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Priest will continue blessing planes despite airport ban

Exclusive

Chai Brady

The chaplain of Dublin Airport has insisted he will continue the Christmas tradition of blessing planes whether that be from the altar or 35,000 feet in the air, following the announcement it is to be banned.

The Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) confirmed to *The Irish Catholic* that due to "changes in security protocols", the 75-year-old tradition of blessing planes 'airside' will be stopped.

The DAA added they are working on a "new approach to facilitating the traditional Christmas blessing".

Fr Des Doyle of Dublin Airport Church, Our Lady Queen of Heaven, who has been blessing planes for 16 years since he arrived in the parish, said he had only heard second-hand about the change in protocol and is unaware of any plans regarding the DAA's "new approach".

Fr Doyle said: "If an airline asked me to bless a plane, I'll bless the plane – delighted to do it – I've been doing that since I came, so that will continue. If the airport authority say 'you can't go out airside' for whatever reasons they have, I can do it from the church. As a former Archbishop of Dublin said years ago: 'I can bless the Dublin mountains from here!'"

"Obviously the airline can bring me to bless their plane, alternatively I can continue doing it every Christmas from the altar, I don't have to be standing under the plane to bless it although my favourite place to bless it would be sitting on it at 35,000 feet. As one of the great commentators of the Church today said, 'We're behind enemy lines', so we have to do what we can..."

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Praying in the home



Denis and Emma Callanan and Liam and Roisín McGovern present Newbridge parish's new icon to encourage prayer in the home on the opening night of the Kildare parish's novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin led the opening night of the novena.

POLITICISATION OF ABORTION HAS ENDANGERED WOMEN

Eilís Mulroy

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A CHURCH STAUNCHLY UPHOLDING HUMAN DIGNITY

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PAGES 4, 12 & 13



GOVERNMENT USING CENTURIES OLD TACTICS

Wendy Grace

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The Irish Catholic

Priest will continue blessing planes despite airport ban

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by *Gript*, comes a few months after a request was made last Christmas by a secular campaigner to include a 'secular blessing' of planes, following a Dublin Airport tweet on Christmas Day about the carrying out of the annual blessing of planes.

Sources close to the situation say there is no correlation between the request for a secular blessing and the new protocol.

The DAA said: "Due to recent changes to security protocols, airside access is now restricted to airport operations only. For this reason, non-operational activities can no longer be facilitated airside."

"We are currently working on a new approach to facilitating the traditional Christmas blessing of the planes at Dublin Airport," it concluded.

Airport chaplain Fr Des said that there is a strong Faith community at the airport and he has a "great

appreciation for the airline world".

"I know that security is constantly under review and rules are constantly tightening up and that's a very good thing," Fr Doyle said.

"I feel very happy about that myself, because as a passenger I want to be very safe. I know it's an area you have to be really careful. I haven't heard anything about this one... I appreciate there are constant security reviews, I'm aware of that. Everybody who goes airside, the side where the planes are, they have to have a good reason for going, they have to be vetted and have airside training. I appreciate all of that and have fit in with that over the years... I suppose something else must have changed."

He added that he holds a special benediction every Friday at 12.50pm at the airport church for any passengers and staff who are interested – "A full blessing for everyone traveling".

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Catholic schools staunch on religious cert requirements as INTO put on pressure

Chai Brady

Catholic primary schools will continue to follow their own faith-based programmes which require teachers to have a religious education certificate despite pressure to remove the requirement, according to the head of the Catholic Education Partnership (CEP).

This comes as the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) announced after their annual congress the aim to engage with primary school patrons and management bodies "to remove the requirement for a religious education certificate in order to teach in denominational schools".

CEO of the CEP Alan Hynes told *The Irish Catholic*: "We have our own patronage programme. Any teacher

in these schools needs to be qualified to engage with those patronage programmes and in Catholic schools they need to have the necessary qualifications certificates to teach religious studies and that simply is just a necessary qualification to teach in our schools.

"Regardless of whether you have future reconfiguration, each school will continue to have its own patronage programmes... We have a reasonable expectation that teachers who teach in our schools be qualified to teach in the type of school they're teaching in. We don't see that as being terribly controversial," he said.

The INTO cited the fact 90% of primary schools are Catholic, saying it "acknowledges the importance of inclusive education to all children... but is concerned that the status quo

may be infringing this right".

The delegates voted to conduct a survey among members within the next year on various issues relating to religious patronage including the role of schools in faith formation and their experiences with religious and secular patronage systems.

Mr Hynes questioned why the INTO would be conducting a survey along this vein when the Department of Education is shortly about to engage in a nationwide survey asking opinions of parents and school staff – which include INTO members.

"I would just think that all of the key stakeholders in the education department would be better off working with the department on this issue, rather than seeking to subvert the department's efforts through their own initiatives," Mr Hynes said.

SOLUTIONS, NEW YEAR'S CROSSWORD 28/12/2023

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Priests warn against watching multiple Masses online

Chai Brady

There is a risk Mass becomes “entertainment” rather than a source of nourishment, particularly when several services are watched a day, priests have warned.

Watching Mass on RTÉ and on webcam was a great service during Covid and continues to be for the sick and elderly, but it “was never meant to be a substitute for presence”, Fr Barry Matthews Adm. of St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh told *The Irish Catholic*.

“The whole idea of Mass is that you prepare yourself to go, you are truly present there, you are focused, you are connected while you're there, and you leave nourished and refreshed. The idea that you would be able to watch five Masses, that really goes against what Mass is,” Fr Matthews said.

“It's a big risk that it becomes more of an entertainment, we just put it on as background noise – I think that would be very dangerous, we want to stay well clear of that and we want to be able to gather as a

community of Faith.”

Fr Joe Deegan PP of Clara parish, Co. Offaly, said that there are many older people who “will watch two or three Masses a day” and have not returned to Mass physically since the pandemic.

“That [livestreaming] is nourishing their spirit, it's feeding them, but I would like to tell them that coming to Mass, connecting to people in a real way, and obviously receiving the physical Eucharist in Holy Communion, that brings it to another level,” he said.

Fr Deegan warned against the “isolation of sitting at home”, which only “compounds an isolation that can build up for older people, whereas if they can get out to Mass physically there is so much more to gain just from being there with other people in that community setting”.

He added: “Even the simple thing of a little chat before or afterwards, I think that's important for people and it's obviously a very important aspect of the Christian Faith, it's about community as well as communion. The physical pres-

ence of gathering, the ecclesia, the getting together is a very important element of the way we do liturgy and the way we practice our Faith.”

For the PP of Ennis parish in Co. Clare, Fr Tom Ryan, there are currently some people who have chosen not to return to Church because they find “the connection at home a little more comfortable and easier to participate in”.

“The people who stay at home are always welcome but they are missing out on a very important part of faith community and that's the coming together, communion and being with one another and to be physically able to receive communion,” he said.

Fr Ryan added: “I don't think it was ever intended with the technology that people would now just be able to stay at home. It was for those who couldn't come and so they could still be part of the community. It certainly served a great purpose during the pandemic but as time has evolved now, the invitation is for people to return to the Church.”

Irish dancer Flatley requested to pray Rosary with ex-wife in her final hours



Brandon Scott

Renowned Irish dancer Michael Flatley has revealed how he personally requested to see his ex-wife Lisa Murphy in hospital to be able to pray by her side and open up to her in her final hours.

Recalling the poignant encounter, he said that he spent time on his own with Ms Murphy reciting the Rosary by her side. “I said the Rosary, a little bit of it,” he said.

“I didn't get through all of it when her parents arrived. But I was able to tell her some truths to take into the next world. And I am so happy I did. She opened her eyes just enough

for me to know. It meant the world to me”.

Mr Flatley was among the many mourners who attended her funeral along with his wife Niamh O'Brien at St John the Evangelist church in Ballinteer, south Dublin.

It is not the first occasion Mr Flatley has spoken openly about his strong Faith. Two years ago while a guest on the Late Late Show he made an appeal to Ireland's youth, reminding them that God wants their dreams to be successful.

“Work hard, stand up, throw your best shot... God wouldn't give you a dream or desire to do something if he wasn't going to give you the opportunity to achieve success,” he said.

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New Vatican document hailed for clear approach against assisted suicide

Brandon Scott

Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran and theologian Dr John Murray have both praised the Vatican's document on human dignity published on Monday, *Dignitas Infinata*, which outlines the Church's response to some of the societal issues which are calling the concept of human dignity into question – particularly the issue of assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Speaking in the aftermath of the document's release on Monday, Bishop Kevin Doran welcomed its publication and overarching message.

"I welcome the publication by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith of a new document on human dignity, *Dignitas Infinita*," he said. "This document makes it clear that human dignity is not something that is given or conceded by law, or something which a person can somehow 'lose'. Human dignity is inherent in the human nature of every person."

Bishop Doran continued, "*Dignitas Infinita* addresses a wide range of circumstances in which particular actions, or failures to act, by individuals



Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin, chairman of the Council for Life of the Irish bishops' conference. Photo: CNS/Irish Catholic

or by the State, would contradict the dignity of a person or a whole group of persons. These include sexual abuse, human trafficking, abortion, discrimination against migrants or people with disability and violence against women.

"At a time when euthanasia and assisted suicide are being actively promoted by vocal minorities in many countries including our own, the extract on euthanasia from *Dignitas Infinita* is particularly relevant.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, lecturer in Moral Theology/Christian Ethics at DCU, Dr John Murray hailed the clarity of the document – particularly with regard to its section on assisted suicide and euthanasia.

"The section on euthanasia is very pertinent and clear. The terminology used in Ireland is assisted dying and that itself is a euphemism – it's deceptive language. The section is a clarion call. Now whether anyone in Irish politics is going to listen to that is

another question."

Dr Murray stressed that objections to assisted suicide and euthanasia are not just explicitly directed by one's faith but that it is inherently a matter of reason and that politicians in Ireland ought to approach the matter from this perspective.

"It isn't a matter purely of faith, but of reason," he said. "The teaching of the Church is very clear and the teaching of reason is very clear on killing. If politicians were able to focus their minds honestly on the fact we're talking about killing rather than just helping people to die – which generally is a good thing and a good part of medicine and human sympathy.

"Dignity with dying – that phase is used by the pro-euthanasia and assisted suicide argument – if you want to call it an argument. It's deceptive again because it isn't facing the fact that it's deliberately killing or helping someone else deliberately take innocent human life. So that means that even if it's well-intentioned, it's going to be against human dignity – a violation of it," he warned.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mater Dei Centre conducts survey on churchgoing in Ireland

The Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education (MDCCE) at DCU's Institute of Education is conducting a new all-island survey that explores churchgoing in Ireland.

The Irish study is led by Dr Bernadette Sweetman, post-doctoral researcher at the Centre. The research team aims to:

- Listen to churchgoers on a range of long-standing issues and questions, particularly as they are being brought to light in the synodal process.

- To explore some new issues that face us now, or soon will, but which were not talked about so much a decade ago, such as climate change, artificial intelligence, assisted dying or safeguarding procedures.

- To investigate what has happened to churchgoers and faith communities since COVID-19 lockdowns ended.

Bishop Alan McGuckian to be installed as new Bishop of Down and Connor this Sunday

The celebration of Mass for the Episcopal Installation of Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ as the new Bishop of Down and Connor will take place at 3:00pm this Sunday at St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast.

Among the concelebrants will be Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland Eamon Martin and Bishop McGuckian's two brothers, Frs Bernard and Michael, who are also Jesuit priests. Bishop Alan had served as Bishop of Raphoe since his ordination as Ireland's first Jesuit bishop on August 6 2017.

Following the conclusion of the Mass, Bishop McGuckian will greet members of the congregation in person.

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United Ireland – Money or vision?

The price of Irish unification has now been put at €20 billion over twenty years – the bill to be picked up by the Irish taxpayer. (Although these figures, as estimated by economist John Fitzgerald, son of Garret, are disputed by some.)

But as Ireland is reckoned to be one of the richest countries in the world according to Global Finance Magazine, the exchequer can probably afford it.

Yet surely there are more important aspects of nation-building than money? Did Pádraig Pearse count the pennies before 1916?

Vision

The first priority in putting a nation together is vision. You need a vision of what kind of unity you are going to construct. Diversity of traditions needn't be an obstacle, but this diversity must also allow a cohesive unity.

Switzerland has often been cited as a model for a united Ireland because of the local democracy vested in the cantonal system.

Switzerland is a country with four official languages – German, Italian and French, as well as Romansh, the minority Swiss language – and two



Mary Kenny

diverse Christian traditions of Catholicism and Calvinism. But it works as a unified nation, not just because of the cantonal structure – but because the Swiss have that sense of who they are as a people, with an identity going back to William Tell.

“Building a nation requires more than money – it needs inspiration and coherence too”

Belgium is a state with two languages of French and Flemish (plus a small corner of German-speakers) and theoretically of the same religion, although much of Belgium is now secular. And yet it's questionable if Belgium is a success as a nation. It remains bitterly divided and the layers of bureaucracy added to alleviate the divisions arguably enforce and add complexities to differences. Belgium is held together by the EU and the monarchy, rather than a unified sense

of identity.

Building a nation requires more than money – it needs inspiration and coherence too. Scotland has seen an upsurge in support for Scottish nationalism in recent decades, but the project of Scottish independence is mired in muddle because, apart from hating the English and especially the Tories, they haven't really developed a coherent vision of what it is to be Scottish. They've also tried to be multi-cultural even before they defined what the host culture is.

The United States of America was, surely, an inspiring model of a nation that was both unified and diverse. The states made their own laws, but there was federal unity on national and international issues, as well as an agreed understanding of what it was to be an “American”. This has become fractured in recent decades over a range of issues from race to drug use to problems of immigration, but if America can hold

“Diversity of traditions needn't be an obstacle, but this diversity must also allow a cohesive unity”



The flags of the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain flying together. Photo: Getty

on to the vision of what it is to be American, the nation will endure.

Economics are not irrelevant to any project. Prof Fitzgerald's calculations have prompted much discourse, and quite a few reflections on the lines of St Augustine's aspiration to virtue. (“Oh Lord, make me chaste – but not yet.”) Taoiseach Harris has already voiced his support for a united Ireland, but not yet.

His real job would be to develop the vision which builds a united nation.

“The first priority in putting a nation together is vision. You need a vision of what kind of unity you are going to construct”

Christianity's unlikely admirer

Richard Dawkins', famous atheist, has now declared that he is a “cultural Christian”, after all. This seems to mean that he appreciates the traditions and inheritance of Christianity, even if he is not (yet?) a believer. Well, his démarche, if not quite a Damascene conversion, is a start!

He has for some time expressed admiration for the beautiful language of the Bible and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, and that has been an influence. He also thinks Christianity could be replaced by Islam if Christian traditions are not defended.

Perhaps he will make another TV documentary updating his views. Perhaps he might even apologise for the way he so unkindly described pilgrims at Lourdes in the last one he made – pouring scorn on the faith of people for whom the experience was deeply meaningful.

Irecently discovered that a cousin of mine, now dead, once ferried Irish babies to America, as part of the practice of American adoptions in the 1950s. She honestly and truly believed she was helping the infants attain a better life. Poignantly, she yearned to adopt a baby herself, since she was childless and loved children, but her husband wouldn't agree. He was a psychiatrist and entertained fears of undisclosed inherited mental illness, which was a concern at the time.

It's desperately sad to think of cases where mothers felt forced into parting with their babies for adoption, as in the “Philomena” story. But it's also desperately sad to think of children growing up in orphanages or industrial schools, with no family to care about them – as in John Cameron's affecting autobiography “Boy 11963”. Two sides to this passage of our social history.



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Antisemitism concerns lead to call for activism to be left outside classrooms

Chai Brady

Schools in Ireland must be “a safe space for children of all religions” but this is not the case if students are given a “one-sided narrative” about the Israel-Hamas conflict in the Middle East, the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland (JRS) has said.

The statement comes following antisemitism concerns of Jewish parents, who allege their children are being marginalised by a pro-Palestinian bias, being levelled at multi-denominational school group Educate Together.

The Irish Independent reported this week on

growing tensions beginning earlier this year when Educate Together's chief executive, Dr Emer Nowlan publicised her attendance at a pro-Palestinian march in Dublin on social media. It was later clarified she attended in a “personal capacity”.

Tensions increased following the revelation two Educate Together schools are putting forward a motion to declare Israel an apartheid state, and adopt a BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) position against Israel which will be voted on at their AGM next month.

Chairman of the JRS, Maurice Cohen said that the council “is extremely

concerned that all schools in Ireland must be a safe space for all children of all religions, races and ethnicities. This is not the case when many schools are giving a one-sided narrative to their pupils regarding the current and ongoing conflict in the Middle East”.

Mr Cohen said: “I expect that Educate Together will find the necessary means to either stop this motion or defeat it overwhelmingly. I further expect that Educate Together and other schools will find ways to encourage all those connected with schools, especially their staff, especially their teachers, to leave their

activism outside of the classroom and to be totally apolitical in their dealings with all children.”

He added: “Anyone who is not fully informed of the very complex situation in the Middle East and engages in activism, in what is just tantamount to virtue signalling for their own good, runs the risk of being a highly antisemitic person.”

Teachers waking up to dangers of gender ideology being pushed on schools

Brandon Scott

Speaking on *The State of the Nation* podcast, primary school teacher and Aontú local election candidate, Aisling Considine, reflected on her experiences at the recent INTO conference and how a minority of left-wing activists are avidly pushing gender ideology in schools across the country.

Speaking in relation to her appeal to delegates to disaffiliate with the National Women's Council of Ireland at the INTO event, Ms Considine said that she doesn't think that teachers should be working with the NWCI because “they don't represent all women”.

“They don't represent me simply because I believe in biology. I took the opportunity to bring a letter by the TENI, the Transgender Equality Network Ireland, that was written a few years ago now. It was signed by various groups including the NWCI and it called on people who believe in biology – like myself – to lose media and political representation.”

Ms Considine said that teachers were initially supportive of the gender ideology movement because its actual implications were disguised in a heartfelt message of inclusivity and progressiveness, but most are now becoming aware of the true impacts of the culture and “people and teachers have caught on and we can now see it for what it is”.

“The problem is we have a whole draft curriculum and it is kind of through the social justice activist lens and gender ideology – it's done very subtly but it's across the curriculum. We need to be very careful now,” Ms Considine said.

Growing interest in Confirmation pledge to abstain from alcohol and drugs

Staff reporter

Darren Butler, National Coordinator of the Irish Bishops' Drugs Initiative (IBDI), has spoken of a renewed interest in taking the pledge to abstain from alcohol and drugs at Sacrament of Confirmation ceremonies.

The work of the IBDI is to mobilise parish communities to work in partnership with

other service providers as a pastoral response to prevent alcohol and drug misuse in the local area. This work is rolled out using education, awareness and alternative activities.

Mr Butler said, “for generations, taking the Confirmation Pledge has been a regular part of receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. However, in recent times, the pledge has been considered by some to

be outdated or old fashioned.

“In order to highlight the value of taking the pledge to young people, both from faith and health perspectives, the IBDI has worked on a new initiative for schools to facilitate a programme called ‘The Commitment’. Since the programme's launch, there has been an increase in parishes and schools seeking support in facilitating the pledge,” he said.

Between the angels



Blessing the people attending the Diving Mercy Sunday devotion celebrated by Fr Mark Moriarty at St John's Church Tralee, Co. Kerry. Photo: John Cleary

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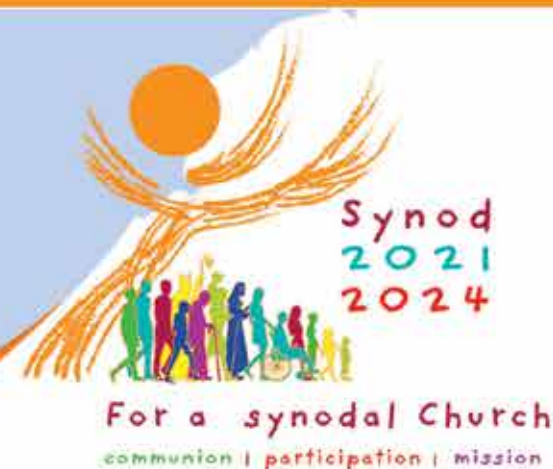


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The same tactics used today as centuries of male oppression



Wendy Grace

The Government's monumental defeat in the referendum showed how truly out of touch they were with the Irish people. The aftermath saw many calling for Fine Gael to get back to its Christian democratic roots with critics saying that too much time has been spent appeasing the woke brigade and too little on bread and butter issues.

A good start would be to scrap the proposed 'Hate Speech' legislation. While Taoiseach Simon Harris didn't reference it during his opening speech at the Fine Gael

Ard Fheis at the weekend, in recent weeks, he has dismissed calls to abandon the legislation.

He may do well to consider that former Minister for Justice Charlie Flanagan, Fine Gael TD Michael Ring, and Fianna Fáil TD, and former Minister for Defense, Willie O'Dea want it to be scrapped. And that Sinn Féin's TDs, who all voted for the proposed legislation in the Dáil, are now calling for it to be abandoned.

Ridiculous

If any proof was needed that this legislation is ridiculous, we need look no further than our Scottish neighbours (with a similar population to ours) who introduced hate crime legislation on April 1. Their legislation is strikingly similar to what is being proposed in Ireland. Under their new law anyone caught "stirring up hatred" against people with "protected characteristics", including their gender identity, can face up to seven years in prison.

Within less than the first week of its enactment, the Scottish police have been overwhelmed with over 4000 complaints of 'hate'. In Simon Harris's Ard Fheis speech, he did reference a return to law and order, yet if the Scottish experience is anything to go by, our Gardai, who are already overstretched and under resourced, would end up drowning in paperwork because of a law that is as ridiculous as it is unnecessary.

“There is also no requirement that comments need to be proven to be likely to cause physical harm to another person”

Ironically, one of the so-called 'hateful' things people feel the need to complain to the Scottish police about is the very man responsible for pushing the law, the first minister of Scotland Humza

Yousaf, and a speech he made in 2020 where he said that Scotland was "too white".

Another chilling similarity to Scotland's new law is that in Ireland you could be prosecuted for what you say in public, or in the privacy of your own home, or for simply possessing material, such as books or a WhatsApp meme that is seen to 'incite hate'.

Unbelievably, under Ireland's proposals there is also no requirement that comments need to be proven to be likely to cause physical harm to another person. So, you could be reported to the Gardaí for hurting someone's feelings.

Transgender

Much of the thrust of both the Scottish and Irish legislation seems to be about protecting a small, but powerful and extremely influential transgender lobby and their ideology.

Author J.K. Rowling, who has been vilified and has received death and rape threats for simply stating biological realities, last week posted a long thread on X where she described some well-known transgender women, like convicted double rapist Isla Bryson, as men. She also mentioned other sex offenders who transitioned to 'women' after their prosecution.

