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Short window to save Catholic education stark report warns

EXCLUSIVE

Ruadhán Jones

The "window is narrowing" to save Catholic education, and the Church must act now to increase investment and streamline resources by divesting schools to the State according to an in-depth report on Catholic schools in Ireland has warned.

Catholic ethos will become "invisible" in schools if the Church doesn't respond to the "trajectory of decline" in levels of commitment to the Faith among teachers and school personnel, authors of the Grace reports released on Tuesday told *The Irish Catholic*.

The six reports, based on surveys conducted with thousands of school personnel, show that teachers in the age category 18-29 are becoming "more and more removed from the Catholic faith", co-author Prof. Eamonn Conway said.

"Three out of 10 under 29 years teaching at second level make it very clear they don't witness to or support the Catholic ethos," he added.

For principals over 50, almost 90% say they are committed to the Faith, but it drops to 56% for under

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First Communion joy!



Students from Scoil Bhride, Co. Laois, are pictured in St Peter and St Paul's Church, Portlaoise parish, for their First Holy Communion. Photo: Agnieszka Kaczmarek

Archbishop Farrell: 'Endurance and tenacity' of Stardust families has secured justice

Brandon Scott

Speaking in the Church of St Joseph the Artisan in Bonnybrook, Dublin on Sunday, Archbishop of Dublin Dr Dermot Farrell commended the families of the deceased victims of the Stardust nightclub tragedy for their "endurance and tenacity" in their unrelenting pursuit of the truth, even though, according to him, they were "systematically and stubbornly denied truth and justice".

At the Mass for the 48 young people who died in the fire on February 14, 1981, Dr Farrell paid tribute to the "courage and persistence" of the survivors and families of the victims in their search for truth and justice, describing it as "dignified and inspirational".

Taoiseach Simon Harris issued a formal apology on behalf of the State on Tuesday after a coroner's jury reached verdicts of unlawful killing for the 48 young people, 43 years after the disaster, last week.

Focus on synodality not doctrine change – Cardinal Grech

Chai Brady

Churches should focus on synodality and not issues that require changes in doctrine as the three-week October synod is not enough time for "in depth theological reflection".

Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod

of Bishops told *The Irish Catholic* communication was "not at its best" regarding the synod, during his visit to Ireland, but that: "From day one, we said the theme of this synod is clear for a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission. So, it is not meant to deal with doctrinal issues but how the Church can strengthen

its synodal dimension," Cardinal Grech said in St Columba's Church, Iona Road Parish, Dublin on April 21.

Looking towards the second meeting of the Synod of Bishops which continues the work of the Synod on Synodality which will run from October 2-27, he said: "Even now for the second session,

we are telling the churches, please focus on synodality, I know there are many issues but let us be real and practical, in three weeks you cannot address so many issues that really need a more in depth theological reflection.

"There are already experiences of synodality in the church, the

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MAKING SURE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS REMAIN CATHOLIC

Fr Eamonn Conway

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SYNODALITY COMES TO KNOCK

Cardinal Mario Grech
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MAKING A PRO-LIFE INPUT IN THE ELECTIONS

Eilís Mulroy

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Short window to save Catholic education stark report warns

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50s, the Grace reports show, while almost half of teachers at second level don't believe that the purpose of Catholic education is to encourage students to develop a personal relationship with Jesus.

The surveys show a "pattern of neglect" for formation around ethos and religious education that needs to be remedied urgently, said Prof. Conway of Notre Dame Australia.

The reports highlight a large cohort of school personnel who are open to the Faith, "but really do need to be engaged with, to be supported, to be cared for" in terms of personal formation and in terms of role formation.

The Church needs to "seriously engage with the divestment issue", according to MIC Prof. Eugene Duffy, one of the reports' co-authors.

"If we don't act now, we're

going to be pushed by demographic change," he told *The Irish Catholic*, citing the declining commitment to Catholicism across the age brackets.

The bishops must work together with a "coherent plan" rather than piecemeal to get "good returns" for divestment, Prof. Duffy added, saying "for schools we retain that means greater control over the curriculum and ethos and attention to religious education".

According to the reports' lead investigator, Dr Daniel O'Connell, if action isn't taken now in terms of divestment and resourcing, ethos will become "invisible".

