

# The Irish Catholic

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# Minister warns of toll on mental health due to continued ban on public worship

Jason Osborne

The Minister for Mental Health has warned about the negative consequences of prolonged restrictions on Mass and other religious ceremonies.

Minister Mary Butler told *The Irish Catholic* that she is "positive and hopeful for a re-opening of churches [for liturgy] soon."

"I've discussed how important Mass is for the older generation with the Taoiseach...I'm very, very hopeful people will be able to return to church to worship soon," she said.

However, the minister declined to set a deadline of Easter insisting that such a return is contingent on various factors. "It would be remiss of me to say Mass will be back by Easter, as there are three things that have to be satisfied for that to happen". She cited a continued reduction in the level of transmission, the number of hospitalisations and the rollout of the vaccines as factors.

"I am a weekly Mass-goer and I would love to be able to go back to Mass. I know such attendance is a comfort for many people, regardless of their religious ethos," Minister Butler said.

She said that "the churches have been fantastic at keeping people socially distanced". However,

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## Back to school – again!



Smiling faces abound as students return to St Fiacc's National School, Graiguecullen, Co. Carlow for the first time in nearly four months, March 1.

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# Pope will bring a message of hope to Iraq

**E**arly tomorrow morning (Friday), Pope Francis will depart from the Vatican for the 33rd apostolic journey of his pontificate outside of Italy. Iraq will be the 51st country that the Holy Father will have visited since the inauguration of his papacy eight years ago this month.

It is a visit that the Pope has wanted to make for a long time, and one that the people of Iraq – particularly the Christians – have longed for.

The Pope's visit will come as the realisation of a dream of his predecessor, Pope St John Paul II. The Polish Pontiff had planned to travel to Iraq at the end of 1999. That trip never took place because Saddam Hussein decided to postpone it, after months of negotiations.

**“Many Iraqi Christians have been martyred, many others have been driven from their ancient homeland”**

I worked in Rome in the early 2000s when the Vatican tried hard to prevent the US-led invasion of Iraq, urging a peaceful solution. John Paul II had insisted: “No to war! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity.” He even dispatched two papal legates, one to Washington and



## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Volunteers secure a placard on a pole along a street in Qaraqosh, Iraq this week. Photo: Thair al-Sudani

another to Baghdad to try to ease tensions.

His work was in vain, and US troops invaded Iraq on March 13, 2003 unleashing a horrendous war and stoking sectarian tensions that had long bubbled under the surface.

Everything that the Pope and Catholic leaders in Iraq warned about came to pass. The Christian population before the US invasion was 1.5 million, today there are fewer than 400,000 Christians in the land of Abraham.

### Martyred

Many Iraqi Christians have been martyred, many others have been driven from their ancient homeland. They have paid a heavy price for holding their ancient faith.

Pope Francis is going there first and foremost as an exercise of his Petrine ministry to confirm the faith of the beleaguered Christian community. When Jesus re-asserted St Peter's primacy on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he instructed him: “Feed my lambs...look after my sheep”. Francis comes to Iraq as the chief shepherd of the universal Church to comfort a community that has suffered and continues to suffer for faithfulness to Christ.

Please God, the papal visit will highlight the plight of the Christian community in Iraq and further underline the bonds of our common humanity that unite the followers of the three great Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

As Catholics in Ireland, Iraq

seems so far away and the Christians there so different from us. And yet, we are part of the same family united in Christ under the leadership of the Successor of St Peter. This visit should serve to focus our minds as individual Catholics and parish communities on the needs of the Church universal. Iraqi Catholics need our prayerful solidarity, but they also need to know that we care about them and their wellbeing. It is important that we keep our politicians aware of the suffering they endure, but also the hope they have to be part of rebuilding a better Iraq with their Islamic compatriots.

Francis will be keen to emphasise bridge-building with the Muslim world and to focus on what unites rather than what divides. If he is successful in this, he will leave Iraq a better country that he finds it. My prayers will be with Pope Francis as he undertakes this arduous pilgrimage of hope.

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## Fishing community ‘horrified’ at possibility of fleets being decommissioned

**Ruadhán Jones**

Communities fear the “devastation of rural Ireland”, as the Government has announced a fishing taskforce with decommissioning of fleets on the agenda, according to a Donegal-based priest.

Fr John Joe Duffy told *The Irish Catholic* that his local community of Creeslough, Donegal, are “horrified” at

the prospect of their ships being decommissioned.

“They’re horrified to think that a decommissioning could take place, because we have spent years building up a modern fishing fleet,” Fr Duffy said. “They’re horrified by what’s happened and the amount of fish that’s been given away and they’re horrified to think that this could be the death knell of what is left of the Irish fleet.”

A Seafood Sector Taskforce is being established by the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in light of cuts following the Brexit fisheries deal. The taskforce will submit two reports, with an eye to recommending voluntary tie-up schemes and the decommissioning of boats.

Fr Duffy warns that such an approach would have a “devastating effect” on rural communities.

“It’s the devastation of rural Ireland,” he said. “We have the Government talking about development of rural Ireland and policies, but we first must begin to sustain what we have.”

## Fresh push for return to Mass

**» Continued from Page 1**

Minister Butler warned that: “The challenge is people meeting before and after Mass.

“The movement of people is what we’re concerned with,” she said.

Meanwhile, *The Irish Catholic* understands that Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin was amongst religious leaders who met with Government officials late last week to press the case for restrictions around worship to be relaxed in line with the continuing fall in cases in the Republic and a promised acceleration of the vaccine rollout.

This newspaper understands that Dr Farrell expressed concern about

how early restrictions on public worship take effect in the current Government plan on living with Covid-19.

A source familiar with the online meeting with officials in the Department of the Taoiseach said that the archbishop pressed the case for a more generous approach to public worship as restrictions are eased and asked that a ban on public Mass not be imposed so early in the plan.

Currently, the roadmap outlines that public worship only be permitted under level one and level two. However, an exception was made permitting Mass under level three in December.

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**ENDING  
EXTREME POVERTY  
WHATEVER  
IT TAKES**



# A mix of 'trepidation and excitement' as schools reopen

Ruadhán Jones

Primary and secondary schools partially reopened on Monday, with staff and students feeling a mix of "trepidation and excitement" at the return.

"The mood among the principals is that, while there is a little bit of trepidation, there's also a desire to get schools open and to get classes in and by teachers to get back to face-face learning," said Seamus Mulconry, secretary

general of the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association.

"Principals, boards of management and teachers have really been putting their shoulders to the wheel," Mr Mulconry told *The Irish Catholic*.

Two principals of primary schools in Meath said they are "glad to be back", although there is still a little apprehension.

Ms Ciara Gleeson, principal at Rathregan NS, said it was "great to see everyone and get back to a sense of normality".

"A lot of the students were nervous they'd been gone so long," Ms Gleeson said. "But kids are just so adaptable as well."

Ms Ailish McKeown, principal at Kilskyre NS, compared the return to coming back after the summer holidays, saying that children are excited to be back, "but the staff are a little more apprehensive".

"We're definitely glad to be back, it's just not as picture perfect as is being painted in the media," Ms McKeown said. "The fact is that we just have juniors, seniors, first and second class

back. It's kind of eerie too."

But she added that after they're "back three or four days" everyone will settle in: "I won't say we're jumping out of our socks, but we'll get on with it," she said.

The president of the Catholic Secondary School Parents Association, Mr Sean O'Riordan, said parents are "relieved" at the return "of some bit of normality".

"However," he continued, "I'm aware that the whole situation hasn't been explained fully to parents, which is a worrying part."

## NBA player credits pro-success to his faith



Staff reporter

22-year-old Desmond Bane's recent success in being drafted to the pro-basketball league can be attributed to his faith, according to Mr Bane himself.

"It serves as my backbone when things are going great and not going great," he said. "You always have it to lean on. I wouldn't be where I am without it," Mr Bane said in a recent interview with *Catholic News Service*.

Mr Bane was recently picked up by the

Memphis Grizzlies following success on the college basketball stage.

The principal of his former school, Seton Catholic High School, John Markward has described how Mr Bane lives his faith.

"I am truly amazed by Desmond's faith and passion. When he is in town, you will always see him at church," said Mr Markward.

"He is not afraid to post something about God on social media, and he praises God for his blessings. In today's society, there are many people that would shy away from this for fear of being viewed differently."

## Barristers slam Govt handling of lockdown laws

Jason Osborne

It would be "an abdication of duty" if the bishops continued to defer to a Government that does not understand the importance of the sacraments, writes well-known barrister and columnist Maria Steen in this week's *The Irish Catholic*.

Writing about the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report which said the way laws have been instituted and communicated during lockdown raises "significant human rights and equality concerns," Mrs Steen said the bishops have to choose whether to continue complying with the Government on public worship.

"Only the bishops have the power to make the sacraments available to the people. So the question is: how will our bishops respond? If it

is not unlawful for Masses to be held, the decision to hold them belongs in Church law to the bishops," she wrote.

Meanwhile, Clare TD Michael McNamara expressed concern about the "democratic oversight" around lockdown laws, saying to this paper, "the Minister [for Health] has pretty much a free hand to bring in regulations".

While this is subject to the Constitution, "it's arguable whether even the Constitution has been adhered to in some of the regulations brought in," he said.

"The committee that I chaired did attempt to provide some oversight and look at the impact on rights. Unfortunately, we couldn't do as much of that as I would have liked."

*See pages 6-7.*

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**The Irish Catholic**



# Ireland must 'take a stand' against abuse of Uyghurs in China – prelate

Chai Brady

Irish people should write to their TDs and push for Ireland to stand with the Uyghur Muslim minority in China who may be facing "the worst single abuse of human rights in the world right now", according to the bishop of the Diocese of Raphoe.

Bishop Alan McGuckian told *The Irish Catholic* that as more countries conclude that the Uyghurs are facing a genocide the Irish Government must speak out and demand answers.

"It's recognised from so many different sides that the position of the Uyghurs is potentially one of

genocide and it may be the worst single abuse of human rights in the world right now," he said.

"I don't know why exactly there's silence from Ireland but there shouldn't be, this is too serious. If this kind of thing was being visited upon Irish people either in Ireland or in a community in some other part of the world, we would be hoping that others would speak up."

There have been a huge number of reports from media and human rights groups alleging systematic rape, arbitrary detention, forced sterilisation of women, forced labour and restrictions on freedom of religion of the mostly Muslim Uyghur population in the north-western region of Xinjiang.

## Detained

It is believed China has detained more than a million Uyghurs over the past few years in what the state defines as 're-education camps'.

Bishop McGuckian said: "We said after the Holocaust 'never

again' and we have to mean that. The Chinese say that there's nothing unusual happening there, well if that is the case, I think there are so many people with questions that they have to be asked, to show us, to give us documentary evidence that it is not as bad as we fear because the fear is that it is unbelievably bad and the world should be asking questions and that means Ireland should be asking questions too, I don't know why we're not but we should."

"When we use the word genocide... that a community is running the risk of simply being wiped out, that cannot be allowed to pass unremarked and people should write to their TDs, Ireland should take a stand, it is a terrible thing. There are many situations of injustice and human rights violation in the world, many people now believe what is happening to the Uyghurs is beyond almost any other one that we see right now and it should be named and called out."

Parliamentary motions have passed in Canada and the Netherlands recognising China's treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority as genocide, with other countries tabling similar motions at the time this paper went to print. Both the former and current US administrations have said they believe genocide has been committed.

## Concerned

Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney said in the Dáil on January 28 that Ireland "remains deeply concerned" about the Uyghurs and reported abuses but said Ireland only recognises genocide when established by an international court or where there is "international consensus".

He added that both Ireland and the EU take the issue "extremely seriously" and have been "raising our concerns" with Chinese authorities "bilaterally and in multilateral fora".

## Malawi 'hopeful' as Covid vaccines arrive, says Malawi-based Irish bishop

Ruadhán Jones

After overcoming a spike in cases in January, Malawi is "hopeful" of continued improvement as vaccines start to arrive, says Bishop John Ryan of Mzuzu Diocese.

Bishop Ryan, a St Patrick's Missionary, has been bishop in Mzuzu since 2016 and told *The Irish Catholic* that the situation there "is not as bad as in Europe".

"You go down town, it's the same as normal nearly," the bishop said. "The more you go into the rural areas, the more normal. For some strange reason, we don't really know why, we've been spared the worst of it."

The country is to receive its first doses of the vaccine next week and Bishop Ryan says that the people of Mzuzu are "hopeful".

"I think there's efforts to try to get the developing world up to speed with the vaccines," Rev Ryan said. "I think everyone recognises the importance of the vaccine reaching all corners."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Knights launch essay competition

Since 2014, the Knights of St Columbanus has organised a public speaking competition for second-level students. This year, due to schools' closure, the decision has been made, using 'public speaking topics', to organise an all-Ireland essay competition.

By way of supporting religious education and literary endeavour, the knights invite senior cycle students (TY, 5th and 6th-year students in the Republic and Years 12, 13 and 14 in the North) in all secondary and post-primary schools throughout the island of Ireland to participate in a unique essay competition.

Prizes for the top three essays from each school will be awarded as follows: first prize €50, second prize €30 and third prize €20. In addition, all-Ireland prizes will apply: €250 for first, €150 for second and third €50.

The length is at the discretion of each student's religious education or other supporting teacher but must be a minimum of 750 words and not exceed 2,000 words. The essay must be submitted as an A4 Word document via email to Mr Seamus McDonald spsc2015@gmail.com – further information is available from Mr McDonald.

### Synod discussions on cards as bishops' meet next week

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference will be discussing how to bring Pope Francis' vision of synodality to Ireland's Church in their spring meeting next week.

A subcommittee of six bishops has been working towards holding a synod in the near future and the issue will be discussed by the whole conference with a statement expected following their meeting.

Bishop Alan McGuckian of Raphoe diocese told this paper: "Pope Francis is calling the Church to synodality and we have been talking in the last months about how we will approach that in Ireland. Synodality begins in parishes and in dioceses and eventually synodality at a national Church level and we're working on it."

## ACP tensions run high over Easter Mass stance

Jason Osborne

The ACP has come under fire from within after issuing a statement expressing concern about calls for a return to Mass for Easter.

The statement read, "The ACP is concerned about calls for an Easter return to community worship," which raised questions from one of the priests in the comments.

Fr Padraig McCarthy agreed with the commendation of archbishops for seeking to "engage political leadership about public worship," but took issue with the ACP's concern over an Easter return to worship.

"Rather, the ACP leadership team is concerned, but there is no procedure for consultation of all ACP members. It might imply that there was simply a call by the archbishops for return to

community worship, without qualification. This is not the case," Fr McCarthy wrote in response.

"ACP members may have a variety of views on this. I have misgivings about this statement, since it seems to imply that there are no circumstances in which re-opening churches for Easter ceremonies would not be premature and potentially detrimental," he said.

Fr McCarthy said he wrote this as a 77-year-old priest "who has had non-Covid health concerns for most of the past year".

The topic of reopening the churches for public worship is an issue which needs to be examined "in the light of changing circumstances," and that it would be unwise to rule out the possibility of a reopening, he wrote.

## Jesuits urge victims to come forward

The Irish Jesuits this week made public the name of a former teacher and priest who abused boys while he was on the teaching staff of Dublin's Belvedere College in the 1970s.

In a statement, the Irish Province said the decision to name Joseph Marmion SJ "is being taken following engagement with a former pupil who was himself abused, in the hope that others who may have suffered would come forward and get the support they may need".

The Jesuits said that Fr Marmion – who was a teacher in Belvedere from 1969 until 1978 and died in 2000 – "abused boys sexually, emotionally and physically".

Fr Leonard Moloney SJ, Provincial of the Order, has met personally with this man. Fr Moloney said: "In our communications, he made it clear to me that he was concerned for others who may also have suffered and that they should be proactively offered a response and support.

"This man also conveyed to me that he believed others who were abused may be helped by the recognition that they too were dreadfully harmed. He asked that we name his abuser, Joseph Marmion SJ, publicly and that we make this information widely available in order to reach as many former students as possible," Fr Moloney said.

He said that the Jesuits have been in contact over many years with others who were abused by Joseph Marmion while they were young students.

Fr Moloney said: "We have in the past apologised and invited victims and survivors of abuse by members of the society to come forward and to seek help. We do so again today. These efforts must always be continuous".

Anyone who wishes to make direct contact with the Jesuit Safeguarding Office should call safeguarding delegate, Saoirse Fox on 089 2644400 email safeguarding@jesuitlink.ie

## Sanctifying the streets



Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan of Waterford and Lismore displays the Blessed Sacrament after Sunday Mass in Waterford City, February 28.



# When banks were community treasures

**W**hen my brother James went to work in a bank, he was first sent to Oldcastle, Co. Meath. In those days – this was back in the 1950s – the Hibernian Bank was regarded as ‘the Catholic bank’, especially in counties nearing the border, while the Ulster Bank was regarded as ‘the Protestant bank’.

## Farmers

James was surprised to discover, however, that so many of the local Protestant farmers kept their funds in the Hibernian, while a goodly number of the Catholic farmers did business at the Ulster Bank. He soon figured out that the shrewd farming folk thought their financial affairs would remain more private if sequestered in a bank associated



**Mary Kenny**

with a different Christian denomination from their own kinfolk. There’d be less likelihood of loose talk around the golf links on the lines of “You’d be surprised how much old O’Reilly has on deposit”. Perish the thought that a banker would ever be indiscreet enough to drop such a hint, but the suspicion might have been there.

In any case, bank relations were cordial, even if competitive. On one St Patrick’s Day, the Ulster Bank ran the tricolour up the flagpole, and the Hibernian had to, somewhat hurriedly, match their rivals. But the Ulster Bank then produced

a trump: they then ran the Papal flag up the flagpole, a masterstroke which the Hibernian found itself unable to match.

## Community

These were the days when banks, and bankers, were respected and indeed trusted elements of the community, notwithstanding some of the farmers’ concerns for financial secrecy. My brother found himself, eventually, in Dublin’s College Green where he became a secular pastor, with a line of people always waiting to talk to him about their woes, financial and otherwise, and he gave

them his time, and his best counsel.

**“88 branches of the Bank of Ireland alone, from Tullow to Cootehill, from Kilkee to Youghal, from Bundoran to Oughterard, from Kiltimagh to Kinnegad”**

There were many bank officials, and bank managers, like him: helpful, kind, approachable, and giving good advice about money-related issues. I myself had a very supportive bank manager, Colette O’Neill at AIB, who sorted me out so constructively with the mess I had got myself into over credit and store cards (at

one stage I had twelve – all accruing interest).

But it’s goodbye to all that, now, as bank branches all over Ireland close down: 88 branches of the Bank of Ireland alone, from Tullow to Cootehill, from Kilkee to Youghal, from Bundoran to Oughterard, from Kiltimagh to Kinnegad. AIB is also combining some of its branches and the Ulster Bank is to withdraw entirely from the south from next year.

Apart from the vexation – and even danger – to

traders who will need to travel long distances to lodge cash, there is a huge loss of the human dimension and the need for people to talk to people, face to face, to seek advice, assistance and expertise from those with whom their earnings have been entrusted. Computerised transactions can never, ever replace that human touch, let alone the presence on so many main streets of what was once a service to the community.

● Jonathan Roche of the University of Nottingham has discovered that a Welsh Catholic spy, Hugh Owen, played a leading role in sending at least one Spanish Armada to Elizabethan England. The historian has found Mr Owen’s reports in the Spanish archives: the Welshman was assisted by a double agent working for the Earl of Essex and a network which included several Jesuits.

Mr Owen’s motive was to bring England back to Catholicism, and the information sent to Spain led to the deployment of the third Spanish Armada of 1597. If it hadn’t been for a storm off the Scilly Isles, Spain might have conquered. One of the great ‘ifs’ of history!



Electronic banking is handy, but no substitute for face-to-face contact.

## The spiritual wealth of secular France

France, as we know, is most insistent on being a secular republic – religious images or statues are forbidden on state or municipal property. And yet, France is proud of its Catholic heritage, in cathedrals, saints, abbeys and monasteries. I saw a wonderful programme on French television last Sunday about the

extraordinary spiritual wealth of the monasteries, identifying most especially Mont St Michel and Cluny. And identifying most especially, too, St Bernard of Clairvaux, who started the Cistercian order, and whose preaching and eloquent writing inspired so many young men to commit to the monastic life.

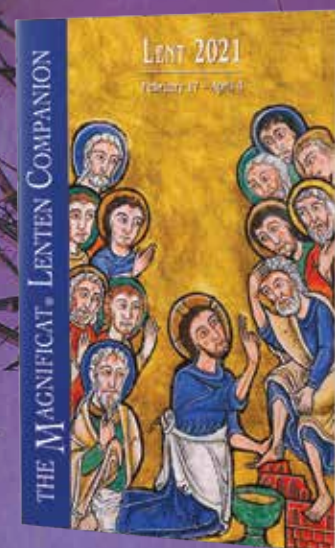
Bernard, who died in 1153, was known for his austerities, so he is particularly suited to being a Lenten saint. He is also the focus of many great paintings, including works by Pier Francesco Foschi and Filippino Leppi, both now in Florence. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione’s The Crucified Christ embraces St

Bernard hangs in a church in Genoa.

Bernard’s name in origin means ‘strong bear’ which made me wonder if the gentle, bear-like canine breed is named after him, but it seems the St Bernard dog is named after the St Bernard pass between Switzerland and Italy.

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# It would be an abdication of duty for bishops does not understand the true importance of



## Maria Steen The View

**S**chools move back into operation this week, with over 300,000 four to seven-year-olds returning to the classroom. This is an age-group notorious for its inability to sit still, take instructions consistently, and with a developmental need for touch. Yet we adults — with a greater ability to take instructions, follow rules, and observe social distance — are still prevented from practising our religion and receiving the sacraments.

### Public religious

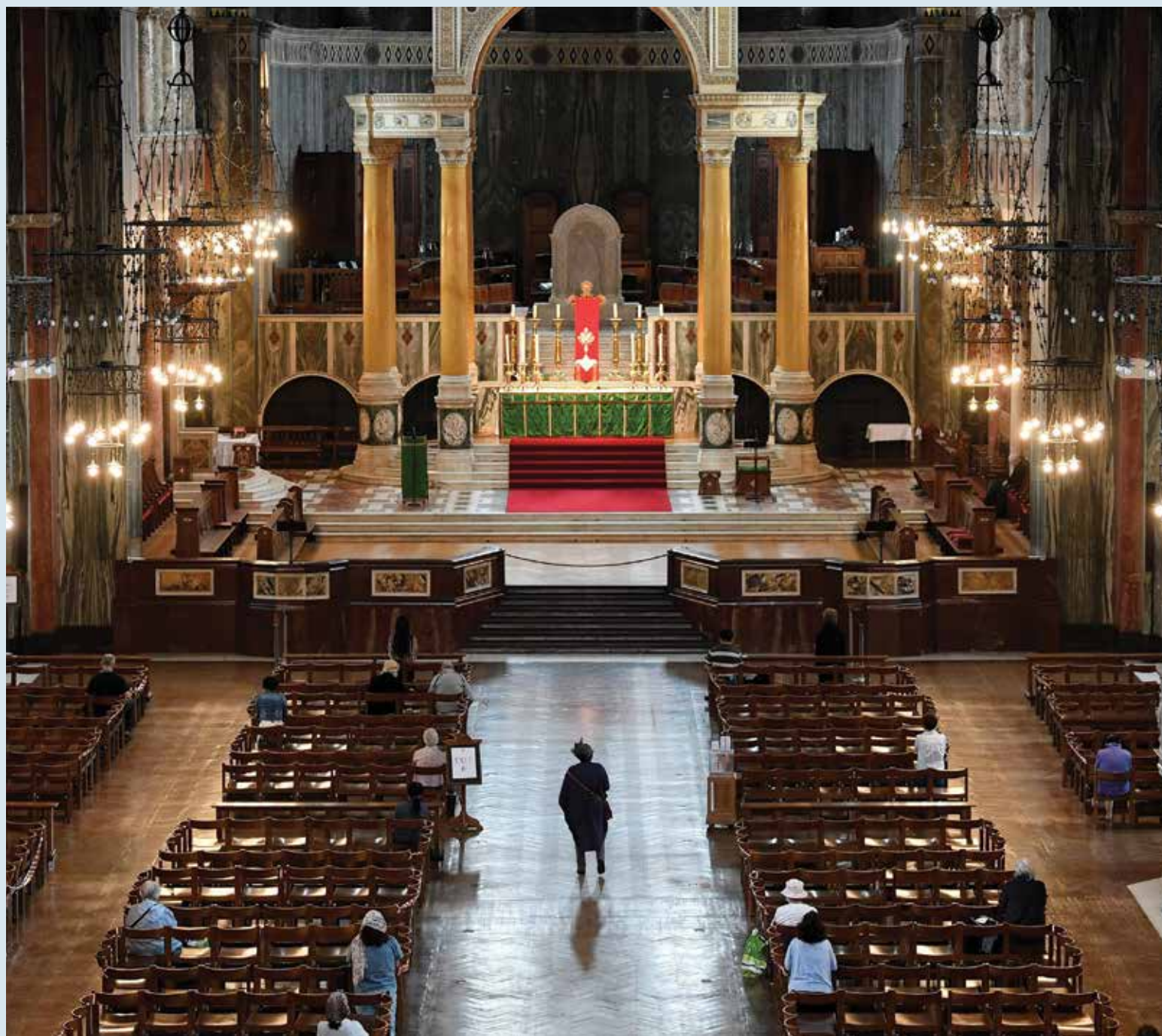
The limitations on the fundamental right of public religious practice have been in place now for a year, with no end in sight.