She went on to say that a higher value has been placed on men performing their idea of 'femaleness' over the rights of actual women and girls. Rowling, acknowledging how her vast wealth in one way insulates her from losing her livelihood, went on to say that: "If they go after any woman for simply calling a man a man, I'll repeat that woman's words and they can charge us both at once."

I hope J.K. Rowling's courage will divert some from being woke to actually waking up. The vast majority of those hurling vicious abuse and gleefully fuelling a cancel culture of anyone who dares question their orthodoxy are transgender women, i.e. biological men.

There is a new misogyny in town that so many seem happy to ignore, and under the law this tiny minority will be protected, while half the population (women) could



Taoiseach Simon Harris.

see hard fought freedoms and advances being eroded.

Another prominent advocate of free speech has been Irish writer Graham Linehan, he has spoken out against the sterilisation of children in gender clinics and spoke up for the protection of women of have been victimised simply for expressing their opinions. He has been approached by the police on several occasions, been sued, had a West End musical cancelled, and lost most forms of his income because of his views.

“We have already seen in this country the stifling impact of groupthink and self-censorship, and this legislation will make things a whole lot worse”

Ireland's proposed law, like Scotland's, is incredibly vague – what is deemed 'hateful' comes down to an individual's subjective perception. My idea of debate could be your idea of hate, and those things could change tomorrow or next week, depending on whatever populist narratives are flavour of the day. It is allowing the authorities to police what we can and cannot say, or even think.

The effect will be that people will just keep their mouths shut. We have already seen in this country the stifling impact of groupthink and self-censorship, and this legislation will make things a whole lot worse.

As a Catholic, something I consider one of the most important parts of my iden-

tity, rarely a day goes by that I don't hear something upsetting or offensive to my beliefs. It may not be pleasant but I respect and will defend the right for someone to hold a differing opinion to my own.

Freedoms

A true libertarian will always defend free speech, even if you might not like it, even if it might offend you.

We have to be able to say things like, there are only two sexes, and that sex-based rights should be protected without fear of prosecution. Otherwise we are risking a culture devoid of free speech that will allow the illiberal liberals to push exactly what George Orwell called Big Brother's "final, most essential command" – telling you "to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears".

But for us, a powerful transgender lobby has the ear of the Irish Government, and they seem intent on criminalising any sort of discussion, many trans activists have even adopted the #nodebate on social media. There has been a determined effort to fuel the culture wars without regard for the lives that are destroyed, often using tactics we can recognise from centuries of male oppression of women; violence, threats, intimidation, vilification. This proposed law will bully us into re-defining 'woman' to mean every man who says he is one.

I can only hope that watching what is unfolding in Scotland will deter our new Taoiseach from going down this path, and he will do democracy, and free speech, a favour and consign the proposed hate speech legislation to the rubbish bin.

“There is a new misogyny in town that so many seem happy to ignore, and under the law this tiny minority will be protected, while half the population (women) could see hard fought freedoms and advances being eroded”

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A Government not valuing the indispensable role of parents



Maria Steen

It is just a month since the resounding defeat of the two referenda put to the voters by the government, but one wonders has the government learned anything. Last Saturday, at the SIPTU Early Years conference in Liberty Hall, Minister for Children, Roderic O'Gorman, doubled down on ignoring stay-at-home mothers and families who wish to care for their pre-school children at home, and reverted to the government policy of promoting institutionalised childcare only.

According to *The Irish Times*, the Minister said the pandemic had "shone a light" on the contribution of childcare workers and the fact that society cannot function without affordable and high-quality childcare. A more reasonable observer might object that if the pandemic highlighted anything, it was the importance of family.

Results

The results of the recent referenda suggest that the Irish people agree. The rejection of both proposals was a comprehensive rejection of an attempt to erase the words "mother" and "home" from the Constitution and a signal that the government should follow through on the constitutional promise that a mother not be forced to leave her children to work because of economic necessity.

Yet the government continues to emphasise institutional childcare as the only form of childcare that matters – and certainly the only kind that it is willing to support financially. Every year, more taxpayers' money is poured into crèches and early year settings.

Early childcare has a role in society, but what of parents who want to care for their children at home? Shouldn't they be supported too? Don't

their children also deserve the best start?

Listening to government ministers and NGOs, one might be forgiven for thinking that the vast majority of families would choose crèche-type care for their children. In fact, this is not at all the case. A succession of polls taken show that, when asked, the majority of mothers with dependent children would choose to stay at home, were it not for economic necessity.

Furthermore, recent CSO figures – although quite misleading at first glance – show that the vast majority of children in the country are cared for by a parent or family member. The official press release states: "A crèche or similar facility was the most common form of childcare (42%), followed by an unpaid relative or family member (28%)". This seems to suggest that 42% of children are in crèche or similar facilities.

“It means that over 80% of children under 15 are cared for at home or by family”

However, those children being looked after by their own parents are excluded. When the number of children in a crèche or similar facility (139,899) is expressed as a percentage of the total number of children in the country, it comes to only 13.8% – which puts quite a different complexion on the figures.

In total, according to the 2022 census, there were 1,012,287 children in the state under 15 years of age. There were 331,783 (32.8%) in childcare, meaning that 680,504 (67.2%) were cared for by parents.

Of the 331,783 in childcare, 110,410 were cared for by a relative or family member which means that 790,914 of the children in the state – or 78% – were cared for by parents or family members. Add to that number a further 20,263 who are minded by a childminder in the child's home, and it means that over 80% of children under 15 are cared for at home or by fam-

ily.

These figures highlight the lengths that parents go to to care for their own children, despite the pressures of living in an economy that makes it almost impossible to raise a family on one income.

Tax individualisation, which was introduced in 2000, forced many mothers back into the workplace, resulting in households needing two incomes to compete in the property market. That double-income model led to inflated property prices, which in turn contributed to the disastrous property boom and bust and the housing crisis we are now experiencing.

The disadvantage suffered by single income families remains to this day. To illustrate it in real terms, a couple each earning €50K, with a joint household income of €100K will pay €23,400 in tax. Another couple with the same household income of €100K but where only one spouse or partner is working will pay €29,800 – €6,400 more in tax.

If the other spouse at home is raising children, the State gives no help other than the child benefit payment, which all children receive. By contrast, the two working parents will also get the benefit of free preschool childcare, and the Minister wants to offer even more help to them.

Intention

What can we conclude is the intent of government economic and social policy? It is, in effect, to force both parents into the workplace and have children spend the majority of their waking hours in the company of people other than their family. Government policy is informing people's choices instead of people's choices informing government policy. This needs to change.

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Minister O'Gorman said that he valued his relationship with unions representing childcare professionals and other "stakeholders" – a phrase from that detestable management-speak of which politicians seem so fond. There was no mention of the only stakeholders who really matter when it comes to children: their parents.

In the run up to the elections, perhaps it is time for parents to send a message to politicians that their continued myopic focus on institutionalised childcare is out of touch with what families want.

“What can we conclude is the intent of government economic and social policy? It is, in effect, to force both parents into the workplace and have children spend the majority of their waking hours in the company of people other than their family. Government policy is informing people's choices instead of people's choices informing government policy. This needs to change”



“These figures highlight the lengths that parents go to to care for their own children, despite the pressures of living in an economy that makes it almost impossible to raise a family on one income”

Rise in mental illness not all to do with social media



David Quinn

What is happening to a lot of our young people? The Annual General Meeting of the Irish Medical Organisation last weekend heard that in the last three decades the number of young people presenting at the Mater hospital in Dublin after self-harming has increased fivefold. Addressing the conference, Prof. Matthew Sadlier, a consultant psychiatrist, blamed excessive use of social media and said it is creating a “broken generation”.

Prof Sadlier is not the only one raising the alarm. Last year two other psychiatrists, Dr Mary Cannon and Dr Michele Hill, said that children's hospitals were dealing with “astronomical” numbers of young people who had self-harmed.

Cannon said it was a “hidden epidemic” while Hill described the mental health issues facing children and teenagers as “shocking”.

Some of what is happening can perhaps be attributed to greater awareness of mental health and more people willing to come forward when they have mental health problems. But few seem to doubt that we are dealing with a growing crisis.

Aggression

For example, schools are also reporting an increase in mental health problems, including more aggression towards teachers from pupils. Sometimes this involves actual physical attacks on teachers.

The same broad problem is being manifested on our streets. A recent survey of transport workers found that 80% of drivers suffer abuse on a regular basis from passengers. A fifth said it happens on a daily basis.

A representative of a shop-



keepers' association recently told an Oireachtas committee about the big increase in shoplifting being encountered by their members and tellingly added: “The most worrying aspect of shoplifting today is the accompanying threats, the actual violence, the obscenities, the misogyny and the vile racist abuse levelled at owners and staff.”

In other words, people are becoming more aggressive. I believe the recent riot in Dublin was not simply the result of anti-immigrant sentiment, but was a symptom of increased aggression overall.

“Prominent academics point to a very strong correlation between the rise of smart phones around 12 years ago and the rise of anxiety and depression in young people”

Male and female mental health problems tend

to manifest themselves in stereotypically male and female ways. If a boy is going through severe difficulties, he will often take it out on others, while a girl will often take it out on herself, which is why girls are more likely to self-harm than boys.

A lot of fingers of blame are pointing at smart phones and social media. Several prominent academics point to a very strong correlation between the rise of smart phones around 12 years ago and the rise of anxiety and depression in young people, and especially teenage girls. They see both lifting off at the same time.

Scrolling

Scrolling on your phone constantly means you spend less time relaxing. Your brain is always seeking the next dopamine hit. Dopamine is a chemical messenger in your brain that social media seems almost designed to stimulate.

When you post something on social media, you then spend your time

watching to see if you have had any reaction. (Confession; I use Twitter and spend quite a lot of time scrolling through it).

If you get no reaction, you're disappointed, especially if you see your peers getting far more reaction. A lot of people post images of themselves on social media, so they are seeking direct validation of whatever it is they are doing. They want to see lots of ‘likes’. It must be depressing if you are 14 years of age and are receiving very little reaction, or worse, if you are receiving hostile reaction.

Social media also allows you to constantly compare yourself with others. Are their lives better than yours? Are they better-looking? Do they go on better holidays? Do they live in a nicer house?

You feel under pressure all the time. Social media has been called a “comparison cauldron”.

“Young people spend less time meeting each other than was once the case because they are spending so long on their phones”

In the days before social media, once a vulnerable

teenager came home from school, they would feel under less social pressure. They could disappear to their bedroom or slump in front of the TV and switch off for a while. But with their smart phones, they are switched on all the time, including when they should be asleep, and this is obviously anxiety-inducing.

In addition, young people spend less time meeting each other than was once the case because they are spending so long on their phones. But meeting people is what allows us to develop social skills, as distinct from social media skills. If you don't develop proper social skills, then ordinary social situations will make you feel more anxious than they should.

Experts

Because of the effects of social media, a growing number of experts are saying that schools should ban smart phone use during school time and that children under a certain age shouldn't be sold smart phones at all, or use social media. In the case of the social media companies, that would mean proof-of-age would have to be provided before they could sign up to the likes of TikTok. Yes, some young people would find ways around this, but a lot wouldn't.

All of this would be a

step in the right direction, but I wonder if social media and smart phones are being blamed for too much?

For example, if it is purely social media, then why are teenage girls with liberal views more likely to suffer from anxiety than teenage girls with a more socially conservative outlook? One theory (and this is based on US data) is that more traditionalist-minded young women are also more likely to be religious, and religion gives people a stronger sense of meaning and purpose and community than non-religious worldviews and practices offer.

“It is hard to believe that the absence of a good father isn't having bad effects, but this is something we are very unwilling to talk about because it seems ‘judgemental’”

A further theory is that children overall are less resilient than they used to be, perhaps because of over-parenting, that is, the tendency to overprotect children from adversity meaning the children don't develop coping skills of their own and do not learn that life is rarely free of challenges.

Another factor might be family breakdown. An awful lot of children today are growing up without a father present in their lives. It is hard to believe that the absence of a good father isn't having bad effects, but this is something we are very unwilling to talk about because it seems ‘judgemental’.

One way or the other though, something bad is happening and all those self-harming children turning up in our hospitals is a big sign of it. With so many of our young people succumbing to mental health problems, shouldn't this be a much bigger national issue than it is? Shouldn't we, in fact, be reassessing where we are going as a society? Isn't what is taking place as big in its own way as the housing crisis, and maybe even worse than that?

“With so many of our young people succumbing to mental health problems, shouldn't this be a much bigger national issue than it is?”

The politicisation of abortion has endangered women



Eilís Mulroy

The story that came to light in recent weeks about the woman from Limerick who almost died after undergoing an abortion is something that could have been avoided if senior members of government had listened to pro-life TDs and accepted the amendments they proposed prior to the passage of the new abortion law in 2018.

But abortion supporting TDs were too preoccupied with pushing the abortion bill to listen to genuine concerns raised about the adverse impact the proposed new law could have, not just on the lives of unborn babies but also on the health and welfare of women accessing abortion.

The story that broke in *The Daily Mail* on March 25 about the recent research in the *Irish Medical Journal* concerning the woman who almost died after not receiving an ultrasound prior to the abortion (that would have detected the ectopic pregnancy), mirrors the precise amendments that pro-life TDs called for back in 2018 - amendments that were greeted with ridicule and scorn from some TDs who repeated like a mantra that the new law was all about 'healthcare'.

Amendment

Over and over, pro-life TDs sought an amendment that would have required an ultrasound prior to undergoing an abortion, but on each occasion they were shouted down. Their proposal was also strenuously rejected by the then Minister for Health Simon Harris.

During the report stage of the Dáil debate in November 2018, Peter Fitzpatrick TD said: "The importance of ultrasound for determining the gestational age of the unborn child and for protecting the life or health of the woman who is undergoing an abortion cannot be overstated, particularly in circumstances where there are concerns about dating the pregnancy or where there is an ectopic pregnancy".

Carol Nolan TD reminded her Dáil colleagues about the Amárach research findings published the previous month which showed that 79% of the public agreed with offering a choice to women to view an ultrasound prior to their abortion and she also highlighted the importance of ultrasounds for protecting the life and health of the woman.

Aontú leader Peadar Toibín referred at the time to the "worry and fear among doctors that if they do not have an ultrasound to make the necessary decision, first, they will not be doing the best for the mothers or the unborn children concerned and, second, they will put themselves in a very exposed situation because they will be making decisions without the best clinical diagnostic tools that are necessary".

Several other TDs contributed to the debate - all highlighting the importance of ultrasound for dating the pregnancy and safeguarding the mother - and they were clear that the amendment wouldn't require a woman to look at the ultrasound if she did not wish to do so.

The hostility from some TDs to the amendment forced the Ceann Comhairle to repeatedly interject to try and bring some order to the proceedings.

“Simon Harris said that ‘to subject every woman to an ultrasound... would be a terrible use of what people rightly point out is a scarce resource in the health service’”

Fine Gael TD at the time, Kate O Connell, said the amendment was "designed to inflict pain and to attempt to impose some sort of guilt" on women. Ruth Coppinger said the amendment sought to "shame women", while Fianna Fáil's Lisa Chambers said the amendment was "not about protecting women but rather judging, embarrassing and making them feel bad."

In his emphatic rejection of the proposal, Simon Harris said that "to subject every woman to an ultrasound... would be a terrible use of what people rightly point out is a scarce resource in the health service".

In the end, just 21 TDs voted for the amendment. All

21 of them have been vindicated for their courage and support of the amendment.

The recent research published in the *Irish Medical Journal* regarding the case of the woman who almost died after her abortion was authored by members of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology in University Maternity Hospital Limerick. It outlines how the 24 year old woman presented at the hospital with severe blood loss and abdominal pain due to a ruptured ectopic pregnancy.

She was treated with fluids and blood transfusions and thankfully survived the incident. The authors state that this near death occurrence "could have been prevented by an ultrasound for location of the pregnancy".

As the World Health Organisation describes, medical abortion can make undiagnosed ectopic pregnancies particularly difficult to identify, since the symptoms of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy and a medical abortion can be so similar. The *Irish Medical Journal* research paper concurs. The story highlights the impact of the decision by the Government and by then-Minister for Health Simon Harris in particular, to reject the ultrasound amendment.

Exacerbated

The risk to women has been further exacerbated by the introduction of telemedicine abortion also under Simon Harris' watch in early 2020, despite having made a commitment in 2018 that "absolutely, termination of pregnancy services in Ireland is not going to be done by telemedicine". Removing the requirement that a woman even meet her GP before receiving the abortion pills, precludes the possibility of an examination let alone an ultrasound.

Given how they protect and amplify support for legalised abortion, it's not exactly surprising that large sections of the media chose to ignore this latest serious incident regarding the new abortion law.

It's a story, nonetheless, that we must ensure isn't ignored in the weeks and months ahead. Those who opposed the 'ultrasound' amendment so strenuously in the Dáil need to be challenged on their stance, particularly the new Taoiseach Simon Harris.

It is a great tragedy that so many of the predictions



A group of young women protest for the pro-life cause near the Dail. Photo: Eilís Mulroy.

made by the Pro Life Campaign and others prior to the 2018 abortion referendum have already come to pass, including Ireland's soaring abortion rate.

It's all the more reason

for people who want to see the injustice of abortion for women and unborn babies ultimately ended to use their vote carefully in the upcoming local and European elections and only

vote for candidates who will speak up and defend the right to life.

! Eilís Mulroy is Chief Officer and spokesperson for the Pro-Life campaign.

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Vatican touts 'seamless garment' of human dignity in new doc



Elise Ann Allen

In a new document published Monday, the Vatican presented a "seamless garment" approach to human dignity, uniting Pope Francis's progressive social agenda with the traditional moral and ethical concerns of his predecessors.

Closely associated with the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, the "seamless garment" approach to life issues in the Church consists of a holistic reverence for human life and dignity in all cases and situations throughout the world.

Monday's new Declaration *Dignitas Infinita* on Human Dignity from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) presented the consistent life ethic of this seamless garment, offering a clear definition of human dignity as the church sees it and stressing the need to uphold it from conception to natural death.

It touches on issues such as war, poverty, migration, and the abuse crisis, stressing the need to protect and uphold human dignity in all of these circumstances, and it also takes a critical edge on topics such as abortion, surrogacy, gender theory and sex change, saying they disregard humanity's natural God-given dignity.

Controversial

Notably, however, the Declaration, while broadly condemning sex change, did not specifically touch on sex changes for minors, despite growing global debate of the controversial issue. The document, which has been in the works for five years and the final version of which was approved by Pope Francis last month, quotes not only the current Pope, but also his predecessors Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI at length, weaving together their social and moral agendas.

Throughout Francis's 11-year papacy, he has often been seen as being at odds with his predecessors' more conservative approach to moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality, at times appearing to downplay the pro-life movement while



Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, second from left, is joined by Msgr Armando Matteo, secretary of the dicastery's doctrinal section, Dr Paola Scarcella, a professor and catechist, and Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office at a news conference April 8, 2024, to present the dicastery's declaration, 'Dignitas Infinita' ("Infinite Dignity") on human dignity. Photo: CNS/Pablo Esparza

repeatedly insisting on the need to be more welcoming of LGBTQ individuals.

Divided into four sections, with the final section dedicated to an array of problematic situations in which the Declaration says human dignity is not being recognised, the document outlines developments the Church's anthropological view of human dignity and repeatedly praises the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

“All human beings possess this same intrinsic dignity, regardless of whether or not they can express it in a suitable manner”

It stressed the ontological nature of human dignity, saying this dignity “belongs to the person as such simply because he or she exists and is willed, created, and loved by God,” and does not depend on external factors, meaning it can never be taken away.

“Dignity is not something granted to the person by others based on their gifts or qualities, such that it could be withdrawn...it is prior to any recognition, and it can-

not be lost. All human beings possess this same intrinsic dignity, regardless of whether or not they can express it in a suitable manner,” the DDF Declaration said.

It highlighted the belief that human beings are created in the image of God as the foundation of the “inseparable unity of body and soul” in the Church's view of human dignity. However, the document also noted that human beings enjoy full freedom, saying “the choice to express that dignity and manifest it to the full or to obscure it depends on each person's free and responsible decision”.

Distortions

Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, the Declaration warned that without religion, human dignity risks falling prey “to distortions” or being “manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person”. “Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century,” it said.

Highlighting what it said were “misunderstandings” of the concept of human dignity and its meaning, the Declaration pointed to the push for “personal dignity” over

“human dignity,” in which the rights of the person are prioritised over the rights of humanity as a whole, putting some, such as unborn children and the terminally ill, at risk.

“Only by recognising an intrinsic and inalienable dignity in every human being can we guarantee a secure and inviolable foundation for that quality. Without any ontological grounding, the recognition of human dignity would vacillate at the mercy of varying and arbitrary judgments.”

“Dignity is based on human nature, not ‘individual arbitrariness or social recognition’”

Human dignity, it said, has also at times been misused “to justify an arbitrary proliferation of new rights, many of which are at odds with those originally defined and often are set in opposition to the fundamental right to life”.

Dignity is based on human nature, not “individual arbitrariness or social recognition”, the document said, saying that without such an objective basis, “the concept of dignity becomes de facto subject to the most diverse

forms of arbitrariness and power interests”.

The document also stressed the communal nature of human dignity, saying it implies a concern for the dignity of others, and therefore, a responsibility toward others and to the community. While underlining the importance of the right to religious freedom, the Declaration also applauded increased efforts to educate on the dangers of racism, slavery, and the marginalisation of women, children, the sick, and people with disabilities.

Violations

In a section outlining what it said were several “grave violations of human dignity” in the modern social context, the Declaration ticked off issues such as poverty, war, migration, human trafficking, euthanasia and assisted suicide, and violence in the digital sphere as areas where dignity is at risk.

Also mentioned were topics such as sexual abuse, violence against women, abortion, surrogacy, the marginalisation of people with disabilities, gender theory and sex change. On the topic of sexual abuse, the Declaration said it “leaves deep scars in the hearts of those who suffer it” and is widespread throughout society.

“It also affects the Church

and represents a serious obstacle to her mission,” it said, saying, “from this stems the Church's ceaseless efforts to put an end to all kinds of abuse, starting from within.” The Declaration also condemned violence against women as “a global scandal that is gaining increasing recognition.”

It lamented that calls for the equal dignity of women often end in words, while “the inequalities between women and men in some countries remain very serious,” even in developed and democratic societies.

Quoting Pope John Paul II, the document said there is “an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State”.

“It also took aim at the practice of surrogacy, which was condemned by Pope Francis during his speech to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See in January”

“Inequalities in these areas are also various forms of violence,” it said, and also condemned the practice of polygamy and of “coercive abortions, which affect both mother and child, often to satisfy the selfishness of males”.

