

The Irish Catholic

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14-PAGE SPECIAL

Remembering the late Pope



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One of the greatest of our times Page 8



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A farewell to Benedict

'Prophetic' Pope remembered as a friend to Ireland

Michael Kelly
Editor

The late Pope Benedict was "prophetic" and always showed a keen interest in Ireland, an Irish-born diplomat who worked closely with the Pontiff has told *The Irish Catholic*.

As Benedict is laid to rest today (Thursday) in the grotto underneath St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican following a simple funeral presided over by Pope Francis, the late Pontiff has also been praised for his interest in the peace process.

At the Vatican, Francis praised his predecessor – who died on Saturday morning at the age of 95 – "as such a noble, such a gentle person".

When it came to Ireland, Co. Down-native Francis Campbell, who served as Britain's ambassador to the Vatican from 2005-2011, described Benedict as "prophetic" and said his "interest in the peace process and reconciliation was greatly appreciated by the governments."

"He often cited the example of the peace process as what could be achieved when leaders engaged. He had a good grasp of the situation and was always supportive of the political efforts," Mr Campbell told *The Irish Catholic*.

Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin, who along with Archbishop

of Dublin Dermot Farrell is representing Ireland at the funeral, also praised the late Pontiff's work to tackle the clerical abuse crisis.

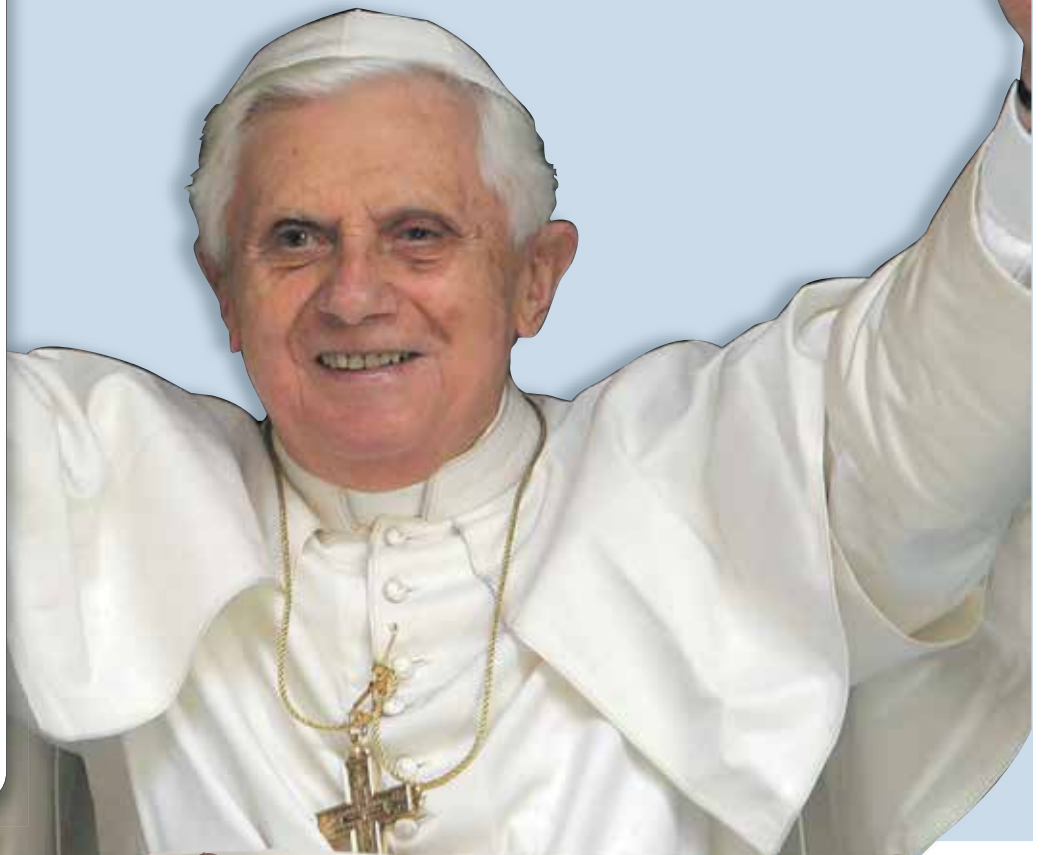
"The then Pope called for urgent action to address the legacy of abuse which, he said, has had 'such tragic consequences in the lives of victims and their families', and which has 'obscured the light of the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution succeeded in doing'."

The Archbishop of Armagh also highlighted Pope Benedict XVI's interest in Ireland, which he said "goes back to his friendship with the late Archbishop Kevin McNamara of Dublin when both were young theology professors."

"Former students of the Pontifical Irish College, Rome, also remember fondly his visit there as cardinal," Archbishop Martin added.

Fr D. Vincent Twomey SVD, who as a former student of then Prof. Ratzinger stayed in touch down the years, said "in the long-term, he will be remembered as one of the greatest theologians of the modern period".

At Benedict's request, political leaders or heads of state were not invited to today's funeral. Only his native Germany and Italy had official delegations while Ireland's ambassador to the Vatican Frances Collins represented the State.



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For Benedict, friendship with God was the key

You can't please everyone as Pope. John Paul II didn't (and he's a saint!), Pope Francis doesn't and Pope Benedict XVI certainly didn't.

Probably that is a very good thing, since to lead with conviction and courage always risks upsetting people – particularly what Pope Francis describes as vested interests and ecclesiastical elites.

On the wider sphere, let's face it: a lot of what the Catholic Church teaches is no longer in fashion in the contemporary West. Being interviewed this week about the death of Benedict XVI I was asked by a reporter if the Church was out of touch with modern Ireland. "Well, it is certainly out of step," I said. Before adding that the Church teaches what it does because it believes it to be true, not out of a desire to win popularity contests.

The death of Pope Benedict XVI marks the end of an era, he was a towering figure in the global Church for the second half of the 20th Century and as John Paul II led the Church across the threshold of the third millennium.

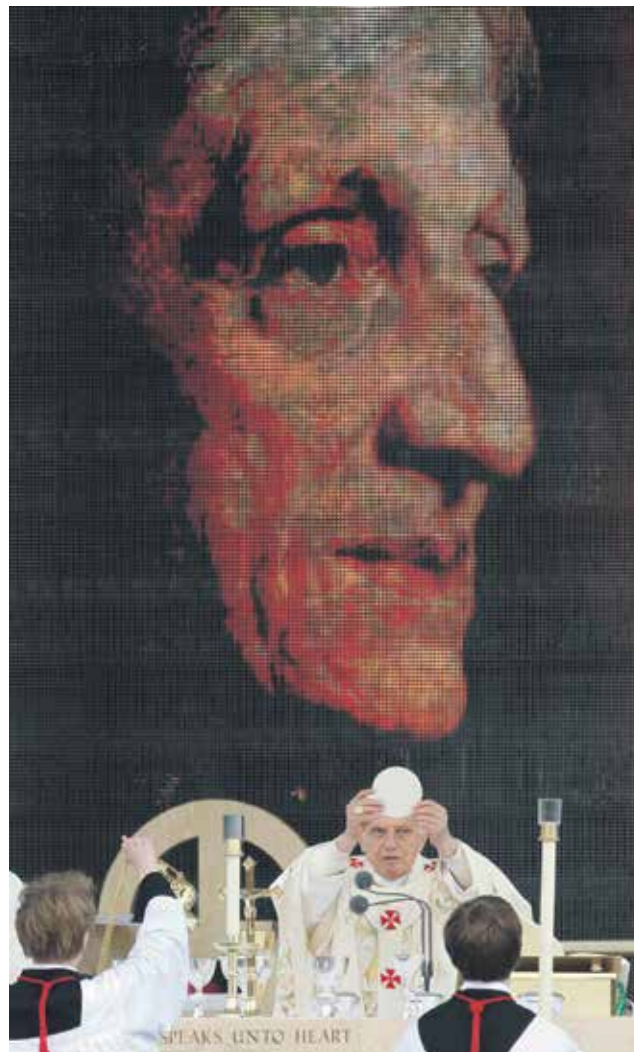
Ministry

Throughout his long ministry, Pope Benedict was above all a priest. He tried to proclaim to people the centrality of God in their lives and the joy that is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by which one knows oneself to be loved unconditionally and eternally.

“Benedict XVI was never someone who ever wanted the Faith to be a burden that would bow people or imprison them in rules and regulations”

The great quest of all of his theology was to help people in every part of the world, particularly the tired and jaded old continent of Europe, that God had a plan for them and that there was a place for them in the Church.

What many interpreted as doctrinal rigidity, for



Pope Benedict XVI raises the host during the beatification Mass for Cardinal John Henry Newman at Cofton Park in Birmingham, England in 2010. Photo: CNS

Joseph Ratzinger was being true to the deposit of faith that had been entrusted to him and his responsibility of not leading people astray or proposing to them anything less than the fullness of the Gospel truth that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Despite the caricatures of his critics, Benedict XVI was never someone who ever wanted the Faith to be a burden that would bow people or imprison them in rules and regulations. On the contrary, he taught that life in Christ is true freedom and it is only in the light of the Gospel that we can see this liberty.

He himself made the point on numerous occasions that we had become too accustomed in the Church of presenting the Faith as a list of prohibitions, spending all of our time telling people what the Church is against. Why

not, he said, tell people what the Church is for? Why not indeed.

Travelling

I remember early in his Pontificate he was travelling to Spain where a government that was quite hostile to the Church had just been elected. The stage was set, we journalists confidently predicted, for a showdown. What happened instead was a few days of joy where everywhere Benedict went, he promoted the positive option that is Faith in God and – particularly to young people – the exhilarating and rewarding challenge that it is.

Like all men, he had his flaws and inadequacies. And his critics have not been slow to point out these weaknesses this week, even within minutes of the announcement of his death.

Editor's Comment

Michael Kelly



In a lot of the media coverage, it has seemed difficult to find someone with anything positive to say about the late Pope. But I don't think this is something that would greatly trouble Joseph Ratzinger. Particularly in his later years he often referred to the fact that he would stand before the power of God conscious of his many sins, but trusting in that God who is at the same time the Lord and also a brother and gentle Father.

“I remember early in his Pontificate he was travelling to Spain where a government that was quite hostile to the Church had just been elected”

Joseph Ratzinger has completed his earthly life, and rests now from his labours.

It seems appropriate to quote from Cardinal Newman, a saint much-loved by Pope Benedict:

“He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do his work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep his commandments.

“Therefore, I will trust him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, he knows what he is about.”

Joseph Ratzinger (1927-2022) knew what he was about. May he rest in peace.

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Benedict XVI's interest in peace process 'greatly appreciated', says former British ambassador

Pope Benedict XVI's interest in the North's peace process and reconciliation was "greatly appreciated", a former British ambassador to the Holy See has said.

During his eight-year reign, the deceased pope encouraged Irish and UK political leaders in "their tireless efforts towards peace", Prof. Francis Campbell told *The Irish Catholic*.

"He often cited the example of the peace process as what could be achieved when leaders engaged," the Co. Down native continued.

Prof. Campbell, who served as Britain's Ambassador to the Vatican from 2005-2011, said Benedict XVI "had a good grasp of the situation and was always supportive of the political efforts".

Irish political leaders also remembered the pope for his commitment to promoting peace in the North.

In a statement following Pope Benedict's death, December 31, President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins praised the pope for his "untiring efforts to find a common path in promoting peace and goodwill throughout the world", including for maintaining a "steadfast interest" in peace in Northern Ireland.

Meanwhile, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin expressed "great concern" for the state of the "fragile peace" on this island in his New Year's homily.

As the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement nears, he warned that "We are more aware than ever that the work of peace is unfinished".

"Sadly, 25 years on, the trauma and hurt of those horrific years remain substantially unhealed," the primate of all-Ireland said on January 1.

"Wounds within, and between, our communities remain open – wounds of body, mind, spirit and heart – and the legacy of suffering continues to fuel mistrust."

Dr Martin encouraged everyone to approach the anniversary "positively and sensitively".

"We owe it to the architects of the past – who built the Agreement by taking risks – to redouble our efforts for peace and reconciliation this year in the name of the common good," he added.

An online book of condolence for Pope Benedict has been opened by the Irish bishops' conference and can be accessed through the conference's website, catholicbishops.ie.

 See P6.



People pay their respects as Pope Benedict XVI's body lies in repose in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, January 2, 2023. Photo: CNS/Ciro De Luca, Reuters.

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David Quinn of The Iona Institute

Eighteen missionaries killed violently in 2022

Chai Brady

A total of 18 missionaries lost their lives violently around the world in 2022.

The data, gathered by Fides Agency and released in its annual report, found twelve priests, one brother, three women religious, one seminarian, and one lay person were killed.

Nine missionaries were killed in Africa, eight mis-

sionaries in the Americas, and one in Asia.

The Vatican news agency stated it uses the term 'missionary' in a broad sense, including "all the baptised engaged in the life of the Church who died in a violent way, not only 'in hatred of the faith'".

Most murders occurred in Africa, with four priests killed in Nigeria where kidnapping is rife. Three mis-

sionaries were killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – two priests and a nun, one priest in Tanzania and another nun in Mozambique.

The most recent murder was of Sr Marie-Sylvie Kavuke Vakatsuraki, of the Congregation of the Petites Soeurs de la Présentation de Notre Dame au Temple of Butembo, in the war-torn eastern province of North

Kivu, DRC. She was killed at night in late October during an assault of a village in Maboya.

Mexico saw the most missionaries killed in the Americas. Three priests and a seminarian were killed against the backdrop of growing drug-related insecurity.

Missionaries also lost their lives in Honduras (2), Bolivia (1) and in Haiti,

where on June 25, Italian nun Luisa Dell'Orto was killed, in Port-au-Prince, allegedly in an attempted robbery. The 64-year-old nun, who belonged to the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Gospel of Charles de Foucauld, had been serving in Haiti for twenty years working for street children.

In Asia, a Vietnamese Dominican priest, was stabbed to death while lis-

tening to confessions in the diocese of Kon Tum, by a mentally ill man.

No missionary killings have been reported this year in Oceania and Europe, which in 2021 counted one victim: Fr Olivier Maire SMM, the provincial superior of the Montfort Missionaries in France killed by a Rwandan-born immigrant with mental issues whom he had been assisting.

Irish parents go biblical with baby names

Jason Osborne

The Bible continues to provide naming inspiration in modern Ireland, with four of the top five most popular male names given December 2021 coming from biblical figures.

'Jack', the exception, remained at the top of the 12-month list for the second year running, with 'Noah' coming in close behind at second place.

Michael, James and Daniel rounded out the top five, names with links to figures both human and angelic in both the Old and the New Testaments.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) said there was "a clear Christmas influence" when it came to naming girls last December, with 'Holly' coming out in the top spot.

Over the course of the year, however, 'Fiadh' was the number one choice for

girls' names, followed by 'Grace'.

The most popular names chosen for baby boys born across Ireland during December 2021 were: Jack (58); Noah (42); Michael (38); James (37); and Daniel (36).

The most popular names chosen for baby girls in December 2021 were: Holly (45); Ellie (34); Grace (33); Emily (32); with Ava and Ella joint fifth with 29 names each.

One of the oldest Irish nuns dies in the US

Ruadhán Jones

One of the oldest Irish nuns worldwide, 102-year-old Irish Sr Anthony Eileen Reidy OSF, died on January 1 in Assisi House, Philadelphia.

Born in Cork, where she was a member of St Columbkille Parish, Ballyagram, Sr Reidy had been a professed member of the Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia for 77 years.

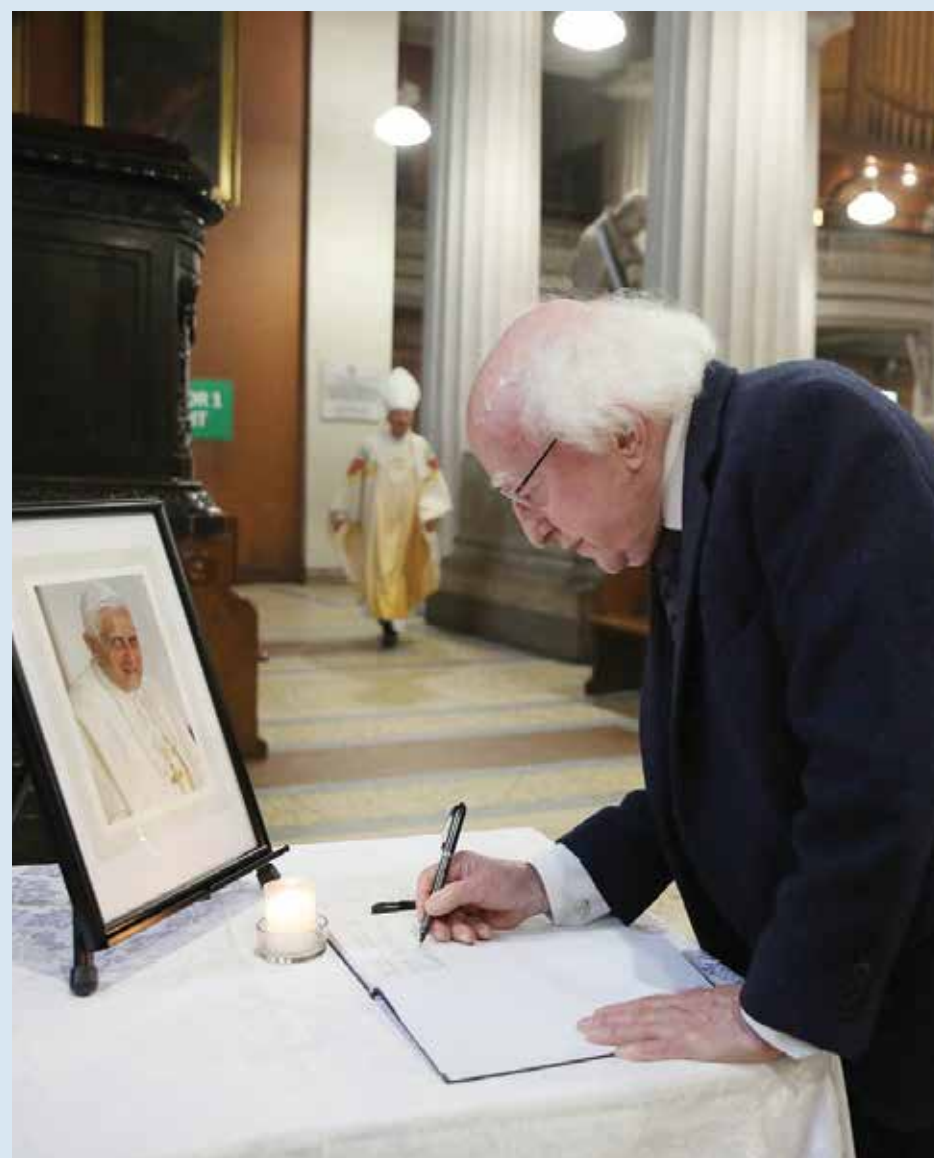
She entered the congregation in 1939 and professed her first vows in 1945 and ministered primarily in healthcare and pastoral care.

Sr Reidy served for 35 years in the Diocese of Trenton at St Francis Hospital/Medical Centre first three years in the dining room and central supply and then in pastoral services.

In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Sister Anthony served at St Agnes Hospital in Philadelphia for 15 years. In 2010 she moved to Assisi House, the congregation's retirement residence in Aston, where she served in prayer and hospitality ministry until her death.

Additional ministry included serving for 11 years in her native Ireland at St Patrick Hospital in Cork.

May he rest in peace...



President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins signs the book of condolence opened in Dublin's Pro-Cathedral following the death of Pope Benedict XVI, Sunday, January 1. Photo: John McElroy.

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Jean Vanier.

Ireland's 50 years in the EU...



Mary Kenny

It is 50 years since Ireland joined the European Union – then called the European Economic Community, (EEC) and subsequently, just the European Community (EC). I remember it because I was reporting from Brussels at the time, and fireworks and parties were laid on for the accession of Ireland, Britain and Denmark.

Key role

But what impressed me most about the occasion was the absence of Patrick Hillery, then Ireland's European Commissioner (and later President of Ireland). Although he had played a key role in negotiating Ireland's entry, he chose not to attend the gala soirée because his little daughter had broken her arm, and he wanted to be at home with her.

In an era long before 'paternity leave', Dr Hillery showed a fatherly dedication to his young child, prioritising her needs before the triumphant jollities of an international event. Respect to him, I thought. (This little girl was adopted, and sadly died from cancer in 1987, which caused Paddy Hillery great sorrow.)

Ireland has undoubtedly benefited from membership of what is now the EU. The economic advantages have been obvious,

and legislation bolstering equal pay for women, rights for workers and for health and safety have all been welcome.

Ireland's geographical position and historic links have played a beneficial outcome. Ireland remains part of a common travel area with Great Britain – Brexit or no Brexit – and as a frequent traveller between London and Dublin airports, I can attest that there are no formalities for Irish people entering the United Kingdom, and no barriers to Irish people working in Britain (which is now not the case for other EU nationals).

“Ireland's excellent educational standards – much of it laid by the foundation of faith schools – has been a terrific boon”

And although Gaelgoiris don't like to agree, Ireland attracts American, and other overseas investment because it is an English-speaking country. (I have great affection for the Irish language, but it's a fact that English is our working native language, which we speak with outstanding fluency and articulacy – only an Irishman like James Joyce could have penned the pun-



ning linguistic contortions of *Finnegans Wake*!)

So: many different factors have contributed to the positive changes that have occurred within the Irish economy over the past 50 years. Ireland's excellent educational standards – much of it laid by the foundation of faith schools – has been a terrific boon.

But all benefits have costs, and one of the costs is not only a diminution, but a hostility, towards patriotic traditions. “Sovereignty”, which was so important to patriots like Pearse, is no longer an

admired idea, it seems.

And in all the enthusiasm about ‘Europe’, it is seldom – if ever – mentioned that European values were essentially Christian values. Ireland's links with continental Europe were established by Irish monasticism, and reinforced during the Penal Times, when Irish people were educated in France, and in Rome, Salamanca and Louvain.

Faith

Three of the four founding fathers of the EU were committed Catholics – Adenauer, De Gasperi, Schumann – and their faith was essential to their vision of what a European union could be.

When we celebrate Ireland joining that union, let us see the full picture.

“Ireland's geographical position and historic links have played a beneficial outcome”

A poet without peer

Alfred, Lord Tennyson is the latest ‘dead white male’ to be condemned for holding some of the views of his era. Lincoln University, where his statue stands, has announced that the poet is “problematic” and held “imperialistic” views.

English Victorian

The author of the peerless *Charge of the Light Brigade* probably did hold Victorian imperialist views, since he was an English Victorian, but that's not the whole story. He also had lofty Christian ideals and was

repeatedly recommended as suitable reading for young priests by the now defunct *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (ceased publication 1968).

Tennyson's uplifting New Year poem, *Ring Out Wild Bells (In Memoriam)* is replete with a Christian, and humanitarian, aspiration to be better versions of ourselves, “ringing out the old, ringing in the new”. Its sentiments still apply – and may even be more relevant to our social media universe today.

“Ring out false pride in

place and blood/The civic slander and the spite/Ring in the love of truth and right/Ring in the common love of good.”

Valiant man

“Ring in the valiant man and free/The larger heart, the kindlier hand/Ring out the darkness of the land,/ Ring in the Christ that is to be.”

It well expresses the light of hope that we can put our flawed past behind us and move onward and upward towards grace.

● The French have an apt word for what I have become, over the Christmas and New Year period – a *boiteuse*. In a maladroitness moving a table, I twisted my knee and seem to have buckled it, so I am currently lame in one leg. One who limps is a (masculine) *boiteux*, and thus I take the feminine form.

I explain that I have a ‘gammy knee’, but the French version seems the more suitable *mot juste*.

JOE WALSH TOURS

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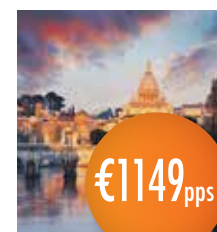
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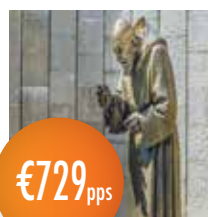


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A prophet who was not afraid of standing alone



In an age when so many seek safety in groupthink, Pope Benedict was never afraid to offer a contrasting point of view, writes **Prof. Francis Campbell**

There is an image I will always recall when I think of Benedict XVI. It was a side view of him as he spoke. Beyond him, watching him intently, sat all the living former British prime ministers. The date was Friday September 17, 2010 – and Benedict was addressing the House of Commons and the House of Lords in Westminster Hall. He was speaking from the spot where St Thomas More was tried and condemned to death, and his text naturally spoke of the proper order between the spiritual and the temporal. His words bounced off the walls of that historic place where the issues of temporal and spiritual had been tested and threatened over the centuries. And just beyond Westminster Hall's walls, Oliver Cromwell's statue was resting yards from where Benedict was speaking.