Is it only anti-lockdown extremists and those who have no concern for the common good who want a return to the sacraments? One might be forgiven for thinking so if one were to rely on mainstream media outlets for information. Last week however, others came forward.

**“It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the delegation of legislative power to the Minister for Health has resulted in a black hole for the consideration of human rights and equality concerns”**

The first was someone who has seen the worst of the virus, but who acknowledges how essential the Mass is. Deacon Don Devaney, organiser of the immensely popular and successful annual Divine Mercy Conference, had himself been seriously ill with Covid-19, to the point of being admitted to intensive care and ventilated for weeks. Yet he recognises the efforts made by parish teams across the country to keep churches safe for the Faithful, and has made a heartfelt call for a return to Mass in this newspaper.

The second expression of concern came from an unexpected



A priest blesses a woman during Mass at Our Lady & St Catherine of Siena Church in London. Ireland is one of only two countries in Europe where public worship has been banned. Photo: Marcin Mazur

source. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) published a report entitled *Ireland's Emergency Powers During the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Echoing the feelings of religious people all around the country, the IHREC report states rather starkly: “It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the delegation of legislative power to the Minister for Health has resulted in a black hole for the consideration of human rights and equality concerns.”

### Deliberations

The report is critical of the interaction between NPHET and the Government in approving policy direction and legislation. These deliberations should allow for consideration of human rights and equality issues, but they are being taken by people who have neither the expertise nor the insight into the needs of disad-

vantaged groups, and who lack any democratic accountability or public scrutiny. The report states that this is a “significant defect” in Ireland’s Covid-19 response and that it breaches international norms relating to the rule of law.

**“It allows governmental control of citizens without having to go through the normal channels of law-making”**

The IHREC makes the point that laws should be published in advance, be clear and be non-contradictory. It highlights three areas where the Government has offended against these principles. First, regulations have frequently not been published before coming into force. Second, Government

statements have been misleading as to what the law requires. Third, official Government statements have tended to blur the lines between what is law and what is mere advice.

With regard to misleading descriptions, when the Government says something is law — or allows the media to present something as law — when in fact it is not, there is an unwarranted interference with the principle of the rule of law. It allows governmental control of citizens without having to go through the normal channels of law-making. As the report says, “Away from the challenges by the politically powerful or well resourced, the Government is quite prepared to allow ordinary people believe they are subject to much greater restrictions than is in fact the case.” The report says that a charitable interpretation of the Government’s response is

that it is “wilfully indifferent” as to whether the public or gardaí understand the law. The less charitable interpretation is that “the Government has deliberately encouraged citizens to misunderstand the extent of their legal obligations in order to allow the Government to achieve policy goals that might not achieve political support in the Oireachtas or that could be vulnerable to legal challenge.”

### Restrictions

To give one example, there is constant talk from Government, Garda and media sources about the ‘5km travel restrictions’. In law, however, the restriction to five kilometres only applies to exercise and recreation, not to any other activity. People are free — by law — to travel outside the 5km zone for any reasonable excuse other than exercise, yet many



# to defer to a Government that the Church's sacraments

believe — and have been allowed to believe — it is unlawful to travel more than 5km from home for any reason.

Another example of a misleading description of the law — where Government again allowed the line to be blurred between what is law and what is advice — dates back to September and October 2020, under level three restrictions. While people milled around shopping centres in their thousands, and gyms and swimming pools were open for training, Catholics were forbidden from attending Mass in cavernous churches, even in groups of 50.

However, the law — at that point — did not outlaw the Mass, or priests from saying Mass, or people attending Mass. (Regulations were later brought in that did criminalise people who attended Mass or other sacraments.) Yet Government relied on the trite statement, expressed in the imperative, “religious services move online”, to severely limit our religious freedoms.

**“On the one hand, the Department of Health in its official statements insisted (correctly) that there was no legal prohibition on holding religious services”**

As a matter of law, the Government's command to close church doors to public services was advisory only. The bishops would have been totally within their rights to say to the Government: we hear what you say, but we are confident that the environment we can provide to the Faithful is as safe as possible (and safer than most other environments), and we are going to resume Masses, albeit at a lower capacity. Instead, while we were able to shop and socialise, we could not receive the sacraments, and most believed it was unlawful to do so.

## Highlights

The IHREC highlights the duplicitous approach of the State well. When subsequent regulations were introduced making it a criminal offence to leave one's home without a “reasonable excuse”, and attending Mass was not listed as such an excuse, “On the one hand, the Department of Health in its official statements insisted (correctly) that there was no legal prohibition on holding religious services. On the other hand, the Gardaí threatened clerics with prosecution for holding religious services.”

The Taoiseach has said that the current lockdown is tentatively due to end on April 5, the day after Easter Sunday, although the regulations actually run out on March 5. It is likely that the Government will revert to the pattern of last year, and move to stepped-down restrictions. My bet is that they will say “religious services continue online”, but without the force of law. Their statement, in that case, would



**“But it is clear to every Catholic on the ground that we have no friends in Government, and not a few members are virulently anti-Catholic”**

be advisory only, and so would not include the threat of penalty. Ordinary Catholics are, however, powerless in the face of such a situation. Only the bishops have the power to make the sacraments available to the people. So the question is: how will our bishops respond? If it is not unlawful for Masses to be held, the decision to hold them belongs in Church law to the bishops. This is their privilege but also their responsibility. It would be an abdication of duty simply to defer to the advice of a Government that cannot and does not understand or accept the true importance of the sacraments, regarding them — like gyms and concerts — as something that a

subset of the population find beneficial to their “mental health”.

Until now, the bishops have pursued a diplomatic approach with Government, requesting meetings and engaging in talks. But it is clear to every Catholic on the ground that we have no friends in Government, and not a few members are virulently anti-Catholic. Will the bishops stand up to the Taoiseach? Will they be a voice for those with no power or resources to challenge Government, but a need for the Eucharist? Will they render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's? Or will we endure another Easter, Pentecost and Corpus Christi without the sacraments?

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# Hope springs in NI as 500,000 vaccine mark surpassed

Jason Osborne

Hope is in the air in the North as the 500,000<sup>th</sup> vaccine was administered late last week, priests have said.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, a number of priests told of the “cautious optimism” that is returning to their socially-distanced parishioners, an optimism that has been buoyed by the recent good weather.

“Because we are open for private prayer, I would be meeting some people coming into the church. Two things I’ve noticed is the impact on mental health in this more recent

lockdown has been much more dramatic and widespread. But those who have received the vaccine have unanimously talked to me about how relieved they felt and how much optimism it gave them,” said Fr Timothy Bartlett of St Mary’s parish in Belfast.

“And that is helping a more general mood of optimism, that the pace of vaccination is so successful.”

Echoing this sentiment was Fr Aloysius Lumala of Ballymena Kirkinriola parish, who said “there is a sense of hope” and that the “light is now at the end of the tunnel”.

Speaking to his parishioners, he said they’re

feeling more “confident” now and that while they won’t be out meeting and mixing just yet, they’re grateful of the extra protection the jab offers.

“There is a positive response to my knowledge. That people really are turning out and embracing the vaccinations, and that’s bringing great, great hope for the people and it’s really going to lift their spirits,” he said.

Fr Martin Graham of St Peter’s Cathedral in Belfast said there’s a sense, particularly among the elderly, that “they’re finally going to be almost released from the prison of their own home.”

Fr Bartlett expressed the hope that parishioners might be back in the pews sooner rather than later, without compromising on the health guidance.

“I think the critical difference in the North has been that the government here has respected the very mature and responsible approach of churches in the North... Given the importance of the right to religious freedom, but also the contribution the churches make to the wellbeing and mental health of people, churches here I would expect to be in the first wave of relaxation.”

## EU must respect ‘rule of law’ over Poland abortion ruling, says bishop

Ruadhán Jones

An EU Parliament resolution on Poland’s recent constitutional ban on abortions “exceeds the confidences conferred on it by the member states”, said Bishop Noel Treanor.

The Down and Connor bishop, who is vice-president of the EU bishops conference, COMECE, was a signatory on a letter from the bishops to the EU criticising the resolution.

While endorsing the EU Parliament’s emphasis on respect for the rule of law, COMECE stressed that “the rule of law also requires respect for the competences of the Member States and the choices made by them”.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bishop Treanor said that it is vital that in “promoting and espousing the rule of law, the EU actually applies it within the workings of its own institutions”.

“There are matters which are of EU competence and there are matters which are of member-state competence,” Dr Treanor said. “The powers that the member states have conferred on the EU over the years are limited, they are agreed, they are enshrined in the treaties.”

“If the EU is to be consistent of course in promoting the rule of law, obviously its own institutions must abide by its own treaties.”

## Hasbro’s Mr Potato Head receives gender-neutral rebranding

Staff reporter

The beloved Mr Potato Head toy brand is set to become ‘Potato Head’ in a move which sees the brand “reimagined for the modern consumer”.

Announced late last week, the company was quick to clarify that both the Mr and Mrs Potato Head characters would still be available to buy.

“Hasbro is making sure all feel welcome in the Potato Head world by officially dropping the Mr from the Mr Potato Head brand name and logo to promote gender equality and inclusion,” Hasbro said of the brand’s

name change.

Responding to the move, Dr Thomas Finigan of Mary Immaculate College said that the shift in the toy’s branding represents “clearly, gender ideology – which sees gender as totally divorceable from biological sex and merely a matter of choice,” and is likely to shape children’s understanding of who they are.

“It’s very likely that a widespread move towards gender ideology will cause unnecessary confusion in children and unnecessary anxiety in parents, to the detriment of both,” he said.

## Lifting up the soul with song



Singers Lillie and Jean Foley, pianist Noel O’Sullivan and violinist Olwyn Trant perform a virtual concert at St Mary’s Cathedral, Killarney, watched by 4,000 people, February 24.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Survey released to help plan Rally for Life 2021

The pro-life group The Life Institute is looking for feedback regarding the annual Rally For Life this coming July to help in the planning process.

The event is normally centred around a major pro-life march on the first Saturday of July but the rally has now grown into a pro-life festival. In 2020, due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was decided the Rally For Life events would be held online. The online rally attracted 40,000 live views and

reached 400,000 people online over the summer. The Life Institute said: “We would greatly appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to fill out our survey... and give us your thoughts on what you enjoyed about last year’s rally, and what you would like to see this year, helping us to make rally 2021 a big success.” The survey can be filled out by the following online link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Rally-forLifeFeedback>

### School and parish links to be examined in Clogher talk

Following the Diocese of Clogher’s first online talk for Lent last week (on baptism and parish ministry) the series continues next week on the theme ‘Reimagining the links between school and parish’.

The speaker will be Dr Gareth Byrne of Dublin City University who has been engaged in teacher education for 25 years, specialising in second-level and primary religious education as well as Catholic education more generally. The

virtual talk takes place on Wednesday, March 10 at 7.30pm and can be accessed via the diocesan website: [www.clogherdiocese.ie](http://www.clogherdiocese.ie), or the diocesan Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/dioce-seofclogher](https://www.facebook.com/dioce-seofclogher)

The online event (including a period of prayer and an opportunity for general discussion) will last approximately 40 minutes and no booking is necessary.

A third talk is scheduled for Wednesday 24 March (Feast of St Macartan).



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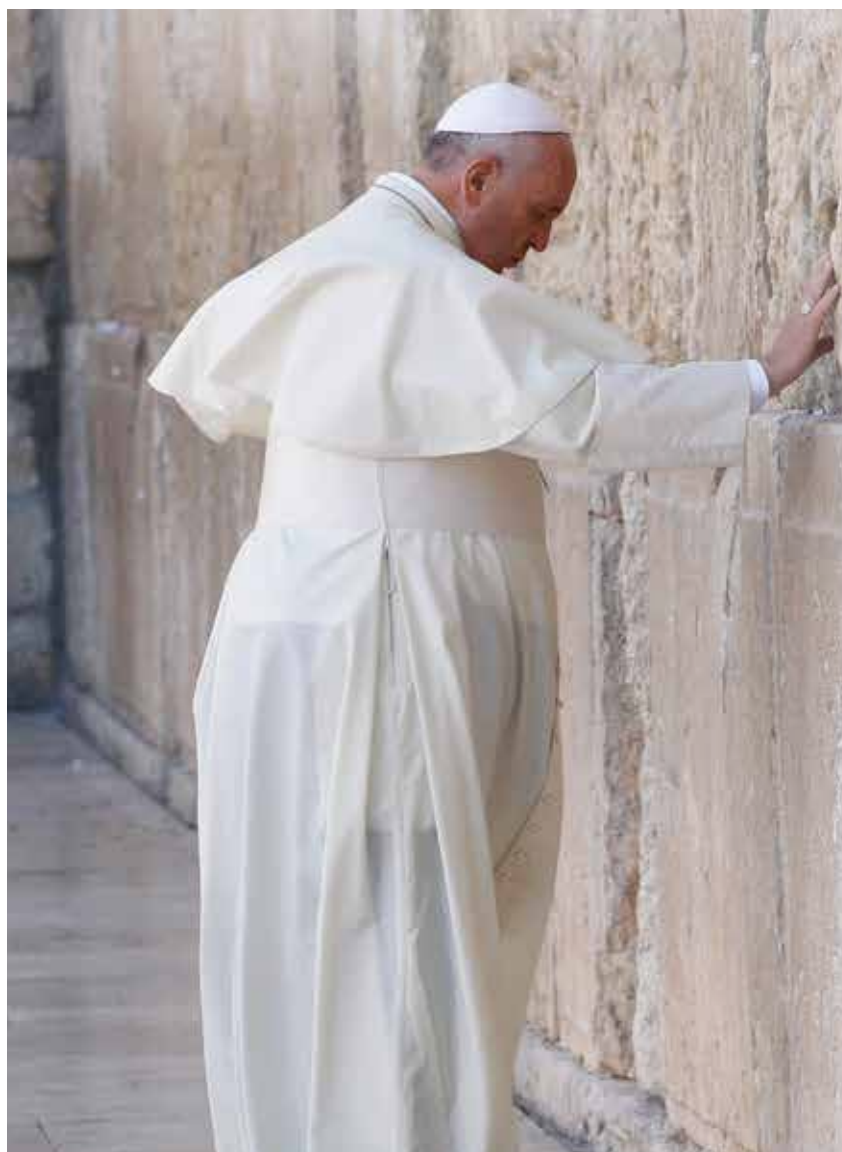
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# A time of cleansing



Pope Francis prays at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2014. The wall was originally erected as part of the expansion of the Temple as Jesus would've known it begun by Herod the Great. Photo: CNS

**T**oday we have John's version of the cleansing of the temple, anticipating the replacement of temple worship by the worship of God through the risen Lord (John 2:13-25).

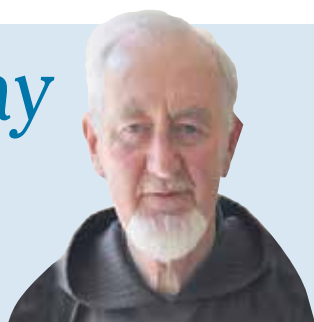
Herod the Great, a man of mixed racial lineage, desiring to ingratiate himself with the Jews decided to build a magnificent temple with a gold-plated dome. The whole complex was more to the glory of Herod than of God. The money for this undertaking was raised by multiple forms of taxation. Foreign coins bearing image of a pagan ruler were not allowed. The sacred area had become a money-changer's bureau, a mart and huge abattoir where thousands of lambs were sacrificed. You can imagine the bleating of sheep, the squawking of birds, the hustling of people and the heavy smell of offal and blood. It was everything but a place of prayer.

## My Father's house

When Jesus, at the age of 12, came to the temple with his parents, he was seriously disillusioned by what he saw. He informed Mary and Joseph that one day he would transform his Father's house. When his time came, he made a whip of cord to drive out the animals, and overturned the money-changers' tables. Realistically, it is unlikely that his little whip made any huge clearance, but it was a symbolic gesture passing judgement on a religious system which had lost its way and its right to survive. Challenged by the authorities about what he had done, Jesus answered, "Destroy this sanctuary,

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester  
O'Flynn OFM Cap.



and in three days I will raise it up". This enigmatic answer would not be understood until after the resurrection of Jesus three days after the destruction of his mortal body. There would be no further need for lambs to be sacrificed because, as John the Baptist recognised, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He died at the very time when the lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. Three days later, in rising from the dead a new way to God was opened.

## Worship in spirit and in truth

Jesus explained to the woman at the well in Samaria that true worship would not be conditional on the correct place but would be "in spirit and in truth". At the last supper Jesus established a new liturgy. The risen Lord would be the new temple of divine

worship. "Do this in memory of me". True worship is in the liturgical memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord. "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Through Jesus as the mediator with God: with him since he is united with us in our humanity: and in him as parts of the body of which he is the head. Obviously, this worship is what we recognise as the celebration of the Eucharist.

## Cleansing of the Church

St Paul identified the Christian community, the Church, as a new temple. "Do you not recognise that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

The self-destructive process which infected the old temple system represents a tendency which can recur in any religious institution. It applies to the Church. There is an old saying that the

Church must be ever reforming. Just as Jesus saw that many of the temple regulations needed cleansing, the Church is in constant need of self-examination.

In a famous Christmas address to members of the Roman Curia, Pope Francis highlighted clericalism as one form of sickness. After years of evasion in the matter of sexual abuse by Church personnel, it was eventually recognised that clericalism was at the root of the failure to deal with the problem. We are the untouchables, it has nothing to do with civil authorities!

**“You can imagine the bleating of sheep, the squawking of birds, the hustling of people and the heavy smell of offal and blood”**

In any institution, rules or customs which formerly expressed something of value may now be counter-productive. You are either open to change or you die. Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*, "In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine, and for the Church's prestige, but without concern

that the Gospel has a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time". A Church unwilling to change becomes a museum of dead fossils instead of a Spirit-filled home of evangelisation.

## After the pandemic

There are strong signs that the Covid-19 pandemic will be controlled. Please God we will soon see a return to normality. But since all of us have changed somewhat in mind and spirit, the new normal will not be the same as before the pandemic.

Will the great neighbourly support continue? Can you think of any way you are a better person because of the lockdown?

How many will return to Mass? It is likely that many for whom weekend Mass was a dull routine will not return. On the other hand, there may be others who had become careless about Mass, might appreciate what they have missed and now will return.

Where do you stand? Do you miss Mass? Do you like the streamed Mass on television?

Do you miss receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, or was this a sort of routine which really did not mean a lot? Have you replaced going to the local church by more prayer at home?

## Prayer

O God, you make all things new. May the Holy Spirit who transformed the apostles at Pentecost, continue to refresh the Church and the face of the earth in a new Pentecost.

**“How many will return to Mass? It is likely that many for whom weekend Mass was a dull routine will not return”**



# D-Day looms for Vatican relations with China



The human rights abuses of the communist regime are becoming worse by the day, writes **David Quinn**

**W**hen Irish people pay attention to what is happening overseas, it is mainly what is happening in Britain and America that occupies our minds. That's understandable, because so many Irish live in those countries and Britain is our closest neighbour.

We pay some attention to what is happening in the Middle East, especially when it involves Israel, and occasionally to what is taking place in parts of South America.

The reason Israel draws the attention is because we see it as a Western power in that part of the world, and the South American countries are closely connected with Europe because of immigration patterns down the centuries. In addition, many Irish missionaries have worked in South and Central America.

**“The Catholic Church makes the Chinese state especially wary because it is both a ‘foreign import’”**

But a country we should pay far more attention to is China. It is now the second most powerful country in the world, after the US, and it looks set to pass out the US in due course.

## Relationship

We must think about what our relationship with China should be. At present that relationship is totally dominated by trade considerations to the almost total exclusion of human rights concerns.

The Communist Party of China (CCP) celebrates the centenary of its founding in July. Last year, it marked the seventieth anniversary of its seizure of power and victory in the Chinese civil war.

Since then, it has carried out some of the worst crimes in history, on a par with those of Stalin and Hitler. Tens of millions of people have died as a direct or indirect result of CCP policies.

It has always been repressive of religion. During the worst of times, it has killed or imprisoned believers.



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

At other times, it has been content ‘merely’ to keep religion under control.

Even before the communist takeover in 1949 and the ascension to power of Mao Zedong, the Chinese State has typically regarded religion as a threat to its authority. In Chinese history, rebellions against the ruling dynasty have often had a religious inspiration.

One in the late 18th century had its roots in Buddhism. A massive one in the middle part of the 19th century – the Taiping rebellion – had a vaguely Christian inspiration. That rebellion was the second bloodiest war in history. At least 20 million people died in it.

Buddhism and Christianity in China are, in a sense, ‘foreign imports’. Chinese emperors for the most part did not want Christian missionaries in China at all, but in the 19th Century were forced to admit them at gunpoint by Western powers.

The Catholic Church makes the Chinese state especially wary because it is both a ‘foreign import’ and its leader, the Pope, is far away in Rome and not answerable to the state.

## Response

The response of the Chinese Communist Party to this was eventually to establish a sort of rival Church in China called the Chinese Patriotic Association (CPA) whose bishops were approved by Beijing, while the legitimate Catholic Church, in communion with Rome, called ‘the

**“During the worst of times, it has killed or imprisoned believers. At other times, it has been content ‘merely’ to keep religion under control”**

underground Church’ was often savagely persecuted.

In 2018, the Vatican and Beijing decided to try and resolve the situation. To cut a long story short, the Pope recognised seven bishops of the CPA thereby bringing them into communion with Rome, and from here on in, both Rome and Beijing would oversee the appointment of bishops.

## Agreement

The agreement has never been published. It was renewed last year over the strong opposition of Chinese Catholics associated with the underground Church, led by Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong, who is a ferocious critic of Beijing and the Chinese Communist Party.

He believes the Vatican has struck a deal with the devil, on a par with the concordat it signed with Nazi Germany in 1933, which Rome came to regret as the true nature of the Nazi regime became ever more apparent.

In 1937, Pope Pius XI had the encyclical letter, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, (With Burning Concern) smuggled into Germany condemning Nazism. The Nazis in the meantime had broken the agreement with the Vatican.

Pius wrote that the Church had

reached the agreement “in spite of many serious misgivings” and in the hope it might “safeguard the liberty of the Church in her mission of salvation in Germany”.

The Vatican’s deal with China (which is less than a concordat) seems to have a similar motivation. Its compromise with Beijing is motivated by a wish to protect Catholics in China from further persecution.

**“We pay some attention to what is happening in the Middle East, especially when it involves Israel”**

There are two very big problems with this strategy, however. One is that Beijing already appears to have breached its side of the agreement. According to reports, a document from the Chinese State bureaucracy references the appointment of new bishops but excludes the Vatican from the process totally.

A litmus test will be what happens in Hong Kong. It currently has no sitting bishop. This hugely concerns Cardinal Zen, the former bishop of the diocese. He thinks Beijing will appoint

a puppet. If it does so, how will the Pope respond? Will he push back, or might he agree to the appointment of a Beijing puppet to the diocese so long as it is done jointly with the Vatican?

## Abuses

The second big problem with the Vatican’s policy is that the human rights abuses being carried out by the Chinese Communist Party are becoming worse and worse. It has recently crushed democracy in Hong Kong. It is cracking down ever harder on religious freedom. It has locked up an estimated one million Muslims in concentration camps in the west of the country.

The Vatican has so far barely referenced any of this for fear of worsening relations with Beijing and because it might also worsen the position of Catholics in China.

But there comes a point at which the evil deeds of a regime have to be condemned and a realisation must dawn that the other party to an agreement is acting in bad faith.