"Whatever it's like now, whatever capacity for articulating and acting on Catholic ethos there is, that is going to diminish and shrink in leadership of schools. It's going to need intervention from the trusts," he added.

See pages 13-15.

Irish bishops delay decision on art by priest accused of abusing women

Chai Brady

Irish bishops have delayed deciding on the future of artwork in Rome's Pontifical Irish College by a controversial priest accused of abusing several adult women.

Slovenian artist and priest Fr Marko Rupnik has faced a myriad of accusations of serious sexual and spiritual abuse of at least 20 women since 2018. He was expelled from the Jesuits last year for "disobedience".

The chapel at the Irish College re-opened in 2010 after extensive remodelling and mosaic work carried out by Fr Rupnik. There is still an image of the controversial priest in the process of his work on

the Pontifical Irish College's website in a section on the college chapel.

Following a follow-up query from *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Paul Finnerty, Rector of the Pontifical Irish College – who confirmed the matter was under review last summer – said the college's trustees agreed to "keep the matter under review". The trustees are the Irish bishops' conference.

Fr Rupnik is responsible for artworks at the Vatican, Lourdes and San Giovanni Rotondo. In February this year Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes and Lourdes said he hopes to make a decision by this spring regarding what to do with the priest's mosaics at the Marian shrine. The bishop formed a commission last year to determine the future of the

mosaics.

Speaking previously to this paper, prominent campaigner and abuse survivor Margaret McGuckian said she believed the works should be removed from the college chapel.

"If there was art done by an abuser displayed for the world to see, should that still be in place? No, I would say not. Otherwise you're applauding him in his work, but not the real person as he was. It's giving the person a platform, he should have no acclaim whatsoever," she said.

"It is showing that the victims have not got a voice here, abusers are still being acclaimed if they are not coming out against it totally."

Focus on synodality not doctrine change – Cardinal Grech

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pastoral council, the parish council – where these exist – this is not something new. We need also to reflect on ministries, appreciating and recognising the importance of

the priesthood and the importance of the bishop's ministry, but it is about time that we reflect on new ministries but within the hierarchical structure of the Church."

Asked about prominent issues

which have been part of the synod in Ireland including female priests, married priests and Church teaching on LGBT+ people, the cardinal said: "Any argument can be brought forward but then you have to leave it

to those who are enabled, and have the ministry to guide the Church to reach the conclusion.

"You mentioned two, three issues, I can mention to you a myriad of arguments, don't forget this

is a listening process for the whole world. The fact that so many have engaged, for me this is the fruit already, because it promises a future where these discussions can go ahead."

Church can't downplay priesthood for fear of offence – Bishop Cullinan

Ruadhán Jones

The Church can't downplay the centrality of the priesthood to the life of the Church because of not wanting to "offend sensitivities", Bishop

Alphonsus Cullinan said at the close of the Year for Vocation.

The charism of the priesthood has been an essential in the makeup of the Church since the beginning, the head of the bishops' council

for vocations told *The Irish Catholic*.

"The healing power of the sacraments would be greatly diminished if we consider that a priest can simply be replaced by other ministries which are not sacramental," the bishop of Waterford said.

"Every person has a vocation – a calling from

God, but let us celebrate the sacredness of the ordained priesthood," Bishop Cullinan added.

The Year for Vocation opened on Good Shepherd Sunday in 2023 with the theme 'Take the risk for Christ' and closed with the celebration of Mass on RTE on April 20.

Bishop Cullinan thanked all those involved in organising and carrying out the various events of the year, which included conferences, golf days and the "fervent prayer" for priestly vocations by people up and down the country.

"The hours of adoration, the rosaries, the aspirations

and intercessions for countless people are what ultimately produce fruit," Bishop Cullinan said.

He added: "I wish to thank especially all those who prayed for priestly vocations. They are the real heroes. Please keep it up. It is worth it!"

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Jesuits hand back Gardiner Street Church to Dublin diocese

Ruadhán Jones

The Irish Jesuits are to hand back Gardiner Street Parish to Dublin diocese after 50 years ministering to Dublin's north inner city, the order announced Monday.