“Benedict, too wanted to show the queen the greatest respect. He travelled to Edinburgh from Rome to meet the queen at the start of his visit”

The significance of the occasion and the context was not lost on anyone there. Something was taking place which could not have happened in previous centuries or even decades. While it was a speech, the context and the content were really making a point – a healing – about the place of Catholicism in British public life following centuries of repression and alienation. Benedict was to later recall with fondness that the speech he gave on that day was, in his view, one of the three most important of his pontificate. What many people in Britain and Ireland saw during those four days in September 2010 via the wall-to-wall television coverage allowed them to see Benedict in a different light and make up their own minds. The airwaves were full of criticism and hostility for the months preceding the visit. And yet when he touched down in Edinburgh on the



Pope Benedict XVI arrives to make a speech at Westminster Hall in London in 2010. Greeting the pope from left to right are former prime ministers Gordon Brown and Tony Blair; the wife of Tony Blair, Cherie; the wife of John Major, Norma; former prime ministers John Major and Margaret Thatcher; and former Foreign Secretary William Hague and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. Photo: CNS

Thursday, it turned. Why? I believe it was down to two people: Benedict and the late Queen Elizabeth II. People made up their own minds about Benedict. What they saw didn't tally with what they had heard over the previous months. And the queen took a keen interest in the visit and had elevated it to a state visit.

Diplomatic

She was conscious that the link to the papacy was the Crown's oldest diplomatic relationship. She had been received on many occasions at the Vatican, with the first visit just after the Second World War when she travelled with Princess Margaret. This was the queen's chance to reciprocate, as Pope John Paul's visit in 1982 had been a pastoral visit amid the Falklands War. She took the unprecedented step of asking the Duke of Edinburgh to greet the Pope at Edinburgh Airport.

Benedict, too wanted to show the queen the greatest respect. He travelled to Edinburgh from Rome to meet the queen at the start of his visit, adding an extra day to the schedule. It had initially been planned to start the visit in London. Those first images of the pope and the queen, with less than a year between them in age, set the scene for the rest of the visit.

For Catholics, they saw the successor of St Peter receiving the greatest of welcomes and the highest of state honours.

And for non-Catholics, the queen set the tone; this was her guest whom she had invited, which helped to set a new narrative and give the visit broad appeal.

The lesson in that visit was that when people were able to encounter Benedict on their own terms, they found someone quite different to the media characterisation. That was my experience from my first meeting with him in 2005.

Portrayal

Like most others who had known him solely through the public portrayal built up during his time at the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, I had expected someone quite different to the person I first met in 2005. In the first meeting, like in all subsequent encounters, he was gracious, humble, insightful, interested, welcoming, and quite egalitarian despite the significant difference in our respective roles. He engaged and went well beyond the briefing provided by his advisors.

The encounters were never pro-forma or simply meetings for the sake of protocol. They had a

purpose and a message which was always substantial and insightful.

“When people were able to encounter Benedict on their own terms, they found someone quite different to the media characterisation”

As a world leader, Benedict was different in an age when so much of our public life had become an echo chamber where we seek safety in groupthink or where views expressed or policies adopted are first tested for popularity. Benedict wasn't afraid to offer a contrasting point of view; for a world leader, that was a risky strategy which sometimes got him into trouble and caused quite a few headaches for the Secretariat of State over the years. He didn't always play it safe and diplomatic and wasn't a natural head of state. As a diplomat, I often shared the angst of my colleagues in the Secretariat of State. Still, as a Catholic, I thought it refreshing that someone in such a role was prepared to be counter-cultural, different and

prophetic. He was not afraid of standing alone. As Pope, he understood the tension at the heart of Vatican diplomacy and statecraft, the tension between the pragmatic and the prophetic.

Changed

Overall, I never really knew how much the papacy had changed Benedict. He was 78 when he became pope, but it must have. I wondered had he been, at one point, the rather stiff and rigid person portrayed and had he ditched that in the new role. Those who knew him before presented a consistent picture; someone who was probably shy and somewhat timid and not a natural performer but genuine.

That's the same person I saw as pope and who we saw on the streets of London, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Glasgow. That's who people connected with. So on balance, I think his demeanour and character had not changed. As time went by, I came to the view that he was not consumed by the office, its power or prestige, and that came through strongly during his 2010 visit. Ultimately his resignation proved the point. While he was not a natural on the world stage, his humility, humanity, intellect, and serenity stood out and will likely leave us with a rich legacy for generations. He was thus prophetic.

i Co. Down native Prof. Francis Campbell is Vice Chancellor of the University of Notre Dame, Australia and served as Britain's Ambassador to the Vatican from 2005-2011 – the first Catholic to hold this role since the Reformation.

“He was gracious, humble, insightful, interested, welcoming, and quite egalitarian despite the significant difference in our respective roles”

Niamh Uí Bhriain

The View



Why are the media ignoring pro-life doctors?

In December, a group of doctors, nurses and midwives wrote an open letter to Minister Stephen Donnelly 'strongly urging' him to keep the 3-day waiting period before a woman undergoes an abortion.

It was a significant statement for several reasons. Firstly, it was timely, in that the Government is supposed to be conducting a review of the abortion legislation which has been in place since 2019.

Almost all of the media's reporting on the review to date has concentrated on demands by abortion campaigners and supporters, who seek an end to the 3-day period of reflection because of the frankly ridiculous claim that it is 'paternalistic'.

Secondly, the letter was signed by more than 100 medics and health care professionals, showing significant support for the stance in favour of the 3-day wait, which was newsworthy in itself.

And thirdly, the media had just given widespread coverage, again, to yet another push by NGOs like the National Women's Council to have the 3-day wait abolished. Some papers, like *The Irish Times*, had sought out interviews with doctors who favoured the campaign of abortion supporters. In the interest of balance, coverage for an alternative view on the issue might be expected.

But that's not what happened. According to the pro-life doctors, every national newsroom blanked the doctor's statement, even though the press release was emailed repeatedly and follow-up phone calls made. After some time, and renewed efforts, the *Irish Times* did print the letter but it was the only paper to do so.

RTÉ, Newstalk, the *Examiner*, the *Irish Independent*, all ignored the pro-life doctors, nurses and midwives – even though they have an obligation to be fair and unbiased. But the truth is that there's nothing new in this.

Documentary

Readers who watched Tim Jackson's documentary, *The Abortion Deception*, will be familiar with the media's actions when it comes to pro-life speakers during the referendum in 2018. One of the most egregious examples was when 150 nurses

and midwives, the professionals working with pregnant women every day, held a press conference calling for a 'No' vote. A RTÉ camera crew attended, recorded and interviewed, but the piece never made the news – because RTÉ couldn't get a pro-abortion equivalent that same day.

This is one of the most pernicious form of media bias: bias by omission – when an opposing point of view is simply never heard. The groupthink in the parochial Irish media seems to be driving a kind of unspoken consensus since the referendum, one which best suppresses pro-life arguments by simply pretending they don't exist.

This works well to also suppress some of the horrific outcomes of the post-repeal legislation such as the shocking rise in the number of abortions, or the baby Christopher case where a baby was aborted on the basis of a severe disability was found to be perfectly healthy.

These outcomes should lead to the authorities and our legislators and abortion campaigners answering some hard questions, but that never happens in the establishment media. That's the effect of bias by omission, it's almost a collaboration to achieve a certain outcome: to conceal information, to discourage questioning, to quieten any public disquiet.

“The letter was signed by more than 100 medics and health care professionals”

It is to the credit of Doctors for Life that they persist in telling the truth and explaining the facts in the face of this bias.

The open letter pointed out that there “is no medical basis” for scrapping the 3-day wait, and points to figures released by the Department of Health which strongly suggest that some 1,000 women change their mind during that period of reflection and do not proceed with an abortion.

“The 3-day wait helps women, it gives them time to think, and the figures strongly suggest it reduces the number of abortions,” Dr Ronan Cleary of Doctors for Life said. Dr Cleary said that there was no justification for the Min-



ister to overturn a promise made to voters in the 2018 referendum, and that scrapping the 3-day wait could dramatically increase the number of abortions taking place.

Contentious

What's remotely contentious about that statement? Why the concerted effort from the media to make sure it wasn't heard? The doctors also said the bid to scrap the 3-day wait “ignores the very real conflict and difficulties women can often face when society fails to offer the real support needed for an unexpected pregnancy. Women deserve better than being deprived of the time to think”.

The truth is that the media are not just ignoring pro-life medics, they are ignoring the real needs of women because that doesn't fit the pro-abortion narrative, and that is shameful. “We urge the Minister for Health and our TDs to now remember that promise and to retain the 3-day period of reflection. To do otherwise would be a betrayal of voters, but worse still, a dereliction of duty to mothers and babies,” the open letter to Stephen Donnelly said.

The same sentiment could apply to the establishment media in Ireland. Their concerted effort to ignore and suppress pro-life views is a dereliction of their duty and it does not go unnoticed.

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He proclaimed to the world that truth alone sets us free



In the long run, Pope Benedict will be remembered as one of the greatest theologians of the modern period, writes **Fr D. Vincent Twomey SVD**

As doctoral student of Joseph Ratzinger from 1971 to 1978, it was my privilege to come to know one of the greatest theologians of our time. Like most of his former students, we kept in touch down through the years. He was, and remained all through his life as archbishop, cardinal prefect and Pope Benedict XVI, a simple, humble man of God. He valued human friendship. He loved Jesus Christ and his body the Church. He sought to proclaim to the world the truth that alone sets us free – and suffered for speaking the at times hard truths to a world that had largely turned its back on God.

“His theology also stimulates further scholarly research, since all he could ever do was sketch the contours of the truth”

Pope Benedict XVI has been described as a “diminutive giant” by one of the few Irish journalists to speak positively about him, John Waters. He was small in physical stature but a colossus in his impact on the Church and the world. This applies above all to his prodigious literary output, his books and homilies (his collected works amount to 16 massive volumes), his book-length interviews on

all theological questions relevant to the Church and world today, and his history-making addresses to politicians in New York, London, Paris and Berlin. He has been vilified in the media for his handling of the clerical scandals, and yet no one in the Vatican did more to tackle the crisis and eliminate its causes, once early on as cardinal prefect he became aware of the extent of what he called in 2005 “the filth of the Church”.

Long-term

But in the long-term, he will be remembered as one of the greatest theologians of the modern period. His output was prodigious. Many of his *Collected Works* (16 massive volumes in German) have been translated into several languages, and are only now being discovered by a younger generation of theologians. His early classic, *Introduction to Christianity* (1968) alone has been translated into over 20 languages. His writings on a vast spectrum of theological and philosophical topics have a clarity and a depth that make his theology inspiring and therefore liberating. His theology also stimulates further scholarly research, since all he could ever do was sketch the contours of the truth. Like Picasso, he paints in broad strokes and writes in superb prose – at times almost poetic.

His appointment as archbishop and later as cardinal prefect put an end to the plans he had, when he decided in 1969 to transfer from the old and famous University of Tübingen to the little-known, quiet backwater that was the new University of Regensburg. Away from the tension and turmoil of Tübingen's theology faculty, it was his hope that in Regensburg, stimulated by his doctoral and post-doctoral students, he would have the needed academic conditions to research and write the multi-volume *Dogmatics* (i.e., a full systematic of the doctrine of the Church) he had planned. His elevation put an end to such a scholarly project. Now future theologians can build on the foundations he has laid.

He long held that the most basic problem in theology today (one which is at the root of the Church's present crisis) is to be found in an interpretation of the New Testament that, in effect, denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. To develop an interpretation of Scripture that would not only consider the modern,



Pope Benedict XVI is pictured before giving a lecture on faith and reason at the University of Regensburg in Germany in 2006. Photo: Vatican Media

historical-critical methodology of exegesis but would also be faithful to the whole of the Church's Tradition, he used every minute of his spare time as Pope to write his three-volume *Jesus of Nazareth* (2006-2013). That work will be his most enduring legacy in the discipline of theology.

“They also play a central role in inspiring the Faithful of every generation to seek the path of holiness”

His many writings on contemporary cultural issues and political life – as well as his original contributions to the moral issues of the day – remain to be discovered by students of politics and philosophers alike. His historic addresses to politicians in New York (the UN), London, Paris, and Berlin, are regarded as masterpieces of political sagacity. They will remain an inspiration for all politicians of integrity.

A large part of this legacy must be his homilies and his pastoral writings as priest, archbishop, cardinal and pope, which will continue to provide inspiration for people from all walks of life.

This likewise applied to his Wednesday addresses on the saints. He chose the saints as his main topic because he was convinced that the canonised saints, together with Christian art, are the most convincing apology for the Faith that the Church can offer. They also play a central role in inspiring the Faithful of every generation to seek the path of holiness. His encyclicals on love, hope and faith (the latter published under the name of Pope Francis) must rank among the most outstanding ever to come from the pen of a pope. *Caritas in Veritate*, his encyclical on integral human development in love and truth, will have a lasting influence on Catholic social teaching.

Contribution

Perhaps his unique contribution to the renewal of the liturgy is his greatest legacy of all. All his life he promoted a reform of liturgy according to the spirit and the letter of Vatican II. How pivotal Benedict XVI saw the reform of the liturgy for the life and mission of the Church can be seen from his decision to publish as the first volume of his *Collected Works* that on the *Theology of the Liturgy*, which is Volume 10 in the series. At the core of that volume (634 pages in the English translation) is his *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (2000), written while

on holidays as cardinal prefect. By allowing a greater use of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite (the so-called Traditional Latin Mass), Pope Benedict XVI fostered a more reverent and sacral approach to celebrating the sacraments in the vernacular (the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite). Despite certain recent restrictions, that initiative will profoundly transform the way the sacraments are celebrated in future. Another of his initiatives with long-term consequences was the creation of the Anglican Ordinariate. Introduced to enable Anglicans to come into union with Rome while preserving the richness of their own liturgical tradition, in time it will enrich the Roman Rite.

“In all his writings, his ultimate concern was to highlight the primacy of God, man's salvation”

His original theological contribution to inter-religious dialogue will also bear fruit in time. For example, in his address to representatives of the world religions in Assisi in 2011, he drew attention to the need of adherents of all religions to listen to the voice of sincere agnostics. Their search for truth can

purify the religions and help them overcome the pathologies to which the religions are prone (such as fundamentalism). In his dialogue with Jürgen Habermas, Europe's leading secular philosopher, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger had pointed out how much philosophy needed to pay attention to the voice of the religions to overcome the pathologies of reason (such as the atom-bomb and IVF). Though initially it caused outrage on account of a quotation taken out of context, his Regensburg lecture on the role of theology in the university led to a new and more intense dialogue with moderate Islam. In Regensburg, he stressed the intrinsic relationship between faith and reason – the *leitmotiv* of his life and writings – if humanity is to become more fully human. In all his writings, his ultimate concern was to highlight the primacy of God, man's salvation. That is his final legacy.

† Fr D. Vincent Twomey SVD is Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology, St Patrick's College Maynooth and author of Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of our Age, and The Dynamics of the Liturgy: Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of Liturgy.

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Pope Benedict XVI: A papacy



He was untiring in his appeals for an end to violence in world trouble spots and for dialogue, writes Cindy Wooden

Retired Pope Benedict XVI, who had an impressive record as a teacher and defender of the basics of Catholic faith, is likely to go down in history books as the first pope in almost 600 years to resign.

He died December 31 at the age of 95, nearly 10 years after leaving the papacy to retire to what he said would be a life of

prayer and study.

A close collaborator of St John Paul II and the theological expert behind many of his major teachings and gestures, Pope Benedict came to the papacy after 24 years heading the doctrinal congregation's work of safeguarding Catholic teaching on faith and morals, correcting the work of some Catholic theologians and

ensuring the theological solidity of the documents issued by other Vatican offices.

As pope, he continued writing as a theologian, but also made historically important gestures to Catholics who had difficulty accepting all of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly about the liturgy. In 2007, he widened permission to use the 'Extraordinary' or pre-Vatican II form of the Mass and, a short time later, extended a hand to the traditionalist Society of St Pius X.

Besides lifting the excommunications of four of the society's bishops who were ordained illicitly in 1988, he launched a long and intense dialogue with the group. In the

end, though, the talks broke down.

Peacemaker

His papacy, which began when he was 78, was extremely busy for a man who already had a pacemaker and who had wanted to retire to study, write and pray when he turned 75. He used virtually every medium at his disposal – books and Twitter, sermons and encyclicals – to catechise the Faithful on the foundational beliefs and practices of Christianity, ranging from the sermons of St Augustine to the sign of the cross.

Pope Benedict was the first pope to meet with victims of clerical sexual abuse. He clarified Church laws to expedite

cases and mandated that bishops' conferences put in place stringent norms against abuse.

Although he did not expect to travel much, he ended up making 24 trips to six continents and three times presided over World Youth Day mega-gatherings: in Germany in 2005, Australia in 2008, and Spain in 2011.

Abortion

On a historic visit to the United States in 2008, the pope brought his own identity into clearer focus for Americans. He set forth a moral challenge on issues ranging from economic justice to abortion. He also took Church recognition of the priestly sex-abuse scandal to a new level, expressing his personal shame at what happened and personally praying with victims.

While still in his 30s, he served as an influential adviser during the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65, and as pope, he made it a priority to correct what he saw as overly expansive interpretations of Vatican II in favour of readings that stressed the council's continuity with the Church's millennial traditions.

Under his oversight, the Vatican continued to highlight the Church's moral boundaries on issues such as end-of-life medical care, marriage and homosexuality. But the pope's message to society at large focused less on single issues and more on the risk of losing the basic relationship between the human being and the Creator.

Surprising those who had expected a by-the-book pontificate from a man who had spent so many years as the Vatican's chief doctrinal official, Pope Benedict emphasised that Christianity was a religion of love and not a religion of rules.

The German-born pontiff did not try to match the popularity of St John Paul II, but the millions of people who came to see him in Rome and abroad came to appreciate his smile, his frequent ad-libs and his ability to speak from the heart.

Some of Pope Benedict's most memorable statements came when he applied simple Gospel values to social issues such as the protection of human life, the environment and economics. When the global financial crisis worsened in 2008, for example, the pope insisted that financial institutions must put people before profits. He also reminded people that money and worldly success are passing realities, saying: "Whoever builds his life on these things – on material things, on success, on appearances – is building on sand."

He consistently warned the West that unless its secularised society rediscovered reli-

gious values, it could not hope to engage in real dialogue with Muslims and members of other religious traditions.

In his encyclicals and in his books on 'Jesus of Nazareth', the pope honed that message, asking readers to discover the essential connections between sacrificial love, works of charity, a dedication to the truth and the Gospel of Christ.

The retired pope looked in-depth at his papacy and resignation, his relationships with St John Paul and Pope Francis and a host of other issues in *Last Testament*, a book-length interview with journalist Peter Seewald published in 2016.

In the book, Pope Benedict insisted once again that he was not pressured by anyone or any event to resign and he did not feel he was running away from any problem. However, he acknowledged "practical governance was not my forte, and this certainly was a weakness". Insisting "my hour had passed, and I had given all I could," Pope Benedict said he never regretted resigning, but he did regret hurting friends and faithful who were "really distressed and felt forsaken" by his stepping down.

“His papacy, which began when he was 78, was extremely busy for a man who already had a pacemaker”

Less than a month after resigning, he already looked frailer and walked with noticeably more difficulty than he did when he left office. The video images released by the Vatican March 23, 2013, when his successor, Pope Francis, visited him at Castel Gandolfo underscored the "diminishing energy" Pope Benedict had said led to his resignation.

Successor

Pope Benedict moved to the papal summer villa at Castel Gandolfo on February 28, 2013, the day his resignation took effect. He remained at the villa south of Rome for two months – a period that included the conclave that elected Pope Francis as his successor and the first month of the new Pope's pontificate. The retired pope moved back to the Vatican on May 2, 2013, living in a monastery remodelled as a residence for him, his secretary and the consecrated women who cared for his household before and after his resignation.

On his only post-retirement trip outside of Italy, he flew to Germany in June 2020 for a five-day visit with his ailing 96-year-old brother.

Answering questions from reporters on a flight back from Brazil in July 2013, Pope Francis

defending and teaching the Faith

spoke with admiration of the retired pope's humility, intelligence and prayerfulness.

The unusual situation of having a Pope and a retired pope both living at the Vatican was working out very well, Pope Francis said. Having the retired pope nearby to consult with, or ask questions of, Pope Francis said, was "like having a grandfather at home – a very wise grandfather".

By the time Pope Benedict had been retired for a year, his daily routine was set. Archbishop Georg Ganswein, his personal secretary, said his days began with Mass, morning prayer and breakfast.

Although mostly hidden from public view, he was not cloistered, but continued welcoming old friends and colleagues, engaging in dialogue or offering spiritual counsel. He spent hours reading and dealing with correspondence before a 4pm stroll in the garden and recitation of the rosary.

In the early days of his retirement, to the delight and surprise of pilgrims and cardinals, Pope Benedict appeared at major events with Pope Francis, including the opening of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica on December 8, 2015.

At a June 2016 celebration in the Apostolic Palace, where Pope Benedict once lived and worked, Pope Francis, top officials of the Roman Curia and a few friends gathered with him to mark the 65th anniversary of the retired pontiff's priestly ordination.

Pope Francis told Pope Benedict that with him in residence, the monastery in the Vatican Gardens "emanates tranquillity, peace, strength, faithfulness, maturity, faith, dedication and loyalty, which does so much good for me and gives strength to me and to the whole Church".

Pope Benedict replied to Pope Francis, "More than the beauty found in the Vatican Gardens, your goodness is the place where I live; I feel protected".

He prayed that Pope Francis would continue to "lead us all on this path of divine mercy that shows the path of Jesus, to Jesus and to God".

Mercy was a prominent topic in an interview Pope Benedict gave in 2015. The Catholic focus on mercy really began with St John Paul, the retired pope told Belgian Jesuit Father Jacques Servais in the written interview, which was not released until March 2016.

From his experience as a youth during World War II and his ministry under communism in Poland, St John Paul "affirmed that mercy is the only true and ultimately effective reaction against the power of evil. Only where there is mercy does cruelty end, only



there do evil and violence stop," said Pope Benedict, who worked closely with the Polish pope for decades.

God's mercy

"Pope Francis," he said, "is in complete agreement with this line. His pastoral practice is expressed precisely in the fact that he speaks continuously of God's mercy."

“He prayed that Pope Francis would continue to ‘lead us all on this path of divine mercy’”

Pope Benedict had said he planned to live a "hidden life" in retirement – and to a large extent he did. But when he did make contributions to public discussions, they became headline news.

In April 2019, for instance, what he described as "notes" on the clerical sexual abuse crisis were published; and, in January 2020, an essay he wrote on priestly celibacy was published in a book by Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

In the text on abuse, which the retired pope said was motivated by the February 2019 Vatican summit on the crisis, Pope Benedict traced the abuse crisis to a loss of certainty about faith and morals,

especially beginning in the late 1960s. To address the crisis, he wrote, "what is required first and foremost is the renewal of the Faith in the reality of Jesus Christ given to us in the Blessed Sacrament".

The 2020 text on celibacy became the centre of a media storm, not only because of its content, but also because Catholics were awaiting Pope Francis' official response to the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon and suggestions made there that in remote areas the Church could consider ordaining some married men to take the sacraments to Catholics who usually go months without.

Since marriage and priesthood both demand the total devotion and self-giving of a man to his vocation, "it does not seem possible to realise both vocations simultaneously," Pope Benedict wrote in his essay.

Contribution

The retired pope's contribution to the discussion became even more controversial when Archbishop Ganswein informed media and the original publisher that while Pope Benedict contributed an essay to Cardinal Sarah's book, he did not want to be listed as co-author of the volume.

As inevitable as his election seemed after St John Paul died in 2005, Pope Benedict's path to the papacy was long and indirect.

Joseph Ratzinger was born April 16, 1927, in the Bavarian town of Marktl am Inn, the third and youngest child of a police officer, Joseph Sr., and his wife, Maria. Young Joseph joined his brother, Georg, at a minor seminary in 1939.

Like other young students in Germany at the time, he was automatically enrolled in the Hitler Youth programme, but soon stopped going to meetings. During World War II, he was conscripted into the army, and in the spring of 1945, he deserted his unit and returned home, spending a few months in an Allied prisoner-of-war camp. He returned to the seminary late in 1945 and was ordained six years later, along with his brother.

In a meeting with young people in 2006, the pope said witnessing the brutality of the Nazi regime helped persuade him to become a priest. But he also had to overcome some doubts, he said. For one thing, he asked himself whether he "could faithfully live celibacy" his entire life. He also recognised that his real leanings were toward theology and wondered whether he had the qualities of a good pastor and the ability "to be simple with the simple people".

After a short stint as a parish priest, the future pope began a teaching career and built a reputation as one of the Church's foremost theologians.

At Vatican II, he made important contributions as a theological expert and embraced the council's early work. But he began to have misgivings about an emerging anti-Roman bias, the idea of a "Church from below" run on a parliamentary model, and the direction of theological research in the Church – criticism that would become even sharper in later years.

“As inevitable as his election seemed after St John Paul died in 2005, Pope Benedict's path to the papacy was long and indirect”

In a 2005 speech that served as a kind of manifesto for his young papacy, Pope Benedict rejected what he called a "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture" in interpreting Vatican II as a radical break with the past. The pope called instead for reading the council through a "hermeneutic of reform" in continuity with Catholic tradition.

In 1977, St Paul VI named him archbishop of Munich and Freising and, four years later, Pope John Paul called him to head the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where he wielded great influ-

ence on issues such as liberation theology, dissent from Church teachings and pressure for women's ordination.

Serving in this role for nearly a quarter century, then-Cardinal Ratzinger earned a reputation in some quarters as a sort of grand inquisitor, seeking to stamp out independent thinking, an image belied by his passion for debate with thinkers inside and outside the Church.

