch OFM and Anne Marie O’Leary go to post Mass Cards to people who asked for them. Photo: Michelle Cooper Galvin.

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# It is not good enough for people of faith to be glibly dismissed

“Where there is no vision the people perish,” is wisdom attributed to King Solomon in the Old Testament. It came to mind this week reflecting on the poor performance of the southern Government when it comes to charting a realistic and hopeful way out of the current level five Covid-19 restrictions. A succession of high-profile ministers – all with former journalists as media advisers – have been tripping over one another to give ever more pessimistic assessments of the road back to something resembling a normal life.

“An RTE twitter account even gushed that it ‘was the lift we had all been waiting for’”

Monday witnessed the spectacle of several ministers in the Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael/Green Party coalition contradicting one another over the space of a couple of hours on an issue as vital as the return to education for vulnerable children.

### Contrast

It was a stark contrast with the picture from London where the British prime minister Boris Johnson – for all his many failings – was offering a hopeful message of a complete return to normal life by mid-summer. Perhaps



## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Priests officiate at the burial of a man in Fethard earlier this month. Funeral restrictions have been particularly hard on families. Photo: Clodagh Kilcoyne

events will overtake him, but with the success of Britain's roll-out of the vaccine it looks like a realistic goal.

The northern executive is due to publish a comprehensive plan next week giving realistic hopes for a safe return to Mass. The four archbishops met with Taoiseach Micheál Martin on Friday to press the case south of the border, but the short Government statement issued afterwards had all the hallmarks of indicating that they got short shrift.

### Recommended

The archbishops are to be commended for making the case for a safe return to public worship. If evidence exists to suggest that it is

unsafe, the Government and the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) should make this evidence available. It is not good enough for people of faith to be glibly dismissed as if their right to freedom of religion is something that can be casually set aside. I have always argued that there can be – at times – credible public health reasons for putting reasonable restrictions on public worship. But, these reasons cannot be arbitrary nor should those affected be met with a wall of silence when asked for the evidence.

The Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) which claims to – at least nominally – represent about a quarter of Irish priests issued a rather

confused statement to the media saying it was “concerned” about a possible return to Mass at Easter. The statement never outlined any reasons for this concern, nor did it give even the slightest hint as to what the ACP in its wisdom felt the right conditions were for a return to Mass.

“The archbishops are to be commended for making the case for a safe return to public worship”

### Euphoria

There was much (evidently short-lived) euphoria in the media when a video appeared of members of the gardaí participating in a dance challenge. An RTE twitter account even gushed that it “was the lift we had all been waiting for”. Few people now appear to remember it or the supposed lift it gave them. Eaten bread is soon forgotten, it seems. But, we continue to be denied access to the Bread of Life while being bombarded with State-sponsored advertisements asking us to ‘mind our health’. Spiritual health, it would appear, doesn't factor in the Government plan to keep people well.

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

“The northern executive is due to publish a comprehensive plan next week giving realistic hopes for a safe return to Mass”

# Deacon who battled Covid in ICU backs call for Easter return to Mass

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spending six weeks in hospital in total – four of them in ICU being ventilated for almost three weeks.

“I missed last Easter because I was on the ventilator. I missed Holy Week, I missed Easter Sunday, I missed Divine Mercy Sunday, so I certainly wouldn't like to be missing

them two years in a row,” Rev. Devaney said.

Rev. Devaney was also critical of the Government's current approach to the virus, and said that while “the virus is real and it's dangerous,” life under lockdown “isn't living”.

“Now there is a culture of stay at home - don't mix, don't meet, don't go for a cup of tea, don't walk, don't exercise. This is not

living...I'm inclined to say: 'look, put on your mask, wash your hands - but get on with life'. And you know, that's from someone who nearly died from it. I'm certainly advocating be cautious, be careful, but I'm saying very clearly, you cannot live your life like this,” he said.

As well as requesting that public worship resume when an easing of

restrictions is considered, the archbishops also requested that the maximum number that can attend a funeral is increased. Currently only ten mourners are allowed.

The Taoiseach said in a statement that concerns raised at the meeting would be considered and that dialogue would be maintained, but didn't commit to any reopening.



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\*Names changed to protect identities.

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# Red nuns latest to take up Jerusalema challenge

Jason Osborne

The Redemptoristines of Drumcondra are the latest community in Ireland to perform the Jerusalema dance challenge, responding to a nomination from their Redemptorist brothers.

The video, which was posted to the community's Facebook page, has been viewed over 10,000 times, and received over 2,500 likes and shares.

"The lyrics of the 'Jerusalema' song are in the Zulu language and express our longing for heaven and for God's loving presence in our lives. They implore God to walk with us, guard us and express our prayer," the video's caption reads.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Sister Lucy Conway said that they did the dance for "the suffering people of the world" and "their carers".

Describing it as a "prayer dance", Sr Lucy said that ten of their order joined in with great enthusiasm.

"We had great fun doing it," she laughed.

The video shows ten of the sisters dancing, with another three clapping along. At one point, two dogs feature, the nuns picking them up and including them in the dance.

"We practiced it for about an hour in total, taking 10 to 15 minutes at a time



to do it," Sr Lucy explained.

"We needed a taskmaster to help us keep time," she said, "but it was really lovely and we had a great time doing it."

"We were delayed by an icon retreat," Sr Lucy said, highlighting the diverse activity a monastery engages in in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Sr Lucy said they felt it was impor-

tant to do as "their hearts are breaking for the world". She acknowledged that while the first lockdown felt like a "novelty" for many, the third lockdown has been "much tougher" for everyone. "To do the dance was a labour of love," she said.

"We're enclosed, but we're very much alive in the world."

# Bishop Kevin Doran criticises Government's endless lockdown leaks

Chai Brady

The possibility of having level 5 restrictions last until May "is not great" according to Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin who also criticised how ministers "leaked" the information.

Bishop Doran took to social media last week to voice his displeasure, saying: "Level 5 until May is not great. What is worse is the way it is leaked by senior ministers before it is even agreed. The task of Government is difficult and they need to inspire people. Meanwhile remember: 'Dominus Spes Nostra: The Lord is our Hope' (from Elphin crest)."

His comments came after a wave of contradictory information last week from Government ministers and information gleaned from media interviews, leaks from parliamentary party meetings and Dáil statements.

The Cabinet sub-committee on Covid-19 recommended on Tuesday that

Level 5 restrictions should remain in place until early April and will be reviewed around April 5 and either eased or further extended.

Meanwhile, one of Bishop Doran's social media posts was blocked on Twitter. Dr Doran has been very active in his criticism of the 'Dying with Dignity Bill 2020' which will legalise euthanasia if passed. One of his tweets about the issue was censored by social media giant Twitter as it was wrongly believed to be promoting suicide.

Bishop Doran posted: "There is a dignity in dying. As a priest, I am privileged to witness it often. Assisted suicide, where it is practiced, is not an expression of freedom or dignity, but of the failure of a society to accompany people on their 'way of the cross'."

Twitter stated it violated their rules "against promoting or encouraging suicide or self-harm". The decision was not overturned after an appeal.

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# Irish charity warns of 'catastrophic' unrest in Ethiopia, appeals for aid

Ruadhán Jones

Up to 4.5 million people have been forced to flee their homes in Tigray, north Ethiopia, causing "catastrophic" destitution, according to Irish charity Mary's Meals.

The charity has launched an appeal to support those without access to food, shelter and medicine.

**"We're committed to feeding many thousands of those people in those displaced centres"**

The displacement is the result of conflict between the Ethiopian government and military forces representing the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which has continually escalated since prime minister Abiy Ahmed

ordered Government troops into the region November 4, 2020.

## Contact

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, CEO of Mary's Meals, has kept in contact with the Daughters of Charity, one of whom – who will remain nameless for her own safety – described the scene on the ground as "traumatising".

"Some of them told us that they have to walk on dead bodies because so many people were dead, they were practically walking on dead bodies to escape for themselves," the sister said.

A communications blackout is making assessing and addressing the situation "a big challenge", Mr MacFarlane-Barrow said.

"The UN are using numbers like 4.5 million people in need of urgent security and that's certainly backed up by the conversations we're having with people on the ground," the CEO said. "This is simply catastrophic."

The main cities are seeing an influx of thousands of people every day, Mr MacFarlane-Barrow explained, "forced to flee" their homes in the countryside.

"Those displaced people are living in crowded makeshift accommodation," he said. "A lot of schools have

overnight become centres for displaced people."

## Needs

Mary's Meals are working to address the needs on the ground, he continued, saying they are providing aid for the Daughters of Charity to distribute on the ground.

"We're committed to feeding many thousands of those people in those displaced centres," Mr MacFarlane-Barrow said. "Already, it's been just incredible to see the way the Irish public have responded. The outpouring of generosity for this Ethiopia appeal has been incredible."

## RTÉ calls for survey responses to guide future decisions

Staff reporter

RTÉ is asking people to take part in a survey which aims to guide them in future content decisions and what audiences think about the broadcaster.

Currently they are preparing a new 'Public Service Statement', which will be a commitment to their audience.

In a statement on their website RTÉ said: "All opinions are welcome, whether you regularly consume RTÉ's television, radio or online services, or whether you don't."

"This survey is being conducted by Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A) on behalf of RTÉ. Your personal information will not be collected by or provided to RTÉ, further to B&A's privacy policy. Findings cannot be linked back to you personally in any way. RTÉ will only see aggregated and anonymous survey results."

Those interested in taking the survey online can do so by following this link: <https://secure.bandasurvey.ie/Web-Prod/Interview/2RX2VSTDKBHO26DE2RX2L7SP4K0HF3KO>

## Evangelicals unite in calling for churches to be reopened

Jason Osborne

Churches must be reopened, evangelical pastors and their congregations have told the Government in a new video campaign, saying "man cannot live by bread alone". The video, which was posted last week, has seen over a thousand interactions, with hundreds reacting and sharing it.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Pastor John Ahern of All Nations Church, and co-founder of Christian Voice Ireland, said that while he fully accepts the danger the virus poses, an "epidemic" of other issues are going unacknowledged at the same time.

"To simply just acknowledge the threat as being physical, with regards to the virus...it's not recognising the threat that so many face right now with regards to

loneliness, isolation, depression, despair, domestic abuse, all of these things that are going on in the background and that may not necessarily show up in the statistics or at least be acknowledged by the Government, but they are happening," Mr Ahern said.

He said that "hope" is what people desperately need, and that "the place where many people find that is in church".

"It's heartrending for ministers, and I'm sure it's the same for priests, to have to turn people away," the pastor said, adding that online liturgies are no replacement for worshipping together as a community.

Mr Ahern said that those who featured in the video were conscious not to come across as angry, but that they all "just want to go back to church".

## A light of peace and healing



Bishop Noel Treanor lights the Candle of Atonement in St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, to mark the annual Day of Prayer for Survivors and Victims of Sexual Abuse, last Friday.

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# 'Love thy neighbour' – its true meaning...

**S**usie Orbach is a well-known London psychotherapist who was Princess Diana's emotional counsellor back in the 1980s. She has recently been speaking about the wave of 'social depression' that has arisen from prolonged lockdown. The severe restrictions on our everyday lives make us 'solace-deprived' and emotionally 'squeezed-out'. Social isolation, she notes, is a form of prison punishment, and a weapon of war. Even the wearing of masks deprives us of a form of communication that is embedded in human nature – face-to-face contact with its' range of expressions. We are emotionally 'abbreviated'.

It's the little things, she noted, that affect our sense of humanity – and our hope. It's the casual exchanges, the meetings



Mary Kenny

over coffee, the jovial office banter, the friendly chat on a bus – the lack of such encounters is creating widespread social depression.

## Slightest encounter

I've noticed this from the other side of the coin, so to speak: how much I appreciate the slightest encounter with any human being now. An essential visit to the optician, where a conversation develops about rugby: a delivery by the postie with a smile: a neighbour who offers to help out with a guttering problem. I'm suffused with gratitude and joy at the slightest sign of human contact around me.

A local man has decided to use his time to bake bread and sell it at a modest price: he delivers on his bicycle each Monday. I'm almost overwhelmed with emotion at the sight of Mat the breadman at the door.

'Love thy neighbour' is sometimes seen in a utilitarian light: it is evident that we may need our neighbours in a practical sense. But the psychotherapist's words have made me realise that it is also about our physical need for community, for the sharing of experience, and the person-to-person contact of which we have been so deprived.

## The richness of helping the poor

European painting is rich in the depiction of the saints, and my Lenten saint this week is St Frances of Rome. She was born into a family of Roman nobles in 1384, and always wanted a religious life: but she complied with her family's wishes and married Lorenzo de Ponziani. She was described as a model wife and mother, and was dedicated to the poor – selling her jewels for charity and giving alms from her household. She founded her own order, the Oblates of Mary, in 1425, for unmarried women and widows, which followed the Benedictine rule. After her husband died, Frances became superior of her order.

Frances was painted by several fine artists, including Orazio Gentileschi, (father of the renowned female artist Artemisia Gentileschi) whose *Vision of St Frances of*



St Frances of Rome Giving Alms by Baciccio

Rome' is in the Urbino Gallery; Giovanni Barbieri, known as Il Guercino, whose painting of Frances is in the Turin gallery. *St Frances of Rome Giving Alms* is a magnificent painting, in stunning colours, by Giovanni Gaulli, known as Baciccio, in Los Angeles' Getty Museum. It shows Frances feeding the poor – although perhaps it's an irony that only a very rich museum can now afford a classic painting of a saint helping the poor.

● Jeff Bezos, founder of the internet company, Amazon, is described as the world's richest man. I'm more interested in his family story than his wealth – he was born to teenage parents – his mother, Jacklyn, was 17, and his father, Theodore, 19. They married and Jacklyn struggled with childcare, while continuing with her school work – even going on to night classes after she finished high school. Sadly, under the strain of their struggles, the young couple split up, and Jacklyn subsequently married a Cuban, Miguel Bezos, who adopted Jeff, aged four.

Young parenthood is unfashionable today: a pregnant schoolgirl now would be under considerable pressure to terminate a pregnancy. But Jacklyn showed character in persisting with her schoolwork and keeping her baby.

Many say Jeff Bezos – who has recently stepped down as Amazon CEO – is too rich: his daily income is reckoned at \$321 million. Excessive. And from all accounts, Amazon workers often toil in exacting conditions, pressed by delivery deadlines.

Yet, over this long lockdown, Amazon has often been my sole provider of books. With libraries and local bookshops closed, Amazon is the only source where I can find a book I need for research. So, I have cause to be thankful to the boy born to a teenage mother in New Mexico in 1964.

Advertorial

# Pope Francis: Climate change 'causing immense hardship for the most vulnerable among us'

Extreme weather destroying crops and food supplies in world's most vulnerable countries.



Photo: Korea.net / Korean Culture and Information Service / CC BY-SA / www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0

2.7 million people are now projected to urgently need food if they are to survive.

Since 1968 Irish charity Concern Worldwide has worked around the world helping alleviate hunger caused by natural or man-made disasters. Over this period, climate change has become one of the key drivers of hunger.

Concern not only supplies emergency food, they continue to provide sustainable solutions to vulnerable communities – so they're able to feed themselves long into the future.

To fund its work, one of Concern's most vital funding sources – on which it absolutely depends – are gifts in the Wills of its supporters. These gifts ensure Concern will always be there for people in need of a helping hand.

## What Concern's help looks like

In Niger life is a constant struggle for survival. A struggle which becomes almost impossible during the annual

'hunger gap'.

*Causing untold suffering, the annual hunger gap runs from April to September – with people spending almost half their year struggling to stay alive.* It's a desperate period where food from the last harvest has run out and it will be months until more is available.

During this time, normal life grinds to a halt. Children leave education to help with agricultural chores at home. Adults travel anywhere to earn even the smallest amount to support their families

And Covid-19 has further exacerbated an already dreadful situation. Local markets have less food to sell so prices have risen. And there's a shortage of seeds for next season's crops – the pandemic's deadly effects will be felt next year too.

**Vulnerable families, who already have little to eat, are in grave danger.**

But thanks to gifts in Wills, Concern is providing food for families in desperate need. And equipping communities to support themselves long into the future. This is achieved by providing drought-resistant seeds – proven to yield more food – along with the tools and training needed to adopt climate-smart techniques.

Chawada Aboubacar is a mother of five. Her family own a small piece of land where they grow the grain, millet. When it runs out between harvests, it used to be a struggle to provide the food they needed to survive.



Photo: Apasitai Baigaya / Concern Worldwide

**With Concern worker Mounkaila's help, Chawada can now grow food to help her family survive.**

But thanks to support from Concern, she now has a thriving kitchen garden and grows a variety of vegetables. This will provide nutritious food for her family this year and for years to come. Keeping her children safe from hunger so they can thrive.

*"We will start eating cabbage, carrot and lettuce in one month and then the onion in about six weeks. This garden helps me and my family. It makes me happy."*

– Chawada Aboubacar

Chawada is ensuring they will be self-sufficient in the future; able to provide for both their own families and the wider community – helping to pull everyone out of poverty.

Thanks to generous people leaving gifts in their Wills to Concern, families like Chawada's can feed themselves this year. **And have the knowledge and skills to produce enough food to eat every year from now on.**

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# Parish in dialogue with gardaí after Communion distribution halted

Chai Brady

A Dublin parish which was allowing people to come to their church after online Mass to receive Holy Communion has been told to stop by gardaí.

## Traffic collision

Fr Binoy Mathew SVD of Mountview/Blakestown parish told *The Irish Catholic* that after a traffic collision on February 14 at the gates of the church drew attention to the practice, a garda told the priest Covid-19 restrictions required them to stop. The gardaí said that the hour and a half window given to parishioners to go to the church to receive the Eucharist was akin to an organised event.

The parish has not distributed Holy Communion since then but are now in contact with senior gardaí in relation to resuming it while adhering to pandemic restrictions.

"We are looking into the possibility of extending the time - maybe about five hours from after Mass online until about 4pm. If somebody comes, we can give them Communion and they won't be allowed to stay in the church at those times" Fr Mathew said.

He started doing this last year in March when churches were first closed, saying it's a way to administer the Blessed Sacrament and keep in touch with parishioners during the pandemic.

"You can take a host and walk away. This is maybe one way of keeping people

sane in Ireland, keeping them connected to their faith. For some people religion means a lot and faith means a lot and this is a way of keeping in touch with them and lots of people have said they are very, very appreciative of what we were doing," he said.

Meanwhile, a priest based in a parish in Munster who wished to not be named confirmed to this newspaper that he had been celebrating Mass for a limited number of people behind closed doors as he considered it to be safe with all social distancing and other regulations observed. An anonymous tip-off from someone alerted gardaí to the practice and he was asked to stop by local officers, which he did.

# Hopes priests could be 'bumped up' for vaccines

Jason Osborne

Minister Patrick O'Donovan has expressed the desire to see priests and undertakers treated as frontline workers when it comes to vaccination.

The *Limerick Leader* reported that Minister O'Donovan said he was planning to write to Government colleague,

Stephen Donnelly, in relation to vaccination for priests and undertakers.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr O'Donovan said priests and undertakers are an "important" part of the pandemic, and that behind the death toll, you have pastors and priests accompanying the deceased and their families.

"I view them as frontline workers," Minister O'Donovan said, noting that this

should be reflected in the State's rollout of the vaccination programme.

"I'm not talking about queue-jumping, but I believe spiritual workers are frontline workers," he said.

Meanwhile, Bishop Denis Nulty has said that he also thinks priests are "very much in the front lines" and that they're also "essential".

# Study finds 'desire to die' transient

Staff reporter

Researchers have found that the "desire to die" that is sometimes expressed among elderly people living in community is often "transient" and linked to experiences of loneliness and depression.

## Longitudinal study

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda) found that four per cent of 8,100 people aged over 50 expressed a desire to die when surveyed. The same research found that almost three-quarters of those who expressed this desire initially did not feel the same way when revisited by researchers two years later.

Commenting on the finding, Dr Des O'Neill of Tallaght Hospital said that the study is a

helpful reminder that people "change their minds" around important issues.

The report's authors noted that the study is of particular interest when the Dying with Dignity Bill is considered, and have called for an "enhanced focus on improving access to mental health care and addressing social isolation in older people".

## Depression

Speaking to *The Irish Times*, consultant geriatrician at St James' Hospital and author of the study, Dr Robert Briggs said most older people with a desire to die and co-existing depression had not been formally diagnosed with the depression. Neither had they received the proper mental health treatment.

## Ready Orr not



Pictured are Paul Orr and Susan Parker following their marriage this week at The Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, County Cavan. Photo: Gerard Mac Cormack

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## Martin Mansergh

### The View



# Ireland's alignment with Europe rather than Britain comes to pass

Some 150 years ago, on January 18, 1871 at Versailles, a united Germany came into being as an empire in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Reminders of it are low-key, confined to German newspapers and magazines.