The day may yet arrive when either Pope Francis or his successor will issue a modern-day version of *Mit Brennender Sorge*, this time about the awful, modern-day crimes of the regime in Beijing.



# A great mind whose abilities were at the service of his heart



A giant of Irish intellectual life, Fr Enda McDonagh is warmly remembered by many as a man of great generosity, writes **Jason Osborne**

**T**ributes have poured in for “towering intellect”, Fr Enda McDonagh, with President Higgins saying he “will be missed by so many for a multitude of good reasons.”

## Intellectual life

Fr McDonagh was a priest of the archdiocese of Tuam but is best remembered for his contribution to Ireland’s intellectual life. In possession of a Doctorate of Divinity and a Doctorate in Canon Law, Fr McDonagh was uniquely placed to inspire the minds placed under his charge, from his appointment to his position as Professor of Moral Theology and Canon Law at Maynooth University in 1958 at the age of 28 until his retirement in 1995.

**“He brought the same perspective to the role he supported for women as equals in participation in Church and society”**

Saying he was honoured to be included among Fr McDonagh’s friends, the president acknowledged Fr McDonagh’s intellectual legacy, saying his “approach to philosophy, combined with a great personal capacity to communicate, meant that he was always in demand where conflicts had sown divisions, as someone who could transcend reductive binaries”.

“May I just say that his sensitivity to the poor at home and abroad meant that he could see the significance of the work of the Liberation

Theology Movement as not only emancipatory, but also as a walking in the spirit of Christ with the excluded, the oppressed, and the unjustly treated. He brought the same perspective to the role he supported for women as equals in participation in Church and society.

“His, I recall so well, was the generous spirit that so many turned to, again and again, on public campaigns, when denunciations were so often more forthcoming than support, be it in relation to the ending of Apartheid, women’s rights, Travellers’ rights. He was always there to listen and support.”

Fr McDonagh’s relationship with the presidential office was cemented following his service as official chaplain to former president Mary Robinson while she was president from 1990-1997.

**“His fresh language, poetic vision, and the unexpected twists as he played on words kept his hearers in suspense”**

The president recalled his ecumenism, an openness which was remarked by Archbishop Michael Neary in his homily for Fr McDonagh’s funeral Mass, saying he was a man who “opened the door” for friends, strangers and countless seminarians, to “experience the excitement that is the quest for faith seeking understanding”.

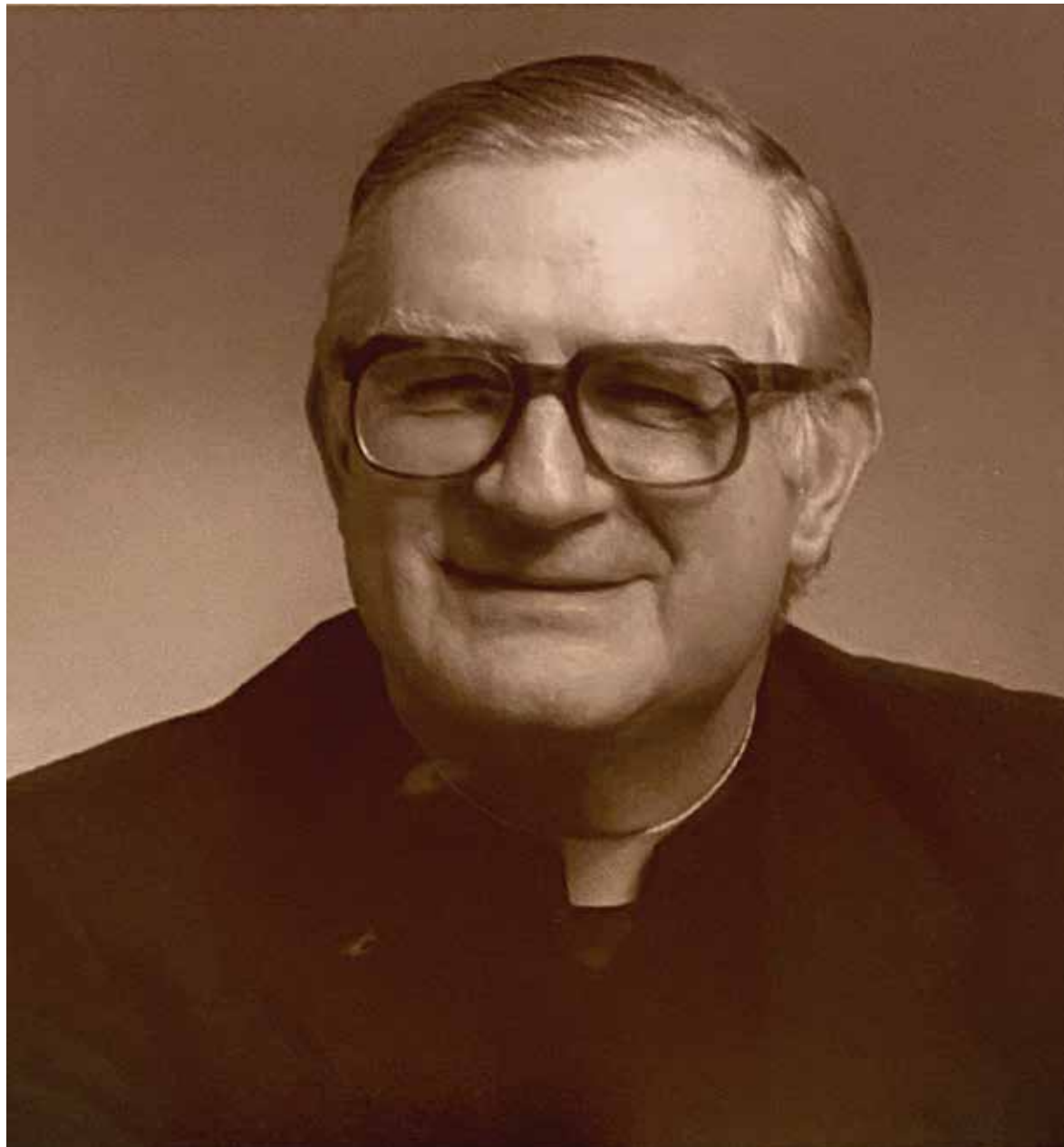
Celebrated in the College Chapel in Maynooth, Archbishop Neary spoke of the “rightly fitting” nature of the proceedings, saying for “the man who had such an appreciation for the arts – poetry, paintings, the theatre, opera, the very beauty of this sacred place must have lifted his heart and mind towards Beauty Itself every time he prayed here”.

“And although he had many opportunities to live and teach elsewhere, he declined them all in favour of his beloved Maynooth,” Dr Neary said.

## Warm-hearted

He described Fr McDonagh as “unassuming, warm-hearted, welcoming of people and ideas” and “blessed with a gentle and at times mischievous sense of humour.” He also spoke of Fr McDonagh as a “colossus on the Irish theological landscape”.

“In today’s society where the presence of the Church may be resented, Enda’s prophetic voice was respected. He recognised the influence of the media in society, understood the media, and used the language which media understood,” Archbishop Neary said.



**“Aware of paradoxes and contradictions, conscious of the potential for good, grieved by human insensitivity, but always alive to the grace of God, this was the man, the theologian and the priest”**

“A masterful weaver of words, with Enda, the Word continued to become flesh whether in hospital wards, in boardrooms, broken homes, or breaking hearts – all those situations derived hope when Enda spoke. Aware of paradoxes and contradictions, conscious of the potential for good, grieved by human insensitivity, but always alive to the grace of God, this was the man, the theologian and the priest. His fresh language, poetic vision, and the unexpected twists as he played on words kept his hearers in suspense.”

In the statement issued upon hearing of Fr McDonagh’s death, Archbishop Neary also said:

“Father Enda was known and respected by people of all theological hues and none, and because of the way he wore his learning so lightly, and because of his genuine humility and personal warmth,

people felt comfortable in his presence, and enriched by the encounter. While he had well thought-out opinions of his own, he was always utterly respectful of those who had different and sincerely held opinions, and his good-humoured and personable manner always saw to it that nobody felt belittled in a discussion or debate.

## Gospel

“While the Archdiocese of Tuam was always proud of the fact that he was a priest of this diocese, he was at home in every diocese because of the simple fact that he taught generations of Irish priests, most of whom served in Ireland, some of whom brought the Gospel to the very ends of the world.”

Archbishop Eamon Martin echoed the condolences, tweeting “Rest in peace, Fr Enda McDonagh. God

comfort his family, colleagues and many friends throughout Ireland.”

Archbishop Michael Jackson of the Church of Ireland also paid tribute to the priest-theologian, saying his was “a household name” in Irish religious life.

“Those of us who now take for granted a whole range of human rights and shared ecumenical opportunities are indebted to this soft spoken and fiercely argued man of God and man of ideas – but also man of justice – for the lifting up into the public consciousness of so much that is good and needful,” Archbishop Jackson said.

He continued by saying he had the privilege of knowing him and came away “enriched and humbled” every time he met him.

“He is sorely missed and greatly appreciated. May he rest in peace”, Archbishop Jackson concluded.



# Finally disposing of direct provision



Welcome plans to scrap the 'undignified' direct provision system will be challenging, writes **Chai Brady**

**M**any priests and religious have been doing their best to help integrate asylum seekers into communities as well as support them through advocacy, particularly by calling for an end to the direct provision system, but with a housing crisis and the financial devastation wrought by the pandemic there will have to be a priority given by society to help some of the most vulnerable according to the bishop of Achonry.

Ending direct provision has been a call made by groups across Ireland's political and charitable sectors but for two decades pushes to overhaul the system seem to have fallen on deaf ears, until recently. Now that a White Paper on the system was published last week, it is anticipated that all existing Direct Provision centres will close by the end of 2024.

Before Bishop Paul Dempsey was ordained bishop of the Diocese of Achonry, he was the parish priest in Newbridge. There was a direct provision centre there of which he was involved.

**“Bishop Dempsey said that ‘there will be huge challenges’ in making the plans a reality”**

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* about the centre, he said: “Obviously it certainly was far from ideal, the conditions that people had to live in there were very cramped and I would consider them very undignified, but there were wonderful people who had come from so many difficult situations and literally had to flee their home countries.”

## Difficulty

“I think part of the difficulty of direct provision would have been the whole issue of red tape, people trying to go through a very long arduous process to try and get some form of permission here to live and to work in Ireland and the amount of red tape that they had to go through was very tiring so hopefully that will be tackled as well.”

The bishop welcomed the new plans, which will see a bigger push for integration and improved living standards, which he described as a “great process”.



Noel Selorm from Ghana, who was staying in the Baleskin Reception Centre for asylum seekers, leads a group of Sanctuary Runners across the Samuel Beckett Bridge in Dublin in January 2020.

“I would have made the statement that obviously we know that the mother and baby homes report was produced there recently, obviously we’re talking about a different time but we were talking about the very undignified way women and children were treated but I would have made the point that maybe in today’s society there are situations where women and children and men are treated in a very undignified manner,” he said.

“Unfortunately, we can’t do much about the past but we can do something about the present and it was certainly an area that’s glaring in our society, that we need to reach out and help these people who have come from very traumatic situations in a lot of instances. It’s great to see, well after about 20 years of calls on this system to be improved, that at least there are some moves to see drastic improvements in this area now.”

## Slow

Bishop Dempsey added that “it has been very slow” but “I think it’s important that we acknowledge that something positive is happening”.

The Government’s White Paper proposes a two-phase approach, with the first taking four months. Asylum seekers will spend that time in reception and integration centres. These six centres will be owned by the State and operated by not-for-profit organisations.

From the day they arrive they will be helped with their integration into Ireland via health, housing, education, and employment supports. Assessments will be carried out to determine accommodation and service needs

and help define suitable supported pathways for the most vulnerable.

## Assessment

A health assessment will be provided for all new international protection applicants in this phase and there will be a particular focus on the needs of children who come to Ireland with their families. Applicants will be entitled to seek paid work after six months, be able to open a bank account and apply for an Irish driver’s license.

Following phase one, applicants will be offered accommodation through a number of strands in phase two. Asylum seekers who are still being processed after four months will be moved to accommodation in the community.

The White Paper states this will be own-door or own-room accommodation, for which they will pay a means-tested rent. For families, all accommodation will be own-door, self-contained houses or apartments while single people will be housed in either own-door or own-room accommodation.

These accommodations are expected to be built or acquired through approved housing bodies or similar organisations.

Bishop Dempsey said that “there will be huge challenges” in making the plans a reality.

“I would imagine too in light of the Covid-19 situation and the many billions that are being spent to try and support people who have lost their livelihoods in so many areas of our country that obviously in the coming years the whole financial situation of

the country is going to be very, very challenging,” he said.

“But I think maybe that challenge is also as a society too, to say ‘well where are our priorities?’ Because it’s not just about providing physical homes for people it’s about welcoming people into communities and making sure that they feel welcome and it’s our attitude towards people that is so important as well – that it’s a homely attitude that we have in welcoming these people to our society.”

**“I think part of the difficulty of direct provision would have been the whole issue of red tape”**

“I think that’s really important and to keep that in mind as well, but no doubt there will be financial challenges around this but as the old saying goes, where there’s a will there’s a way, and I think if the will is here to help these people and to welcome these people from these very difficult situations then I think we should invest in that and it’s very well worthwhile investing in it and very important that we do.”

The Minister for Children Roderic O’Gorman, whose department prepared the plans, said they estimate the current cost per year will be €175m across all departments. They have also set out a range of capital costings over the lifetime of the new system of between €440m and €670m.

Measures are expected to be put in place to avoid local dissatisfaction

with the location of the Reception and Integration Centres or community accommodation, according to the minister.

## Housing crisis

Regarding Ireland’s current housing crisis – January 2021 figures show a rise in the number of people who are homeless to 8,313 – Bishop Dempsey said it’s something “we’re going to have to look at urgently in society”.

“You know in recent years we’ve seen some horrific programmes – say [RTÉ’s] *Primetime* programmes – the way some people are corralled into horrific housing situations, on top of one another in the most undignified fashion,” he said, “when you think about it from our own history as an Irish people, emigration was very much part of our history, so many of our people certainly in the 1950s and the maybe the 1980s in particular had to emigrate to the likes of the United States or England, Australia.”

“But many of our people certainly in the 1950s had to live in horrendous conditions themselves maybe in the likes of London, in very lonely and difficult situations, so we’ve been there ourselves, maybe it’s time now that we reach out and learn from our own history to welcome people and to invest in dignified housing for all of our people, not just the people who have come into the country but for our own citizens as well who are here.”

“It’s a basic human right that we have a decent shelter over our heads and maybe the whole Covid situation will help us to reflect on what are our basic human rights, what is really important in life and surely to goodness a bit of dignified living conditions would be very, very important for anybody in our country, our own citizens and those that we welcome who have come from very difficult situations in other parts of the world.”

**“From the day they arrive they will be helped with their integration into Ireland via health, housing, education, and employment supports”**





# ‘Fanatical friends’ are still angry with me says frail Benedict XVI

Pope Francis and new cardinals meet retired Pope Benedict XVI at the retired Pope's residence November 28, 2020. Photos: CNS



The retired Pontiff is keen to burst conspiracy theories, writes **Michael Kelly**

**A** little over eight years ago, Benedict XVI stunned the world by announcing that he would resign as Pope. In so doing he became first man to renounce the papacy on his own initiative since Celestine V in 1294.

Now, in a new interview the Pope emeritus has shed fresh light on the decision and insisted to Catholics who grumble about his successor Francis that “there is only one Pope”.

## Anniversary

Sunday marked the eighth anniversary of Benedict's resignation taking effect rendering the See of St Peter vacant and setting in motion the process that would elect the Argentine Pontiff.

“It was a difficult decision,” Benedict told *Corriere della Sera*, an Italian newspaper.

“I took it in full consciousness, and I think I did well. Some of my slightly ‘fanatical’ friends are still angry, they did not want to accept my choice.”

“I think of the conspiracy theories that followed it: There were those who said it was the fault of the Vatileaks scandal, some of a conspiracy by the ‘gay lobby’, some because of the conservative Lefebvrian theologian Richard Williamson.

**“The retired Pope – who turns 94 next month – insisted during the interview ‘There are not two Popes. There is only one’”**

“They [his slightly ‘fanatical’ friends] don’t want to believe in a conscious choice. But my conscience is fine,” he said.

The Vatileaks scandal refers to the leak of confidential documents leaked by the Pope’s butler exposing corruption, bribes and power struggles to try to prevent Benedict’s efforts to implement greater financial transparency. The documents leaked included



White smoke billows from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel March 13, 2013, at the Vatican. Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, was elected the 266th Roman Catholic pontiff.

an anonymous letter warning of a death threat against Benedict.

## Lobby

The so-called ‘gay lobby’, the existence of which Pope Francis acknowledged during a 2013 press conference on board the papal plane on the way back from his trip to Brazil, has long been the rumoured cause for the German

Pontiff’s resignation. In the days leading to his February 11 surprise announcement, Italian media carried several unsourced reports of gay Vatican clergy working together to advance their personal interests and leaving the Holy See vulnerable to blackmail.

Lastly, the Bishop Williamson matter involved the scandal of Benedict ‘rehabilitating’

four bishops who had been ordained in 1988 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, founder of the traditionalist Society of Pius X, for which they incurred automatic excommunication. The Pontiff in 2009 decided to lift those excommunications, and soon after the scandal broke: Bishop Williamson had appeared on a pre-recorded television interview





Pope Benedict XVI walks away after his final public appearance as pope at Castel Gandolfo, Italy, February 28, 2013.

## “The mind remains clear, quick as the eyes, alert and lively,’ writes the journalist who met with the Pope emeritus”

denying the Holocaust, a crime punishable with up to five years in Germany. The canonical sanctions on the men were reinstated, and Benedict publicly apologised for what happened.

### Conversation

The newspaper reported that Benedict's voice is “thin as a breath,” and during some sections of the conversation, almost soundless. His personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein was also present at the interview, and in some rare passages repeats and “translates” while Benedict nods in approval.

“The mind remains clear, quick as the eyes, alert and lively,” writes the journalist who met with the Pope emeritus.

“The white hair is slightly long, under the papal skullcap as white as his robe. Two very thin wrists emerge from his sleeves, highlighting an image of great physical fragility...[he] wears a watch on his left wrist and on his right a strange contraption that looks like another watch but is actually an alarm ready to go off if

something happens to him.”

The retired Pope – who turns 94 next month – insisted during the interview “There are not two Popes. There is only one”.

He also reflected on Pope Francis' upcoming trip to Iraq with the newspaper reporting that “his expression becomes serious, worried”.

“I think it is a very important visit,” he said. “Unfortunately, it comes at a very difficult time that makes it a dangerous trip for security reasons and because of Covid”.

“I will accompany Francis with my prayers,” the retired Pope said.

The newspaper also asked Benedict about US President Joe Biden.

“It's true, he is a practicing Catholic, and personally against abortion,” the retired Pope said.

“But as president, he tends to present himself in continuity with the platform of the Democratic Party. And on gender policy, we still don't have a clear idea of his position,” Benedict said.

*Additional reporting by Cindy Wooden*



Pope Benedict XVI reads his resignation in Latin during a meeting of cardinals at the Vatican.



# Statue to Irish 'Rosary Priest' Fr Peyton unveiled in Massachusetts

**H**oly Cross family ministries, founded by Irish priest Venerable Patrick Peyton, have welcomed the installation of a handcrafted, Italian sculpture in the likeness of Fr Peyton outside the Fr Peyton Centre in North Easton, Massachusetts.

Fr Willy Raymond, president of Holy Cross Family Ministry, welcomed the arrival of the Irish-born 'Rosary Priest's' statue, blessing it during a ceremony on January 9, 2021.

It stands over 8 feet tall and was created by a team of sculptors under the supervision of Reto Demetz of Demetz Art Studio in Ortisei, Italy, and was then cast in bronze by Mazzolini Artcraft Co. in Verona, Italy.

Fr Peyton, who was named Venerable in 2017, was famous for his Family Rosary Campaign, a worldwide movement which encouraged families to pray the rosary.

The Co. Mayo priest popularised the phrase "the family who prays together, stays together".

The statue travelled from Italy to a Mazzolini facility in Cleveland then arrived in North Easton January 9.



Fr Peyton's statue is installed, January 9, 2021. Photos: CNS.



Fr Willy Raymond blesses the statue following its installation.



Fr Willy Raymond, president of Holy Cross Family Ministries, welcomes the arrival of a handcrafted Italian sculpture of Fr Patrick Peyton at the Fr Peyton Centre in North Easton, Massachusetts.



A worker prepares the base for the installation of Fr Peyton's statue.



# Remembering a heroic Wexford priest 150 years on



Fr Peter Whelan's compelling story of war-time ministry in the US is worth remembering, writes **Chai Brady**

**I**t takes a brave man to remain a prisoner of war in order to continue ministering to defeated soldiers despite being offered freedom, but that, among many other selfless things, was what Fr Peter Whelan did during the American Civil War.

Born in 1802 in Foulkesmills, Co. Wexford, Fr Whelan acted as a chaplain to both Confederate and Union soldiers during the civil war. He previously served as a missionary in North Carolina and pastor of Georgia's first Catholic parish, and twice served as administrator of the entire diocese of Savannah.

Peter Whelan (69) died on February 6, 1871 and precisely 150 years later, last month, a substantial crowd gathered around his tombstone in the Catholic Cemetery in the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia to recall and honour his exceptional career.

## Life

Little is known of his early life prior to his attending Birchfield College in Kilkenny, where he received an education in the classics and mathematics before deciding to emigrate to America hearing God's call in an appeal for priests to support the new Archdiocese of Charleston where he was ordained in 1830.

**“About a year after his release in a prisoner exchange, he was assigned to minister to the Union prisoners-of-war held at Andersonville”**

Over the next 30 years Fr Whelan was a tireless shepherd of a flock which continued to grow exponentially, particularly due to the Great Famine which saw Ireland's population drop by more than a quarter due to starvation, disease and emigration.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the Director of Irish Research and Teach-



With the US, Irish, and Wexford county flags behind him, Msgr William Oliver O'Neill delivers his address at the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Fr Peter Whelan at the Catholic Cemetery in Savannah, Georgia.

ing at Georgia Southern University, Dr Howard Keeley, said he personally became interested in the priest due to research he was conducting.

“My students and I were researching the strong links, forged in the mid-19th Century, between County Wexford and Savannah, due to a direct trade and emigration route between the two places. Numerous compelling stories emerged, including that of Fr Whelan, whose funeral procession was Savannah's largest ever,” Dr Keeley said.

## Memory

Asked why he thought it was important to honour the memory of Fr Whelan in particular, he said: “His humanitarian outreach was exceptional, especially given that it occurred in the context of America's civil war. Not only did he steadfastly minister to the vast numbers of Union troops in the wretched Andersonville prisoner-of-war camp, he continued, after his months there, to help them from his pastoral base in Savannah.”

Fr Whelan initially ministered to Confederate troops, some of which were made up of Irish Catholics. He remained with them during the Union siege of Fort Pulaski and volunteered to remain with them during their imprisonment in New York in 1862 despite being offered his release.

About a year after his release in a prisoner exchange, he was assigned to minister to the Union prisoners-of-war held at Andersonville, Georgia, where he became known as the ‘Angel of Andersonville’.

Fr Whelan was stationed there between mid-June and late September of 1864. Dr Keeley states that under a burning sun, he cared for the Union army inmates, whose numbers exceeded 33,000, even though the place had been designed to accommodate only a third of that quantity.

Fleas and rats proliferated, as did scurvy, diarrhoea, and dysentery. The camp hospital maintained a gangrene ward. One prisoner, a Sergeant David Kennedy, labelled Andersonville a “hell on earth, where it takes

seven occupants to make a shadow”.

Even after concluding his full-time ministry at Andersonville – where he sought to “allay misery” and “gain souls to God” – Fr Whelan remained engaged with the notorious site (officially called Fort Sumter). In January 1865, he travelled from Savannah to Americus, a distance of over 200 miles, to purchase flour with \$16,000 in Confederate currency to provide sustenance for the inmates. The flour was baked into ‘Whelan's bread’.