As the newly elected pope in 2005, he explained that he took the name Benedict to evoke the memory of Pope Benedict XV, a "courageous prophet of peace" during World War I, and said he wanted to place his ministry at the service of reconciliation and harmony among peoples.

End violence

Like his namesake and his predecessors, he was untiring in his appeals for an end to violence in world trouble spots and for dialogue as the only true and lasting solution to conflict. Another key to building a better world, he said repeatedly, is to respect the right of each person to seek and to worship God.

A direct appeal to China's communist government to respect the religious freedom of its people was a central part of Pope Benedict's 2007 Letter to Chinese Catholics. The letter also pleaded with the Faithful on the mainland to work toward reconciliation between communities that had accepted some government control in order to minister openly and those that continued to practice their faith more clandestinely.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States and amid reports of rising religious-inspired violence in various parts of the world, Pope Benedict also repeatedly and clearly condemned all violence committed in the name of God.

One of the biggest tests of his papacy came after a lecture at Germany's University of Regensburg, in 2006, when he quoted a Christian medieval emperor who said the prophet Muhammad had brought "things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached".

Protests in the Muslim world followed, and Pope Benedict apologised that his words had offended Muslims, distancing himself from the text he had quoted. Soon after, he accepted the invitation of an international group of Muslim scholars and leaders to launch a new dialogue initiative, 'The Common Word', looking at teachings that Christians and Muslims share.

“The pope called instead for reading the council through a ‘hermeneutic of reform’ in continuity with Catholic tradition”

Benedict was a gentle soul who left a great intellectual legacy



Pope Benedict had been well and truly reduced to a caricature, but what we really had was a humble, courteous and holy man, writes David Quinn

After Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope in 2005, it was eagerly anticipated by some, and feared by others, that he would begin a new crackdown on theological dissent within the Catholic Church. When Pope St John Paul II made him head of the Church's doctrinal watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), in 1981, both men did strive to restore boundaries to theological debate within the Church.

“The dissent often reached very deep, far beyond issues like women priests and contraception”

They wanted to make it clear that there were limits to Catholic theological inquiry beyond which it could no longer be considered Catholic.

In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, some theologians seemed to believe that the Council had given them licence to bring the Catholic Church where it could not go without shedding its essential identity.

The dissent often reached very deep, far beyond issues like women priests and contraception. It sometimes called into doubt the most fundamental tenets of the Church, for example, the divinity of Christ, or the inerrancy of scripture.

In 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger, at the behest of Pope

John Paul, released the document, *Dominus Iesus* (Jesus is Lord) precisely to respond to theologians who seemed willing to sacrifice the claim, made by Jesus himself, that he is “the way, the truth, and the life”, in order to foster inter-religious dialogue, or else to give up the Church's own belief that it is the ‘one, true Church’.

To this day many theologians, who call themselves Catholic, are still willing to give up these claims.

Under John Paul, if one of those theologians went too far, and publicly confronted Church authorities, they were sometimes disciplined.

Once Joseph Ratzinger became Pope, it was expected that more theologians would be disciplined, but in fact this happened only on very rare occasions. There was no wider crackdown. Maybe he believed he had done his work under John Paul II, and the main point had been made, namely that there were certain beliefs the Church could not give up.

Instead, Benedict XVI's pontificate was quieter and gentler in many ways than people had anticipated.

Beforehand, he had earned nicknames like ‘the Panzer cardinal’, or ‘God's rottweiler’ because of his role as head of the CDF.

The movie, *The Two Popes*, probably also shaped many people's impression of him. This imagined the relationship between Pope emeritus Benedict and Pope Francis. Anthony Hopkins played Benedict, but the abrasive version he presented in the film was far more like Hopkins himself, rather than the much gentler Joseph Ratzinger.

Interview

I was lucky enough to interview Cardinal Ratzinger in Rome in late 1995, and it was his gentle demeanour that struck me most. I hadn't been sure what to expect. Would he conform to the abrasive, aggressive stereotype?

Would he be like other important people who often give the impression that they have better things to be doing than wasting time with a journalist, and therefore seem impatient to be elsewhere?

For the hour I was with him, I had his full attention. He answered every question courteously and, of course, intelligently. When the hour was up and I was

being led out of the room (by the future papal nuncio to Ireland, then Msgr Charles Brown, as it happens), I looked back to see Cardinal Ratzinger clearing away the tea and coffee cups himself.

The first time ordinary Irish people got to look beyond the stereotype themselves was when he paid a state visit to Britain in 2010. For months beforehand there had been the usual cacophony of protest, including even demands that he should be arrested upon arrival in Britain because of the sex abuse scandals.

It was by no means clear whether or not the protests would continue after he arrived, and whether many British Catholics would turn out to welcome him.

The Irish media certainly anticipated a hostile reception and seemed to be looking forward to it.

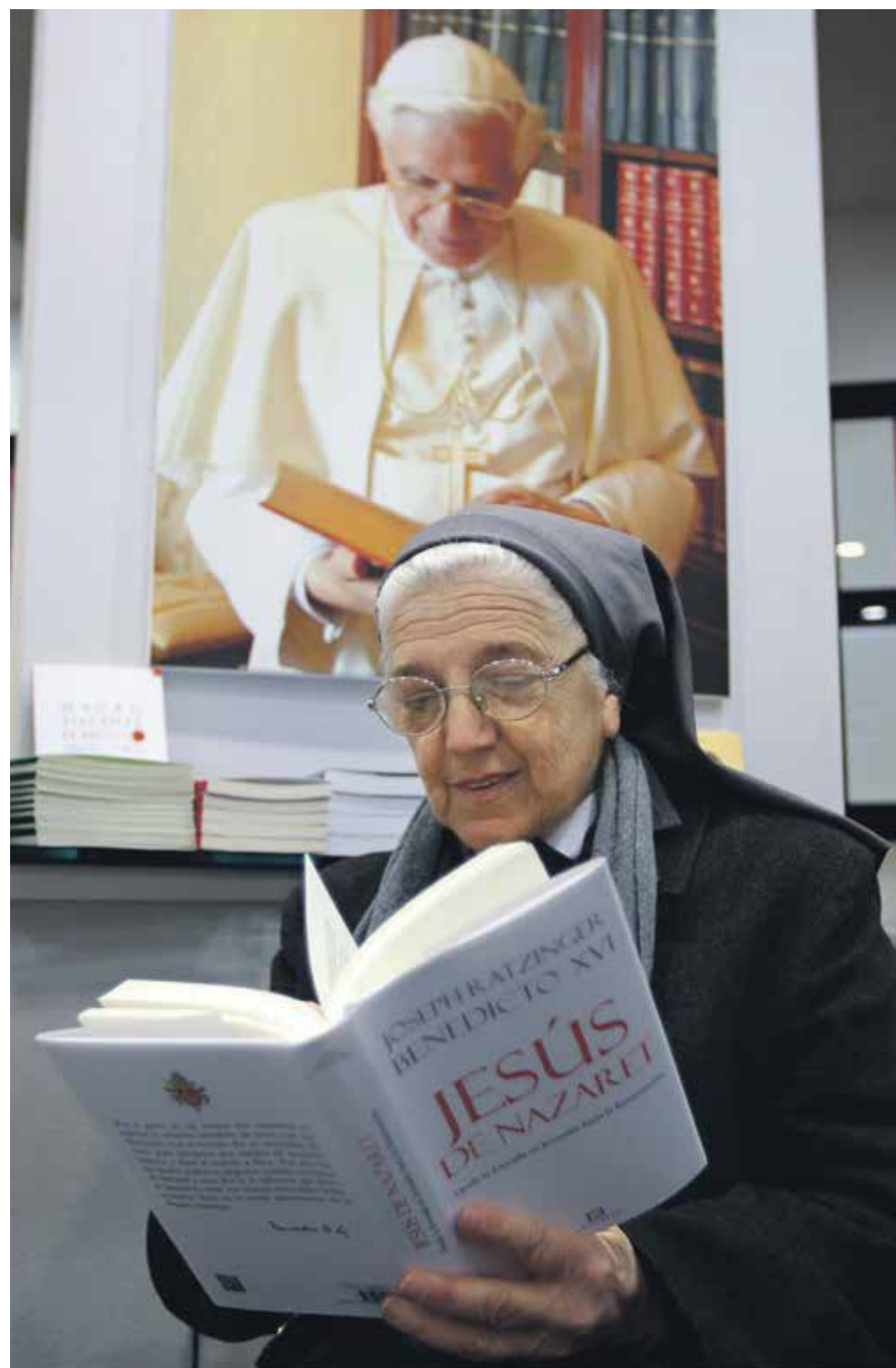
It must always be remembered that we are made to see the world at all times through liberal eyes (if ‘liberal’ is still the proper word), and to like the people they like and to know the figures they dislike only as caricatures.

Pope Benedict had been well and truly reduced to a caricature, a villain and that is why, when we could see him for ourselves on live television, without anyone interpreting him for us, we were surprised to see the same humble, courteous, gentle, self-effacing person I met in Rome in 1995. The visit was a great success in the end.

“For the hour I was with him, I had his full attention. He answered every question courteously and, of course, intelligently”

The fact is that Pope Benedict was not a warrior, or a firebrand. He was scholarly by temperament. In a way, he was not ideally suited to the role of either the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, nor that of pope. He humbly and against his own nature, accepted both, because that is what he was asked to do.

He didn't even want to be made Archbishop of Munich in his native Germany back in 1977, aged 50. He would undoubtedly have preferred to be left in academia, to



A religious sister reads a volume of *Jesus of Nazareth* by Pope Benedict XVI in a bookstore in Rome in 2011 when it was published. Photo: CNS

which he was most suited by nature.

The cardinals who made up the conclave of 2005 choose him to be Pope because he was a known quantity and also because they believed the administration of the Vatican had drifted under John Paul II with mediocre or frankly corrupt people in positions of influence.

Popular impression

But Benedict was not the man to tackle the Vatican in the necessary way. Contrary to the popular impression, he wasn't tough or ruthless enough. He was too gentle, and he was also getting very old. Therefore, he resigned in 2013, aged 85, to the shock of

many. It probably amazed no-one more than himself that he lived for almost ten more years.

“Contrary to the popular impression, he wasn't tough or ruthless enough”

His legacy is mainly one of tremendous intellectual, moral and theological clarity. He was acutely and painfully aware that the West had lost sight of God and was losing connection to its Christian roots. It was adrift in a fog of relativism, he said, and becoming more hostile to religion which it sought

to reduce to a marginal irrelevance at best.

His speeches to political and civic leaders in Westminster Hall in London in 2010, and to the German parliament in 2011, were pleas to overcome these tendencies and for the West to point again in the right direction, that is, towards God.

He did this in his writings, his speeches, his sermons, and in his own life. They are all there for us to study in the decades and even centuries to come, in the same way so many continue to study and read another person, one Benedict himself admired greatly, and beatified in 2010, namely John Henry Newman.

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Former doctrinal enforcer used pontificate to crack down on sex abuse



Carol Glatz

The late Pope Benedict XVI's disgust over the abuse scandals marring the Church was made evident even before his election as pope.

In his forceful Way of the Cross meditations, drafted in the weeks before his election as pope in 2005, he wrote for the world to hear: "How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him."

That straightforward attitude, coupled with sympathy for victims and commitment to prevention, marked much of the pope's subsequent eight years as pope.

"Pope Benedict XVI will certainly be remembered for his extraordinary reply and response to the very sad phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy," Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta once told Vatican Radio. The archbishop was promoter of justice at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, handling accusations of clerical sex abuse from 2002 to 2012.

Pope Benedict's approach to the scandal was to see it as a result of serious sin that polluted the Church; the process of cleansing must be serious and profound, he said, but it also must acknowledge Christ's power to heal and to strengthen the Church.

“As pope, it said, he paved the way for a change in mentality in how the Church treats survivors”

Although he mostly stayed out of public view in retirement, in April 2019, the former pope published what he described as “notes” on the abuse crisis, tracing the roots of the scandal to a loss of a firm faith and moral certainty that began in the 1960s. The Church's response, he insisted, must focus on a recovery of a sense of faith and of right and wrong.

Late into his retirement, he faced renewed criticism after the release of a report in early 2022 that looked at how known cases of sexual abuse against minors were handled in the Archdiocese of Munich from 1945 to 2019. The study, conducted by a law firm for the archdiocese, said then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger mishandled abuse allegations on four occasions during his time as archbishop of Munich and Freising, from 1977 to 1982. The pope and a small team of legal experts denied



Australians protest clergy sexual abuse outside St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney during Pope Benedict XVI's visit to celebrate World Youth Day in 2008. He met with the victims of abuse in Australia and in the US that year. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

wrongdoing in all the cases and disagreed with the final conclusions in the study, which included an 82-page testimony and evidence compiled by the retired pope's team.

A *Vatican News* editorial defended Pope Benedict, noting how, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then-Cardinal Ratzinger “promulgated very harsh norms against clerical abusers” and enacted special measures that had not existed before to improve the way allegations were handled.

Change

As pope, it said, he paved the way for a change in mentality in how the Church treats survivors who, instead of being welcomed and accompanied, often were marginalised and considered “enemies” of the Church. He was “the first pope to meet several times with victims of abuse,” it said, and he repeatedly emphasised the need for the Catholic Church to ask forgiveness from victims and from Jesus, “who has always been on the side of the victims and never of the executioners.”

Though nearly 95 years old and frail, Pope Benedict drafted a two-page letter in response to the Munich abuse report, expressing his deep hurt that an unintentional editing error in testimony written on his behalf would lead to the assumption he was a liar.

“Each individual case of sexual abuse is appalling and irreparable,”

he also wrote in that letter in early February 2022.

“I have had great responsibilities in the Catholic Church. All the greater is my pain for the abuses and the errors that occurred in those different places during the time of my mandate,” the retired pope wrote.

“Once again I can only express to all the victims of sexual abuse my profound shame, my deep sorrow and my heartfelt request for forgiveness,” he said.

From 2001, when St John Paul II charged the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – headed by then-Cardinal Ratzinger – with the authority to take over cases from local bishops for investigation, Pope Benedict was aware of many examples of abuse. It was his office in 2003 that expedited the process for laicising priests guilty of sexually abusing minors.

Concerns

After his election in 2005, Pope Benedict worked to address lingering concerns.

He approved a decision to sanction Fr Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, who was accused of sexually abusing minors. Though no canonical process was begun against the late priest, he was banned from exercising his priestly ministry publicly in 2006 following a Vatican investigation.

As new revelations of abuse hit the news, particularly in Europe, Pope Benedict and his top aides

looked for ways to refine policies for handling accusations and strengthening child protection programs worldwide.

He approved the revision of Church law in 2010 on handling priestly sex abuse cases, streamlining disciplinary measures, extending the statute of limitations and defining child pornography as an act of sexual abuse of a minor. The revisions codified and clarified practices that had been implemented through special permissions granted over the past decade and made them part of universal law.

Pope Benedict also met personally with survivors of abuse in Australia, Malta, Great Britain and the United States, acknowledging the horror they had suffered and the scandal of a slow Church response.

“He approved the revision of Church law in 2010 on handling priestly sex abuse cases, streamlining disciplinary measures”

In a pastoral letter to Catholics in Ireland, he addressed victims directly.

“You have suffered grievously, and I am truly sorry,” he wrote. “I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed, and your dignity has been violated.”

In Ireland and elsewhere, the

pope removed bishops accused of abuse and other improprieties or who were found to have covered up the sexual crimes or misconduct of their own clergy.

Under fire

Nonetheless, Pope Benedict still came under fire by some victims' advocates for a lack of transparency and for having not done enough as pope and as former prefect of the doctrinal congregation.

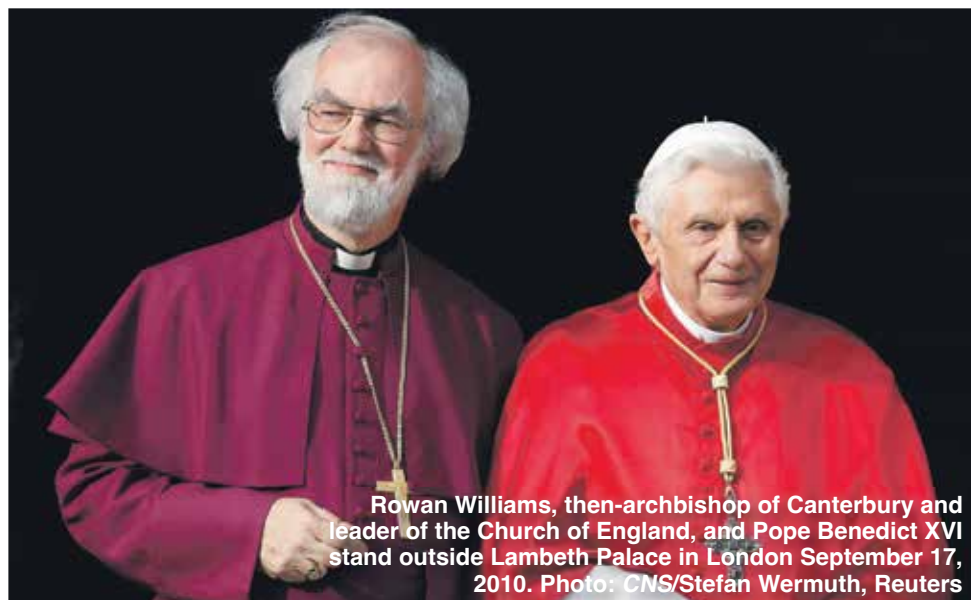
One case in particular was the decision not to laicise a Wisconsin priest who had probably molested about 200 children, despite the recommendation of his bishop that he be removed from the priesthood.

By the time the Vatican learned in the late 1990s of the case of Fr Lawrence C. Murphy, the priest was elderly and in poor health. The Vatican suggested that the priest continue to be restricted in ministry instead of laicised, and he died four months later.

At a Mass marking the end of the Year for Priests in 2011, Pope Benedict said that what had been planned as a year of celebration became a “summons to purification” in light of new scandals.

“In this very year of joy for the Sacrament of the priesthood, the sins of priests came to light – particularly the abuse of the little ones, in which the priesthood, whose task is to manifest God's concern for our good, turns into its very opposite,” the pope said during a Mass with about 15,000 priests.

Pope Benedict forged ecumenical friendships even as dialogue slowed



Rowan Williams, then-archbishop of Canterbury and leader of the Church of England, and Pope Benedict XVI stand outside Lambeth Palace in London September 17, 2010. Photo: CNS/Stefan Wermuth, Reuters



Cindy Wooden

During his many years at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well as during his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI made incisive contributions to the search for Christian unity, although some of his teaching also was read as ecumenically insensitive.

While the late pope forged strong bonds of friendship and esteem with the leaders of the world's Orthodox and Anglican Christians, his papacy also coincided with a difficult time in the search for full Christian unity.

In the face of new obstacles to ecumenism — particularly regarding the ministry of women, attitudes toward homosexuality and differences on ethical issues — Pope Benedict often emphasised the role of prayer in seeking Christian unity, as well as the need for divided Christians to work together to protect religious freedom and defend traditional Christian values.

From personal experience and theological study, his longest ecumenical engagement came in the area of Catholic-Lutheran relations.

Contributions

Shortly after Pope Benedict resigned in 2013, the Rev. Nikolaus Schneider, then head of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, told reporters at the Vatican how important the contributions of then-Cardinal Joseph Ratz-

inger were for the landmark 1999 Catholic-Lutheran theological agreement on justification, the dispute at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Rev. Schneider also described as “historic” Pope Benedict's decision in 2011 to visit the former Augustinian monastery where Luther lived until 1511.

The visit, though, left many German Lutherans disappointed. Somehow in the weeks before the visit, people started talking about the possibility that Pope Benedict either would lift the 500-year-old excommunication of Martin Luther or would make it much easier for a Lutheran married to a Catholic to receive Communion in the Catholic Church.

“His longest ecumenical engagement came in the area of Catholic-Lutheran relations”

Neither happened. But Pope Benedict knew of the expectations and, in the monastery where Luther had lived, the pope said conjecture about him making an “ecumenical gift” demonstrated a “political misreading of faith and of ecumenism.”

Progress in Christian unity is not like negotiating a treaty, he told his fellow Germans. Ecumenism will advance when Christians enter more deeply into their shared faith and profess it more openly in society, Pope Benedict said.

But Rev. Schneider also told reporters the German-born pope “offended” Protestants when, as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in 2000 he insisted Protestant communities were not “Churches in the proper sense” because they have not preserved apostolic succession

among their bishops nor a traditional understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist.

Then-Cardinal Ratzinger repeatedly explained that the assertion in the document *Dominus Iesus* was simply a statement of Catholic belief, not a judgment of others. But particularly because the doctrinal congregation reviewed every joint ecumenical statement before publication, the statement cast a pall over the Church's dialogue with other Christian communities for several years.

For Catholics coming from the Anglican tradition, the ecumenical highlight of Pope Benedict's pontificate was his decision in 2009 to establish personal ordinariates, jurisdictions similar to dioceses, which recognise their full communion with Rome while preserving some of their Anglican heritage.

Unity

But for many ecumenists, the move was not about Christian unity at all. Rather it was simply a pastoral provision for individuals and groups who, in conscience and after long prayer, sought full communion with Rome while not wanting to leave behind their spiritual, theological and liturgical heritage.

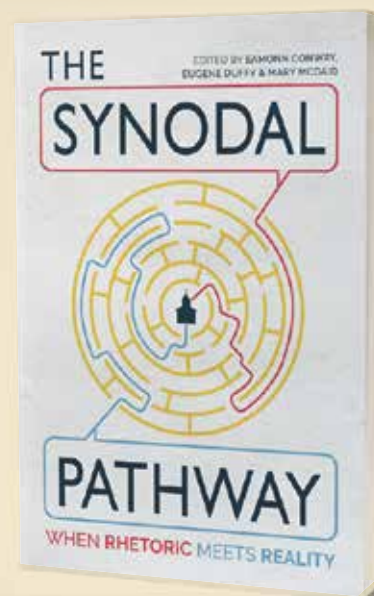
Even when ecumenical progress seemed slow, though, Pope Benedict continued to preach the importance of Christian unity and to recognise the duty of the pope to be its chief proponent.

After celebrating Mass April 20, 2005, in the Sistine Chapel with the cardinals who elected him pope the evening before, Pope Benedict, referring to himself, said he would assume as “his primary commitment that of working tirelessly toward the reconstitution of the full and visible unity of all Christ's followers. This is his ambition, this is his compelling duty”.

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Irish bishops, political figures pay tribute to Pope Benedict

Ruadhán Jones

Archbishop Eamon Martin was one of a number of Irish bishops, along with Irish political leaders, who reflected on the legacy of the late pope following the news of his death on Saturday, December 31.

Archbishop Martin said he was “saddened”, remembering the pope emeritus’ “gentle soul in prayer, asking God, in his great mercy, to forgive his sins and human failings, while rewarding his generous service and complete dedication to the Gospel and to the Church.”

“On behalf of the Irish Bishops’ Conference, and the Faithful across Ireland, I extend sympathy to Pope Francis, to the family members and carers of the pope emeritus, and to all those in his native Germany and around the globe who loved him and will mourn his loss.”

The Primate of All-Ireland recalled Benedict’s “unique” *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland* in 2010, at the height of the abuse crisis.

In it, the then pope expressed “profound sorrow for those grievously wounded by abuse in the Church”, said Archbishop Martin in a statement released Saturday.

He continued, saying: “The then pope called for urgent action to address the legacy of abuse which, he said, has had ‘such tragic consequences in the lives of victims and their families’, and which has ‘obscured the light of the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution succeeded in doing.’”

The archbishop of Armagh highlighted Pope Benedict XVI’s interest in Ireland, which “goes back to his friendship with the late Archbishop Kevin McNamara of Dublin when both were young theology professors”.

“Pope Benedict understood the ‘need and potential for all people of goodwill to work for the realisation of the common good’”

“He often admired the huge contribution of generations of Irish men and women to the Church, and to humanity, and he took a special interest in the work of early Celtic missionaries like St Columbanus to spread the Gospel in Europe and to Europe’s spiritual identity,” Dr Martin said.

“He followed closely, and prayerfully, the peace process as it matured.”

Dr Martin described the deceased pope as “a person of deep spirituality and prayer, an outstanding apostle of Christ”, with a “great capacity to listen combined with a personal, discreet charm”.

Pope Benedict understood the “need and potential for all people of goodwill to work for the realisation



Pope Benedict XVI meets with Irish bishops at the Vatican on February 15, 2010. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters

“He followed closely, and prayerfully, the peace process as it matured”

of the common good”, he continued.

He praised Benedict’s emphasis on social issues, particularly on charity being “rooted in truth in order to be fruitful”.

“On the eve of his election to the Petrine Ministry, the then Cardinal Ratzinger incisively identified a tendency in society to lapse into ‘a dictatorship of relativism.’

Commitment

“At the same time, his papacy was marked by a commitment to dialogue between faith and reason, between the Church and the modern world, and to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, as evidenced on his significant apostolic journey to the United Kingdom in 2010.”

Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell praised the “prowess and clarity of his theological thinking, his power of judgement, and his personal interaction with many people”, saying these set Pope Benedict apart.