A thousand-year Reich had existed in the past, the Holy Roman Empire, that existed from the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III in Rome in 800AD (and more specifically Germany from 962) until its dissolution in 1806 precipitated by the French revolutionary wars. Theoretically, it represented a unity of Church and state, with three elector archbishops (Cologne, Mainz and Trier) among seven or eight electors, who chose the emperor, latterly almost always a Habsburg. Whatever political unity it possessed was destroyed by the Reformation. Germany has not forgotten the horror of religious war. Under the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, Germany became a patchwork of over 300 states and principalities theoretically sovereign. The surviving ceremonial outer shell was mocked by Voltaire as neither holy, nor roman, nor an empire.

### Nationalism

German nationalism from the 18th Century was first of all cultural. The German-speaking countries have given the world some of its best music, literature, philosophy, and also theology. The Napoleonic wars underlined the imperative of political unity, which took another half century to happen. As a young prince, Kaiser Wilhelm I had been present at Leipzig in 1813, 'the battle of the nations', which was decisive in the liberation of Germany.

Traditionally, post-Reformation, Ireland looked for succour to continental Catholic powers, like Spain, then France. In the early 1840s, Thomas Davis stressed the need for Ireland to cultivate foreign alliances, including Germany, at this stage down to 39 states led by Prussia and Austria, so as to reduce English interference.



Brexit has contributed to realising the vision of Ireland more aligned with continental Europe.

Post-1871, the power, prestige, and economic prowess of Germany, rose rapidly, challenging all the great powers about them. Bismarck, the architect of German unity, who understood the need for restraint, became the arbiter of Europe in a peaceful sense. His Germany was the pioneer of the modern social welfare system, and also a model for building an economy behind protection. The economist Friedrich List influenced Seán Lemass during Ireland's efforts to create a domestic industrial base in the 1930s. German scholars played a key role in research underlying the Irish language revival.

There were also downsides, Bismarck's anti-Catholic campaign known as the *Kulturkampf*, an unaccountable military, and an empire built on blood and iron, not popular or parliamentary consent. Enemies were waiting for an opportunity to reverse annexations, of a third of Poland extinguished by three partitions by enlightened despots in the 18th Century, and the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine taken from France in 1871 with no democratic consultation. Under less responsible German leadership, intense power competition and escalating brinkmanship led to war on an unprecedented and horrendous scale. Germany was not solely to blame, but it bore some of the worst consequences.

Prior to the war, some unionists and nationalists looked to Germany and

Austria-Hungary for arms, and for political support. Edward Carson lunched with the Kaiser in 1913, and several unionist leaders publicly speculated that another William might defend them, and that rule by the kaiser would be preferable to that of John Redmond. Roger Casement argued that Germany needed to detach Ireland to neutralise British command of the seas.

### Land of Home Rule

The war further delayed the promised land of Home Rule, and created the opportunity for a Rising, the plausibility of which for many hinged on the hope of a German intervention. Yet Ireland never figured in published German war aims. Even though President Woodrow Wilson mentally excluded Ireland, the American aim of national self-determination, entering the war in 1917, provided the international context for pressing the case for Ireland's establishment as a separate state. It has been a durable democracy for a century.

During the inter-war years, the Irish Free State tried to reduce its dependence on Britain, for example, by bringing in Siemens to build the Shannon hydroelectric scheme. A German, Dr Alfred Mahr, directed the National Museum, and Colonel Brase organised and conducted the army band. In the late 1930s, Éamon de Valera supported the policy of appeasement, and negotiated with prime minister Neville Chamberlain

return of the ports allowing Ireland to remain neutral during the Second World War and retain diplomatic relations with all sides.

For Germany, 1945 was year zero. It was defeated, disgraced, occupied and partitioned. A Catholic chancellor Konrad Adenauer put the Federal Republic on its feet, embedded it in the West and then in the EEC in partnership with France. The swiftness of recovery in West Germany was remarkable, the economic miracle. In 1976, SPD Chancellor Helmut Schmidt could go to the polls on the platform 'Modell Deutschland'. The Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt and the reunification of Germany within the EC, strongly supported by

Ireland's Presidency in 1990 under Charles Haughey, set important precedents. Although the German Democratic Republic had been a one-party state that imploded when Soviet support was withdrawn, it did provide its citizens with a comprehensive social safety net.

### Conference

At a conference last week at the University of Limerick, 'Operation Shamrock', where Irish families took in German children after the war, was recalled. French and German bilateral aid helped Ireland in late 1978 to break with sterling and join the Exchange Rate Mechanism, precursor of the Euro. Chancellor Kohl agreed

in 1992 a huge expansion of structural funds, from which Ireland greatly benefited. EU support for Ireland and for the peace process during the Brexit negotiations was vital, and again owed much to Germany. Both Germany and Ireland are more comfortable with the EU as a soft power rather than one that hankers after the colonial era. What is deeply ironic 100 years on is that Davis' and Casement's vision of a self-governing Ireland aligned with Germany and Europe rather than Britain has come to pass in political and economic terms. This outcome is not just Ireland's doing. Vital relationships within and between these islands now need to be reconfigured.



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# No end to Covid if richer countries don't share vaccines, says bishop

Ruadhán Jones

It's important nations "work together" and not hoard vaccines, said Bishop Denis Nulty, as he warned that the Covid-19 pandemic can only end once everyone is vaccinated.

That bishop's call comes as figures reveal that the EU, US and Japan have purchased one billion more vaccine doses than their population needs.

"It's crucial ethical question and issue,"

Bishop Nulty told *the Irish Catholic*. "Obviously we all want to be vaccinated – but maybe we're looking to get too many vaccines into our country for the population we have. People in poorer areas, the developing world, will not be able to access vaccines as well and as easily."

Ireland should use its voice in Europe to advocate for fair vaccine distribution to the developing world, the bishop of Kildare and Leighlin continued.

"We need to be strong on that in trying to

set an example," Bishop Nulty said.

In recent days, both Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron have indicated a desire to tackle the "accelerated growth of global inequality" as a result of Covid-19.

Bishop Nulty said that while it will be a challenge, the Covid-19 pandemic will only end once every country has been vaccinated.

"If we vaccinate all of Ireland and say the vaccine hasn't taken hold in Africa, we're not out of Covid," Bishop Nulty said. "We talk

about wanting to get around the corner of Covid – that happens when the whole world is vaccinated. That's hard, it hasn't happened before, it's asking for a complete re-think about how we operate our world systems."

Bishop Nulty called on Ireland maintain its "tremendous tradition of charity", saying that "our contribution could be giving something of our vaccine distribution to make sure that the voices of the poorer countries are also heard".

## Celebrating St Patrick's Day in a different way in Downpatrick

Staff reporter

Many St Patrick's Day celebrations won't be on the cards this year due to Covid-19 restrictions but The Saint Patrick Centre in Co. Down have prepared an online performance which includes music, dance and iconic imagery honouring the saint.

'The Saint Patrick Show – A Musical and Visual Tale from Ancient to Modern Times' will be brought to audiences online at 3pm and 7pm on March 17 this year.

This 45-minute show will be performed at The Saint Patrick Centre in Downpatrick, the

home of St Patrick in Ireland and will bring audiences on a journey through the ages.

Inspired by stories and legends from St Patrick's time up until modern day Irish poetry, the Saint Patrick Show features 2021 Grammy nominated Fontaines DC frontman, Grian Chatten, Matthew Campbell from the Shamrock Tenors, soprano Mary McCabe, and other Irish artists.

This launch event is a precursor to a series of live events that will be held at Downpatrick starting in summer 2021 (when Covid restrictions allow).

The link to the livestreamed event is: <https://vimeo.com/saintpatrickspate>

## Papal astronomer weighs in on Perseverance



Members of Nasa's Perseverance rover team react in mission control in Pasadena, California, February 18, after receiving confirmation the spacecraft successfully touched down on Mars.

Jason Osborne

The latest Nasa rover to touchdown on Mars has been hailed as inspiration for future explorers, a Church astronomer has said.

Own path in life

Jesuit Brother Robert Macke said that events like this were what inspired his own path in life. With degrees in physics, philosophy and theology, Br Macke said that he hopes the new discoveries the 'Perseverance' rover offers will inspire future explorers.

Nasa's latest rover touched down on the surface of the Red Planet last Thursday and has already begun sending back pictures and audio for the scientists of the world to explore and analyse.

The curator of the Vatican's meteorite collection, Br Macke is excited by the

prospect of the discoveries Perseverance can offer.

"Maybe in the past, maybe back when Mars was wetter, when the atmosphere was thicker, perhaps back then maybe it might have supported life. And so that's what we want to look for," he told *Catholic News Service*.

The search for life

"The more we know about Mars, the more we can direct our focus in the search for life," he said, adding, "Mars is the nearest and easiest and biggest laboratory for us to search for life."

Brother Macke revealed in the same interview that the Vatican's meteorite collection has half a dozen specimens from Mars, some of which have been held by Popes Benedict XVI and Francis.

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# Pro-lifers cannot make the perfect an enemy of the good



A bill that would ban abortion of people with disabilities has split the pro-life camp, writes Ruadhán Jones

Early last week, the DUP announced that it would propose a bill seeking to outlaw abortions on children with disabilities such as Down Syndrome, cleft palate and club foot in the North. The *Severe Foetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill*, proposed by Paul Givan, would amend the *Abortion Regulations 2020* to prevent abortions being carried out on children with 'non-fatal disabilities'.

Many in the North were angered when Westminster imposed abortion on the region through section 9 of the *Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019*,

despite a lack of consultation or support from the people. As a result, you might expect that Mr Givan's move now would be very popular among pro-life organisations in the North who have been fighting the new abortion regulations since they were introduced early last year.

**“Many in the North were angered when Westminster imposed abortion on the region through section 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 2019”**

However, Mr Givan's Bill was accused of being “merely symbolic” by the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC). They are calling on the bill to be withdrawn for fear that it might “legitimise the legislation of abortion imposed on the province last year by the London government” and to be replaced by a bill to “repeal the legislation Westminster imposed

in violation of the devolution settlement”.

Philip Lynn, SPUC's Northern Ireland development officer, said in a statement that “despite (abortions of non-fatal disabilities) being statistically insignificant, it would lend democratic legitimacy to the 99.993% of abortions which would fall outside the scope of the bill – legitimacy that they would not otherwise enjoy. It could also seriously undermine the chances of repealing the radical legislation imposed by Westminster by creating the false impression that it is less extreme than it really is.”

## Agencies

SPUC would prefer – as would all the pro-life agencies and supporters – to remove the legislation in its entirety. The problem, is that isn't feasible as there simply is not sufficient support in the Assembly at present. Because of this, the DUP's Bill has been carefully worded to ensure it receives the support it requires to pass.

Were it to seek any stricter legislation, it would run the risk of being voted down. This, says Tracey Harkin of the Iona Institute NI, would serve

to legitimise the legislation in exactly the manner the SPUC fear. She says that while the bill “isn't perfect”, Iona is supporting it because “it is a step in the right direction”.

“While the Iona Institute NI will continue to seek the full legal protection of the right to life for every unborn child, this bill is an important step in the right direction,” she said. “We need to support their efforts to push back against this law. If the bill was more bracing and sought to protect more babies and it failed, it would almost legitimise the legislation.”

There may be a lesson in this for pro-life advocates across the island of Ireland. There is a temptation to be ‘all-or-nothing’ because abortion is a grave moral evil. It sets an easy marker down to know the true pro-lifers from the false. There are also going to be situations where compromise isn't the answer.

## Fighting

But to suggest that fighting only one type of it is not enough risks making the perfect an enemy of the good. And it is certainly a good that children are not aborted for

Cork PP warns of ‘crippling’ financial pressure, appeals for support

## Staff reporter

Parishes already struggling with debt are under “crippling pressure” to maintain church structures, said the parish priest in Gurrabraher, Cork.

Fr Tom Walsh SMA appealed to “committed” and “not-so-committed” parishioners to “come to the aid of churches in need”. He warned that some parishes may not be able to survive the pandemic.

“We have seen in recent years the loss and inconvenience of post-offices, Garda stations and small neighbourhood shops closing,” Fr Walsh wrote on the Church of the Ascension's Facebook page. “The closure of a parish Church, with all its memories (happy and sorrowful), is even more traumatic. The lock-down, for the best part of a year now, has put crippling pressure on parishes to maintain Church structures.”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Walsh said that his own parish is financial situation and the situation of other parishes prompted him to make the appeal.

“Number one our own finances – we've big debt here having recently replaced the Church roof – and from talking to other priests the way they're being hit as well,” said Fr Walsh. “We were on the pig's back really up to Covid. The people were responding magnificently really and then suddenly Covid threw a spanner in the works.”

## Relies

Fr Walsh said that in his experience, every parish relies on the generosity of a small number of regular contributors. He hopes now to reach those whose use of the church is typically for funerals and weddings.

“There are other people who like the Church being there and heated for weddings and funerals, but don't contribute as much,” Fr Walsh said. “I'm appealing to them to contribute if they want the church to still be available for them. Covid is taking a big toll and I'm concerned for the financial viability of the parish.”

**“There is a temptation to be ‘all-or-nothing’ because abortion is a grave moral evil”**

having Down Syndrome, a cleft palate or a club foot. If it were to pass, lives will be saved – and by no means will it end the cause.

This is what St John Paul II had in mind in 1995 when he taught that: “when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official – whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known – could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality.”

**“While the Iona Institute NI will continue to seek the full legal protection of the right to life for every unborn child, this bill is an important step in the right direction”**

“This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects” the Pontiff taught in *Evangelium vitae*.

The DUP move could be an important first step.



# Time to let us go to Mass again



Few people in Ireland seem aware that we are one of the only countries in Europe that has put a total halt to public worship, writes **David Quinn**

**T**he four Catholic archbishops have met online with Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, once again to express their wish that Catholics be allowed to gather in churches for Mass and other ceremonies as we get close to Easter Sunday, which falls on April 4 this year.

By then, we will have been barred from attending Mass in person for more than three and a half months. That is on top of all the time we were prevented from doing so last year.

## Public worship

In 2020, we could not attend from the end of March, until the end of June. In places like Dublin and Donegal, public worship stopped again in September, and in the rest of the country from the following month until early December. Everything shut down again on St Stephen's Day.

In other words, by the time Easter comes around, we will have been unable to attend public worship for about two-thirds of a year.

But there is absolutely no guarantee public Masses will resume by Easter either. The way the Government is talking, it might be weeks after that again, maybe sometime in June.

If public worship does not resume again till June, by then we will not have been to Mass in person for almost six months straight.

All of the main churches in Ireland have been reasonably content to go along with this for most of the time with little public objection. They know that their members tend to be in the vulnerable age groups, they are extremely sensitive to public health concerns generally, and they feel that stopping public worship is a form of social solidarity with all the other sectors of society that have been forced to close.

But there are probably very



Pope Francis walks in procession during Ash Wednesday Mass in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. Ireland stands almost alone in Europe in banning public worship. Photo: CNS

few people in Ireland who are aware that we are one of the only countries in Europe that has put a total halt to public worship, and for so long.

Almost all countries stopped public worship during the first lockdown last year, from March, through to some time in May.

**“In Italy and Spain, to name two of the bigger EU countries, no attempt has been made to stop public worship again”**

But since then, governments in other countries have been very reluctant to stop public worship completely again. Limits on numbers have been commonplace, as have social distancing and hygiene measures, but for the most part, public worship has been permitted, or else courts have intervened to ensure it takes place, like in France and Germany.

In secular France, for example, since May, public worship was stopped again only for a very brief period in the autumn.

In Italy and Spain, to name two of the bigger EU countries, no attempt has been made to stop public worship again.

Public worship cannot currently take place in the North or Scotland, but both of those regions were slower to take this action than the Republic. And north of the border, the executive has been careful to consult the Churches and hasn't simply imposed a ban on them, as happened in the South.

Recall that in late September, when Dubliners were being prevented from going

to Mass again, the deputy chief medical officer, Dr Ronan Glynn, told reporters that in the context of a pandemic, public worship was considered to be of “less importance”.

Recall also that public worship stops under level three, not just four and five. In level three, you can still go shopping, to the hairdresser, to the gym, but not to Mass.

Both the Government and NPHE have reduced public worship to an afterthought at best. It is one of the first things they stop, and one of the last things they reopen.

Furthermore, under the law as it stands, a priest could potentially be prosecuted for saying Mass in public and you can be fined for doing anything ‘non-essential’. Going to Mass is considered ‘non-essential’.

There are reports of Gardaí intervening in churches in Clonmel and Arklow because it was decided too many people were in those churches praying privately.

## UK variant

Notably, in England Catholics can still attend Mass. England is where the more infectious ‘UK variant’ of Covid-19 is said to have originated. Nonetheless, neither the Government there, nor the equivalent of NPHE have said that public worship should be stopped again because there is no evidence it increases infection rates in the community.

This is the key point. Anything the Government does to slow down the virus must be backed by hard evidence, not supposition. If NPHE and the Government want to restrict a fundamental right like freedom of worship, the onus is on them to provide the evidence to justify such a decision.

They have never provided such evidence because there isn't any.

Yes, you can find isolated examples of some churches

in some countries that did not observe safety rules and caused an outbreak, but isolated cases do not amount to a proportionate reason to bring a complete halt to public worship, which is why so few European countries have taken such a drastic measure again.

## Effect

When Boris Johnson did temporarily stop public worship in the autumn, religious leaders in England wrote a letter to him to voice their objection. This seems to have had an effect.

Unfortunately, no similar effort has been made here. Why not? Are our religious leaders too timid?

A statement issued by the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) in response to the meeting between the Taoiseach and the four archbishops would indicate that some are. ACP leaders don't even want public Masses restored by Easter. The statement said: “The ACP is concerned about calls for an Easter return to community worship.”

“ACP members have significant misgivings about reopening churches for Easter ceremonies, believing it to be a premature and potentially detrimental move.”

They provided no evidence in support of their misgivings and no mention was made of the much greater freedom Catholics and others enjoy in almost every other part of Europe. It was an extremely parochial statement in every possible sense of that term.

Logically, they should upbraid Pope Francis and the Bishops almost everywhere else in Europe for supporting public worship now. Logically, the ACP must think even the Pope is being irresponsible.

But of course, he is not being. There is no good reason for continuing the ban on public worship. It should be restored under safe conditions next month.

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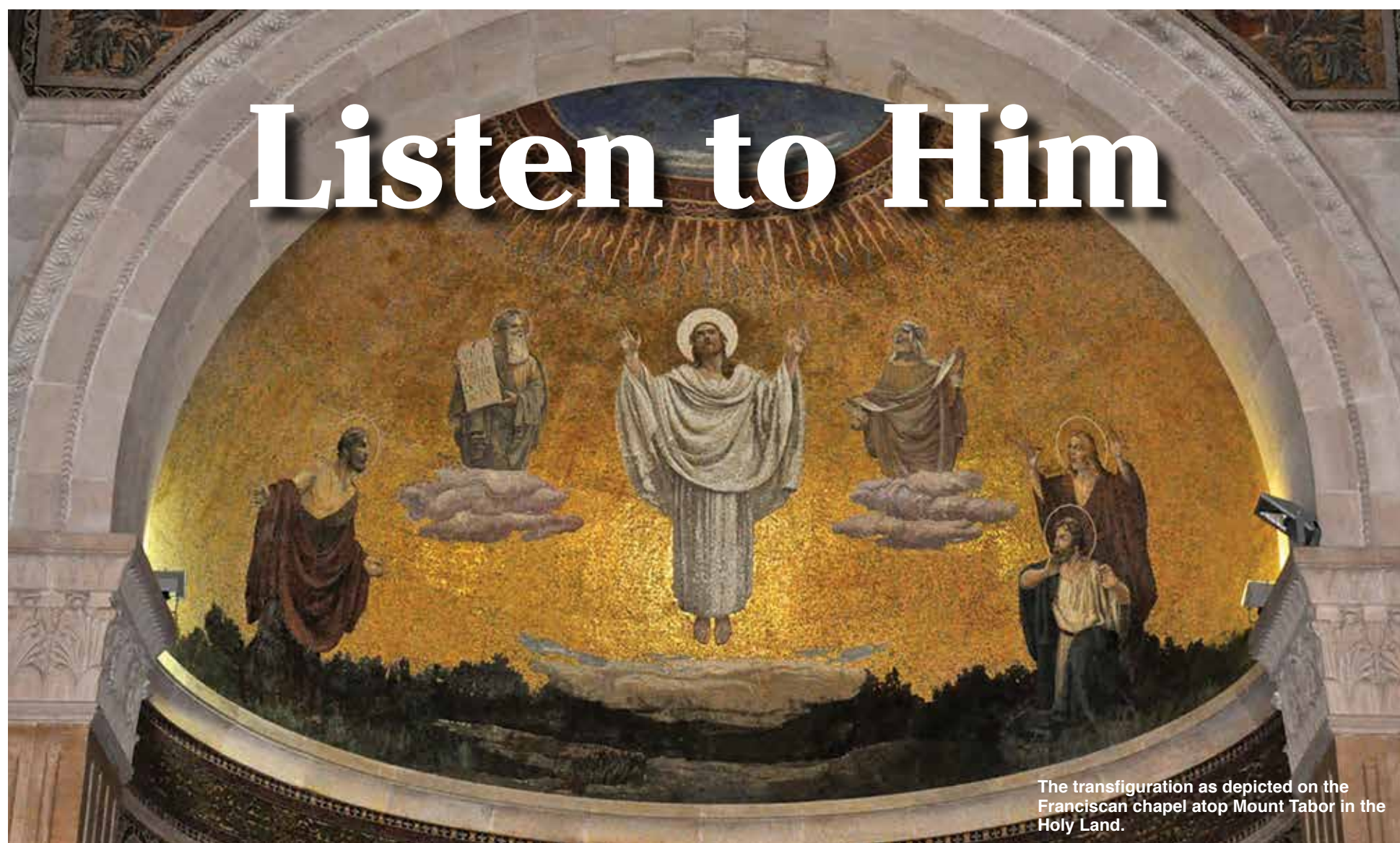
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# Listen to Him



The transfiguration as depicted on the Franciscan chapel atop Mount Tabor in the Holy Land.