It also condemned the troubling trend of femicide, a key issue in Italy that makes headlines annually, often with end of the year death count on how many women were murdered in the previous year.

The Declaration also condemned abortion as “the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth,” calling unborn children “the most defenceless and innocent among us”.

It also took aim at the practice of surrogacy, which was condemned by Pope Francis during his speech to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See in January, and which the Declaration said

treats “the immensely worthy child” as a “mere object”.

Quoting Pope Francis's remarks to diplomats in January, the document said a mother's womb “cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking”, calling surrogate motherhood “deplorable” and a “grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs”.

Because of their unalienable dignity, “the child has the right to have a fully human (and not artificially induced) origin and to receive the gift of a life that manifests both the dignity of the giver and that of the receiver”, the document said. Surrogacy also violates the dignity of the woman, “whether she is coerced into it or chooses to subject herself to it freely”, as she is detached from the child growing inside of her and thus becomes “a mere means subservient to the arbitrary gain or desire of others”.

Dignity

“This contrasts in every way with the fundamental dignity of every human being and with each person's right to be recognised always individually and never as an instrument for another,” it said. In Italy, the document's treatment of surrogate motherhood – known here as *utero in affitto*, or “uterus for rent” – is likely to have special resonance.

A 2004 law already banned surrogacy in Italy itself, and a 2017 decision of Italy's Constitutional Court upholding that ban said the practice “offends the dignity of women and deeply undermines human relations in an intolerable way”.

Now, the current conservative government under Prime Minister Giorgi Meloni is also seeking to make it illegal for Italians to utilise a surrogate mother abroad, with prison terms of up to three years and

finest of up to \$1.5 million.

The bill was adopted by the lower house of the Italian parliament in July 2023, and is currently before the Justice Commission of the Italian Senate. Some observers expect the government to try to push the measure through ahead of European elections set for June, given that most polls show solid majorities of Italians opposed to surrogate motherhood, especially when money is involved.

The proposed law, however, has drawn fierce opposition from groups such as Famiglie Arcobaleno, or ‘Rainbow Families’, which recently staged a protest outside a Vatican-sponsored university in Rome with people who've engaged surrogate mothers brandishing signs reading, “We're families, not crimes”.

“It must be strongly reiterated that suffering does not cause the sick to lose their dignity... Instead, suffering can become an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of mutual belonging”

Monday's Declaration from the DDF also condemned the practice of euthanasia and assisted suicide, which is also a source of heavy debate in Italy and throughout Europe, calling it a “quieter” violation of human dignity which is “swiftly gaining ground”.

“It is unique in how it utilises a mistaken understanding of human dignity to turn the concept of dignity against life itself,” the Declaration said, noting that euthanasia is often pitched as “death with dignity”.

In response, the DDF said

“it must be strongly reiterated that suffering does not cause the sick to lose their dignity...Instead, suffering can become an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of mutual belonging and gain greater awareness of the precious value of each person to the whole human family”.

The document also decried the “marginalisation” of people with disabilities, saying a “throwaway culture” is increasingly imposing itself on society in which individuals with disabilities are oppressed and treated as “rejects”.

“However, the truth is that each human being, regardless of their vulnerabilities, receives his or her dignity from the sole fact of being willed and loved by God,” the Declaration said.

Gender theory

On the topic of gender theory, which Pope Francis has previously called one of the greatest dangers facing the modern world, the Declaration reiterated that each person, regardless of their sexual orientation, must be respected, and that discrimination and violence against them must be avoided.

“It should be denounced as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation,” it said. However, at the same time, the document “critical issues” in gender theory, repeating Pope Francis's condemnation of it in his January speech to the diplomatic corps, in which he said that “in recent decades, attempts have been made to introduce new rights that are neither fully consistent with those originally defined nor always acceptable”.

“They have led to

instances of ideological colonisation, in which gender theory plays a central role; the latter is extremely dangerous since it cancels differences in its claim to make everyone equal,” he said. Calling life a gift from God, the Declaration said the desire for “personal self-determination...apart from this fundamental truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel”.

“Gender theory, the document said, is an ideology that ‘envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family’”

“Another prominent aspect of gender theory is that it intends to deny the greatest possible difference that exists between living beings: sexual difference,” the document said, saying

sexual difference is “the most beautiful and most powerful” of all differences between men and women, as it allows for the “miracle” of new life.

Gender theory, the document said, is an ideology that “envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family.” “All attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman are to be rejected,” it said, saying, “Only by acknowledging and accepting this difference in reciprocity can each person fully discover themselves, their dignity, and their identity”.

Sex change

Touching on sex change, the Declaration reiterated the church's belief that humans are “inseparably composed of both body and soul.” “Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created,” it said.

In this sense, “any sex-

change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception”, the Declaration said, drawing a distinction between voluntary sex changes and those born with genital abnormalities that are resolved through a medical procedure.

The document also decried what it said were violations of dignity in the digital sphere, such as various forms of exploitation, pornography, cyberbullying, and gambling. The document closed asking that respect for human dignity and the common good be placed at the centre of “every legal system”, and that states not only protect this dignity, but guarantee “the conditions necessary for it to flourish in the integral promotion of the human person”.

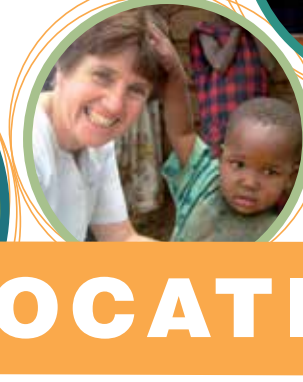
“Even today, in the face of so many violations of human dignity that seriously threaten the future of the human family, the Church encourages the promotion of the dignity of every human person, regardless of their physical, mental, cultural, social, and religious characteristics,” it said.



Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, holds up a copy of the dicastery's declaration, “Dignitas Infinita” (“Infinite Dignity”) on human dignity during a news conference at the Vatican press office April 8, 2024. Photo: CNS/Pablo Esparza

The Irish Catholic

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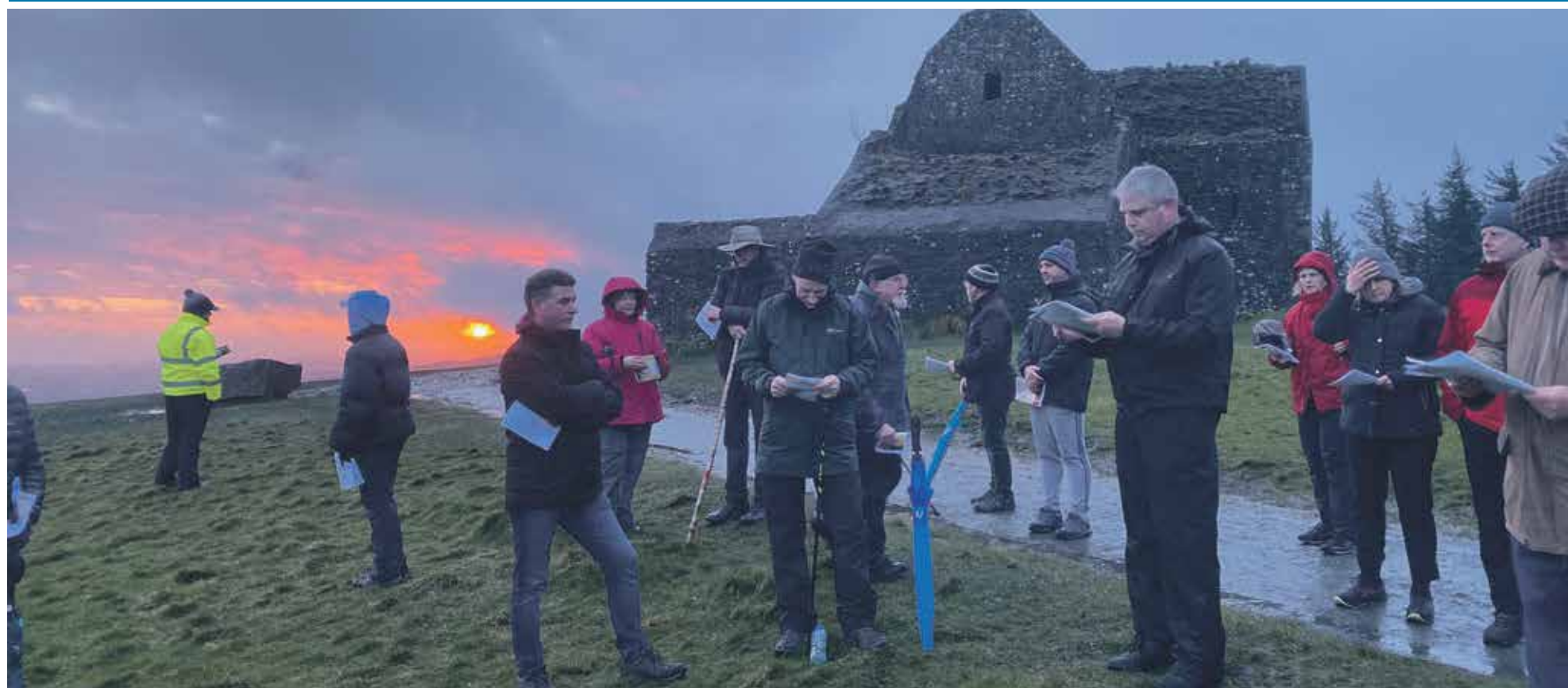
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Out&About

A new dawn



DUBLIN: A congregation gathers on Montpellier Hill, Ballyroan parish, to celebrate dawn Mass on Easter Sunday.



CORK: Fr Noel O'Leary SMA lights the Paschal Candle from the flames of the new fire aided by Fr Michael O'Leary PP and parishioner, Jim Manning at the Easter Vigil ceremony held at St Joseph's SMA Church, Wilton. Photo: Mike English.



KERRY: The Paschal fire burns in front of Holy Cross Dominican Church Tralee on Easter Saturday night as the Prior Gregory Carroll OP of Holy Cross Dominican Church and Fr David McGovern OP, light the Paschal Candle, with Bobby Boylan helping. Photo: John Cleary.

IN SHORT

Bishop Nulty launches 'Easter People'

Bishop Denis Nulty launched a new book of compositions of liturgical music in Duiske Abbey, Gaignamanagh, Co. Kilkenny.

The launch of *Easter People*, containing compositions by Gaignamanagh native Brenda Foskin and arrangements by Edward Holden, brought hundreds of people to Duiske Abbey.

Ms Foskin led a 40 strong choir in a recital, performing seven original pieces from the new collection, in a programme also well populated with popular Easter hymns.

Bishop Nulty thanked Ms Hoskin, Mr Holden and the choir for their great work in

serving their community each week in song and supporting the work of the parish.

The title of the new book is a nod to the late Msgr Séan Swayne who spent many years ministering in Gaignamanagh and inculcated in the parish a love for Easter and so often quoted the words St Augustine "We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song".

Food insecurity 'spiraling' in Yemen

Food insecurity and childhood malnutrition are "spiraling" in Yemen, Irish charity Concern Worldwide have warned.

Over 18 million people – 55% of the country's population – are in need of humanitarian assistance, with one analysis showing a

12% rise in the numbers experiencing acute food insecurity in parts of the country during the five months up to February this year (compared to a previous analysis done in mid-2023).

"Nine years of conflict have taken a severe toll on the lives of ordinary people, especially the 4.5 million who have been forced to flee their homes and are currently living in temporary camps," Concern Worldwide's Country Director in Yemen, Victor Moses, said.

"The key essentials of food, clean water, sanitation, health and nutrition, are all desperately needed."

In a bid to halt the spread of cholera and other diseases, Concern has distributed hygiene kits in the camps that include jerry cans and buckets to carry water, soap, wash-

ing powder and water purification tablets, the charity said in a statement.

Merchants Quay Ireland cofounder honoured

Tony Geoghegan, an advocate for the homeless and those suffering from drug addiction has been awarded the Irish Red Cross (IRC) Lifetime Achievement Award for 2024.

He was chosen for "his foresight in cofounding Merchants Quay Ireland", a homeless charity based on the Franciscan ethos, "in 1989 and his many subsequent years dedicated to working with the homeless and people who had serious issues with drug use", the Irish Red Cross said in a statement.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



KILKENNY: Flautist Laura Neville performs at the launch of *Easter People* in Duiske Abbey. Photo: Tom Walsh.



KILKENNY: Brenda Foskin and Edward Holden are joined by Bishop Nulty at the launch. Photo: Tom Walsh.



DUBLIN: Brenda O'Tighearnaigh is pictured in Mt Merrion's Easter garden after a presentation to mark the inauguration of the parish's family Mass 30 years ago.



KILKENNY: Duiske Abbey Choir is pictured with Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty following the launch of *Easter People*, a collection of liturgical music from Duiske Abbey, Graigueamanagh. Photo: Tom Walsh.



WESTMEATH: Declan Fletcher, Fr William Coleman and John Joe Brady take part in the Fr Timothy Shanley devotions at Carrick Cemetery on Good Friday.



CLARE: Fr Jarek from Glenstal Abbey leads the Polish blessing of food at Ennis Cathedral with Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan.

ANTRIM

Antrim parish rosary and night prayer takes place on Tuesday's at 8pm in St Joseph's Church.

ARMAGH

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults takes place every Tuesday at 7.30pm in St Catherine's Irish Secondary School. For more info contact 0044 7856 172206

CARLOW

Parish Biblical studies group with Dr Amelia Fleming, takes place each Friday 10.30am-12pm in Carlow Cathedral Centre.

CORK

Frankfield/Grange children's rosary group meets the second Saturday of every month at 6pm in front of Our Lady's Shrine at the Church of the Incarnation, Frankfield.

DERRY

'The Demons and the reality of spiritual combat' a talk by Fr Cajetak Apeh OCD takes place in the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, April 18.

DONEGAL

A guided holy hour of adoration in honour of the Holy Face of Jesus takes place on Sundays, 6-7pm in St Mary's Oratory.

A retreat for Young Adults at Lough Derg, Pettigo County Donegal takes place on Saturday, April 27, from 10am-4pm. Refreshments and lunch provided. This retreat is organised by the Knights of St Columbanus Omagh and is free of charge. To register, please visit tiny.cc/loughderg or email info@knightsfst-columbanusomagh.co.uk

DUBLIN

Lecture on the Book of Kells by poet James Harpur takes place Thursday, April 11, in the JM Synge Theatre, Trinity College Dublin, at 7.30pm

Collection to Capuchin Day Centre. Rosary of reparation and conversion takes place first Saturday every month at 2pm on North Earl Street

GALWAY

A series of talks on Dominican life in Ireland takes place in St Mary's Church, the Claddagh on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm. Next

talk 'Dominicans in Time of Persecution' by Ultan Lally, local historian.

KERRY

Youth week takes place in Kerry diocese from Saturday April 20 to Friday April 26, with a range of events across the dioceses. Visit dioceseofkerry.ie for more information.

LAOIS

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place each Sunday of Lent from 5-7pm and concludes with the rosary.

LOUTH

Fr Willie Doyle SJ prayer group takes place in Holy Family Church, Drogheda every Thursday at 7pm. Includes adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and a prayer for vocations.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place at 6pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock Shrine on Sunday, April 14.

SLIGO

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in St Colmcille's Church takes place every Sunday from 4-5pm.

TIPPERARY

Next Cherished women's meeting for prayer and fellowship takes place Monday, May 6, beginning with rosary at 7.30pm in Glencomeragh House, Kilsheelan. For more information visit www.holyfamilymission.ie

Holy Face hour takes place Tuesdays 7-8pm in Our Lady and St Kevin's Church, Littleton, E41 HD90, including rosary, Holy Face prayers, Divine Mercy chaplet and Eucharistic Adoration.

TYRONE

The men's rosary takes place on the first Saturday of every month in Market Street, Omagh (opposite Primark) at 1pm. Next rosary May 4.

WATERFORD

Premiere screening of *Little Nellie of Holy God*, a short movie-documentary on the child, on Friday, April 12 at 8pm in St John's Pastoral Centre, X91 HW9D, followed by Q and A with John Donovan and presentation of Little Nellie's belongings.

A map of Dublin and Cork, Ireland, with numerous yellow circular markers of varying sizes overlaid on it. These markers represent 'proposed Exclusion Zones' around various locations. The map includes labels for streets, landmarks, and public services. A yellow banner with black diagonal stripes is at the top right, and a solid yellow banner is at the bottom.

Dublin and Cork

EXCLUSION ZONES

www.prolifecampaign.ie

There are at least 45 'relevant premises' - hospitals, medical centres, general practices, and obstetric clinics, and abortion providers in Dublin's inner city. Under proposed legislation, each of these premises, and access routes on 'shared premises', will have a 100m 'Safe Access Zone' around it. Any communication likely to discourage people from seeking abortions will be forbidden in these zones.

The Exclusion Zone project is an attempt to engineer our cities so that chilling effects will stifle free speech, and prevent women from being given real choices. For over a decade, Irish political rhetoric has rung with cries of how 'choice' and 'freedom' mattered, how women were to be helped, and how 'chilling effects' were to be avoided.

Other parts of the inner city are similarly dominated by Exclusion Zones, limiting freedom of speech and preventing practical offers of help to women. In much of the city, it seems that 'pro-choice' has become 'no choice'.

One might wonder how people are to be expected to know whether or not they are in an Exclusion Zone. Is it the intention that people should simply assume silence is the best policy? Is the objective to create a 'chilling effect' on free speech and practical offers of help?

● Yellow markings on maps indicate proposed Exclusion Zones.

'Safe access zones'
seek to create areas where
options cannot be suggested
or offered.

The Exclusion Zone project attempts to engineer our cities so its chilling effects will stifle free speech, and prevent women from being given real choices.



Dublin

There are a wide range of Exclusion Zones south of the Liffey. Just as the main streets of the city's northside are heavily obstructed by Exclusion Zones, so too are southern streets like Dame Street, Nassau Street, Grafton Street, and Dawson Street. As a medical centre is within the 'shared premises' of Trinity College, the entirety of the college is likely to be off-limits to offers of help for young women.

Indeed, of Grafton Street's 450 or so metres, just 100 metres are free from Exclusion Zone obstruction. Exclusion Zones in this area also encompass the grounds of St Teresa's Church on Clarendon Street.

The proposals so far allow for free speech within the St Andrew's Church building in Westland Row, but would ban even posters and banners on the church railings, or a simple stall on the church steps.

The north inner city, between Dorset Street and the Parnell Monument will effectively be an area where it will be illegal to offer women alternatives to abortion. Telling people they have choices will be forbidden.

Offering women alternatives to abortion will be illegal on more than half of O'Connell Street – of the street's over 560m length, telling women they have choices will be permitted along just 250m.

● Yellow markings on maps indicate proposed Exclusion Zones.

DUBLIN

CORK

Cork

Dublin is not alone in facing such censorship. Exclusion Zones are envisaged as a standard part of Ireland's towns and cities. This is likely to be the pattern of Exclusion Zone distribution around Cork's city centre, for example.

With roughly two dozen hospitals, clinics, and general practices in the central part of Cork City – roughly equivalent in size to the part of Dublin we have looked at – the city is likely to be dominated by Exclusion Zones limiting free speech and offers of help to women.

While Cork's major hospitals are outside the central part of the city – again, the sides of this square are 1km long – there is a remarkable Exclusion Zone density in the city's historic heart.

With two adjoining Exclusion Zones dominating Shandon Street, for instance, Cork's Catholic cathedral – and significantly the grounds of the cathedral with the adjoining Cathedral Road, Cathedral Walk, and Cathedral Street – will be an area where banners, posters, and organised efforts to protect human beings for their entirety of their lives will be forbidden.

St Patrick's Street, meanwhile, the city's main shopping street, will become off-limits to pro-life activity. Of the almost 500 metres of the street's length, barely 50 – a tenth of the street – will be free.

● Yellow markings on maps indicate proposed Exclusion Zones.



**Women
deserve
protection.
Exclusion Zones are not the answer.**

THE SYNODAL TIMES



“Synodality is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium” – Pope Francis

THE HISTORICAL TRUTHS ABOUT WOMEN DEACONS IN THE CHURCH

JOHN WIJNGAARDS

PAGE 20-21



OTHER VOICES

PENELOPE MIDDELBOE

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Fixed dialogue between Irish Bishops and laity is a good model says Mary McAleese

Former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, has opened up about her faith and hopes for the future of the Catholic Church at a special event at Mary Immaculate College. President McAleese was discussing 'On Being A Catholic' at the invitation of the Irish Institute for Catholic Studies (IICS) at MIC in front of an audience made up of the College's students, staff and community.

In a detailed and wide-ranging two-hour conversation with Dr Patricia Kieran, Director of the IICS, President McAleese spoke about her upbringing in a Catholic family in a Protestant neighbourhood in Belfast, her perception of the Church in her formative years, her work as a lawyer, and her renewed focus on Catholicism since leaving Áras an Uachtaráin in 2011, among other topics.

Dr Kieran thanked the President for her contemplative and honest reflection on her life and religion, and said: "It has been a huge privilege for us to be in your company and to hear your passion, integrity, honesty, openness and your connection with people. It's wonderful to hear you articulate - with that critical, intelligent, expert voice - your thoughts on Catholicism, on canon law, on various pastoral issues, and to share so generously with us".



Mary McAleese pictured with representatives of Mary Immaculate College.

Speaking of her reflection on Catholicism and her own faith, President McAleese identified a number of issues she hopes to see improved including the power imbalance in the Church, the exclusion of women from Church roles and the treatment of the LGBTQI+ community.

"I've read everything that has been written on theology that excludes women and I've read nothing yet that is

impressive," said President McAleese. "It's the kind of theology that is custom raised to meet the Magisterium teaching and to flatter it but not to integrate it, and I think that's a pity. The important thing about excluding women from priesthood is you also exclude them *ipso facto* from decision making because all decision making in the church is written through the Magisterium."

"There are a few

women in the aerial roles and I don't want to be mean about this but it just strikes me as minimalism. It's just enough to stop people from whinging and complaining and to look like you're doing something. But what you're doing is never really addressing the fundamental inequalities and the fundamental waste of talent.

"I think the Church has to change and the governance structure has to

change. The hierarchical construct belongs to an old empire. It's no longer fit for purpose and I think it will have to change.

President McAleese referred to "a synodal process that truly involves the laity" as something she would approve of.

"I would love to see something like what's happened in Germany, a synodal process that truly involves the laity. We've had synodal processes

in Ireland but at the end of the day the filtering is always filtered through the Episcopal conference. That's not to say the Episcopal conference got anything wrong, I actually think our Episcopal conference did quite a good job on the Synodal synthesis. But what we don't have is, if you like, a stable forum in which our bishops meet the people of God on the basis of equality. Our Episcopal conference, if it meets laypeople, they are brought in as invited guests or experts. I just don't think it's the right fit.