“Many of his writings are characterised by a depth of content and the simplicity of language which only comes from a profound appreciation of the mysteries of the faith.”

In a statement released the day of the retired pontiff’s death, he praised the 2010 pastoral letter, adding added that the Church must not “shy away” from the questions that remain unanswered about abuse.

Archbishop Noel Treanor, Apostolic Administrator of Down and Connor, recalled Benedict’s skill as a scholar, quoting from the pope’s “memorable” message to the people of Down and Connor on the feast of St Columbanus.

Archbishop Treanor added that the Pope Benedict’s 2010 visit to the United Kingdom was “historic”.

“Many travelled across from Northern Ireland to Scotland and England to meet with Pope Benedict and celebrate the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman,” he continued.

“In that same year of 2010, Pope emeritus Benedict issued a pastoral letter to the Church in Ireland, addressing the scandalous abuse of children by clergy.”

“This provided an impetus to further strengthening the national safeguarding policies and procedures in Ireland to ensure that the Church would be a safer place for children and adults at risk.”

Historic decision

Bishop Michael Duignan, the bishop of Clonfert, Galway, Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilmfenora said Pope Benedict’s “historic decision to resign on health grounds in 2013 will forever frame the insightful humility and unshakeable trust in God that marked his life”.

He joined with “so many in giving thanks to God for his leadership at a time of great transition”.

The President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins led the tributes Irish political figures, including the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, paid the late Pope Benedict XVI.

“He often admired the huge contribution of generations of Irish men and women to the Church, and to humanity”

President Higgins said in his message that Benedict will be remembered for “his untiring efforts to find a common path in promoting peace and goodwill throughout the world”, including for maintaining a “steadfast interest” in peace in Northern Ireland.

Also of note was the “value he attached to intellectual work and for the personal commitment he gave to such” within the Catholic Church, the president said.

“Of particular importance was that during his tenure, Pope Benedict sought to highlight both the common purpose of the world’s major religions and his injunctions as to

how our individual responsibilities as citizens require the highest standards of ethics in our actions.

“May I extend my condolences to his family, to Pope Francis, to Archbishop Eamon Martin, to his friends and colleagues, and to all members of the Catholic Faith both in Ireland and across the world,” President Higgins concluded.

Saddened

An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said that he was “saddened” to learn of Benedict’s death.

“Leading the Catholic Church for almost a decade, the son of a police officer and a cook, the first German elected as pope in one thousand years, he was ultimately a ‘humble worker in vineyard of the Lord’,” Mr Varadkar said, adding that his thoughts are with Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin and all those in Ireland who will find the news saddening and difficult.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin TD said that Pope Benedict will continue to hold a “special place in the collective memory of Catholics the world over” as the first pope in almost 600 years to retire.

“He showed great strength of character and humility in leaving the papacy at a time when by his own analysis, his declining health meant he could not provide the leadership he felt the Church required at the time.”

Mr Martin also remembered the late pope’s commitment to global peace, including in Northern Ireland, and extended his condolences to those affected by the news.

Benedict XVI 'a future saint', student says of former mentor

Jodi Marlin

There was a time – it encompassed most of the 1980s – that Catholic publishers weren't very interested in what the largely unknown Fr Joseph Ratzinger of Germany had to say about Christian morality, the mystery of the heart of Christ, the role of religion in post-Marxist Europe or, for that matter, any other topic.

US Jesuit Fr Joseph Fessio was an exception. The California priest had already become convinced of the highly academic German priest's ability to synthesise Christian truth and complex theological issues and express them succinctly, as well as in a way that encouraged deep reflection and meditation.

Providential design

By intention and providential design, Ignatius Press, established by Fr Fessio in 1978, became the sole English-language publisher of the pre-papal books and the biography of the man who was elected Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

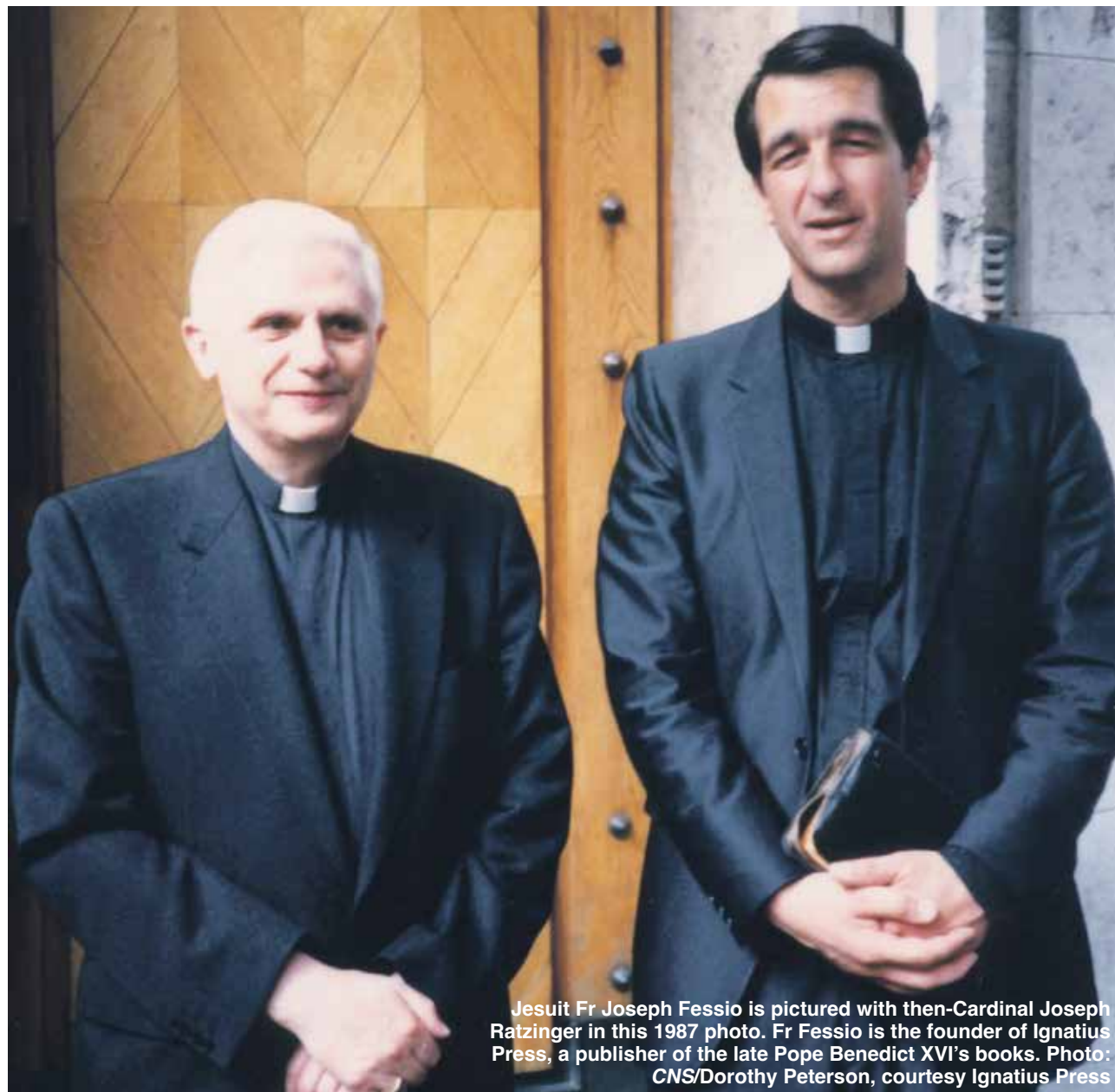
"We knew we wanted to publish translations of fine European theologians like Ratzinger, Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar and others," Fr Fessio told *Catholic News Service* before the retired pope's death December 31. "It was kind of a golden age of Catholic theology, in the mid-20th century. But their works were rarely translated into English. That was our mission."

“He had a tremendous power of synthesis. He listened so well. He grasped things immediately, and he organised them very organically”

Pope Benedict's body of writings will be his legacy, said Fr Fessio. Ignatius Press pledges to keep his core writings in print.

"He will be not only a saint but a doctor of the church someday," Fr Fessio predicted.

Fr Fessio gained a deep-seated admiration of Fr Ratzinger in the early 1970s, while pursuing a doctorate in theology at the University of Regensburg, in what was then West



Jesuit Fr Joseph Fessio is pictured with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in this 1987 photo. Fr Fessio is the founder of Ignatius Press, a publisher of the late Pope Benedict XVI's books. Photo: CNS/Dorothy Peterson, courtesy Ignatius Press

Germany. His thesis, "The Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," was directed by Fr Ratzinger, his professor and mentor.

Intelligence

During that process, he also gleaned an appreciation of his mentor's great intelligence.

"We had these seminars with theological and doctoral students – maybe seven or eight of us – and he'd be directing the seminar. They'd last about two hours, and he'd make sure everyone had his chance to speak. He would ask people what they thought about this or that, and at the end, he would sum up the whole seminar in just a few very

long, German sentences. He had a tremendous power of synthesis. He listened so well. He grasped things immediately, and he organised them very organically," said Fr Fessio.

“‘He will be not only a saint but a doctor of the church someday,’ Fr Fessio predicted”

The Jesuit said that later, when then-Cardinal Ratzinger oversaw the writing of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, he saw the same qualities.

"He had the tremendous ability to understand what others were saying and writing," Fr Fessio added. "He could be critical, but he was fair, and then he would present what he thought was a more accurate view of things."

Humble

"He really had a serene and humble insight. He was such a great person and had a great mind."

After graduation, Fr Fessio began to participate in the annual three-day-long reunions of his mentor's *Schulerkreis*, or group of former students. Fr Ratzinger, meanwhile, was named the archbishop of Munich and Freising, and

soon afterward, a cardinal.

In 1989, under Cardinal Ratzinger's tutelage, Fr Fessio and three others were instrumental in forming a house in Rome called Casa Balthasar – a place of discernment for young men and women. The house took its inspiration from the life and works of Adrienne von Speyr and two highly regarded theologians: Jesuit Fr Lubac, whom St John Paul elevated to cardinal in 1983, and Fr von Balthasar, named a cardinal by St John Paul II in 1988.

At the time Casa Balthasar was established, Cardinal Ratzinger had been appointed prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by St John

Paul II. He became cardinal-protector of the home and remained involved with Casa Balthasar into the beginning of his papacy.

Pope Benedict's capacity to understand, summarise and evaluate extended beyond the great theological discussions for which is he was known, said Fr Fessio. "It was philosophy, literature, history, art, music – all these things that make up the so-called humanities. He was immersed in and interested in all these things."

"He had a warm and wonderful sense of humour. It would come up all the time," Fr Fessio added. "He would grasp the irony of things."

“Pope Benedict's capacity to understand, summarise and evaluate extended beyond the great theological discussions for which is he was known”

When members of the *Schulerkreis* would gather with him to pray, celebrate Mass and share meals and engage in discussion, not all the discussions were of an ecclesial nature. But Pope Benedict could speak to them all.

"He was a great listener and conversationalist, always with a warm sense of humour. He has done all things well. He was a wonderful orator and speaker, preacher, writer and thinker."

Fr Fessio also said the late pope's great love for the Church was always evident.

"His insistence on the continuity of the Church before and after Vatican Council – that was an important part of his papacy. In fact, he emphasised that in the very first talk he gave when he was made pope. He was elected around 6:30 at night, and the next morning at 9:30 he gave a talk in Latin, which he himself wrote without any help, and he made it very clear that he was a pope of the council – but that we had to see the council not as a rupture from previous Church teaching, but rather in continuity with it."

“He really had a serene and humble insight. He was such a great person and had a great mind”

Notable quotes from Pope Benedict XVI

Joy and Hope

"Know that God will never abandon you. Turn your eyes to him often. He gave his life for you on the cross because he loves you. Contemplation of this great love brings a hope and joy to our hearts that nothing can destroy. Christians can never be sad, for they have met Christ, who gave his life for them." – World Youth Day message 2012

Faith

"Faith is not an illusion, a flight of fancy, a refuge or sentimentalism; rather it is total involvement in the whole of life and is the proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News that can set the whole of the person free." – General audience, November 14, 2012.

Vatican II

"The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church. It asserts that the texts of the council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the council. It claims that they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was

found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless. However, the true spirit of the council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts." – Speech, December 22, 2005.

Truth

"Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made 'experience' all-important. Yet, experiences, detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair." – Speech, World Youth Day, Sydney, July 17, 2008.

Economy

"I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world's economic and social assets, that the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity." – Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009.

Abuse

"It is your God-given responsibility as pastors to bind up the wounds caused by every breach of trust, to foster healing, to promote reconciliation and to reach out with loving concern to those so seriously wronged." – Meeting with US bishops, April 16, 2008.

Right to life

"The fundamental human right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself. This is true of life from the moment of conception until its natural end. Abortion, consequently, cannot be a human right – it is the very opposite." – Speech in Austria, September 7, 2007.

Liturgy

"Our earthly liturgies will never be more than a pale reflection of the liturgy celebrated in the Jerusalem on high, the goal of our pilgrimage on earth. May our own celebrations nonetheless resemble that liturgy as closely as possible and grant us a foretaste of it!" – Homily in Paris, September 12, 2008.



Pope Benedict XVI reads his resignation in Latin during a meeting of cardinals at the Vatican in this February 11, 2013, file photo. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano

THE LIFE OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

OSV news

- **APRIL 16, 1927** – Joseph Ratzinger is born in Marktl am Inn, Germany.
- **1945** – With World War II ending, the 18-year-old conscripted soldier deserts from the German army and is held briefly as a U.S. prisoner of war.
- **JUNE 29, 1951** – He is ordained a priest along with his brother, Georg, and continues his theological studies.
- **1958-1977** – He teaches theology at five German universities.
- **1962-1965** – Father Ratzinger serves as an expert at the Second Vatican Council.
- **MAY 28, 1977** – He is ordained a bishop, becoming the archbishop of Munich and Freising, Germany.
- **JUNE 27, 1977** – Pope Paul VI inducts him into the College of Cardinals.
- **APRIL 19, 2005** – Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 78, elected pope and takes the name Benedict XVI.
- **1981-2005** – He serves as prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
- **DEC. 22, 2005** – In a meeting with top aides at the Vatican, Pope Benedict insists the teaching of the Second Vatican Council must be read in continuity with the church's tradition.
- **SEPT. 12, 2006** – In a speech about faith and reason at the University of Regensburg, Germany, Pope Benedict cites a historical criticism of violence in Islam, setting off consternation and protests.
- **APRIL 15-20, 2008** – Pope Benedict visits Washington, New York and the United Nations, meets with victims of clerical sex abuse for first time.
- **JULY 7, 2007** – Pope Benedict issues an apostolic letter, "Summorum Pontificum," permitting wider use of the 1962 Roman Missal.
- **APRIL 16, 2007** – The first of what would be a three-volume work, "Jesus of Nazareth," by Pope Benedict goes on sale and is an immediate commercial success.
- **JANUARY 2009** – With Pope Benedict's approval, the Vatican issues a letter lifting the excommunication of four traditionalist bishops belonging to the Society of St. Pius X to clear the way for reconciliation talks with the group.
- **NOV. 4, 2009** – With the apostolic constitution "Anglicanorum coetibus," Pope Benedict establishes personal ordinariates for Anglicans entering into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **JULY 15, 2010** – With the approval of Pope Benedict, the Vatican releases streamlined procedures for handling accusations of clerical sexual abuse and removing from the priesthood those found guilty.
- **FEB. 28, 2013** – Pope Benedict, 85, becomes the first pope in almost 600 years to resign; he cited declining strength because of age.
- **MAY 1, 2011** – Pope Benedict beatifies Pope John Paul II.
- **2013-2022** – Lives a "monastic" life of prayer and study, receives visitors in a renovated monastery near the Vatican Gardens. With prompting from Pope Francis, he appears in public for a number of significant church events at the Vatican.
- **DEC. 31, 2022** – Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI dies at 9:34 a.m. Rome time. His funeral is scheduled for Jan. 5, 2023.

The Spiritual Testament of Pope Benedict XVI



Pope Benedict XVI prays as he leads the Good Friday service in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican April 6.
Photo: CNS /Paul Haring

My spiritual testament

When, at this late hour of my life, I look back on the decades I have wandered through, I see first of all how much reason I have to give thanks. Above all, I thank God himself, the giver of all good gifts, who has given me life and guided me through all kinds of confusion; who has always picked me up when I began to slip, who has always given me anew the light of his countenance. In retrospect, I see and understand that even the dark and arduous stretches of this path were for my salvation and that he guided me well in those very stretches.

I thank my parents, who gave me life in difficult times and prepared a wonderful home for me with their love, which shines through all my days as a bright light until today. My father's clear-sighted faith taught us brothers and sisters to believe and stood firm as a guide in the midst of all my scientific knowledge; my mother's heartfelt piety and great kindness remain a legacy for

which I cannot thank her enough. My sister has served me selflessly and full of kind concern for decades; my brother has always paved the way for me with the clear-sightedness of his judgements, with his powerful determination, and with the cheerfulness of his heart; without this ever-new going ahead and going along, I would not have been able to find the right path.

I thank God from the bottom of my heart for the many friends, men and women, whom he has always placed at my side; for the co-workers at all stages of my path; for the teachers and students he has given me. I gratefully entrust them all to his goodness. And I would like to thank the Lord for my beautiful home in the Bavarian foothills of the Alps, in which I was able to see the splendour of the Creator himself shining through time and again. I thank the people of my homeland for allowing me to experience the beauty of faith time and again. I pray that our country will remain a country of faith and I ask

you, dear compatriots, not to let your faith be distracted. Finally, I thank God for all the beauty I was able to experience during the various stages of my journey, but especially in Rome and in Italy, which has become my second home.

I ask for forgiveness from the bottom of my heart from all those whom I have wronged in some way.

What I said earlier of my compatriots, I now say to all who were entrusted to my service in the Church: Stand firm in the Faith! Do not be confused! Often it seems as if science - on the one hand, the natural sciences; on the other, historical research (especially the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures) - has irrefutable insights to offer that are contrary to the Catholic Faith. I have witnessed from times long past the changes in natural science and have seen how apparent certainties against the faith vanished, proving themselves not to be science but philosophical interpretations only apparently belonging to science - just

as, moreover, it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith has learned to understand the limits of the scope of its affirmations and thus its own specificity. For 60 years now, I have accompanied the path of theology, especially biblical studies, and have seen seemingly unshakeable theses collapse with the changing generations, which turned out to be mere hypotheses: the liberal generation (Harnack, Jülicher, etc.), the existentialist generation (Bultmann, etc.), the Marxist generation. I have seen, and see, how, out of the tangle of hypotheses, the reasonableness of faith has emerged and is emerging anew. Jesus Christ is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life - and the Church, in all her shortcomings, is truly his Body.

Finally, I humbly ask: pray for me, so that the Lord may admit me to the eternal dwellings, despite all my sins and shortcomings. For all those entrusted to me, my heartfelt prayer goes out day after day.

Benedictus PP XVI.

Out&About

Keeping up the Christmas spirit...



▲▼**ROSCOMMON:** Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey celebrated Mass in the hall of Cloontia and afterwards the community stayed on for tea, food and a chat.



DUBLIN: Radio Maria's studios were visited by two Slovak community groups, the Slovak Gospel Choir and Ostroha Group, to perform some festive music.

IN SHORT

'Vivid' history of women religious launched

A "vivid" account of the experience of women religious in Ireland from 1530-1700 was launched at the Poor Clare Monastery, Galway, recently.

The book, *Irish Women in Religious Orders, 1530-1700*, is the first comprehensive study of the lives and experiences of women religious for that period and shows how many young Irish women ignored the State's official proscriptions of religious life and found ways to circumvent them.

Professor John McCafferty of UCD History Department said author Bronagh McShane "has vividly brought the difficult decisions

these women made back to the historical stage and proves that there is no aspect of the Irish experience from 1500-1700 that did not touch on their extraordinary choices".

The Abbess of the Galway Poor Clares Sr Colette also praised the book, adding that Ms McShane's "work brings the exploits of our early sisters to a wider audience and is a good read for anyone interested in this neglected area of Irish women's history."

The experiences of the Galway Dominicans and the Kylemore Benedictines are also examined in the book and as the author herself observes in the introduction "the picture that emerges is one of spirited and resilient individuals and communities who grappled with countless challenges but whose perseverance prevailed".

Govt to streamline migrant work permits

The Government is set to establish a working group with the task of streamlining the application procedure for employment permits and immigration permissions.

Currently to work in Ireland, a person from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) has to make two applications, first to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment for a work permit, and then to the Department of Justice for an immigration permission.

The new measure will simplify the procedure for third country nationals wishing to migrate to the EU legally for work pro-

cesses, through a single application procedure for a combined employment and residence permit.

The measure also aims to strengthen the safeguards and equality of treatment of those third-country nationals, the Government said in a statement.

Minister for Justice Heath Humphrey welcomed the decision, saying it is a "very good reform".

"We should aim to develop a new, user-friendly system which makes it easier for enterprise and prospective workers to use.

"We should also aim to reduce costs through increased digitalisation and centralisation," the minister said.

The working group is to report to Government within six months.



KILDARE: Bishop-emeritus of Meath Michael Smith is congratulated by Fr J. Anthony Gaughan on the launch of Bishop Smith's book *Vatican Council Memories* in Maynooth College.



KILDARE: Fr Paul Connell and Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan are pictured congratulating Bishop-emeritus Michael Smith following the launch of his *Vatican Council Memories*.



ARMAGH: Danya and Eugenia from Ukraine are pictured with Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin after lighting the peace candle as those gathered prayed for peace in Ukraine during the Advent carol service in St Patrick's Cathedral.



BELFAST: Megan Boyd (4 Corners Festival), Fr Martin Magill (4 Corners Festival), Inspector Roisin Brown (PSNI), Andrew Patterson and Rev. Steve Stockman (4 Corners Festival) are pictured at the launch of the 4 Corners Festival 2023 at the QUB Catholic Chaplaincy.



ARMAGH: A night of celebration was held in St Malachy's Church as Nora McBrien and Sean Boylan were presented with St Patrick's Medals, to acknowledge their years of great service in the Church and Parish, by Cardinal Sean Brady.



ROSCOMMON: Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey was presented with a painting of the Cathedral of the Annunciation and St Nathy, Ballaghaderreen at a Carol Service in the cathedral. It was painted by Ballaghaderreen-based artist, Conor O'Connell and was presented to the bishop to mark the Silver Jubilee of his ordination to priesthood.



DUBLIN: Dublin City University president Daire Keogh officially launched the refurbished Woodlock Hall Library on the university's All Hallows campus in Drumcondra. The library houses part of the Irish Jesuits library, the Woodlock Hall Collection, which contains over 18,000 books. Visitors to Woodlock Hall will also see artwork commemorating the 1916 leaders by renowned artist Mick O'Dea. Mr Keogh is pictured with Fr Leonard Moloney SJ, provincial of the Irish Jesuits.



CAVAN: Following the blessing of the two new stained glass windows in the north and south transepts of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, master stained glass artist Patrick Muldowney is pictured with Fr Gerry MacCormack, Annette O'Rourke, Chairperson of Kingscourt Parish Pastoral Planning, Niall Smith, Niall Smith Architects, Vincent Galligan, Niall Smith Architects, Seamus Malone, Emerald Glass, Ciaran Boylan, Chairperson of Kingscourt Parish Finance Committee, Catherine Finnegan, Kingscourt Finance Manager, Roisin Hughes, Secretary of Kingscourt Finance Committee.



CAVAN: Pictured are the two stained glass windows installed at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, created by Kilkenny native and stained glass artist Patrick Muldowney. One is dedicated to Creation, Ulster Ss Bronach, Colmcille and Killian and the second to Our Lady. Photo: Paul Callaghan



BELFAST: St Mary's University College Belfast hosted a meeting with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in the College Old Library, to discuss opportunities around working together to promote the positivity of teaching the role Catholic schools provide for young people and communities they serve.



BELFAST: Queen's University Belfast's Catholic chaplaincy hosted their annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols before Christmas, with music and song provided by Canticle, with scripture readings from representatives of various groups and ministries involved in chaplaincy life.



KILDARE: Paul Deveraux, Josie Kelly, Sr Consilio and Fr Robert McCabe are pictured at the launch of the Pioneer calendar at Cuan Mhuire, Athy. The 2023 Pioneer calendar promotes spiritual support for the families, friends and residents of addiction treatment centres. Each month carries one of the 12 Steps of the AA programme as a way of focusing the attention and awareness of Pioneers on the many people who value their prayers.



GALWAY: Bronagh McShane is pictured with Sr Bonaventure and Sr Colette of the Galway Poor Clare Community at the launch her book *Irish Women in Religious Orders, 1530-1700*.

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



GALWAY: Leo Varadkar visited to Kylemore Abbey shortly before taking up his role as Taoiseach. During his visit, Mr Varadkar experienced the range of social enterprise activity on site, from heritage to education, tourism to artisan craft production. He met with Kylemore Abbey staff, the Benedictine nuns and colleagues, and students from the University of Notre Dame Kylemore Abbey Global Centre onsite.



KERRY: Bishop Ray Browne blessed the Mobile Crib in Killarney before a large crowd.