Lent takes us from last Sunday's encounter with Satan in the wilderness to this Sunday's vision of the transfigured Lord on the mountain (Mark 9:2-10). Jesus took three apostles, Peter, James and John with him up a high mountain where they could be alone. From a mountain height one gets a panoramic view of the winding of rivers, the meeting of roads, the outline of fields and coastline. It is an experience that opens up the mind. The poet, William Blake, described it like this.

*"Great things happen when men and mountain meet*

*This is not done while jostling in the street."*

**“People flee from silence by turning up the volume or inserting earphones”**

## Holy Mountains

It is not surprising that, in the Bible, mountains are associated with divine encounters. It was on a mountain that Moses received the commandments, Elijah experienced a mystical meeting with God, and Jesus delivered the great sermon which is the charter of Christian living. On a high mountain Peter, James and John were granted a new understanding of Jesus. They got a little glimpse of his divine glory. They had to come down from the height but memory kept the experience alive. These three apostles needed this supportive memory when they witnessed the dreadful agony of Jesus in Gethsemane. Later, as pillars of

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



the early Church they experienced many difficult times. The Second Letter of Peter lets us know how they tapped into this precious bank of memory. “We were with him on the holy mountain”. We must treasure our moments of insight and tap into the bank of golden memories when the going is hard. The voice from above which the apostles heard affirmed the identity of Jesus and the importance of listening to his teaching. “This is my Son the Beloved. Listen to him”.

### Listen to him

In this technological age, on social media there are many voices competing for our attention. Remember that Jesus warned us that when the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit. Some of this false leadership has serious consequences. As in Hitler's time, there are false prophets

who are whipping up feelings of discontent, social anger, homophobia and racist prejudice. This has become the age of post-truth when people lap up conspiracy theories to deny election results, the reality of climate change, Covid-19 vaccination and the legitimacy of the papacy of Pope Francis. Truth may be silenced for a while but it cannot die.

### Who guides me?

Lent is a good time for asking ourselves who directs our lives. As the psalm reminds us, the Lord is the Good Shepherd who guides us along the right path. Whose voice do we follow?

We are quite aware how much our physical diet affects our state of health. But are we equally sensitive to the effects of our mental diet on our spiritual life? Anybody who

feeds the mind with pornography or noisy, violent films is asking for trouble.

A serious Lent will mean cutting back on the time we give to compulsive radio, obsessive television and internet addiction. Some people recommend a ‘digital detox day’ once a week. Even a digital detox hour each day might be a good start. We need to relearn how to listen to God, to listen attentively to other people and even to listen to our own inner feelings. To listen with attention is the first step in loving.

### Mother Teresa's Business Card

When Mother Teresa of Calcutta became internationally-known she met with many world leaders. She was handed many business cards with the promise of financial help if she needed cash for any project. In return, she would give her own business card...five short lines: “The fruit of silence is prayer: the fruit of prayer is faith: the fruit of faith is love: the fruit of love is service: the fruit of service is peace.” Everybody seeks inner peace. The path to peace begins with silence creating space for prayer... which inflames faith...thereby inspiring love...which reaches out in service. Peace then comes because it is in giving that we receive.

Pray for the gift of silent listening. In our technological world of

today it is hard to listen attentively. People flee from silence by turning up the volume or inserting earphones.

**“Remember that Jesus warned us that when the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit”**

Many years ago the poet, T.S. Eliot, wrote that we have “Knowledge of speech, but not of silence/ Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.” His observation is far truer today.

### Your inner chapel

It's easy for me, living in a religious community with a beautiful chapel, to write about silence. But do try to find your own inner chapel. You might profit from learning about breath control and muscular relaxation to create an inner space. Remember what Jesus said: “When you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place” (Matthew 6:6). God is within you, waiting for you just as Jesus was waiting for the troubled woman at the well in Samaria.

One final thought. If you think God is a million miles away, guess who moved!

### Prayer of the day

*God our Father, help us find our inner room where we can listen to your Beloved Son. Enlighten us with your word so that we may find the way to share in your glory. Amen.*

**“As the psalm reminds us, the Lord is the Good Shepherd who guides us along the right path”**



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# ‘Contemporary poetry has lost the view of the transcendent’



English Catholic poet Sally Read, tells Ruadhán Jones what Catholicism taught her about life and art

**C**an you remember what you were doing this time 11 years ago? Early spring of 2010 was cold and blustery; or was it? Did I go for a trip away, was I busy with work? Seasons come and go and perhaps it simply wasn't a memorable one. But for Sally Read, March 2010 was the beginning of a momentous change in her life. Nine months later, on December 14 2010, she entered the Catholic Church.

**“Due to her Catholic friends’ recalcitrance, Ms Read was forced to seek out a Catholic priest who could answer her questions regarding Catholic views on female sexuality”**

Now, the celebrated poet and convert reflects on her conversion and the decade that has passed since then. It was not a path she expected to be on. In fact, she came to the Faith via an unusual route – a book on female sexuality. In the spring of 2010, she found herself disillusioned with contemporary poetry, although a published poet. Ms Read believes her frustration was not a coincidence.

“It’s not coincidental, I think contemporary poetry has lost view of the transcendent,” she says. “So, I thought I would write non-fiction.

Me and a friend of mine who’s a doctor, who I used to work with, decided to write a book on female sexuality. She would handle the medical stuff and I would do psychological and sociological stuff.

“I was going to interview lots of women from different groups, gay, straight, non-religious, then Jews, Catholics and Muslims. But it was really hard to make them talk, they wouldn’t speak to me. Strangely enough, at that time I had close American friends who were Catholic and wouldn’t answer questions either.

“I was living in Rome where my husband works, and I knew them and knew things like NFP (Natural Family Planning) from them. I knew they weren’t prudish, and I thought a lot of what they thought about the female body was interesting and people needed to know this. Even back then I knew that modern medicine does a complete disservice to women in the way it deals with reproductive and gynaecological issues.”

Due to her Catholic friends’ recalcitrance, Ms Read was forced to seek out a Catholic priest who could answer her questions regarding Catholic views on female sexuality. It was on the foot of these discussions that her conversion began.

“My conversations with him led to three encounters in spring 2010 when God really, really came to me and really made himself known to me,” she explains. “It was such a powerful experience that I became a Catholic in the space of nine months.”

## Conversion experience

From her position as a staunch atheist in the spring of 2010 to a Catholic in December of the same year, Ms Read experienced a profound change in her life. However, she was reluctant to write about it for fear of diluting her own personal experience by oversharing.

“Before I wrote *Night’s Bright Darkness*, I didn’t think I would talk about it at all,” she says. “I wrote a short article, and then my intention was not to write about the whole experience. I really felt that, and I think this is true, having experienced something so powerful from God, it is important not just to rush into the streets, announce it from the rooftops. Because there’s something intimate and something specifically for you in the experience.”

However, while writing a fictional novel about a person undergoing a conversion, she received an overwhelming message every time she went to pray: “Don’t write the novel, write the truth. For Heaven’s sake, just write the truth down.”

“When I realised that, I realised how perfectly formed my conver-



Sally Read at work in her home near Rome.

sion was, its poetic structure. I went through terrible anxiety around the time that it was being published, thinking I’d get terrible feedback and I shouldn’t have done it. But the feedback I got was so positive, I realised that if you have a powerful experience of God, in due course it’s good to share – it’s for everybody, not just for you, for everybody.”

The fruit of this change of heart is available for all to read – *Night’s Bright Darkness* is a very modern conversion story and one which deserves careful reading.

## The Virgin Mary

Though Ms Read had no especial interest in religion prior to her conversion, she thinks looking back that she “wanted there to be God, but I couldn’t see a rational and logical reason to believe in him,” she says. Equally, however, she thinks God was reaching out to her, particularly in the person of the Virgin Mary.

“It was really bizarre – through life and especially faith, things pick you rather than you pick them,” she says. “And you can’t say why. Often, the things you pick don’t last, it’s the things that pick you. For some reason, even before conversion, I was always drawn to the face of the Mother of God. I always had a picture

of the Madonna in my flat in London. I didn’t know why. I thought it must be because I like Renaissance art.

“Ditto the Annunciation – I was very drawn to write about it as poet. I found it such a fascinating, highly charged encounter. I think much of that has to do with the art around it. When I was an atheist, I really saw her as someone taken advantage of by patriarchal culture.”

**“At the beginning, I thought that people put such an importance on her, that I was scared about her overshadowing Christ in some sense”**

Ms Read reflects that her conversion was very Christ centred, focused on the Eucharist, and it was only as time went on that she felt Mary’s presence.

“Now I have great devotion to the rosary, it has a very mysterious role in our lives,” she says. “I think it’s important with Mary that you’re well informed about her role in

salvation history and the figure of Mary in the whole Bible. And once you’re informed about that, you get to understand the complicated issue.

“At the beginning, I thought that people put such an importance on her, that I was scared about her overshadowing Christ in some sense. But as I read, and as I developed as a Catholic, I understood how she is the gateway to Heaven, something we go through. She has a subtle but extremely important role.”

## Annunciation

It was this theme, the importance of the Virgin Mary and in particular her *Fiat* (her yes to God), that Ms Read explored in her second Catholic book, *Annunciation*, which was written for and to her young daughter. It distilled the new knowledge she had gleaned since her conversion.

“*Annunciation* was written for my daughter, directed at her and the troubles we have in our lives,” she says. “I realised how central the *Fiat* is to our lives. Let’s face it, life is a tricky business! I think that became the point of the book, that it’s the key to everything. If you have a bad day, it can be difficult to get up in the morning. It’s about giving consent to every situation we find ourselves in.



It's like this quarantine now, it's giving your full consent to that, this is where I need to be, I have to live this in a way for God."

Ms Read also attempts to untangle some of the issues that face young women today. She draws on her personal experiences of modern culture, while tying it back to her developing understanding of Mary's importance. She believes that the denigration of feminine traits such as receptivity and submission in favour of a hyper-masculine ideal is partly responsible for the collapse in religiosity in the West and a rejection of motherhood.

**“For truly formed Catholics, the challenges the modern world holds for mothers won't be as much of a challenge as they will know their vocation in God”**

Reflecting on her experience of pregnancy, Ms Read explains that “when you become pregnant and a mother, it's amazing how you do lose control. There's a line in a Sylvia Path poem, which I really love; ‘When you become pregnant, you've boarded a train and you can't get off. I remember that feeling, being on a train and nothing to stop it. Everything is unfolding within you without you doing anything.

“In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's become exacerbated in women, they want to be in control, think they need to be in control of every aspect of their lives. They set up to be earning as much and as powerful as men – we have lost sight of how incredible motherhood is.”

She continues: “We have accepted the stereotypically masculine as being *the* thing to be, the only way to be. I think one reason why religion is suffering in the West is because traits of femininity and receptivity and submission are what you need for a relationship with God. We're rejecting all that, we think we must be powerful, not to bend our knee to anybody. It's sad, it stops people turning to God sometimes.



English poet and Catholic convert Sally Read reflects on ten years since her conversion.

“For truly formed Catholics, the challenges the modern world holds for mothers won't be as much of a challenge as they will know their vocation in God. But lots of women, pregnancy and motherhood are a real encroachment on their own ambitions, which is dangerous thing. The trend is that it's ok to say you don't like children and you'd never want to have children. Of course, everyone's entitled to do what they want to do, but we have lost sight of fact that self-sacrifice and self-giving is the fundamental part of love,” she concluded.

### Identity

Another theme which permeates the book is the question of identity, which Ms Read believes has become fraught. This is the result of the invention of the pill and the popularisation of contraception.

“When contraception became freely available, we deconstructed what sex was about,” she says. “It could become completely divorced from reproduction. Then, women and men lost sight of their role in that, of what it means to be a man or woman. Everything is up for grabs, people can reinvent themselves. The idea of what is a woman became debated, which it never was, and what sex is as well, which it never was because it was always plainly about having children.

So I think that's the root of it.”

The other cause she identifies is a loss of our religious beliefs. We no longer see ourselves in terms of our relationship to God and so lose a grounded sense of ourselves.

“Then, there's a great unease and anxiety in the West at the moment – we are generally a comfortable, well-educated society, and people are free,” Ms Read says. “This floating anxiety has to latch onto something and people feel the need to redefine themselves. They almost feel the need to write their own story as though life is a film. By writing a role, they think they've found their vocation. But they don't bring God into the equation, so I think they get a bit lost.

**“I think when people don't believe, they need gaze of friends/peers, they need to be famous and that becomes very unstable”**

“People who live without God in their lives, they live in a gaze and they have to find it, whether it be on social media or other places. When we're born, we live in the gaze of parents and for many years we want to be watched all the time. The healthy thing to do would be grow up and pass into the gaze of God, to be more conscious of God watching us. Living without being seen is terribly, terribly lonely. I think when people don't believe, they need the

gaze of friends/peers, they need to be famous and that becomes very unstable.”

This in part explains her reservations about social media. Though she has an Instagram account herself – to help her promote new book releases – she feels there's a great deal of showing off, even when people don't mean to.

“To me, the issue is, when something happens to you it isn't real until you've told someone,” she explains. “When I was young, I told my mum. When you grow up, you want to tell it to your best friend or your husband or whatever it is. People today think it isn't real until it's broadcasted.

“But if we don't let something happen to us, to sit with us ourselves and process experiences, and contemplate and understand experiences, we become immature,” Ms Read says. “Sometimes we have to sit with an experience to really, fully experience it. When we run off to tell someone immediately, it almost detracts from it. The Gospels talk of Mary pondering something in her heart, and there's a way things become a part of you before you share them.”

### Writing

When asked if she feels her conversion has affected her writing at all, she responds that it has – for the better.

“My writing has become much more relaxed and communicative,” Ms Read says. “It's probably because before I converted, I didn't really know what I was trying to say half the time and was conscious of trying to be clever. Now

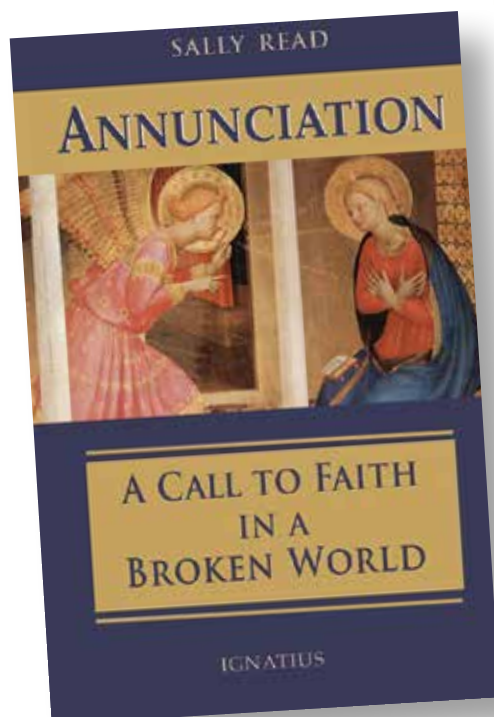
I'm not, I just want to communicate because I have something to say.

“There are all sorts of issues with modern writing – what every writer has to avoid is ego. I'll pick up a book and put it down right away if the author is just trying to be clever. Sometimes when I pick up a book of poetry I'll think – you don't know what you're trying to say either. Because there's a general confusion about truth, about reality.

**“Her two Catholic autobiographies – *Night's Bright Darkness* and *Annunciation* – should be essential reading for Catholics young and old”**

“The gap between any word and what it describes is slender beyond measure – or it should be. With poetry, my obsession was always that words are so close to what they describe, you have to choose the word closest to it. Some words are onomatopoeic, they have a sensual sound so close to the thing. Good writing really makes you feel the thing.”

Ms Read is a professional poet and author of a number of non-fiction books. Her two Catholic autobiographies – *Night's Bright Darkness* and *Annunciation* – should be essential reading for Catholics young and old.





# It is a modern myth that science and faith are at loggerheads

The South Pole Telescope and the Background Imaging of Cosmic Extragalactic Polarisation experiment, or Bicep2, at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station are seen against the night sky. Researchers used the equipment to detect ripples in the space-time fabric that echo the massive expansion of the universe that took place just after the Big Bang. Photo: CNS



Belief in Jesus Christ and God as our Creator remains absolutely compatible with science, writes **Dr Brian Wilson**

**A**s a young Catholic increasingly curious and hungry for more knowledge of the Faith, I find that rather than holding my faith back, my scientific training has helped to deepen it. After taking time to understand and ponder the beliefs of the Christian faith, I have been attracted by its long tradition of engaging in debate and providing a clear defence of what it believes, as well as why it is relevant for today. Modern culture increasingly presents faith and science as diametrically opposed. Many surveys of young people reveal that the number one statement of unbelievers is that science has refuted religion. Whatever is true, is of God. Jesus said: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Therefore Catholics reasonably seek compatibility and complementarity between truths of science or philosophy and the truths of religion. But a lot of people succumb to this modern myth - and it is modern - that science and faith are at loggerheads. But it is useful to remind ourselves that many great figures in

science have been Christian believers. Georges Lemaître is just one example. He was a Belgian Catholic priest, mathematician, astronomer, and professor of physics. Fr Lemaître was the first to propose what later became known as the 'Big Bang Theory' which convinces the scientific community today.

**“The key question in my mind is how the simplest organism capable of independent life, the bacterial cell, could be created from non-life?”**

In the Creed each weekend I profess my faith in God in the first line: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." At the

same time I realise that the society in which I live in now is predominantly of the opinion that science and faith are incompatible. It is accepted that we are just animals, a species like any other, differentiated by the fact of our large brain. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, presented in his 1859 publication *On the Origin of Species*, has played a major role in the emergence of a world which accepts humans as just another species within the animal kingdom. In a nutshell the theory provides a plausible explanation of how the simplest form of life (a microorganism or bacteria) steadily evolved into fish, then to amphibians, from amphibians to reptiles, from reptiles to mammals, and from apes to humans.

#### Key question

The key question in my mind is how the simplest organism capable of independent life, the bacterial cell, could be created from non-life? Stephen J. Gould, an evolutionary biologist, palaeontologist, and Harvard professor noted over 30 years ago: "Evolution, in fact, is not the study of origins

at all. Evolution studies the pathways and mechanisms of organic change following the origin of life." The theory of evolution attempts to explain only the diversity of life. Even the bacterial cell is regarded by scientists as a "masterpiece of miniaturized complexity which makes a spaceship seem rather low-tech". The likelihood of sugars, amino acids and the like somehow coming together has been said to be about as likely as "a tornado sweeping through a junkyard and assembling a Boeing 747 from the materials therein". Chance assembly is just a naturalistic way of saying 'miracle.'

A scientific explanation of this is deemed unnecessary by Darwinists, who handle the problem with philosophical argument. Life obviously exists, and if a naturalistic process (a process excluding God) is the only conceivable explanation for its existence, then the difficulties must not be as insuperable as they appear. But I understand that science is not decided by vote, but by evidence. The fact that scientists have never come even remotely close to creating life from non-life is ignored. Richard Dawkins, one of the most prominent atheists today, reasons that:

"An apparently miraculous theory is exactly the kind of theory we should be looking for in this particular matter of the origin of life."

The advancing scientific field of epigenetics is now regarded as providing the most vivid reason why the popular understanding of evolution might need revising, but it's not the only one. Epigenetics helps to explain observations where a simplistic approach to evolution and genetics cannot. For example, why do identical twins end up with different diseases in old age? How can a caterpillar change into a butterfly?



**“Science is not decided by vote, but by evidence”**



**“Why not consider the possibility of God’s intervention in the creation of the world? Science and the search for answers would continue”**

Why does new research show that a person’s diet affects the lifespan of their grandchildren? Additionally, scientists have recently discovered that huge proportions of the human genetic code consist of virus-like materials, raising the notion that they got there through infection – meaning that natural selection acts not just on an accumulation of small random mutations, but on larger sudden additions in complexity introduced from elsewhere. There is also growing evidence in bacterial science of genes being transferred not just vertically, from ancestors to parents to offspring, but also horizontally, between organisms.