**“His humanitarian outreach was exceptional, especially given that it occurred in the context of America's civil war”**

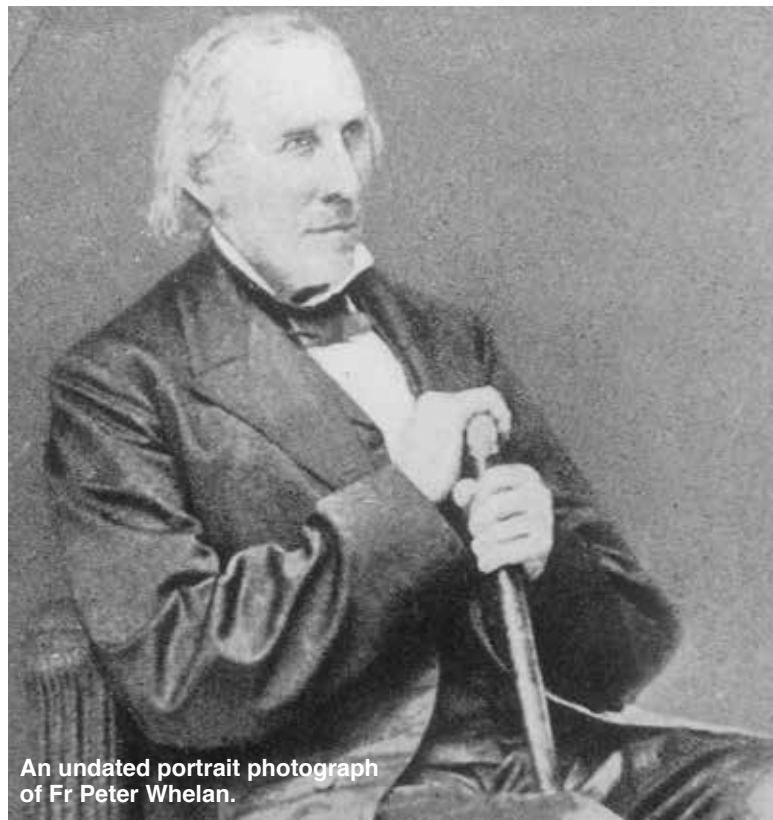
Regarding his work in Andersonville, one prisoner said that “without a doubt he was the means of saving hundreds of lives”. Another described Whelan's ministering to the sick: “All creeds, colour and nationalities were alike to him. He was indeed the Good Samaritan.”

## Returned

After the war, Fr Whelan returned to Savannah as pastor of the new St Patrick's church. He died just a few years later, on February 6, 1871, from a lung disease he is said to have contracted at Andersonville.

Many people in Wexford however, may not know much about his ministry and actions but there are efforts to preserve his memory.

Dr Keeley said: “It's wonderful to know that two memorial plaques were erected to honour Fr Whelan in his home district in south County Wexford. I'm delighted that the people of the Model County have demonstrated such pride in a native son, a figure long and deeply revered in Savannah. In our time, which too often seems riven by political, racial, and economic fissures, Fr Whelan's outreach to all men, regardless of affiliation, constitutes a sterling example of the fact that there is a better way.”



An undated portrait photograph of Fr Peter Whelan.



Members of the Savannah St Patrick's Day Parade Committee at the commemoration for Fr Peter Whelan on February 6, 2020.



A memorial plaque to Fr Peter Whelan, located on the grounds of the Catholic church in Clongeen, Co. Wexford.



Bishop emeritus of the Savannah diocese, John Kevin Boland, Bishop Stephen Parkes of Savannah (right), and the chancellor of the diocese, Fr Pablo Migone attend the commemoration for Fr Peter Whelan.



# A Catholic caught between politics and religion



The gulf between Joe Biden and the US bishops is a symptom of a divided Church, writes Jason Osborne

Plenty has already been said about the fractious state the United States find themselves in; religiously, politically and culturally. It was into this mire that President Joe Biden has waded, himself a flash point in many of the societal wars currently being waged. A divisive figure from the off, President Biden presents himself as a devout Catholic, and yet has been pulled up by many for his perceived failings to not even promote, but defend, Catholicism and Catholic teaching in the public sphere.

## Politics and religion

Hoping to cast a light on a man who has evaded satisfactory analysis so far, historian and theologian Massimo Faggioli has penned a new book, *Joe Biden and Catholicism in the United States*, in an attempt to better help readers understand the president's place at the intersection of politics and religion.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Professor Faggioli explained that the first thing to be noted is the significance of the election of only the second-ever Catholic to the office of US presi-

dent. Personal piety aside, and remaining purely in the realm of sociology, the fact that Mr Biden finds himself in the seat of power of what has historically been a Protestant country is remarkable in and of itself, Dr Faggioli argues.

"It's very important, not just because it happened twice in less than a century, but also because as we know, the United States as a country, as a nation, as an idea, was founded by Protestants," Dr Faggioli said.

## Anti-Catholicism

"For a long time, until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, anti-Catholicism was a really integral part of the culture of the establishment, of the elites, and so we had already a breakthrough with John Kennedy in 1960, but Joe Biden's election means something different because now Catholicism is the single largest Church in the United States. This happens at a particular time in the life of the nation, but also of the Catholic Church."

This signals an enormous shift in the American attitude towards Catholicism, Dr Faggioli says, because for the longest time, Catholicism itself was regarded with a wary suspicion.

"Well, for a long time, beginning with the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Catholicism was considered an alien presence that was incompatible with the American ideals, with American democracy, and with American religion. And so as you know very well, Irish were not consid-

ered compatible for a long time and then Italians and then the Latinos. There's a long history in this tension between the compatibility of the Catholic Church with America," Professor Faggioli said.

Key factors that drove the shift in attitudes towards Catholicism in America included the enormous impact World War II had on American society, particularly the socio-economic changes it brought about. Not only this, but the "sheer growth" of the Catholic community in the country meant that it wouldn't be long before Catholicism would have to be accepted.

**“At the time of John Kennedy, the question was, ‘Are you a Catholic or not?’ if you were running”**

"And so, things start to really change in the 1940s-50s, and it has been a constant growth. In these last 60-70 years, with a big change in these last couple of decades, I would say that there is a bipartition or a polarisation in the Catholic community, which is the fundamental difference between the Catholic Church today and at the time of John Kennedy. At the time of John Kennedy, the question was, 'Are you a Catholic or not?' if you were running. Now the question is, 'What kind of Catholic are you?' It's a whole different situation," Prof. Faggioli explains.

The fragmentation in the Catholic Church in America is a phenomenon that is making itself felt on many levels – not least in the polarised reception President Biden has received since taking to office. Many Catholics argue that if you're going to tout the Faith in the public eye, you should be prepared to walk the walk, while other Catholics hold that Mr Biden's comparable normalcy is to be desired after former-President Trump's time in office.



President Biden's willingness to display his faith in public has rubbed many the wrong way, but the very fact that he's willing to do so marks another change in the Catholic relationship with public office, Prof. Faggioli explains.

## Faith

"John Kennedy basically privatised his Catholicism, but he also privatised many other things of his life, so it was really part of a general persona. Joe Biden's faith has always been a really integral part of his life. It has been cemented in him because of the tragedies he came through, and so he used his faith in a very wise way, especially during the campaign, not to 'play Church', but to be more himself. The only thing he did was not to hide it," he said.

"It was the choice to keep doing what he was doing – going to Mass, having the rosary in his pocket, and so on. That is the first time in American history because all other candidates, I mean, Al Smith in 1928, John Kennedy in 1960, and even John Kerry in 2004. They all chose to make that part of their life private, and so this is something new."

In keeping with the polarised response to Mr Biden, some have expressed delight at such visible displays of faith in the oval office, while others have been critical of the lack of substance to the gestures.

Many commentators have pointed to President Biden's repeal of a ban on federal funds going to international aid groups that perform or otherwise advocate for abortion, the BBC reporting that Mr Biden said the ending of the Mexico City Policy reverses former President Trump's "attack on women's health access". Policy decisions such as these are at odds with Catholic teaching.

**“A further point of contention raised by those who argue Mr Biden's Catholicism is that his emphasis on a specific form of ‘equality’ will see religious freedoms undermined”**

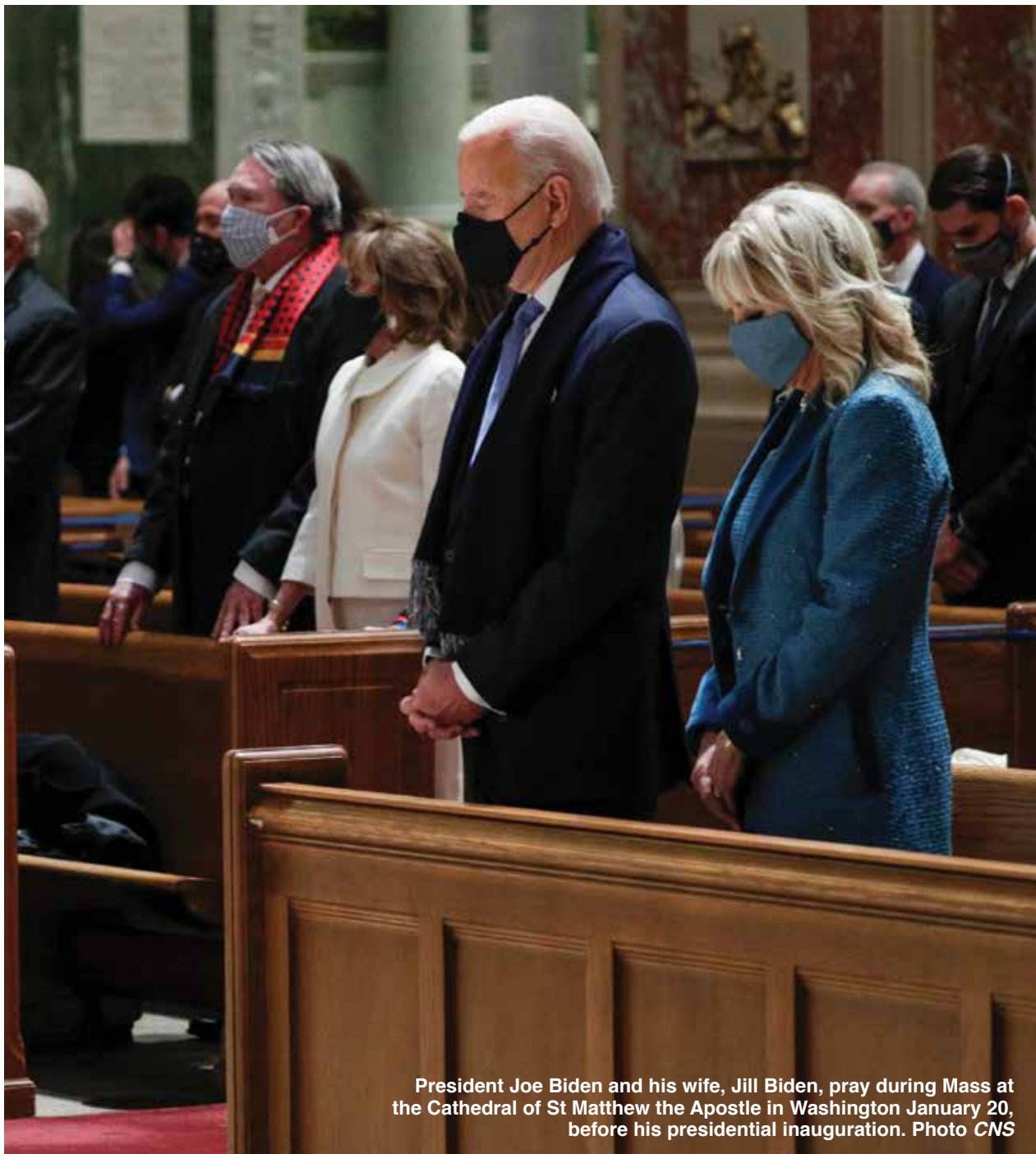
The programme had previously been expanded by then-President Trump, who banned funds from going to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that provide funding for abortion groups.

A further point of contention raised by those who argue



Professor Massimo Faggioli





President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill Biden, pray during Mass at the Cathedral of St Matthew the Apostle in Washington January 20, before his presidential inauguration. Photo CNS

## “Practical examples of how this might play out could see religious hospitals forced to offer gender transition therapies or perform operations to the same effect, thereby violating their religious convictions”

Mr Biden's Catholicism is that his emphasis on a specific form of “equality” will see religious freedoms undermined. These fears are expressed in response to Mr Biden's support for the Equality Act, which would see the 1964 Civil Rights Act expanded to forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

No Catholic would argue against less discrimination, but the concerns expressed say that such an Act would override the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which gives people a way to challenge the government on matters they feel infringe on their religious rights.

Practical examples of how this might play out could see religious hospitals forced to offer gender transition therapies or perform operations to the same effect, thereby violating their religious convictions. Similarly, faith-based adoption agencies could be made to place children entrusted to them with same-sex couples or transgender couples.

### Conscience rights

The chairmen of five US bishops' committees have said that if the act were passed, its mandates will “discriminate against people of faith” by adversely affecting charities and those who avail of them, women's sports, “sex-specific facilities” and conscience rights.

How Mr Biden himself squares stances which are opposed to those the Church takes, Prof. Faggioli says, is that he does so in a way “typical of Catholics in the 20th Century”.

“[He does so] by saying, ‘I personally respect the teaching of the Catholic Church, but as a politician, I cannot impose that,’ which is something that made more sense in the 20th Century. And so right now, it's more difficult honestly to hold that because the Democratic Party has become more radical on life issues and so it's a position that is more difficult to square with the reality of the ideology of the party. So, it's a very difficult balance. This is the single most important choice that a Catholic politician has to make in

the West, so what kind of a position is mine on the abortion issue. But on top of this, there has been in these last few years other issues that are core in the culture war. It's an area which is religious freedom for the Church, LGBT rights, but again, it's emotionally, still the abortion issue is the number one,” Prof. Faggioli says.

### Tensions

As mentioned, the US bishops have been critical of some of President Biden's stances, but that should not come as a surprise when the stony welcome the incoming president received from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is considered. Dr Faggioli explained the tensions the president's faith has exacerbated among the US bishops.

“It has caused tensions because in the campaign and immediately after the election and on inauguration day, the majority of the US bishops, which has one of its members as president of the bishops

conference, has chosen a hard-line on President Biden. They issued a stern statement on January 20, even before the Pope sent his message to Joe Biden. In mid-November, they established a special committee of the USCCB to deal with Joe Biden's position on abortion and his participation in Communion. This group in these last few days has been disbanded, and so nothing will come of that group.

**“We never heard anything from the US bishops saying that you are excluding from the democratic process some that are members of our churches”**

“I mean, the issue is still there, but not the group. But it's a bishops' conference that is clearly divided because the ordinary, the archbishop of Washington D.C. has said repeatedly that he has no intention to use the Eucharist as a weapon to make a case of President Biden. He said that he will raise the issue of abortion but not beginning with a sanction...the USCCB itself is divided on this, quite openly, honestly, because some bishops have in public challenged the wisdom of those steps taken by the president of the USCCB.”

In the same way that Catholics too cosy with President Biden receive criticism, so too has criticism been levelled at the USCCB for those times when members were seen to be too close to the Trump administration. Prof. Faggioli suspects that such criticism was fair.

“I think it is. I think it is unfortunate because it's clear that the duty of the bishops to be, but also to look, non-partisan was not respected. I never expected US bishops to invite Catholics to vote for Joe Biden, but I did expect more balance in terms of criticism of what the Trump administration was doing,” Prof. Faggioli explains, continuing, “I'll give one example, in these last few years, we have seen from the Trump administration repeated attempts to disenfranchise sectors of voting population in many states, simply because they were inclined to vote for the other party. On this, we never heard anything from the US bishops saying that you are excluding from the democratic process some that are members of our churches. We never heard that. And so, there was clearly an attempt to cling to that presidency because of the abortion issue, I believe, in a fundamental blindness of the whole picture of the whole country, so I'm afraid it is a fair criticism.”

Whether Catholicism can have any influence on the way the White House operates, only time will tell. But Dr Faggioli suggests that one thing Catholic bishops and intellectuals can do to sway the behaviour of the Democratic Party is “put some distance between political worldviews and dogmatic, orthodox understanding of things”.

“Now in the west, the only orthodoxy that is very strongly held is political. It is no longer religious or dogmatic. Secondly, I think Catholicism can bring into the national conversation a certain sense of the unity of the people, of the human family. Something typical of Catholicism should be that it's the opposite of the sectarian mentality. It's a country that has become very sectarian, politically, culturally, religiously. These are two things in which Catholics can have a voice, also because this presidency could reignite or start a new conversation that, until Trump was really focused on two camps, and this needs to change.”

Whether or not President Biden is the man to heal the divide between the states remains to be seen, but one relationship Dr Faggioli expects to improve is that between the US and the Vatican, seeing something of a likeness between Pope Francis and Mr Biden.

“Historically, the Vatican always has a very pragmatic approach to every new leader. This is Vatican pragmatism, diplomacy. In this case, there's something different because the Vatican went through a very difficult four years with Donald Trump on many issues and so the election of Joe Biden is taken as a very positive sign with a huge sigh of relief. The environmental issue is the most important that both leaders have talked about,” Prof. Faggioli says.

However, it isn't all going to be smooth sailing, as, with a Latin American Pope, views are expected to diverge on other issues.

“There's one new factor now, compared to the time of John Paul II and Reagan, or Pope Benedict and George Bush, which is that now, the US president is a Catholic, and he's much closer to Pope Francis than the US bishops are to Pope Francis, and so this is really strange, but this is reality.”

With Italy hosting the G20 Summit this coming September, a meeting between the Pope and Mr Biden may happen sooner rather than later, with Dr Faggioli guessing that it's a meeting that both leaders “look very much forward to”.

It's unlikely that President Biden will heal tensions in the rivalling Catholic camps any time soon, but Dr Faggioli sees a way forward: the synodal model.

### A horizon

“I think it (the divide) can be healed if the US Church starts considering the option of a synodal process that need not be exactly like the German one or the Australian one, but something that gives Catholics a horizon, a time frame, to say, ‘Well now there's a moment to take the time to say things and exchange’. This is not here, not at the local level, not at the national level. This is something Pope Francis has asked many Churches to do, including Italy. There's a resistance, but I don't think it's something that can be avoided for much longer, honestly.”

Until that happens, it's likely many Catholics will remain at loggerheads with one another, particularly over Mr Biden himself. One thing all should agree on, however, is to pray for him.



# Praying our troubled world...

We are called to look at our beloved, broken and beautiful earth and see the weeping face of God in it, writes  
**Fr Daniel O'Leary**

**Y**ou are away from your family. Your family is in trouble. You pray for the family. You hope the prayers will work. But you are still anxious. You decide to go back home. You arrive at home. You bring your full attention to the whole situation. You are there in person, with your total concern, your full involvement, your truest self. It is your home, where you began your life's journey. It is where you belong. From within the situation you try to bring about the change you could not achieve from the outside. Beyond all your advice from a foreign shore, all your prayers at a distant shrine, your real presence is the most powerful transforming influence of all. Because then you are inside the situation, your love is released at the heart of your family, and it does its work of healing the home.

## Wounded

I feel it is the same with how we pray for a deeply wounded humanity, a troubled world, a ravaged earth. We are not outsiders looking on, sending transitory good wishes towards less fortunate foreigners in a weeping world. We are not unconnected to those who perish at barricaded borders, with those who are persecuted, tortured, shot for seeking safety in our western countries. They are our family. The mutilated earth is our home, our mother. Our essence has been formed by the energies of the earth. We are, in fact, the very consciousness of the world itself, reflecting back to it its sublime wonder and its ruined beauty. Pope Francis echoes St Francis when he reminds us of these precious truths in his wonderful documents – the *Evangelii Gaudium* letter and the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

We 'pray our troubled world' when we allow our understanding

of it, and our relationship with it, to be transformed; when we identify with it, consciously embracing it as the source of our being. We are now present to people's pain and their cries, to the 'groaning' of the earth itself (St Paul), in a new, deeper and more intimate way. In some mysterious manner we are healing the world when we see it as we see ourselves and those we cherish; when we look with compassion upon it through God's eyes, recognising the divine presence already and always incarnate within it. A central dimension of 'praying our troubled world' is to get to understand more profoundly the mystery of creation and of incarnation. What do I mean by that?

**“The troubled world we pray for is not out there, of course – anymore than God is”**

This calls for a wider world view, an expansion of the horizons of our hearts and minds, the bigger picture, a more inclusive grasp of the mystery. The Christian is becoming re-inspired by a wonderful, recently recovered theology – often referred to as a theology of creation, of 'nature and grace'. Once we acknowledge our flawed understanding of the Adam, Eve and Original Sin story, which from the beginning radically distorts our relationship with the universe, with each other and with God, we then begin to

see all creation and evolution as a divine love-story whose beauty reflects the essence of the Creator. The Incarnation most powerfully reveals this amazing, saving grace. Just as the ever-present Word redeemed the world by becoming the heart of it, so also do we when we see ourselves not just as passing travellers in exile on an alien soil, but as the beating heart of God's incarnate body, the earth itself, and all its citizens who suffer unending torments.

Too many of us say a few passing prayers for the wider, wounded world, contribute our loose change, blame someone or other for the situation, and feel smug about our efforts as dutiful citizens. Such shallow involvement may work wonders for personal ego-health; it does little

for the eco-health of our natural home. We are called to be present to the troubles of the world in a real way. It is God's body; it is our mother, our sister, our brother. Its inhabitants are God's family, our family. Pope Francis writes urgently about a 'conversion' of our souls, a whole transformation of life-style, an ultimate dedication of our energies to saving planet Earth and the poor who cling to it in desperation.

## Prayerful

The Pope believes that the call to a prayerful concern for our troubled world, to a conversion of our lives to save our Mother-Earth, is much more than an added-on obligation. It is a knowing in the heart, a recognising of our wider family of origin and destiny, an

awakening of the divine imagination already within the human psyche. Our hearts, sacred from birth and Baptism, fashioned lovingly in the divine image, somehow sense this astonishing revelation of our intimacy with the earth, and our responsibility for saving her life and the lives of those whose plight is increasingly desperate.

**“In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis sees a silent 'Eastering' at work in the evolution of the planet”**

Our prayers are powerful when they grow from the way we see and understand the mystery of creation and incarnation. The Pope is trying to help us hold the suffering poor in a ravaged world as the greatest concern of God and of us. He wants us to live and love and serve in that non-negotiable perception. Like the artist who looks at the block of marble and sees the hidden angel,







like the farmer who looks at his winter fields and sees the waving harvest, like the mystic who looks at the caterpillar and sees the butterfly, like the midwife who looks at the pregnant woman and sees a beautiful wee baby, like Jesus who looked into the hearts of sinners and saw their grace, so too we are called to look at our beloved, broken and beautiful earth and see the weeping face of God.

### Sympathy

Beyond a passing sympathy we now surrender to the deepest empathy, seeing our earth and its broken-hearted family from the inside, experiencing it as we experience ourselves. We are urged to get utterly involved in a full commitment and to do everything possible to transform Christian and universal consciousness before it is too late. In 'praying our troubled world' we do not stay on our knees. We need to remember in our active contemplation that resurrection has happened. And resurrection is about more than a miraculous moment for the crucified body of Jesus. It is the final stage of creation and incarnation for the crucified world.

**“All creation is moving towards fulfilment. It is a slow, vulnerable becoming, with terrible birth-pains”**

Humanity, in its evolution, is moving inexorably towards the final Omega in God. Even on this weeping, warring planet we still believe in that divine dream for it. Incarnation establishes this belonging and evolving as the very purpose of our being. Deeply,

**“Beyond a passing sympathy we now surrender to the deepest empathy, seeing our earth and its broken-hearted family from the inside, experiencing it as we experience ourselves”**

essentially we are the vital voice of the earth, calling, yearning for completion. Only when we truly realise this, and live our lives with an eternal vigilance for the well-being of our Mother-Earth, will our prayers for her be salvific and transformative. Our pleas and wishes will come from the depths of our earthly hearts and bodies. These were already, and always, the living promise in the womb of the earth. When we pray for a troubled world we are praying for our own future, for the survival of our children, of all humanity, and of all creation – for all we call the incarnate body of God.

The troubled world we pray for is not out there, of course – any more than God is. We, and the Holy Spirit who moves us to pray, and the world we pray for, are inextricably bound up together. All creation is moving towards fulfilment. It is a slow, vulnerable becoming, with terrible birth-pains. And the crucifixion continues. But so does resurrection.

### Evolution

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis sees a silent 'Eastering' at work in the evolution of the planet – the same evolution that is transforming our own sense of participation and responsibility, in an unfolding future. "The kingdom of God is already present in this world," he writes, "and is growing here and there in different ways – like the small seed that grows in a great tree...the kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Resurrection is already

secretly woven into the fabric of history." Words such as these reveal to our hearts the depths of the mystery we are part of, and the urgency of our desires for its completion.