MARSEILLE: Pictured at the Global Congress of the International Office for Catholic Education, held recently, were Mr Alan Hynes, CEO of the Catholic Educational Partnership; Dr Jacintha Collins, Executive Director of the National Catholic Education Commission of Australia; Fr Eamonn Conway, Professor of Integral Human Development, Notre Dame University Australia; Mr Paul Barbour, Director of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales; Ms Angela Mitchell, Notre Dame University based in Dublin; and Prof. Francis Campbell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Notre Dame Australia.



DONEGAL: A new icon dedicated to St Colmcille was blessed and consecrated by Bishop of Raphoe Alan McGuckian SJ in Glendowan Church. Sr Marie Therese of the Sisters of the Merciful Jesus, Divine Mercy Centre, Letterkenny prepared and presented the Icon to Fr Michael McKeever.



BELFAST: Department of Education (DE) Permanent Secretary Mark Browne, Holy Evangelist Primary School Principal Claire Robinson, students and chair of the board of governors Fr Brian McCann, as well as representatives from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), officially open Holy Evangelist Primary School.



LIMERICK: Bro. James Dormer, chairperson of the Board of Management at Scoil Iosagain CBS Sexton St, makes a presentation to Doireann Garrard on behalf of the school BoM. Ms Garrard was deputy principal at Sexton St CBS and has recently been appointed principal of Christ the King Boys Primary School, Caherdavin.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Fire breaks out in Brazil's Aparecida shrine

● A fire broke out in the Chapel of the Candles at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida in Sao Paulo state, Brazil.

The fire started around 8am local time. According to the Marian shrine, the fire started because a candle had been placed on a pew.

Firefighters responded quickly after the start of the fire and brought it under control. No injuries have been reported.

The Chapel of the Candles is one of the most visited spaces in the Aparecida Shrine. The Faithful light candles of various sizes as they pray and give thanks to God.

Alaska archbishop condemns attacks on Catholic church

● Recent incidents of vandalism committed against a church in Alaska represent an "attack on the dignity of each person and their religious practice," wrote Archbishop Andrew Bellisario of the Diocese of the Anchorage-Juneau in a letter to parishioners.

In his December 9 letter, Archbishop Bellisario called attention to two recent acts of vandalism that took place at St Andrew Catholic Church in Eagle River.

"We do not know what

has motivated people to do these serious and disturbing actions," Archbishop Bellisario wrote.

"These are especially significant in the context of the many expressions of anger that have become so commonplace in our society, our political system, and even our Church. This must be called out for its attack on the dignity of each person and their religious practice."

Pro-life Florida musician evangelises with rap music

● For pro-life Catholic rapper John Levi, there's no secret that his music is about evangelisation.

Mr Levi has turned his love of rap music and his talent as a rapper into outreach to people on the margins of the Church by building a community that promotes urban Catholic culture.

"There must be a triumphant counter to bad messages that destroy human dignity," Mr Levi told *Gulf Coast Catholic*, news outlet of the Diocese of St Petersburg, Florida.

"For me, it became clear very early on that all things can be used for the greater glory of God.

"Even hip-hop can turn the minds of the people to our Creator and the life-giving Gospel. Something as powerful as hip-hop must be used for the kingdom," Mr Levi said, adding that he stops the music during every performance "to remind the crowds they are loved by an almighty God who wants nothing more than to welcome them home".

Salvadoran cardinal recalls rough seas for St Romero

● In a candid account of his five decades in the Church in Salvador, the country's first cardinal tells of calumnies against El Salvador's St Oscar Romero, but also of slights against him by other prelates, including one bishop who said, in notes to a Vatican ambassador, to not even "think of giving me a

diocese".

Salvadoran Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chavez has had one reason after another to despair in his 52 years as part of the Catholic clergy, but if there's one thing he said he has learned in that time, it's that "God writes straight in crooked lines," as an old Spanish saying goes.

Nigerian bishop: Pre-Christmas massacre part of 'a deliberate plan'

A Nigerian bishop has denounced "a deliberate plan to unleash evil" on Christian villagers following reports that dozens of people were killed in a violent attack December 18 in Kaduna State.

"The motivation for these attacks as far as we know is that it's a deliberate plan to unleash evil and to terrify our people because we do not profess the same religion or because we oppose their violent activities on our land," Bishop Yakubu Kundi wrote in a text to CNA.

Bishop Kundi is the spiritual leader of the embattled Catholic Diocese of Kafanchan in southern Kaduna. The night time attack took place in and around the town of Mallagum.

Witnesses say a group of approximately 100 armed men dressed in army fatigues or black tunics arrived in Mallagum on motorcycles and trucks.

"At first we thought the military driving up and down the main street had come into town to provide security, since an attack had been rumoured for days," Emmanuel Allau Dominic, an eyewitness, told CNA in a text message.

Believing help had arrived, many residents surged toward the men, who opened fire, he said.

"Those running helter-skelter for help saw them and ran towards them, and that was the end of their journey on earth," Mr Dominic said.

Claim Church teaching helped prompt gay bar shooting is 'lie'

Denver Archbishop Samuel Aquila called it irresponsible and a "flat out lie" for *The Denver Post* daily newspaper and some other local media to scapegoat Catholic teaching on human sexuality as contributing to hatred against transgender people and the wider LGBTQ community that led to a mass shooting at a Colorado gay bar. He made the comments in a December 21 interview on a Denver radio talk show about a December 8 op-ed on the issue that he wrote for *The Wall Street Journal*.

Archbishop Aquila was among the religious and civic leaders who immediately



Flowers lie on caskets during a funeral Mass in the the parish hall of St Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Nigeria, June 17, 2022. The Mass was for at least 50 victims killed in a June 5 attack by gunmen during Mass at the church. Photo: CNS/Temilade Adelaja, Reuters

Media reports say as many as 46 people were killed in four villages over three days.

Thousands of other residents have been displaced from their homes because of the violence. While these people have received emergency supplies from the government, such as soup cubes and rice, those rations cannot last for very long, said Fr Justin Dyikuk, a Catholic journalist from Jos who reported on the attack.

Bernard Biniyat, a medical technician in Mallagum, told CNA that the raid was

foreshadowed by the killing of four farmers on December 13 by herders of the Islamic Fulani tribe.

Mr Biniyat said a local farmer, Cletus Dunia, confronted the men to object to their open grazing on his ripe bean crop. Dunia was hacked to death along with three other farmers in nearby fields, according to a press release of the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union.

Gen. Timothy Oporum, commander of the forward operating base in Kafanchan, told CNA that the December

18 attack in the Mallagum area was in reprisal by herders who believed that six members of their group were killed or captured after the December 13 incident. There have been multiple cases of reprisal killings in recent months, he added.

"The Fulani people have called the cell phones of these six men, but none have answered," the general said. "They want the men to be released from captivity or the bodies to be returned."

condemned the November 19 attack on Club Q in Colorado Springs that left five people dead at the scene and injured at least 25 others.

Police arrested the alleged gunman, Aldrich Lee Aldrich, 22, after he was subdued by a couple of bar patrons.

Aldrich faces 305 charges for first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, first- and second-degree assault charges and many counts of bias-motivated crimes.

"My state witnessed an unmitigated tragedy on November 19 when a gun-

man opened fire in a gay club in Colorado Springs, killing five and wounding 25," Archbishop Aquila wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Unfortunately the reaction has thus far fostered more vitriol and division than peace and unity as the press has blamed religious communities including the Catholic Church, to which the shooter has no apparent connection."

Saying the Church's approach to human sexuality "contributed to the violence" is "just a flat out lie," the prelate told radio host Dan Caplis.

US Supreme Court keeps 'heartbreaking' restriction on border entry

The US Supreme Court said December 27 that a federal public health rule that allows immigration officials at the border to quickly turn away migrants seeking asylum could stay in place while legal challenges to the policy played out.

In a 5-4 decision, the jus-

tices stopped a trial judge's ruling that would have lifted the measure, known as Title 42 of the Public Health Services Act, on December 21.

Chief Justice John Roberts had already put that order on pause December 19 responding to an emergency request

filed by 19 states asking the justices to keep Title 42 in place.

The Trump administration used the public health measure during the pandemic to allow US border officials to expel migrants quickly without giving them an opportunity

to seek asylum in the United States.

"Our hearts (are) broken by this decision and the many people that will be further harmed because of it," tweeted the Interfaith Immigration Coalition December 27.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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'Down Mexico way...'



George (5) a migrant boy from Venezuela who is traveling with his family to seek asylum in the United States, plays with a Captain America doll along the border between Mexico and the United States in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, December 27. In the background members of the Texas National Guard were positioned on the banks of the Rio Grande to reinforce border security and inhibit migrants from crossing into the US. Photo: CNS/Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters.

'I never had respect for the bishops', says dictator Ortega

The president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, once again attacked the Catholic Church in the Central American country, accusing it of "calling for bloodshed," and said, "I never had respect for the bishops."

The Sandinista dictator made the statement December 19 during the 25th commencement for graduates in police sciences from the Walter Mendoza Martínez Police Academy.

"I never had respect for the bishops, I couldn't believe in the bishops, in some priests, and in that approach there were exceptions of priests who practiced Christianity like Gaspar García Laviana,

who without being Nicaraguan had more commitment to the people," Mr Ortega said.

Influenced by liberation theology, Gaspar García Laviana was a Spanish priest and guerrilla fighter who took up arms and participated in the communist Sandinista revolution in its fight against the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in the 1970s.

Mr Ortega's remarks came a week after the bishop of Matagalpa, Rolando Álvarez, who was abducted in the middle of the night by the dictatorship and has been held under house arrest since August, was accused of "conspiracy to undermine national

security and sovereignty" and "spreading fake news".

Mr Ortega also said that he was raised "in a Catholic, Christian family, but I learned over time that at the end of the day, behind a cassock is a human being. The cassock doesn't make anyone a saint, the habit doesn't make the monk."

The dictator recalled the 2018 protests that demanded his removal from power. In particular, he referred to the police intervention in the town of Masaya, where the regime also attacked the Catholic Church on several occasions.

"They thought that the

police were defeated and the attacks were in different quarters every day, and they came out of some churches, not all the churches, but some churches where the Pharisees were, the whitewashed tombs, from those churches they came out and from an apartment where some priests even openly came out wearing the cassock, exploiting the blood, calling for bloodshed," Mr Ortega said.

After saying that his "first inspiration" to "fight for the poor" was Christ, the Nicaraguan dictator said that he "couldn't trust the priests".

Rome diocese learned 'recently' of Fr Rupnik accusations

Cardinal Angelo De Donatis said December 23 that the Diocese of Rome learned only recently about the accusations of abuse against Fr Marko Rupnik, a Jesuit priest and artist who has served in the diocese for decades.

In a statement, Cardinal De Donatis said "the diocese of Rome, which was unaware until recently of the issues raised, cannot enter into the merits of the determinations made by others, but assures, also in the name of its bishop, every support necessary for the desirable

positive solution of the case..."

Cardinal De Donatis is vicar of the diocese of Rome, of which Pope Francis is bishop.

The 68-year-old Fr Rupnik, originally from Slovenia, is a renowned sacred artist whose works decorate Catholic churches, chapels, and shrines around the world, including the Redemptoris Mater Chapel in the Vatican and the major seminary of Rome.

Reports were published earlier this month containing allegations that Fr

Rupnik had, around three decades ago, sexually, spiritually, and psychologically abused sisters in a religious institute with which he was formerly associated.

Following the media reports, the Jesuits confirmed that Fr Rupnik had also incurred an automatic excommunication for absolving an accomplice in a sin against the sixth commandment. The excommunication was verified, and shortly afterward lifted, by the Vatican in 2020.

Vatican roundup

Love comes first, Pope says in letter on St Francis de Sales

● The most important question a Christian can ask when making any decision in life is "where the greatest love is to be found," Pope Francis wrote in a letter marking the 400th anniversary of St Francis de Sales, a doctor of the Church.

Thinking about the legacy of St Francis, who was born in France in 1567 and died in 1622, Pope Francis said he was convinced that the French saint's "flexibility and his farsighted vision have much to say to us," especially in recognising the real-life struggles of ordinary people and judging faith by love.

The Pope's letter was titled *Totum Amoris Est* (*Everything Pertains to Love*) and was released by the Vatican December 28, the 400th anniversary of the death of St Francis de Sales, who was bishop of Geneva, Switzerland, co-founder of the Visitation Sisters and a prolific writer, including of tracts he would slip under the doors of people's homes.

In a letter that quoted heavily from St Francis' books, *Treatise on the Love of God* and *Introduction to the Devout Life*, but also from his own exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis said the saint has much to teach the Church today.

"We are challenged to be a Church that is outward-looking and free of all worldliness, even as we live in this world, share people's lives and journey with them in attentive listening and acceptance," the Pope wrote.

"That is what Francis de Sales did when he discerned the events of his times with the help of God's grace."

Continue contemplating the mystery of Christmas, Pope urges

● The birth of Jesus in a stable "shows us God's 'style,' which is closeness, compassion, and tenderness," Pope Francis told visitors and pilgrims at his weekly general audience.

On the Church's calendar Christmas was not over when the Pope held his audience December 28, and he insisted it is important for Christians to use the season to contemplate the meaning of Jesus becoming human and being born into the poverty and simplicity of the manger.

"With this style of his, God draws us to himself," the Pope said. "He does not take us by force, he does not impose his truth and justice on us. He wants to draw us with love, with tenderness."

Basing his Christmas reflections on the teachings of St Francis

de Sales, a bishop and doctor of the Church, Pope Francis announced at the audience that he was publishing an apostolic letter that day marking the 400th anniversary of the death of the French saint and theologian.

But rather than quoting from his apostolic letter, Pope Francis quoted from St Francis de Sales' meditations on Christmas and, especially, his focus on the love of God and on the poverty of Jesus' birth.

"Who is Jesus? Looking at the manger, looking at the cross, looking at his life, his simplicity, we can know who Jesus is," the Pope said.

"Jesus is the son of God who saves us by becoming man, stripping himself of his glory and humbling himself."



Letter from USA



Dennis Sadowski

Fr Paul Seil experienced a Christmas unlike any other in his 67 years of life in Buffalo, New York.

In the midst of the multiday blizzard that paralysed parts of western New York, Fr Seil, chaplain for the Buffalo Fire Department, had to evacuate the rectory at his parish in the city's Old First Ward neighbourhood on Christmas Eve, then spent the night aboard the department's fire boat and celebrated a short Mass Christmas morning for crewman Jack Kelleher.

“Relocating to the kitchen, Fr Seil periodically used the stove for a little heat, making sure the carbon monoxide detector he had worked”

Finally the afternoon of Christmas Day Fr Seil made it to the rectory at St Joseph Cathedral – courtesy of Mr Kelleher – where he has been “holed up” since.

“This is the worst storm I’ve ever seen,” Fr Seil, a native of Buffalo, told *Catholic News Service* December 27.

The blizzard and subzero temperatures prompted Buffalo Bishop Michael Fisher to urge Catholics living in the worst affected communities to avoid venturing to their parish for Christmas Mass and to take advantage of livestreamed liturgies instead.

“Do not attempt to attend Masses in person,” Bishop Fisher warned December 24.

At least 28 people in Erie County, New York, had died during the storm, said county executive Mark Poloncarz. Over the course four days, the storm dumped four feet of snow in Buffalo and surrounding communities.

Nationwide, more than 50 people died because of the storm, which affected tens of millions of Americans and Canadians beginning December 21 and lasting for five days.

Fr Seil’s Christmas adventure began after the electricity went out the evening of December 23 in much of the neighbourhood around Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, which has served the community for 125 years.

He said he went to sleep that night bundled in warm clothing and woke up the next morning to a “pretty cold room”.

Relocating to the kitchen, Fr Seil periodically used the stove for a little heat, making sure the carbon monoxide detector he had worked. That

Priest weathers Christmas blizzard on fireboat celebrating Mass for two



People walk on the street as cars pass by in Amherst, New York, December 26, during a deadly winter storm that hit the Buffalo region. Photo: CNS/Brendan McDermid, Reuters

“Quickly packing a few overnight necessities and Communion wafers and dressing in his fire turnout gear, Fr Seil tried walking through the deep snow and gale-force winds”

situation lasted just a few hours.

“I heard a sound of rushing water. The pipes broke evidently and water came pouring down through the kitchen ceiling and extinguished the stove,” he said.

“With water coming in and no heat, it was getting a little desperate. I was scared. I was a little afraid of what the future might bring,” he said.

Help

Soon, Fr Seil put out a call for help on the fire radio he carries as fire department chaplain, a ministry he began in 2018. But the department couldn’t respond. Fire trucks and emergency vehicles answering emergency calls were getting stuck in snowdrifts up to 6 feet high.

“There was nothing for me to do,” Fr Seil said.

That’s when Mr Kelleher responded with an offer to help.

The marine engineer aboard the fire boat, named the Edward M. Cotter, said he could try to make it the mile from the boat’s mooring along the Buffalo River to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Five blocks from the church, tall

drifts blocked Mr Kelleher’s SUV. He radioed Fr Seil asking if he could trudge to him instead.

Quickly packing a few overnight necessities and Communion wafers and dressing in his fire turnout gear, Fr Seil tried walking through the deep snow and gale-force winds. He quickly realised, however, that the storm’s intensity was too much.

That’s when a couple of neighbourhood residents who were checking on people in their homes offered to help, followed by a man in snowmobile who had made his way from an outlying area to evacuate people to safety. Fr Seil called him a godsend, a Christmas gift.

“I got on the back, strapped in my bags. In a few moments we were at Mr Kelleher’s Chevy Blazer,” Fr Seil said.

The fireboat was operating on a generator, which provided heat and electricity. “It was nice. It was warm,” Fr Seil said.

Also in Fr Seil’s bag was a couple of pounds of smoked kielbasa sausage and a few rolls. Christmas Eve dinner on the Cotter was a feast for the two men.

The next morning, Fr Seil celebrated a brief Mass for Christmas,

Mr Kelleher then offered to take him to “your boss’s house,” meaning St Joseph Cathedral. It’s where Fr Seil has been since.

The priest, whose father was a firefighter in Buffalo until a serious accident while fighting a fire disabled him in 1964, was hoping to return to his parish as soon as possible. He was waiting for the all-clear from city officials that travel was safe again.

“Most parishes in the immediate Buffalo vicinity cancelled Masses, while many livestreamed liturgies for people stuck at home or in shelters”

“I’m sorry I’m not in my parish,” he said.

The city of Buffalo remained under a travel ban at midday December 27 as snow removal crews gradually cleared streets, many of which were blocked by vehicles that had become mired in deep snow.

Bishop Fisher said safety was his primary concern in asking people not to attend long-awaited Christmas Masses.

“Unfortunately, it was too dangerous to ask people to even try to get here to the cathedral or any of our parishes,” he told *CNS* December 27.

Most parishes in the immediate Buffalo vicinity cancelled Masses,

while many livestreamed liturgies for people stuck at home or in shelters. In some locales where streets were not clogged with snow, Masses went ahead as scheduled.

Bishop Fisher credited Catholic Charities of Buffalo for rushing to ensure food and supplies were distributed to people in need before the storm arrived.

“We felt confident people had food who needed it,” he said.

Several parishes also opened as shelters under Erie County’s emergency management plan, allowing people whose homes lost heat and electricity to relocate to some place comfortable.

Two days after Christmas, many parishes remained closed, with pastors “hunkered down in their rectories,” Bishop Fisher said.

A special Mass was planned for December 28 at St Joseph Cathedral for Buffalo-area residents who died during the storm. Another liturgy was set for the weekend for first responders and other essential workers who continued to serve residents most affected by the wild winter weather.

“We’re trying to take care of one another,” the bishop said.

“This time of the year, as we’re celebrating Christmas, it’s supposed to be a time of hope,” he added. “The people here in Buffalo, I’ve found, they’re tough and hearty and resilient and very faith-filled. I know they’re caring for one another and we’re trying to do what we can as part of the community.”

How was the Pope's Christmas?

As ever, it depends on who you ask



John L. Allen Jr

Probably the single most commonly asked question this week in casual conversation, in lines at grocery store lines and post offices, in telephone calls and messages on WhatsApp, and pretty much everywhere else humans interact, is some version of the following: "So, how was your Christmas?"

“Cardinal De Donatis is widely seen as a key papal loyalist, and thus his words are presumed to reflect the Pope's thinking”

For most of us, answering that question requires a fairly simple equation involving family, food and fun, maybe with a dash of faith thrown into the mix. For a Roman Pontiff, however, the maths is always far more complicated, and that's certainly the case for Pope Francis in 2022.

As ever, judging what kind of Christmas Francis had this year depends on who you ask.

If you were to put the question to "Anna," for example, the pseudonym employed by the Italian publication *Domani* for a Slovenian ex-nun who says she was abused sexually and spiritually for nine years by Jesuit Fr Marko Rupnik, she might not be terribly enthusiastic.

Two days before the holiday, the Pope's hand-picked Vicar for Rome, Italian Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, announced that the diocese probably will have to take a series of unspecified "measures" to restrict Fr Rupnik's activities in the Eternal City, especially at the Centro Aletti, a centre for art and theology founded by Fr Rupnik in 1991 and inaugurated by St Pope John Paul II in 1993.

Yet Cardinal De Donatis also insisted that Fr Rupnik deserves the benefit of the doubt, declaring that "we ministers of Christ can't be less committed to the due process of law, and less charitable, than a secular state,

automatically transforming an accusation into a crime".

"The judgements that we see spread by many with particular vehemence," Cardinal De Donatis said in his statement, "don't seem to manifest either an evangelical criterion of the search for truth, or a basic criterion upon which every law-based society is founded, a *verbis legis non est recedendum* ('there must be no departure from the words of the law')."

Cardinal De Donatis is widely seen as a key papal loyalist, and thus his words are presumed to reflect the Pope's thinking. Critics have wondered aloud if Francis is showing his fellow Jesuit special treatment, raising new questions about the handling of the abuse crisis, especially as it applies to offenses against women. An Italian advocacy group called "Women for the Church" warned that Fr Rupnik is merely "the tip of the iceberg".

For those folks, Christmas-time 2022 probably won't be counted among this Pope's finest hours.

To take a different point of view, if you were to ask Francis's top diplomatic advisors how Christmas went this year, they might profess delight that somebody finally has signalled openness to peace talks to end the war in Ukraine, but also a bit of melancholy that nobody seems interested in the Vatican's offer to mediate that dialogue.

Peace-maker

Since the beginning of the war Francis has aspired to play the role of peace-maker, and Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, his top diplomat, has publicly and repeatedly volunteered the Vatican's mediation services. A recent apology to Moscow after Francis raised hackles by linking two ethnic minorities allied with Russia, the Chechens and Buryats, to war crimes, was intended to keep that possibility alive.

Yet on Monday, when Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba proposed that talks take place in February, he made it clear that Ukraine sees UN Secretary-General António Guterres, not the Pope, as the right broker.

Most observers consider a February summit highly unlikely anyway, since Kuleba premised the proposal on Russia first facing a war crimes tribunal, something the Kremlin has rejected on principle. Still, it was at least a hint of openness, albeit one that would appear to suggest a cold shoulder to the Vati-



Pope Francis holds a figurine of Baby Jesus to take to the Nativity scene at the conclusion of Christmas Eve Mass in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican December 24. Photo: CNS/Guglielmo Mangiapane, Reuters.

can's obvious eagerness to play a key role.

On the other hand, Francis's Christmas certainly had its bright spots.

The Pope's Christmas eve liturgy drew a standing room only crowd of 7,000 souls inside St Peter's Basilica and another several thousand outside in the square watching the Mass on Jumbotrons. (The Vatican, unlike most of the United States, benefitted this year from unusually mild weather over the Christmas holiday.)

The Pope's warning about "people hungry for power and money" who end up "consuming" their neighbours drew wide play in the global media, especially in light of ongoing images of destruction in Ukraine.

Likewise, the Pope's lament about a "famine of peace" in his Christmas Day *Urbi et Orbi* address, delivered before a crowd in St Peter's Square estimated at 70,000 people, led news broadcasts that day all around the world. In part, that's because in a moment when most public figures turn upbeat and

even a bit sappy, Francis has always been willing to deliver an eyes-wide-open Christmas message, mixing hope with realism.

“Distraught by grief over the death of his wife, Mr Cofano turned to his parish priest, Fr Donato Liuzzi”

Then there's Giacomo Cofano, who, if asked, would probably tell you Pope Francis had a Christmas that bordered on the miraculous.

Mr Cofano was, up until recently, a manager at a hotel in southern Italy near the city of Brindisi, while his wife, Viviana Delego, was an English teacher in town. Just before Christmas, she went into the hospital due to complications with her pregnancy. Despite the best efforts of her medical team, she died of hemorrhaging on December 22 after having given birth to twins, one boy and one girl, a few days before. In addition to the

newborns, she also left behind a six-year-old little girl.

Distraught by grief over the death of his wife, Mr Cofano turned to his parish priest, Fr Donato Liuzzi. In addition to offering his own consolation, Fr Liuzzi also quietly informed Fr Fabio Salerno, a private secretary of Pope Francis, of what had happened, knowing that sometimes Francis likes to reach out directly to people suffering tragedy.

Without explicitly tipping his hand, Fr Liuzzi also advised Mr Cofano that if he got any calls over the holidays from unrecognised numbers, he should answer. At 7:20 pm on Christmas Day, the phone rang. Mr Cofano later reported that he had just walked back into the house from the hospital, where he was able to pick up his newborn son, Edoardo Maria, and was amazed to hear the Pope's voice on the line.