#### Scientific community

Charles Darwin was clear when he said: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.” The scientific community has already observed exceptions to his theory, but it remains accepted as fact. It goes unnoticed by many supporters of Darwin’s theory that he was adamant that there was no reason to assume that natural selection was the only imaginable mechanism of evolution.

The honest answer is that uncertainty remains.

**“A step of belief in the unknown and flawed is required to fully accept how human life was created”**

So a step of belief in the unknown and flawed is required to fully accept how human life was created. But why is it deemed acceptable by many to uncritically believe in a process which is increasingly shown to have flaws? We don’t do this with other scientific theories, so why should we do it with this one? It is contrary to

an honest search for truth. Right now the only intellectually honest answer is that there’s no way to know for certain how life was created. So I have a choice to make. Switch off my enquiring mind and believe that chemicals originated from nothing and life emerged from these chemicals due to an unknown natural process. The logic follows that we are creatures like any other, and once we die, we die, and that’s it. Belief in Jesus remains compatible with science.

Why not consider the possibility of God’s intervention in the creation of the world? Science and the search for answers would continue. What scientists would lose is not their research programmes, but the illusion of total mastery of nature. They would be brought to the possibility that beyond the natural world there is a further reality which transcends science. It is core Christian teaching that God created the world from nothing, that he has intervened in it in the past by sending prophets, sending Jesus the Redeemer, and raising him from the dead. Many of my friends say that this is nonsense and an escape from reality. Some tolerate my faith but make it clear that I will have to accommodate to the so-called enlightened public opinion. But the practicality of the Christian faith remains to this day. As science learns more about how different organisms form, perhaps the greatest irony we may be discovering is that we remain closer to the beginning of that journey than we’ve come to think.

#### Huge mystery

To accept we are human is to accept uncertainty. The origin of life still remains a huge mystery, but the rather rapid elimination of honest, deep discussions around the topic has contributed greatly to confusion and atheism. It is hugely unscientific to ignore the questions which remain. For the scientist, the choice of belief in Christ remains compelling.

*Dr Brian Wilson holds his PhD in chemistry.*

# Ash Wednesday under lockdown



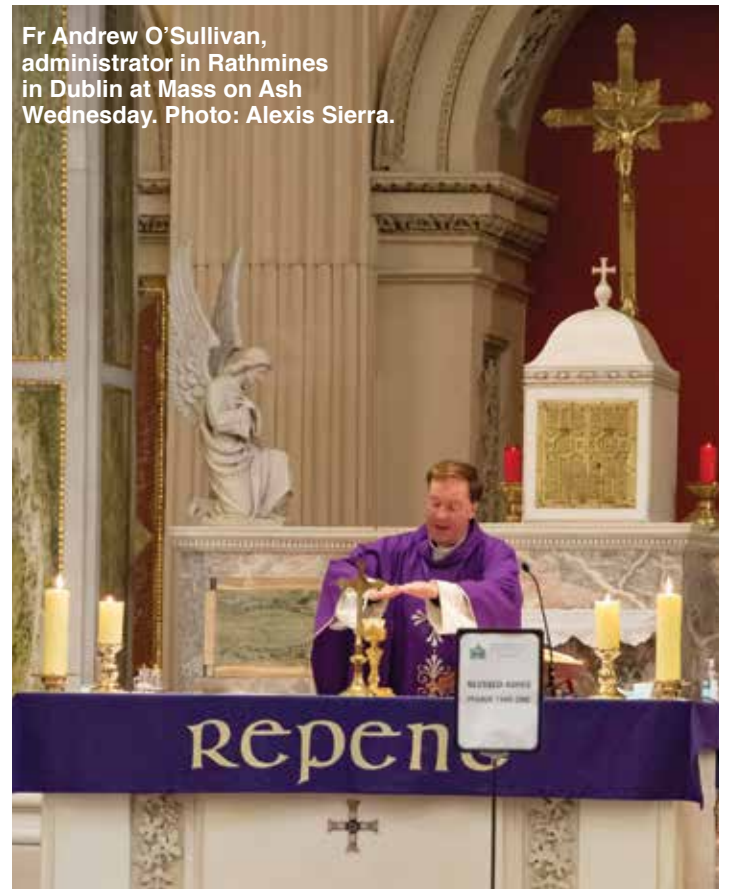
Parishioners receive their ashes at a drive thru event at the Mater Dei Church in Crumlin Co. Antrim. Photos Mal McCann.







Fr Liam Belton PP of Ballinteer, Dublin, with ashes for his congregation.



Fr Andrew O'Sullivan, administrator in Rathmines in Dublin at Mass on Ash Wednesday. Photo: Alexis Sierra.



A parishioner in Rathmines after collecting her blessed ashes.



Romaine Roche with her children Odhran (8), Sadhbh (6) and Ailbhe (nine months) collect their ashes in Ballinteer, Dublin. Photo Chai Brady



John collects his ashes in Rathmines, Dublin.



Fr O'Sullivan and Jude Iwuh outside the Church Of Mary Immaculate Refuge of Sinners in Rathmines, Dublin.





Ballinteer parishioners Veronica, Mary Anne, Angelina and John Paul receive their ashes from Colman Nolan in Dublin.



Jude Iwuh in Rathmines



Mary Hegarty collects her blessed ashes in Rathmines in Dublin



Colman Nolan gives ashes to Betty McCulladh in Dublin's Ballinteer parish.



Michael Conlon, sacristan at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, Ennis, Co. Clare, preparing ashes for distribution on Ash Wednesday.



Fr William Coleman, Rochfortbridge, Co. Westmeath, blesses ashes for distribution on Ash Wednesday.





Bishop Fintan Monahan of the Diocese of Killaloe blessed ashes in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Ennis, Co. Clare, on Ash Wednesday.



Pictured after the annual Ash Wednesday Mass with blessing of ashes in the Interfaith Centre, Glasnevin Campus, Dublin City University (DCU), from left-right Monica Keogh, Daire Keogh (President of DCU), Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell, Fr Séamus McEntee (chaplain) and Eric Hughes (Church of Ireland chaplain)



Therese McNamara praying on Ash Wednesday in the Cathedral of Ss Peter and Paul in Ennis, Co. Clare. Photo John Kelly.



The Dunlea family from Fermoy parish in Co. Cork pictured with their ashes on Ash Wednesday.



Fr Damian Polly OP receives ashes from the Dominican prior, Fr Maurice Colgan in St Mary's church in Cork.



Sean Lehane, choir director, takes his ashes from the back of the St Mary's Church in Cork.



Tommy Mahoney, Mary Doyle, Michael Galvin, Mary Galvin and Larry Kidd - all picking up their ashes at Barntown church in Co. Wexford on Ash Wednesday.



# Joyful parishioners in Clonakilty parish receive their ashes



Msgr Aidan O'Driscoll and volunteers ensured that parishioners had their ashes in Clonakilty, west Cork. Photos: Denis Boyle.







# Out&About

## What a dose!



**KERRY:** James and Elizabeth Atkinson, 90 years of age and 67 years married, getting their first vaccine dose against Covid-19, administered by Dr Eleanor Johnson and Dr Ken Keohane at Deenagh Torc Medical Practice Killarney last Wednesday morning. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan



**DUBLIN:** The Carmelite Sisters in St Joseph's, Kilmacud, deliver messages of love and care on St Valentine's day.



**CORK:** Dominican novices Brs Desmond, Philip and Michael, of St Mary's Priory, enjoy their pancakes before Lent begins, February 16.

### IN SHORT

#### Archbishop encourages families to pray together, fast and be generous for Lent

Archbishop Eamon Martin has encouraged families to commit "to prayer, charity and fasting or self-denial" for the Lenten season, as public worship continues to be suspended.

Speaking before Ash Wednesday, the archbishop of Armagh launched the #LivingLent initiative, which invites the Faithful to use social media to grow closer to God during this sacred season.

"As we prepare for Easter over the next 40 days, our spiritual conversion can be nourished by daily actions, thoughts, prayers and words," Archbishop Martin said. "Believers are encouraged to make a commitment to prayer, charity and fasting or self-denial."

Dr Martin invited everyone "to read the Holy Father's short Lenten message and to avail of our #LivingLent initiative on Twitter and Instagram, and online resources on catholicbishops.ie which offer suggestions for fasting, prayer and charity – the three pillars of the Lenten season – and support to observe Lent at home."

#### Construction needs to open up as people dying on streets, says Aontú

Aontú Leader & Meath West TD Peadar Tóibín has called on the Government to clarify when the construction of homes will be allowed to return, as people continue to die from homelessness.

"There has been an unprecedented spike in the number of homeless people who have died in homelessness this year," the Meath TD said in a statement. "Figures

I have received from the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive showed that in Dublin alone nearly 70 people lost their lives. The housing crisis has not gone away."

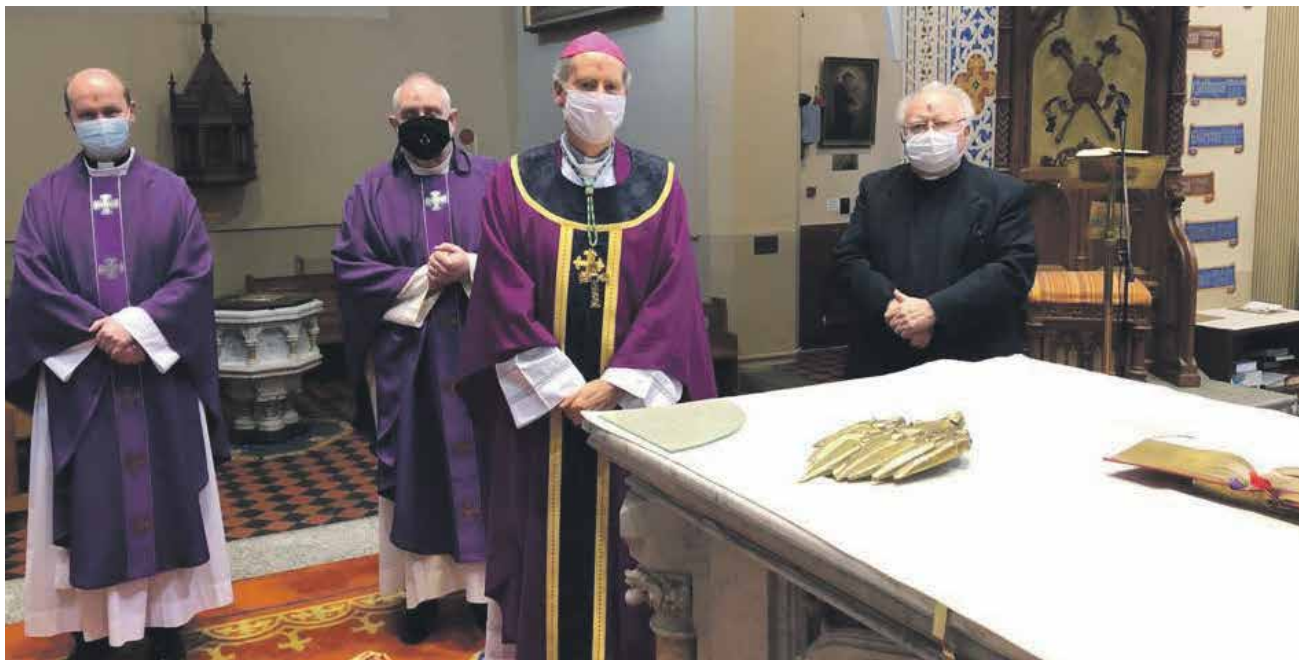
He continued: "The cessation of construction has decimated supply of homes to an already under-supplied housing market. It's estimated that each week the sector is shut results in 800 fewer houses being built in 2021. Failure to reopen construction safely will lead to an increase in rents, an increase in homelessness both official and unofficial and an increase in already crippling house prices."



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**WEXFORD:** A presentation was made to Bishop Denis Brennan February 17, in St Aidan's Cathedral to belatedly mark the occasion of his golden jubilee as a priest of the diocese of Ferns. Pictured are (l-r) Fr Jim Cogley, CC St Aidan's Cathedral, Fr Odhran Furlong (ADM), Bishop Brennan and Monsignor Joe McGrath VG.



**BELFAST:** Fr Martin Magill of St John's Parish shows off the first fruits of his 'Make it for Lent' video series, February 16.



◀ **WATERFORD:** John McEaney, Tramore, is pictured with Bishop Phonsie Cullinan of Waterford and Lismore after being received into the diaconate on Sunday, February 14.

▼ **KERRY:** In the Franciscan Friary Killarney, Keon, one of the novices, makes pancakes, as Novice Master Antony offers guidance.



**ANTRIM:** Undeterred by the latest lockdown, Henry O'Loan and Clare Gilmore celebrated their wedding, crediting the sisters at Drumalis Retreat Centre for their relationship.



### Events

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



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Bishops: Blanket DNR for Britons with learning disabilities 'immoral'

● Medical orders against attempting to resuscitate patients with learning disabilities in the UK are "wholly unacceptable and immoral", said the bishops of England and Wales.

Bishop Richard Moth of Arundel and Brighton issued a February 16 statement denouncing the practice of imposing Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) orders on such patients during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government said it does not support the practice and has notified all health care providers to desist, threatening further action.

"In a time when we are being given so much hope by the efficient rollout of the vaccination program, it is shocking to hear that people with learning disabilities are being made the victims of such discrimination," said Bishop Moth.

### Bishops oppose radioactive discharge from Fukushima plant

● Catholic bishops in South Korea and Japan have issued a joint statement to strongly oppose the Japanese government's decision to discharge radioactive water from the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant into the sea.

"We oppose the discharge of tritium-containing water, a radioactive material that has been purified and treated, into the ocean," said a joint statement from

the Justice and Peace Commissions of the bishops' conferences of Korea and Japan, the Korean bishops' ecological and environmental committee and the Japanese bishops' subcommittee on nuclear for peace.

"Once released into the sea, radioactive material cannot be restored to its original state. It will have impacts on humans and nature. It will cause greater anxiety and damage to people around the world."

### Vatican not mentioned in China's new rules on bishop appointments

● According to new rules which will reportedly take effect on May 1, China's state-run Catholic Church and bishops' conference will select, approve, and ordain episcopal candidates – with no mention of the Vatican's involvement in the process.

Under the new rules, the state-run Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) will be responsible for selecting episcopal candidates. The candidates will then be "approved and consecrated by the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference".

The rules do not mention any role of the Vatican in approving bishops, despite the 2018 Vatican-China agreement reportedly involving both Chinese authorities and the Holy See in the process of appointing bishops.

China's new "Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy" will come into effect on May 1 and were translated by the magazine *Bitter Winter*, which reports on religious freedom conditions in China.

### Arctic weather prompts emergency response from US Church leaders

● Sub-zero temperatures, teeth-chattering wind chills and deep snow turned the southern plains into an arctic landscape, forcing Catholic charities agencies to adopt emergency measures to get people to safety.

Rolling power blackouts in Texas and Oklahoma left some families without heat for hours at a time, necessitating the opening of at least one church in the Diocese of Dallas to endangered people.

The lack of electricity and the cold weather led parishes throughout the region to cancel Ash Wednesday Masses and the distribution of ashes for the first time in memory.

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio granted dispensation from fasting and abstinence for the day that marks the beginning of the holy season of Lent.

## Vatican faces budget deficit up to €50 million

In the wake of the economic fallout due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy said it expects a multimillion-dollar deficit in its budget for 2021.

In a statement released February 19, the Vatican said Pope Francis signed off on the Holy See's 2021 budget, which was proposed by the secretariat and approved by the Council for the Economy, the Vatican board charged with overseeing the financial operations of all offices and entities.

"With total revenues of €260.4 million and expenses of €310.1 million, the Holy See expects a deficit of €49.7 million in 2021, heavily impacted by the economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic," the secretariat said.

The Council for the Economy met February 16 to discuss the Vatican's 2021 budget, which was presented by Maximino Caballero Ledo and Emilio Ferrara, respectively secretary general and director of the administrative section of the Secretariat for the Economy.

The Vatican said the Council for the Economy is expected to reconvene in April.

In an effort to provide "more visibility and transparency to the economic transactions of the Holy See", the Secretariat for the Economy also said the 2021 budget will consolidate incomes and grants from the Peter's Pence collection and



Pope Francis walks past artwork showing the dome of St Peter's Basilica and two doves during his general audience at the Vatican in this August 8, 2018, file photo. Photo: CNS

"all dedicated funds", which are expected to bring in a net balance of €30.3 million.

"Excluding Peter's Pence and the dedicated funds, the deficit of the Holy See would be €80 million in 2021," the dicastery said.

The statement did not mention the budget of Vatican City State, which usually operates at a profit and helps offset the deficit in the Holy See budget. However, like many countries, restrictions in place due to the pandemic forced the Vatican to close the city-state's main income generators – the Vatican

Museums, the necropolis tours and the museum at the pontifical villas in Castel Gandolfo during 2020 – resulting in substantial financial losses.

The Secretariat for the Economy explained that the 2021 budget includes a 21% reduction in income because of a "reduction in commercial, services and real estate activities, as well as in donations and contributions".

At the same time, it said, operating expenses – except for personnel costs – also decreased by 14%, which reflects serious cost-saving

efforts even while "employment security continues to be a priority for the Holy Father in these difficult times".

The Vatican also said 68% of the year's budget expenses are designated to sustaining "apostolic activities", while 17% will be used to manage property and assets and 15% for administration and service activities.

"If the level of donations remains as expected, the deficit will be settled with part of the reserves of the Holy See," it said.

## Thousands flee homes as violence flares in Papua, Indonesia

More than 5,000 people including 3,000 Catholics have fled their homes in Indonesia's Papua region following clashes between security forces and a separatist group, according to a Church official.

The violence flared in Bilogai, Intan Jaya district, between security forces and members of the Papua Independence Organisation (OPM) on February 10 and was still ongoing, Fr Marthen Kuayo, apostolic administrator of Timika Diocese, said on February 15.

It began after a villager suspected

of being an informer was shot and wounded by the rebels, he said. Two days later, a soldier was also shot and wounded.

So far, they are the only two reported casualties in the violence.

Of those who fled their homes, at least 600 have sought refuge in the compound of St Michael's Church in Bilogai, the priest said.

"That number will likely increase in the next few days because the violence is continuing," Father Kuayo told *UCA News*.

He said most of the others forced to leave their homes in three villages had fled to nearby districts: "We are trying to help those at the church with food and shelter as best we can."

However, he said he was not sure how long the aid could last: "We hope both sides can show restraint so that peace can prevail and no harm comes to local people."

One 32-year-old villager said he and his friends fled to the church on February 11. "We are afraid to return home," he told *UCA News*.

## Holy Land Franciscans offer virtual Way of the Cross for Lent

The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land launched a virtual Way of the Cross project for pilgrims during Lent because the Holy Land is not accessible for a second year in a row due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

When the Franciscans realised that pilgrimages would not be possible again this year, the Custody wanted to provide a way for the Faithful to connect to the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, said Father Alberto Joan Pari,

director of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land communication office.

In the 13 short videos of the 'On the Way of the Cross' project, a friar from a different Franciscan Holy Land shrine will narrate a message

about each Station of the Cross in his own language, providing for a moment of meditation.

Videos will be posted each Tuesday and Friday until March 30, the Tuesday of Holy Week.





Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
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## Dust to dust



A man receives ashes on his head during an Ash Wednesday drive-thru service outside a church in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, February 17, 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo:CNS

## Peru's bishops indignant over 'vaccine-gate' scandal involving nuncio

Peru's Catholic bishops want a thorough investigation of a Covid-19 vaccine trafficking scandal that includes the country's papal nuncio.

In a statement released late February 17, the bishops' conference said the illicit use of vaccines "exposes the new face of the monster of corruption" in this Andean country of 33 million people.

The scandal, known in Peru as "Vaccine-gate", has rocked the country, not only forcing political resignations, but undermining the credibility of some of the sectors that still commanded respect, including doctors, universities and the Church.

"We demand that these actions are investigated and

punished so that impunity does not gain more space among Peruvians," the bishops said.

The snowballing scandal began in early February when former President Martín Vizcarra admitted that he, his wife and his brother had been inoculated in October with doses from China's Sinopharm.

The shots they received were part of a batch of 3,200 doses sent by Sinopharm to supplement a clinical trial it was conducting in Peru with nearly 12,000 volunteers. The Peruvian government, now headed by interim President Francisco Sagasti, signed a deal in January for 38 million doses

of Sinopharm's vaccine. One million doses had arrived by mid-February.

The tenor changed February 14, when the health and foreign affairs ministers admitted they, too, had been vaccinated. An initial investigation of the universities that conducted the trials for Sinopharm found that 474 people had been inoculated, including Archbishop Nicola Girasoli, the Vatican ambassador to Peru since 2017.

In a brief statement February 16, Archbishop Girasoli said he had been invited to receive the vaccine because he was a "consultant on ethical issues" for the Cayetano Heredia University.