**“Our hearts, sacred from birth and Baptism, fashioned lovingly in the divine image, somehow sense this astonishing revelation of our intimacy with the earth”**

'Praying our troubled world' is now resounding from the heart of the universe. It is our own voice, no longer chanting from a disconnected, elevated and remote plateau but passionately pleading, on fire at the core of life, joining in the lamentations of the Indwelling Trinity, bereft with the sorrowful Mother of Life we call God. Pope Francis sees the emergence of a timeless, universal resurrection gestating at the core of the earth, like an eternal Spring. He believes in the 'Good Fridays' of our existence, in the irrepressible birthing of Easter. He sees all evolution, all the slow growing of the world, in terms of incarnate redemption, in terms of the saving and blossoming of the earth. "Each day in our world," he reminds us, "beauty is born anew; it rises, transformed, through the storms of history...Where all

seems to be dead, signs of resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force."

All of this brings us to a new way of being, a new way of seeing, a new way of praying. In the Christian tradition this revelation has been called 'the sacramental vision', the 'catholic imagination'. It springs from the orthodox theology of nature and grace, from the mystical spirituality of humanity, from the astonishing implications of incarnation. It reveals to us the nature of the ultimate intimacy of God with all created beings, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in all that lives. In this truth and context we begin to realise, at the core of our being, the praise in bird-song, the adoration in each new dawn, the cry of the ocean, the lament of the earth. It is then that our prayer is in deep communion with the wounded earth; our anxious voices are in time and tune with the longing of life, with the desire of the Holy Spirit.

### Poet

The Irish poet Joseph Mary Plunkett wrote:

*I see his blood upon the rose  
And in the stars the glory of his eyes;  
His body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.*

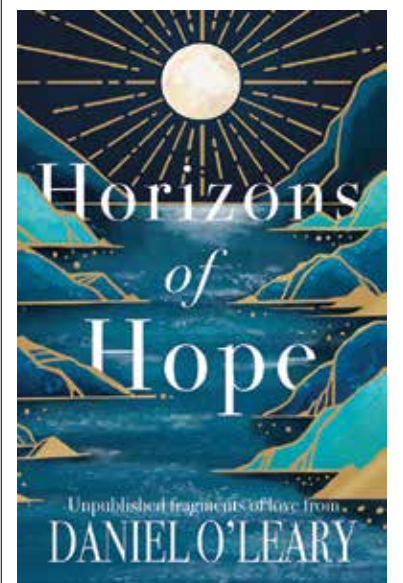
Children, of course, unknowingly have that grace of seeing, being and belonging. They somehow sense their place in the world. And just as they heal us all, they heal the world too.

Their very lives of wonder bless the earth. In ways we cannot understand, they are the fleshed prayers of incarnation, priestesses and prophetesses of life, small sacraments of divine presence to protect their suffering sisters and brothers, and Mother-Earth herself. The land silently reverberates with the perfect passion of their innocent prayer and presence. They know that an un-prayed for world will die. Physicist Brian Swimme wrote, "Say this to every child – you come from the energy that gave birth to the universe. Its story is your story; its beginning is your beginning."

**“All of this brings us to a new way of being, a new way of seeing, a new way of praying”**

When we 'pray the troubled world', the troubled world is praying for itself. Why? Because we are its beating heart. We are its mind, soul and voice. And when the troubled world is praying for itself, it is God incarnate, also at the heart of her own lovely, ravaged body, that is praying and listening to its 'groaning'. Christians are challenged to hold together the mystery of creation, of evolution, of suffering, of incarnation, of Christianity, of Eucharist. This love-story captivates us with a different lilt, logic and language to the destructive, dualistic 'fall/redemption' doctrines that are still suffocating the Holy Spirit of freedom and intimacy.

At the dynamic, evolving centre of it all, is the love called God. This love, pulsing in the dance of the Blessed Trinity, continues to beat out its pain, prayer and praise in the heart of the cosmos and in the cosmos of the heart. It is the wild energy of the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ. It is the beginning, and the middle, and the end of God's love-affair with humanity, with every creature. It is that first sacred thrust of Being into the Alpha of space and time, finding its invincible, healing, loving way towards the Omega of God's all-embracing, all-welcoming, all-completing heart.

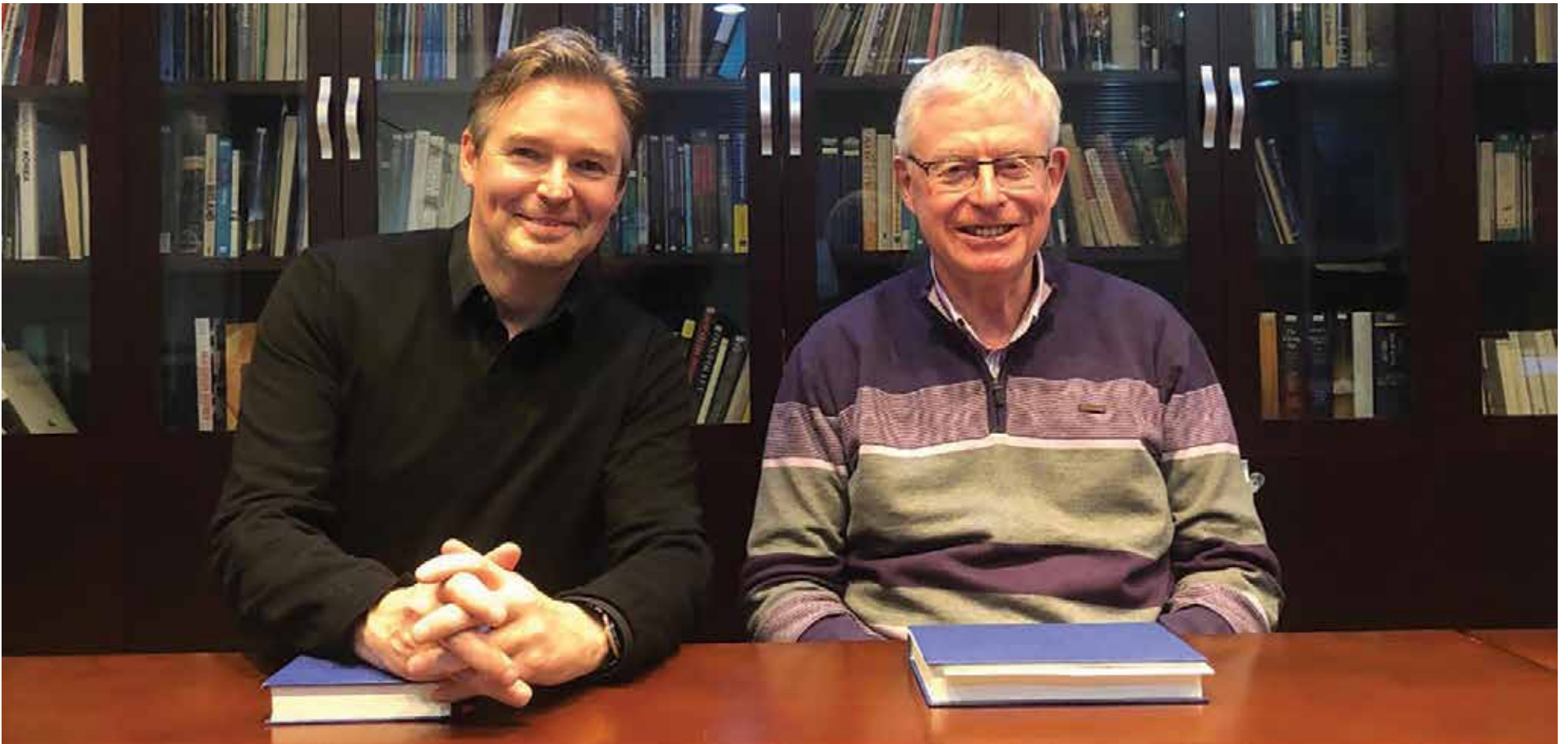


**1** This is an extract from the last book of the late Fr O'Leary *Horizons of Hope* which was recently published by Columba Books [www.columbabooks.com](http://www.columbabooks.com)



# Out&About

## Spreading the word



**SOUTH KOREA:** Fr Donal O'Keeffe and Prof. Peter McAuley visit the the Irish Embassy Korea to film a tribute to the late Fr Kevin O'Rourke for St Patricks Day 2021.



**ROSCOMMON:** Bishop Paul Dempsey of Achonry lights the Candle of Atonement at St Nathy's Cathedral to mark the day of prayer for victims of abuse, February 19.



**DUBLIN:** Sr Lucy and Sr Gabrielle of the Dublin Redemptoristines model their handmade snoods.

### IN SHORT

#### UNHCR welcomes Ireland's ambitious plans to integrate refugees

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has welcomed the publication of the Irish Government's White Paper on Direct Provision as a significant shift in policy aimed at maximising the integration of refugees.

However, it warned that deteriorating processing times, continued reliance on emergency accommodation for asylum-seekers, and shortages of housing in the

community for those granted status risk hampers the realisation of the report's aims.

"The White Paper on Direct Provision is a welcome, ambitious plan that has the potential to radically transform the integration outcomes of refugees in Ireland", said Enda O'Neill, Head of Office with UNHCR Ireland.

"In moving away from accommodating people in centres, some of which are in isolated locations, the new system promises a model which integrates access to services into existing community settings that will promote positive links between refugees and their communities."

#### Archbishop Farrell: Lent a chance to discover the 'essential' in the wilderness

Lent is a chance to "be brought into the wilderness... where we must discover what is essential" said Archbishop Dermot Farrell in his homily for the Divine Mercy Conference 2021.

"For the people of the Bible, the wilderness was a place that was rich in meaning," Archbishop Farrell said in his homily on Sunday February 21. "All external props are

removed – no entertainment, no diversion. Silence and solitude... where the people were confronted with their limits and fears, where they encountered both the powers of darkness, and the presence of God."

Dr Farrell said that, as Jesus sought God in the wilderness, so too should we.

"Lent offers us a graced opportunity to re-evaluate and readjust our relationship with God," he said. "To do this well, we need to spend some time in the wilderness, in some barren place devoid of excessive comforts and social distractions. May this Lent be a season of grace for each of us."



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Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**MAYO:** Fr Frank Fahey of Ballintubber Abbey celebrates his 85 birthday lockdown-style, February 19.



**CORK:** The novices at St Mary's priory Cork put in over-time to ensure the church is clean.



**ATHLONE:** A stained glass window from the studios of Harry Clarke, formerly housed in St Aloysius College, is installed in Collaiste Chiarain Athlone's new school buildings, February 25.



**KERRY:** Lisa O Shea, a Confirmation candidate in St John's parish, Tralee, with her mom Helen as she prepares for her work cleaning/sanitising in St John's.

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

### Catholic agencies welcome access to Ethiopia's Tigray region

● Catholic relief agencies in Ethiopia welcomed a move by the government to allow more access in Tigray where a military operation displaced millions and left an unspecified number of people dead. Amid increased international calls for unrestricted access, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali announced February 24 that 135 personnel from bilateral and multilateral organisations had been cleared to travel and undertake aid work in the region. Seven international media organisations, including *The New York Times*, the *BBC* and *Reuters*, also were granted access. "This is all what the humanitarian agencies have been seeking. They have been asking for access to the region so that they can provide the much-needed services," Andre Atsu, the Jesuit Refugee Service regional director in Eastern Africa, told *Catholic News Service*.

### Mozambique's Christians living an 'experience of the cross'

● Catholics living in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province have lived an "experience of the cross" amid the escalation of terrorist violence over the past three years, according to their former bishop. An Islamic militant insurgency has launched hundreds of attacks in the northern province, killing more than 2,000 people since October 2017. Violence peaked in 2020 with beheadings, kidnappings,

and attacks on churches. Brazilian Bishop Luiz Fernando Lisboa served as a missionary in Mozambique for nearly 20 years with six and a half years as the bishop of the Pemba diocese in Cabo Delgado. "It was an extremely searing experience, an experience of the cross, an experience of suffering," Bishop Lisboa said in an interview with *Aid to the Church in Need* published on February 25.

### 'Justice' as Serra statue vandals prosecuted, says archbishop

● Amid calls from California activists to drop vandalism charges against five assailants who destroyed a statue of St Junipero Serra last year, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco warned that doing so would set a dangerous precedent. "If a crime caught on videotape and witnessed by the police were not to have been prosecuted, it would have sent a profoundly disturbing message to the hundreds of thousands of people of faith in Marin County," Archbishop Cordileone said in a February 19 statement. Four of the five assailants were arraigned late last year, and the last of the five was arraigned February 18. "I want above all to thank the San Rafael Police Department and the Marin County District Attorney's Office for recognising that social justice requires justice," Archbishop Cordileone concluded.

### Vatican abuse trial: Allegations ignored, say witnesses

● Witnesses at the fifth hearing in a trial for alleged abuse and cover-up at a Vatican youth seminary testified last Wednesday to an unhealthy culture of ridicule and abuse of power. The witnesses also alleged that reports of sexual abuse were ignored or dismissed by authority figures. Three former students at the Pius X pre-seminary testified before the city state's court on February 24 that the environment was "unhealthy", indicating that taunts of a sexual nature were common and that they had witnessed one of the accused grope the genitals of other students. The three witnesses also alleged that reports of abuse were known by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, the archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, who dismissed them as "false and calumny".

## EU bishops criticise European Parliament resolution on Poland's abortion law

In a letter released on February 25, the EU bishops said that the resolution, passed on November 26, 2020, would have "a very negative impact" on the way that the European Union (EU) is seen by member states.

The European Parliament, the EU's law-making body, passed the resolution by 455 votes to 145 after Poland's top court ruled that a 1993 law permitting abortion for foetal abnormalities was unconstitutional.

The resolution lamented what it called a "de facto ban on the right to abortion in Poland".

Before the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling on October 22, Polish law permitted abortion only in cases of rape or incest, a risk to the mother's life, or foetal abnormality.

### Publication

Following the publication of the ruling on January 27, abortion will continue to remain legal in cases of rape or incest and risk to the mother's life.

In their letter dated February 22, the bishops said: "From a legal perspective we wish to underline that neither European Union legislation nor the European Convention on Human Rights provide for a right to abortion. This matter is left up to the legal systems of the member states."

The letter was addressed to David Maria Sassoli, president of the European Parliament, and signed by members of the standing committee of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European



Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, is pictured in a file photo during a news conference at the Vatican. Photo: CNS.

Union (COMECE).

The EU bishops underlined the Catholic Church's support for women facing difficult pregnancies as well as for the protection of unborn life.

They suggested that the resolution downplayed "a fundamental principle of European Union" known as the "principle of conferral", which confines the EU to acting within limits agreed by member states.

"As the Parliament's resolution rightly stresses, respect for the rule of law is essential for the functioning of the Union. That being said, the rule of law also requires respect for the competences of the member states and

the choices made by them in the exercise of their exclusive competences," the bishops wrote.

### Resolution

They said that the resolution also appeared to question the right to conscientious objection.

"This is particularly worrying considering that in the healthcare sector conscientious objectors are in many cases subject to discrimination. In our view, such unjust stigmatisation should not be promoted," they said.

The bishops also expressed concern that the principle of "non-discrimination", highlighted in the resolution, could

be used to "stretch or blur the limits" of the EU's authority over member states.

COMECE, founded in 1980, consists of bishops delegated by the bishops' conferences of the 27 member states of the European Union.

In the letter, the bishops alluded to mass protests in Poland in the wake of the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling.

The bishops said: "We also noted with sadness that no condemnation or solidarity was expressed in the text with regard to the unacceptable attacks on churches and places of worship in the context of protests related to this law in Poland."

## Priest related to English princes is step closer to sainthood

A priest related to Princes William and Harry took a major step closer to sainthood when Pope Francis declared him venerable.

Like St John Henry Newman, Passionist Fr Ignatius Spencer is considered one of the towering figures of the 19th-century revival of English Catholicism, often referred to by church historians as the "Second Spring".

The February 21 announcement means the Catholic Church is satisfied that Father Spencer lived a life of heroic virtue. The search will now begin for two

inexplicable healings at the intercession of the priest.

Father Spencer is related to Prince William, the second in line to the British throne, and to Harry, the sixth in the line of succession, through their mother, Princess Diana.

The Passionist was a great-great-great uncle of Princess Diana, and a great-uncle of Sir Winston Churchill. A former Anglican clergyman who became a Catholic, he raised money to bring Blessed Dominic Barberi – the priest who would receive St John Henry Newman into the

Church – to England and petitioned the Passionists to send him.

Fr Spencer's grave is located beside both Mother Prout and Blessed Dominic in the Church of St Anne and Blessed Dominic in St Helens, a town in the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon of Liverpool said he welcomed the Pope's announcement with "great happiness", adding that it was a "remarkable grace" for the archdiocese to have both Fr Spencer and Mother Prout declared venerable within weeks of each other.

## Anger over Malaysia's deportation of Myanmar migrants

The Malaysian Catholic Bishops have decried the deportation of nearly 1,100 Myanmar nationals back to their home country despite a court order banning the move.

The country's High Court on February 23 granted a temporary stay on the planned deportation of 1,200 Myan-

mar nationals who have been held in immigration detention centres while a proper judicial review of their case is undertaken.

Immigration authorities ignored the court's decision and the same day handed 1,086 of the migrants and asylum seekers over to the Myan-

mar navy, which sent ships to Malaysia to transport them back home.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia have voiced their opposition to the planned deportation of the Myanmar migrants on humanitarian grounds.

"Guaranteeing personal

security to the most vulnerable refugees, migrants and asylum seekers must not only be governed by international laws but also by the laws of humanity, which are grounded on mercy, compassion and love," the Malaysian bishops said in a statement on February 23.





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## Putting mass on ice



Fr David Pellican, associate pastor at Divine Child Parish in Dearborn, Michigan, preaches in a makeshift snow chapel constructed by parishioners and students at the parish's elementary school and high school. Photo: CNS

## Equality Act will 'discriminate against people of faith' says US bishops

As the House of Representatives passes the Equality Act, US bishops warn the mandates will "discriminate against people of faith" by adversely affecting charities and their beneficiaries, conscience rights, women's sports, "and sex-specific facilities".

The bill, known as HR 5 and recently reintroduced in the House, also provides for taxpayer funding of abortion and limits freedom of speech, the chairmen said in a February 23 letter to all members of Congress.

HR 5 amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of

sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, the credit system and jury duty. The house passed the passed the Act February 25, 224 votes to 206.

"Human dignity is central to what Catholics believe because every person is made in the image of God and should be treated accordingly, with respect and compassion," they said. "This commitment is reflected in the church's charitable service to all people, without regard to race, religion or any other characteristic."

"It means we need to honour every person's right to gainful employment free of unjust discrimination or harassment, and to the basic goods that they need to live and thrive," they continued. "It also means that people of differing beliefs should be respected."

HR 5 "purports to protect people experiencing same-sex attraction or gender discordance from discrimination. But instead, the bill represents the imposition by Congress of novel and divisive viewpoints regarding 'gender' on individuals and organisations," they said.

"This includes dismissing sexual difference and falsely

presenting 'gender' as only a social construct," they said.

Signing the letter were: Bishop Michael Barber, chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Catholic Education; Archbishop Paul Coakley, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Cardinal Timothy Dolan of the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty; Bishop David Konderla of the USCCB Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defence of Marriage; and Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

## Concern as Indian state passes controversial anti-conversion bill

A law to curb religious conversions done by force and fraudulent means was passed amid protests on February 24 in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2020, will replace an ordinance passed last November. The bill has a provision of imprisonment for up to 10 years and a maximum fine of 50,000 rupees (US\$690) for violators.

"There was no need for a new bill as the state already had a bill to check religious conversion, but it is a matter of concern because it can be misused by majority groups in the name of forcible religious conversions, especially against minority groups," Bishop Gerald John Mathias of Lucknow told UCA News.

"The Catholic Church in the country does not promote or propagate religious conversion, nor believe in forced conversion, and there is no record of any

religious conversion where the Church is involved in my state.

"We as a church are engaged in much charitable work and our main concern is anything can be considered as allurement. Any charitable work we do can be construed as allurement to conversion."

Yogi Adityanath, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, has been an ardent proponent of bringing in a law to check conversions for marriage.

## Vatican roundup

### Vatican official insists religious services are 'essential'

● For believers, the ability to practice their faith and receive spiritual guidance are "the highest of essential services", and pandemic practices over the past year have shown they are not automatically super-spreader events, the Vatican foreign minister said.

Speaking February 23 during the high-level segment of the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva, Archbishop Paul Gallagher said, "There are numerous examples of how the freedom of worship can be guaranteed while taking all the necessary precautions to protect reasonably public safety." Pope Francis, the Vatican and most bishops around the world acknowledged and accepted most of the measures imposed by local and national governments to ensure public health and slow the spread of the pandemic, he said.

But some measures have gone so far as to "impinge on the free exercise of numerous human rights. Any limitations on the exercise of human rights for the protection of public health must stem from a situation of strict necessity," he said. "Such limitations must be proportional to the situation, applied in a non-discriminatory fashion and used only when no other means are available."

### Vatican supports waiving patents for vaccines

● The Vatican threw its support behind an effort by India, South Africa and a host of developing nations to loosen international patent protections and speed up sub-licensing agreements for the production of Covid-19 vaccines, pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment. "Despite the billions of taxpayer dollars invested in R&D (research and development), and announcements that Covid-19 vaccines should be considered a public good, no government has openly made such a public commitment," Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic said February 23. The archbishop, who is the Vatican representative to UN agencies in Geneva, spoke at a meeting of the

World Trade Organization's Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. "Most countries of the world are experiencing delays in vaccine rollout programs," the archbishop said. "On the other hand, in many countries, a large number of manufacturing facilities, with proven capacity to produce safe and effective vaccines, are unable to utilise those capacities" because of the patents and other intellectual-property protections. The international TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) agreement, he said, has proven to be too cumbersome to facilitate sub-licensing.

### Pope mourns deaths of Italian ambassador, officer in Congo

● Pope Francis joined the people of Italy in mourning the murders of the country's ambassador to Congo and an Italian officer in his security detail, both young men the Pope described as "servants of peace and law".

Ambassador Luca Attanasio, 43, and 30-year-old officer Vittorio Iacovacci of the Italian military police died after being shot in an ambush in North Kivu February 22. Their driver, Mustapha Milambo, also was shot and killed as they were traveling in a UN convoy. Mr Attanasio, who had been ambassador to Congo since 2017, left behind his wife and three young children.

Mr Iacovacci was engaged to be married in the summer. In a message to Italian President Sergio Mattarella February 23, Pope Francis expressed his "heartfelt condolences to their families, the diplomatic service and the Carabinieri for the loss of these servants of peace and law".

The Pope described Mr Attanasio as "a person of outstanding human and Christian qualities, always generous in forging fraternal and cordial relationships" with an aim of helping bring peace back to Congo.





# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

**F**rom the beginning, Pope Francis has been committed to financial reform of the Vatican. It was the first study commission he created, it was the first major appointment he made, and it's been a constant of his papacy over what's now almost eight years.

Yet after all this time, Francis faces the same fundamental dilemma he did at the beginning: There's no way to cut expenses and increase income, thereby reducing the incentives for suspect manoeuvres, without trimming payroll, ie, firing people – a step this pontiff (like all of his predecessors) has proven extraordinarily reluctant to take.

During a recent meeting of the Council for the Economy, a mixed body of cardinals and lay financial experts created by Pope Francis to oversee the Vatican's money management, the numbers for 2020 and projected numbers for 2021 came up for consideration.

**“For a frame of reference, consider that Italy is considered to have one of the most worrisome levels of public debt in the Eurozone”**

The results were sobering: For 2020, the Vatican ran a deficit of €49.7 million. The total income for the year was €260.93 million and expenses came to €310.63 million, hence the deficit.

## Income

In terms of annual income, the Roman Curia – as opposed to the Vatican City State, which draws on earnings from the Vatican Museums, the Vatican Post Office, and so on – relies on three principal revenue streams:

- Investments and financial activity, which are partly composed of earnings on a lump-sum payment made by Italy in 1922 to compensate the Vatican for the loss of the Papal States. (Annual investment earnings are generally estimated at somewhere between €75 and €83 million.)
- Earnings from real estate holdings, including rental income from apartments and buildings owned by the Vatican in Rome and other parts of Italy.
- Contributions from dioceses, Catholic organisations, and individuals.