While St Francis Xavier church will remain attached to the Jesuits, it will cease to be a parish church from August 1 this year, becoming part of the neighbouring Pro-Cathedral Parish.

Public Masses and the popular Sacred Heart novena will continue in the church, but from August, Baptisms, Confirmations, First Communions, weddings, and the Easter Vigil will take place in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral.

The decision came in response to falling Jesuit vocations, as well as dwindling

numbers of Catholics living in the parish, outgoing PP Fr Niall Leahy SJ said in a statement.

Most of the local people attending Gardiner St will notice "very little difference" as a result of the change, Fr Leahy continued.

"We Jesuits hope to continue and enhance our ministry in collaboration with our lay colleagues and the diocese," he said.

"Together we will serve the local Church by continuing to develop our adult faith formation programmes, Ignatian spirituality courses, and youth ministry. Recent fundraising efforts and significant financial investment have ensured that the St Francis Xavier's will continue to be a hub for this mission."

The church also offers space to local community groups

in an area that has "suffered unfairly and disproportionately" from the effects of homelessness, poverty, and drug addiction, the Jesuits said.

St Mary's Adm Fr Kieran McDermott welcomed the integration, saying it "will mean greater pastoral planning and better use of our respective resources".

The decision came following a series of consultations with clergy, the respective parish pastoral councils, the school community and staff since January this year, the Jesuits said.

The consultation will continue with parishioners and volunteers, those involved in lay ministries invited to participate in parish gatherings on Wednesday, May 1, at 7.15 pm, in Gardiner Street and Thursday, May 16, at 7.15 pm in St Kevin's Oratory, Pro-Cathedral.

Mural of Irish WWII hero priest vandalised in Kerry

Renata Steffens

A mural in honour of an Irish priest who saved thousands of Jewish people during World War II has been vandalised with Hitler references in Tralee.

Kerry artist May Leen who painted the mural of Msgr Hugh O'Flaherty in 2015 said the priest's family "don't deserve to see this".

"To see this war hero, and a brave Kerry man, that saved thousands of people from the Nazis during the war to now, ironically, be compared to Hitler, it is very wrong," she told the *Kerryman*. The attack is believed to have occurred at some point over the weekend.

Msgr O'Flaherty saved more than 6,500

Jewish lives and Allied prisoners of war when he was based in Rome, becoming known as The Vatican Pimpernel.

The mural is part of a permanent memorial which honours the priest's good deeds.

Being an art teacher, Ms Leen encourages her students to respond to and interact with art. "This is healthy, so I am respectfully calling out the individual that did this to respond to this painting in a healthy and dignified way by creating their own artwork and offer it for public display," she said.

The artist believes if someone is brave enough to vandalise another artist's work, they should be as brave to do their own artwork and have that analysed and discussed by the public.

Good shepherds for Armagh...



Fr Davis Haberkorn and Fr Francesco Campiello are pictured with Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin after the two men were ordained to the priesthood in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, on Sunday, April 20.



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Pope coming home to Argentina the 'best thing' – slum priest

Michael Kelly in Buenos Aires

An Argentinian priest who works with the country's poorest and most vulnerable people is hopeful that Pope Francis will visit the community during a proposed trip to the Pontiff's homeland later this year.

Fr Pedro Cannavó, who was ordained by the then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio over 15 years ago, is one of the so-called 'slum priests' working in the Argentine capital.

"A visit by Pope Francis would be the best that could happen to us," Fr Cannavó told *The Irish Catholic*.

Pope Francis (87) was invited to

visit his native country earlier this year by President Javier Milei.

"You well know that you do not need an invitation to come to Argentina. At the risk of saying the unnecessary, I invite you to visit our beloved country, according to the dates and places indicated to us, bearing in mind the widespread desire of our cities, provinces and towns to count on your presence and to convey to you their filial affection," the president said in the letter dated January 8, 2024.

Sources have indicated that the Pope is considering visiting in November, the first time he will return to Buenos Aires since his election to the papacy in 2013.

Fr Cannavó said that the visit will depend on the Pope's health.

"But if he does come, it's here – to these neighbourhoods, where he will be the most comfortable, and feel the most welcome," he told *The Irish Catholic* during a visit to the sprawling parish of Mary Mother of the People, in the shadows of the Estadio Pedro Bidegain – home of Francis' favourite soccer team Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro.