"I like the German Synodal set up in which the laity and the bishops are in a regular, stable, fixed dialogue and also have a kind of solidarity now between bishops and people that I don't see anywhere else. I think our bishops have had a massive problem because of the clerical abuse and trust being shattered. Of course, the same thing happened in Germany also but as an antidote to that they are sort of building from the grassroots up to this model of synodality in which there is equality between laity and episcopacy and clerics. And I like that it's not perfect. At the end of the day, due to the way its structured at the moment, the decision still ends up being filtered through the numbers of bishops, they have to have a majority. But it's on the way to something new."

NEXT WEEK - THE POPE'S FINAL RESTING PLACE

Did women deacons receive the sacrament of holy orders?



John Wijngaards

Having been born in tropical Indonesia taught me a useful lesson or two about storms. We might be playing outside in a local park on a usually hot sunny afternoon. Suddenly a few dark clouds would poke their heads up from the horizon.

Nothing to worry about? Gracious goodness. Plenty! We had to run back home just in time to avoid being washed away by torrents of water bucketing down from the sky. And now I sense a storm being unleashed upon the Church.

During the first millennium practically every parish, especially in the East, had one or two women deacons. They assisted at the baptism of women. They served women at Mass in the church assemblies. They took communion to women who were ill. They often performed their anointing with consecrated oil. They organised funerals for women who had died. But were they true *deacons*?

Various reports, both official and unofficial, indicate that one of the positive outcomes of the Synodal Process may be the restoration of the diaconate of women. But the latest news from the Vatican is that Pope Francis has appointed ten Study Groups dealing with specific issues. The Group commissioned to study questions of ministry, including the ordination of women as deacons, has been entrusted to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

“Fears remain that an attempt will be made to downgrade this female diaconate as non-sacramental”

This raises serious concerns. Does this wipe the topic from the general discussion platform of the Synod? And in the light of previous negative experiences, will this Curia department deliver a truly dependable, independent scholarly report?

Moreover, well-grounded



A group of Benedictine nuns from Fahr Monastery near Basel, Switzerland, call for “Votes for Catholic Women” at the Vatican during the October 2019 Synod of Bishops for the Amazon. Photo: OSV News/Deborah-Rose Milavec, courtesy Global Sisters Report

“He obviously wanted to make sure that, even if women are admitted to the diaconate, this will not open the door to them being ordained priests”

fears remain that an attempt will be made to downgrade this female diaconate as non-sacramental, as not part of holy orders. The diaconate was conferred on women in the Church for a thousand years.

Great, you would think, but some conservative scholars, including Cardinal Gerhard Müller, former head of the Vatican Congregation for Doctrine, declared this to have been only a second-rank ministry. Pope Benedict XIV added an ominous clause to Canon Law in 2009, stating “Those who are constituted in the order of the episcopate or the presbyterate receive the mission and capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head, whereas deacons are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity” (Can. 1009 §3.). He obviously wanted to make sure that, even if women are admitted to the diaconate, this will not open the door to them being ordained priests.

The crucial question is: were the ancient women deacons *sacramentally* ordained? Did they receive *holy orders*?

The Ordination Rite

The answer is: yes, they did. And this can be proved con-

vincingly by comparing the ordination rites used for male deacons and female deacons. I will focus first on the Byzantine part of the Church. Ordination rites have been preserved in many ancient Greek documents such as *Barberini Gr.* 336 (780 AD), *Sinai Gr.* 956 (950 AD), *Grottaferrata Tβ1* (1020 AD), *Coislin Gr.* 213 (1027 AD), *Bodleian E.5.13* (1132 AD) and *Vaticanus Gr.* 1872 (1150 AD). The rite in all these documents can be shown to derive from a fifth-century proto-type originating in Constantinople.

I will describe six decisive features of the ordination. The quotes are from the original first-millennium ordination rites.

Where the ordination took place

In the ancient Byzantine East, the sanctuary which held the altar was closed off by doors. These remained shut especially during consecration. But at all major ordinations these doors were opened and ordinands led into the sanctuary. The ordination rite says: “After the sacred offertory, the doors [of the sanctuary] are opened and, before the deacon starts the

litany ‘All Saints’, the woman who is to be ordained deacon is brought up [to the altar]”.

This means the woman deacon ordinand, just like her male counterpart, was placed in front of the altar facing the ordaining bishop. The Orthodox liturgist Simeon of Thessalonika confirms this in his classic work *About Sacred Ordinations* (ca. AD 1429): “Two ordinations are given outside the sanctuary, that of the reader and sub-deacon. There are also others for administrators, deputies, acolytes . . . But the (three) exalted ordinations are imparted inside the sanctuary.”

Election to the ministry by God

Before all the major ordinations, the Bishop would speak the so-called ‘Divine Grace’ proclamation. It was considered an essential part of the ordination because through it the bishop elected the ordinand for one of the higher orders. Pseudo-Dionysius (5th cent. AD) explains it clearly: “The ordaining bishop speaks the Divine Grace proclamation with a loud voice. This mystery signifies that the ordaining bishop, who is loved by God, is the herald of the divine choice. It is not he himself who leads the ordinand to ordination by his own grace, but he is moved by God in all ordinations”.

The Divine Grace proclamation declared it was God who chose the ordinand for his or her task. The rite

states: “He [the bishop] says the ‘Divine Grace’ with a loud voice, after which the woman to be ordained bows her head.”

This is the actual formula used: “Divine Grace [= God] who always heals what is infirm and completes what is missing chooses so-and-so [name] as bishop [or priest, deacon] of [name of the location]. Let us therefore pray for him/her that the grace of the Holy Spirit may descend upon him/her.” - The people reply: “Lord, have mercy on us!”

“The imposition of hands was the ceremony through which God’s Spirit actually descended on the ordinand”

Some scholars maintained that the proclamation itself was the ordination, at least originally. But later studies disproved this. Ordination consisted of two distinct stages of one and the same liturgical action, each equally essential: the *election* and the *ordination proper*. The election indicated who was chosen for the ministry. The imposition of hands was the ceremony through which God’s Spirit actually descended on the ordinand.

Note that the ‘Divine Grace’ was only proclaimed for bishops, priests and deacons. The fact that the ordaining bishop proclaimed the ‘Divine Grace’ to announce the divine election of a woman deacon, shows that he ranked her ordination, without any shade of doubt, within the sacrament of major orders, like that of male deacons.

The first imposing of hands while invoking the Holy Spirit

The ordination rite for women deacons says: “The Bishop imposes his hand on her head, makes the sign of the cross on it three times, and prays: ‘Do now look upon this your handmaid, who is to be ordained to the diaconate, and grant her your Holy Spirit. Dedicate her to the task of your diaconate, and pour out into her the rich and abundant giving of your Holy Spirit.’”

In the Eastern tradition, the calling down of the Holy Spirit is technically known as the *epiclesis*. At the eucharist, it is not so much the ‘words of consecration’ but the *epiclesis* that brings about the transformation of the bread and the wine. *Epiclesis*, in one form or other, occurs in all the sacraments, for the sacraments come about through the action of the Spirit. At ordination, the Pentecostal Spirit ‘who provides all things’, pours its fullness into the ordinand: the bishop, the priest or the deacon.

Although mention is made



Participants in the Leadership Collaborative's Hope-Esperanza Conference in Chicago take a group selfie January 27, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Dan Stockman, courtesy Global Sisters Report

of the gifts of the Spirit in the installation prayers of some of the minor orders, it is only bishops, priests and deacons on whom the full *epiclesis* is called down.

Second imposition of hands while calling on the Holy Spirit

The ordination rite continues: "... Meanwhile [during the intercessions] the bishop prays as follows keeping his hand on the head of the woman to be ordained: 'Lord, Master, you do not reject women who dedicate themselves to you and who are willing, in a becoming way, to serve your Holy House, but admit them to the order of your ministers. Grant the gift of your Holy Spirit also to this your maidservant who wants to dedicate herself to you, and fulfil in her the grace of the diaconate, as you have granted to Phoebe the grace of your diaconate, whom you had called to the work of this ministry.'"

The second ordination prayer, added since the 4th century, was known as the *ekphonese*, because the bishop spoke it softly. It was performed only for the major orders: episcopacy, priesthood and diaconate.

It may have been inspired by the need of the ordaining bishop to make sure that the conditions for ordination had been fulfilled. By speaking the *ekphonese* prayer over the woman candidate, the bishop again indicated her being raised to the sacramen-

tal order of the diaconate.

Investing the woman deacon with the official stole

The ordination is confirmed by imposing the diaconate stole: "The bishop puts the stole of the diaconate round her neck, under her [woman's] veil, pulling the two extremities of the stole towards the front."

The bishop himself invests her with the distinctive vestment: to *diakonikon horarion*, the diaconate stole, in a way that agrees with her veil, the *maphorion*. As for functionaries in the Greco-Roman Empire, the distinctive insignia indicated rank and power. The Synod of Laodicea in 363 AD excommunicated anyone wearing the diaconate stole without having been ordained.

Handing over the chalice

The ordination rite also mentions the following: "At the time of the partaking of the sacred mysteries [= holy communion], she [= the newly ordained deacon] shares of the divine body and blood with the [male and female] deacons. When the newly ordained has taken part of the precious body and blood, the bishop hands her the holy vessel. She accepts it and, without distributing it to others, puts it back on the holy table [the altar]."

It should be noted that this is highly significant. At

communion the new woman deacon was present in the sanctuary with the other clergy, for the holy doors of the iconostasis were still closed. She was given the host on her hand by the bishop as her male colleagues were. And she drank from the chalice as they did. Now a special rite was added.

"She was given the host on her hand by the bishop as her male colleagues were. And she drank from the chalice as they did"

For the ordinary faithful, both the wine and pieces of consecrated bread were mixed in a chalice. Communion was given by dipping a little spoon in the chalice and pouring the contents on a communicant's tongue.

It was customary for a newly ordained male deacon to be introduced to his task by making him share in the distribution of holy communion to the laity for, at the public eucharist, it was the male deacons who distributed communion to the faithful. But to show that in principle the woman deacon too received the same commission, the bishop handed her the chalice which contained the consecrated bread and wine, and she herself put it back onto the altar.

This meant that she was, in principle, empowered to distribute communion. It amounts to what theologians call a degree of *potestas in eucharistiam*, authority regarding the eucharist. The Syriac *Testamentum Domini* 5th century) confirms that women deacons took communion to the sick.

Conclusion

In all essentials, the ordination of women to the diaconate in the Byzantine part of the Church ran parallel to that of men. If women were not ordained to the full rank of the diaconate, then neither were the men.

The public setting, the proclamation, the double imposition of hands and invocation of the Spirit, the investiture with the distinctive stole and presentation with the chalice prove abundantly that women, as much as the men, were ordained to the major order of the diaconate.

Most scholars have come to the same conclusion (Thiermeyer 1966; Congar 1973; Vaggagini 1974; Hünermann 1975; Frohnhofer 1986; Aubert 1987; Ansorge 1990; Theodorou 1992; Hof-

richter 1996; Böttigheimer 1996; Lochmann 1996; Jensen 1997; Karidoyanes 1998; Reiniger 1999; Zagano 2000; Winkler 2010; and many others).

The Orthodox scholar Bishop Kallistos Ware sums it up. "The order of deaconess seems definitely to have been an 'ordained' ministry during early centuries in the Christian East ... Some Orthodox writers regard deaconesses as having been a 'lay' ministry."

"There are strong reasons for rejecting this view. In the Byzantine rite the liturgical office for the laying-on of hands for the deaconess is exactly parallel to that for the deacon; and so on the principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* — the Church's worshipping practice is a sure indication of its faith — it follows that the deaconess receives, as does the deacon, a genuine sacramental ordination."

In the Western Latin-speaking part of Europe there were fewer ordinations of women to the diaconate. This was mainly due to patriarchal prejudice against women stemming from Roman law. In spite of that, quite a few women were ordained dea-

cons in present-day Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands and England.

In 786 Charlemagne obtained from Pope Adrian I a sacramentary with ordination rites which the king prescribed as a model for all bishops in his realm. The sacramentary originated under 6th-century Pope Gregory the Great.

"They had access to the altar and fulfilled the tasks proper to a deacon"

Hadrian's sacramentary, which has been preserved in five manuscripts, contains this basic ordination formula for women deacons: 'Prayer to make a woman deacon [*diacona*]. "Hear, O Lord, our petition and send down on this your maidservant here [*on which I impose my hands*] the Spirit of your ordination so that, since you have conferred on her your heavenly office, she may obtain favour with your majesty and may present to others the example of a good life. Through etc.'" It runs parallel to the formula for male deacons.

After the first thousand years, the diaconal ordination of women was gradually halted. Byzantine scholars of the time tell us that the main reason was a growing fear of menstruation, which it was thought, would contaminate the sanctuary.

Balsamon (12th cent.) says: "Formerly the order of deaconesses was recognized as in accordance with ecclesiastical law. They themselves had a position [= a specific duty] at the altar. But because of their monthly defilement their office was removed from the cultic sphere and from the holy altar." Blastares (14th cent.) states: "Today the ministry of women deacons is almost totally unknown ... Apparently, they had access to the altar and fulfilled the tasks proper to a deacon. Later however authorities stopped them from entering the sanctuary or fulfilling their duties because of their uncontrollable menstrual fluids."

More detailed information about all this can be found in my book: *Women Deacons in the Early Church* (Crossroad 2006) and on www.womendeacons.org. On that website I have printed historical records of 108 women deacons who served in present-day Greece, Turkey, France, Italy, Armenia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. There I also published the complete texts of 18 ancient ordination rites and their mention in 11 church councils and synods.

John Wijngaards is a Catholic scripture scholar and a longstanding advocate for women's ordination in the Catholic Church.

"Byzantine scholars of the time tell us that the main reason was a growing fear of menstruation, which it was thought, would contaminate the sanctuary."

Other visions



Penelope Middelboe

My grandmother was a surprising person. She received an MBE for helping young Kenyan women in the 1950s and 1960s; became an ardent campaigner for recycling 35 years before it became compulsory in the UK; and mastered a crude, early word processor to write her last book, at the age of 81.

For more than 60 years she'd banged out books and articles on a typewriter, cigarette dangling from the side of her mouth. I remember her being particularly taken with the way the word processor, unlike a typewriter, could justify text (give the text straight edges on both sides of the paragraph). On one visit she suggested it might also 'justify' the existence of God to my atheist first husband.

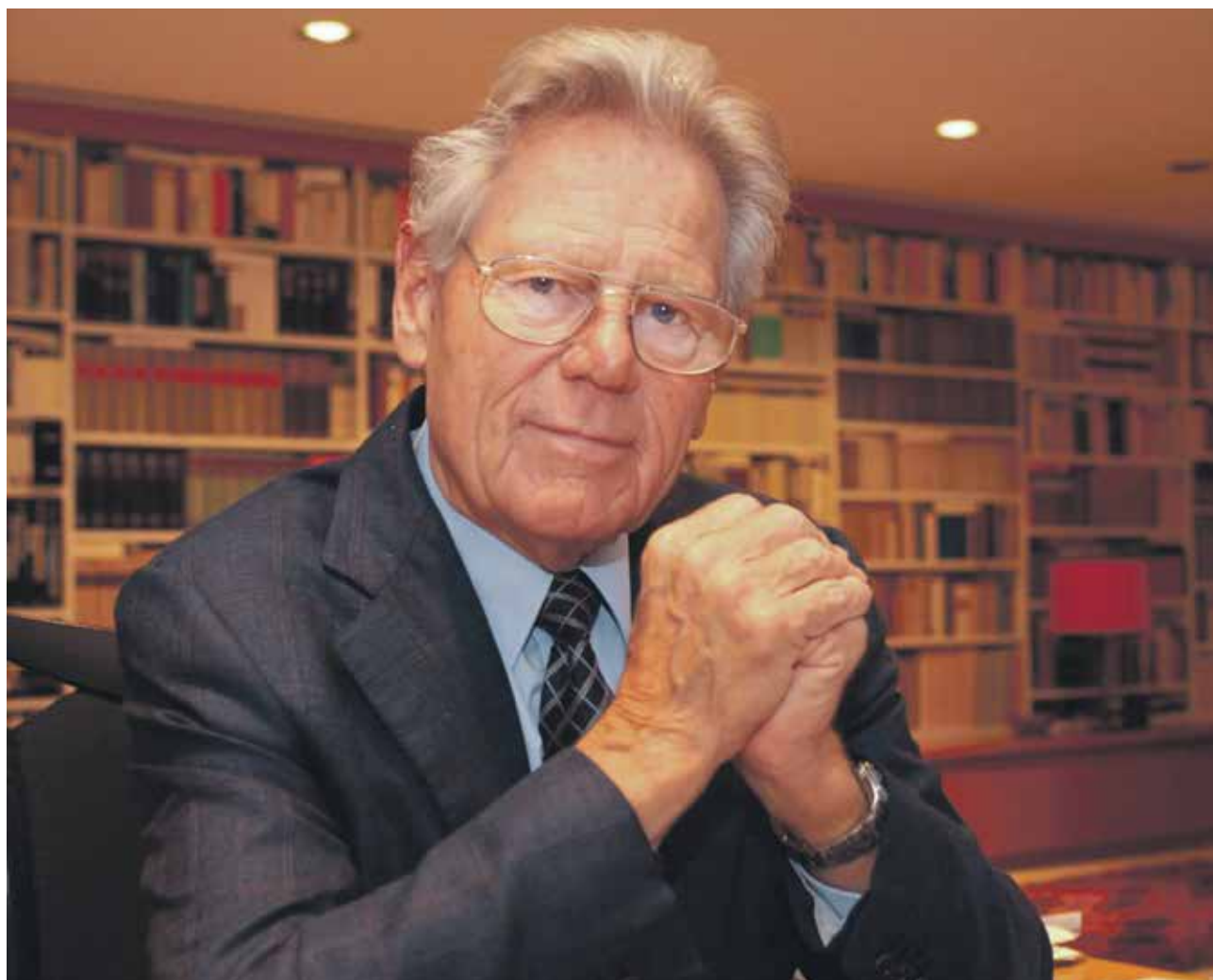
My grandmother was a Catholic convert with some distinguished Anglican clergymen in her family. She was not afraid to see things differently from other people. She believed that women priests would be accepted, but not in her lifetime, and that this would come before married priests because the Church wouldn't be able to afford partners of priests.

Underground

What she didn't know, is that while we sat talking about her spiritual guru, the Swiss priest and theologian Hans Küng, he was working with in an underground Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. And in this secret church called Koinótēs (meaning self-sufficiency) at least five women had been ordained.

Czechoslovakia was under Soviet domination for more than 40 years from the end of World War Two until November 1989. When a Czech Catholic priest, Felix Davidek, emerged from 12 years in prison for 'high treason' in 1964, he had a plan to continue a Catholic underground community and to provide priestly ministry covertly to prisoners.

His plan was to become a bishop himself (long story) and then to ordain married men and women to minister



Fr Hans Küng is pictured in his office in Tübingen, Germany. Photo: CNS/Harald Oppitz, KNA

to people in prison. After all, the communist authorities would never suspect that they could be Catholic priests.

The first woman he ordained was Ludmila Javorová. She was a childhood family friend and a theologian. Ever since his release from prison in 1964 she'd been the only person he trusted with the administration of his secret church.

He made her his vicar general in 1970 and ordained her on December 29 1970 with his brother as witness. Ms Javorová tells us that miraculously someone had smuggled in documents from Vatican II, and they used these as a fresh vision for a church community 'for the future', should freedom ever come.

By the time Fr Davidek died, one year before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, he had kept the underground church alive for 19 years, secretly ordaining 595 priests, at least five of them women. To protect their identities Ms Javorová was the only

witness. These priests daily risked imprisonment, torture and execution.

“There would be no opportunity for the post-Vatican-II church they'd nurtured at such great personal risk to emerge”

After the communist regime had been toppled, the Polish Pope John Paul II absolved all the priests who had openly colluded with the Czech Communists. But he declared all 595 ordinations of the underground church invalid. Single men were told they could attend seminary and pursue ordination all over again. Married priests were told they could join the Byzantine-Slav rite that accepted married priests. The ordinations of the five women

were simply ignored. There would be no opportunity for the post-Vatican-II Church they'd nurtured at such great personal risk to emerge.

Ms Javorová tells us that she wrote to John Paul II herself, but he never replied. She's just had her 92nd birthday and is blind and in poor health. When she last spoke in public she said she accepts she cannot function as a priest but maintains the validity of her orders.

Hans Küng, so revered by my grandmother, met Ms Javorová publicly in 2011 in Vienna. Küng openly deplored the potential that had been lost in the 'dismissal' of the underground priests. In an interview shortly afterwards, Hans Küng, mirroring God's answer to Job, commented “we ... must accept how little we ultimately know.” My grandmother would have agreed. But she had died of leukaemia 20 years before.

Li Tim-Oi

I was reminded of all this when we went, on January 25, to a service at St Martin's-in-the-Fields in London. The occasion was the 80th anniversary of the priesting of the first Anglican woman priest during the Second World War, in China. Florence Li Tim-Oi

At St Martin's, the Anglican Bishop of Dover, Jamaican-born Rose Hudson-Wilkin, took up the story. When Li Tim-Oi got wind of Bishop Hall's predicament, “it was Li Tim-Oi who showed courageous advocacy. She agreed to give up her licence so that Bishop Hall could continue his ministry.” Their new vision of a church was, for the moment, obscured. It would take another 50 years before a woman would be ordained in the Church of England.

Li Tim-Oi would remain a priest but not practice. She was put in charge of a parish near the Vietnam border, where she started a maternity home to prevent girl-babies being smothered at birth. For years, during the Cultural Revolution in China, Li Tim-Oi was forced to undergo political re-education and to work in a factory. The Red Guard made her cut up her vestments.

Legacy

How I wish I had known these two extraordinary stories when my grandmother was alive. She would have understood the absurdity of the treatment of these women, silenced by people who believed we can put God in a box and know His mind.

She never agreed with the Vatican banning Hans Küng from teaching theology for the crime of questioning papal infallibility. For her other visions were always possible.

When my grandmother was diagnosed with incurable leukaemia, she was afraid she wouldn't finish the novel she'd mastered that early word processor to write. It was a very personal interpretation, based on the Gospels, of Jesus's missing years before he begins his ministry. She struggled against the constant pain of angina and fatigue and lived to see the book published. In the blurb she'd written for the back cover she said “...the book will appeal to all those who would like to be given a slightly different version of the Christian story”.

In *Galilean Symphony* she imagines Jesus as a young shepherd. She never claims it is history. But the point is that, ultimately, we know very little about Jesus's childhood. Here, as in so many ways, other visions may renew and challenge us.

i Penelope Middelboe is a writer and history podcast presenter.

was a young woman deacon in the Portuguese territory of Macau, which was then occupied by the Japanese.