All three sources of income were down in 2020, primarily due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Pope can't make ends meet with a 'no firing' policy



Rain falls as Pope Francis leads the Angelus prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St Peter's Square at the Vatican, February 7. Photo: CNS

**“Maintaining jobs continues to be a priority for the Holy Father in these difficult times”**

Amid the crisis, Francis actually cut the rental charges for Vatican-owned properties, further compounding the income shortfall.

## Worse

In all honesty, the situation is even worse. This year for the first time, income and expenses from “Peter's Pence”, an annual collection around the world to support the activities of the Pope, were included in the Vatican's annual financial accounting. In the past, “Peter's Pence” was considered an entirely separate operation.

In 2020, “Peter's Pence” brought in €47.63 million and outlays, mostly to support charitable activities, came to €17.15 million. That amounts to a surplus of €30.48 million. In other words, without “Peter's Pence”, as the Vatican's financial performance has been calculated in the past, the total deficit would be close to €82.4 million.

That would mean the Vatican's debt is more than one-quarter of its total income, which might be considered the Vatican's economic output. For a frame of reference, consider that Italy is considered to have one of the most worrisome levels of public debt in the Eurozone,

but its deficit of €2.58 trillion is only about 7.5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

In other words, it's a really bad situation.

What's especially remarkable about it all is that the Vatican reported a 14% decrease in spending for 2020, which represents the impact of an across-the-board effort to cut costs and achieve economies of scale, in a year in which expenses for major events and travel were obviously significantly reduced because of the pandemic – and which, presumably, will go back up once the pandemic has passed.

**“The problem is that the Vatican's pension system is seriously underfunded”**

The reason that 14% reduction in outlays didn't have a bigger impact on the deficit, according to Vatican officials, is because Pope Francis had held to a rigid “no firing” policy amid the coronavirus crisis, on the basis that people are already suffering and a job loss could be catastrophic.

“Maintaining jobs continues to be

a priority for the Holy Father in these difficult times,” a Vatican statement said.

Further adding to the economic woes is the Vatican's unfunded pension obligation. Under the terms of a 2009 decree by Pope Benedict XVI, the retirement age for lay employees in the Vatican is 65, while it's 70 for clergy and religious. According to a 2018 estimate, some 1,500 lay employees will hit that age of 65 within the next decade, roughly a third of the Vatican's current workforce, and will expect to begin drawing pension checks.

## Underfunded

The problem is that the Vatican's pension system is seriously underfunded, and it's not clear exactly how it will meet those obligations. Its annual deficits in recent years have made it impossible to set aside additional funds for future pension expenditures.

Given all that, there's really no way around the conclusion that if the Vatican is to remain economically viable, it will have to cut payroll.

It's not that the Vatican is overstaffed relative to other institutions – its ratio of bureaucrats

to citizens compares highly favourably, for instance, with the US federal payroll, a primary reason management guru Peter Drucker once called the Vatican one of the three most efficient institutions in human history.

**“There's no way to cut expenses and increase income, thereby reducing the incentives for suspect manoeuvres”**

It's rather that the Vatican is overstaffed relative to its means, and probably needs to shrink by about a third in order to stay afloat long-term.

The question is whether Francis, a legendary advocate of labour and the working poor, will be the Pope to face that reality head-on and to authorise the elimination of non-productive and non-essential personnel.

If not, then his financial legacy could be the ironic one of saving money, as the Vatican did last year, while also going broke. Every Pope bequeaths some unfinished business to his successor – we'll see if balancing the chequebook is one of the tasks this Pope leaves behind.

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



# Young Iraqi on Covid front lines fight readies to welcome Pope



An illuminated cross is displayed in the Christian town of Hamdania, Iraq, February 16, 2021. Photo: CNS



Elise Ann Allen

**T**wo and a half years ago, Safa Al Alqoshy shared a heart-warming embrace with Pope Francis while in Rome to attend a Synod of Bishops on youth, before leaving the gathering early to care for his ailing mother.

During their brief conversation, Al Alqoshy told *Crux*, the Pope “told me to have faith and he promised me that he would pray (for me), and he promised me that someday he would be in Iraq to visit the people and especially the young people”.

Now, with the Pope’s March 5-8 visit to Iraq just days away, “he is doing what he promised”.

Francis will become the first Pope ever to set foot in Iraq, despite numerous attempts from his predecessors, including an effort from John Paul II which eventually fell through when talks with then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein broke down.

During his whirlwind visit, Francis is expected to make stops in Baghdad, Erbil, Mosul, Qaraqosh, the Plain of Ur, traditionally held to be the birthplace of the biblical

figure Abraham, and Najaf, where he will meet with top Shi’a cleric Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani.

For Al Alqoshy, the Pope’s trip is “very, very important” not only because it will be the first time a Pope visits the country and because of Iraq’s biblical significance, but it will give “hope to the people, saying that the Pope has not forgotten us, giving people that push to stay and touch their land. And then maybe the people who immigrated can have the faith to come back to their country”.

**“He will go on vacation a few days before Pope Francis arrives and will get his Covid test”**

What Pope Francis says during his visit, in Al Alqoshy’s view, is secondary, because for him, just the fact that he is coming says everything there is to say.

“I don’t need to hear any message, only his coming to Iraq is the message,” Al Alqoshy said, adding, “Popes visit Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, but here in Iraq, no one has visited Iraq from the Popes in history.”

The fact that Pope Francis has insisted on coming despite the coronavirus and recent rocket attacks in Erbil and bombings in Baghdad “is

the biggest message” he can send, Al Alqoshy said.

During the 2018 Synod of Bishops, Al Alqoshy – who was the only Iraqi youth to attend the event – drew an enormous round of applause and a few tears from other participants after describing what it is like to grow up amid war and violent persecution, and the long-term psychological impact that can have on young people.

Now a dentist working to complete his surgical training in Baghdad, Al Alqoshy said he hopes to meet the Pope a second time when he arrives at the airport, but he’s unsure whether he will be able to given concerns over the country’s worsening coronavirus outbreak.

Al Alqoshy said there’s a shortage of doctors and specialists in hospitals, as many have contracted Covid-19 themselves and “have a lot of consequences and problems with their lungs or with their brains”, so even dentists have been called in to assist Covid patients.

Al Alqoshy said this is the main reason why he is not participating more closely in preparations for the trip.

He will go on vacation a few days before Pope Francis arrives and will get his Covid test. If the result is negative, he will be at the airport to meet the Pope for his arrival to Baghdad, but if he tests positive, he’ll have to watch the event on television.

“I can’t do more than hope to see the Pope, but I can’t leave the people who need my service at the hospital,” he said.

**“Here in Iraq it’s not the first and not the last time that minorities, Christians, or all Iraqi people, have had a difficult time or difficult years”**

In terms of what impact Pope Francis’s visit might have on Iraq, which for decades has been plagued by war, terrorism, conflict, and an ongoing economic crisis, Al Alqoshy said he believes “it will put pressure on the government and religious men” and cause them to reflect on the “improvement of Christians’ rights, living in dignity, and even protecting them and their land”.

Should this happen, “it may reduce the number of people who immigrate, give them hope”, he said, noting that the spiritual element of Francis’s visit is important, “but other issues related to society and to the law, the government, are important too. So, we hope the Pope’s visit will give a push to our lives and all these issues.”

Yet despite his hope that the papal visit will have a political impact, Al Alqoshy said he doesn’t think the

Pope himself will be overly political.

Recalling negotiations for Pope John Paul II’s attempt to visit Iraq, Al Alqoshy said that at a certain point, Hussein asked John Paul to speak out about some political issues, which John Paul refused to do on the grounds that his visit “was for faith” and the people of Iraq, “so I don’t think that the political issues will be included”.

Asked what he believes the future of Christianity is in Iraq, given the fears voiced by many in recent years that the country’s dwindling Christian population might soon disappear, Al Alqoshy said he doesn’t think that will be the case.

“Here in Iraq it’s not the first and not the last time that minorities, Christians, or all Iraqi people, have had a difficult time or difficult years,” he said. “Iraq and Baghdad in history have had a lot of problems, from the people around Iraq or far off that want to take the wealth of Iraq, so I think the situation of Christians will be okay.”

Christians, he said, “are part of Iraq, and what is happening to all Iraqi people is happening to them, so we are all equals, and we need to improve the situation of all Iraq, it’s not special for the Christians. We have a good situation here, and I hope that the visit of Pope Francis will improve some important things.”

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



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### We ignore threats to Catholic schools' ethos 'at our peril'

**Dear Editor,** Thank you to Jason Osborne on his timely front-page article 'Catholic parents voice anger at exclusion from school talks' [IC 18/02/2021]. In a recent written answer to Sean Canney TD, Education Minister Norma Foley revealed that her civil servants are working with the National Parents Council Post Primary to amalgamate it with the National Parents Council Primary. This proposal is opposed by the Catholic Secondary Schools Parents

Association, which represents parents in 341 secondaries, or over 50% of Irish secondary schools. It is also opposed by the ETB Parents Association the official body which represents State non-denominational schools, a further 33% of secondaries. At the heart of all this is a secularisation agenda of civil servants. In recent years we have witnessed increasing attacks on parental rights especially in respect of Catholic ethos. When civil servants have pursued a non-

denominational agenda, we have seen no evidence of the National Parents Primary standing up for the distinctiveness of Catholic schools. To give just an example, the recognised Catholic parent body has been excluded from many curriculum groups including one designing a new Relationship and Sex Education curriculum. We ignore these threats to our Catholic ethos at our peril.

**Alan Whelan**  
Killarney, Co. Kerry

### Atrocity against nuns during the Spanish Civil War

**Dear Editor,** In Mary Kenny's article [IC 11/02/2021] relating to the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939 and the fate of religion in that conflict. The British Consulate sheltered the Loreto sisters who later escaped. "Other nuns were not so fortunate," Mary writes.

Many years ago in London, a man was pointed out to me who was involved in such an incident. He was a rather unpleasant looking individual. In company with others they put a group of nuns into a small boat and when it drifted some distance they opened fire as target practice.

I don't know if this atrocity was ever documented but it is probably just another killing seeing that "over 3,400 clergy and religious were murdered" as Mary further reports.

*Yours etc.,*  
**Patrick Fleming**  
Glasnevin, Dublin.



### Bishops should stand up for right to attend Mass

**Dear Editor,** There are so many voices from all over the world who question the whole response that has been enacted by governments but especially ours.

These are people of the highest qualifications and standards and who speak out at great cost to themselves. But our bishops almost to a man completely ignore them, why?

The same bishops in a recent meeting with the

Taoiseach, Mr Martin completely acquiesced meekly and surrendered all our rights as Catholics to attend Mass even with the many guidelines that the Church was adhering to. This, at a time when so-called elite sports like rugby and off licences (allowing the masses drink at home causing many problems) were allowed to open and operate. We have all seen big building sites operating. But

opening the churches with all the safety measures they had in place – that would be too much of a 'risk'. Shame on the bishops for accepting this. Shame on the bishops and some priests who agree with this, for not standing up for us your parishioners.

We all know the churches could easily have been open with guidelines in place with a dispensation for all those including priests who felt vulnerable.

I am certain that as I kneel here before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, he would not want this, and would not allow this to happen. He would have our churches open and never allow them be closed, ever. Bishops, open our churches. Stand up to this tyranny of Government.

*Yours etc.,*  
**John Taaffe**  
Drogheda, Co. Louth

### Mass should never have been put on hold

**Dear Editor,** At this late stage of the lockdown I feel compelled to make known my thoughts about the way the hierarchy are responding to the current and previous lockdowns imposed by the powers that be, and the impact that this is having on the Church as a whole, and individuals who desire to receive the sacraments. Why are the bishops not demanding balanced treatment on behalf of their flock to enable us to attend Mass and receive the sacraments? I am inclined to think that many of the clergy see this lockdown as Godsent, that gives them an overdue rest, however I do not think it is Godsent but

rather Satan sent, to finish off what little faith remains in the priests and the people. It is a caving in to laziness on the part of the clergy due to whatever reason; poor morale, over work, age? But I shudder to think what awaits us on judgement day. To think that we have not had the Easter Ceremonies last year and it is unlikely that we will have them this year also. The Mass should never have been put on hold even if it had to be celebrated outside the churches. Why do the clergy appear to show such total concern for our physical health to the detriment of our spiritual health? The health professionals with the aid of the media

are very capable in that area. If ever there was a case of rendering unto Caesar that which belongs to God, this is one!

Is it not within the scope of the bishops collectively to come up with an acceptable plan to make available to us the essentials for our ongoing spiritual sustenance? It was considered a mortal sin in the past to miss Mass on a Sunday now we are led to accept that viewing Mass on TV is sufficient!

*Yours etc.,*  
**Joe Bolger**  
Dungarvan, Kilkenny.

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

### Outdoor Mass could be key for Easter return to public worship

Good idea but people must keep their social distance. – **Gillian Counihan**

Thank you. It is diabolical that public Masses are banned. – **Aniharg Adain**

Churches need to open for public Masses. They are safe because they follow all the rules. This will be the second year Churches are closed for Easter ceremonies. – **Ann Kelly**

Why do they not know that our greatest need always but Especially now is God, to honour him and to get his forgiveness in confession and receive him in Holy Communion. – **Margaret Cunningham**

Waiting until Easter is just not good enough. Our churches are safer than our supermarkets. I know the Government will argue that supermarkets are essential and I agree with them. But by not allowing public worship the implication is that public worship is not essential. Maybe the Government does not realise how essential public worship is. I wonder why. – **Brendan Kennedy**

Excellent idea! There's still several Mass rocks from the last time that the Government banned the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. – **Lynne Flatley**

Now that is a good idea! – **Brendan McConvery**

That makes sense as the weather will be milder and we know how we can keep each other safe. – **Frank Browne**

We want to have our mass, and Communion, and a bit of holy water would nice. – **Christine O'Brien**

The church was better socially distanced than any supermarket before they closed... – **Angie Geraghty**

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

### Was distributing ashes on Ash Wednesday wise?

**Dear Editor,** While it is understandable that there have been calls for Catholics to lobby their politicians to re-open the churches for worship [IC 18/02/2021], I think there is a lesson to be learned from our experience of Ash Wednesday. Last week some parishes were creative in making the blessed ashes available. Many people brought them home to family members or brought them to neighbours who were housebound. Yet NPHET urged people to reduce their social contacts as transmission rates are still very high due to close contacts within families and between neighbours. One wonders if the distribution of ashes was really a wise and responsible endeavour in these present times. While we all miss our familiar rituals, we need to look at the bigger picture of public health and the hope of normal living.

*Yours etc.,*  
**Fr Padraig Walsh PP**  
Tralee, Co Kerry

### Letters to the Editor

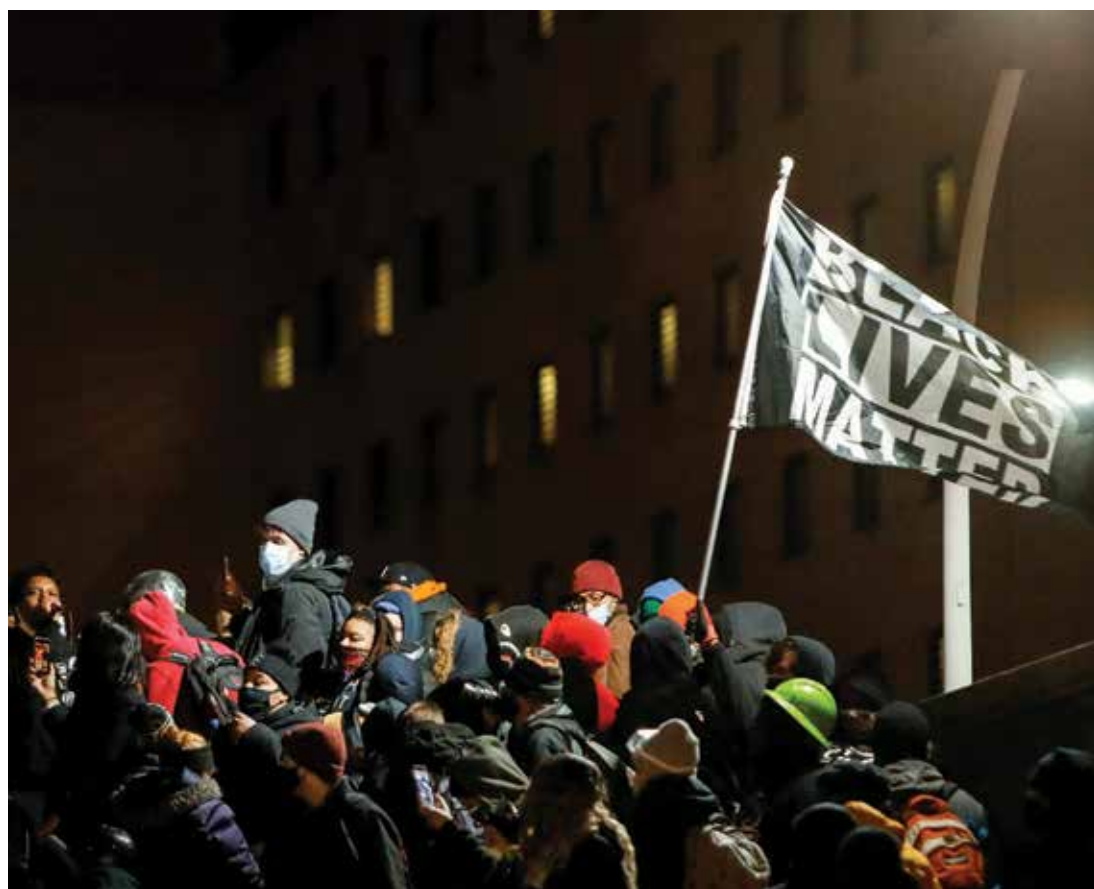
All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

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

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



# Around the world



▲ **FRANCE:** People relax on Promenade des Anglais beach in Nice. Photos: CNS

◀ **USA:** People in Rochester, New York, react on February 23, after a New York grand jury voted not to indict police officers in Daniel Prude's death.



**MYANMAR:** Protesters take shelter behind shields as they clash with riot police officers on March 1, during a protest against the military coup in Yangon.



**JORDAN:** Vendors wearing protective masks wait for customers at a market in Amman, February 25, as the country announced stricter measures to curb the spread of Covid-19.

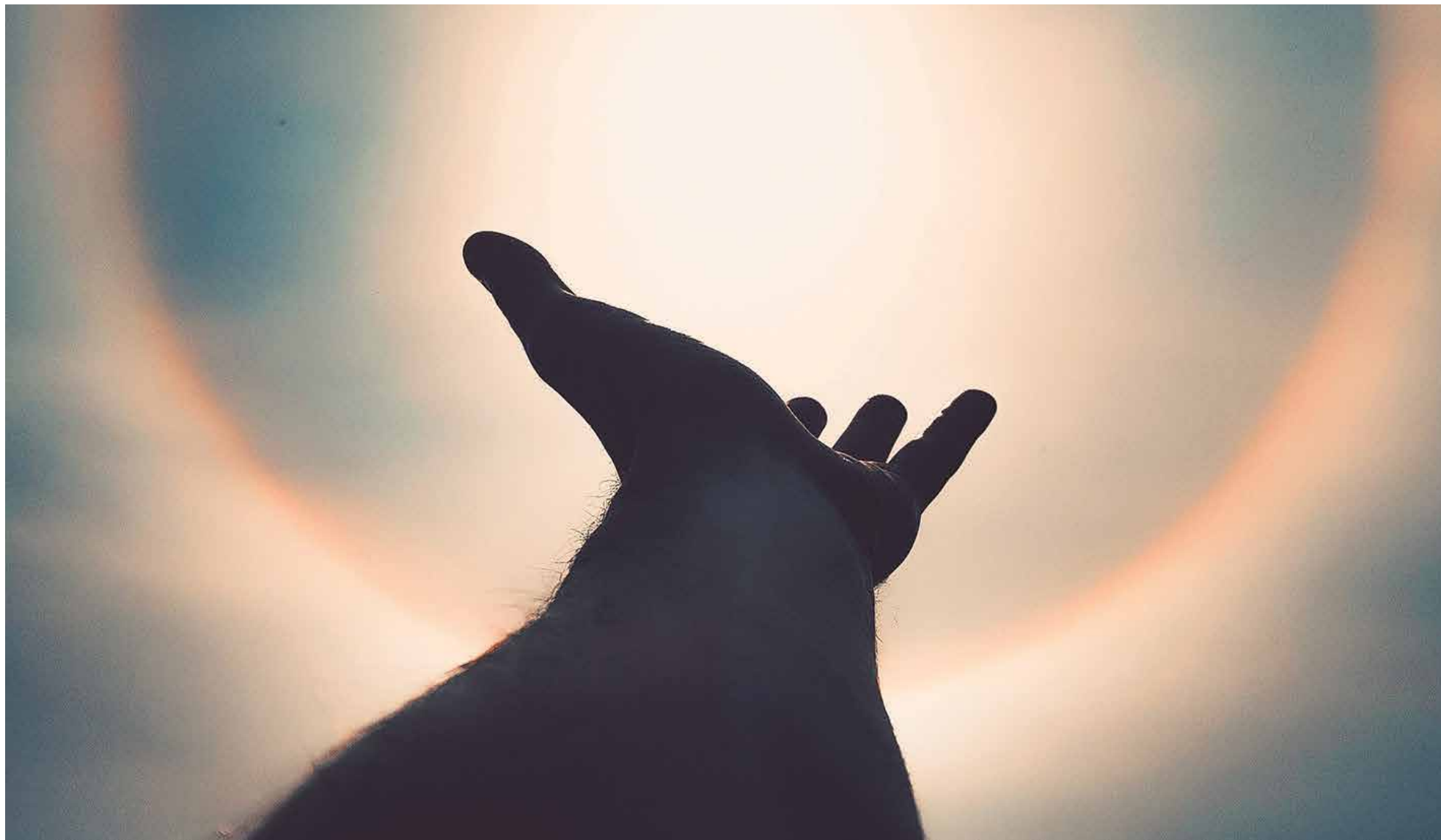


**ETHIOPIA:** Workers carry food into a Catholic Relief Services warehouse near Mekele in Ethiopia's Tigray region.



**BELGIUM:** Migrants are pictured near an image of Christ inside St John the Baptist Church in Brussels.





# An invitation to something higher

**I**n 1986, Czechoslovakian novelist Ivan Klima published a series of autobiographical essays entitled, *My First Loves*. These essays describe some of his moral struggles as a young agnostic seeking for answers without any explicit moral framework within which to frame those struggles. He's a young man, full of sexual passion, but hesitant to act out sexually, even as all his peers, men and women, seemingly do not share that same reticence. He remains celibate, but isn't sure why; certainly it's not for religious reasons since he's agnostic. Why is he living as he is? Is he being responsible or is he simply uptight and lacking in nerve?

**“He's not sure what God would say to him and whether at any given moment God is smiling or frowning upon him”**

He's unsure and so he asks himself: if I died and there is a God and I met that God, what would God say to me? Would God chastise me for being uptight or would God praise me for carrying my solitude at a high level? Would God look at me with disappointment or would he congratulate me for going without consolation?

As he writes this book, Klima doesn't know the answer to that



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

question. He's not sure what God would say to him and whether at any given moment God is smiling or frowning upon him. Irrespective of the answer, what's insightful here I believe, is how Klima frames his moral choice. For him, it's not a question of what's sinful or not, but rather a question of carrying his solitude and tension in a way that makes for nobility of soul. At first glance, of course, that can seem self-serving; trying to be special can also make for a pride that's very judgmental. However, true nobility of soul isn't something sought for its own sake but something sought for the good of others. One does not try to be good to set oneself apart from others. Rather one tries to be good in order to create a beacon of stability, respect, hospitality, and chastity for others.

**“After weighing the various opinions of students, the professor said this: I don't think the important question is whether this is a sin or not”**

This, I believe, can be a second starting point for moral theology and spirituality. The first starting point, of course, is more basic. It focuses on keeping the Ten Commandments, and most of these begin with a negative warning, “thou shalt not”. At a base level, moral theology and spirituality are very much identified with ethics, with sorting out what's right and what's wrong, what's sinful and what's not. However, keeping the Ten Commandments and sorting out what's a sin and what's not, while a non-negotiable and critically important endeavor, is to moral theology and spirituality what elementary arithmetic is to higher mathematics, a necessary base, no more. Once that fundamental base has been essentially achieved, the real task starts, namely, the struggle to

become big-hearted, to put on the heart of Christ, to become a saint so as to create a better world for others.