In a radio interview prior to the release of the bishops' statement, Lima Archbishop Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio said the nuncio's explanation was insufficient.

"That he is on the list hurts us deeply. His participation is a sign that we, too, need to overcome indifference to the problems" faced by Peruvians, said Archbishop Castillo.

The bishops' statement also highlighted the impact on front-line workers, saying the indignation from the illicit use of the vaccines "is worsened because it pushes aside those who have been sacrificing themselves".

## Myanmar nuns show solidarity with anti-coup protesters

Hundreds of Catholic nuns, priests and laypeople have joined protests in Buddhist-majority Myanmar following the February 1 coup.

*Ucanews.com* reported that hundreds of Catholics, including dozens of nuns, marched on the streets of Yangon February 14 and recited prayers and the rosary.

Youths held placards reading "Free Aung San Suu Kyi" and "We support CDM", the latter referring to the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Nuns from various congregations

have shown solidarity with the people of Myanmar by marching on the streets, saying prayers at convents and offering snacks to protesters in Yangon and elsewhere, *ucanews.com* reported.

In the Christian stronghold of Kachin state, nuns stood at the entrance of a church compound while holding placards that read "No to dictatorship" and "Listen to the voices of people," while protesters swarmed the streets of Myitkyina, the state's capital city, February 14.

Nationwide anti-coup protests have

intensified for nine consecutive days in Yangon, Mandalay, villages and the ethnic regions of Kachin and Chin states.

The Vatican said it has been following with "great attention and deep concern" the developments in Myanmar, which Pope Francis visited in November 2017.

"The Holy See wishes to assure once again its spiritual closeness, prayer and solidarity with the people of Myanmar," Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, the Holy See's permanent observer to the UN Human Rights Council, said February 12.

## Holy See urges equal access to labour market

● Archbishop Janusz Urbańczyk gave voice to the Holy See's concern that women's work in the family should be recognised as advancing economic development.

While focusing on the promotion of the equality of women and men in economic participation, states "should not fail to pay due attention to the family, the fundamental cell of society and building block of tomorrow's economic life," the Holy See has told the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In this context, the Vatican representative Archbishop Urbańczyk said it is important to remember the "huge role" of women's unpaid work, which contributes "not only to every country's economic development, but it also sustains the fundamental pillars that govern a society and a nation".

"This," he noted, "is certainly the case for the noble and unpaid work of educating children and caring for the elderly, considering also how much the State would otherwise have to spend for these social services."

In his statement, Archbishop Urbańczyk reiterated once again the Holy See's support for women's economic empowerment, saying, "every person, woman or man, has the right to economic initiative".

## Getting vaccine included in Vatican employee safety regulations

● As a last resort, the Vatican may sanction employees who refuse to get a Covid-19 vaccine for non-medical reasons, according to a new Vatican decree.

A variety of sanctions for anyone violating measures intended to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus were included in a decree signed February 8.

Because of the current state of emergency, getting the Covid-19 vaccine is part of a series of mandatory health and safety requirements for all employees, unless they have "proven health reasons" to not be inoculated.

For employees who lack a proven medical reason,

a refusal to be inoculated during the current health emergency exposes them to a range of sanctions, including a termination of employment.

However, in a follow-up note issued later February 18 by the city state governing office, the 2011 norms are not meant to be seen as a set of sanctions or "punitive".

It is always possible, the note said, to adopt measures that safeguard the community by minimising the danger posed by someone who refuses to get a vaccine for non-medical reasons and finding "alternative solutions" for the worker in question to carry out their job.

## Pope Francis modifies Vatican criminal code, citing 'changing sensibilities'

● Pope Francis February 16 made several modifications to the Vatican's criminal code, citing "changing sensibilities" requiring updates to an "outdated" law.

The law is affected, the Pope wrote in the introduction to his February 16 *motu proprio*, by "inspiring criteria and functional solutions [which are] now outdated".

Thus, Francis said, he continued the process of updating the law as dictated "by the changing sensibilities of the times".

Several of the changes introduced by Pope Francis involve the treatment of the defendant in a criminal trial, including the possibility of a reduced sentence for good behaviour and of not being handcuffed in court.

Another change is that the court's judgment in a trial can be made with the defendant "in absentia" and will be treated in the ordinary way.

These changes may affect the Vatican's impending trial of the 39-year-old Italian woman Cecilia Marogna, who has been accused of embezzlement, which she denies.

In January, the Vatican announced that it had dropped a request for Marogna's extradition from Italy to the Vatican, and said that a trial against her would begin soon.





# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

**D**uring the St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI years, the Vatican had a council of cardinals from around the world who allegedly oversaw its financial affairs. Members of that body routinely complained that the information they received was incomplete, that it lacked credibility and was fundamentally untrustworthy.

Two of the prelates voicing those objections most consistently were Cardinals Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and George Pell of Sydney, Australia. Thus when the new “Papa Bergoglio” made Cardinal Pell his tip of the spear for Vatican financial reform in February 2014, it boiled down to one veteran reformer turning to another, despite their clear ideological differences on other fronts.

Unfortunately, the odd couple partnership between Francis and Cardinal Pell fell apart almost before it could begin. The rift had nothing to do with the sexual abuse charges against the cardinal Pell in his native Australia, which came later – it was about the transition from what the two men had been against, to what they were actually for.

## Reform

For Cardinal Pell, reform meant adopting virtually wholesale the “best practices” of international finance, premised on minimising expense (in part by combatting losses due to corruption, but also by achieving economies of scale and trimming payroll) and maximising profit. The centrepiece of his vision was to be a consolidated Vatican investment fund, which would be so well-managed and adept at playing international stock and currency markets that other Catholic entities would want to join, creating even greater financial leverage.

**“Bruni expressed scepticism that Mr Draghi actually has a vision of economic life rooted in Catholic social teaching”**

In the end, that was never really Francis’s scene.

Famously the champion of the underdog and an inveterate critic of a globalised “economy that kills”, Francis saw reform more in terms of personal integrity, simplicity of lifestyle, and an option for the poor. He never wanted to be running an ecclesiastical version of a multi-national corporation, and he was uncomfortable with some of the new players who seemed to be running the show.

## Will Pope have a ‘Pell Problem’ with Super Mario over visions of reform?



Newly installed Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi leaves the lower house of parliament in Rome February 17, 2021. Photo: CNS.

**“Things fell apart because ‘reform’ isn’t just about ending one way of doing things; it requires a shared vision of what to do instead”**

In other words, things fell apart because “reform” isn’t just about ending one way of doing things; it requires a shared vision of what to do instead.

## History

That bit of history comes to mind this week as Mario Draghi, or “Super Mario” as the Italians call him, takes over as Italy’s Prime Minister after winning massive majorities in both houses of the Italian parliament.

A Pope is traditionally the Primate of Italy, and inevitably, what happens in the Vatican’s own backyard consumes a disproportionate share of any Pope’s time and energy. A thoughtful recent piece by *AGI*, a news service owned by the Italian gas company Eni, observed that Popes are forever trying to reconcile “their own courtyard [in Italy] and its quarrels with the universal scope of their apostolic mission, and usually, or, at least, not infrequently, the former prevails over the latter”.

At first blush, it would seem that Francis and Mr Draghi are primed for an era of good feelings.

Mr Draghi is a product of Jesuit education in Rome, with strong ties to various members of the Pope’s

order, he’s a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, and personally he’s a devout Catholic. Moreover, like the Pope, Mr Draghi is a strong believer in European solidarity – his claim to fame is that, as governor of the European Central Bank, he saved the EU’s common currency during the Eurozone crisis. He’s vividly opposed to the nationalist and populist currents in Europe today that loom like a *bête noire* in Francis’s political rhetoric.

However, like Cardinal Pell, Mr Draghi’s version of “reform” may well differ from that of Francis, in this case not in terms of Vatican finances but public policy.

## Reform

A banker and economist, Mr Draghi’s vision of reform appears to imply trimming public debt, encouraging economic growth, easing business regulations and reducing Italy’s infamous “spread”, meaning how much more the country has to pay to borrow money than Germany. It’s considered an index of how much riskier lenders perceive Rome to be as compared to Berlin.

All that may reassure stock markets and corporate board rooms,

but how much similarity it bears to Francis’s bottom-up vision of economic life remains to be seen.

Ten days ago, Italian economist Luigino Bruni, who convened the recent “Economy of Francis” seminar and who’s a thinker close to the Pope, warned that Mr Draghi may not be the leader of the Pope’s dreams in an interview with the widely read *Famiglia Cristiana* newsmagazine.

**“For Cardinal Pell, reform meant adopting virtually wholesale the ‘best practices’ of international finance”**

“The Church has never expressed much sympathy for high finance,” Mr Bruni said. “Pope Francis, in the footsteps of his predecessors, has said it all, and more, about the problems when finance becomes the primary dimension of the economy.”

Mr Bruni expressed scepticism that Mr Draghi actually has a vision of economic life rooted in Catholic social teaching.

“That an economist whose doctoral thesis was on monetary

theory, who worked for Goldman Sachs, who led the Bank of Italy and the European Central Bank, actually has a vision based on subsidiarity, is entirely to be seen,” he said.

“In Draghi’s résumé, there aren’t any measures regarding the poor or social justice,” Mr Bruni said.

Of course, the fact that two leaders may have differing accents when it comes to policy doesn’t mean they can’t do business together.

## Indication

We’ll get an early indication of how Italy’s two centres of power, the Vatican and the Chigi Palace (the Prime Minister’s residence), want to manage their relationship on March 2, when Mr Draghi meets Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican’s Secretary of State, at an event marking the anniversary of the Lateran Pacts.

For Mr Bruni, the first real acid test will come later in March, when a freeze on firings due to the coronavirus pandemic is due to expire. If Mr Draghi doesn’t renew that measure, at least for the most heavily affected industries – restaurants, catering, hotels, tour operators, and so on – Mr Bruni predicts that a seemingly sunny relationship with Francis could turn sour.

Time will tell whether Francis and Mr Draghi truly are a good match. Until then, Mr Bruni’s counsel may be apt: “I’d wait to beatify Draghi,” he said, “until we see him at work.”

**John L. Allen Jr** is Editor of *CruXNow.com*



# For Iraqi Christian youth, papal visit brings Church closer to home



Women and a girl attend Mass in the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh, Iraq. Pope Francis plans to visit Iraq March 5-8. Photo: CNS



Elise Ann Allen

A priest from Qaraqosh helping to prepare the city's youth for Pope Francis's visit next month has said the fact that a Pope is traveling to the country for the first time has shown young people that the Church, which can often seem far away, is close to them.

"Here in Qaraqosh, we are so happy that the Pope will come to visit us," said Iraqi Father Roni Momika in comments to *Crux*.

## A historic visit

Calling Pope Francis's upcoming trip to Iraq "a historic visit", Fr Momika noted that most Christians in the country have suffered some form of violence or persecution for their faith, with hundreds of thousands forced to leave everything behind and live as refugees during the 2014-2017 ISIS insurgency of the Nineveh Plain.

"This visit will give us the strength to stay here in Qaraqosh and to continue our life," he said, voicing hope that the Pope's visit will have a political impact. Once Pope Francis comes, Fr Momika said, "the government will take care of us".

Christians in Iraq have long been discriminated against and have often complained of being treated like second-class citizens, making the Pope's visit all the more important to the country's tiny Christian minority.

**“Now when they heard that Pope Francis would come to visit Iraq, they felt that the head of the Catholic Church is near”**

Young people in particular are "very excited" that Pope Francis will come, Fr Momika said. Speaking of those in his home city of Qaraqosh – once dubbed the "Christian capital" of Iraq and where the headquarters of the Syriac Catholic Church is located – Fr Momika said youth in the village used to think "that no Pope would ever come to Iraq".

"Now when they heard that Pope Francis would come to visit Iraq, they felt that the head of the Catholic Church is near," he said, adding, "Iraqi Christians are in pain, they have lost everything, but the Church is with them."

A Syriac Catholic priest from Qaraqosh, Fr Momika was ordained a deacon and then a priest in a refugee camp in Erbil in 2016, after ISIS had taken over swaths of Iraq's northern Nineveh Plain. Once villages on

the Plain were liberated, Fr Momika moved back to his hometown of Qaraqosh and led women's groups before moving to Lebanon, where he is currently completing his studies.

Fr Momika was given permission to return to Qaraqosh to assist in preparations for the Pope's March 5-8 visit to Iraq, which includes a stop in Qaraqosh.

The trip will also include stops in Baghdad, Erbil, Qaraqosh, Mosul, the Plain of Ur, and Najaf, where Francis is scheduled to meet privately with one of the top authorities in Shi'a Islam, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani.

He will visit Qaraqosh on March 7, a packed day for the Pope which also includes stops in Mosul and Erbil.

## Community

In Qaraqosh, Francis will host a meeting with the local community inside the Church of the Immaculate Conception, which was burned and vandalised by ISIS, with some graffiti still visible on the charred stone walls. After praying the Angelus, the Pope will then leave and head back to Erbil for Mass.

Ahead of the Pope's visit to Qaraqosh, Fr Momika has been tasked specifically with preparing young people in the area, as most have limited knowledge of the Pope and the Vatican – things that often seem distant and out of touch with their daily reality.

To get young people ready, Fr Momika helped organise a large event last week attended by some

7-800 youths from Qaraqosh and surrounding villages such as Bartala, Karamles, Bahzani, and Bashiqa.

In addition to discussing scripture and evangelisation, speakers at the event also gave talks on Pope Francis himself, and the special attention he pays to young people and to the poor and marginalised, including migrants and refugees.

"There were a lot of young people who didn't know a lot about the Pope or the Church, but now after this youth day they started to research and they want to know everything about Pope Francis, especially when they heard that Pope Francis is a friend of the poor, a friend of families and a friend of youth," Fr Momika said.

**“Once they arrived at the hall where the event was being held, they opened with a prayer in Syriac and Aramaic”**

After the event, "I think Pope Francis became closer for young people," he said.

Things started off with a major procession through the streets of the city, hoisting a large cross at the front of the crowd as they processed through Qaraqosh. Once they arrived at the hall where the event was being held, they opened with a prayer in Syriac and Aramaic.

Throughout the day talks were given by priests, nuns, monks, and even the Syriac Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, Yohanna Petros Mouche, with the focus being on what Pope Francis has said and written about young people, the poor, and families. Fr Momika himself spoke about young people, and the Pope's invitation to brotherhood and solidarity, as well as his frequent encouragement for youth to go to take the Gospel to the streets.

Youths also practiced a song and dance that they will perform for Pope Francis when he arrives to Qaraqosh, and they painted a large banner of Pope Francis that will be hung up during the visit. They also went around the city hanging up posters and banners of welcome for Pope Francis, with words of welcome written in both Syriac and Italian.

## Faith

Fr Momika voiced his conviction that the faith of Iraqi Christians will be strengthened as a result of the papal visit.

"I think it will be good, because Iraqi people and especially people in the Middle East have a strong faith," he said, adding that for him personally, the Pope's decision to come "will push us to be even stronger in faith and to stay here and to say that we are Christians, and that we are proud we are Christians".

**i** Elise Ann Allen, senior correspondent for *Cruxnow.com*



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Good apples in Church will see it through current crisis

**Dear Editor,** Whenever the media do a story that involves the Church it very often elicits very vindictive comments from readers. Recent examples included 'that vile institution,' 'this evil cult'.

I spent my youth in five different schools taught by nuns, priests and Christian Brothers. Some were strict and dished out corporal punishment which I didn't appreciate at the time. I have to say it didn't do me any harm. My introduction to nuns was when I served Mass in a convent on special occasions. We were treated to cakes, sandwiches, and lemonade afterwards. We got to know the nuns who were

always friendly and full of chit-chat. In boarding school, I got to live with priests and lay teachers who were always helpful in the classroom and on the sports field. Nothing untoward ever went on with any of the pupils, a point made by many past pupils at college reunions. So, they weren't all bad apples.

People who reject the Catholic Church and in some cases all religions are growing in numbers as we experience a more secular society in Ireland. Their decision to reject religion of any sort and by implication God may only have consequences if there is a God and an afterlife. We

cannot know this as it is a matter of faith.

Over the years the Church has played a major role in helping to educate young people in all walks of life. There must have been some good apples about. While the Church is far from perfect in its institutional aspects, it is made up of laypeople and clergy who are in many respects a sinful people in need of redemption. This should not cause them great concern. Christ didn't come for the self-righteous he came for sinners. We are in good company.

*Yours etc.,  
Eddie O'Mahony  
Clonmore, Co. Waterford*

## There's a need for more exorcists

**Dear Editor,** There is much merit in Fr Denvir's (SMA) notion for Irish exorcists to tell their story as a means to inform and not for ghoulish interest [IC 11/02/2021]. It is noticeable that these things are increasing, when one looks at the herstory "movement" identifying St Brigid as "goddess" etc, we confront what Adam Blai, Peritus of demonology in Pittsburgh diocese, states is mission in regression. He argues just when Catholicism came to a country, say the Irish missionary outreach between the 6th and 10th Centuries in Europe, these demons retreated, now they are back once the sacramental influences of the Faith recede. Maybe the question needs to be asked of our bishops: "Have each diocese in Ireland trained exorcists and do you treat these growing problems seriously?" There is a need for more exorcists as I can personally vouch for in my own ministry.

*Yours etc.,  
Fr John McCallion  
Clonoe, Co. Waterford*



## Sisters are seen as token 'bad guys' in investigation

**Dear Editor,** The idea of 'restorative justice' seems to need a blood sacrifice for the redress-element of the concept to flower. In this case it looks as if the privilege of being the token 'bad guy' in this mother and baby investigation falls to the sisters who ran these homes on behalf of the State.

Six years of investigation has revealed no evidence of systemic physical or sexual abuse in these institutions, but the commission's spin on the history of these institutions is almost all negative: 9,000 babies dead over a span of 76 years but little talk of those who left and went on to have productive, useful lives.

The burial practices at the Tuam home were elevated to world prominence in 2014 with a 'Dead babies in Septic Tank' Evidence within the report destroys this narrative. But, the government of the day and most politicians bought into the narrative hook-line-and-sinker and the commission was duly created in 2015. Some €14 million later and a lot of embarrassment all round. But better to grasp the nettle now than 'dig the hole deeper' by blowing many more millions on the ghoulish task of exhumation, DNA testing and reinterment. The hard evidence points to this mysterious structure being a custom-built

burial-chamber or catacomb, extremely efficient from a land-use perspective and ideal for an institution having to cope with five to six infant deaths per month. The total absence of local authority records of its design remains a mystery. Conflating respect for the dead with the disposal of the remains is woolly thinking - how then cremation? Those dead babies, who never got a shot at life are in God's hands. A tasteful on-site memorial would be nice after all those years.

*Yours etc.,  
Michael Gill  
Dalkey, Co. Dublin*

## New Dublin archbishop offers hope for future

**Dear Editor,** I would like to wish the new Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Farrell well, as he takes on the onerous role as leader of the Catholic Church in Dublin, with all the challenges of falling numbers of priests, and finances. But during a very simple installation service, he offered hope for the future, as he spoke of his faith in God, the need to listen to all voices within the Christian community and a call to build up our parish communities in the

service of all. While his predecessor Archbishop Diarmuid Martin's legacy was one of restoring the Church as a safe place for children, perhaps Archbishop Farrell's legacy might be a smaller but a more authentic Church that lives the Gospel message of love of God and all our neighbours.

*Yours etc.,  
Frank Browne  
Templeogue, Dublin*

## Priests are courageous people

**Dear Editor,** I totally agree with Senator Ronan Mullen [IC 11/02/2021]. Priests are putting themselves in virus danger by being with their people at their most devastating times of death and subsequent funerals. Many of these priests are over 70 years and still, they administer their religious duties faithfully. They are very courageous people, possibly 21st-century martyrs.

*Yours etc.,  
Mary O'Mahony  
Crosshaven, Co. Cork*

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

### Let us hope and pray that we can gather to celebrate Easter

When are the bishops going to collectively stand up to the government and tell them worship of God will not be abolished by the state?? No problem going to a supermarket but Mass is dangerous somehow. – **Noel Kelly**

It is true that we are not an online community usually, but one trend in our own parish we have noticed is that the numbers attending online are double those who attend in normal time in person. – **Julia Mary Keane**

Worship hasn't been abolished. Churches are open for private prayer. Masses and novena are online, TV and radio as they have always been. Christenings, weddings and funerals are still on going as is anointing of the sick. Crowds are not allowed in churches for mass as its deemed too risky as Covid is so contagious. – **Ann Lagan**

### Prioritise vaccination of priests as essential workers, says senator

I would have thought that went without saying. 100% they are frontline workers. – **Caroline Ennis**

Yes, all priests are frontline workers, they can be called at any time to the sick and dying. I know what comfort they give to all those who are leaving this world, some very afraid. Please respect the dignity of their ministry. – **Deirdre Quinn**

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

## Begging bishop to allow outdoor Masses

**Dear Editor,** Having read the regrettable news that Level 5 restrictions will extend to Easter, I have already written to my own bishop to beg that a way be found to offer outdoor Masses at least so that a second Holy Easter Sunday would not pass without Mass being offered in public in Ireland.