She was ordained by Bishop Ronald Hall on January 25 1944. There were no male priests in Macau and the wartime, Anglican 'ghetto' congregation was struggling. Her ministry was warmly welcomed by the community she was already serving and there's a lovely photograph of her wearing her priestly stole, seated calmly and happily in the centre of her church council. It's an image of a church envisioned differently.

“Li Tim-Oi was forced to undergo political re-education and to work in a factory. The Red Guard made her cut up her vestments”

But immediately after the war, when the Anglican Bishops' Conference met at Lambeth Palace, Bishop Hall recounted in person the action he had taken under Japanese occupation. There were immediate calls for his resignation.

Abuses plague riot-affected Pakistani Christians

Kamran Chaudhry

Arif Masih still remembers the day he was left speechless after finding that tons of radishes on his smallholding had started withering last August.

"At first, I thought the radishes were dying due to the August heat. But, I discovered someone had sprayed poisonous chemicals on them. The radishes died one by one," recalled Masih, 40, from Maharanwala, a village in Punjab province.

The attack on his crop came shortly after Muslim mobs attacked and set fire to a number of churches and about 80 houses in a Christian neighbourhood in Jaranwala, a nearby town, on Aug. 16, following the alleged desecration of a Quran by two local Christians.

The rioting that lasted for hours has been described as one of the worst bouts of anti-Christian violence in Muslim-majority Pakistani.

The destruction of Masih's crop meant a net loss of 400,000 rupees (US\$1,440). The financial setback left him unable to buy new clothes for his four children at Easter.

A member of the Salvation Army, Masih has been a landless, marginal farmer tilling two hectares of leased agricultural land for over two decades. This was the first time he incurred such a heavy loss.

Survival

Most Christians in Jaranwala are poor, illiterate people like Masih who rely on low-paying jobs like sanitary work, domestic help and farming for survival, Church sources say.

Masih's family is among 450 Christian households in Maharanwala, where the rioting mob attacked and vandalized six churches.

Adding salt to the wounds were some of Masih's long-time Muslim friends who joined in the rampage.

"My friend Muhammad Bilal phoned and warned me not to go to the Salvation Army church, as he and a mob was about to attack it," he said.

"I asked him not to, but he started hurling abuse. We



Members of the Christian community chant slogans as they hold placards during a protest in Karachi, Pakistan, August 17, 2023, to condemn attacks on churches and houses in the Faisalabad district.

had known each other for years. All the attackers were locals, no outsiders. All relationships perished that day," Masih said.

“At least 26 churches including three Catholic churches and 80 Christian houses were attacked and set ablaze in Jaranwala”

The number of churches attacked in Jaranwala and neighbouring Christian-majority areas is disputed. Some say the figure is 22, while others reported 26 churches were vandalized.

At least 26 churches including three Catholic churches and 80 Christian houses were attacked and set ablaze in Jaranwala and several other Christian settlements on Aug. 16, according to a report from Catholic bishop's National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) released last November.

These areas are home to

6,790 Christians, the report said.

Masih has since been struck by further misfortune as the Muslim village chief who allowed him to cultivate on his land for years cancelled the lease agreement after cases were filed against Muslims following the violence.

"My wheat crop which is ready for harvest will be the last crop cultivated on his land," he said.

Moreover, Masih says he has been falsely accused by a local Muslim who claims the farmer and eight other Christians were planning an attack on his house.

In the aftermath of the Jaranwala attacks, a total of 22 complaints were filed by Christians and 304 people had been arrested as of February 13, according to police. Investigations into 18 cases have been completed and submitted to the local court.

Most of the arrested Muslims have been released and 55 are still in jail, said Muhammad Ali Zia, a police officer in Faisalabad city, which covers Jaranwala.

Zia claimed there has been no further conflict between

Muslims and Christians since the attacks.

Police and local authorities have ensured there is no more Christian-Muslim religious conflict, he said, adding that since the Jaranwala attacks centres for the protection of minorities as well as inter-faith harmony and peace committees have been set up.

"We are committed to avoiding incidents like Jaranwala happening again," he added.

Rampant discrimination

Masih said his family has been in a dire situation. He sold three cows to cover family expenses, loans, and the cost of traveling to attend court hearings for the case filed by the Muslim.

He alleged that he has been targeted since March 16 when he accompanied a police officer to identify the houses of the Aug. 16 rioters in his village.

That same morning, three Christians called police to say they had been threatened by Muslims.

"Instead, the police registered a fabricated case against Christians including myself," Masih said.

Such abuse and violence against minority Christians who make up 2.6 million of the 235 million population and suffer from social discrimination, lack of educa-

tion and decent employment, Christian leaders say.

A sizable number of Christians are engaged in menial jobs such as sanitary work. The federal and provincial government often reserve low-paying sanitation jobs for Christians only.

“193 attacks on individuals, properties, and places of worship of minorities were recorded, according to the annual fact sheet of the Center for Social Justice”

Christians are also routinely abused and attacked by Muslims under the guise of violating controversial blasphemy laws, which punish defamation of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad with life imprisonment and the death penalty.

Christians and other minority group members have been killed in Muslim mob attacks instigated by unproven allegations of blasphemy.

Last year, 193 attacks on individuals, properties, and places of worship of minorities were recorded, according to the annual fact sheet of the Center for Social Jus-

tice, a Lahore-based rights group.

Last month, the two Christians accused of blasphemy that sparked the anti-Christian violence in Jaranwala were freed from jail. An anti-terrorism court in Faisalabad allowed their release while the Supreme Court rejected a report on the attacks submitted by the Punjab provincial government.

Meanwhile, the NCJP has secured bail for all nine Maharanwala Christians including Masih until April 18 amid ongoing investigations.

‘Heavy price’

Besides such legal support, Catholic and Protestant churches have been offering humanitarian services to affected Christians to help rebuild their lives.

Church leaders have distributed aid to the affected families. Catholic charity Caritas has offered support to rebuild 40 Christian houses destroyed in the violence.

A team of 15 Catholics painted renovated and rebuilt Christian houses in Jaranwala and surrounding villages before Easter celebrations.

Faisalabad diocese has formed a Christian Joint Action Committee on the Jaranwala incident to oversee humanitarian assistance to victims.

Christians will receive motorcycles and rickshaws soon, said Father Khalid Rashid Asi, the convenor the committee.

"Some local rickshaw drivers avoid taking Christians in Jaranwala blaming them for having the Muslims arrested. We condemn this kind of harassment and discrimination," he said.

Waqar Masih, a Protestant Christian and mason in Maharanwala, said he lost much of his monthly income of 30,000 rupees since the attack.

"We can barely afford three meals a day," said the father of two, alleging that Muslims have been boycotting Christian workers.

"Nobody hires us," Masih said.

He thanked Church groups for lending a hand to support people like him.

📌 Kamran Chaudhry, based in Lahore city, reports issues of religion, social justice and human rights from Pakistan. A journalist of more than 15 years, he also contributes videos and commentaries.

“In the aftermath of the Jaranwala attacks, a total of 22 complaints were filed by Christians and 304 people had been arrested as of February 13, according to police”



World Report

IN BRIEF

US bishop accuses Archbishop Viganò of 'public defamation'

● A US bishop has publicly rebuked the former apostolic nuncio to the United States.

The clash between Bishop James Powers of the Diocese of Superior and Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò stems from a March 22 post on X in which the controversial former Vatican official criticised what he called a "shamanic ceremony" at the start of the Superior Diocese's 2024 chrism Mass.

The March 19 Mass at its outset featured four Ojibwe women engaging in traditional dance while accompanied by Indigenous drumming. Archbishop Viganò in his post called the ritual "a very serious sacrilege", describing Powers as "a squalid official of the ecumenical religion" and "not a successor of the apostles but a servant of Freemasonry".

Arguing that Archbishop Viganò's rhetoric "does not befit an archbishop of the Catholic Church" and that it "brings harm to the faithful" entrusted to his care, Bishop Powers requested "a public apology from [Archbishop Viganò] to me and my people".

Missionaries in Haiti hang on despite shortages of food, water and medicine

● As the situation becomes more and more chaotic in Haiti, with criminal gangs controlling vast territories in Port-au-Prince and citizens facing growing difficulties to obtain food, water, and medicines, Brazilian missionaries in one of the capital city's poorest districts fear they soon may not have enough provisions to continue their work.

According to Br Hélio

Ferreira, one of the five members of Missão Belém (Mission Bethlehem, in Portuguese) in Haiti, with the border with the Dominican Republic closed and the airport inactive, the Caribbean nation is facing an acute shortage of basic food items and medicines.

"Last month we managed to buy some food just a couple of days before running totally out of provisions," Ferreira told *Crux*.

Communion wafers found discarded in car park of US church

● Catholics who attended Easter Mass at a historic Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, church were met with a disturbing sight when they left the service to go back home - at least 100 Communion wafers were strewn across the parking lot and nearby street.

"[The people] were upset because they were concerned [they could be] consecrated hosts," Fr Timothy Grassi said of the incident that took place at 190-year-old St Peter's Roman Catholic Church.

It's unclear who placed the wafers on the ground or what message the perpetrator was trying to convey, but the church reported the action to the National Park Service law enforcement, which is investigating the matter. Fr Grassi told *CNA* he has not received any updates since the incident was reported to the police.

Zimbabwe bishops sound alarm over El Niño-related droughts

● As the El Niño climate phenomenon produces drought and food shortages in several African nations, the Catholic bishops of Zimbabwe are issuing urgent appeals to avoid what they describe as a serious risk of starvation.

According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), El Niño reached a peak in December that will result in above-normal temperatures until May. The spike has affected several countries in Southern Africa, including Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the temperature increases have triggered dry spells, low and erratic rainfall and elevated temperatures and floods, all of which have led to low harvests. In Zimbabwe, the government recently estimated that droughts related to El Niño have left 2.7 million people at risk of starvation.

Vatican says 'no' to sex changes and gender theory in new document

The Vatican on Monday reaffirmed its opposition to sex changes, gender theory and surrogate parenthood, as well as abortion and euthanasia, four months after supporting blessings for same-sex couples.

The Vatican's doctrinal office (DDF) released the '*Dignitas infinita*' (Infinite dignity) declaration following fierce conservative push-back, especially in Africa, against its document on LGBT issues.

There is no suggestion that the new text, which describes what the Church perceives as threats to human dignity, was prepared in direct response to the rows over same-sex blessings, as it has been five years in the making. But it has undergone extensive revisions over the period.

Pope Francis approved it after requesting that it also mention "poverty, the situation of migrants, violence against women, human trafficking, war, and other themes", the head of the DDF, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, said in a statement.

The declaration said surrogate parenting violated the dignity of both the surrogate mother and the child, and recalled that Francis in January called it "despicable" and urged a global ban.

On gender theory, the declaration said that "desiring a personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, apart from this fundamen-



About 15,000 visitors join Pope Francis for the midday recitation of the "Regina Coeli" prayer in St Peter's Square at the Vatican April 7. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

tal truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel".

Gender theory, often called gender ideology by its detractors, suggests that gender is more complex and fluid than the binary categories of male and female, and depends on more than visible sexual characteristics.

On changes of gender, the declaration said that "any sex-change intervention,

as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception".

It acknowledged that some people may undergo surgery to resolve "genital abnormalities", but stressed that "such a medical procedure would not constitute a sex change in the sense intended here".

At the same time, the text also denounced as contrary to human dignity the fact that "in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of

the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation".

Elsewhere, the declaration doubled down on the Vatican's standing condemnation of abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty, quoting from Francis, his predecessors Benedict XVI and John Paul II and past Vatican documents.

It also mentioned sexual abuse as a threat to human dignity - calling it "widespread in society", including within the Catholic Church - as well as violence against women, cyberbullying and other forms of online abuse.

UK abuse survivors campaign seeks culture change in the Church

St Joseph's Cathedral in Wheeling, West Virginia was the scene on Sunday of an event to show support for survivors of sexual abuse in the Church and advocate for meaningful change, not only in ecclesiastical structures and governance practices, but in ecclesiastical culture generally.

Some 120 people came to see the 'Walk in my shoes' installation designed and executed by LOUDfence, a survivor advocacy organisation founded by Cath-

olic laywoman Antonia Sobocki in 2020 in the UK, which has garnered the support of many UK bishops and has now come stateside. Survivors were among the participants, including several from beyond the confines of West Virginia.

The "Walk in my shoes" installation in Wheeling on Sunday was the first LOUDfence event in the United States, and featured exhibits dramatising the trauma, the plight, and most of all the presence of survivors in the Church. "The response

was really intense," Ms Sobocki told *Crux* on Sunday.

Pairs of shoes representing victims of abuse feature prominently in the installation. They represent victims from all around the world who have contacted LOUDfence. They are not only victims who suffered abuse when they were minors, but also adult victims from every state of life in the Church: laity, clerics, religious men and women.

Michigan bishops lament new surrogacy law, say women could be exploited

A newly enacted package of bills in Michigan that decriminalises paid surrogacy contracts ignores multiple concerns that exist within the practice, including protecting women from exploitation and human trafficking, according to the state's Catholic bishops.

Governor Gretchen Whit-

mer signed the Michigan Family Protection Act earlier this month. Ms Whitmer touted the package of bills as "commonsense, long overdue" action that not only repeals the state's ban on surrogacy contracts, but also protects families formed by in vitro fertilisation (IVF), and ensures LGBTQ+ parents

are treated equally.

Meanwhile, the Michigan Catholic Conference, the policy arm of the state's Catholic bishops, have warned that the bills will create a new, unregulated industry in the state that will result in the advertising, recruiting and targeting of women to become paid egg donors and surrogates.

The organisation also said it fears that the state will likely see a surge in surrogate agencies and attorneys whose work is built around negotiating contracts between couples of individuals with means and "vulnerable, cash strapped young women" for the conception, birth, and forfeit of a child.



Edited by Brandon Scott
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Shaking a nation's foundations



Workers carry out operations April 4, 2024, at the site where a building collapsed following a 7.4 magnitude earthquake near Hualien, Taiwan. Photo: OSV News

Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew hopes for 'unified date' for Easter in East and West

The Eastern Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople has expressed a desire that Christians in the East and the West begin celebrating Easter on a "unified date" rather than adhere to separate Lenten calendars.

"It is a scandal to celebrate separately the unique event of the one resurrection of the one Lord," Patriarch Bartholomew I, who holds the title "first among equals" in Eastern Orthodoxy, said in a recent homily, according to *Orthodox Times*.

The ecumenical patriarch made the

comments during a homily on March 31, which marked Easter on the Western calendar and the second Sunday of Lent on the Eastern calendar.

"We extend a heartfelt greeting of love to all Christians around the world who celebrate holy Easter today," Bartholomew said during the homily. "We beseech the Lord of Glory that the forthcoming Easter celebration next year will not merely be a fortuitous occurrence but rather the beginning of a unified date for its observance by both Eastern and Western Christian-

ity."

The ecumenical patriarch noted that the Eastern Orthodox Church in Constantinople sent representatives to Christian communities who celebrated Easter on March 31 "to extend our heartfelt wishes".

He also said this effort is "particularly significant" because the 1,700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicea of 325 is approaching. That meeting took place at a time when the Eastern and Western Churches were in full communion with each other.

'Rocker' Spanish priest dies from burns suffered during lighting of Easter fire

Fr Javier Sánchez of the Archdiocese of Zaragoza in Spain died last week from burns he suffered when his liturgical vestments caught fire from a candle during the Easter Vigil. According to the Spanish newspaper *El Heraldo de Aragón*, sources from the archdiocese said the priest "tried to protect the nuns of the convent".

"The priest tried to protect the nuns of the convent when embers lit up in the basin that was used [for the fire] and that ultimately caused his death. Apparently a flammable substance had been used to start the fire. [The Easter Vigil] was held inside the convent," said the source cited by the Spanish newspaper.

Fr Sánchez, 60, who was a parish priest at St Gregory Church, was a counsellor of the Brotherhood of Humility and chaplain of the Franciscan Conceptionists of the Santa Isabel neighborhood in Zaragoza, according to a statement published by the archdiocese.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis: I was 'used' against Ratzinger in 2005 conclave

● Pope Francis said he was "used" in the 2005 conclave in an effort to block the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, though he supported the candidacy of the man who soon became Pope Benedict XVI.

"He was my candidate," Francis said of his predecessor in excerpts from the forthcoming book 'The Successor', published by the Spanish newspaper ABC on Easter Sunday.

In the book, Pope Francis told Spanish journalist Javier Martínez-Brocal that his name, then-Cardinal Jose Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, was put forward as part of a "complete manoeuvre" by an unnamed group of cardinals to manipulate the conclave's outcome.

Pope on Gaza conflict: 'Without justice, there is no peace'

● Pope Francis during his general audience on last Wednesday deplored the recent killing of humanitarian workers in the Gaza Strip, with the Holy Father renewing his appeal for an immediate cease-fire amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

The Pope buttressed his plea with a

catechesis focused on the virtue of justice, noting that it is the building block for a well-ordered society premised upon the rule of law.

"I express deep regret for the volunteers killed while distributing food aid in Gaza," the Pope said to the 25,000 gathered in St Peter's Square.

Vatican employee busted for selling stolen goods online

● According to Italian media reports, a middle-aged Italian Vatican employee was caught trying to sell stolen goods online, after one of the items was identified by the original owner. The man in question was a 54-year-old Italian who was caught selling a stolen Hamilton watch, a brand that can cost anywhere from €500-1000 euros or more, online.

He was caught after the owner of the watch filed a complaint with police at Rome's Porta Pia station after the watch and other valuable items were stolen from his home, and after having seen the watch for sale on a second-hand online site. Officers arranged a sting operation in which they posed as a potential buyer of the watch and organized a meeting with the seller near the area of Giulio Cesare in Rome.

International conference in Rome demands abolition of surrogacy

● For two days, experts from around the world come together to discuss the issues surrounding surrogacy. The conference is organised by the collective that signed the Casablanca Declaration in 2023. The Holy See is participating.

On March 3, 2023, a hundred experts from 75 nationalities, including jurists, physicians, psychologists, and philosophers, signed the 'Casablanca Declaration' from the Moroccan metropolis, calling for

the establishment of a treaty abolishing Surrogacy.

Convinced that "the contract by which one or more principals agree with a woman to carry a child or children for them for delivery at birth, regardless of its designation and terms", the participants called on States, through this text, to condemn surrogacy "in all its forms and under all its forms, whether paid or not, and to adopt measures to combat this practice".



Letter from Rome

Pope stresses close relationship with predecessor but takes swipe at his former secretary



Elise Ann Allen

Pope Francis opened up about tensions between himself and the private secretary of his predecessor Benedict XVI, German Archbishop Georg Gänswein, who he said made things “difficult” for him.

Speaking to Spanish Journalist Javier Martinez-Brocal with ABC Español, Francis addressed comparisons between himself and Benedict, saying such comparisons are normal, and that even Benedict was compared to John Paul II.

However, he said certain things were attributed to Benedict XVI that weren't true, and voiced his belief that those who saw Benedict's resignation as “the end of the Church” and as having caused enormous harm had “a position that's a bit ideological”.

Pope Francis, without giving names, said Benedict once “expelled” someone who spoke badly about him from the Mater Ecclesiae monastery where Benedict resided, “but he did it with gentleness. He was a gentleman”.

Francis said that in turn, he once confided in Benedict that Gänswein, who served as Benedict's personal secretary throughout his papacy and the years after his resignation, “did some very difficult things to me”. Offering a concrete example, Pope Francis, without mentioning the name, said he once replaced the head of a Vatican department “and the decision generated some controversy”.

“In the midst of all that noise, the secretary took the initiative to take him to see Benedict, since that person wanted to greet him. Since the Pope emeritus was very kind, he accepted,” Francis said, saying the problem was that “they spread the photo of that meeting, as if Benedict was answering my decision”.

Forceful

“Honestly, it wasn't right,” he said, saying many people wanted Benedict to be more “forceful” or “directive” in his years of retirement and “enter the game of controversy. But he never did”. Asked whether he had consulted Benedict XVI about his decision to roll back Benedict's liberalisation of the use of the Traditional Latin Mass, Francis said he never spoke to Benedict about it, but



Pope Francis walks next to Archbishop Georg Gänswein, prefect of the papal household, during the general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican in this May 29, 2019, file photo. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

that Benedict once defended him when he was facing criticism over his support for civil unions for gay couples.

Shortly after the controversy over those remarks erupted, Francis said, a group of cardinals went to see Benedict about it, and during the meeting, “Benedict did not become agitated, because he knew perfectly what I thought”.

“He listened to all of them, one by one, and he calmed them and explained,” distinguishing between civil unions and sacramental marriage, telling the cardinals that “this is not a heresy.” “How he defended me!” Francis said, saying this situation helped him understand that there were people “who were half covered and who took advantage of the slightest opportunity to bite me”, but Benedict “always defended me”.

“I felt obliged to ask Benedict's secretary to take a ‘voluntary leave’, maintaining his position as Prefect of the Papal Household and also his salary”

Pope Francis also touched on tensions with other Benedict supporters, referring specifically to the January 2020 book *From the Depths of our Hearts: Priesthood, Celibacy, and the Crisis of the Catholic Church*, which was pub-

lished as having been co-authored by Benedict XVI and Cardinal Robert Sarah.

At the time, the impression was that Benedict was siding with the conservative Sarah in defending priestly celibacy at a time when Pope Francis was weighing proposals to allow limited ordination of married men in some areas of the Amazon, following the 2019 Synod of Bishops on the Amazon.

In the wake of the uproar, “I felt obliged to ask Benedict's secretary to take a ‘voluntary leave’, maintaining his position as Prefect of the Papal Household and also his salary”, Francis said. He described Sarah as “a good man”, and a man of prayer, but said voiced his belief that during his tenure as prefect of the Vatican's department of liturgy, Sarah was “immediately manipulated by separatist groups”.

Bitter

“At times I have the impression that working in the Roman Curia made him a little bitter,” he said. Last year, following the death and funeral of Benedict XVI, Pope Francis sent Gänswein back to his native Diocese of Freiburg in Germany with no official position, seen by many as a direct snub.

Pope Francis's words were made in a new interview book *The Successor* on his relationship with Benedict XVI, set to be published by Planeta on April 3. Speaking generically of his relationship with Benedict, Francis said “he never stopped supporting me”, and that even if Benedict disagreed with something, “he never said it”, and would instead simply draw his attention to other aspects of a given issue.

“If there was a man who went forward, who was progressive, it was him. To the point that, in the time of the Second Vatican Council, he was seen with suspicion. Even the decision to resign was very advanced, very progressive,” he said, praising Benedict as “a great theologian”.

“It has always caught my attention that he was one of the first to join up the Second Vatican Council to achieve reform,” he said. Francis said that while still Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he visited then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger every time he came to Rome, while Ratzinger was prefect of the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to discuss things like episcopal appointments and the abuse crisis.