Let me risk an earthy example to try to illustrate this. When I was a seminarian studying moral theology, one day in class we were examining various questions within sexual morality. At one point, the question arose as to sinfulness or non-sinfulness of masturbation. Is this an intrinsic disorder? Seriously sinful or not anything serious? What's to be said morally about this question?

**“At this second level, moral theology and spirituality cease being a command and become an invitation, one to a greater nobility of soul for the sake of the world”**

After weighing the various opinions of students, the professor said this: I don't think the important question is whether this is a sin or not. There's a better way of framing this. Here's where I land on this question: I disagree with those who say it's a serious sin, but also disagree with those who see no moral issue here whatsoever. The issue here is not so much whether this is a sin or not; rather it's a question of what level, compensatory or heroic, we want to carry this

tension. In the face of this issue, I need to ask myself; at what level do I want to carry my solitude? How noble of soul can I be? How much can I accept to carry this tension to make for a more chaste community inside the body of Christ?

At this second level, moral theology and spirituality cease being a command and become an invitation, one to a greater nobility of soul for the sake of the world. Can I be more big-hearted? Can I be less petty? Can I carry more tension without giving in to compensation? Can I be more forgiving? Can I love a person from whom I'm separated by temperament and ideology? Can I be a saint? Saints don't think so much in terms of what's sinful and what isn't. Rather they ask, what is the more loving thing to do here? What's more noble of soul and what's more petty? What serves the world better?

## A higher mind

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus begins his preaching with the word *Metanoia*, a word that implies infinitely more than what's connoted in its English translation, *Repent*. *Metanoia* is an invitation to put on a higher mind, to be more noble of heart, and to leave paranoia, pettiness, and self-gratification behind.



# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, March 4, 2021

## Personal Profile

Realising the Faith is 'the real deal'

Page 34



# Watching our weight as winter wanes



**P**erhaps we should have anticipated it, but one of the real challenges of lockdown life has been making sure that our weight doesn't change for the worse. There is any number of reasons why it could, from stress about the state of things, to an increased amount of time spent sitting at home, in the proximity of all of the snacks we've stocked up on.

When you couple the increased temptation to eat a little less healthily with the decrease in exercise most of us are getting, you're confronted with a potent mix of factors than can contribute to severe weight gain. It's not an idle fear either, with obesity and



**Covid may be on everyone's mind, but watching our weight is still essential, writes Jason Osborne**

simply being overweight becoming serious problems in Ireland.

### Statistics

According to Health Ireland Survey findings, which are listed on the HSE website:

- Just under four in ten people (37%) in Ireland have a normal weight, with six out of ten overweight or obese (37%

overweight and 23% obese).

- While men are more likely to be overweight than women (men: 43%, women: 31%) the proportions that are obese are more closely aligned (men: 25%, women: 22%).

- A smaller difference exists between men and women aged under 25.

- 31% of men aged 15-24 are

overweight or obese, compared to 27% of women of this age.

- Women who are overweight or obese are more likely to try and lose weight than men who are overweight or obese.

- Those who are attempting to lose weight generally do so by exercising more often or by eating fewer calories.

While all of the talk at the moment is about Covid, we ought not to let other health concerns fly under the radar – obesity and becoming overweight foremost among them, as it's very often something in our power to affect or change.

Heart disease and diabetes,

which often accompany obesity, can deprive people of up to 8 years of life and 19 years of a healthy life. Other ill-effects can include:

- A higher risk of chronic illness, disability, and as mentioned, an early death.

- Higher risk of pregnancy complications and an overweight child.

- A loss of independence due to chronic illness or disability.

- An increased risk of bullying, poor mental health, and obesity as an adult (if overweight as a child).

» Continued on Page 33



## Family News



### AND EVENTS

#### ITALIAN LANDSLIDE PUSHES HUNDREDS OF COFFINS INTO THE SEA

An estimated 200 coffins tumbled from their places in northwest Italy when a landslide destabilised a 100-year-old cliffside cemetery last week.

Video emerged on social media which showed emergency response workers in boats searching for the coffins in the waters of Camogli, near Genoa.

Two chapels were also swept away in the landslide to the rocks below the graveyard.

The village mayor is quoted as saying it was an “unimaginable catastrophe” in an area that is prone to cliff collapse.

The videos that appeared on social media showed a number of coffins floating in the muddied waters.

Speaking to *CNN*, Mayor of Camogli, Francesco Olivari, said “This type of collapse that happened today is very hard to detect or to predict”.

Local workers had noticed cracks in the cliffs and realised there was a risk of collapse, the authorities said, which resulted in the area being cordoned off.

Around 10 of the estimated 200 coffins had been recovered according to regional civil protection assessor Giacomo Giampedrone.

#### WHO COVAX SCHEME DELIVERS FIRST VACCINES

The BBC reported that Ghana is the first country to receive vaccines as part of the Covax vaccine-sharing initiative.

A delivery of 600,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine arrived in Accra last Wednesday. The first recipients are to be healthcare workers.

The Covax scheme aims to reduce the divide between the wealthy nations and the poorer nations, who are unable to buy doses.

The programme aims to deliver two billion vaccine doses globally by the end of the year, and Ghana was chosen as the first recipient after promising to distribute the vaccines quickly.

Vaccinations are due to start in Ghana next week, and as well as healthcare workers, those over 60, people with underlying health conditions, and senior officials are expected to be prioritised.

Meanwhile, nations in the developed world have faced criticisms of “vaccine hoarding” as they began buying and ordering more vaccines than they would need months ago.

#### AUSTRALIA: OLDEST ROCK ART IS 17,300-YEAR-OLD KANGAROO

Australian scientists have discovered the continent's oldest known rock art – a 17,300-year-old painting of a kangaroo.

The painting, which measures 2 metres (6.5 feet) was painted in red ochre on the ceiling of a rock shelter.

The artwork was found in western Australia's Kimberley region, which is known for its Aboriginal rock paintings.

Its age was determined by radiocarbon-dating ancient nearby mud wasp nests, and the findings were published in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*.

“We radiocarbon dated three wasp nests underlying the painting and three nests built over it to determine, confidently, that the painting is between 17,500 and 17,100 years old; most likely 17,300 years old,” said Dr Damien Finch, a geochronologist from the University of Melbourne.

# A closing prayer for meditation



**W**e have been exploring the depth of meaning in the John Main prayer which we say before meditation. The prayer is very simple and reads ‘Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the silent presence of the spirit of your son. Lead us into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call’.

I love its simplicity and clear focus. The prayer itself is not a mental or discursive prayer but a deep cry of the heart that we might be awakened to the reality of the present moment; that we might discover how intimately we are linked to the presence of God in whom we live and move and have our being.

**“The thing that we have to face is that life is as simple as this. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent and God is shining through it all the time”**

The Christian meditation community also has a closing prayer for meditation which is used by some meditation groups. By comparison, it is much less concise and more verbose. For that reason, I have written a very short closing prayer which is closer in theme and style to John Main's opening prayer. It reads: ‘Lord, may our hearts remain open to your presence and guide us to love like you’.

While the opening prayer asks God to lead us into the mysterious, silent presence of his son, we have seen that the request is not for a brief insight limited to the period of meditation but that we should be awakened to the fact that God

## Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



is ever-present in our lives. It is we, who, through our business and our continual focus on the small, separate, egoic self rather than the true-self, lose sight of the bigger picture. Teilhard de Chardin expressed it as follows: “We are not human beings on a spiritual journey. Rather, we are spiritual beings on a human journey.” Thomas Merton was even more poetic: “The thing that we have to face is that life is as simple as this. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent and God is shining through it all the time. This is not just a fable or a nice story, it is true.” The practice of meditation helps to awaken us to the truth of this and helps us to appreciate how human life can be utterly changed if enough people lived their lives knowing this to be true.

The short closing prayer I am recommending asks that our hearts would remain open to God's presence in our lives and that this awareness would guide us to love like Jesus. It prays that our faithfulness to our daily meditation would help us to put on the mind of Christ and to live life as he would wish us to do. While we can never come to know God fully in this world, our faith encourages us to live with an ever-deepening and abiding awareness of the presence of God in our lives every day. It is the

task of a lifetime to figure out how to realise our full humanity as we strive to respond to the circumstances and events of our lives after the example of Jesus.

That is why the second half of the closing prayer asks that our open hearts would guide us to love like him. What does it mean to act like Christ, to love as he would, in the world today? How are we to love our neighbour following the example and teaching of Jesus? This is not a matter of creed but of ‘credo’. Creed has come to mean giving intellectual assent to a set of doctrines and dogma formulated by the fathers (and mothers) of the Church. But ‘credo’ points instead to a heartfelt response to the call to become like Jesus. The theologian Karen Armstrong reminds us that ‘credo’ derives from the Latin phrase ‘Cor do’ which means ‘I give my heart’; so its original meaning is closer to ‘trust; commitment; engagement; involvement’ rather than creed.



Meditation helps to bring about the personal transformation which leads to such a mind-set. It frees us from our conditioning and from the tendency, which we all have, to react rather than respond. The fruit of meditation, of all contemplative prayer, is contemplative action in daily life. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: “If you pray without

serving your prayer is in vain; if you serve without praying your service is in vain. Go forward, pray and serve in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

**“Lord, may our hearts remain open to your presence and guide us to love like you”**

We are called to respond with compassion to the myriad situations we encounter in life; not to react out of our conditioning but to respond as each situation calls for. We are called to be like the Good Samaritan. What distinguished him from the others in that parable was that he saw clearly. The priest and the Levite were blinded by their conditioning, perhaps by their religious conditioning, but the Samaritan saw clearly the suffering before him and was aroused to respond with compassion and kindness.

And that is why the closing prayer for meditation that I offer you today reads: ‘Lord, may our hearts remain open to your presence and guide us to love like you.’ It challenges us to live our lives informed by our deepest connection and communion with God.

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



» Continued from Page 31



## Causes of obesity/ being overweight

While the detrimental effects of being overweight or obese on our physical and mental health are evident enough, the causes of these situations often slips beneath our notice, particularly during lockdown. Lifestyle choices play one of the largest parts in influencing our weight, and with everyone's lifestyle severely disrupted by the ongoing restrictions, it's easier than ever to tip the scales a little more than we have done previously.

The main sources of excess weight are unhealthy food choices, a lack of physical activity, genetics and medical reasons. In terms of unhealthy food choices, eating processed or fast food (that is high in fat), not eating fruit, vegetables and unrefined carbohydrates, drinking too much alcohol, eating larger portions than you need and comfort eating are all behaviours that contribute significantly to becoming overweight or obese.

A lack of physical activity is also an enormous fact in influencing weight. In ordinary time, it was identified that jobs involving many hours sitting at a desk, followed by a heavy reliance on cars and passive leisure activities were contributing significantly to a decrease in physical activity. It isn't hard to imagine that since working from home was instituted, coupled with five kilometre travel restrictions, levels of physical activity have dropped even further.

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend that adults do at least 150 minutes, or two hours and 30 minutes, of "moderate-intensity" aerobic activity every week. Such activity includes exercises like cycling and fast walking.

Genetics and medical conditions can play a role in weight, with some people staying the same weight for years without making an especial effort to do so, while others put on weight quickly if they're not too careful about what they eat. This could be due, in part, to genetics.

Some of the ways in which genetics influence weight include increasing the appetites of some, while others might have a genetic variation that sees their body more likely to store fat than somebody

else's. On the other hand, a medical condition, such as Cushing's syndrome or an underactive thyroid gland can result in weight gain too.

## Obesity 'wonder' drug

It is sometimes the case that a person requires medical intervention in order to tackle their obesity first, before progressing to managing their weight themselves in the long run.

A recent development on this front is a drug set to be available in Ireland early next year, Semaglutide. A study of around 2,000 patients, and published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, found that the mean change in body weight was -14.9% in the Semaglutide group, as opposed to -2.4% in the placebo group.

Semaglutide works by "hijacking" the body's appetite regulating system in the brain, which results in a reduced sense of hunger. The development comes as the HSE looks to step up its fight against obesity in Ireland, which has been described as an "epidemic".

*Newstalk* reported that Dr Donal O'Shea, the HSE's clinical lead for obesity, said the "penny had dropped" on the obesity crisis in Ireland.

"This drug, which is probably going to be licenced in Europe by the end of the year and available in Ireland by early next year, is the first step-change in drug management of obesity," he said on *Newstalk Breakfast*.

"We have drugs to treat heart disease and we have operations to treat heart disease: we're now reaching the point where we have

drugs to treat obesity, and the HSE is committing to operations to treat obesity," he said.

This marks a real change in the management of obesity, but in the long-term, the majority of us must continue to rely on the old-fashioned remedies of healthy eating and sufficient exercise.

## Health kick

As has been said throughout the article, staying active, eating well, and as I said last week, sleeping well, are the keys to an all-round healthy lifestyle. The lockdown has made many of these pursuits more difficult, but certainly not impossible. The key to maintaining any of them, however, is routine.

An exercise routine, meal plans, and a disciplined approach to our bedtime will make it much easier to manage our weight going forward. All of these things are achievable in the present circumstances.

Rather than initiate an unsustainable health kick, start with simpler steps, depending on what you're used to. Try going to bed slightly earlier, if work and your family situation allow, and getting up earlier in turn. Use the early hours of the morning to do some form of exercise, based on your capabilities. For some, this will be a simple half-hour walk, while for others, it may be an hour-long workout using homemade weights or workout equipment.

Also begin to manage your meals in advance. The temptation to order something or snack often descends upon us when we're at our most tired and are unwilling or unable to muster up the energy to rustle up something reasonable. Try to get into the habit of preparing tomorrow's meals the night before, as it leads to more balanced eating habits in the long run.

Dishes such as pastas, curries, soups, stews, sandwiches, wraps and rolls keep well, so don't be afraid to make a few days supply (provided the ingredients are fresh).

A holistic approach to a healthy life, a measured plan, will make it much easier to keep the weight off as winter loses its grip, allowing us to enjoy the coming spring to the full.



# Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

Many of the readings in the early weeks of Lent have reminded us of God's call to break the rod of oppression, to feed the hungry and care for the homeless poor, to learn to do good and to love our neighbour. I know people who live their lives faithful to this but they may never explicitly call themselves Christian. I look at the impact Pope Francis has on people of all faiths and none and it reminds me of the words of Psalm 42 "Deep is calling to deep". It is as if the Spirit alive in Pope Francis calls out to the Spirit alive in others, at the heart of their humanity, whatever their faith, spoken or unspoken.

So many of these people see Pope Francis wash the feet of prisoners, visit a survivor of the holocaust, reach out to a child who has a disability and they know they are tapping into something vital, something which matters. They 'get' the idea of service, of care, of living out the ideals that each person is worthy of respect and love. I think of the way so many and particularly young people respond to the urgent call to look after the environment. They have an intuitive sense of the sacredness of the earth, of how we need to care for our planet and protect it from destructive greed and consumerism. Whether or not these young people talk explicitly about faith – and they probably don't – they could teach us a lot about the sacredness of creation.

But what about Eucharist? Do people 'get' Eucharist in the same way? What do people think about Eucharist? We have all heard and perhaps contributed to the conversations that run along the lines of, "Ah it's a handy Mass, all done and dusted in twenty minutes". Have we turned the Mass into a commodity, something to have and to do as efficiently as possible? In many ways the experience of the past year, of relying on a virtual Mass online is the ultimate disconnection of Eucharist from what happened in the Upper Room. And maybe there is a very valuable challenge to us there to think again about how we experience and understand Eucharist – and how we communicate that to anyone else.

Eucharist is of great importance in my life but I've been really challenged by my experience over the past year. I know that priests around the country have provided an important resource to people with online Mass but more and more I feel that Eucharist without a community is not really Eucharist. We are



slipping back into that era when laity were utterly passive and the Eucharist began and ended with the priest. When we could go to Mass in small numbers I found it challenging because although I wanted to be there, the whole element of 'a faith community' had been stripped out of it with social distancing and masks. We have been disconnected.

So is this how some people feel when they come to the parish simply because their child is preparing for First Holy Communion? If they feel disconnected, not part of the faith community can Eucharist really make any sense to them? Perhaps before running sacramental preparation programmes we need to take a step back and build community. It might sound mad but I dream of digging up the parish lawn and planting vegetables together, watching them grow, gathering families together for picnics. If we listen to each other, talk about what has kept us going over the past year, about what we have missed, what we have learned, what we will treasure, we could create real "washing of feet" moments where people feel nurtured, understood and accepted – part of the community. And then when we gather to celebrate the Mass together we will both receive the Body of Christ and more fully be the Body of Christ. I think that the community, which remembers the Upper Room, could discover anew the meaning and power of Eucharist.



# Realising the Faith is 'the real deal'

## Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Patrick Edmund McCormick Williams in Cameroon, 2020, visiting the uncle of a friend, whose wedding he attended.



**W**hen Catholics are in school or college, they receive education on the Catholic Faith and have ready-made Faith communities. When they leave school for the world of work, this access to education and community can fall away. This was the experience of Patrick Edmund McCormick Williams, an Austrian Catholic who moved to Ireland in April 2015.

So Patrick, along with other Cork-based Catholics, organised an impromptu weekly gathering for prayer and adoration in 2015.

"We just decided to have local meetings," Patrick tells *The Irish Catholic*. "Our first meetings were usually just having an adoration and then having the Rosary and then going to have a social in the pub afterwards."

**“There was already a link with the Fraternity of St Peter (FSSP), they were coming over and saying a monthly Mass”**

A year later, a new arrival Matt Lavelle, founded Juventutem Corcaigh with Patrick. For Patrick and Matt, this development made sense as "in the end Juventutem is just a core group of people who want to show people what the Latin Mass is", Patrick says.

"The cornerstone is that we have at least a monthly meeting where we do outreach to especially

younger people between 18-35," he continues. "It started early 2017. There was already a link with the Fraternity of St Peter (FSSP), they were coming over and saying a monthly Mass. We really just spring boarded off that."

"We knew that the FSSP weren't around for just that day, but also for the whole weekend and even Monday nights. So it made sense to utilise their capabilities by actually inviting them to also have a talk on different topics and to really get some theology classes as well."

For these gatherings, they took on the banner of "Theology on Tap" – they were weekly social gatherings, yes, but they also served another purpose. They were a chance for Patrick, and other Catholics, to fill the gap left in their lives when they finished school and college.

"Ever since we started working,

and this would apply for me as well, we didn't get that weekly or monthly class of just learning about the faith," Patrick says. "It was really like – ok, we have to do it ourselves, at home alone, reading books or watching lectures online. In the end, we're here to know and love God and the only way to know God is by actually learning more about him, his Faith, what he created. We're living as young Catholics, young adult Catholics, that have a job – we don't have the access that students have, a dedicated group. That was really something that we wanted to have."

Patrick's route to the Faith had not been without its struggles, however. He was raised a Catholic by his parents, but he knew as he got older there would come a point where he either accepted or rejected the Faith.

"In the end, I went through loads of struggles of really trying

to figure out if the Faith is the real deal," Patrick says. "I decided to quit school early on. There were a lot of reasons, but the main one was that I am partially dyslexic, so I had a bit of a hard time. I did try and get the high school degree, but after a few years I said this is enough. It also wasn't properly understood by certain teachers, so certain teachers dismissed it."

### Challenge

Fed up of school, Patrick decided to head abroad and challenge himself. He went on a mission trip to India, doing work for the Church.

"I was not in Europe, my parents weren't with me, this is really my own initiative now, so will I really believe what they taught me to believe, does it actually make sense," Patrick asks himself. "There were definitely challenging things."

But it was in India that Patrick woke up to what God can do for a person: "In India, the school system is harsher than here," he says. "Some of the schoolteachers unfortunately still use corporal punishment. This was something that I went, ok, well how can I deal with this, especially in connection to the Faith and so on."

**“The small ‘b’ was a small ‘d’, the ‘three’ and ‘e’ were turned around, all these things that are clear signs of a dyslexic”**

"There was a little girl, she might have been six or seven years old. The teacher was very annoyed at her, pulled her into the teachers room – I was in there as well. She handed me the test of the little girl. I looked at it, to see what it was, and – there were definitely a couple of seconds of pure disbelief from my side. The small 'b' was a small 'd', the 'three' and 'e' were turned around, all these things that are clear signs of a dyslexic."

"I was sitting there in disbelief, thinking my goodness – I had a good couple of years, four, maybe five years, of trying to get the high school degree and keep failing a lot of the times because of dyslexia. It completely did a 180 now – I was in India, the other side of the world. If I hadn't been there, nobody could have told the teacher. She had dyslexia and it was so clear to me."

"That was something I found really, really eye-opening. I was 19 and I thought, ok, God's plans are way bigger than I expected. Because it was so personal, I thought that there needed to be something that was personal, because it was almost at the core of my five years of being at high school. It was definitely something that really opened up my eyes then."

## Sweet Treats

Laura Anderson



## Make someone's day with delightful homemade Jammy Dodgers

**T**hese biscuits are quick to make and taste so much better than the shop-bought version! Traditionally they are sandwiched with strawberry jam but you can try anything – apricot, chocolate spread, whatever you fancy.

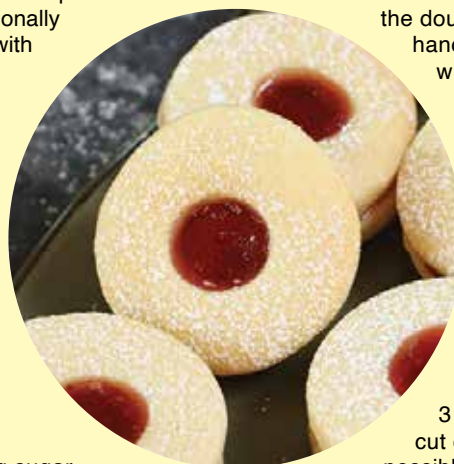
### Ingredients

Makes about 10 sandwich biscuits

- 175g unsalted butter
- 100g icing sugar
- 1 medium egg yolk
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 275g plain flour
- Raspberry or strawberry jam to fill

In a bowl, using an electric whisk beat the butter and icing sugar together on high for about two minutes until pale and creamy. Reduce speed to medium and beat in the egg yolk along with the vanilla

extract. Working in parts, sieve and then fold in the flour until it is fully combined. Shape the dough into a ball using your hands, then flatten it slightly and wrap in cling film. Leave it to rest in the fridge for half an hour.



To prepare for the next step, line a large baking tray with greaseproof paper and preheat the oven to 180°C/160°F/Fan/Gas mark 4. Roll the chilled dough out on a floured surface to a thickness of about 5mm. Using a cookie cutter about 3 inches/7.5 cm in diameter cut out as many biscuits as possible. Remember you need multiples of two. You will have to reroll the scraps to get the most out of your dough. In half of the biscuits using a smaller cutter (a star

or heart-shaped one looks extra decorative!) cut a hole in the centre of the biscuit. Place them on the lined baking tray leaving about an inch between each biscuit. You may need to work in batches. Bake the biscuits in the oven for 7-10 mins until pale golden and just starting to colour around the edge. They will be very soft coming out of the oven so leave them for a few minutes to cool on the tray and then carefully transfer them to a wire rack using a palette knife to cool fully.

It is important that the biscuits are completely cool before you try to assemble them or the jam will melt. Place a heaped teaspoon of jam into the centre of each plain biscuit and spread it evenly but not too close to the edge. Place the biscuit with the hole on top of the base and press down gently to sandwich. Dust with sieved icing sugar to finish. These delicious treats probably won't last long but will keep for about a week if kept in an airtight container.





# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## An inspiring story of a young role model

**F**or the Catholic Church there's a pressing need for role models that will appeal to young people. These role models don't have to be young but it helps.

**I Am With You – A documentary about Carlo Acutis** (EWTN, Saturday) gave us one such example. Carlo was beatified last year, mid pandemic, and so, perhaps didn't get the attention he deserved. He was a young student from Italy who took a particular interest in Eucharistic miracles and used his computer skills to design an exhibition to bring greater awareness of these phenomena. He died in 2006 after being diagnosed with a rapid onset strain of leukaemia.

The documentary painted a picture of a young man who spent much time in Eucharistic adoration and who was also kind, sociable, concerned for the practical needs of the poor and of his own generation. Though he used technology and the internet in particular for his evangelising work he was only too aware of the downsides, everything from pornography to bullying. He sought to be master rather than slave of these powerful means of communication.

The testimonies of those who knew him were touching – especially so when his mother spoke. And it wasn't



The body of Blessed Carlo Acutis is pictured after his tomb was opened in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Assisi, Italy ahead of his beatification last October. Photo: CNS

that he had been brought up in a particularly religious family – she had only been to Mass for the big sacramental milestones. St Francis and the town of Assisi were a big influence – as one contributor pointed out the saint captured many of the concerns of young people today – peace, love, respect for creation and the poor.