"He understood the tragedy of a mother who gave her life for her children, and the anguish that's struck my family," Mr Cofano said.

"I don't remember the exact words, but I was stu-

pefied by the fact that he thought of me and found the time to call," he said of Pope Francis. "I swear, it seemed like talking to somebody who's close to me, a friend. It was almost like a confession."

"I know it seems absurd to say it, but it was a beautiful Christmas," Mr Cofano said. "He gave it meaning."

Coincidence

Then he noted a striking coincidence: His twins were born on December 17, which was also Pope Francis's 86th birthday, so their lives will be forever intertwined.

So, to sum up: Christmas 2022 for Pope Francis was, alternatively, a disaster, a disappointment, a PR success or a pastoral bravura, all depending on the eye of the beholder. In reality, it may well have been all those things at once – a reminder, perhaps, of the complexity of the papacy, and why we should all consider it another Christmas gift that such a crushing burden doesn't fall on us.

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

Letters

Letter of the week

Catholic schools at top of leader boards again

Dear Editor, As usual Catholic schools are found to be at the top of school leader boards in the south, and according to a recent poll, in the North as well.

The recent poll highlighted by your paper [*The Irish Catholic* – December 15, 2022] in which three out of the top five schools in the North were found to be Catholic is a reminder of the quality education the Church continues to deliver across the island.

We know that it is not only literacy and numeracy, general academic study and sports these schools deliver, but through their Catholic ethos is delivered powerful principles which build virtue.

Despite surveys and polls showing, time and time again, that Catholic schools are really the cream of the crop, there is a determined effort to turn them into bland State controlled centres which focus on delivering education that isn't 'value-based'. There is no such thing as education that is not 'value-based'.

A secular education is not an education that takes no stance on particular moral issues, it is an education that is influenced by the politics and the Government of the time. Fortunately we know the Church's stance, which has not changed for 2,000 years.

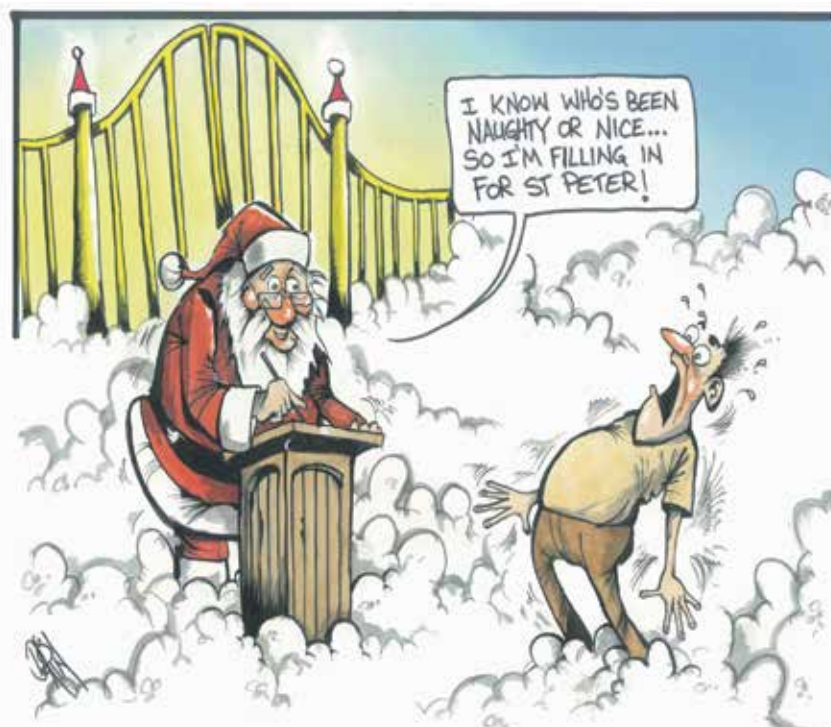
As long as there are people who are happy to send their children to Catholic schools, who value the education that they provide, they must be supported. Calls by Irish politicians to seize Church assets and take over schools is frankly ridiculous. Judging by what the State is already in charge of, particularly housing and healthcare, I don't think any sane person would be jumping up and down about getting them involved in the management of all schools.

Yours etc.,
Keith Barry
Limerick City, Limerick

How did previous generations survive winter?

Dear Editor, It's a wonder how previous generations survived winter and respiratory viruses with no National Emergency Co-ordination Groups or National Public Health Emergency Teams respectively to in effect babysit and wrap them up in cotton wool. One could be forgiven for being cynical about this overbearing Government (which established these bodies) and thinking such zeal in caring, minding and consideration for us all has something to do with guilty consciences over promoting, supporting and introducing a law that does not care, mind or consider the most vulnerable... the unborn!

Yours etc.,
John Burke
Clontarf, Dublin 3



Hopes Pope's prisoner plea is followed

Dear Editor, The Pope has been so consistent in his support for prisoners, always reminding us of their humanity. His message to governments around the world to give prisoners clemency – where appropriate – at Christmas was once again an expression of his outreach to

the margins, or the peripheries, of our societies and the world.

Throughout his papacy he has been a powerful force for a new evangelisation, reaching out to those who have fallen away from then Faith, and those who are downtrodden and maligned.

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

A beautiful message and a powerful message. I hope his example is followed by those in power, who too often disregard those who are not involved in voting them in to Government.

Yours etc.,
Emma Doyle
Drumcondra, Dublin 9

Gestures are part of social interaction on and off the road

Dear Editor, Thanks for the article by Fr Bernard 'Better to wave and seem deranged than cause offence' [*The Irish Catholic* – October 13, 2022].

Also I read and prayerfully responded to the bidding prayers of Fr Bernard as referenced in regards to www.corkandross.org

Actual gestures (kind ones!) rather than increasingly virtual ones in our culture are of course part of the come and go of social interaction on or off road.

I wonder what acceptable gestures might be in play across different cultures around the world. Thai

people I believe bow to each other but I'm unsure what the car etiquette might be.

The only thing that comes to mind about transport frustrations and saints is a certain saint who when thrown by her horse took out her annoyance on God; "No wonder You have few friends!"

I'm sure having regained her composure she went on with the horse and all forgiven.

Yours etc.,
Sean McAree
Laytown, Co. Meath

Carrying pictures of those who support abortion

Dear Editor, I don't think it right that Ruadhán Jones's article should carry a picture of people who supported abortion, including Ailbhe Smith, just because we are on the same page where another form of violence against women is concerned [*The Irish Catholic* – December 8, 2022].

Let us not forget that when the Freedom of Dublin was conferred on Ailbhe Smith, no long-time leader of the pro-life movement was on the honour list that day – nor, as far as I know, did Ms Smith press for their inclusion.

Yours etc.,
Gerald O'Carroll
Ballylongford, Co. Kerry

facebook community

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

President Biden's transgender mandate suffers second big court loss

Joe Biden is by far the worst president in US history. He claims to be Catholic while at the same time he stands against every Christian principle. – **Mary Duggan Murphy**

Am so disgusted with President Biden! Well done to American justice! I am ashamed at Joe Biden's behaviour since he took office. Omit the shamrock this year? – **Deirdre Quinn**

This is why we need prayers. We need to have prayer vigils in all our Churches. – **Margaret Griffin**

Are there still people who pretend that a Catholic can actually vote Democrat without committing mortal sin? – **William Broderick**

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

Providing instruction on the practice of discernment

Dear Editor, Your advocacy of discernment in a recent editor's opinion piece could be understood in terms of mere promotion of individual discernment [*The Irish Catholic* – December 8, 2022].

It correlates with Pope Francis's prescribing discernment as an aid to the implementation of the still ambiguous notion of a synodal Church. It is more and more the practice of Pope Francis to impose a top-down authority structure on the present Church, increasingly making the decisions by himself. He often uses a 'synodal' system to raise issues but not to make decisions, for whose validity he relies more and more on his own personal discernment.

Discernment has become in many individual minds and lives little other than a throwaway postulate. It is deemed to have priority over the teachings of the historical Church and is consequently deemed superior to the discernment of the Church through history.

Discernment is indeed very important, particularly as outlined by Frs Timothy Gallaher and Robert Spitzer whose inputs if combined provide a great guide regarding its practice. Without the catechesis inherent in such guidance there is a risk of many adhering to, following, promoting the German pathway debacle.

The Irish Catholic can do us all a great favour by providing instruction on the practice of discernment.

Yours etc.,
Neil Bray
Cappamore, Co. Limerick

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, January 5, 2023

Faith in film

A heist film with the Vatican's seal of approval

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Learning to love with St Francis de Sales

A statue of St Francis de Sales, patron saint of journalists, stands outside a seminary in the US in this 2005 photo. Photo: CNS.

On December 28 Pope Francis released an apostolic letter *Totum Amoris Est* (*Everything Pertains to Love*), to mark the fourth centenary of the death of one of the doctors of the Church, St Francis de Sales. Born to an old, noble family, Francis lived an early life of prestige – attending the best French schools – before acquiescing to the wishes of his father to embrace a legal career and going to study law at the University of Padua.

However, it was there that he unearthed an interest in theology. This stuck with him through his graduation and as he moved in a legal direction, to the point that he fostered an unquenchable desire to be



Pope Francis thought it a good idea to hone in on the life of St Francis de Sales on the 400th anniversary of his death and so should we, writes Jason Osborne

ordained a priest, which he went on to do at the age of 26. These were the first steps in a life that would go on to play a key role in steadying the ship of the Church in Europe, which was reeling from the ongoing effects of the Protestant Reformation.

As with Pope Francis, St Francis de Sales took an incredibly hands-on, pastoral approach to healing the religious division

in the Chablais region in his charge. He was to be assaulted, threatened, rejected and insulted among other things for his efforts. He wasn't deterred though, and his steadying, calm guidance flows down to us today – most notably through his books, *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God*, which have provided invaluable spiritual direction and formation for many.

Pope Francis in his recent letter quoted extensively from both of those works, and so it's worth looking at alongside the Pope to see what can be gained by listening to one of God's great saints.

God of the human heart

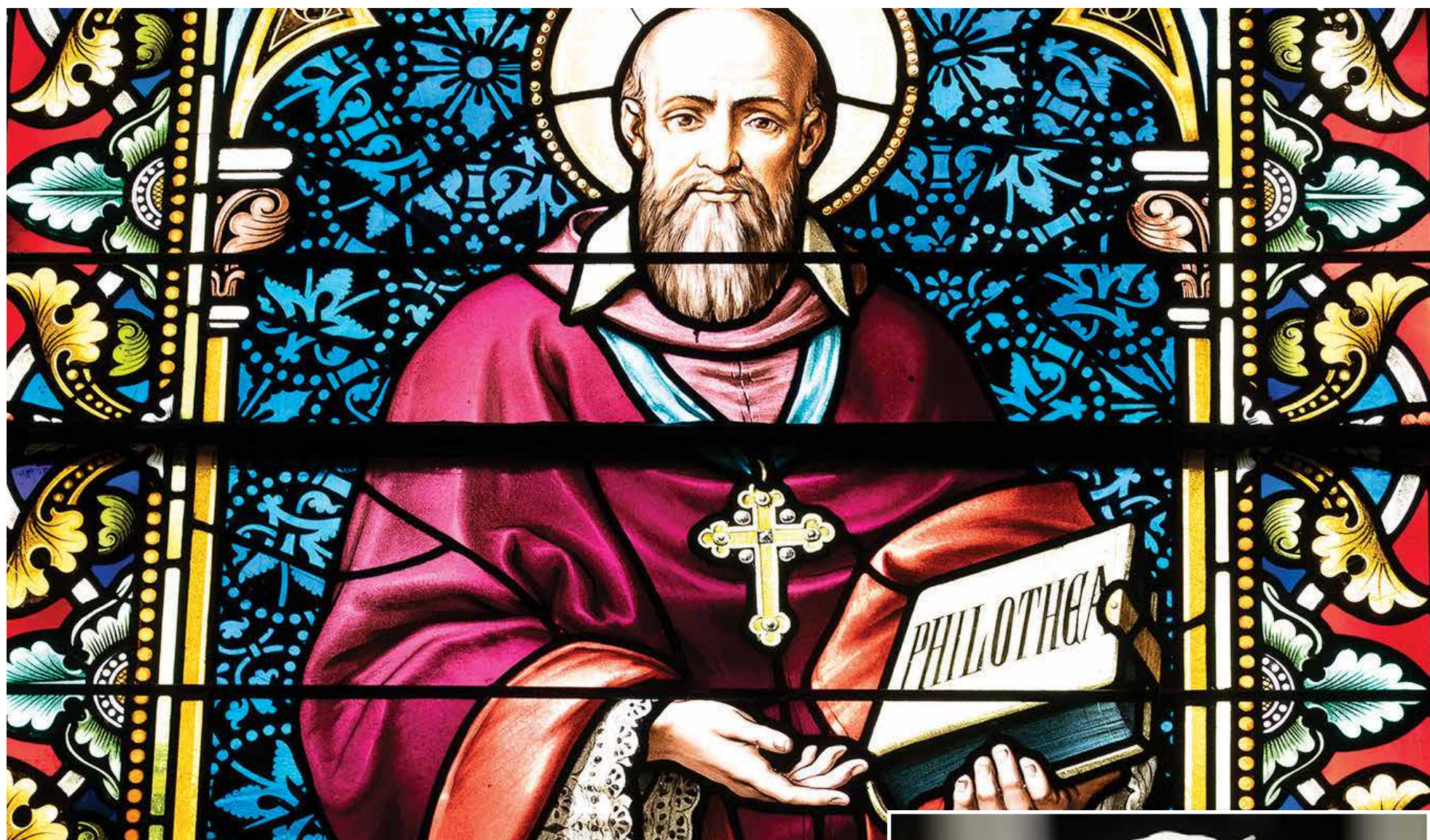
Pope Francis turns his attention first to St Francis de Sales' reasoning for living a life totally centred on God, which he shares "with simplicity and precision" in the aforementioned *Treatise on the Love of God*: "At the very thought of God, one immediately feels a certain delightful emotion of the heart, which testifies that God is God of the human heart".

Describing these words as a "perfect synthesis of his

thought," Pope Francis writes that an experience of God is "intrinsic" to the human heart for St Francis de Sales. He is not an optional extra or a mental construct implemented in order to feel better about ourselves, but rather the reason for our being. The 'heart' in Christian tradition isn't the sentimental place of emotion alone, but is rather the centre of our being – the place in which we encounter God, and from which he flows out into all of our activities, in every realm of life. As Pope Francis says:

"In the heart and through the heart, there comes about a subtle, intense and unifying process in which we come to know God and, at the same time, ourselves, our own origins and

» Continued from Page 29



A likeness of St Francis de Sales in stained glass.

depths, and our fulfilment in the call to love. We discover that faith is no blind emotion, but primarily an attitude of the heart, whereby we entrust ourselves to a truth that appeals to our consciousness as a 'sweet emotion' and awakens in response, as he [St Francis de Sales] was wont to say, an enduring benevolence towards all of creation."

“That is what Francis de Sales did when he discerned the events of his times with the help of God’s grace”

With this understanding, it’s no wonder then that St Francis thought there was no better place to find God than in the hearts of those around him. For St Francis, and for all the saints of the Church, while God is to be found in abundance in the Church, he’s also the reality encompassing the lives of every single person we encounter – whether they know God yet or not.

It is in this sense that the Church of today – particularly the “synodal” Church – can learn from the legacy of St Francis. His flexibility and far-sighted vision allowed him to perceive the changing times in which he lived, and so to capitalise on the new opportunities to preach the Gospel that these presented. “The word of God that he had loved from his

youth now opened up before him new and unexpected horizons in a rapidly changing world,” Pope Francis notes, continuing:

“That same task awaits us in this, our own age of epochal change. We are challenged to be a Church that is outward-looking and free of all worldliness, even as we live in this world, share people’s lives and journey with them in attentive listening and acceptance. That is what Francis de Sales did when he discerned the events of his times with the help of God’s grace.

“Today he bids us set aside undue concern for ourselves, for our structures and for what society thinks about us, and consider instead the real spiritual needs and expectations of our people. In our own time too, it is helpful to revisit some of the crucial decisions he made, so that we for our part can respond to today’s changes with the wisdom born of the Gospel.”

Beauty of God

The first of those decisions worth revisiting, in the Pope’s estimation, is St Francis’s decision to “reinterpret and propose anew” to every man and woman – in their unique circumstances – the beauty of a relationship with God. St Francis’s way of doing this, according to Pope Francis, was not a way of “external imposition,” but that of a persuasiveness that respects human freedom, just as God respects the freedom he has created us with.

The second “crucial” decision of

St Francis was to take the issue of devotion seriously. Living through changing times as he was, St Francis recognised that it was necessary to clarify the meaning of this central aspect of the life of the Church. As he writes in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, “It is necessary, first of all, to know in what the virtue of devotion consists. There is only one true devotion, and many false and vain ones. Unless you can distinguish true devotion, you can fall into error and waste your time running after some useless and superstitious devotion”. The truest devotion is found in God’s life dwelling in our hearts, he teaches.

“For St Francis, the Pope remarks, while the Christian life is never without ecstasy, ecstasy is ‘inauthentic apart from a truly Christian life’”

Finally, St Francis came to view the entirety of Christian life as “the ecstasy of work and life” – the opposite of escapism, self-absorption and “dull and dreary obedience,” as Pope Francis puts it. Allowing joy to take root and blossom in our hearts is what St Francis means by “the ecstasy of work and life”. In this way, “we live not only a civil, honest and Christian life, but a superhuman, spiritual, devout and ecstatic life, a life that in any case is beyond and above our natural



Pope Francis released an apostolic letter on the legacy of St Francis de Sales to mark the fourth centenary of the saint’s death.

condition,” he says.

For St Francis, the Pope remarks, while the Christian life is never without ecstasy, ecstasy is “inauthentic apart from a truly Christian life”.

“Indeed, life without ecstasy risks being reduced to blind obedience, a Gospel bereft of joy. On the other hand, ecstasy without life easily falls prey to the illusions and deceptions of the Evil one. The great polarities of the Christian life cannot be resolved and eliminated. If anything, each preserves the

authenticity of the other. Truth, then, does not exist without justice, pleasure without responsibility, spontaneity without law, and vice versa,” Pope Francis writes.

Divine heart

As you might expect, St Francis identifies as the greatest source of this ecstasy Jesus Christ, the human and divine heart that loved the most. For a deeper examination of St Francis de Sales’ thought, I thoroughly recommend Pope Francis’s letter *Totum Amoris Est*.

A heist film with the Vatican's seal of approval

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

Starring Catholic convert Alec Guinness as a mild-mannered bank attendant who happens to be in charge of shipments of gold, *The Lavender Hill Mob* is a whimsical 1951 comedy made by Ealing studios. It gets onto the Vatican's great films list from 1995 under the 'art' section.

“They steal one million pounds worth of gold, and the film begins with Holland living a life of luxury in Rio de Janeiro”

It is an odd choice for the Vatican's list of significant films, but not a bad one in my humble opinion. Comedy often gets left out in the battle for significance, scorned for being 'mere entertainment'. But there's nothing wrong with being entertained, and good comedy is just as hard to pull off as good tragedy – and oftentimes harder.

It is a product of Ealing Studios in London, which was so proficient at churning out low-budget, high-quality comedy that they became known as 'Ealing comedies'. Alec Guinness was the star of many of their best efforts, including the perhaps more distinctive and better-known *Kind Hearts and Coronets*.

But he's surrounded here by solid English acting talent – comedians Stanley Holloway and



Sir Alec Guinness, star of *The Lavender Hill Mob*, and a convert to Catholicism. Photo: Allan Warren.

Sid James, Alfie Bass as Shorty and the under rated John Gregson as the inspector.

Professional criminals

Guinness plays a meek bank clerk, Holland, who teams up with his eccentric neighbour – Pendelbury, played by Holloway – and two professional criminals in order to pull off the heist of the century.

They steal one million pounds

worth of gold, and the film begins with Holland living a life of luxury in Rio de Janeiro.

Holland, you see, has spent 19 years cultivating a deliberate smoke screen of honesty, reliability and something close to stupidity. People trust him, and that's what he wants – little do they know he harbours dreams of bigger and better things.

That's not the most moral of

themes, but remember this film comes in under the 'art' category, and as much as anything it's for the skill and craft of the filmmakers. Their work is particularly clever in the way they exploit what we know about 'heist' movies.

The characters, the names, and even the shape of the plot derive their humour from our expectations of heist films. We expect a long build up, some close encounters before the big con and then either victory or jail. We expect seasoned criminals, suave and debonair, preparing for the job of their life.

Instead, we get Dutch Holland and Al Pendelbury, both English eccentrics of a kind. Holland has a soft lisp so that the classic code word Roger becomes 'Woger', while Pendelbury has an encyclopaedic memory for quotes from Shakespeare.

Big heist

And in addition to that, the big heist takes place quite early in the film, maybe halfway through, perhaps even earlier. It all runs smoothly, with even the little hiccups along the way proving to work in their favour.

As the set-piece takes place early in the film, the tension comes from the fact that they're amateurs and at every point along the way expect that they have bungled it. They almost give up the game by virtue of their fear and inexperience.

Of course, there is a moment when some bungling occurs but even at that stage there is a chance they could wait it out. But that comes later in the film, around two-thirds of the way through, and the last act works out the ramifications in a very clever and very silly denouement.

The thing about this film, as was pointed out to me by someone else who watched it, is that it maintains a perfect tone the whole way through. When it wants to be tense, it can be, and that keeps you on your toes.

But generally, it is an example

of English whimsy, that delicate humour so suited to a cup of tea and a crumpet, a chortle and a sly wink. There is an English type, an eccentric, who is completely unselfconsciously so, and this type wheedles his way onto screens occasionally.

Americans try and capture it, but end up glib. It becomes quirky and self-conscious. But here, the strange shape of the script, the wonderful silliness of the humour, the sharpness of the tense moments – they're all at home in this delicate script and find in Alec Guinness particularly a perfect vehicle for their charm.

“Over Christmas I reviewed *It's A Wonderful Life*, which centres on men and women accustoming themselves to the difficulties of daily life”

That's ultimately why I think it ends up on the Vatican's list – it is an excellent film, and a very funny comedy. Artistically it is high quality. Morally I think it's at best neutral, with a moral ending leveling out what are otherwise quite amoral ambitions. Over Christmas I reviewed *It's A Wonderful Life*, which centres on men and women accustoming themselves to the difficulties of daily life.

But here, it's about ordinary people who constantly yearn for material ambition, for money and luxury, and are willing to be quite unscrupulous about how they achieve it. So yes, morally it's dubious – but as the ending shows, it takes place in a moral universe where justice is done, in the end.

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



A portrait of St Elizabeth Ann Seton by Amabilia Filicchi.

St Elizabeth Ann Seton: The United States' first saint

A mother of five who went on to become a religious sister and the United States' first saint is one of the examples the Church pays tribute to January 4. St Elizabeth Ann Seton was born Elizabeth Ann Bayley, into a prosperous Protestant family from New York in 1774 – a year before the start of the American revolution.

After Elizabeth's mother's death, her father remarried, but Elizabeth's father and stepmother separated. Elizabeth and her sister were sent to live with their uncle in the wake of this, and she was deeply hurt by the rejection.

Things took a turn for the better in 1794, when Elizabeth married William Seton, a merchant who had a trading partner, Filippo Filicchi of Livorno, Italy. Elizabeth and her husband had five children and for a time were a fashionable, prosperous family, but it wasn't to last. William's company went bankrupt in 1801, shortly after which the Setons lost their home and William contracted tuberculosis.

Pinning their hopes on warmer weather, the couple set sail for Italy with their eldest daughter. It wasn't to be, however, as William died shortly after their arrival, leaving Elizabeth a widow at the

young age of 29. As can be clearly seen, Elizabeth's early life was filled with more than its fair share of suffering.

William's former trading partner, Filippo Filicchi, took pity on the young Ms Seton, inviting her to live with his family for a time. As she continued to suffer through grief, the Filicchi's spoke to her of the consolation their Catholic faith offered them. Their words weren't lost on Elizabeth, whose interest was piqued and she began to ask them questions about Catholicism. Asking about the Eucharist, Mass, Mary and the unbroken thread from the Church of the day all the way back to the Apostles, God led her step by step to the doors of the Catholic Church. By the time she returned to New York in 1804, she had made her decision and in 1805, she entered the Catholic Church.

Elizabeth's decision to convert to Catholicism was not popular. She had previously started a small school in Baltimore in the US to support her children, but when parents found out that she'd become a Catholic, they withdrew their children. With few friends to turn to, God reminded her of his friendship with “widows and orphans”, arranging that she should meet a Fr Louis Dubourg, a

Sulpician priest. His order had been discussing the possibility of starting a congregation of American religious sisters, modelled on the French Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, to help with the education of children in the small but growing Catholic community there. They invited Elizabeth and her children to Baltimore, and not long after other young women began to join her. In 1809, Elizabeth became the first of them to take vows.

Arriving in Emmitsburg, Maryland in 1809, the Sisters of Charity of St Joseph, the first congregation of religious sisters founded in the United States, and led by “Mother Seton”, got off the ground. The sisters opened a free Catholic school for impoverished girls, which was the beginning of Catholic education in the newly-formed United States.

After the school, the sisters provided an orphanage and numerous other religious, educational and cultural resources, all intended for the poor. Mother Seton served as the sisters' superior until her death at 46.