“Francis said that Benedict refused, saying, ‘I don't know why Cardinal Bergoglio has so many enemies here’, and extended his mandate another two years”

Benedict, he said, “acted with courage” on the abuse issue, and was serious about cleaning things up. He recalled how once, then-Cardinal Ratzinger had a meeting with officials of the Vatican's Secretariat of State to address allegations against disgraced Legionaries of Christ founder, Fr Marcial Maciel Degollado, and that he had brought a dossier on

Maciel to the meeting.

However, after the meeting, he had the dossier shelved, telling his secretary, “take it back to the archive, the other party won”. (The reference likely was to a conflict between Ratzinger and the Vatican's then-Secretary of State, Italian Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who was close to the Legionaries and opposed taking action against Maciel. Sodano's role was later made public by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna.)

Despite the setback, Benedict, Francis said, “didn't put the case aside or let it go. He looked for the right moment and, years later, as Pope, the first thing he did was face that question and clean it up. He was a fighter who did not throw in the towel, who did not give up until he finished what he considered just”.

In 2006, as Pope, Benedict XVI removed Maciel from active ministry and sentenced him to a life of prayer and penance. Francis recalled how Benedict, prior to his resignation, defended him in 2011 when mid-level officials in the then-Congregation for Bishops wanted him out of leadership, so had prepared something on his resignation when he reached the retirement age of 75, and had already selected a new name as the next Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Instead of accepting, however, Francis said that Benedict refused, saying, “I don't know why Cardinal Bergoglio has so many enemies here”, and extended his mandate another two years.

Consequential

Pope Francis said he believes Benedict's decision to resign was likely the most consequential decision he made. He said he heard about the resignation shortly after it was announced, and a journalist friend in Rome called him to give him the news and the details as things were happening.

Francis said he never took seriously reports of tensions between he and Benedict, calling them “nonsense. I didn't get into them”. He said he met with Benedict regularly, and that they discussed various things, such as the controversial “Synodal Path” reform process in Germany.

Pope Francis said he showed Benedict a June 2019 letter he had written to the leadership of the German Bishops' conference warning that the process risked breaking Church unity, saying, “Benedict said that it was one of the most relevant and also most profound documents that I had written.”

Elise Ann Allen currently works as a Senior Correspondent for Crux in Rome.

Letters

Letter of the week

Rooted in the truth of Christ's love

Dear Editor, I was heartened by Bishop Kevin Doran's recent remarks in the article about the changing cultural landscape and its impact on our Faith [The Irish Catholic – April 4, 2024]. His call to focus on the fundamentals of our beliefs and the support offered by the Church is more important than ever as we face into

ever more hostile territory.

In a society where faith is increasingly marginalised, Bishop Doran's reminder of the enduring truth of Christ's resurrection and the importance of communal support through the Church is timely and inspiring. It encourages us to remain steadfast in our convictions and to find strength in

our spiritual community.

As Bishop Doran aptly pointed out, our faith transcends public policy and social media trends; it is rooted in the eternal truth of Christ's love.

Yours etc.,
Mary Ryan
Bray, Co. Wicklow

Would there be enough to convict you?

Dear Editor, I wish to refer to an article in the March 7 issue of your paper. The article was headed: 'A Strange march for nuns to take part in' [The Irish Catholic – March 7, 2024].

As far as I can see the researcher did not complete his/her homework. The march in question was a 'Solidarity March'. As I read the article, I wasn't clear as to what David Quinn was actually trying to say. The headline was disturbing. As another religious sister, a Franciscan, whose life has been spent working, praying and, at times, marching for peace, justice and reconciliation I found it hard to reconcile it with what I expect from a Catholic paper. If we don't stand for justice and peace how can we expect others to do so. Our beloved Pope Francis from the very start of his Pontificate has been calling on us for just this. I was reminded of a poster we had in many of our houses in the past: "If You Were Arrested Today For Being A Christian, Would There Be Enough Evidence To Convict YOU?" The Dominican sisters certainly would in my estimation if they lived in a state where marches for solidarity were forbidden. Thank God we don't.

Yours etc.,
Sr Anne Mary Hannon
Dublin 7



Human rights intact in the grave

Dear Editor, I read Theo McDonald's article on Covid and the opposition to vaccines [The Irish Catholic – March 28, 2024].

My simple comment is two-fold:

1. The only people I know of who died of Covid were against the vaccine and not vaccinated.

2. I look at some of the main proponents of anti-lockdown and herd immunity and I ask myself, do I want to be in the same room as

they? Boris Johnston being a prime example.

You can fool some of the people... God protect us from such.

And your correspondent rattles on about human rights, God help my foolish friends whose human rights are intact with them in the grave.

Yours etc.,
Sean Creaney
Blackrock Co. Dublin

Neighbour's house on fire

Dear Editor, Next year will be the 400th anniversary of the birth of St Oliver Plunkett. Scotland has passed a law against 'Hate Speech'. I'm reminded of a letter St Oliver wrote in 1674 (our saints still speak to us today): "Here we are in greater fear and trembling than ever, for our neighbour's house is on fire. In Scotland the Parliament enacted that in future it should be considered high treason to hear Mass. It would seem the days of Nero and Domitian and

Diocletian have returned. The penalty for this crime of high treason is to be disembowelled and quartered. So, we shall have the blood of martyrs in abundance to fertilise the Church...

"It is like the time of the early Church; ... it is my hope the Church will once again be made glorious and enriched by the sufferings... and martyrdoms of devoted servants, imitators of Christ."

In Scotland it's illegal to stir

up hatred based on age, disability, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity. Some say it infringes on free speech and Catholic liberty. We have over 3,000 reports of hate within 48 hours of this law been enacted. A controversial hate speech bill approved by the Irish Government, is making its way through the Seanad.

It is a good thing to make better known the heroic story of St Oliver to love him and to pray to him for the grace to

stand up and speak the truth and triumph over all evil that is attacking Ireland.

Glorious martyr St Oliver, may all hatred and bitterness be banished from the hearts of Irish men and women. May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts, as in your heart.

Pray for us and Ireland. Amen.

Yours etc.,
Fintan Tracey
Bettystown, Co. Meath

'Religion-free' spaces

Visitors to Dublin Airport will be familiar with the simple yet profound message on the belltower of the on-site Catholic Church: God is love. That statement from the first chapter of the Gospel according to St John neatly encapsulates 5,000 years of salvation history.

At first thought, the presence of a church at an airport, and the ministry of chaplain Fr Des Doyle, may seem like a peculiar thing from another era. But as in all places of comings and goings, all human life is there in the airport.

Think, for example, of the emigrant taking the lonely flight home from Australia after news that a parent has died. Or the immigrant in Ireland frantically making their way to the airport for a long trip to the land of their birth in the hope of arriving for a brief 'goodbye' before a loved one dies.

Airports are often places we associated with happiness: holidays, a honeymoon, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity etc. But, for many people they are also places where painful and difficult journeys begin. And if "God is in the bits and pieces of Everyday" as Kavanagh wrote, then God is surely in the airport.

Dublin Airport has announced that the traditional 'blessing of the planes' ceremony cannot take place as usual in coming years due to security considerations. Apparently, the regulator has changed security rules 'air-side' and the chaplain blessing the assembled planes is now a no-no.

The airport authorities say they are looking at other ways to facilitate the blessing that will ensure that security procedures are adhered to.

Given that the decision was announced after atheist campaigners questioned the blessing given that atheists were not part of the ceremony, people of faith will understandably question what is really going on.

Sources close to the process have told this newspaper that the campaign by atheists has had no impact on the decision, and safety and security is indeed the reason.

Whatever the reasons behind the decision, it's a curious campaign by atheists to try to stop a blessing ceremony because they are not part of it.

Secular campaigners often tell us that they have nothing against religion or people of

faith. They simply want to be left alone, they claim.

But, at the same time, there is a strand of strident atheism that can only be described as aggressive secularism. They actually care little about deep philosophical debates, and care more about removing every vestige of faith from the public square.

If puritanism has been defined as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy". What does one say of atheism *de type irlandais*?

At least for some atheists, their allergy around faith compels them to work to strip life of all transcendent meaning. Why, for example, if pilots, crew and passengers draw some comfort and consolation from knowing that at 35,000 feet their plane is blessed, try to stop this?

Not everyone who goes to hospital is religious, but people even people who wouldn't describe themselves as 'Gospel greedy' often draw solace from religious iconography. Why should this be removed in favour of some sort of enforced bland uniformity with little more than lilac paint to lift the heart and mind?

Recent years have also seen a concerted effort by atheist campaigners to eject religious chaplains from hospitals and from the defence forces. These should be 'religion-free' spaces the logic goes.

There is a stunning tone deafness about the campaigns, and certainly no-one involved in these campaigns can have any experience of dealing with a chaplain at a difficult time.

Take, for example, when fallen soldier Private Seán Rooney was murdered by Hezbollah Islamists in Lebanon in 2022. As news spread in the close-knit Defence Forces community, it was the priest-chaplains who took the lead. It was the 'padre' serving in Lebanon who comforted Private Rooney's comrades. It was another chaplain in Ireland who drove at pace during the night, to ensure that he could bring the dreadful news to Private Rooney's mother Natasha that the child she had nursed in her arms just a few years earlier had died in the service of his nation.

Bland secular platitudes and cheap nihilism feeds nobody's soul.

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.

If we want peace, the UN Security Council needs to go



Michael Sanfey

In a lecture delivered last month at the European University Institute in Florence, European Central Bank Executive Board member Isabel Schnabel referenced the importance of 'creative destruction', a concept associated with the Austrian political economist Joseph Schumpeter.

It means that in a well-functioning system, productivity is boosted by the exit of inefficient firms and processes and their replacement by more dynamic ones.

The problem with international organisations is that this does not happen – creative destruction is largely unknown.

A case in point is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) which clearly fails 'the Ronseal test' – it does not do what it says on the tin – ie., it doesn't provide international security.

The most egregious example of this was the February 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine by the then President-in-Office of the UNSC, Russia, which made a complete mockery of the idea of 'global governance'.

A second example is the Gaza-Israel conflict stemming from the savage massacres which took place in Israel on October 7, 2023, leading to Israel's punitive, still ongoing and highly controversial military actions.

Over a long period the struggle between Palestinians and Israelis had been left to fester, and indeed the late-2020 Abraham Accords seemed to relegate the Palestinian issue to a zone of international disinterest, with the UNSC as a kind of bystander.

Following the events of October 7, the Palestinian issue returned to the agenda with a vengeance.

Some UN insiders – eg., senior diplomats – habitually defend the UNSC by saying that "Yes, it's not perfect, but imagine if we didn't have it."

It's akin to declaring "My favourite football team is hopeless but imagine if we didn't have it." Such an attitude does nothing to boost performance. It's complacency, not humility.

The summit of the future

What can be done to improve things, and how soon? An opportunity for radical change presents itself later this year when 'The Summit of the



A church destroyed by a Russian attack on the village of Bohorodychne in Ukraine's Donetsk region is pictured February 13. Photo: OSV News/Vladyslav Musiienko, Reuters

Future' (SOTF) will take place at the United Nations in New York on September 22-23.

The UN itself describes the summit as "a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and address gaps in global governance, reaffirm existing commitments including to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Charter, and move towards a reinvigorated multilateral system that is better positioned to positively impact people's lives."

“Multilateralism is not an option,' the declaration continued, 'but a necessity as we build back better for a more equal, more resilient, and more sustainable world’”

During a Carnegie Endowment online event last month, UN Under-Secretary General Guy Rider explained that the idea for the summit stemmed from the UN75 Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2020 commemorating the 75th anniversary of the setting up of the UN.

Inter alia that declaration said that the challenges facing the world are interconnected and could only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism.

"Multilateralism is not an option," the declaration continued, "but a necessity as we build back

better for a more equal, more resilient, and more sustainable world."

The weakness of the declaration is exemplified by the content of Articles 9 and 10 which said "We will promote peace and prevent conflicts" and "We will abide by international law and ensure justice". Neither has been borne out in practice.

All such documents necessarily seem to contain their share of bromides, but in the context of the forthcoming SOTF, the worrying thing is that its outcome document – The Pact for the Future – will be similarly replete with high-blown rhetoric that doesn't deliver.

UN model of multilateralism open to question

There is a rich repository of academic literature on the subject of multilateralism. For example, the Italian political scientist Mario Telò wrote a brilliant book entitled *Multilateralism – Past, Present and Future – A European Perspective* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2023).

He noted that some critics say that "the West is declining and too myopic to take a long-term approach to global governance".

However, he points out that "the war in Ukraine of 2022 and its acceptance or tolerance by many Asian, African and Latin American countries is not making the global credibility of the BRICs and their soft power stronger."

In *Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism* (Brill, Leiden, 2023) Fontaine-Skronski et al wrote that the UN

"remains a controversial model of multilateralism."

The China syndrome

We've already noted that Russia made a laughing stock of 'global governance' by invading Ukraine in February 2022. What about China, Russia's very close partner?

Writing in *Crisis of Multilateralism? Challenges and Resilience* (Palgrave Macmillan // Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy, 2023) Camille M. Brugier gets to the heart of a key problem with the UN system.

“This is also central to its attempts to circumscribe the progression of liberal norms that it perceives to be destabilising for its own regime”

About China, she says that the real challenge with it in the liberal international order is what it stands for.

She notes that in a UN context "China's objective, through its appointed nationals and increasing financial engagement, is to spread a set of values at odds with political liberalism and individual rights."

"This is also central to its attempts to circumscribe the progression of liberal norms that it perceives to be destabilising for its own regime."

Songpo Yang of Tsinghua University speaking during a Chatham House online event on August 30, 2023, said that the international

order that China wants is essentially UN-centred.

Yet Brugier points out that "China also contributes to relative losses of power of the UN by creating alternative venues of discussion, international initiatives, and multilateral organisations such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation".

Prof. Matteo Dain of the University of Bologna, speaking at the 2024 EU-Asia annual Conference at the EUI on 18 March 'Italy, Europe, the G7 and the China challenge' referred to what he termed China's "ideological over-supply". China's zeal in this context could be deemed counter-productive.

Global security governance and elite deals

The zero draft of the Pact for the Future that was released by its co-facilitators Germany and Namibia has chapters on (i) Sustainable Development and Financing for Development (ii) International Peace and Security (iii) Science Technology and Innovation, and Digital Cooperation (iv) Youth and Future Generations (v) Transforming Global Governance. Clearly, this represents a huge range of important topics with ample room for spreading desired improvements too thinly.

As the recently elected President of Finland Alexander Stubb put it in his farewell address to the School of Transnational Governance last month, the problem with peace efforts these days is that they are transactional, rather than multilateral.

In a draft paper entitled 'Inventive Interventions' presented at the Robert Schuman Centre in Florence on March 5, 2024, Prof. Simone Tholens et al wrote that "Global security governance (structures) are primarily webs of elite deals".

What comes next?

If September's 'Summit of the Future' is to have a positive effect on global governance and international peace and security, an acceptance of this reality is a necessary starting point, followed by 'creative destruction' of any structures that have not delivered.

Specifically, the UN Security Council needs to be abolished – not 'tinkered with' for the next several years to no appreciable effect – and replaced by an altogether new body. The possible outlines of such a structure will be detailed in Part Two of this article.

i This article was initially published on EUIdeas <https://euideas.eui.eu/> Michael Sanfey holds a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from UCP Lisbon. He is a Visiting Fellow at the EUI's Robert Schuman Centre.

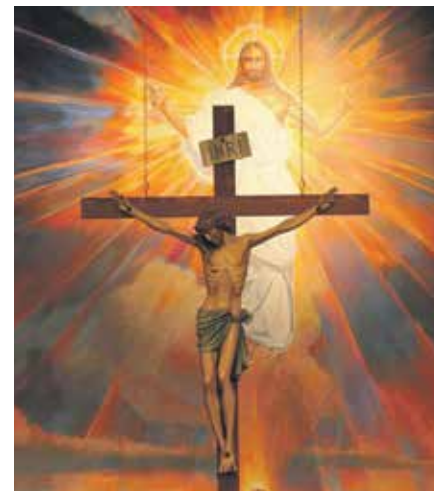
Your Faith

Debunking theories that dismiss Christ's resurrection

Carl E. Olson

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The Irish Catholic, April 11, 2024



The scales of justice.

Without justice there is no peace



Here we are at the second of the cardinal virtues: today we will talk about justice. It is the quintessential social virtue. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines it as “the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour” (no. 1807).

This is justice. Often, when justice is mentioned, the motto that represents it is also quoted: *unicuique suum* – that is, “to each his own”. It is the virtue of law, that seeks to regulate the relations between people equitably.

It is represented allegorically by the scales, because it aims to ‘even the score’ between people, especially when they



The virtue of justice is fundamental for peaceful coexistence, writes Pope Francis

risk being distorted by some imbalance.

Its purpose is that in society, everyone is treated in accordance with the dignity proper to them.

Fundamentals

But already the ancient masters taught that for this, other virtuous attitudes are necessary, such as benevolence, respect, gratitude, affability, and hon-

esty: virtues that contribute to a good coexistence between people. Justice is a virtue for good coexistence between people.

We all understand how justice is fundamental for peaceful coexistence in society: a world without laws respecting rights would be a world in which it is impossible to live; it would resemble a jungle.

Without justice, there is no

peace. Without justice, there is no peace. Indeed, if justice is not respected, conflicts arise.

Without justice, the law of the prevalence of the strong over the weak is entrenched, and this is not just.

But justice is a virtue that acts on both a large and small scale: it regards not only the courtroom, but also the ethics that characterise our daily lives.

It establishes sincere relations with others: it realises the precept of the Gospel, according to which Christian speech is “simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Mt 5:37).

Half-truths, double-talk intended to deceive one's neighbour, the reticence that conceals true intentions, are

not attitudes in keeping with justice.

The righteous person is upright, simple and straightforward; he does not wear masks, he presents himself for what he is, he speaks the truth.

The words ‘thank you’ are often found on his lips: he knows that no matter how generous we strive to be, we always remain indebted to our neighbour. If we love, it is also because we have been loved first.

Righteous

In tradition we can find countless descriptions of the righteous person. Let us look at some of them.

The righteous person reveres laws and respects them, know-



Pope Francis at his general audience on Easter Wednesday, April 3. Photo: CNS

ing that they constitute a barrier protecting the defenceless from the tyranny of the powerful.

The righteous person does not think only of his own individual wellbeing, but desires the good of society as a whole.

“The righteous person keeps watch over his own behaviour, so that it is not harmful to others: if he makes a mistake, he apologises”

Therefore, he does not give in to the temptation to think only of himself and of taking care of his own affairs, however legitimate they may be, as if they were the only thing that exists in the world.

The virtue of justice makes it clear – and places this need in the heart – that there can be no true good for oneself if there is not also the good of all.

Therefore, the righteous person keeps watch over his own behaviour, so that it is not harmful to others: if he makes a mistake, he apologises.

In some situations, he goes so far as to sacrifice a personal good to make it available to the community. He desires an orderly society, where people give lustre to the office they

“The righteous person does not think only of his own individual wellbeing, but desires the good of society as a whole”

hold, and not the office that gives lustre to people.

He abhors recommendations and does not trade favours. He loves responsibility and is exemplary in promoting legality.

Indeed, this is the way of justice, the antidote to corruption: how important it is to educate people, especially the young, in the culture of legality!

It is the way to prevent the cancer of corruption and to eliminate criminality, removing the ground from beneath it.

Furthermore, the righteous person shuns harmful behaviour such as slander, perjury, fraud, usury, mockery, and dishonesty.

The righteous person keeps his word, returns what he has borrowed, pays fair wages to all labourers: a man who does not pay fair wages to workers is not just; he is unjust; he is careful not to pass reckless judgments on his neighbour, and defends the reputation and good name of others.

Unknown

None of us knows if, in our world, righteous people are numerous or as rare as precious pearls.

But there are people who draw grace and blessings both upon themselves and upon the world in which they live.

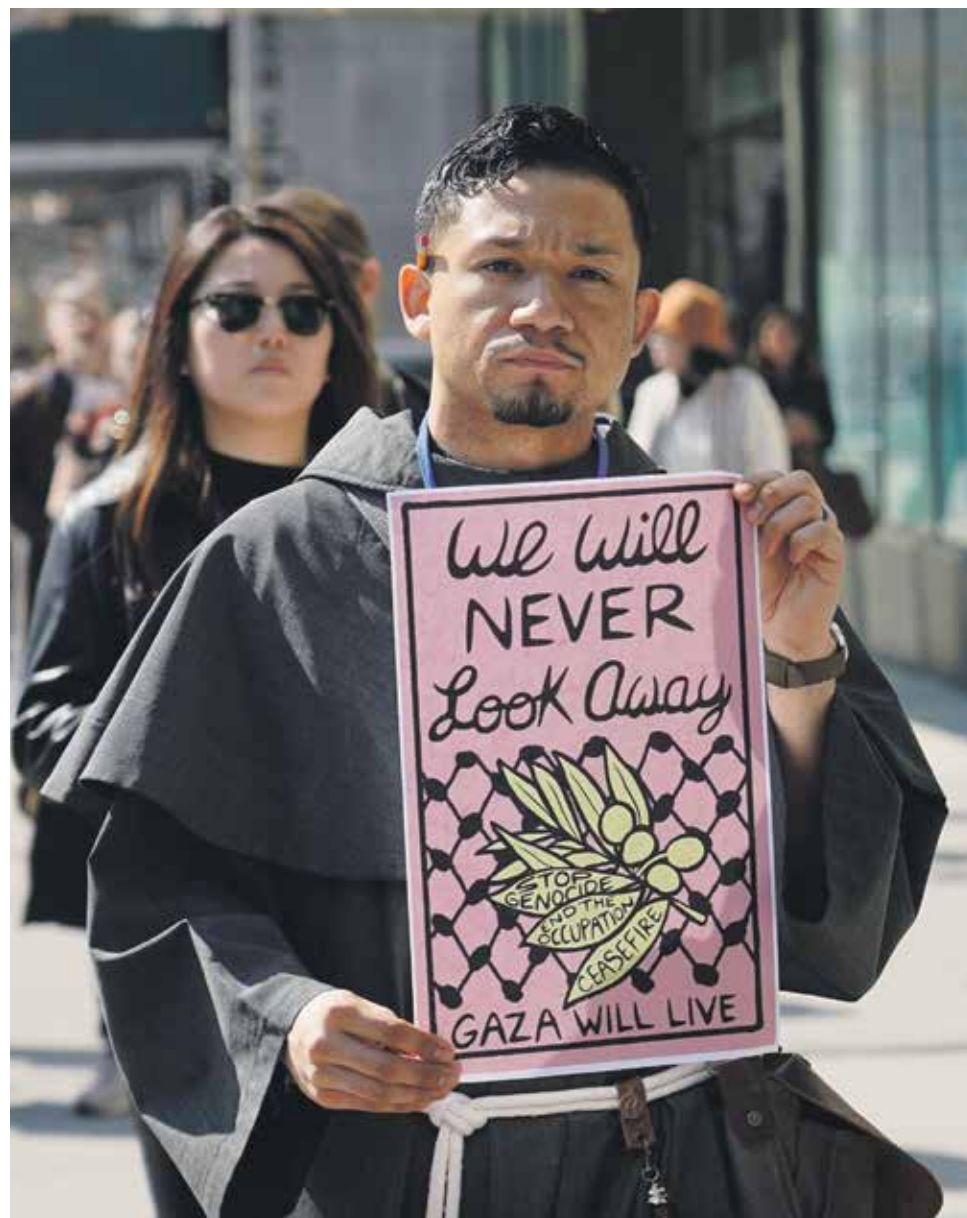
“The righteous are not moralists who don the robe of the censor, but upright people who ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’”

They are not losers compared to those who are “cunning and shrewd”, for, as Scripture says, “He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honour” (Pr 21:21).