Fr Cannavó said such a visit will mean everything to local people, many of whom are poor migrants from Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Chile.

"Here, no one reduces him to politics," Fr Cannavó said, "for everyone here, he is the best thing that's ever happened to Argentina."

"All of us priests who do this ministry of working and living

in the slums would love to host him. But I think we have a better chance because here, he could say Mass in the San Lorenzo stadium!"

Bishop Darío Quintana Muñoz, prelate of Cafayate, and a member of the Argentine bishops' conference told *The Irish Catholic* he was hopeful that the Pope will come.

However, he insisted that it will depend on Francis' health given that the proposed trip to Argentina comes after a gruelling visit to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore proposed for September 2-13 and the month-long synod of bishops in October.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Irish Capuchins plan for 'new spring'

The Irish Capuchins are hosting a 'New Spring' project at Ards Friary, Co. Donegal, planting native Irish trees in their new sanctuary woodland.

Taking place Friday, May 3, at 12-2pm, the Capuchins invite volunteers to join in this project, following the order's ideal of working humbly and simply as brothers, offering their services for the good of all.

Ards Friary Retreat and Contemplative Ecology Centre's main purpose is to offer a place where people can reconnect with nature and God.

Following Pope Francis' and Franciscan tradition, their plan to respond to the cry of the earth, joining ecology and spirituality with fraternity.

Those interested in joining, need to RSVP by Friday the 26th of April, either by texting to +353 (0) 87455 7796 or Email: marketing@ardsfriary.ie

Waterford displays Eucharistic miracles

St Saviour's Church, Waterford City, are hosting an international exhibition of the Eucharistic Miracles of the World from April 28 to May 12.

The solemn opening of the exhibition takes place at 3pm, April 28, in the Sacred Heart Church, Waterford.

The exhibition will be open to the public from Monday to Friday, 10.30am-5pm, Saturday 11am-5pm and Sunday 2pm-6pm.

The exhibition is designed and created by Blessed Carlo Acutis, a young man who is on the path to sainthood after dedicating his life to Christ and documenting his Eucharistic miracles.

Human trafficking becoming 'more prevalent' in Ireland

Ruadhán Jones

Homelessness charities believe human trafficking is becoming "more prevalent" and they are coming in contact with more victims, according to a new report from Christian NGO Depaul.

Depaul published *An Overview of Homelessness and Human Trafficking in Dublin* in conjunction with UK-based charity The Passage on Monday.

The report found most homelessness charities believe they are coming into contact with

victims of trafficking, but warned they have insufficient knowledge and awareness to identify victims.

Depaul CEO David Carroll said human trafficking is becoming "more prevalent" in Ireland.

The research "highlights the need to not only to identify victims to be able to link these victims into crucial support services", Mr Carroll said in a statement.

"This report signals an initial response to links between human trafficking and homelessness in Ireland and highlights that we can do more to support these individuals. Every

gender and every nationality can be a victim of this destructive crime. No community is immune to it."

Mr Carroll called for "an ecosystem that is robust enough to support victims of trafficking", saying we don't have that at present in Ireland.

"Much of the discussions to date focused on trafficking in the context of foreign nationals, and it is therefore not clear whether homelessness organisations are coming into contact with Irish nationals or people with residence in Ireland who have been trafficked," he added.

Aontú Deputy Leader Brolly speaks out against passed RSE motion

Staff reporter

Deputy Leader of Aontú Gemma Brolly has criticised the recently passed Alliance Party motion which seeks to enforce "compulsory, standardised, inclusive, high-quality, evidence-based and age appropriate" RSE teaching into classrooms. Ms Brolly has described some of the language used in the motion as "misleading". The motion was passed on Monday by a margin of 49 votes to 33.

Ms Brolly, a teacher, described the motion as "another step in the pathway impinging upon the role of the family".