I ask all bishops, priests, and laity to consider the following points. Firstly, there is little evidence anywhere in the world that a socially distanced Mass, without singing, is dangerous. The onus should be on the Government and health agencies to prove that any health concern is worth sacrificing our freedom to practice our religion; they have not done so, rather they have trampled on our rights. Secondly, any priest or congregant is free to absent him- or herself if age or medical condition is a concern. Thirdly and most importantly, our Christian people need the Eucharist to fortify us to live our lives in these terribly dark and threatening times. The sacrifices of concentration camp priests, gulag priests, plague priests, and our own Irish penal-era priests of the past were offered in the belief that providing the sacraments was essential under the worst of conditions. As heirs to this history, I believe that Catholics must not be cowed any further into non-practice.

*Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Mooney  
Lifford, Co. Donegal*

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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



# 📷 Around the world



▲ **VATICAN:** The crowd watches as Pope Francis leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St Peter's Square at the Vatican February 21. Photos: CNS

◀ **ITALY:** Pope Francis talks with Edith Bruck, a Holocaust survivor and author, during a visit to her home in central Rome February 20.

**CONGO:** A first responder attempts to put out a fire in Kinshasa, February 17.



**USA:** Alvin Williams of Houston checks his smartphone while taking shelter at Gallery Furniture store, which opened its door as a warming station February 17.



**MEXICO:** Perla Vargas, an asylum-seeker from Nicaragua wearing a protective mask, stands inside a makeshift shelter at a migrant encampment in Matamoros, February 18.



**BOSNIA:** Migrants warm up in an abandoned factory near Velika Kladuša.



# The imperialism of the human soul



In his autobiography, Nikos Kazantzakis shares how in his youth he was driven by a restlessness that had him searching for something he could never quite define. However, he made peace with his lack of peace because he accepted that, given the nature of the soul, he was supposed to feel that restlessness and that a healthy soul is a driven soul. Commenting on this, he writes: “No force anywhere on earth is as imperialistic as the human soul. It occupies and is occupied in turn, but it always considers its empire too narrow. Suffocating, it desires to conquer the world in order to breathe freely.”

**“During World War II, Jesuit theologians resisting the Nazi occupation in France published an underground newspaper”**

We need to be given permission, I believe, to accept as God-given that imperialism inside our soul, even as we need always to be careful never to trivialise its power and meaning. However, that is a formula for tension. How does one make peace with the imperialism of one's soul without denigrating the divine energy that is stoking that imperialism? For me, this has been a struggle.

I grew up in the heart of the Canadian prairies, with five hun-



**Fr Rolheiser**

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dred miles of open space in every direction. Geographically, that space let one's soul stretch out, but otherwise my world seemed too small for my soul to breathe. I grew up inside a tight-knit community in an isolated rural area where the world was small enough so that everyone knew everyone else. That was wonderful because it made for a warm cocoon; but that cocoon (seemingly) separated me from the big world where, it seemed to my young mind, souls could breathe in spaces bigger than where I was breathing. Moreover, growing up with an acute religious and moral sensitivity, I felt guilty about my restlessness, as if it were something abnormal that I needed to hide.

## State

In that state, as an eighteen-year-old, I entered religious life. Novitiates in those days were quite strict and secluded. We were, eighteen of us, novices,

sequestered in an old seminary building across a lake from a town and a highway. We could hear the sounds of traffic and see life on the other side of the lake, but we were not part of it. As well, most everything inside our sequestered life focused on the spiritual so that even our most earthy desires had to be associated with our hunger for God and for the bread of life. Not an easy task for anyone, especially a teenager.

**“I suspect, is not to trivialise the soul, not to make its infinite longings something less than what they are”**

Well, one day we were visited by a priest who gave my soul permission to breathe. He gathered us, the eighteen novices, into a classroom and began his

conference with this question: Are you feeling a little restless? We nodded, rather surprised by the question. He went on: Well, you should be feeling restless! You must be jumping out of your skin! All that life in you and all those fiery hormones stirring in your blood, and you're stuck here watching life happen across the lake! You must be going crazy sometimes! But...that's good, that's what you should be feeling, it shows you're healthy. Stay with it. You can do this. It's good to feel that restlessness.

## Prairie

That day the wide-open prairie spaces I had lived my whole life in and the wide-open spaces in my soul befriended each other a little. And that friendship continued to grow as I did my studies and read authors who had befriended their souls. Among others, these spoke to me: St Augustine (You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.); St Thomas Aquinas (The adequate object of the human intellect and will is all Being); Iris Murdoch (The deepest of all human pains is the pain of the inadequacy of self-expression); Karl Rahner (In the torment of the insufficiency of everything

attainable, we ultimately learn that here, in this life, there is no finished symphony); Sidney Callahan (We are made to ultimately sleep with the whole world, is it any wonder that we long for this along the way?); and James Hillman (Neither religion nor psychology really honours the human soul. Religion is forever trying to save the soul and psychology is always trying to fix the soul. The soul needs neither to be saved nor fixed; it is already eternal – it just needs to be listened to.)

**“I grew up in the heart of the Canadian prairies, with five hundred miles of open space in every direction”**

Perhaps today the real struggle is not so much to accept sacred permission to befriend the wild insatiability of the soul. The greater struggle today, I suspect, is not to trivialise the soul, not to make its infinite longings something less than what they are.

During World War II, Jesuit theologians resisting the Nazi occupation in France published an underground newspaper. The first issue opened with this now-famous line: France, take care not to lose your soul. Fair warning. The soul is imperialistic because it carries divine fire and so it struggles to breathe freely in the world. To feel and to honour that struggle is to be healthy.

**“We need to be given permission, I believe, to accept as God-given that imperialism inside our soul”**



# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, February 25, 2021

## Personal Profile

60 years  
rewarding work in  
the priesthood

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# Sleeping soundly is the key to Lent



**S**leep remains a mystery right at the heart of our daily existence. We know we need it, and we have some sense of what goes wrong when we don't get enough or when it's of a poor quality, but exactly why we sleep remains an open question for the scientists of the world.

Despite the questions, I think it's fair to say that sleeping soundly is one of the keys to a successful Lent. It's been long understood in the spiritual tradition that good decision-making is more difficult when we're tired, and in recent decades scientific research has backed that up. One 2020 study suggests



**A good night's sleep is the firm foundation upon which to build an effective Lent, writes Jason Osborne**

that under the effects of sleep deprivation, people who are habitually more reflective and cautious become more impulsive and prone to risk taking.

With this being the case, it's not hard to imagine those tricky Lenten resolutions appearing a little more daunting, that little bit less possible, if we haven't been sleeping as well as we could have

been. In the name of a successful Lent, it's worth considering the mystery sleep presents us with, the benefits of prioritising it, the risks of neglecting it, and ways to ensure we're getting as good a sleep as possible.

### Why we sleep

As mentioned, why we sleep is still a question with which many

people are grappling. However, one path researchers have taken in an attempt to answer why we do it is to look at it practically. Sleep is an essential function. That is to say, if we don't do it, it can end in death. At the very least, it will have an extremely detrimental effect on our health. Sleep recharges both the body and the mind, and as such helps keep us healthy, staving off disease.

Without enough sleep, neither the body nor the mind function as they're supposed to. A few key effects of a lack of sleep are difficulty concentrating, thinking clearly, and processing memories. Not limited to these,

a lack of sleep has also been associated with a wide range of negative health consequences, such as cardiovascular problems, a weakened immune system, a higher risk of obesity and diabetes, and an increased risk of mental health issues like depression and anxiety.

The fact that sleep seems to affect so many vital functions of, not only the body, but the entire person, implies that it doesn't just have one biological purpose.

### Circadian rhythm

A "body clock" regulates our sleep cycle, and it's widely known

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# Family News



## AND EVENTS

### SCIENTISTS SEQUENCE MILLION-YEAR-OLD MAMMOTH DNA

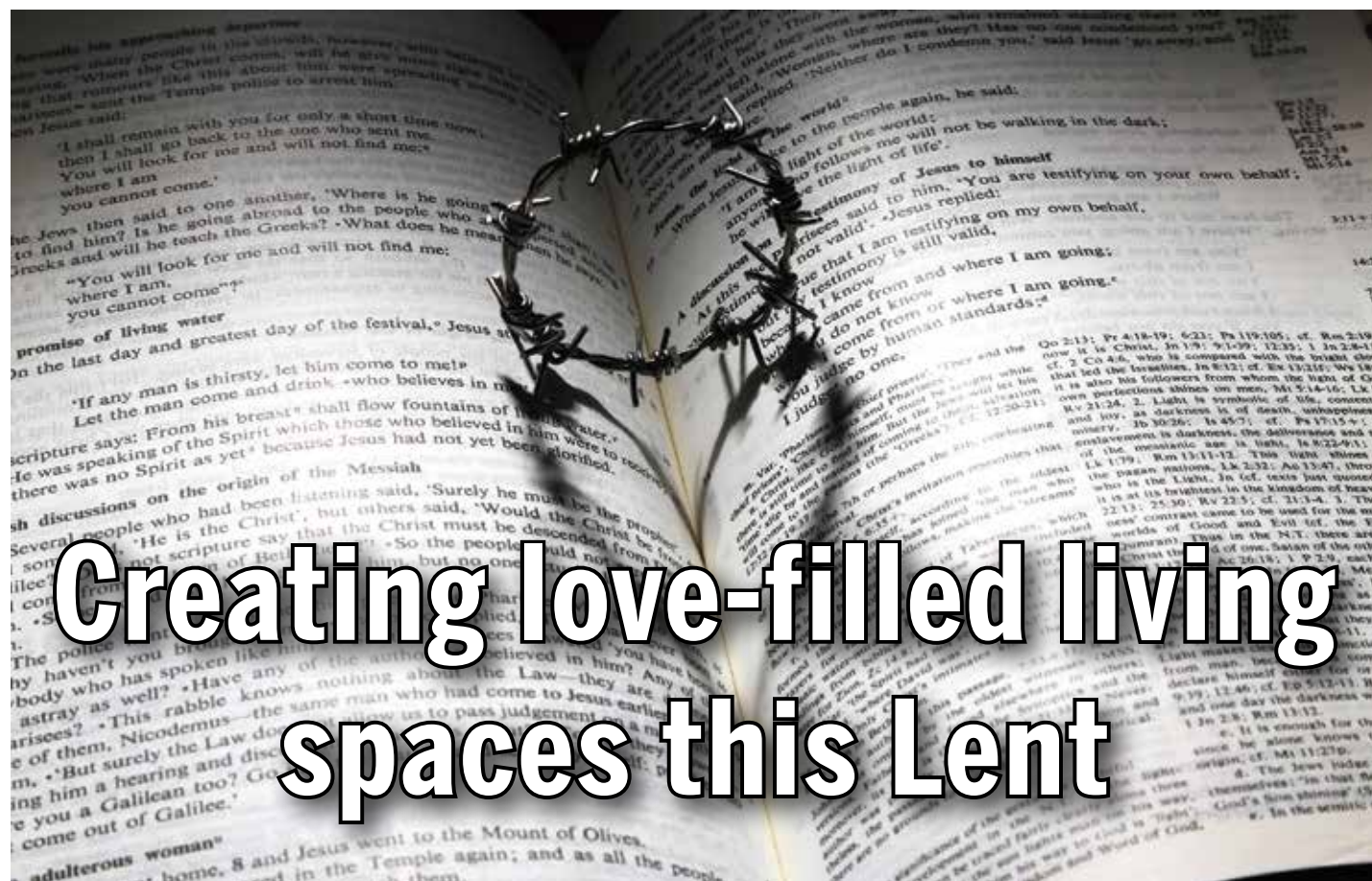
An international team of geneticists has managed to recover and sequence the oldest DNA to date. The researchers extracted severely degraded DNA from the teeth of three ancient mammoths that are believed to have roamed Siberia between 700,000 and 1.2 million years ago. They pieced the DNA together to reveal a previously unknown genetic mammoth lineage. Before this, the oldest recovered DNA sample was sourced from a horse bone found in the Yukon permafrost, which dated back to between 560,000 and 780,000 years ago. Evolutionary geneticist Love Dalén, of the Centre for Palaeogenetics in Sweden said, "This DNA is incredibly old," continuing, "the samples are a thousand times older than Viking remains, and even pre-date the existence of humans and Neanderthals". Around a million years ago, the well-known woolly mammoth didn't exist yet. In an attempt to learn more about its ancestor, the scientists turned mammoth genealogy on its head. The three mammoth teeth from which they extracted DNA were excavated decades ago and had been kept in a museum collection. The youngest, at 700,000 years old, belonged to a woolly mammoth - one of the earliest known.

### UAE HOPE MISSION RETURNS FIRST IMAGE OF MARS

The United Arab Emirates' Hope mission has returned its first picture of Mars. The spacecraft entered into orbit around Mars February 9, which made the UAE the first Arabic nation to have a scientific presence at the Red Planet. The image is expected to be the first of many. Hope was put into a wide orbit so that it could study the planet's weather and climate, which means that it's able to see the planet's full disk. It's a type of view that is familiar to telescopes viewing other planets from Earth, but is less common for satellites actually positioned at Mars. They are usually stationed closer to the planet so that they can get higher resolution shots of the surface, and act as communications relays for the landed robots in communication with Earth. "The transmission of the Hope Probe's first image of Mars is a defining moment in our history and marks the UAE joining advanced nations involved in space exploration," the mission's Twitter account stated. "We hope this mission will lead to new discoveries about Mars which will benefit humanity."

### DEADLY WINTER STORM SWEEPS US SOUTHERN STATES

A winter storm in the US has brought wintry conditions to states that rarely see such storms. Freezing winds, ice and snow have seen surges in demand for electricity, which has led to widespread power cuts. Texas has been heavily affected by the storm, with the power cuts leaving millions freezing in their homes. At least 21 deaths have been attributed to the storm, with deaths being reported in Tennessee, Texas, Kentucky and Louisiana. The storm has even reached northern Mexico, where millions of people have also suffered intermittent power cuts. February 16 the National Weather Service reported that over 73% of the US is covered by snow.



# Creating love-filled living spaces this Lent

I was chatting with my family about what we are all doing for Lent this year. My 10-year old son was adding more and more tough penances onto his list including daily cold showers, giving up all sweets and treats, saying more prayers and a schedule that even the most saintly would find challenging. Some people think that with all the hardships and losses we've endured in the last year, surely we've suffered enough and should go easy on ourselves this Lent. It might be tempting to view Lent as some sort of Catholic boot camp where those who are taking on the toughest mortifications are the winners in the spiritual Olympics. This isn't what Lent is all about at all. Fr Mike Schmitz, Catholic speaker and author, says that the additional disciplines we embrace during Lent are primarily about deepening our faith, hope and love in preparation for our celebration of the Resurrection at Easter. The Covid-19 lockdown has imposed all sorts of difficulties on all of us but that's an even greater reason to use this time to grow closer to Jesus.

**“Whatever we are trying to do for Lent, it should be centred on Jesus and striving to become more like him”**

In the message of Pope Francis for Lent 2021, he reiterates that perennial message of Lent as a time of conversion when we “renew our faith, draw from the ‘living water’ of hope and receive with open hearts the love of God, who makes us brothers and sisters in Christ”. Whatever we are trying to do for Lent, it should be centred on Jesus and



## A parent's perspective Maria Byrne

striving to become more like him. If we're really honest, and do a sincere examination of conscience, we'll probably find that there were lots of times in the past months when we didn't use the sufferings of these unusual times to become better Christians. Who hasn't had days when they were thoroughly fed up with some aspect of family life under the new arrangements? Every family is unique but one of the stresses in my own household is around the very differing requirements for social interaction. I've one child who would talk until the cows come home and another who really needs large amounts of quiet time and bemoans the fact that “No one is going anywhere anymore”. I have to admit that I miss those blissful hours of peace when my husband used to bring the children on day trips so I could get work done. Now, it's snatched minutes early in the morning and I've become even more of a night owl cherishing the peace of everyone else finally being in bed. A big Lenten sacrifice this year would be to do anything that makes life easier for those we're sharing our living space with and realising that our biggest Lenten challenge might be something as simple as saying the kind word or holding back on the harsh criticism.

Pope Francis points to Lent as the time for prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The various amusements we give up during Lent help us to remove obstacles

to our relationship with God. One result of continuous lockdowns is a feeling that we deserve to treat ourselves more with no end to sweet snacks, binge watching of favourite programmes and an overdependence on social media. Routines are more lax and even logging on for an online Mass



can start to feel like a big effort with parents struggling to make the sitting room seem remotely like a church on Sunday. Many churches are open for private prayer so we can use these weeks to commit to regular visits to the Blessed Sacrament, saying the family rosary and renewing our sense of hope in God. In his Lenten message, Pope Francis talks about how, in these times of trouble, “everything seems fragile and uncertain” and it may seem challenging to speak of hope but Lent is “precisely the season of hope when we turn back to God”. I'm sure priests will be making extra efforts during Lent to make sure people can avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Some parishes

have Confession on request but, if you can't get to Confession, it's important not to delay in seeking God's forgiveness. Night prayer with our children, especially during these tough times when it's so hard to access the sacraments, should include an act of contrition for the times we have failed during the day. There are great online resources to help families—my children love Fr Mike Schmitz's YouTube videos which cover every possible topic. They're also quite short which makes them perfect even for the younger children depending on the topic.

**“A Lent filled with love means that we reach out to the suffering, the abandoned and the fearful”**

I asked some of my siblings for Lenten suggestions and got some great ideas. Many focused on cutting down on phone usage, online games and apps and reducing time spent just scrolling. Less time online means more time for family and prayer and more effort devoted to what Pope Francis calls “the gift that gives meaning to our lives”, the gift of love. A Lent filled with love means that we reach out to the suffering, the abandoned and the fearful. A phone call, a letter, joining a charity initiative, donating to a good cause or joining a lonely person in prayer are all ways to infuse God's love into these few weeks so we can all celebrate Easter in the knowledge that Lent was a time when we turned away from our old ways and united ourselves to the sufferings of Christ himself.



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as the circadian rhythm. This “clock” operates on a 24-hour cycle or so, and it dictates the natural fact that after waking from sleep, you’ll grow increasingly tired throughout the day. These feelings peak in the hours before bedtime.

A couple of things influence this cycle – light foremost among them. A specific region of the brain processes signals when the eyes are exposed to natural or artificial light, and these signals help the brain determine whether it is day or night. As the natural light fades throughout the day, the body releases a hormone, melatonin, which induces drowsiness. When the sun rises in the morning and light increases, the body produces another hormone, cortisol, which brings about energy and alertness.

Chemicals play a large role in the regulation of sleep. Scientists suspect the sleep drive (which is also known as sleep-wake homeostasis) may be linked to adenosine. Adenosine levels increase throughout the day as tiredness develops, before the body breaks the compound down during sleep.

### Stages of sleep

Once asleep, our bodies follow what have been identified as four sleep cycles. The first three stages are known as non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep, with the first stage known as rapid eye movement (REM) sleep.

- Stage one: The first stage sees the transition between wakefulness and sleep, and it consists only of light sleep. The body relaxes, such as the muscles, breath and heart rate, eye movement, and brain waves. It’s understood that stage 1 sleep lasts for only a couple of minutes.

- Stage two: The second stage is similar to the first, as the body continues to slow down and enter into deeper sleep. Eye movement stops during this time and body temperature drops. This is generally the longest of the four sleep stages.

- Stage three: This stage sees the lowest levels of bodily activity, and plays a key role in granting the feeling of ‘refreshment’ that everyone

wants following a night’s sleep. The heartbeat, breath rate, and brain wave activity are as low as they will descend to, and muscles are as relaxed as they can be.

- Stage four: The first stage of REM sleep generally occurs about 90 minutes after falling asleep, with the eyes beginning to move rapidly underneath the eyelids. Breathing and heart rates increase, along with blood pressure. Dreaming typically occurs during this sleep cycle, and the arms and legs become paralysed – this is thought to be intended to prevent a physical acting out of the dreams. A number of studies have linked this sleep stage to memory consolidation, which is the process of converting recent experiences to long-term memory.

**“Even though their bodies struggle for a lack of sleep, they may muddle through because the state of sleep deprivation has become the norm”**

These four stages are repeated cyclically until waking. For most people, each cycle lasts about 90-120 minutes, with NREM sleep accounting for about 75-80% of each cycle.

### How much sleep do we need?

The amount of sleep we require depends on a number of factors, but age is a primary one.



Newborns generally need 14-17 hours, with that number lowering as our age rises. Toddlers need around 11-14 hours, while teenagers require around 8-10 hours. However, as adults, we progress to a stable 7-9 hours per night, with older adults needing slightly less at 7-8 hours a night.