This documentary won't be the last word on Carlo – if canonisation follows I hope

his example will be brought to the world anew. When the programme started I wondered if I was watching the film that was advertised as there was a relatively long lead in that explained Church teaching on the Eucharist and transubstantiation. Eventually they got to Carlo's story, and that last hour was the best. I found the background music bland and irritating – the testimonies were absorbing enough without flags of

significance being flown. I liked the way the film ended with a roundup of quotes from Carlo – “To be always united with Jesus is the plan of my life”, “our goal must be infinite, not finite”, his description of the Eucharist as a “highway to Heaven”. At a time when most of us are deprived of receiving the Eucharist it served as a reminder of why it should be so important to us, so central to our life of faith.

Carlo and St Francis certainly inspire, while St David of Wales was the focus for **Songs of Praise** (BBC Two, Sunday), which kicked off appropriately with the hymn *For All the Saints*. The geographical focus was Tintern Abbey. I had heard of the place before when studying the Wordsworth poem inspired by the beautiful location and it was interesting to hear the history of the building and its history as a medieval Cistercian monastery.

Last weekend also saw Wales winning the triple crown and of course both rugby and singing have long been central to Welsh culture. Personable presenter Sean Fletcher spoke to three former rugby internationals for whom religious faith was now an important part of their lives. Emyr Lewis, Garin Jenkins and Bryn Hayward spoke of the mutual support in faith they gave each following their

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### MASS

**RTÉ One Sunday March 7, 11.00am**

Mass from the RTÉ studios, Dublin, on the Third Sunday of Lent, with the Cavan Cathedral parish group. Celebrant – Bishop Martin Hayes.

#### VATICANO

**EWTN Sunday March 7, 8.30 pm**

The latest news from the Vatican with newsmaker interviews, highlights of recent events, and feature segments from the heart of the Universal Church.

#### The Confessors

**RTE One Monday March 8, 10.35 pm**

A selection of Irish priests, urban, rural and chaplains discuss their experience of Confession, Covid-19 and more. Repeat.

retirement from rugby.

My favourite song was *Jesu, Lover of My Soul* from the Aberystwyth Arts Centre – this and the other choral performances were filmed before Covid-19 and I have to confess to getting a little emotional to see so many people singing their hearts out together. Oh what we have lost and hopefully will regain, though it might be a while yet...

Earlier Sunday morning **The Big Questions** (BBC One) asked if religion had let us down during the pandemic. Presenter Nicky Campbell started by declaring that “religious people have done incredible things” – volunteering in hospitals, food banks and the like. Rabbi Jonathan Romain was

critical of some UK religious authorities that wouldn't open for worship even though there could have been social distancing, and also of churches and synagogues that didn't use online services when they could have done. I don't think enough credit was given to how creative religious communities became by using technology and online gatherings.

Overall however there was positivity towards the contribution of religion in Covid-19 times and a welcoming of the co-operation between religious and secular groups.

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# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## Glimpses of Dublin's operatic past

Last time round I may have implied that soprano May Devitt made her Dublin Operatic Society debut as Philine in *Mignon* in 1937. In fact, her first DOS appearance came on April 30, 1935 as Leonora in Verdi's *Il trovatore*. The following year she was heard as Violetta in *La traviata* and Marguerite in *Faust* at the Gaiety.

### Prodigy

Something of a child prodigy, May Devitt began her career singing *Home, Sweet Home* at a concert in the Rotunda when she was eight. Her remuneration was five shillings! She later appeared at the Olympia – billed as ‘Little May Devitt, the child soprano’.



Miss May Devitt.

She studied with Vincent O'Brien, director of music at Dublin's pro-cathedral and professor of singing at

the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM). He impressed on her the importance of taking her top notes *pianissimo*, as a genuine singer should never shout! Under Prof. O'Brien's guidance her voice developed a three-octave span.

In her late teens May met, fell in love with and married Irish army commandant, Liam Murphy, and her singing career was grounded almost before it had taken off. In time she returned to Vincent O'Brien and undertook the role of Leonora in a Radio Éireann broadcast version of *Il trovatore*.

Hearing her shortly afterwards English producer Sydney Russell invited her to

appear as a guest with the Universal Grand Opera Company as Mimi in *La bohème* at the Gaiety Theatre. This led to engagements with DOS each season between 1935 and 1941. Her final DOS role – Arline in *The Bohemian Girl* – came in February 1952. May Devitt also sang many times with the DGOS and toured extensively with popular Belfast tenor Josef Locke in musicals and variety shows.

### Irish artists

Besides many other Irish artists on DOS rosters, the name of English tenor Heddle Nash (1894-1961) stands out. One of my father's favourite artists, Mr Nash's

first DOS appearance came with the title role in *Faust* in April 1935. He was back the following year as Alfredo opposite May Devitt's Violetta in *La traviata*; repeated his *Faust*, this time with Ms Devitt as Marguerite, and Pinkerton to her *Madama Butterfly*.

Mr Nash's other DOS roles included Des Grieux (*Manon*); Fernando (*La Favorita*); Rodolfo (*La bohème*); Almaviva (*The Barber of Seville*) and Turiddu (*Cavalleria Rusticana*). His last appearance with DOS was as Alfredo in October 1951.

London-born, Milan-trained Mr Nash, who was known as a “*tenore di grazia*” and “the English lyric tenor par excellence”, made his Covent Garden debut as Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*

in 1929. He sang Basilio in *Le nozze di Figaro* at the opening night of the first Glyndebourne Festival in 1934 when he was also heard as Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*. One critic commented, ‘hardly another tenor of his time has sung Mozart with such elegance’.

### Gerontius

In the concert hall Mr Nash was revered for his *Gerontius*, which he sang under Elgar's baton in 1931 and his 1945 recording of the work under Malcolm Sargent is still considered as ‘unsurpassed’ by many reviewers. Following his retirement from public performances, Mr Nash was professor of singing at London's Royal College of Music.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## A glimpse of new hope for fragile lives

**As Many as the Stars: a story of change for the children of China**

by Robert Glover with Theodore Brun  
(Hodder and Stoughton, £16.99)

Author Robert Glover had had an adventurous and varied life: being a submariner when that was a dangerous vocation and then a footballer (before there was money in, one imagines). But then he became a social worker helping in what ways he could for teenagers in Norfolk who had disturbed lives.

**“Readers in Ireland will view this book with interest given our own historical and social backgrounds”**

However he nourished an early dream of visiting China - who hasn't? And from this emerged a whole different direction to his life. He and his family of six actually moved to China. He was engaged with the charity Care for Children in Shanghai.

### Persuaded

Remarkably he persuaded the authorities that instead of a system of state orphanages - this may now begin to sound familiar - he prompted them to accept a family-based system of fostering and adoption. For



every child he wanted there to be a family. The charity is now active not just in China - where they managed to settle a million children (some 85% of the infants in state-run institutions) - but also in Vietnam and Thailand as well.

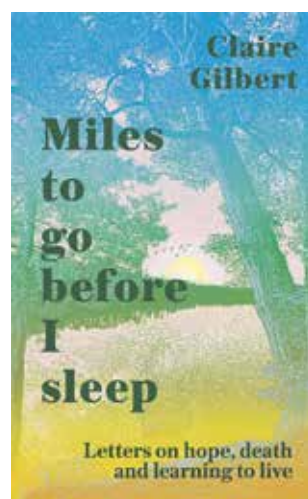
**“He and his family of six actually moved to China. He was engaged with the charity Care for Children in Shanghai”**

Readers in Ireland will view this book with interest given our own historical and social backgrounds. Robert Glover tells (with the aid of Theodore Brun) his remarkable story in an uncomplicated and straightforward way. When it so easy to despair of goodness in the world, a book like this gives one hope.

## Living life to the full, cancer or no cancer

**Miles to go before I sleep: Letters on hope, death and learning to live**

by Claire Gilbert  
(Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99)



Peter Costello

**O**ut this month, Claire Gilbert's unusual book which might have been a memoir of dying, becomes instead a celebration of living. It is a remarkable book, one which (as Rowan Williams is quoted as saying), is not easy reading, but in the end is uplifting and liberating.

In her mid-50s Claire Gilbert was diagnosed with myeloma. This is a cancerous condition of blood. However it has unusual features. She was told by her doctors she might have only months to live. On the other hand, given the vagaries of the disease she might live on for a decade or more. There was no way of telling. She was left in a limbo of medical and emotional uncertainty.

**“Her book is also very much a collective effort in another way”**

Of course she was put on a course of chemotherapy and other severe treatments.

“My cancer is incurable,” she writes, “so although the treatment has ‘worked’ and I am in remission, it could come back next year, or in twenty years’ time. I have no idea. So, I have to find my peace else-



Claire Gilbert at home and well again.

where than in having or not having cancer. I can't think of fighting it: it isn't going away.”

Behind Claire Gilbert lies a woven heritage of Jewish, Scottish, Spanish, Irish and English cultures. Her main inspiration in life seems to be the writings of St Julian of Norwich. Married to an Irishman, the couple divide their time between England and Ireland.

### Revitalise

Claire Gilbert is the director of the Westminster Abbey Institute in London, which works with the public service institutions around Parliament Square “to revitalise moral and spiritual values in public life”. Wherever one lives and whatever one believes, this is a programme worthy of support which every vivid-minded citizen will support.

Remarkably her book has no bibliography, but a ‘Dear Readers Playlist’ - an aural feast of life-enchancing music of many kinds - an unusual feature I cannot recall ever having seen before in this category of book. It will give the book and her ideas a special relevance in the memories of her readers.

**“She was told by her doctors she might have only months to live”**

Her book is also very much a collective effort in another way. She arranged with a wide circle of varied friends to write about her feelings, ever changing as they were, as she passed through her treatments. The 44 letters are arranged in five parts leading down to her cur-

rent Covid-19 self-isolation.

### Incomplete

This is the kind of book which is incomplete, in the sense that it calls for the reader to think about how all this might apply to them. In a sense we are all aware of the course of life: death to this life is on its way. But the central question is not dying but living: how do we use the time we have to the best advantage of ourselves, of others, and of the planet. The book is not about dying but about learning to truly live.

Each one of us like Robert Frost are merely “stopping by woods on a snowy evening” too; and like the poet we are aware that though “the woods are lovely, dark and deep,” we have to move on before sleep: “I have promises to keep...”

Those promises should not be forgotten about; the time should not be frittered away. Let us hope that many readers will be influenced by Claire Gilbert's book to concern themselves with living life to its very fullest.



Robert Glover with his extended family - with love enough to spare for hundreds of thousands of orphans. Photo: robertmarkglover.com.

**“Of course she was put on a course of chemotherapy and other severe treatments”**



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.

## Towards the turn of the revolutionary tide

### An Illustrated History of the Irish Revolution 1916-1923

by Michael B. Barry  
(Andalus Press, €24.95)

Peter Costello

This is another illustrated history from the pen and press of Michael B. Barry. He has chosen in this one to colourise the images of the past. This is a process which most historians are sceptical about. As I have said before in these pages, it is a form of forgery, a manipulation of historical documents.

**“We are approaching the anniversary of the truce, followed by the treaty, and then the civil war”**

The past - which is still of some importance to many people - is made to look like a television documentary, sometimes even a 'docudrama',

like *The Crown*. However Michael Barry with a sharp eye has selected from a wide variety of newly available sources images which will be fresh to many readers; the supposed 'colour of real life' imposed on them can always be subtracted, leaving the true image.

### Anniversary

But we are approaching the anniversary of the truce, followed by the treaty, and then the civil war; to inexcusable events for which we will no longer be able to blame the British, but will have to account to ourselves and to history for what Irish people did to Irish people. For the 'War of Independence' was at its heart not a war with Britain, but between at least seven different groups from left to right for power on the island - or part of the island. The civil war truly began in 1912. We have to come to terms with this, and to let

it become history rather than a source of present-day politics; perhaps even to face the fact that the revolution was not so revolutionary.

**“The past - which is still of some importance to many people - is made to look like a television documentary”**

This book ends in 1923. In 1924 when the emigration office for the United States opened again there were queues around the block for travel permits, and the ships were crowded with those who lived through the years we are commemorating, but did not want to live in the 'new Ireland'. The main gift of freedom was, down to the 1960s, the freedom to leave the country in huge, nation-weakening numbers, that too needs to be commemorated.

## Mainly about books

By the books editor

## Towards a new kind of parish history



Patron Day in early Victorian days in Cork

**T**he other week, while writing about the long neglected topic of the thatched churches of Penal times, it struck me that this was an ideal subject for research, not only for local historians but by local people themselves.

I had in the back of my mind the survey into Irish folklore in the interwar years by the Irish Folklore Commission (as it then was: it is now the Folklore Department in UCD). Through the co-operation of national school teachers across the country, children were asked to 'inter-view' (so to speak) the older generations in their family and to ask them for their recollections of stories and tales and events of their local place. The structure for the questions was drawn from Sean O'Sullivan's *Handbook of Irish Folklore*.

Such questionnaires were not new even then. Back in early Victorian times when the ordnance survey was underway under the direction of Col. Larcom, the Celtic scholar John O'Donovan travelled from townland to townland making enquiries about place names, in the process collecting a great deal of local lore.

### Inspiration

The more immediate inspiration of the folklorists of the Free State were their own professors in Sweden and Norway who had been trained to collect not tales only, but also details of all kind of folklore and folk-life. They wanted not only the details of how a story ended, but how buckets were made, and what was thought the best times to go out after fish.

Coming back to the Church: all the details of local lore of all kinds began to disappear with the advent of radio in the 1920s. After the cinema and commercial radio from Europe, television made the matter worse in the 1960s. So now before the invasion of the internet becomes too dominant, is the time to ask the older folk about all the things, people, and lore that they can recall, say from 1940s.

Such as: "The people used to say, as I remember from a child, that there was a dried up holy well at the bottom of Ryans' field." There is an equivalent to 'Ryans' field' in every parish. It seems to me that

this period of lockdown might be the time to inaugurate in every parish a plan to gather local information about their local churches. Perhaps indeed it might be extended to all places of worship and faith in a parish, which would involve say passage graves, holy wells, Mass rocks, old graveyards, and the succeeding versions of local chapels. All of this can be recorded or photographed on one's portable telephone.

### Gather

The thing would be to gather the local lore at first. There would be time later to see what historians and others say: don't assume someone knows all about it. You would be surprised at how local knowledge fades.

So too recollections about the religious life are quickly lost. One reason is that when a parish priest dies, the parish house is quickly cleared out and his papers destroyed. These are seen as 'Church property', and the business of no-one else. Also how often one is told that "Fr Maguire, who was a dear kind man, knew all about that..." Perhaps his people have saved something. But of course they never have. One of the saddest things to see in a priest's house cleaned out on his death: it is an image of tradition dying.

If people are concerned about the folklore and folk life of their own place it is up to them to record it and preserve it. So much lore that might otherwise be lost, could be preserved. This never seems to have been done for ecclesiastical affairs.

### Suggestions

I will return to this topic in a later issue with more suggestions on how to proceed. But the outcome of any research would doubtless reveal far more about the eras of thatched parish churches.

To understand what I mean, would-be researchers might read such books as *Ask the Fellows who cuts the Hay*, by George Ewart-Evans, *Ackenfield* by Ronald Blythe, or Ronald Fletcher's *In a Country Churchyard*, which will show just what genuine sympathy with local people has achieved in England.



The Chief State Solicitor of the new State, Michael Corrigan, outside the ruin of his home in Leinster Road, one of numerous houses bombed or burned by Republicans in February 1923.







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— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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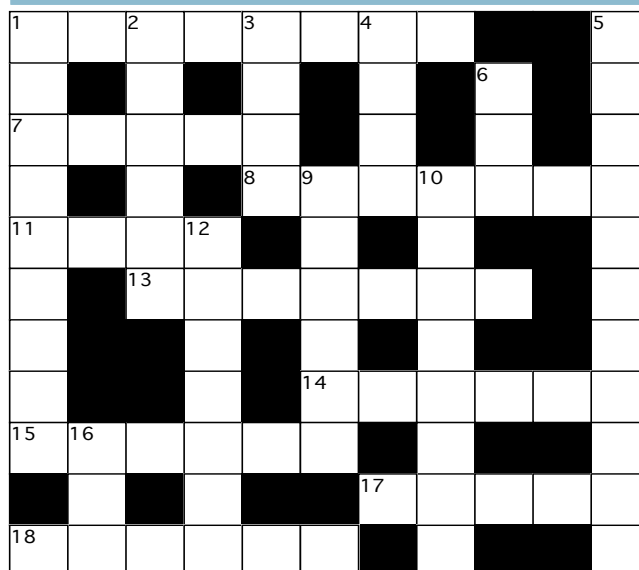
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# Leisure time

## Crossword Junior

Gordius 372



### Across

- 1 You may have to show this when you go to another country (8)  
7 Elevators (5)  
8 Tall church tower (7)  
11 Girl's name (4)  
13 Not as old (7)  
14 Put a stamp on the envelope before you post this (6)  
15 Type of puzzle you tell to someone (6)  
17 Sound (5)  
18 Took part in a game (6)

### Down

- 1 Large creature that lives near the North Pole (5,4)  
2 Security, lack of danger (6)  
3 Go by (4)  
4 Popular flower (4)  
5 Where you might buy groceries (11)  
6 Jump on one foot (3)  
9 Jumble up - some string, perhaps (6)  
10 When people have a chance to vote for a new government (8)  
12 Vacation (7)  
16 Sick (3)

## SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 25

GORDIUS NO. 496

**Across** — 1 Right angle 6 Iced 10 Bantu 11 Sanctuary lamp 12 Almonds 13. Eager 17 Tart 19 Champ 21 Deborah 23 Range 24 Vase 25 Cure 26 Newer 28 Dry dock 33 Itinerary 34 Zaire 35 Eggs Florentine 36 Wellington

**Down** — 1 Ribs 2 Gentlemen 3 Truro 4 Nosed 5 Link 7 Clang 8 Day tripper 9 Stretch 13 None 14 Stopped 20. Anarchist 21 Decreed 22 Army 27 Wring 29 Royal 30 Dozen 31 Daze 32 Vein

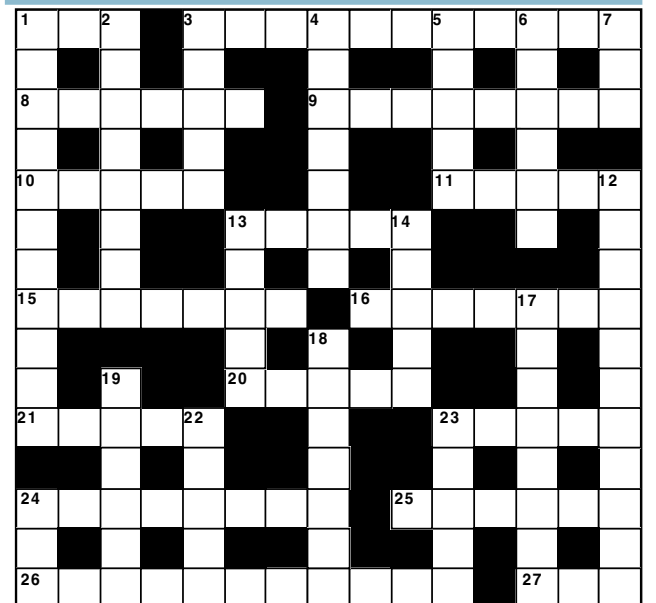
CHILDREN'S No. 371

**Across** — 1. Frying 5. Plus 8. Education 9. Kid 10. Value 13. Daffodil 15. Adder 17. Neighed 20. Boil 21. Created 22. Roll

**Down** — 2. Red card 3. Include 4. Gate 6. Linked 7. Sandal 11. Earn 12. Officer 14. Ice 15. Amber 16. Drill 18. Hats 19. Dodo

## Crossword

Gordius 497



### Across

- 1 Unruly group (3)  
3 Mr Richard's executioner will keep you in suspense (5-6)  
8 & 22d Ecclesiastic melodies (6,5)  
9 Limp once, around evening prayer-time (8)  
10 With perfect timing, where the snooker chalk goes (2,3)  
11 Inexpensive (5)  
13 Wide (5)  
15 Tyrannise, subdue (7)  
16 Such clothing causes a parish priest real confusion (7)  
20 & 7d Lake on the Shannon (5,3)  
21 Abyss (5)  
23 Gleam (5)  
24 The first Roman emperor (8)  
25 The capital of the Bahamas (6)  
26 Replace pine like this - you'll have a less-obstructed smoke after using it (4-7)  
27 Owing (3)

### Down

- 1 Tiny (11)  
2 A sad piece of fast food, but a good investment! (4,4)  
3 Hidden store (5)  
4 Non-factual writing (7)  
5 Savoury jelly (5)  
6 The pilot is powerless to control this aeroplane! (6)  
7 See 20 across  
12 Bar (6,5)  
13 Herb? Mr Fawltly to you! (5)  
14 It may be measured in fathoms (5)  
17 How a sad leper fell back into former condition (8)  
18 If such a mixture can produce so beautiful a plant... (7)  
19 ...one's obsession will cause one to terminate the phone call (4,2)  
22 See 8 across  
23 Panache (5)  
24 The current measure of a British politician (3)

## Sudoku Corner

372

### Easy

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

### Hard

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

### Last week's Easy 371

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

### Last week's Hard 371

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



## Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# An argument for retirement of parish priests

## BERNARD IS A BEAUTIFUL

name (think of St Bernard of Clairvaux, patron of beekeepers and Gibraltar and all that). But I am not called after him. Bernard is also a surname in these parts, and my mother was born Maeve Bernard – hence my Christian name.

My mother had a grand-uncle who was a priest in Cork diocese, Denis Bernard by name. According to our diocese's website, he trained for priesthood in Salamanca and Thurles before being ordained in 1874 (imagine the trek to Spain in the days before Ryanair – or even planes).

## Parishes

After a few curacies in west Cork parishes, he was appointed PP to the parish where I serve in 1905, and served there 30 years until he died in his 92nd year. Imagine that, he was 91 years of age and still the parish priest! His headstone is one of the highest in the churchyard, so even though he was dead years before I was born, I literally serve in his shadow. The only other place I see his work is in the parish registers, which he kept faithfully (though not legibly) till he drew his last breath: no delegation in those days.



Some of the older people carried memories of the old man, 'Daddy Bernard' as he was affectionately known. Little of his homilies remains, apart from a very vivid Christmas sermon about the bleakness of the stable, and an annual reminder to farmers saving the hay not to neglect the priest's horse.

At the end of his life, his nephew Jack Bernard was his curate for seven years. The parochial house was divided between them. The older man had the top of the house, complete with an external door and a flight of stairs that I imagine he rarely descended. The curate shared the lower level with the housekeeper, with smaller windows and lower-ceilinged rooms, as befitted his junior station.

## Protective

I imagine it must have been tough on the young man, watched over like a hawk by the protective uncle, living on very little, as curates subsisted in those days and not empowered to do much in the parish, since the elder man retained all the reins of power. Jack Bernard,

the curate, my granduncle, is remembered in parishes where he served being 'mad about the dogs' (training and racing greyhounds); I can't help but think he may have picked up the hobby here, as a break from excessive familial supervision.

If ever there was an argument for retirement from the office of parish priest, the above situation confirms it. Of course, in those days, the older man didn't consider retirement a ministerial possibility, because he presumably saw it as his duty to serve until he could serve no more, due to being dead. And his young curate could not protest, because curates had few rights, and certainly no voice. How much more the younger man could have learned if he were put in charge, with a wise uncle to advise, gently: not all change is bad.

## Dining one day with an unbeliever

● A lovely card made its way to me lately. I had sent birthday greetings to a priest in another diocese celebrating a milestone birthday. I had remarked on the good impression he had made on a friend with whom I was dining one day, an unbeliever. His reply: "I'm glad I made a good impression on your infidel friend. Your dining with outsiders does not surprise me. You are somewhat a maverick... I like mavericks."

I have been smiling since the card arrived. It may help to explain why I can annoy non-mavericks. Please forgive, please smile with me...

## Bread of Life nourishes us until we receive again

● Unlike 99% of priests in Ireland, I do not include the 'Act of Spiritual Communion' in online Masses, though those who tune in may well say one. I believe that once we receive the Bread of Life, it nourishes us till we receive again; it has no 'BEST BEFORE' date, but keeps on working in us. Like millions around the world who are lucky to receive once a year, we can experience Christ present when His Word is read and listened to, when God's praises are sung and when we gather even when apart: Christ never deserts us.



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