The righteous are not moralists who don the robe of the censor, but upright people who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Mt 5:6), dreamers who yearn in their hearts for universal brotherhood.

And, today especially, we are all in great need of this dream. We need righteous men and women, and this will make us happy.

① Taken from Pope Francis’ address at a general audience on April 3.



Conventual Franciscan Brother Christofer Fernandez holds a sign as he participates in a silent peace procession across the street from United Nations headquarters in New York City March 14, 2023. Photo: OSV News

Easter gives us reason to hope



Members of a local Vietnamese-Catholic community in Palm Beach County, Florida, gather March 30, for the Easter Vigil Mass – Service of Light with Easter Proclamation at Holy Spirit Parish in Lantana. Photo: OSV News.



Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

“We are an Easter people and ‘alleluia’ is our song.” We love to quote St Augustine when we talk about what the church of Jesus Christ is. And honestly, there may be no better description.

But I think a lot of us, somewhere along the line, have lost hope that we will experience the fullness of salvation that Christ’s resurrection signifies on this side

“God may be very busy blessing other people, but we can’t expect to be holy, healed or forgiven anytime soon. Life, we tell ourselves, just doesn’t work that way”

of eternity. Instead, we settle for something far less than God intends for us. What do I mean? Basically, that a lot of Catholics have simply given up. It often goes something like this. We get a bit older, weighed down with adult responsibility, and the glow of our faith – our childlike trust in God – can begin to wear off.

“Once we expect nothing, we become incapable of receiving”

We pray, but the answer we want doesn’t occur. We undergo times of suffering and loss, but there is little relief or consolation to be found. We grow frustrated banging our heads against the same walls, and falling to the same temptations and sins

again and again.

So we throw up our hands and decide to accept the way things are, and even more to the point, the way we are. We convince ourselves that nothing will ever really change, that all we’ve been taught to believe just isn’t going to work for us.

God may be very busy blessing other people, but we can’t expect to be holy, healed or forgiven anytime soon. Life, we tell ourselves, just doesn’t work that way.

The Gospel stories may well be true, but it is unlikely that Jesus will ever speak to us or transform us – let alone raise us from the dead. Amid that kind of hopelessness, we may well be tempted to throw in the towel. Many have done just that. It’s understandable, of course.

There are only so many times we can ask ourselves, ‘Why am I here?’ before we decide not to be. Or before we allow the lies of the enemy to distract, discourage and distance us from what God wants to give us.

The problem is that once we expect nothing, we become incapable of receiving much of anything.

“The enemy of our souls would be happy to see us wallowing in our own sinfulness, uncertain of God’s willingness to forgive us”

Easter sets us straight

The evil one wants us to believe that the character defects we’ve always had – the ones that are responsible for the bulk of the sins we confess – aren’t going anywhere. That is not the case.

While we may not reach perfection in this life, we can make genuine and significant progress. Old habits are tough to beat.

But God’s grace makes up for where our efforts fail. The Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts is the gift of sanctifying grace.

What doesn’t happen here on earth will be completed in purgatory. The good news is that everyone who wants to be a saint will, in fact, become one. We may be tempted to give up on healing past hurts. Dogged by brokenness and struggling to find peace, we

can lose sight of God’s healing presence.

But the glorified wounds of Jesus show us not only what God can do. All we have suffered is given a part in our redemption and in the redemption of others.

“There is nothing that puts us beyond God’s reach, other than our own choice to reject his mercy”

Easter means that what is ugliest in our lives is made not only beautiful, but glorious. Our sins, no matter how great, can be forgiven. There is nothing that puts us beyond God’s reach, other than our own choice to reject his mercy. The enemy of our souls would be happy to see us wallowing in our own sinfulness, uncertain

of God’s willingness to forgive us.

Easter shows us that is precisely what the Saviour does for anyone – anyone – who asks. Salvation is not just a happy ending in another life. The stone has been rolled away.

Sin

The reign of the Victor King begins here and now. We don’t become who we were created to be only by leaving this world behind.

Death in all its forms has been conquered by the Risen Christ. We don’t have to die with a full complement of all our sins and failures.

Jesus breaks the bond of sin. We might be tempted to doubt the truth or power of the Resurrection as some of Jesus’ disciples did.

But Easter really does change everything, and it can change us. Even more, Easter can raise us from the dead.

i Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is a sinner, Catholic convert, freelance writer and editor, musician, speaker, pet-aholic, wife and mom of eight grown children, loving life in New Orleans.

Debunking theories that dismiss Christ's resurrection



Carl E. Olson

It is something of a tradition for magazines and newspapers to run articles about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the weeks leading up to Easter. Scholars, pastors, skeptics and ordinary people weigh in with their opinions.

Some argue the Resurrection never took place. Down through time there have been a number of arguments made about what really happened on that Sunday some 2,000 years ago.

Peter Kreeft and Fr Ronald Tacelli, in *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (InterVarsity Press), outline the four basic theories used to explain away the Resurrection.

Theories

The first is that a conspiracy existed to misrepresent what transpired in the aftermath of Jesus' death. The most ancient variation of this argument was concocted by the chief priests upon discovering the empty tomb: The body of Jesus was stolen by his disciples (Mt 28:11-15).

The second is that the apostles and other disciples experienced the world's most dramatic group hallucination. Convinced that they had seen the impossible, they set out to convince the world of the same.

Another argument is that Jesus, tortured and exhausted, had not died, but had only passed out for a time until he was revived by his followers.

The final argument, which has a loyal following among atheists, sceptics and theologically liberal

Christians, is that the Resurrection is a myth.

There are, of course, many problems with each theory. For example, how would a group of frightened fishermen overwhelm Roman guards and move away a huge stone?

And why would they fearlessly proclaim Christ's resurrection and then accept martyrdom, despite knowing Jesus was actually dead? How is it that hundreds of people (see 1 Cor 15:3-8) experienced the same hallucination?

How would Jesus, who was ripped to shreds and crucified, appear shortly thereafter as glorious in appearance (Jn 20:19-29)?

“Belief in the Resurrection is not a matter of mere reason or facts, but of a real encounter with the Risen Lord”

But it's the theory of the mythical or metaphorical Resurrection that is most disconcerting.

In Acts, Peter bluntly states: “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us” (Acts 10:40).

The story of doubting Thomas (Jn 20:19-29) soundly rejects any such understanding. The Gospels describe real confusion on the part of the disciples and the fact that this confusion was due to a physical Resurrection.

“Some argue the Resurrection never took place. Down through time there have been a number of arguments made about what really happened on that Sunday some 2,000 years ago”

“Do not be amazed!” the angel told the women, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here” (Mk 16:5-6).

The story of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) emphasises how belief in the Resurrection is not a matter of mere reason or facts, but of a real encounter with the Risen Lord.

Having walked and talked at length with Jesus, they still did not recognise him. But when he took bread and blessed it and gave it to them, their “eyes were opened and they recognised him”.

“The basic form of Christian faith,” Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in *Faith and the Future*, “is not: I believe something, but I believe you.”

Faith

It's not that faith is unreasonable; rather, it is finally, in the end, above and beyond reason, although never contrary to reason. It is ultimately an act of will and love.

“We believe, because we love,” wrote St John Henry Newman in a sermon titled, ‘Love the Safeguard of Faith against Superstition’.

“The divinely-enlightened mind sees in Christ the very Object whom it desires to love and worship – the Object correlative of its own affections; and it trusts him, or believes, from loving him.”

Carl E. Olson is editor of Catholic World Report and Ignatius Insight and the author of several books.



A crucifix hangs before a mural depicting the Resurrection in the sanctuary at St Timothy Parish in Mesa, Arizona. Photo: OSV News

Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

Why does a paschal candle holder have bee artwork?

Q: In my parish, we have an antique candle holder for the paschal candle. The design on the candle stand looks like it has some sort of insect, and so my 6-year-old asked me why there were ‘bugs on the Paschal candle’. Any thoughts?

A: My guess is that the ‘bugs on the paschal candle’ were probably meant to be bees. The liturgy for the Mass of the Easter Vigil contains a number of striking elements, such as the blessing of the Easter fire and the lighting of the new paschal candle. One of the most notable prayers unique to the Easter Vigil is an ancient hymn called the *Exsultet*. Ordinarily sung by the deacon – or, in the absence of a deacon, a priest or if necessary a lay cantor – on the surface the *Exsultet* is a song of thanksgiving and praise for the newly lit paschal candle.

But of course, this prayer actually goes much deeper, as the joy found in the paschal candle is actually a sign of the joy we find in the resurrected Christ, who brings light out of darkness. In our current version of the prayer, there are two lines which reference the bees that produced the wax for the candle: “On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants’ hands, an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church.”

And: “But now we know the praises of this pillar, which glowing fire ignites for God’s honour, a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by sharing of its light, for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by mother bees to build a torch so precious.” Prior to the new translation of the Mass in 2012, the bees were left out of the English-language translation of the *Exsultet*, which is why they might not be an obvious Easter motif for those of us Catholics who grew up after the liturgical changes of the Second Vatican Council but prior to the new translation.

However, there seems to have been a more lively popular appreciation for ‘mother bee’ prior to Vatican II. So it

makes sense that a paschal candle stand from that era would be decorated with a bee design. Because of their mention in our liturgy, I personally think that bees are a beautiful symbol of Easter. And my own hope is that bees on Easter decorations make more of a comeback!

Q: When I was a kid, I thought Lent ended on Palm Sunday. Later in life, I was told Lent ended on Good Friday. A priest recently said in a homily though, that Lent actually and officially ends on Holy Thursday. Could you clarify?

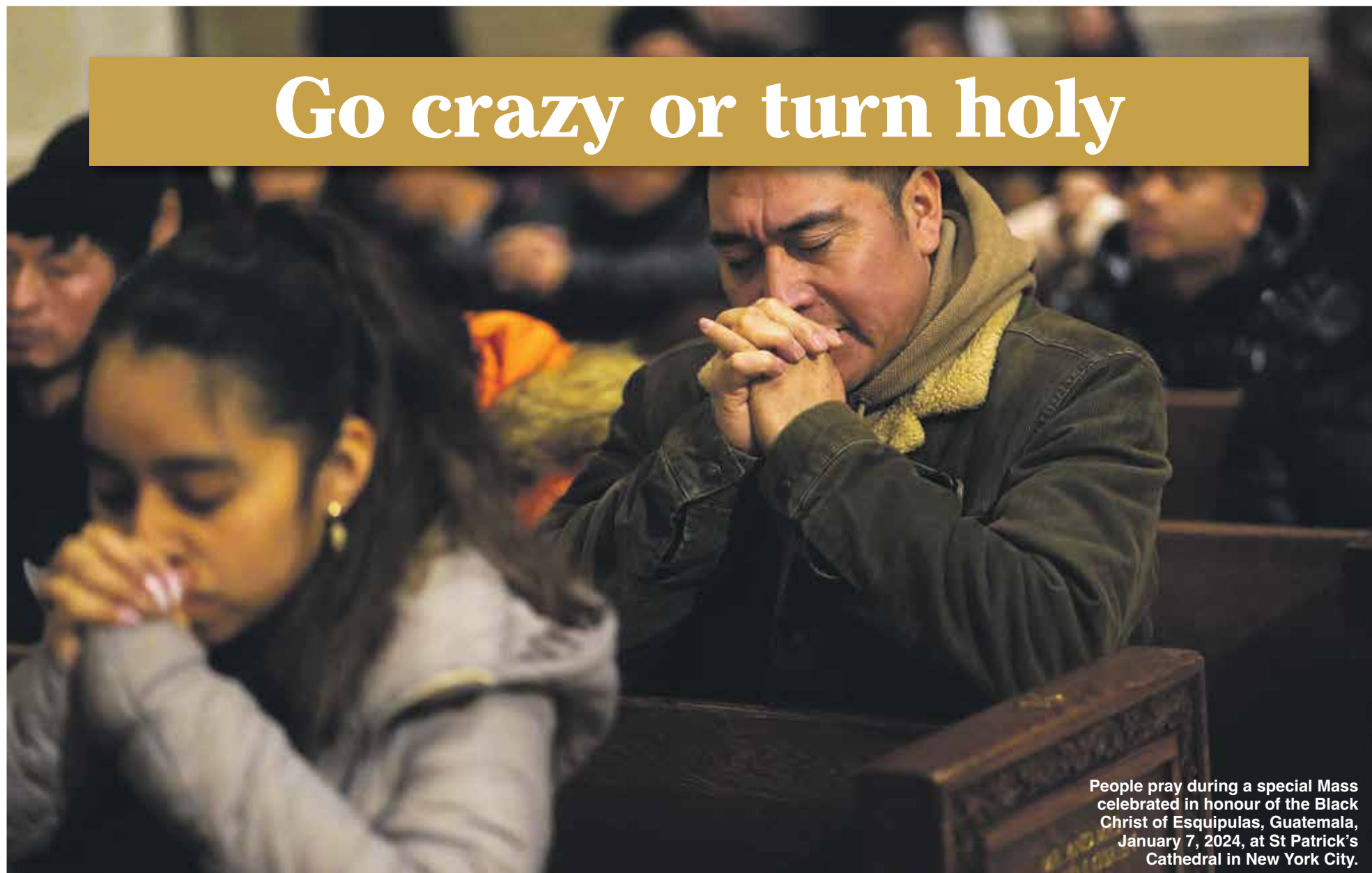
A: Your priest is correct – Lent technically ends with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening. The Mass of the Lord’s Supper on the night of Holy Thursday begins the Easter ‘Triduum’, a word which roughly translated means ‘three days’.

The Triduum is essentially its own mini liturgical season, being neither Lent nor the Easter season, but a time when we as a Church are laser-focused on the events of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection.

The Triduum begins with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, and continues through the liturgical services of Good Friday, the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday and morning Mass on Easter Sunday. The Triduum officially concludes with Evening Prayer (Vespers) for Easter Sunday in the Liturgy of the Hours. There are a number of ‘clues’ in the Triduum liturgies that tell us we are no longer in Lent. For example, at Mass on Holy Thursday evening, the priest wears white vestments instead of the Lenten purple; and the Mass of the Lord’s Supper includes the singing of the ‘Gloria,’ and otherwise takes on a joyful tone rather than a penitential one.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.

Go crazy or turn holy



People pray during a special Mass celebrated in honour of the Black Christ of Esquipulas, Guatemala, January 7, 2024, at St Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

In a poem *Serenade*, Brazilian poet Adelia Prado speaks of a painful ache we feel inside us as we forever wait for something or someone to come and make us whole. What are we waiting for? Love? A soulmate? God? No matter, the frustration eventually pushes us towards a choice, go crazy or turn holy:

I am beginning to despair
And can see only two choices:
Either go crazy or turn holy.
And when that someone or something finally does come:
How will I open the window, unless I'm crazy?
How will I close it, unless I'm holy?

Either go crazy or turn holy. The older we get the more we realise how true that is, how eventually that's the choice forced on all of us, both by the way we are built and the limitations inherent in life itself. Why? Is there something wrong with life and with us? Why can't we find a peaceful space somewhere between crazy and holy?

Reason

Well, the biblical preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes offers a reason. After penning that beautiful, oft-quoted text about how there is a time for everything – a time to be born and to a time to die; a time to plant and a time to harvest; a time to break down and a time to heal; a time to weep and a time laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time for love and a time for hate; and a time for war and a time for peace – he offers us this.

“In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable we learn that here in this life there is no finished symphony”

God has laid out a beautiful rhythm for life and has made everything beautiful in its own time, but God has put timelessness into the human heart so that we are out of sync with the seasons from beginning to end. God has established a beautiful rhythm to nature; but we, unlike the physical elements and the plants and the animals

who don't have timelessness in their souls, never quite fit into that rhythm. We are overcharged for life on this planet. (Ecclesiastes 3, 1-11)

You find expressions of this in literature everywhere in both religious and secular circles. For example, the renowned German theologian Karl Rahner used to affirm that in the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable we learn that here in this life there is no finished symphony.

Apropos

In that, he echoes Saint Augustine's famous line that is as true and apropos today as it was seventeen hundred years ago when he wrote it: You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. That single line expresses both a non-negotiable understanding of the human

person and a non-negotiable path he or she must walk. We don't have a final home here and that's why at the end of the day there is no option other than going crazy or turning holy.

It's no surprise that Ruth Burrows, the renowned spiritual writer, begins her autobiography with these words: I was born into this world with a tortured sensitivity and my path has not been an easy one.

“We can never really stand up fully or ever stretch out fully. Eventually, this breaks our spirit – and we either go crazy or get holy”

While this motif is everywhere present in religious literature, it is also present in the thought of many secular poets, novelists, and philosophers. For instance, after he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Albert Camus, a professed atheist, was asked by a journalist if he believed in God. He answered: No, I don't believe in God, but that doesn't mean I am not

obsessed with the question of God. Why that obsession?

Because in his thought he could not make sense of the world, nor find a fully sensible place in it for humans, unless there was a God. Without a God, human existence cannot make peace with itself. He likened the condition of someone in this world to that of a prisoner in certain medieval prisons, where they would put a prisoner in a cell that was so small that he or she could never stand fully upright or ever fully stretch out.

Spirit

The perpetual feeling of being cramped, it was believed, would eventually break the prisoner's spirit. For Camus, that's our situation in life. We can never really stand up fully or ever stretch out fully. Eventually, this breaks our spirit – and we either go crazy or get holy. That's also the basic view of other atheistic existentialists like Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Go crazy or get holy! Richard Rohr offers us a third option, get bitter. He submits that once we get to a certain age, we have only three options left open to us: We can become a pathetic old fool; or we can become a bitter old fool; or we can become a holy old fool. Notice what's non-negotiable. We will all eventually become old fools. We have the choice only as to what kind of old fool we will be – crazy, bitter, or holy.

“I was born into this world with a tortured sensitivity and my path has not been an easy one”

We can testify to Christ every day



Tim Klimisch as Jesus holds a candle during the Resurrection scene during a dress rehearsal of Living Stations March 12, at St Paul in Ham Lake, Minnesota. Photo: OSV News

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon
Greg
Kandra



“You are witnesses of these things.” It almost sounds like an episode of *CSI: Jerusalem*. But the case unfolding in this Sunday’s Gospel is part of a larger story that gives the overwhelming events of Holy Week and Easter a surprisingly relatable, realistic dimension.

Luke gives us a risen Jesus who not only appears, talks and teaches, but he is also a Jesus who is unmistakably human.

He even makes it clear he’s not a mirage, a phantom or a figment of their imagination. This is nothing supernatural. He is real.

“A ghost,” he explains patiently, “does not have flesh and bones.” (It sounds

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19
Ps 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9
1 Jn 2:1-5a
Lk 24:35-48

so startling, coming from the Son of God, I have to wonder if he actually said that with a straight face.)

“A lot of people saw Jesus, heard him, even touched him”

If that weren’t enough, it turns out the resurrected Christ has worked up an appetite.

“Have you anything here to eat,” he asks. The apostles must have been flabbergasted (and, maybe, embarrassed that they didn’t offer him something first).

It is a remarkable scene in so many ways – vivid, tactile, a little awkward, almost

comical.

But it also conveys something that is vitally important in the post-Resurrection appearances.

Passages like this serve to tell us, again, that these aren’t flukes, daydreams, or isolated cases of someone having too much wine and imagining he spotted a friend walking along the road.

The Gospel assures us: A lot of people saw Jesus, heard him, even touched him.

Witness

Read the Scriptures and you can’t escape a recurring theme. Again and again, Christ appears to groups – the women outside the tomb, the couple walking to Emmaus, the believers gathered in the Upper Room.

Just as he tells them in this Sunday’s Scripture, “You are witnesses of these things,” he is almost attentively, thoughtfully, building the case for his Resurrection.

It’s as if he is saying, “Take

notes. Write this down. You all can corroborate this. You are my witnesses.” And we come to realise he is not just speaking to those in the room. He is speaking to all of us, across the centuries.

In our way, we all bear witness to the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and testify to it every day with our words, our actions, our choices. We continue what he began.

“The great work that he began continues with communities of believers”

But, significantly, we don’t do it alone.

These appearances remind us that Christianity involves both communion and community. It is lived among others.

Jesus first sent his followers out two-by-two to preach

the Good News. When he rose from the dead, he appeared repeatedly to multiple people at a time.

And today, the great work that he began continues with communities of believers.

Message

The message is clear: the Good News we hold in our hearts is not something meant to be kept to ourselves. It’s meant to be lived, practiced, shared with others.

Christ’s great work in the world – the work of saving souls, healing wounds, opening eyes, inspiring hope – is to be lived and spread everywhere.

The fundamental message of the Resurrection is heard in Christ’s first word to his followers: “Peace.”

What he conveyed to them is now our charge to convey to others. We need to spread the word.

In these weeks after Easter, as the flowers fade

and the chocolate eggs get eaten and we get accustomed once again to “Alleluia” ringing through the air, it can be easy to take for granted the splendour of this moment. We shouldn’t.

“Help us remember this beautiful truth: We are all witnesses of these things”

Pentecost is coming, and fire will fall and another thunderous event will remind us of the church’s first days and the astounding tale we have to tell.

We are Easter people!

This Sunday’s Scripture serves to keep that idea before us – and help us remember this beautiful truth: We are all witnesses of these things.

i Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog ‘The Deacon’s Bench’.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Heretics, wafflers and original podcasts

Podcasts aren't quite radio but they're close – the lines are blurred. Some podcasts are original, living only on the hosting platforms like Spotify, others are really just playback options from regular radio broadcasting.