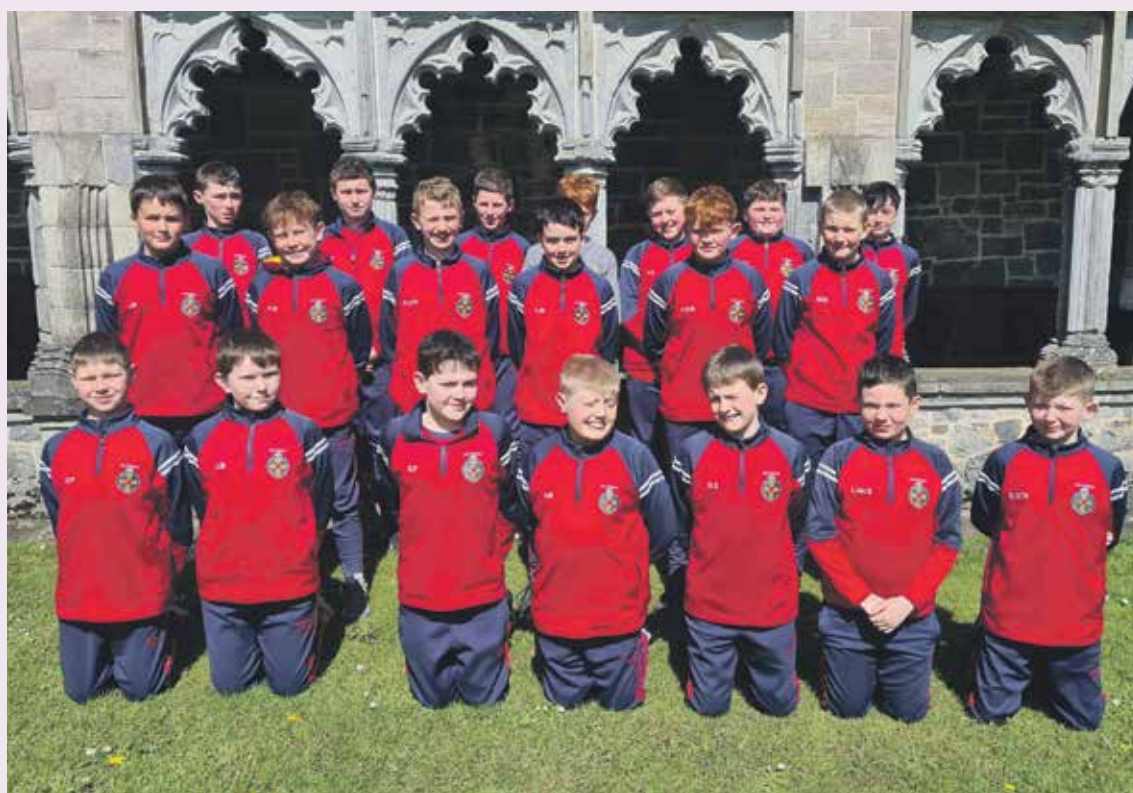
"Monday's motion is yet another step in the pathway impinging upon the role of the family in society," she said. "It seeks to impinge upon the rights of parents and respecting that parents know their children best,

wrongfully and needlessly setting the rights of children and their parents against one another."

Ms Brolly also said that the motion incorrectly states that it "regrets that children and young people in Northern Ireland have not had access to such a curriculum" and that "we in Aontú would argue quite the contrary. RSE teaching has been present for many years in many classrooms and more importantly in many homes, as deemed appropriate by parents and by school ethos".

Ms Brolly also said that the use of the term "age-appropriate" is misleading and that "many children develop maturity at various rates and levels. Their age does not dictate their maturity, nor does it take into account any medical or educational needs. Parents will not be fooled by smokescreens and misleading language".

Our Christian heritage...



Pupils from Doon Christian Brothers School, Co. Limerick, visit at Holy Cross Abbey, Co. Tipperary during a day retreat in preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Mind your language, minister – words matter

What is 'the far right' in the political – or social – sphere? We hear this phrase from various authorities, but when the admirable Senator Sharon Keogan asked Justice Minister Helen McEntee for a definition, the minister dithered over her response.

She was "not sure there is a definition," said Ms McEntee. It was, she suggested vaguely "obviously a political ideology or a particular view that a person has".

She elucidated further: "We have seen people to be anti-government, anti-state, anti-women's rights, amongst other things – that would be my own particular view of those who claim to be far-right."