Most adults need at least seven hours of sleep per night for proper physical and mental functioning. Troubling research has also suggested that people can develop a tolerance of sorts to chronic sleep deprivation. Even though their bodies struggle for a lack of sleep, they may muddle through because the state of sleep deprivation has become the norm.

### Tips for a good night's sleep

For those among us who struggle to manage their sleep, or who haven’t been able to enjoy a good night’s sleep for one reason or another, a couple of the following steps may be worth implementing in your daily routine:

- Set a realistic and healthy bed time and stick to it as often as possible.
- Maintain a low level of light in your bedroom before bed.
- Make sure your sleep settings are comfortable – mattress, pillows, quilt, and temperature.
- Consider removing screens from your room, or ceasing the use of electronics a certain amount of time before bed, e.g. for an hour.
- Exercise during the day.
- Don’t consume heavy meals, caffeine or alcohol in the hours leading up to bedtime.
- Pray before bed – the slow, peaceful nature of the activity is good for slowing down your mind and body before sleeping.

Sleep may seem like the most mundane of realities, but the truth is that a good sleep underpins much of the success of the day that follows. If our Lent is to be made up of good, sober and prayerful days, consider building them upon the firm foundation of a good night’s sleep.

# Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



The world is a poorer place. My beautiful mother Anne has died. She had been in hospital for an operation and sadly contracted coronavirus in there. For the first week of the illness, we held out hope, since she remained cheerful and vibrant as ever.

Yet we knew that a grim moment of truth was coming, as a point comes when symptoms can suddenly begin to worsen in severe cases. We fearfully noticed that her breathing was becoming more laboured as we spoke on the phone. The diagnosis of pneumonia came, followed by a rapid succession of bad news as to the severity of her condition.

One evening, my brothers, my father and I were told that we could visit her. The doctors said things weren’t looking good, but there was still a faint hope. We donned full PPE, and my father and I went in to see her first. She was in a calm room in the ward, being well cared for. Although unwell, she was cheerful, and managed to laugh at us arriving in, looking like spacemen in our PPE. She even chuckled at the virus too, saying “It looks like I’ve been hit by my second wave of the coronavirus”.

We sat together and chatted happily during those precious moments, and spent time looking at pictures of her grandchildren. Her face lit up as she spoke so lovingly of each one. She said, “We have such strong love between us in our family, that is a powerful thing. It is the most important thing”. After a time, I reluctantly left, so that she and my father could have some time together. My mother had a rare ability to put a smile on the face, and a glow in the heart, of everyone she met. She managed this, even the very last time we spoke. I went home with a heart full of love, to tell my four anxious children that she was unwell, but happy, comfortable and thinking lovingly of them all.

The following day, the doctors told us that things had deteriorated overnight and that she had fallen into a sleep. Our last faint hope was lost, as she was moved onto palliative care. My wife broke the news to us, as she had been liaising with the medical team. She sobbed as she said the words nobody wants to hear, “your mother is dying”. I somehow quickly finished up my work and then I called the older children in.

The older kids already knew that their beloved grandmother had coronavirus and that things were not looking good. With an arm around my 9-year-old daughter and my 11-year-old son, I told them the bad news, as gently as I could. They cried, we spoke, we embraced and cried again. Then, at one point, I suddenly noticed that my daughter had the happiest, most contented smile on her face. I asked what she was thinking of, and she said: “I can still feel her hug, it was so warm.”

For the next two days, as my mother slept her final sleep, we all dreamt of

her. It almost felt as though she was coming over for a chat as we slept. Each of us woke in the morning feeling that we had spent time in her presence.

On her last night, I drove alone to the hospital, as a powerful storm rolled in from the Atlantic. Wrapped in PPE, I went into the room where she lay. Now there were no drips and no beeping monitors. She just lay sleeping, like



someone dreaming pleasant dreams.

She lay not a mile from where she was born, in the crucible of love that was the O’Connell family of Glasheen road in Cork city. The bodies of her parents and brother lay close by in St Finbarr’s Cemetery. The church they worshipped in was just across the road. I spoke of them, and said the prayers she would have heard nightly as a child, hoping that those familiar cadences would somehow reach into her waning consciousness. The next morning, when I returned, she was gone. She was gone on her journey, into the deepest love, and into the mystery of God.

She turned 73 just a few weeks before she died. We had hoped for many more years of her joyful presence. Yet, even in our devastation, there is some consolation in a life beautifully lived. A life spent bringing love and joy wherever she went, as a teacher, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a grandmother and a friend to all.

Even in these strange times, when the powerfully curative Irish funeral rituals are held in abeyance by the pandemic, we were flooded by messages from far and wide, to honour a woman loved so much by so many.

She had never feared death, thinking of it as walking through a door to a more beautiful world than this, one without sickness, cruelty, war or plagues – such as the one which took her in the end. She has gone home, leaving the world warmed by her love.

Anne Fitzgerald (nee O’Connell) was born on January 21, 1948, and died on February 13, 2021 in Cork University Hospital.



# 60 years rewarding work in the priesthood

## Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Canon Brendan Murray's career as a priest began in 1957 and has spanned six decades of momentous change on the island of Ireland, some for better, some for worse. "I grew up in a different age from the present one, where religion was accepted simply as a matter of fact," Fr Murray tells *The Irish Catholic*.

"I was in a family where prayers were said, and I remember as a teenager being an altar server. My two brothers and I were encouraged to go to daily Mass," he adds.

**“Fr Murray was ordained in 1957 and received his first official posting in June 1958”**

It was this daily attendance at Mass which he thinks brought him to the attention of the parish priest, who asked him if he would consider the priesthood. It was in his mind from then on, but it wasn't until he finished school that he made a decision.

"I did quite well at my exams and actually got a scholarship for the university," Fr Murray says. "I met (my local priest) Fr Cunningham on the Glen Road and he asked me how I had got on. I told him that I'd got the scholarship for the university. Before I could say I was thinking of doing another year of advanced maths, he said 'Well Brendan what



Canon Brendan Murray.

about it?' And I thought for about 20 seconds and I said, 'Alright father, I'll give it a go!' That was when I made up my mind."

Fr Murray was ordained in 1957 and received his first official posting in June 1958. He first worked as a chaplain to a Dominican conference, before being posted to his home parish, St Teresa of Avila's, the Glen Road, Belfast. He was also given the role of spiritual director to the presidium of the Legion of Mary in his area, beginning a long career ministering to lay organisations.

The group he spent most of his time ministering to was the Apostolic Workers.

### Foreign missionaries

"The Apostolic Workers have been a feature of my life for quite a long time now, about 50 years," he explains. "It was an organisation founded in Belfast in 1923, to help foreign missionaries. They meet in groups, they used to make vestments, chasubles, albs, things like that which they would send to the missionaries. It spread out across the diocese. Every

year, we have a special Mass on Mission Sunday, though this year it went by the board."

His connection with lay missionary groups was happenstance, Fr Murray explains, rather than a specific calling: "It was a minor part of my work, my work was mainly in parishes. I went from the Dominicans to a parish in Bangor and was lovely parish work there for 13 years, then I was in various parishes in Belfast."

**“Fr Murray ministered during the height of the troubles, which had a direct effect on his ministry”**

Fr Murray loved the parish work, especially going out and meeting people: "I like meeting people and I generally get on well with people," he says. "It's not so easy now, but one of the things I liked doing was going round and calling or doing visitations, not just to the house bound. I was quite shy when I was young and to begin with it was quite something to go up and ring the doorbell of a house on an afternoon or an evening. But after a bit I became very used to it then."

"I found that very rewarding and getting to know people, it's really done in their houses. You see them at church, they're a big mass of people there, but when you go to the house, you get to know them much better there. Even at the moment now, although retired, I enjoy going into schools, talking to the children."

Fr Murray ministered during the height of the troubles, which had a direct effect on his ministry. Two of his parishioners were killed in separate shooting incidents outside his parish church.

"There were some very, very sad experiences," Fr Murray says. "Part of a priest's job of course is

ministering to families who have had bereavements. Sometimes of all ages of people – families who have lost a baby for instance, families who have lost an elderly person. But where families have lost someone as a result of murder, that's very difficult indeed."

While they had no effect on his faith, the second shooting incidence did impact his physical health, Fr Murray believes.

"The gunmen had shot at two women, killing one of them. They also shot six bullets at Mr Travers, a local magistrate, and I could hear the shots, but I didn't know where they came from so I ran around and when I got there, Mr Travers he was writhing in agony and I anointed him. Mr Travers was very ill, he was in intensive care for a month and I visited him regularly. It was some time after that I can remember having high blood pressure. It was only later that I associated it with that time."

**“Some people say we were forced to go to Mass, but that wasn't my experience, it was something you did, like you'd have your Sunday dinner”**

Ireland has changed significantly, Fr Murray notes, some for the better, some for the worse.

"Thank goodness, there's much less trouble in Northern Ireland," he says. "But the Ireland I grew up in – I'd hardly recognise it now at all. Some people say we were forced to go to Mass, but that wasn't my experience, it was something you did, like you'd have your Sunday dinner. It was part of life. Now of course, that's very, very different."



## Children's Corner

Chai Brady

## A painless process to polish your pennies

Ireland has been using the euro currency for almost 20 years so it's no wonder that some of our coins have become so dirty they're almost unrecognisable from their former shiny splendour. If you have lost hope in them, never fear, there's a fun way of giving them a good polish without the elbow grease! By assembling a few household items you can conduct an experiment that will not only clean your coins but also prove the effectiveness of the certain method compared to others.

### Apparatus:

- three dull coins
- two cups
- Vinegar
- Liquid soap
- Kitchen towel

### Method:

- First things first, have a guess which liquid would make a coin shine.
- Set one coin aside. Put each of the other two coins into its own paper cup.
- In one cup, pour enough vinegar to cover the coin.

- In the other cup, pour enough liquid soap to cover the coin.
- Wait at least 10 minutes.
- Remove the coins, rinse them in water, and rub them with a kitchen towel.
- Compare all three pennies.

### Results

After examining the coins, you will find the coin that was submerged in vinegar will be far shinier. Coins become dull over time as the copper on the surface reacts with oxygen from the air. The two elements combine to form dark chemicals called copper oxides. The acetic acid in vinegar dissolves these chemicals and leaves the copper surface of the coin looking shiny. Soap can clean lots of things, but it can't dissolve copper oxides.

If you want to go a step further, younger children can be helped to do the experiment again with more coins. With your child, collect

10 coins and count them one at a time. Before placing the coins in the vinegar, have a chat about what they look like. Think about colour, shape, and size. Repeat the experiment and then talk about the pennies again after they are shiny and rinsed. What is different about the pennies? What is the same? Finish up by counting the pennies again and adding them to your child's piggy bank.

For older kids they can take the experiment a step further. Originally the penny was left in the vinegar for 10 minutes. What do you think would happen if you left it in for 30 seconds? What if you left it in for an hour? What would happen if you put only part of the coin in the vinegar? Make a guess and test these ideas with other coins. If you run out of vinegar, you can also use other acidic liquids, such as lemon juice or pickle juice.





# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



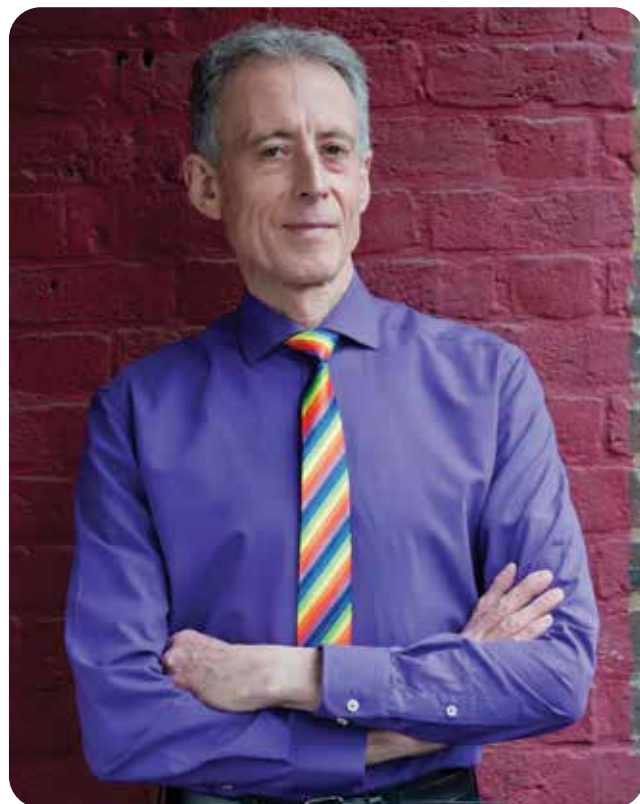
## Debating the vexed issue of how much free speech is too much

There are so many hot button issues out there, so many battles in the culture wars, so many threats to democracy, it can all get a little head wrecking.

It's welcome then to get a debate that's calm and reasoned, like the discussion on free speech with our own David Quinn and Nathan Young, deputy editor of UCD's *University Observer* on **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk, Tuesday). I thought stand-in presenter Sinead Ryan did particularly well in how she handled it. What prompted the item was the British government's appointment of a 'free speech champion' for the universities, as an antidote to 'cancel culture'. David defined free speech as being able to speak your mind, with broad parameters, but some limitations. There were no hard and fast rules, but he thought it was preferable to err on the side of freedom. Mr Young pretty much agreed with most of what Mr Quinn said, though despite the common ground, the item had the feel of a discussion of opposites, an illusion of division, when maybe it was only a difference of emphasis.

### Concerned

Mr Young was concerned about the Tories' initiative and seemed to fear this would only be protecting views from the right. He



Veteran campaigner Peter Tatchell was broadly opposed to so-called 'cancel culture'.

wasn't keen on the idea of an arbiter, and anyway didn't think UCD was particularly prone to the type of censorship under discussion. He came up with a rather odd phrasing – Ms Ryan asked him if people had a right not to be offended, and he replied that people had a right to be offended (anyone want to claim that right?) and to complain about it! Further he said people had

a right to turn down an invitation, hardly the point – maybe deflection, or interview nerves?

Mr Quinn was wary of the 'safe spaces' concept, regarding it as a threat to diversity of opinion. This was particularly true for debating societies (no point debating just with people who agree with you), but both agreed there could be other college societies where it would be appro-

priate, presumably support groups for the vulnerable or private gatherings for people with particular interests.

### Champion

Also, in response to the 'free speech champion', the issue was discussed that night on **Iain Dale** (LBC – catchup on phone app only). Typically of LBC, Mr Dale had no disinclination to give his own views. A moderate gay Conservative, he asked where else would you get diversity of views but in a university and he didn't have much time for no-plat-forming except in the most extreme cases. He instanced a case where a mature student was expelled from a social work course for saying God hated homosexuality, and that homosexuals do 'wicked acts'. Mr Dale thought these views "despicable" and "abhorrent" but he didn't favour the expulsion (which was later reversed). He thought instead people should have tried to persuade him of "the error of his views".

His first guest was Matthew Goodwin, a professor of politics at the University of Kent, who said he found himself ostracised, experiencing a "low level campaign of harassment" for being in favour of going ahead with Brexit after the people's vote. Another guest, gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell thought the problem was real but often exaggerated.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### I AM WITH YOU

**EWTN Saturday February 27, 11am**

A documentary about the young Italian computer programmer Carlo Acutis who was beatified last year.

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC Two Sunday February 28, 1.15pm**

Sean Fletcher explores Tintern Abbey in Monmouthshire, and hears about the daily life of the Cistercian monks who lived there.

#### BRAVERY UNDER FIRE

**EWTN Sunday February 28, 9pm**

This original EWTN docudrama presents the life and ministry of Fr Willie Doyle SJ, an Irish Jesuit priest who was killed in action during the First World War.

gerated. He wasn't against the free speech champion idea on principle but wondered how this person would be accountable, feared that the initiative was not taken from high principle, and that it might look sectarian (in a political sense) with the conservatives using the issue as a "wedge issue" in the culture wars.

He favoured the right to free speech (a 'precious' right) except in three specific cases – libel, harassment and incitement to violence. So, ironically, Mr Tatchell and David Quinn were pretty much in agreement on this issue...an interesting alignment.

### Worth

Finally, there are two other programmes well worth catching up on. **Bowman Sunday** (RTÉ Radio 1) featured an item about singer

Delia Murphy. Best known for her music, she was also wife of TJ Kiernan, Irish ambassador to the Vatican during the Second World War, which gave her the opportunity to discreetly help Msgr Hugh O'Flaherty in his work of saving prisoners of war and Jews from the Nazis. Later, Sunday morning's **Mass** on RTÉ One was reverent and graceful, featuring the most beautiful music, much of it composed by Fr Liam Lawton, from the musicians and singers of Brackenstown parish in Swords.

It was a tonic to all the head wrecking.

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

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Stories of suspense and marital disharmony

*The Glass Castle* (Amazon) is an impressive tale of a hard-scrabble American family struggling to stay afloat under an alcoholic father (Woody Harrelson). He's continually enabled in his dysfunctionality by his ever-jolly wife (Naomi Watts). His children seem to have an incredible ability to soak up punishment.

His favourite one is played by Brie Larson. She won an Oscar for *Room*. Here she has less emotional territory to navigate.

The film is based on Jeanette Walls' best-selling novel. I read this last year. It's an epic, a kind of American *Angela's Ashes* with the closely-knit family wondering where their next meal – or living abode – is coming from as

their father (a kind of intellectual Walter Mitty) drinks away whatever small amount of money he earns.

The film is well made but there's no attempt to age Watts or Harrelson as the children grow into adults. Were the make-up people asleep? Harrelson almost looks younger at the end of the film – which traverses a generation – than at the beginning. He's thin on top these days so he's obviously wearing a wig. Why didn't they just remove it for the final scenes? And colour Watts' hair a bit?

### Twists

*Dangerous Lies* (Netflix) has more twists than a corkscrew. Many of them are so far beyond the bounds of



Jessie Usher and Camila Mendes in Netflix's *Dangerous Lies* comprehension that it spoils this potentially impressive story about a carer (Camilla Mendes) who inherits a house from an elderly man (Elliott Gould) despite only knowing him for a few weeks.

There are lots of suspicious characters lurking around. Is the estate agent on the level? Is the attorney really an attorney?

Most of the early suspicion falls on Mendes' hus-

band Adam (Jessie Usher). His attraction to money seems to give him an elastic conscience about how he finds it. He does so many suspicious things in the film without telling Mendes that you feel he murdered Gould. And yet he looks as if butter wouldn't melt.

### Imbroglia

The whole imbroglia will keep you guessing for 100 minutes but the climax is so full of hokum it denigrates whatever slim credibility the foregoing scenes possess.

*I Am Woman* (Netflix) is a standard issue biopic of the 1970s singer and activist Helen Reddy. She died last year. Tilda Cobham-Hervey is a good lookalike for her

but the film could have done with a half hour shaved off its running time. It's far too soporific. The dialogue and themes are so old hat as to be yawnful.

The title song, which became a kind of anthem for the feminist movement, has overtones of Eleanor McEvoy's *Only a Woman* or Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive*. That's what we're expected to cheer on here – Helen's indomitability in the face of all the problems she faces in her marriage to her drug-taking producer-husband, Jeff Wald.

That's fine in theory but the film has a 'straight to video' look about it that makes you reach for the fast forward button on the remote once too often.





# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The varied face of modern film

Peter Costello

**Maureen O'Hara: The Biography**  
by Aubrey Malone  
(University of Kentucky Press, £15.00pb)

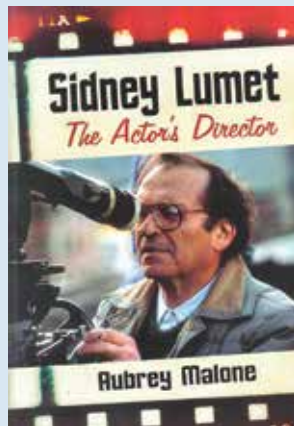
**Sidney Lumet: The Actor's Director**  
by Aubrey Malone  
(MacFarlane & Company, £50.95hb/£36.00pb; also on Kindle)

Aubrey Malone, the film critic of *The Irish Catholic*, is an intensive historian of the movie-making business (as it is for most people), with a sharp critical eye also on the smaller world of genuine filmmakers. Both these classes are covered by his latest offerings.

I sometimes wonder if Maureen O'Hara, at the end of a long and varied career, regretted making *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, released 1952), which seems to have become the most truly popular Irish film ever made. In itself it has given rise to a whole local tourism industry down in the Galway region around Cong.

**“Mr Malone is able to reveal both the man and his passions as well as the director and his methods”**

But, as this book makes clear, there was a great deal more to this fiery, strong-minded woman and her career. She was a product of the real glory days of Hollywood, but had the luck and the talent to work with some very best directors and actors, and not merely John Ford and John Wayne. Mr Malone does full justice to her, but as the story unfolds one realises there is even more to Maureen O'Hara as a



representative Irish woman of her time.