She was canonised in 1975, becoming the first person born in the United States to be declared a saint.

The dialogue between faith and reason



The Wisdom of Pope Francis

Christian faith, inasmuch as it proclaims the truth of God's total love and opens us to the power of that love, penetrates to the core of our human experience. Each of us comes to the light because of love, and each of us is called to love in order to remain in the light. Desirous of illumining all reality with the love of God made manifest in Jesus, and seeking to love others with that same love, the first Christians found in the Greek world, with its thirst for truth, an ideal partner in dialogue.

“Augustine accepted the Greek philosophy of light, with its insistence on the importance of sight”

The encounter of the Gospel message with the philosophical culture of the ancient world proved a decisive step in the evangelisation of all peoples, and stimulated a fruitful interaction between faith and reason which has continued down the centuries to our own times. John Paul II, in his Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, showed how faith and reason each strengthen the other. Once we discover the full light of Christ's love, we realise that each of the loves in our own lives had always contained a ray of that light, and we understand its ultimate destination. That fact that our human loves contain that ray of light also helps us to see how all love is meant to share in the complete self-gift of the Son of God for our sake. In this circular movement, the light of faith illumines all our human relationships, which can then be lived in union with the gentle love of Christ.

In the life of St Augustine we find a significant example of this process whereby reason, with its desire for truth and clarity, was integrated into the horizon of faith and thus gained new understanding. Augustine accepted the Greek philosophy of light, with its insistence on the importance of sight. His encounter with Neoplatonism introduced him to the paradigm of the light which, descending from on high to illumine all reality, is a symbol of God. Augustine thus came to appreciate God's transcendence and discovered that all things

have a certain transparency, that they can reflect God's goodness. This realisation liberated him from his earlier Manichaeism, which had led him to think that good and evil were in constant conflict, confused and intertwined. The realisation that God is light provided Augustine with a new direction in life and enabled him to acknowledge his sinfulness and to turn towards the good.

Journey of faith

All the same, the decisive moment in Augustine's journey of faith, as he tells us in the *Confessions*, was not in the vision of a God above and beyond this world, but in an experience of hearing. In the garden, he heard a voice telling him: “Take and read”. He then took up the book containing the epistles of St Paul and started to read the 13th chapter of the Letter to the Romans. In this way, the personal God of the Bible appeared to him: a God who is able to speak to us, to come down to dwell in our midst and to accompany our journey through history, making himself known in the time of hearing and response.

Yet this encounter with the God who speaks did not lead Augustine to reject light and seeing. He integrated the two perspectives of hearing and seeing, constantly guided by the revelation of God's love in Jesus. Thus Augustine developed a philosophy of light capable of embracing both the reciprocity proper to the word and the freedom born of looking to the light. Just as the word calls for a free response, so the light finds a response in the image which reflects it. Augustine can therefore associate hearing and seeing, and speak of “the word which shines forth within”. The light becomes, so to speak, the light of a word, because it is the light of a personal countenance, a light which, even as it enlightens us, calls us and seeks to be reflected on our faces and to shine from within us. Yet our longing for the vision of the whole, and not merely of fragments of history, remains and will be fulfilled in the end, when, as Augustine says, we will see and we will love. Not because we will be able to possess all the light, which will always be inexhaustible, but because we will enter wholly into that light.

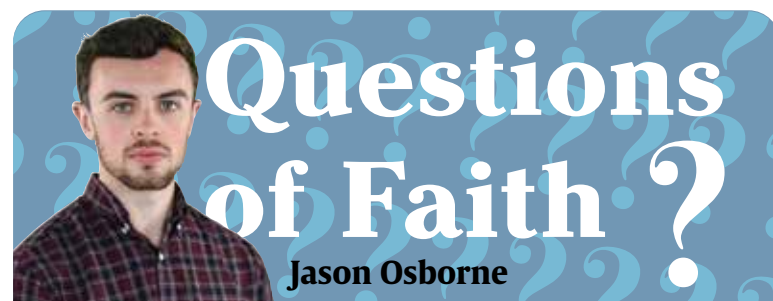
The light of love proper to faith can illumine the questions of our own time about truth. Truth nowadays is often reduced to the subjective authenticity of the

individual, valid only for the life of the individual. A common truth intimidates us, for we identify it with the intransigent demands of totalitarian systems. But if truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others. One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.

“It also illumines the material world, trusts its inherent order and knows that it calls us to an ever widening path of harmony and understanding”

Nor is the light of faith, joined to the truth of love, extraneous to the material world, for love is always lived out in body and spirit; the light of faith is an incarnate light radiating from the luminous life of Jesus. It also illumines the material world, trusts its inherent order and knows that it calls us to an ever widening path of harmony and understanding. The gaze of science thus benefits from faith: faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness. Faith awakens the critical sense by preventing research from being satisfied with its own formulae and helps it to realise that nature is always greater. By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation.

(*Lumen Fidei*)



Questions of Faith?

Jason Osborne



Is the Church's wealth immoral?

An accusation frequently levelled at the Church is that while it talks a good game regarding helping the impoverished, it actually hoards its riches in a very immoral way. Comments such as “The Pope lives in a palace” or “The Church should sell some of its treasure to help the poor” are commonplace in this day and age, and can be difficult to argue against if we haven't thought about it before.

The Church is an extensive, world-spanning organisation quite unlike any other. It's in possession of buildings, resources, investments, art and more on a scale difficult to comprehend. While that is true, the vital point is that these things are no one person's to own or make use of, quite unlike the riches of a billionaire or for-profit company.

To take an example, St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican is one of the grandest buildings humans have ever produced – but it's not Pope Francis's private home, nor that of any of his priests. Rather, it's intended to give glory to God and to uplift the mind of those who visit to God and his heavenly things (which it certainly did for me).

It's part of the Church's mission to provide windows into transcendent beauty, which it does through its buildings and art. Anyone can enter a Catholic Church around the world and take in its beautiful design and the rich spirituality of its decoration. Similarly, the Vatican Museums display some of the greatest works of art out in the open, for anyone to buy an inexpensive ticket to go in and see.

Our values are also reflected in what we choose to spend our resources on. If the Church speaks of the ultimate importance of having God at the centre of your life, wouldn't it be unusual if its buildings dedicated to God were run-down places with little effort put into their maintenance? Just so, the Church's commitment to the provision and maintenance of artistic wealth speaks of its belief in the power of beauty.

This isn't to say that this is all that the Church spends money on, or that the Church should spend money on these things to the detriment of the poor. Fortunately, it isn't and it doesn't. The Vatican's budgets in recent years have frequently turned up deficits running into the tens of millions, and much of its money is spent on charitable activities.

There have been people throughout history, and still today, who use their proximity to the Church's money to line their own pockets, but the important thing is that this is a gross misuse of the Church's finances – not its purpose, as detractors claim. Money amassed for the comfort and advantage of an elite few is obviously immoral, and this is to be found in the Church as anywhere else in the world where you have humans and money. The key is that once those misdeeds come to light, those of good will in the Church do their very best to root it out and set things to rights.

An interesting passage from the Gospel can help us to understand God's thoughts on this very topic. In the Gospel according to John, as Mary anoints Jesus's feet with a costly ointment, Judas takes issue with what he perceives as a wasteful action:

“Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair...But Judas Iscariot...said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’... Jesus said, ‘Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.’”

In the same breath, Jesus encourages helping the poor, but also expresses approval for touching shows of devotion to him. Just as the Church, and the Faithful, spend millions around the world every year charitably, so too does the Church not spare expense in paying tribute to God in its buildings and art. He is the beginning and end of all of our efforts, after all.

My top 10 books of 2022

The book you need to read finds you, and finds you at that time in your life when you need to read it'. I believe that old axiom, and offer it here as an apology for my selection of books for 2022. Good art and good literature always have an objective element to them, a depth and an aesthetic that are not contingent on the eye of the beholder, but an old axiom also asserts that 'whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver'. Hence, there is always a subjective element in how we judge or evaluate anything. All of this to say that these are the ten books that most spoke to me during this past year. Their practical claim to my top ten list is that they found me and spoke to me.

In the area of spirituality, both in its restricted and its wider sense, I found these books particularly meaningful.

1. Jim Forest, *At Play in the Lion's Den, A Biography of Daniel Berrigan*. A well-written biography of Daniel Berrigan by a man who knew him well, supported all his causes, went to prison with him, but still kept a critical distance from him.
2. Robert Ellsberg, *Dearest Sister Wendy, A Surprising Story of Faith and Friendship*. A delightful, warm, touching, intimate book, sharing some of the letters between the renowned art



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

critic Wendy Beckett (who died in 2018), and Robert Ellsberg the publisher of Orbis Press. Their conversations touch on all points religious.

3. Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda, *The Shepherd Who Didn't Run, Blessed Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma*. A very good biography of Stanley Rother's path to becoming a prophet and a martyr for the poor. Hagiography for today.
4. Sherry Turkle, *The Empathy Diaries*. Sherry Turkle is a first-rate scientist and penetrating writer of soul. This is essentially an autobiography, but in sorting herself out, she helps us to do the same thing. The title of the book bespeaks its thesis.
5. Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex – Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*. A strong book that takes no prisoners. I don't always agree with her on some major points, but she asks the right questions and answers many of them in a way that falls between the ideologies of both the right and the left.
6. Jane Goodall & Douglas Abrams, *The Book of Hope, A Survival Guide for Trying Times*. Just the name, Jane Goodall, says why this book should be read. Abrams adds his own color, including the assertion that creating the human species may be the biggest mistake evolution ever made.
7. Roosevelt Montas, *Rescuing Socrates – How The Great Books Changed My Life and Why They Matter For A New Generation*. This is a powerful apology for liberal education, akin to John Henry Newman's, *The Idea of a University*, save

that Newman didn't have to deal with the many hyper-sensitive contemporary critiques of classic Western thinkers. Among the novels I read, three stand out.

8. Sally Rooney, *Beautiful World, Where Are You*. Set in post-modern and (mostly) post-Roman Catholic Ireland, this novel chronicles the conversations (emails and texts) between two young, emotionally sensitive women. They are trying to make sense of their lives and of the times against the backdrop of a cultural Catholicism that still helps define who they are and a set of friends and a workplace that would define them in a new way. What comes after one lets go of an explicit faith, but is still struggling with an inchoate one?
9. Valerie Perrin, *Fresh Water for Flowers*. A translation from French, this is a masterpiece, a work of art, a beautiful painting. Nothing much happens in this story, except that it is beautiful.
10. Jeanine Cummins, *American*

Dirt. Cummins received a lot of negative reaction to this book, not because it isn't a well-written, gripping story, but because she, its author, is not Hispanic and thus her writing "someone else's story" is considered by some to be both patronising and a certain act of theft. Be that as it may, this is a gripping story of a mother and her young son facing death in Central America and fleeing for the USA border.

Honourable Mention

That's ten, but there's an honourable mention:

- Joyce Aitken, *Sincere Condolences – What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say*. Aitken lost her husband to suicide and found that, in its wake, many people found it awkward to talk to her about it, even though that is exactly what she, in her grief, needed. The book is insightful and practical. Don't we all find ourselves in situations that leave us awkward, not knowing what to say? As well, commenting on her inability to prevent her own husband's suicide, she adds a line that needs to be heard by anyone who has ever lost a loved one to suicide: "The will to save a life does not constitute the power to prevent a death."

These are my favorite ten books for 2022.

“All of this to say that these are the ten books that most spoke to me during this past year”

Who is this child born in Bethlehem? The manifestation of his divinity is known as an epiphany. On Friday, the sixth of January, we recall the first of three epiphanies. The Wise Men coming from the east brought gold to proclaim Jesus as king, frankincense to represent his priesthood, and myrrh which is used for the anointing of a dead body anticipated his resurrection. The second epiphany is in this Sunday's Gospel, the revelation of Jesus as the beloved Son of God after his Baptism in the Jordan river. The third revelation would be the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana, the first sign or miracle of Jesus through which his glory was revealed and the disciples believed in him.

“John had attracted great crowds of people who were anxious to turn a new leaf by confessing their sins”

In John's Gospel there is no account of the Baptism of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote of the Baptism of Jesus, the coming of the Spirit and the voice from heaven identifying Jesus as the Beloved Son. For our reflection this week we will concentrate on something which is only in Matthew's Gospel, the dialogue between John and Jesus.

Seeing Jesus entering the water, John tried to stop him. “It is I who need Baptism from you, and yet you come to me.” Jesus replied, “Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands”. What did he mean by righteousness?

John had attracted great crowds of people who were anxious to turn a new leaf by confessing their sins. The Baptist then dipped them one by one in the flowing water of the Jordan as a symbol of their new life. In those days, the Jewish ablutions used still water, kept in tanks or large jars, but the Baptist chose flowing water as a symbol of a new way of living.

The Jewish religion at the time was very much based on the perfect observance of hundreds of laws. This was the only way to righteousness, being fully at rights before God. Later, in his public ministry, Jesus had several encounters with the legal experts about the strict legal-

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



ism which squeezed the joy out of religion. When religion is dominated by the concept of a strict, exacting God, it can drive people to an obsessive guilt complex, especially with anything to do with sexual imagination or thought. God is then feared but not loved: and religion strives to be very correct, but is also very cold. St Paul admitted that in his time as a Pharisee, he strove for perfection but could never observe all the laws. Coming to know Jesus Christ released him.

The crushed reed and smouldering flame

To understand what Jesus meant by righteousness, the best commentary is in today's First Reading, Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7. Matthew, as he wrote, surely had his eye on this text. Jesus is identified as the chosen servant of God, endowed with the Spirit and bringing true justice to the nations. He did not stand aloof from sinners but came close to them. He came not to condemn but to heal and give hope. He did not stand aloof on the bank of the river but, although sinless, he entered the river of human frailty and submitted to the ritual washing given by the Baptist. Sinners would find that he would sit with them, listen

to them and eat with them, an act that scandalised the strict legalists. He would not cast stones at the woman condemned for adultery but he told her to go and sin no more. His gentleness is beautifully described by Isaiah.

“He does not break the crushed reed

Nor quench the wavering flame.”

To put my eyes into your eyes

This Christian approach is exemplified in the life of Pope St John XXIII. He was visiting Regina Caeli prison in Rome, but when he saw the line of broken humanity in front of him, he felt a large lump in his throat and was unable to deliver his prepared speech. Eventually he recovered and spoke from the heart.

“Men,” he began, “I have come here today to put my eyes into your eyes.” He had come to understand rather than condemn. He told them of a member of his extended family who was in jail. It had

an extraordinary effect on the prisoners. Pope John died not too long after that. On a television programme about him, one of the prisoners said that while he was still behind bars, he had been interiorly liberated that day.

The public ministry of Jesus

The day of the Baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of his public mission. He began by entering the flowing water of the Jordan. It expressed his solidarity with human experiences. He would be a victim of misunderstanding, opposition and eventually persecution unto death. But he always witnessed to the power of goodness and love from within the waters of pain and pressure. He came to bind up the bruised reed and to fan the wavering flame

into a consuming fire. The Baptist predicted that while he baptised with water, the one coming after him would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

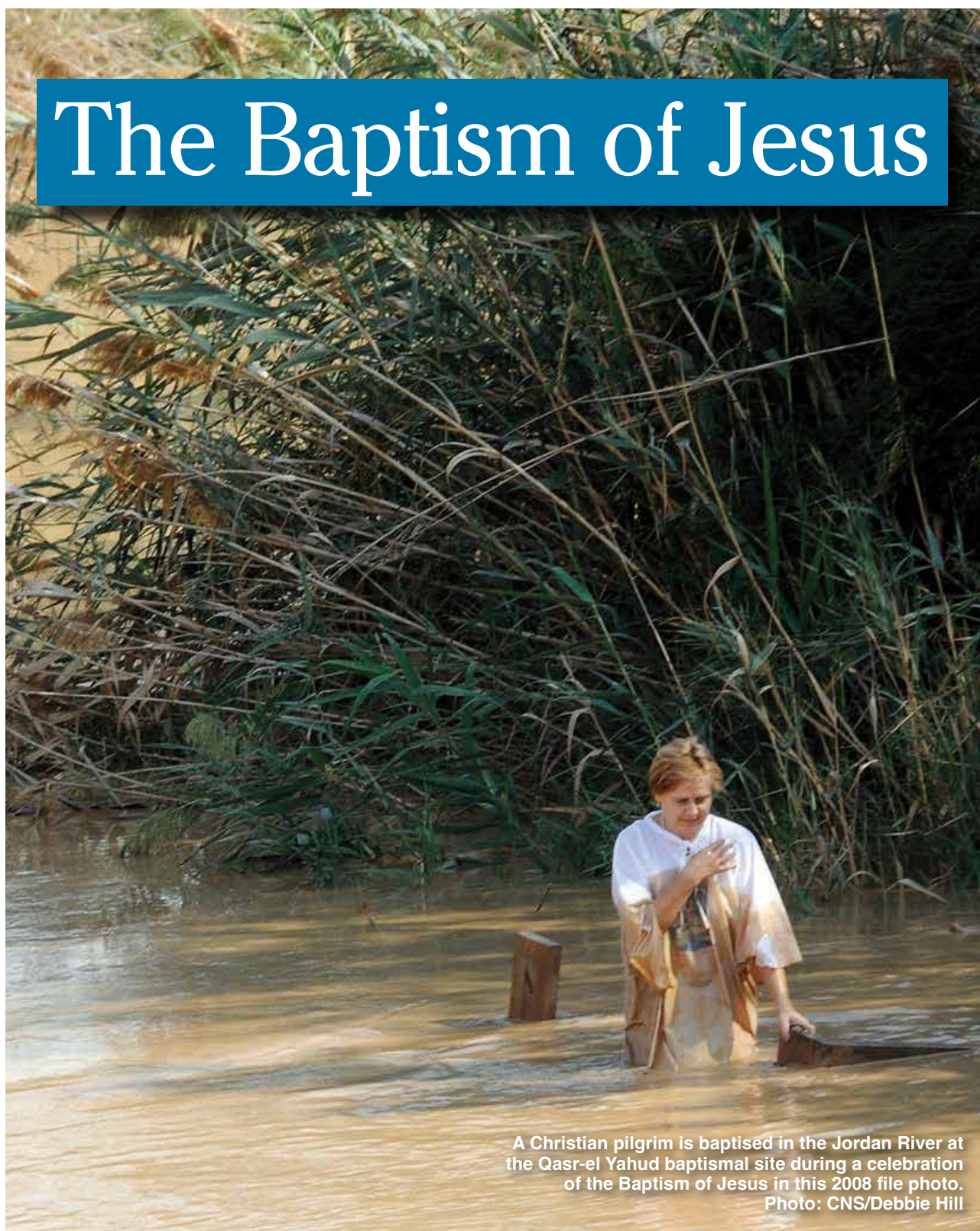
Like Pope John, he looked through the eyes of sinners seeking mercy, hope and a new life. “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life” (Pope Francis).

We were baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All we have to do is to let God be God: and to be aware of:

- the Father's love for us as his beloved children
- the Son's solidarity with us by entering the flowing water of life
- the Spirit's desire to set our hearts aflame with the fire of divine love.

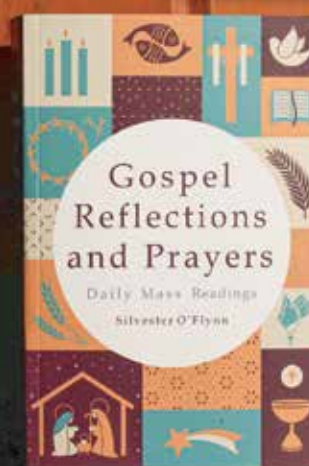
The Baptism of Jesus



A Christian pilgrim is baptised in the Jordan River at the Qasr-el Yahud baptismal site during a celebration of the Baptism of Jesus in this 2008 file photo. Photo: CNS/Debbie Hill

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TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Originality amid the repeats over Christmas

Looking back over the Christmas programming I was on the lookout for something different, original and creative amidst the huge amount of repeats.

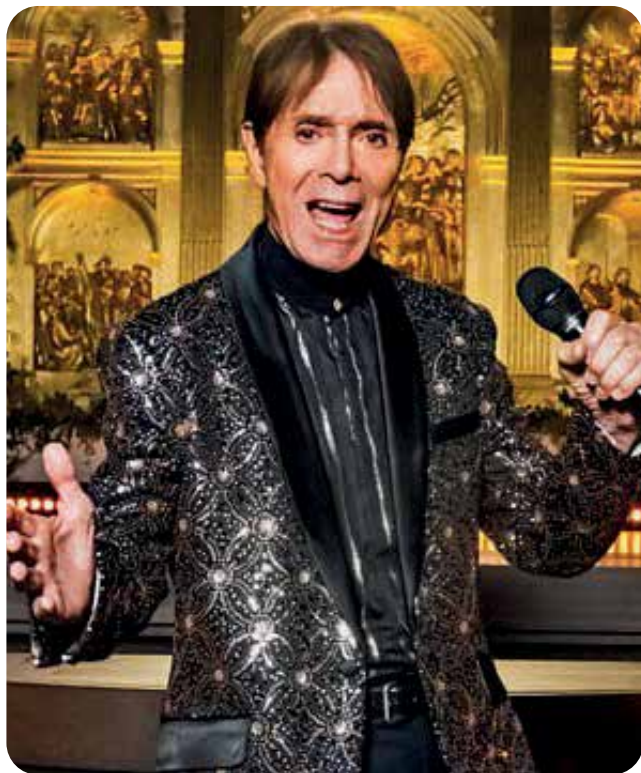
Pick of the bunch for me was **A Christmas Postcard: The History of the Nativity Story** (Lyric FM Christmas week). Each morning there was a reflection with Scripture readings, dramatisation and music on aspects of the nativity story.

The opening episode was a useful introduction with the Scripture background from Matthew and Luke, with references to apocryphal texts where, for example, the role of the crib animals was highlighted. Throughout the week Dr Malgorzata Krasnodebska-D'Aughton of University College Cork provided just the right amount of historical background.

On the Tuesday the focus was on the crib, and how the first crib was attributed to St Francis. The saint saw the nativity scene as embodying the poverty he was trying to live and promote through his new Franciscan order.

Epiphany

On the Wednesday the Wise Men and the Epiphany was highlighted. We learned that only Matthew covers this aspect of the story, and that much of what we commonly find in the story, like their



Cliff Richards performs on *Cliff at Christmas* on BBC Two

names, their kingly status, and even their number is not in his account, but surfaced in later non-scriptural accounts.

Thursday's episode developed the theme with a more focused emphasis on the gifts of the Magi – both their practical uses and their deep symbolism. On Friday we learned how the nativity has long been an inspiration for Christian artists – the earliest example known is a Fourth Century depiction on

a Roman sarcophagus.

On the whole, the original music of Marc Wilkins was interesting but rather dirge like. But then it was meant for contemplation rather than entertainment.

Music programmes were pre-dominant in the specifically Christmas programming – I enjoyed *Cliff at Christmas* (BBC Two) – it is impressive to see a performer that has had chart success in eight decades! Cliff Richard is a bit too middle-of-the-

road for me, but I've liked his contemporary Christian album *Small Corners* and his collaboration with Van Morrison on the song 'Whenever God Shines His Light'.

This show was a mixture of Christmas songs, old pop hits (like 'Move It!') and 'Devil Woman', which jarred somewhat with the Hackney Church setting).

Guest Andrea Corr added her distinctive vocals to 'Mistletoe and Wine', which admittedly is a bit schmaltzy. The song 'Heart of Christmas' from the new album *Christmas with Cliff* was one of his better seasonal offerings.

Interview

In an engaging interview with Sara Cox he looked back over his long career, right back to when he was vying with the Beatles for recording time at Abbey Road studios. As always he was open about the importance of his Christian faith.

Originally he had seen a dichotomy between rock music and religion but had learned to see a harmony – I liked his quote – "Rock 'n roll and God work brilliantly in the hands of someone who loves them both."

I enjoyed **A Christmas Leap of Faith** (RTE Radio 1) which has become a familiar and comfortable feature of Christmas morning. Siobhán chatted with a variety of guests, including Fr Peter

PICK OF THE WEEK

IGNATIUS LOYOLA: THE STORY OF THE PILGRIM

EWTV Sunday, January 8, 9pm

A compelling docudrama featuring "St Ignatius", narrating the amazing story of his life.

THE US AND THE HOLOCAUST

BBC Four Monday, January 9, 10pm

After decades of open borders, a xenophobic backlash prompts the United States to pass laws restricting immigration.

MISNEACH

TG 4 Wednesday, January 11, 9:30pm

Filmed over one academic year, this documentary tells the story of one group of Irish Travellers making their way through university life.

McVerry, who couldn't enjoy Christmas because the homeless people he worked with couldn't enjoy it.

Rev. Philip McKinley was enthusiastic about the spiritual side of Christmas and spoke of his work with the Discovery Gospel Choir. Poet and lawyer (interesting combo!) John O'Donnell had a quirky reflection on Christmas traditions, Lelo Thebe gave insight into the life of a refugee with a touching reflection on the town of Ballyhaunis that has taken in many refugees and asylum seekers – Ballyhappiness, she called it.

The music was excellent. St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Girls' Choir with director Blánaid Murphy sang a Ukrainian Christmas song 'The Little Swallow', known better to us as 'Carol of the Bells', and West of Ireland harpist Laoise

Kelly – she played a haunting tune with a resonance for the season and for all displaced travellers – 'My Lodgings Uncertain Wherever I Go'.