Right

But which category of people actually claim to be 'far right'? Surely it is mainly other agencies – An Garda, RTÉ, politicians – who make this claim? It seldom seems to be these mysterious 'far right' groups themselves.

Moreover, the ideology of the 'far right' has never been 'anti-Government' or 'anti-state'. Indeed, the most defining aspect of 'far right' political thinking is a strengthened, even a militarised state, with expanded state control in every area of life.

Although in that sense, it's not very different from the 'far left': Stalin



Mary Kenny

and Hitler got along so well (until they fell out) because their ideas were essentially similar.

Is the 'far right' anti-women's rights? Historically, yes, it would be patriarchal, and yet the two leading European leaders who represent genuine right-wing policies are women – Marine le Pen in France, and Georgia Meloni in Italy.

“None of these conditions apply to Ireland today, as far as I can see”

Fascist movements have also attracted women: Julie Gottlieb's study *Feminine Fascists* (published by the University of Manchester) documents that.

These women claimed that certain fascist movements offered "equality" – to dress up in military-type gear, speak at meetings, get active.

“Catholics, he noted, are often socially conservative but economically veering more to the left”

None of these conditions apply to Ireland today, as far as I can see. Yes, there are people who oppose immigration; there are people who foment street violence; and there are those who protest outside TDs' homes, which is completely unacceptable.

Definitions

But if the Justice Minister can't really define what 'far right' means – or misjudges certain aspects of its manifestation, such as the classic position on state control – then surely the phrase shouldn't be chucked around so promiscuously?

Besides which – as Fintan O'Toole has pointed out – many people hold a mixture of 'right' and 'left' opinions. Catholics, he noted, are often socially conservative but economically veering more to the left.

Senator Keogan asked if this brandishing of 'far right' was linked to 'hate speech'. A perceptive question: that, too, has not yet found a satisfactory legal definition.

It's the bi-centenary of the death of the Romantic poet Lord Byron, who died in April 1824, aged 36, while supporting Greek independence.

To the Victorians, Byron was a scandalous figure, described by Lady Caroline Lamb as "mad, bad and dangerous to know". He was awful to his wife, had many mistresses and an obsessive (and incestuous) relationship with his half-sister, Aurora Leigh, by whom he probably had a daughter.

Byron's views of women would not pass scrutiny today. He liked women to talk, he wrote, "because then they think less". He famously wrote that man's love is "a thing apart", but "tis a Woman's whole existence".

He was a hedonistic pagan, yet he championed Catholic Emancipation. He also wrote in a letter: "I am really a great admirer of tangible religion; and am breeding one of my daughters a Catholic, that she may have her hands full. It is

by far the most elegant worship... what with incense, pictures, statues, altars, shrines, relics and the Real Presence, Confession, absolution – there is something sensible [substantial] to grasp at."

He was great friends with the Irish melody-maker, Tom Moore, who he called "gentlemanly, gentle and, altogether, more pleasing than any individual with whom I am acquainted."

Byron placed his memoirs with Tom, who passed them on to a group of Byron's friends – who burned them as being too decadent to publish.

Despite his shocking reputation, my pious Co. Galway grandmother was an undiminished Byron fan. But then no one could deny his status of genius.

The Destruction of Sennacherib ("The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold/And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold") must be one of the most vivid and terrifying poems ever written.