### Contrast

Sidney Lumet presents quite a contrast. As this is the first full-scale biography of the director, Mr Malone is able to reveal both the man and his passions as well as the director and his methods. Among his films are some that are everyone's list of the greatest ever made: among his catalogue of 50 there is a wide choice. He was a liberal-minded man with a sense both of purpose and his trade, he could also bring in his movies within budget and on time. One of his earliest jobs was working on the series *You Are There*, which reconstructed historical events as they might have been reported now for television, which caused great excitement here in Ireland when it was rescreened in the early 1960s. His transition from US television to films explains the decline of that medium into the sorry state it is now in: the best like Sidney Lumet went elsewhere.

If the Maureen O'Hara biography will delight fans, the Sidney Lumet book ought to find a place on the shelves of film buffs everywhere.



Maureen O'Hara and John Wayne from *The Quiet Man*

## 'Mary has chosen the better part...which shall not be taken away from her'

**Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church**  
by John O'Brien  
(Cascade Books, \$46.00hb  
\$26.00/£20.00pb distributed by Books Depository and others, and available on Kindle)

Peter Costello

On January 11 Pope Francis, acting he said "after theological reflection", issued a decree, *Spiritus Domini* (*The Spirit of the Lord*), which in the words of a press release "amended Canon Law to allow women to serve as readers at liturgies, altar servers and distributors of communion".

This was seen by commentators "as another step towards greater equality for women in the Roman Catholic Church".

Of course, informally, this had been going on for some time. But this change means women cannot not be rejected from these roles at whim.

But the Vatican stressed that these serving roles were "essentially distinct from the ordained ministry", and were not an automatic precursor to women one day being allowed to be ordained as priests.

**“To ascertain this is to move back from many of the long familiar documents such as the Greek and Latin Fathers**

However, in the wider world of discussion the ordination of women was once again back on the agenda for many.

In this context John O'Brien's recent book will arouse great interest and perhaps lead to a more focussed discussion of the question. After serving for three decades in Pakistan, which is very much on the troubled edge of missionary work, he is now an associate professor of theology in Durham University. He is well aware of the nature and state of the world. No ivory tower here.

### Ordination

In Rome the ordination of women is usually seen as a matter settled by the long tradition of the Church. For others, the call for the ordination of women is most often seen in a context of the essential equality before God and society of women and men. The more traditional minded feel that it is a mere fashionable

whim.

But what is this tradition, and where does it begin? Not certainly with the Greek and Latin Fathers, but with the Apostles. If (others think) at Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on both men and women, of whom it was said that "your sons and your daughters will prophesy" (added emphasis). Given the pre-eminent role of women in the Gospel narratives, where they are shown to have had a special place, this is understandable. That central role is illustrated by the painting from the Cathedral of St Mary at Pamplona.

Perhaps Catholics need to reflect on that significant passage concerning Martha and Mary in Luke 10:42: "Mary hath chosen the best part which shall not be taken away from her." (Rheims version)

### Tradition

John O'Brien's approach is quite different. Rather than argue about the outcome of tradition (influenced as it is by so many social and philosophical changes over the centuries), he asks what did the earliest Christians think and say. To ascertain this is to move back from many of the long familiar documents such as the Greek and Latin Fathers, to engage with newly emergent epigraphic evidence from the first three centuries rather than textual materials of later centuries.

These suggest that in those earlier centuries woman occupied many roles in the emerging Church, roles analogous with those later defined as pertaining to those of deacons, priests and bishops. Thus he argues from sources which are more archaeological than textual. But they are also immediate and datable.

The argument in his book is summed up by John O'Brien in this way: prior to the 12th Century women were validly ordained according to contemporary ecclesiastical understanding. Prohibitions were issued, but these showed that ordination was commonplace.

"These canons were a cultural practise in search of a theology," he suggests, "and the subsequent theological justification for restricting ordination to men appealed to supposed female inferiority against the background of priesthood as eminence rather than service."

In conclusion: "the assertion of women's non-ordination is a matter of Canon law rather doctrine. As such, that law can be reformed."

This will seem clear and persuasive. And quite in keeping with the feeling



that many derive from their reading of the Gospel. Ultimately like many abuses, the matter is an expression of power to exclude and dominate, rather than to live in charity.

Those, and there are many of them, who are seriously concerned about the role of women in the Church, will want to read and absorb the argument in John O'Brien's book. Many may not agree with him. But they must be prepared for a careful scholarly appraisal based on evidence both old and new. Based as it is on new research into the earliest centuries of Christianity, with which

**“In the wider world of discussion the ordination of women was once again back on the agenda for many”**



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.



Image of the Apostles and the Virgin at their centre, 1507, Pamplona Cathedral

many are unfamiliar, the ideas of this book may yet prove influential.

### Reviewing

But an objective observer reviewing the book has to ask can this reformation of Canon Law come about? In Europe and North America it may find wide acceptability; but not in Africa, Latin America, and Asia? There the tone of the Church is often affected not by theological considerations but by the social lore and traditions of the societies of those continents.

**“They must be prepared for a careful scholarly appraisal based on evidence both old and new”**

However, as we know change comes. Sometimes it comes slowly over centuries and may take that amount of time to reverse. But as has been elaborated by Thomas Kuhn

with regard to the world of science, the change can be rapid, even sudden. Speaking of revolutions in scientific thought he notes that once a ‘change of paradigm’ takes place in the realm of science, and receives acceptance, the overall change and acceptance is immediate. The new idea’s time has quite simply come.

But when it does come in the Church, that same observer might suggest the ordination of women will not be presented as a ‘new idea’, but an ancient fundamental position of the Apostolic church that had been lost sight of through the ages due to social change that devolved authority increasingly on men.

If the ordination of women comes it will be presented not as a ‘reformation’ or a ‘modernistic change’, but the recovery of an original inspiration of the Church! It will be seen as the recovery of the ‘the best part’ chosen by Mary that accidents of history took away from her. But this is speculation and a matter beyond the topic range of John O’Brien’s insightful book.

## Mainly about books

By the books editor

# The last of Ireland’s thatched churches

Only part of my week is spent working on these pages for *The Irish Catholic*. Other days are spent on research for other projects. Recently in the course of these, I lighted upon an article in now *The Standard* from 1936, the headline of which spoke of “the last of the Penal thatched churches”.

The historian and archaeologist who lurks constantly at the back of my mind reacted immediately. Mass rocks are a topic of great interest in many places; but the local churches that followed them get little or no attention.

The story (which was part of a series on churches and church building) concerned a parish church at Camus, now in Rosmuck parish, in Connemara, which had lasted as a thatched chapel down to the mid-1890s before being replaced with a new church, which today is now without a resident priest.

In penal times Catholic chapels were outlawed. After the Jacobite threat waned after ‘15 and ‘45, they began to be built openly, but under regulation. Even then they could not be built on main streets, and have a clear appearance: they were down side streets and often had houses standing in front of them. Hence ‘Chapel Lane’ and ‘Church Street’ place names in so many town - the church being the established Church of Ireland.

### Poverty

Certainly it was poverty and remoteness that kept the chapels in many places thatched for so long – slates had to be imported from North Wales. However, another issue of the paper mentioned that the description of the Galway church was

close to that given by the *Freeman’s Journal* of the chapel at Sneem, down in Kerry.

**“After the Famine, the Catholic Church spent widely on church building, hence many churches survive from the 1860s or so”**

That too had been a small thatched bleak little building. However, Edwin, 3rd Lord Dunraven, who had converted to Catholicism in 1855, had bought Garnish Island nearby and was busy with the garden and the villa there.

He attended Mass at Sneem. It struck him one day that there he was making himself and his estate as comfortable as could be for a gentleman. But here was the impoverished chapel of his tenants.

To get the job done quickly he paid for it himself. He engaged a builder, a local man name Murphy, who set to work with purpose. Mr Murphy died soon after, and was replaced in the contract with his son, none other than the famous (or is it still infamous) William Martin Murphy, the

politician, developer, newspaper owner and leader of the employers in the 1913 ‘Lock-Out’. The thatched chapel of Sneem was soon no more. The new church was opened in 1867.

**“Mass rocks are a topic of great interest in many places; but the local churches that followed them get little or no attention”**

However, it seems that the thatched chapel at Camus was deemed to be the very last in the country. This may well be true for there had been waves of church building in Ireland, in the town in the 18th Century, and again after the Famine in the 1860s onwards, millions then being spent by the Church all across the country. Those who had emigrated were now called upon and bravely responded to an appeal to provide funds. Few, if any, in Camus were people of means like Lord Dunraven. But



A bleak winter in remote Camus

across the country such people as Daniel O’Connell in Dublin and Kerry provided a measure of lay national leadership in the matter.

These thatched chapels belonged to a neglected aspect of Irish parish history, for they must have been commonplace in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Indeed, they represent what many small local chapels looked like in the long centuries since St Patrick.

### Famine

After the Famine, the Catholic Church spent widely on church building, hence many churches survive from the 1860s or so. No one seemed to remark on the immense sums involved for a still distressed country. The generation of prosperous cattle farmers who had done well out of the Famine were much less ready to speak of it back in mid-century as a national disaster. Indeed it was not until the end of the century that the Famine began to be used as a symbol in nationalist propaganda.

A great deal of history is certainly bound up in the fading memories of Ireland’s thatched chapels of ‘the olden days’.



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# The Irish Catholic

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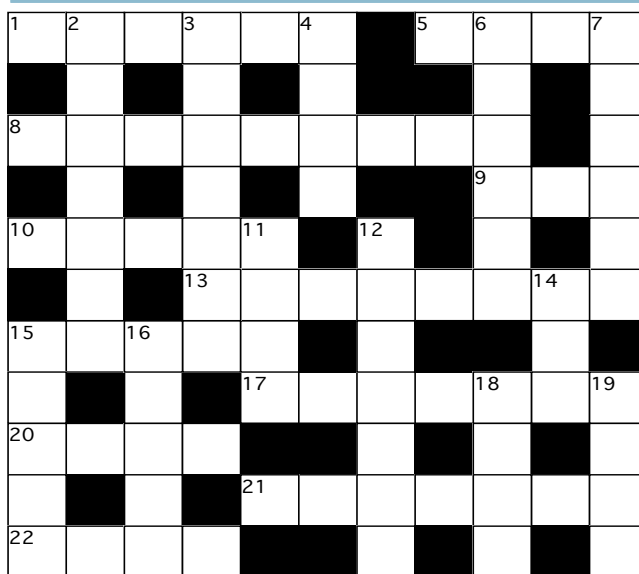
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## Crossword Junior

Gordius 371



### Across

- Cooking something in a pan. (6)
- This sign in a sum tells you to add the numbers. (4)
- We go to school to get a good \_\_\_\_\_. (9)
- Baby goat. (3)
- 'That's good \_\_\_\_\_, it's well worth the price'. (5)
- Lovely yellow spring flower. (8)
- Britain's only poisonous snake. (5)
- Made the sound of a horse. (7)
- Use a kettle to do this to water. (4)
- Made something out of nothing. (6)
- Travel like a ball or a wheel. (4)

### Down

- You might see a referee show this to a player to send him or her off the pitch. (3,4)
- Count in. (7)
- You'll see it at the entrance of a field. (4)
- Connected. (6)
- Type of shoe you might wear in summer. (6)
- Deserve because of effort or work. (4)
- A high-up member of the army. (7)
- You might go skating on it. (3)
- The 'orange' traffic light. (5)
- Use this tool to make a hole. (5)
- People wear them on their heads. (4)
- Probably the most famous kind of extinct bird. (4)

## SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 18

GORDIUS NO. 495

**Across** – 1 Arm 3 Magic Circle 8 Canine teeth 9 Destined 10 Ivory 11 Elder 13 Quake 15 Ethical 21 Stung 23 Juror 24 Lutheran 25 Shofar 26 Gingerbread 27 TNT

**Down** – 1 Auctioneers 2 Monmouth 3 Money 4 Indycar 5 In the long run 6 Canada geese 7 End 12 Reinterpret 13 Quart 14 Epoch 17 Retrofit 18 Seminar 19 Mutton 23 Jihad 24 Log

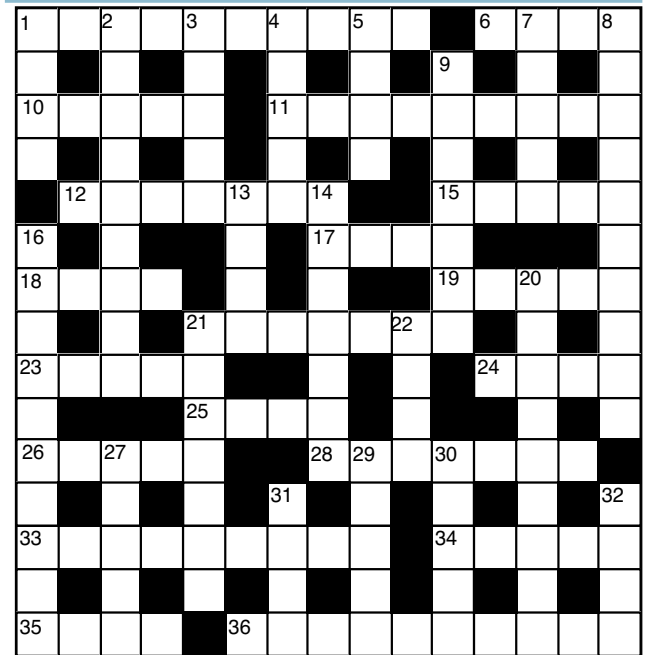
CHILDREN'S No. 370

**Across** – 1. Satellite 5. East 7. Underneath 9. Enormous 13. Ale 15. Naughty 16. Nest 18. Junior 19. Cough 20. Closes

**Down** – 1. Saucepan 2. Tadpole 3. Tears 4. Eat 6. Ship 8. Roman 10. Unusual 11. Chairs 12. Cyprus 14. Lemon 17. Togs

## Crossword

Gordius 496



### Across

- Ninety degrees (5,5)
- Topped a cake with sweetness (4)
- African tribe found among urban Turks (5)
- 11 & 18a Smartly uncap a concoction and light this in church (9,4)
- Nuts used to make marzipan (7)
- Keen (5)
- Fruit-filled pie (4)
- See 11 across
- Dish of potatoes and scalions (5)
- Do rehab; upset a Biblical prophetess (7)
- Scope given a solid fuel cooker (5)
- Flower container (4)
- French clergyman (4)
- More recent or modern (5)
- An arid, wild plant in which to repair ships (3,4)
- Planned route and timetable (9)
- A former name of The Democratic Republic of the Congo (5)
- 35 & 16d One may be greeting felons with this dish involving spinach (4,10)
- The capital of New Zealand (10)

### Down

- Bones that form a cage in the body (4)
- These chaps can produce a Lenten gem (9)
- This city is Cornwall's administrative centre (5)
- Pried with the hooter (5)
- Part of a chain (4)
- Discordant sound (5)
- Such a tardy piper will be back from the jaunt by evening (3,7)
- Extend (7)
- Not any (4)
- Bent down, and so opted out (7)
- See 35 across
- Lawless type (9)
- Officially ordered or stated (7)
- Body of soldiers (4)
- Get the water out of western jewellery (5)
- Regal (5)
- Twelve (5)
- Stun (4)
- Blood vessel (4)

## Sudoku Corner

371

Easy

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

Hard

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

## Last week's Easy 370

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

## Last week's Hard 370

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



Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



# The importance of simple signs, symbols and rituals

**AN ASH WEDNESDAY** scene in a home in our parish last week. John, a farmer, comes home after his day's work is done. His daughter Clara is sitting at the kitchen table studying for her Leaving Certificate. John immediately notices that Clara is sporting a very big black cross on her forehead which she informs him, somewhat smugly, she has applied herself. Dad smiles but then notices his wife with no cross visible on her forehead. He enquires as to why his beloved has not followed their daughter's good example? John's wife, Maureen explains that she was waiting for him to come home. She is going to place the cross on his forehead and then he will return the compliment. Before this intimate little ritual they say together the short prayer that came with the bag of ashes which they picked up at the village shop; "May these ashes remind us of God's invitation to us to repent from sin and to follow him".



received the ashes from the local priest. That too would have been an important moment for them and a faith encounter in the company of their neighbours and friends. What happened this year was a more intimate affair and no less a faith encounter. It was also an expression of what Pope Francis loves to talk about, 'the domestic Church'.

I feel I may owe the environmentalists a little apology but there was something of an ash cloud over our parish last Wednesday. Like so many other parishes we were challenged to be creative about how to mark Ash Wednesday this year. A decision was made to put together a little DIY kit for the day or 'a goody bag' as the local radio station called it. We filled 400 bags which each containing a sachet of ashes, a

little bottle of holy water and the previously mentioned prayer card. They were delivered on Monday morning to our two churches, two local shops and the SuperValu supermarket in the town. We asked that people only take one bag per family. By lunchtime most of the 400 bags had gone. The next two days were spent trying to replenish the stocks and in the end we managed 750 bags but that fell way short of demand.

**Normal**

Now what was all that about? In a normal year we might have a few hundred people come to Mass on Ash Wednesday but here we are talking about a few thousand people wanting to mark their foreheads with a cross of ash at the beginning of Lent. Was it simply

that something, anything, was being given out for free? Interestingly, the shopkeepers all told me that most people were looking for the non-existent donation box so they could pay for the bag! Was it the inclusion of the bottle of holy water which I realise many people have not had access to in almost a year?

I really don't know the answer to my questions but the experience has caused me to reflect again on the importance of simple signs, symbols and rituals which have always been central to our Catholic Faith. Is it also too much to suggest that for many people, Faith has become more important during this time of pandemic? Ashes symbolise and remind us of our frailty, vulnerability and mortality. For many of us, the experience of the last year has done the same.

**Double Dutch**

Two Irish sailors were at Mass in Amsterdam. As the Mass was in Dutch they were not sure what was being said so decided on the following plan, that whatever the man in front of them would do they would also do immediately. In this way they hoped to avoid notice. Halfway through the sermon the man in front stood up and the two Irish lads were on their feet straight away. However, there was no one else standing. As a matter of fact everyone else seemed amused or embarrassed by the whole affair. And, so, red faced and embarrassed they crept around to the sacristy afterwards to find out what had gone wrong. "Well", said the priest in broken English. "I announced we were going to have a Baptism and I asked would the father of the child please stand up!"

**A Prayer for Lent**

Truly dust we are, and to dust we shall return;  
And truly yours we are, and to you we shall return.  
Help us to discover you  
In our loneliness and in community,  
In our emptiness and in our fulfilment,  
In our sadness and in our laughter.  
Help us to find you when we ourselves are lost.  
Help us to follow you on the journey to Jerusalem  
To the waving palms of the people's hope,  
To their rejection, to the cross and empty tomb.  
Help us to perceive new growth amid the ashes of the old.  
Help us, carrying your cross, to be signs of your kingdom. AMEN

Jan Sutch Pickard



**Mass**

In any other year, pre-Covid, John and Maureen might have managed to get to Mass on Ash Wednesday but would be unlikely to persuade their teenage daughter to join them. They would have queued up with perhaps a hundred fellow parishioners and



One of the Sisters of Charity and grateful patients at St Vincent Health Centre, north-eastern India.



## YOUR GIFT CAN HELP BRING MEDICINE TO SOME OF INDIA'S POOREST PEOPLE

### Children under the age of five are dying from malnutrition and vitamin deficiency

The pandemic is stretching the already-limited resources of missionaries working with the poor. The Sisters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul write to The Little Way Association from north-eastern India: "Covid means that people are completely depending on the St Vincent Health Centre which we established in 2015 in Darenchigre. Patients are suffering from anaemia, jaundice, typhoid, diarrhoea, malnutrition, calcium and iron deficiency, and many children below the age of five are dying. We are unable to provide better medical care and treatment due to the lack of finance and the other issues like lack of medical equipment and oxygen supply monitors in emergency situations."

**"Please can you help us?"**

The sisters work in one of India's poorest regions, where the people scrape a living from subsistence-agriculture. The health centre was intended just to provide first aid but people from 20 villages have come to use it as their principal medical facility. The sisters urgently ask for funds for vitamins, diagnostic equipment and treatment for those suffering from various dietary deficiencies. The sisters conclude their letter: "We earnestly ask you to participate in this humble effort to offer our medical support to the people in need. With a prayer that God will bless all your endeavours and bring to fruition all your charitable works."

**Your donation to the Little Way Association's fund for the sick, hungry and deprived will go, without deduction, to help hard-pressed establishments such as the St Vincent Health Centre.**



"Do not fear. If you are faithful in pleasing Jesus in little things, He will be obliged to help you in the greater things."

- St Therese

**MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS**

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends for the missions can benefit priests and people, and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

**We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass**

**HELP FEED THE HUNGRY**

Please spare a thought for the thousands who die each year of hunger and disease in mission lands. Your donation will be forwarded to a missionary without deduction.

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:  
€..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**  
€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**  
€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**  
(Please state no. of Masses \_\_\_\_\_)  
€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

To donate online go to  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address