So, whither 2023? I hope the Ukraine war fades from the news because it ends; I dread the prospect of another Biden versus Trump contest shaping up in the USA (the primaries will be divisive enough for both Republicans and Democrats); I hope our semi-new Government will get to grips with more of our country's injustices, from homelessness to unnecessary pregnancy termination. But I won't hold my breath for any of those.

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Pat O'Kelly

Music

Celebrating Sergey Rakhmaninov

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Sergey Rakhmaninov's birth in 1873, the National Symphony Orchestra is scheduling a number of his works in late spring. These include his Paganini Rhapsody on May 5, Second Piano Concerto on May 12 and choral masterpiece The Bells, preceded by his tone poem The Isle of the Dead, on May 26.

The composer was born in Semyonovo, in Russia's Novgorod region, into an aristocratic family that had both musical and military backgrounds. It is interesting that his paternal grandfather, Arkady Alexandrovich, had been a pupil of our own highly regarded John Field, who had settled in Moscow



Sergey Rakhmaninov.

in 1806.

Sergey's father, Vasily Rakhmaninov, was an army officer and good pianist. His

mother, Lyubov Butakova, daughter of a wealthy army general, brought five estates with her as part of her dowry. Sergey was the fourth of the couple's six children.

Realising Sergey had a particularly sensitive musical ear his parents arranged his formal music education at home with a young live-in teacher. However, due to his father's financial misadventures and squandering the family fortunes, the estates were sold off one by one leaving the Rakhmaninovs little option but to move to a small apartment in St Petersburg.

Sergey entered the city's conservatory and when his father absconded to Moscow, the boy's maternal grand-

mother supported the family and brought a religious focus into its life. This meant Sergey was taken regularly to church where he was greatly influenced by Russian Orthodox liturgical chants and bells that would be later incorporated into many of his compositions.

By 1885 it was suggested Rakhmaninov should transfer to Moscow's conservatory where he came under the influence of the rather severe Nikolay Zverev with whose family he lived together with fellow student composer Alexander Scriabin.

It was Zverev's hope that Rakhmaninov would concentrate on his prodigious pianistic abilities rather than

composition, which Zverev regarded as "a waste of time". Rakhmaninov thought otherwise completing his First Trio élégiaque in January 1892 and his First Piano Concerto quite soon after that. His one-act opera Aleko had its first performance at the Bolshoy in May 1893 when a very impressed Tchaikovsky heard it.

Following the latter's death later that year, Rakhmaninov suffered a lengthy period of depression that was not helped by the disastrous St Petersburg première of his first symphony conducted by fellow composer Alexander Glazunov in March 1897. Panned by the critics, one described it as "a depiction of

the seven plagues of Egypt".

Meanwhile Rakhmaninov became engaged to Natalya Satina although they would not marry until 1902. When Natalya's parents realised their future son-in-law needed medical help, they advised he visit a Dr Nikolay Dahl noted for his treatments by hypnosis. Although initially reluctant, Rakhmaninov agreed to a consultation.

As Dahl was also keen on music it is felt that Rakhmaninov's recovery resulted from their conversations on that subject rather than on any hypnosis. Whatever, the result proved positive with Rakhmaninov's Second Piano Concerto and Second Suite for Two Pianos enjoying considerable success in 1901.

More on Rakhmaninov anon. Happy New Year.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Echoes of history from the National

The release of files for the 1990s and earlier in January

Archives and the making of history

This year's release was a poor year for anything not related to Northern Ireland and Arms decommissioning.

The flood of 6,000 odd files relating to Northern Ireland affairs seriously unbalances the release of files in other departmental areas. For instance, the

files from our Embassy in the Vatican and in Italy, usually rich sources of stories relating to the Catholic Church, are quite missing.

So, too, files from North America, in particular the always interesting Irish-American material from Chicago and from Los Angeles. There are fewer

historical files that were held back previously, only to be gathered up and released at this late date, which are usually also rich sources of incidents that are very striking in retrospect. However, some interesting episodes from our forgotten past were still retrieved.

Foreign Affairs: 'Keeping our eye on the Russian Eagle'

Earlier this year the news that the Russian navy was planning to hold manoeuvres off the south-west coast of Ireland caused the government concern and dismayed most Irish people. The manoeuvres were in fact planned to take place, not inside Irish territorial water, but well within our Exclusive Economic Zone – once described in these pages as “the true extent of the Irish Republic”. As a result of this controversy the Russian Navy stood down the manoeuvres.

In reality, though, this was a serious matter. A file in this year's release contains details of Soviet activities off the Irish coast back in the 1960s and later, which makes interesting reading in the light of the recent controversy.

Three types of Soviet ships were involved: first off, merchant marine ships, carrying say, bananas from Cuba – the troubled years of the Bay of Pigs and the October 1962 face-off between the US and Soviet Union provided an unmentioned background to the file.

Controversies

Then there were fishing boats, which made the Russians par-

ticipants in the ongoing and still persisting controversies about fish volumes and fishing areas in the north Atlantic.

These activities could perhaps be called normal.

But there was a third category: the activities of “Research vessels”. These too, from time to time, put into Irish ports, to replenish supplies, to seek medicines, or even hospital care. But these were within the ordinary run of things. The Irish Government at this date refused to accept official visits, in which the crew could come ashore in uniform. In Cork, for instance, there was a fear of incidents with local anti-communist groups could lead to violence – a very real possibility. The Irish intelligence service watched over these ships, and photographs of some of them are preserved in the file.

Such research vessels have long been a matter of international controversy. One of the ships in question had earlier been involved in “research” of British territories in the South Pacific, then an area where regular tests of nuclear weapons took place.

In Ireland there were no tests to spy on, but there were

the beginnings of investigations for oil and gas, which would certainly have been of interest to the Russians. The file does not mention whether these intrusions were backed up by the activities of Russian agents onshore (perhaps that file has not yet been released). Certainly the Irish government and its agencies shared their concerns with their British counterparts.

These incidents were in the past. But the recent planned Russian intrusion was in the heated context of the on-going Ukrainian war.

“One of the ships in question had earlier been involved in “research” of British territories in the South Pacific”

The Irish government will also have given attention to the view of “Putin's brain”, the philosopher and historian Alexander Dugin, who spoke recently of Russia under Putin extending the mantle of its influence over all of Europe from the Urals to “the coast of Ireland”.

Coming as it did the context of the intended manoeuvres this suggested that there is serious interest among some of those ultra-nationalists around Putin in the west coast of Ireland. (Back in August, it may be recalled, Darya Dugin was killed by a bomb planted on a car in which not only she, but her father Alexander, was to have also travelled. No arrests have been made.)

The area they are interested in has since the middle of the 19th century been a significant area for the clustering of cable

lines to North America and South America from places such as Valentia. Once these carried telegrams; now these same routes carry internet pulses.

During the first days of the Great War in 1914 (as related by American historian Barbara W. Tuckman in her book *The Zimmerman Telegram*) these cables lines were very important in altering the course of the war. Even before the shooting really began, British Naval Intelligence sent engineering ships out into the Atlantic to pick up and sever the cables connecting Germany with North America.

Messages

The Germans had then to send their coded messages by a secondary and less secure route through Portugal to Brazil and on to Mexico City and Washington DC. But tapping these lesser cable lines Naval Intelligence were able to pick up and later decode a telegram from Ambassador Zimmerman in Washington, to the Mexican government, offering them the reversal of the territories of South West US captured back in the 1840s.

The message was shared with the US government and was the immediate cause of President Wilson entering the war in April 1917, undermining the strong feeling among German-Americans and Irish-Americans that the US should not support the British Empire.

So southwest Ireland has already played a part in history. The Russians seem to be of the opinion that it will again. For it overlooks not only international communications, but also one of the largest and busiest sea trade routes in the world.

Serious thought has to be given to these hints of Alexander Dugin.

A serious question

A serious question was asked in the 1930s: Shouldn't there be a Concorde between Ireland and the Vatican?

The Free State was then, and is often today, described as a Catholic State. It was not any such thing, at least not in the sense that the government of Northern Ireland was “a Protestant state for a Protestant people”, though Northern Ireland was not actually such a thing in law either.

Did the Church always get its way in those days? Files on two court cases, one criminal, the other civil, suggest there were sometimes difficulties for the Church.

Concern

The first matter concerns a Catholic curate in Connacht, file number (2022/24/30) dating from 1934. Fr John Fahy was well known to the police for his strong political views in favour of the Republicans. He attempted to purchase from a reservist in the Free State Army a machine gun – the type is not identified, but may well be one of those Thompson machine guns which everyone from Chicago gangsters to South American dictators – and Irish revolutionaries – was fascinated (with the same enthusiasm evinced by young Pike in *Dad's Army*).

The reservist told Fr Fahy that a thing like that would cost £100 or more – though he did not, it seems, make

an actual offer to obtain one. That dismayed Fr Fahy, as his militant group only had £20 in hand.

The reservist told all this to the police when questioned. Fr Fahy was detained, was charged and due to go on trial. However, he was a voluble character, and made a long statement about his position, which is on file (2022/26/31).

His bishop was very concerned at one of his priests being brought into court, and so was anxious for the matter not to develop any further. He seems to have felt that it might be quietly dropped. But the clerical obedience of Fr Fahy was in some doubt.

Fr Fahy thought this whole matter of priests appearing in court on serious charges could be resolved if a Concorde could be signed between Ireland and the Vatican. The Vatican had regained its own diplomatic status with Italy through the Lateran Treaties in 1929. This, however, was a very special case. The usual method was for a concordat between the Vatican and what were seen as “Catholic countries”. These were usually enacted with countries like Spain, France, and various South American states.

Agreements

Such agreements governed the matter of how the authorities of those states treated the Church, and how relations between the police and the



Alexander Dugin, called by some 'Putin's brain', by others 'Putin's Rasputin'.



Bleak winter days at Kilemore Abbey.

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.

Archives previewed



A free State soldier armed with a Thompson machine gun guarding the Border.

clergy were arranged. There would be no appearances in court, he thought, of patriotic clergy in those countries.

But there was no concordat in Ireland. Avoiding serious scandal by a hair's breadth, Fr Fahy came to terms with his bishop, and pleaded in such a way that the matter could effectively clear the courts, much to everyone's relief.

“The Free State was then, and is often today, described as a Catholic State”

Fr Fahy's behaviour was foolish, if not foolhardy. But his thoughts about a Concordat between Dublin and the Vatican are interesting.

I suspect, reading through the file, that neither Dublin or Rome wanted any such thing. How much better it would be if priests simply stayed out of politics! In any case one gains the impression overall that the Vatican was content with hav-

ing a papal nuncio in Ireland, appointed in December 1929, a person who was by rank the doyen of the diplomatic corps. They would be able to make their views known, without the unsteady and uncontrollable matter of jury trials entangling Catholic affairs.

However, even the Nuncio Pascal Robinson, a born Irishman, could face embarrassing difficulties at times. There was a dispute over, of all places, Kilemore Abbey. Due to rising debts, a sale was being forced on the nuns from Ypres. The money gained was to be used directly, the papal nuncio thought, for the purchase of more appropriate premises. Some critics, seeming close to Glenstal it appears, thought that the Ypres nuns were really not needed in Ireland – forgetting it seems that they had been granted refuge in Ireland originally after the horrors of the Great War.

Laymen

The distinguished Catholic laymen who were the financial guarantors of the original bank loan for the purchase of the abbey thought that their financial rights of repayment were to be secured first. They felt these rights were being overborne by the Nuncio. This, too, was due to go to a hearing, though in a civil court. Those involved were very anxious to avoid what would inevitably be a very great public scandal.

However, the file ends with no resolution. There was one, however, for the Abbey continued its original work, and still continues, though in a different direction today. But this matter casts a shadow over Kilemore, not discussed since. Perhaps next December a further release of files will show how the matter was settled, and how the Benedictine nuns managed to continue.

But the fact remains that great difficulties of all kinds faced the Catholic Church in the Free State years.

Irish Embassy in London aided author Bernard Shaw in finding an Irish maid



Bernard Shaw's country house.

Irish legations abroad are well known for the care they take of Irish citizens in trouble with foreign states, or with their own documentation for travel. Many families in Ireland in recent decades have cause to thank the officers delegated abroad by Iveagh House. I have personal experience of this in matters great and small.

But from time to time these files can have a lighter, more human touch. This year, for instance, there is a file on how after an appeal from Bernard Shaw, the secretary to the Irish

High Commissioner in London, John Whelan Dulanty, who had been en poste since 1930, in succession to John McNeill, came to the playwright's aid.

Embassy

Shaw wanted the embassy's help in engaging an Irish-born maid. This task was delegated by Dulanty to his secretary. She went about the task with great eagerness, even though she thought of Shaw as an “English gentleman” – Shaw in fact was very conscious at all times of the strong Irish connec-

tions maintained over the years by himself and his late wife Charlotte Payne-Townshend – her people were from Cork, Shaw was a Dubliner. She had died back in 1943, so Shaw now depended on his own staff a great deal.

The High Commissioner's secretary drew up an advertisement, which was amended and then inserted in assorted Irish papers, such as *The Irish Times*. The answers as they came in were scrutinised and some of the applicants were interviewed by the secretary. Eventually a well referenced young lady was selected and taken into Shaw's employment. The Shaws had always been keen on advancing women's rights.

“The High Commissioner's secretary drew up an advertisement, which was amended and then inserted in assorted Irish papers”

The writer's household, given his age (he was 94), was a small one. The house was largely run, it seems, by his housekeeper. There was a cook too; but it was not explained to the new maid beforehand that the Shaw household was an active vegetarian (his cook later assembled a vegetarian cookbook, which was eventually published in the 1970s –

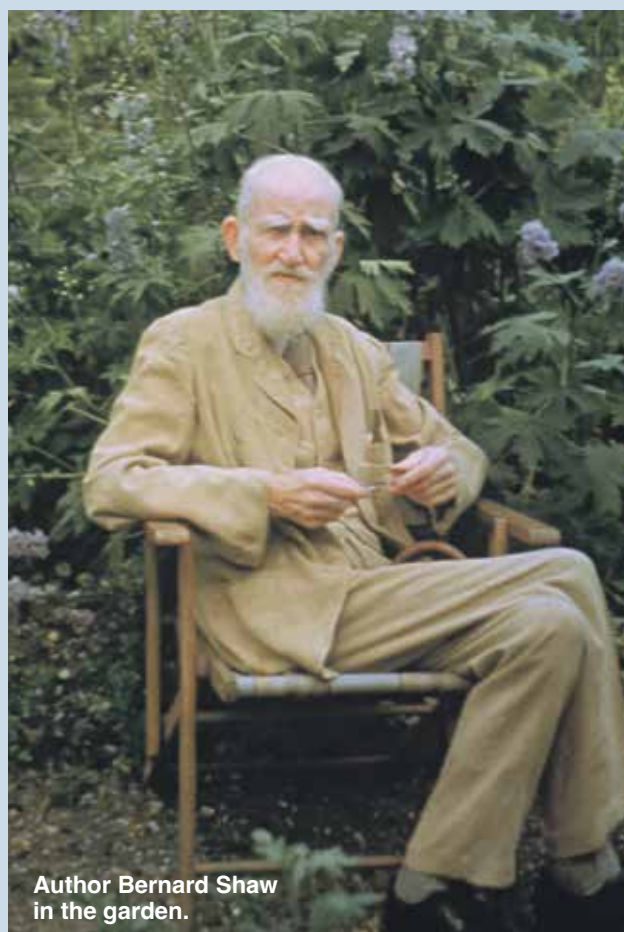
some of the recipes were excellent, but perhaps only for those who like that sort of thing).

Shaw died on November 2, 1950, at his long-time home, Ayot St Lawrence down in Herts. The last items in the archive file relate, however, to a row which the maid's mother began with the housekeeper, who had kept the maid on after Shaw's death (rather than releasing her for new employment at once). However, among those who were familiar with the matter, including a Church of Ireland canon, the mother was a domineering personality, and he had long been anxious to get the girl out from under her thumb.

Outcome

We are left in the dark about the outcome of the row. One wonders if the maid was left a legacy, for Ireland certainly was. In Shaw's will the National Gallery of Ireland (along with the British Museum Library and the Royal College of Dramatic Art in London), in acknowledgement of “the incalculable value to me of [those] institution[s] at the beginning of my career”, were each left a third part of the estate.

When the *My Fair Lady* boom began in 1956 this legacy also boomed, much to the delight of the directors of the gallery on Merrion Square. A bronze statue of Bernard Shaw, larger than life in a characteristic pose, now stands in the foyer as a token of what we can safely call national gratitude.



Author Bernard Shaw in the garden.

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.

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Image: Roge Wavio (29) of Kalacha, Marsabit, Kenya holds produce she has grown with support from Concern. Photographer: Jennifer Nolan / Concern Worldwide

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When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

trócaire

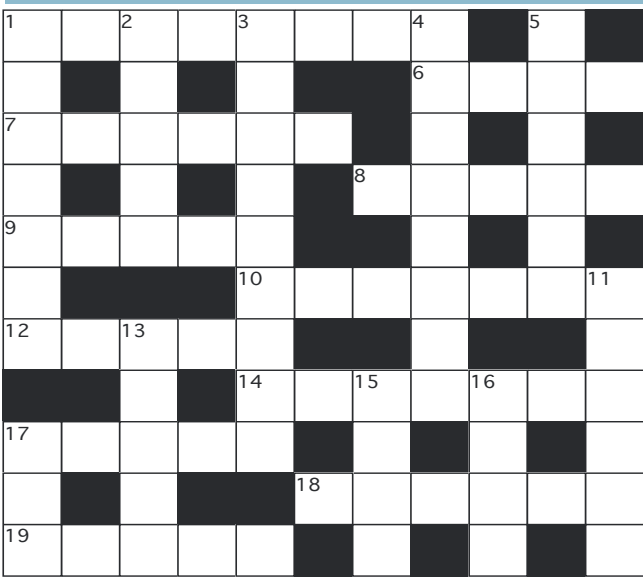
It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Leisure time

Crossword Junior

Gordius 464



- Across**

1 These objects are valuable because they are old (8)

6 Harsh, cutting liquid (4)

7 Dried grape, often used in baking (6)

8 Own up (5)

9 Made bread (5)

10 Asks someone to a party (7)

12 Heat bread to make this (5)

14 You might put this on a seat to make it more comfortable (7)

17 Sandy place beside the sea (5)

18 It's in Africa - the world's largest desert (6)
- 19 '_____ right of way' (5)

Down

1 Tumbling circus performer (7)

2 Use your brain (5)

3 Harry Potter's favourite sport (9)

4 To make it, you put filling between two slices of bread (8)

5 Split up, share out (6)

11 Christian day of rest (6)

13 Not asleep (5)

15 You wash yourself with this and water (4)

16 Baghdad is in this country in the Middle-East (4)

17 When he grows up, he becomes a man (3)



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Crossword

Gordius 592



- Across**

1 Historic manacled attachment to limit the movement of prisoners or slaves (4,3,5)

7 Spherical symbol of monarchy (3)

9 Separate article on a 34 across (4)

10 Melancholic, sad (6)

11 Outhouse (4)

14 & 16a Iconic peak in Japan (5,4)

15 Explode like a volcano (5)

16 See 14 across

18 Did he write his Bolero to upset Laver? (5)

21 The capital of Egypt (5)

22 Looking at (5)

23 Franz, composer of the Merry Widow (5)

24 Aching (4)

25 The bone that protects the brain (5)

26 String (5)

29 Data (abbreviated) (4)

33 Proverbs (6)

34 Inventory (4)

36 Fruit with a hard shell (3)

37 Those who saw what happened (12)
- 2 Citrus fruit (4)

3 Part a church where peas might be spilled (4)

4 Disney's flying elephant (5)

5 Third-largest of America's Great Lakes (5)

6 He built the Ark (4)

8 It is grown in a pot before being transplanted to the garden (7,5)

9 An intervention asking God to help us, often by Our Lady (12)

12 Inferior in rank or younger (6)

13 Three legged seat (5)

14 Spring month (5)

17 Individual, differing from all others (6)

19 Stanza (5)

20 An aid to controlling a dog when walking (5)

27 Bereaved woman (5)

28 Have a thing about the time of darkness (5)

30 Destiny (4)

31 Small, insular location (4)

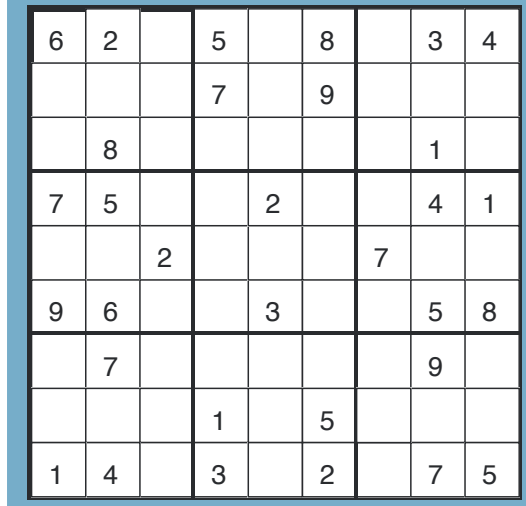
32 Charity (4)

35 Distress signal (1,1,1)

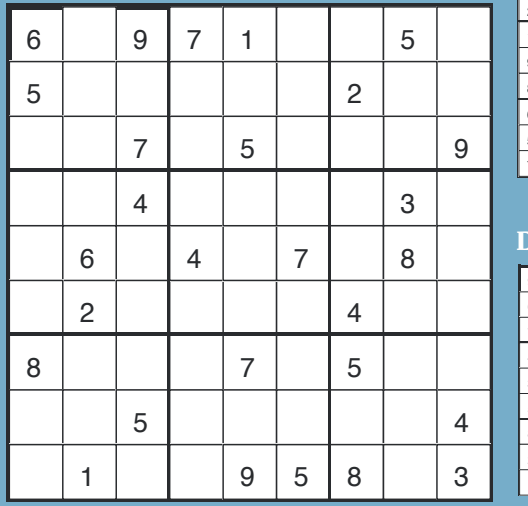
Sudoku Corner

464


Easy



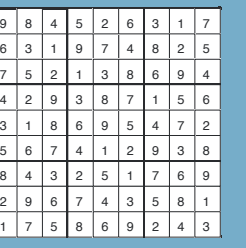
Hard



December 15 Easy



December 15 Hard



Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock

Trusting in 2023 after sadness and uncertainty

DEAR 2023,

A few years ago, I wrote a letter to your older sister, 2020!

I wondered what she had in store for us and hoped that we might be able to handle whatever she had to offer. I wondered about the months she held in her hand and what they might bring. I asked her to help us all to face whatever might be in her plans for us and conceded that to some she would bring moments of great joy and to others, sadness, uncertainty, and disappointment. In fairness, I pointed out that much of what might happen was most likely unknown to her too and would take her as much by surprise as it would us.

Little did any of us know that by St Patrick's Day we would be closing our churches in response to something I had never heard of as I wrote the letter – Covid-19. Little did any of us know that for the rest of that year and much of the year to follow, our lives would be dominated by this, our journeys curtailed and many families ripped asunder by sickness and death. Little did any of us know that we would celebrate Mass in empty churches, with only a webcam linking us to the people we truly



wanted to be with. How could we have imagined that travel between countries would be suspended and that many people would not see close and loved family members for years? Little did any of us know!

January

It is the same this January, dear 2023. We do not know what lies ahead of us. There are some who will not turn the calendar to another month. There are children to be born, moments to be celebrated and lamented, matches to be won, lost or drawn and a road to be travelled. On this January Day, dear New Year, all we can do is trust.

Some will make new year resolutions. Many will break them but all of us, truth told, want this to be a good year. That begs the question, what is a good year?

As we begin...

A story of a man who was rushed to hospital whilst visiting a foreign country. The doctors told his wife that he was seriously ill and urgently needed a blood transfusion but since they had no records, they did not know his blood type. They asked if she knew it. She said "No" and explained that her husband had never been sick a day in his life and had no contact with doctors or hospitals and, consequently, no records. They stressed they needed to know. Sadly, the man died. Later, as his wife explained what happened, she said he was such a gentle and loving man and that he never complained. As he died, he held her hand, looked at her and just kept saying "Be positive"!!!

Maybe it's not a bad way for us to begin the year!

us, the hope that guides us and the love that shapes us.

2020 brought more our way than we could ever have imagined but somehow we got through it. Maybe 2020 reminded us that we are stronger than we thought and more aware of one another than we had appreciated. That remains the truth, the lasting truth – 2020 reminded us that we needed to mind one another and, in a strange way perhaps, made us better people. Any year that does that deserves its welcome.

So 2023, I am not going to put you under pressure by asking you what you have in store for us. I am not going to make promises that I cannot keep but I am going to put trust in you. Trusting you, means we trust the one by whom you and all the years are measured.

2023, we can do this.

Vincent.



The Little Way Association

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Your New Year gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.

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

"Insofar as you did this to one of the least of My brethren, you did it to Me".

As 2023 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain all the blessings and graces you need for 2023.

Daily Mass for your intentions

You and your intentions are remembered in a special Mass offered in the Missions for all Little Way benefactors and friends.

It was St Therese's vocation to be **"love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church"**, and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since St Therese's death on 30th September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.