A relatively new kid on the Podcast block is **State of the Nation**, presented by former *The Irish Catholic* editor Michael Kelly. Last Friday's episode was called 'Demonising women who believe in biology' – obviously dealing with the gender wars. Co-host was David Quinn and special guest was Aisling Considine, an Aontú candidate in Dublin for the upcoming local elections. A primary teacher, she had called for her union, the INTO, to disaffiliate from the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) as they didn't properly represent the views of women. She referenced how out of touch they were during the recent referendum and their recent attempts to normalise abortion. On the show the NWCi was characterised as having been "captured" by particular ideological forces. David Quinn gave a little explainer on the whole notion of gender ideology. He thought the NWCi behaved like a version of "the one true church", with anyone who disagreed branded as "heretics", even if they were obviously feminists, like author JK Rowling. I liked the approx. 30-minute format and the easy



Author J.K. Rowling.

chat, keeping in mind that all participants were broadly of the same view on the issue.

A previous episode, from the Wednesday of last week, was called 'Euthanasia and the economic push'. It focused on the recent Dáil committee report on assisted dying and euthanasia. As Michael Kelly said, the report had not received the attention it should have as it was released the day Leo Varadkar dropped the shocker that he was stepping down as Taoiseach. The presenter discussed the matter with Wendy Grace of Spirit Radio and Eilís Mulroy of the Pro-life Campaign. A few simple points were made effectively – the recommendations of the

Joint Committee (in favour of assisted dying and euthanasia) were made without adequate discussion, and in the teeth of much opposition from the medical professions; some members including chairperson Michael Healy Rae TD took the unusual step of issuing a minority report; it was naive to think Ireland wouldn't follow the pattern of countries like Canada and Belgium in gradually liberalising the laws in this area. Michael Kelly said it was a "moral cliff edge" rather than a slippery slope.

Treading similar territory, *The Week that Really Was* is another original podcast, hosted by John McGuirk and Sarah Ryan. It is longer (around

1 hour) and somewhat more abrasive. Last week's episode was titled, 'Two Stuttering wafflers who say nothing' based on the unkind description of an acerbic critic. Definitely not true! They covered author J.K. Rowling's defiance of the new hate speech law in Scotland, brought into law, ironically on April 1. It wasn't a prank, but ultimately perhaps a joke. There was admiration for Ms Rowling's strategy – daring them to arrest her for trans-critical tweets. The police said they wouldn't act against her, which was a kind of victory for common sense. If they had taken action she would have won then too – causing such an uproar as to discredit the

PICK OF THE WEEK

SUNDAY SEQUENCE

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday April 14, 8.30am

Topical religious and ethical issues with a Northern Ireland flavour.

RTÉ INVESTIGATES – IRELAND'S ABORTION SERVICES

RTÉ One Monday April 15, 9.35pm

The blurb gives the game away: "RTÉ Investigates the realities of Ireland's current abortion services and gaps in the system of care which continue to cause heartache for affected women."

UNREPORTED WORLD: CAMPUS WARS USA

Channel 4 Friday April 19, 7.30pm

Meeting the students divided by the conflict in Gaza who are fighting for their voices to be heard on campus. Across universities in the US, a battle's raging over freedom of speech.

bill anyway.

Another interesting discussion was on the phenomenon of journalists getting Government jobs as press secretaries and the like. I was surprised at the extent when John McGuirk read out a long list of former journalists that had gone down this road. The problem arises when journalists don't ask hard questions of politicians so as not to blot their copybooks and make it less likely that they'll get the plum jobs. There was also some incisive analysis on US politics, with neither Trump nor Biden getting approval. I think it could have been shorter – my preference is for podcasts around the 30-minute mark, but maybe

my attention span is at fault.

Like a lot of stations Spirit Radio facilitates catchup listening by compiling some items in their podcast section – I'd like to see more of them. One of the latest from *Mornings with Wendy* had Dougie Hobson of the Mustard Seed Soup Run in Dublin, speaking to Wendy Grace about his work and service in helping the homeless on the streets of Dublin. Now he was retiring from this work. He found the problem getting worse, especially since the end of lockdown, though he believed there were no hopeless cases. His religious faith was central to his work. Inspiring!

Music

Pat O'Kelly



A tale of talent and tragedy

As the main work in tomorrow's NSO concert at the NCH will be Shostakovich's 10th Symphony I had intended this column to be principally devoted to the Russian master. However, taking pen to paper I realised that tomorrow's opening work is by Czech composer Bedřich Smetana born 1824, died in 1884 with this year commemorating the bicentenary of his birth.

Smetana came from the Bohemian city of Litomyšl. Recognising his exceptional musical talents early on, his parents encouraged his violin and piano lessons and the chap gave his first public concert when he was six. Aged fifteen he travelled to Prague and began participating in that city's lively round of musical activities.

Despite the attention Smetana was

enjoying in Prague his father feared his son's 'proper' education was being neglected and ordered the young lad home. Smetana obeyed and a number of years elapsed before he returned to Prague. Mixing in its varied musical milieu, he was introduced to the influential Liszt, Berlioz and Robert and Clara Schumann.

Smetana's piano music expressed the popular virtuosic tendencies of the time but as the pecuniary rewards hardly kept 'the wolf from the door', Smetana set up an institute for piano playing in 1848 and became a very successful teacher.

His piano music began to be widely performed and in addition he became a conductor in 1855. However, tragedy struck the same year when his eldest daughter died at the age of four.

Smetana dedicated his Piano Trio in G minor – one of his most powerful and personal works – to her memory.

Deciding to travel, Smetana moved to Göteborg in Sweden where he established another piano institute and became a concert organiser.

Crescendo

With a change in the political atmosphere in the Czech lands, Smetana returned to Prague in 1862 and the ensuing decade or so was the most momentous period in his life.

With the opening of the Czech Provisional Theatre in 1862 Smetana was invited to become its conductor some time later and it was there that his eight operas, including *The Bartered Bride*, had their first performances.

As Maynooth music professor Pat

rick Devine reminds us in the latest edition of *Sound Post* magazine, Smetana's comic operas celebrate rural village life as well as having colourful casts of lovers, opposing parents, matchmakers and circus performers. The more serious works, among them *Dalibor* (1870) and *Libuše* (1872), based on historical figures, are to be found in the realm of grand opera.

In the early 1870s Smetana developed hearing difficulties with a constant ringing sound in one ear. He incorporated this discomfort into his autobiographical First String Quartet written in 1876 and entitled *From My Life*.

Sadly with his health deteriorating further the composer was obliged to enter an asylum in Prague where he died in 1884. As professor Devine

points out Smetana's greatest achievement was to create in his music a national style that was distinctive and original, with which his compatriots identified and which would profoundly influence the leading Czech composers of future generations not least Dvořák, Janáček and Martinů.



Bedřich Smetana.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Two great Caravaggio's united in Belfast exhibition

Peter Costello

The big summer exhibition at the Ulster Museum in Belfast this year will be the exhibition of two important Caravaggio's together for the first time in centuries. One is from the National Gallery in London, *The Supper at Emmaus* (1601); the other is lent by the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin, the now famous *Taking of Christ* (1602).

The two pictures are already united by their creation. They were painted at the same time for the same patron, Ciriaco Mattei. They were originally displayed at the Mattei Palazzo in Rome.

The two paintings are nowadays rarely lent, and they have not been exhibited together in this way since the first decades of the 1600's.

This is an event that should not be missed by admirers of Caravaggio, and indeed by any student of religious art.

The exhibition opens on May 10 and will run until September 1; but now is

the time to make plans to go north to see this unique presentation in its full glory.

In thinking about them, however, it is better to take *The Taking of Christ* first, for this portrays an event at the beginning of Easter-tide. Readers of this paper will not need to be reminded of the extraordinary tale of the rediscovery of this painting.

Presented privately to the Jesuit community in Dublin's Leeson Street, it hung unnoticed for years until its full importance struck a visitor.

Examined carefully in the laboratories of the National Gallery Merrion Square it was revealed for what it is, one of the world's great works of art.

Betrayal

It is a painting of the betrayal of Christ by Judas when he kisses him in salute. It is full of power and force, expressive in a way of the artist's own rumbustious life but also recreating the appalling significance of what is being shown.

Judas has long been an ambiguous figure, but one

worth thinking about. For 2,000 years he has been exorcised by Christians as the archetype of the treacherous betrayer.

He was seen in medieval times as the money man of the Apostles, a man only interested in the cash in hand, and it was for a lust for wealth that he betrayed Jesus.

“The betrayal of Jesus is a burden for all Christians, whether they wish it or not”

But then again, could he have been in fact that figure familiar in many social and political movements, who is impatient for action, and deprecates what he sees in his leader as a lack of action: Jesus seemed to his mind to be content to wander round the country talking to people when what was needed was immediate action.

Perhaps he saw Jesus

“Perhaps he saw Jesus more as Pilate did, as a political figure, the ‘King of Jews’ who might chase away the Romans”



Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, courtesy National Gallery of Ireland / Jesuit Community, Leeson Street.



Caravaggio, *The Supper at Emmaus*, courtesy the National Gallery London.

more as Pilate did, as a political figure, the ‘King of Jews’ who might chase away the Romans. Judas chose to precipitate a conflict by revealing his leader's location to his enemies. It could in a way be matter plucked from the headlines of today's news.

An ambiguous figure, he might be a man who needs more theological thought. The heart of the betrayal of Jesus was the sins of mankind, and they, God knows, have not gone away. The betrayal of Jesus is a burden for all Christians, whether they wish it or not.

Emmaus

But then what a contrast is *The Supper at Emmaus*. It illustrates the episode related in Luke 24:13-35. This, too, is filled with power, not of violence, but of sudden spiritual insight.

The ‘appearance’ of Christ is not the right word for their vision: Jesus is not a ghost, but a real man. This is a revelation.

Here, too, is a painting that expounds a theological teaching: “At the breaking of the bread, they recognised him.”

Notice in the painting how

the hand of Jesus is raised in blessing over not only the bread, but over the glass of wine a little to the left. This is in effect is the first post-Resurrection Eucharist.

“Revelation can indeed come unheralded, a mere moment in the daily round of the quite ordinary”

However, it is the convention of art historians these days to deal only with art historical matters; they cautiously leave to one side all matters of theology.

Thus they deprive both paintings of what their real interest and power was to the Mattei family and those of their time who were first privileged to see the pictures.

Also in the National Gallery of Ireland is another treatment of the moment at Emmaus, by Velazquez, created about 1617.

This is dominated in the foreground by a Moorish

servant, that is to say, an African slave girl. Upon the left hand top corner there is a glimpse through a hatch from the kitchen into the dining room, where Jesus is breaking the bread. The slave looks up in surprise, as if she knows something important is happening.

When I see this painting there comes into my mind that phrase from St Teresa of Avila about meeting God “among the pots and pans”. Revelation can indeed come unheralded, a mere moment in the daily round of the quite ordinary.

Ulster

Readers should make every effort to visit Belfast to see this exhibition. The Ulster Museum is a fine institution, set in a park that seems always to be filled with city people enjoying themselves, many of them immigrants.

On a fine day it is as crowded as St Stephen's Green. People living in the South should make every effort to see Belfast and Ulster as they are, and not as they imagine them to be, or others claim them to be.

“The ‘appearance’ of Christ is not the right word for their vision: Jesus is not a ghost, but a real man. This is a revelation”

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.

Encountering Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise: Following Dante in an exploration of the afterlife

Dante: *The Divine Comedy*,
Penguin Books (Penguin Classics Series).

I. Hell (1949)
translated by Dorothy L Sayers. ISBN 978010440065

II. Purgatory (1955)
translated by Dorothy L Sayers. ISBN 9780140440461

III. Paradise (1960)
translated by Dorothy L Sayers and Barbara Reynolds. ISBN 9780130441055

€55.00 approximately for the set

Peter Costello

With Dante you do not just enter a poet's world, but a poet's cosmos.

Hell is defined by theologians as a place or state of punishment. Dante, Doré, and others present visions of the place, but the state of hell may be something very different to what they have so generously imagined.

Flann O'Brien more wisely suggested that hell is not so much other people, but other people constantly re-met, an inescapable mental and spiritual hell.

But in Dante one encounters at least a complete vision of the afterlife as a place. There is nothing else like it, but it needs, as Dante himself found out when he encountered Vergil, a knowledgeable guide. But there are many experts who will provide that guidance.

The first simple query many readers have is why the work is called *The Divine Comedy*, when there is clearly nothing merely amusing about these three long poems.

But we have to recall that in classical times drama was divided into tragedies, with so to speak unhappy endings; and comedies with happy endings. Mere laughter was provided in classical times by the Satyr plays, from which we derive our satires.

As what Dante ends with the greatest happiness possible, that of the Beatific Vision, it does indeed bring the greatest possible happiness in conclusion.

Exploration

Book review pages all too often are reduced to extended advertisements for new books. This is a shame. It is also part of a Books Editor's

“Hell is not so much other people, but other people constantly re-met, an inescapable mental and spiritual hell”

task to entourage the reading of worthwhile and often overlooked books from the past.

An opportunity arises to this end for those interested in exploring Dante becoming aware of the *Centre of Dante Studies in Ireland*, which provides access to an understanding through not only academic ventures, but also lectures and events aimed at the general public.

This year, they have been hosting a collaborative reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which was directed to the *Paradiso*, which concluded this week.

“The state of hell may be something very different to what they have so generously imagined”

Members of the public who feel they would like to learn more about the one of Europe's major poets, his celebrated works, and the ongoing reassessments of the man, his poetry and the times he lived in, might like the make contact with the group: *Centre for Dante Studies in Ireland*, Department of Italian, University College Cork: www.casilac.ie/cdsi/

Aside from the general cultural interest in Dante, for Ireland he had always had special dimensions. Many Irish scholars have seen in the visionary works of our Middle Ages dealing with the afterlife, such as St Patrick's Purgatory, the visions of Tondal and others, evidence that Dante was directly inspired by Irish sources.

To others this is too broad a claim. They see those early works as having some relevance to the general intellectual climate, but that Dante deeply rooted the in culture of his own times, was initially influence by Vergil through *The Aeneid* in which there is

“Those who might like to follow Vergil and the poet into the after world would need to prepare themselves by at least some acquaintance with the divine comedy”

a visit to the underworld, as well as, of course, Homer in *The Odyssey* in which Odysseus visits the underworld to met the heroes and well as his relatives.

In the *Divine Comedy* Dante chose Vergil as the poet's guide because of this matter. This derives from the poet's *Fourth Eclogue*, which was interpreted by Christians as predictive of the coming of Jesus.

Understandably modern scholars do not accept this view of the eclogue; but this in no way affects the fact that the medieval Europe held this idea, and that it was this idea that influenced Dante.

If all of this controversy over the very origins of Dante's notion for his *Divine Comedy* is only a taste of the difficulties that face those who seriously engage with Dante's works as whole.

Those who might like to follow Vergil and the poet into the after world would need to prepare themselves by at least some acquaintance with the *Divine Comedy*.

Sayers

There are naturally many versions of Dante, but since the 1950s the version by Dorothy L. Sayers in Penguin Classics has commanded wide respect.

She did not live to complete the third volume, but she brought to the task not just a mind trained in medieval literature, but the appreciation of a poet sensitive to the nuances of Dante's vision, both theological and literary.

Like many millions already this then might be the place to begin. Those who think of her only as the author of detective novels might keep in mind that she was not merely a critic and poet in her own right, but a popular Anglo-Catholic theologian famous for her broadcasts.

‘Celtitude’ in Ireland and Brittany



Pic: Breton pipers on parade recently

Peter Costello

Last week the annual Pan Celtic Festival was held in Carlow last week. With groups of musicians, singers and dancers it is a notably vital occasion, at which Celtic culture from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and Spain are on display.

Celtic culture in its several varieties spreads from the Outer Isles of Scotland along the western seaboard down to Spain, the region today most closely connected with what the French call *Celtitude*.

However, there are enthusiasts who would also include the Galatia in Central Turkey, the cultural group to which St Paul addressed his important epistle.

This group arrived in Asia Minor in the 3rd Century BC, from the middle Europe Celtic heartland around southern Germany and Switzerland and the Czech Republic, about the same time the Celts conquered Ireland. But there is nothing Celtic about Turkish Galatia today.

But back in Europe, though the Celtic homelands have been transformed by the tides of history, along the western seaboard they represent outposts of Catholicism in a much changed Europe.

Those who enjoyed the last hectic week in Carlow, or indeed those who missed it, will want to know that the Festival Interceltique Lorient 2024 is still to come, and takes place in that Breton city from August 12-18. From what I have seen of it in past years it promises to be even more hectic, more international than Carlow. (For information contact email festival@festival-interceltique.bzh, or visit www.festival-interceltique.bzh).

But keep in mind that despite the enthusiasm of participants Celtic Culture in all its varieties, and often the religious faith that carries it, faces many difficulties and the many challenges of change.

However a few hectic days will allow those who attend to have time out from the problems of the world.



Dante and Beatrice enjoy The Beatific Vision at the conclusion of the *Divine Comedy*.


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Gordius 658

Across

- 1 The closest star (3)
- 3 Mount Rushmore is in this US state (5,6)
- 8 & 9 Here one may open 'windows' to count down the days before Christmas (6,8)
- 10 Measure of turn (5)
- 11 Challenged or ventured (5)
- 13 Thin oatmeal (5)
- 15 Variety of lettuce (7)
- 16 One who is in charge of a museum or art collection (7)
- 20 In which to keep a pet rabbit (5)
- 21 Winter sports enthusiast (5)
- 23 'Carmen', for example (5)
- 24 Game played on a chessboard (8)
- 25 Material used to make tablecloths (6)
- 26 Median socio-economic group (6,5)
- 27 Organ of hearing (3)

Down

- 1 Columns of dripstone which hang from above (11)
- 2 Guide or find one's way (8)
- 3 He wrote 'The Playboy of the Western World' (5)
- 4 Sensitively thoughtful, diplomatic (7)
- 5 Make a change (5)
- 6 Commands (6)
- 7 The mixture of gases we breathe (3)
- 12 Sherlock Holmes' hat (11)
- 13 Saddle strap (5)
- 14 Ireland's smallest county (5)
- 17 Put up with (8)
- 18 Kitchen implement (7)
- 19 Sorcerer (6)
- 22 Royal (5)
- 23 Tests in which the answers are spoken (5)
- 24 Indistinct (3)

SOLUTIONS, APRIL 4

GORDIUS No. 657

Across

- 1 Bloodhound 6 Spin 10 Ardee 11 Conundrum 12 Mallard 15 Rhyme 17 Iota 18 Opts 19 Trawl 21 Bar-code 23 Verse 24 Adam 25 Nice 26 Ridge 28 Swallow 33 Impatient 34 Agent 35 Nods 36 Cash in hand

Down

- 1 Boar 2 Old Master 3 Dwell 4 Occur 5 None 7 Party 8 Nom de plume 9 Ingrate 13 Area 14 Ditches 16 Conversion 20 Andromeda 21 Beneath 22 Diva 27 Duped 29 Watch 30 Learn 31 Beta 32 Stud

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528

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 527

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

Last week's Hard 527

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

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



Ireland's spiritual revolution born from Christ

In a recent edition of *The Irish Catholic*, David Quinn pondered "Where the next Easter might come from" and wrote: "We might eventually have a social revolution, one that will point us once more in a pro-life, pro-family and very possibly a pro-religion and pro-Christianity direction again" [*The Irish Catholic* – March 28, 2024]. Here is the dream that ought to burn in the heart of every committed Catholic Christian – that our culture and society be transformed by the power of the Gospel. But how can this dream be realised? How can this 'social revolution' come about? By a spiritual revolution that comes first.

Division

The modern default position in debate about Irish public life is to drive a wedge between the spiritual/religious and the secular/political. The problem with this exaggerated division is that it ignores the truth that political events do not occur in a vacuum but are preceded by spiritual undercurrents that influence cultural and social change. For them to have traction, political and social movements must resonate with key instincts, needs, drives and dimensions of human beings. In 1938,



A woman arrives with children at a polling station in Dublin, March 8, for the referendum.

Maud Gonne, the Irish nationalist and convert to Catholicism, wrote: "I believe every political movement on earth has its counterpart in the spirit world and the battles we fight here have perhaps been already fought out on another plane and great leaders often draw their unexplained power from this. I cannot conceive a material movement that has not a spiritual basis. It was this that drew me so powerfully towards the Catholic Church".

This spiritual foundation of every social development was not lost on people like Pope St Leo the Great, St Augustine and our own St Patrick whose mission in the 5th Century was not just to convert the Irish to Christianity but in so doing, to constitute us as a nation, joining us to

the universal family of nations who would come to experience salvation at the end of time.

For Padraig Pearse, the concept of nationhood was inseparable from the concepts of spirit and soul. He argued: "I believe that there is a spiritual tradition which is the soul of Ireland, the thing which makes Ireland a living nation". He continued: "They have conceived of nationality as a material thing, whereas it is a spiritual thing". Pearse insisted that "a nation is knit together by natural ties, ties mystical and spiritual, ties human and kindly... the nation is the family in large... the nation is of God".

“Where might the next Easter come from? From the spiritual revolution that was born at the first one”

These insights from our history and heritage ought to empower and inspire Catholic Christians today to be the spiritual revolutionaries required whose witness, words and actions will lead to the social revolution that will lead to our cul-

ture becoming pro-life, pro-family, pro-religion and pro-Christianity again. The entire civilisation project born after the Dark Ages and based on equality, human rights, justice and peace, did not appear out of the blue. It emerged from the religious and spiritual revolution that began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that was carried forward by his disciples. Where might the next Easter come from? From the spiritual revolution that was born at the first one.

The consequences of killing God

In dialogue with an increasingly secular Ireland, Christians cannot remain silent on the consequences of the Creator being eliminated from the horizon of humanity. It isn't just a question of a personal religious choice. Social and ethical parameters change if God is rejected as we move to create the society we want with absolute power, particularly in the areas of human rights and morality. If God does not exist then humans do not have inalienable rights but only those that are bestowed upon them by the will of the majority and those in power. This can and does lead to the politicisation of right to life issues – something that we saw

played out with the campaign to repeal the 8th Amendment to the Constitution and the recent Oireachtas recommendation on euthanasia.

A new confidence?

Many priests I know have shared how the outcome of the referendum on March 8 has given them a new confidence and a hope that the Gospel message might be listened to again. The bishops' statement was well received and provided the clarity that the wording on the amendments to the Constitution did not. While it did not tell the faithful what to vote for, it explained the reasons why they should. After years of unqualified welcome of changes deemed 'progressive', people are now thinking critically again and are rightly wary of political momentum taking them to where they are not yet prepared to go.



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Archbishop Nicholas and our Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese remember all Little Way friends and benefactors every day in their prayers and Masses. On their behalf, we appeal to you wholeheartedly this Easter for ANY gift, large or small, you can send us. They will be forever grateful to you. Please pray for them, for Myanmar and for all its people, in the ongoing conflict.



We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and blessed Easter.

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