All things glitz and glamour



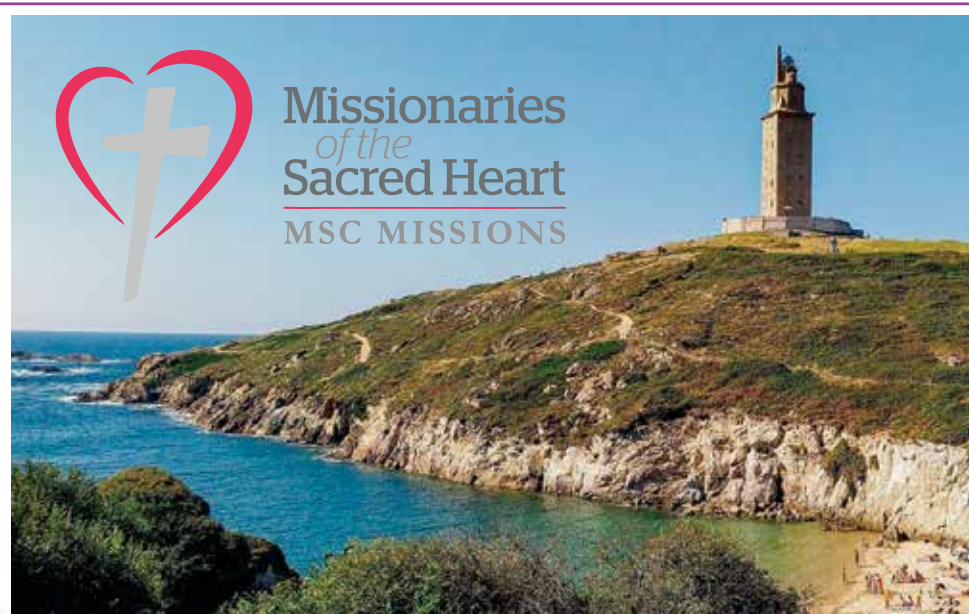
Victoria Beckham aka Posh Spice is pictured on her 50th birthday with her husband David and film star Tom Cruise. Photo: X.

By contrast with Byron's 19th Century decadence, some of the most popular celebrities of our time seem downright wholesome. Step forward 'Posh Spice', Victoria Beckham, who has just celebrated her 50th birthday with acclaim and élan.

Married successfully for 24 years, parents

of four children, forming a strong family unit who pull together, David and Victoria Beckham are the supreme role models of today. Who says the world is going to the dogs?

The pair, it will be recalled, were wed at Luttrellstown Castle in Co. Dublin, inspiring every betrothed couple since to emulate the golden couple's wedding extravaganza.



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The answer to loneliness, addiction and despair should not be death



Nuala O'Loan

Questions are asked openly about the future of the Church. It is said that it is in terminal decline. They have said this for centuries. Yet still it continues to grow. It was most unlikely, given the might of the Roman empire and the power relationships existing in the Holy Land at the time of Christ, that this man from a tiny village, who had lived and worked quietly for 30 years, should have been able, in the space of just three years, to found a global Church now comprising 1.39 billion Catholics and millions of other Christians.

People are talking openly of the possibility of World War III, of the necessity to enhance our defences and our military resources. The conflict in Ukraine and the situation between Hamas and Israel, with the significant involvement of Iran supporting Hamas, the engagement of the US, the UK and Europe in trying to find a way to peace whilst acknowledging the realities of what happened in Israel on October 7 and the consequential devastation of Gaza and much of the Palestinian territory, all result in a world which is much more vulnerable and threatened than before.

Peace

The strategic and military alliances which are developing across the world mean that the work of peace-making is even more important and the work of religious congregations in bringing the Gospel message of love, not violence, in supporting those living in conflict, in helping in the work of restoration and resettlement of the displaced, in working to assist refugees, whilst not facilitating human trafficking, is vitally important. Equally important is the work to care for the lonely the isolated, the young, the elderly, the newcomer, in Ireland.

Society in the UK and Ireland and in most of the west is increasingly secularised. Different norms are emerging rapidly – perhaps most starkly demonstrated in society's attitude to and response to two vital moments – the moment of birth and the moment of death.

Once human life was seen as

“The strategic and military alliances which are developing across the world mean that the work of peace-making is even more important and the work of religious congregations in bringing the Gospel message of love, not violence”



vital, to be cherished and respected to the extent that the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, states that “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth” and the more general human rights instruments proclaim the rights to life, freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment, to family life and all the other protections which are necessary for human life, even that understanding is changing.

“In Oregon over 35% of those who have died reported being motivated by being a perceived burden on family, friends and caregivers”

In Ireland 9,218 children were aborted in 2023, not including abortions carried out in hospitals. In England and Wales the abortion statistics for 2022 and 2023 have yet to be published, but between January and June 2022, 123,219 abortions had been carried out. One in four pregnancies globally now end in abortion.

In the context of the end of life the situation is equally grave. Assisted dying – either euthanasia,

where a doctor or someone else intentionally terminates a person's life using lethal drugs; or assisted suicide, which usually involves providing lethal drugs which people take to end their lives, has become available initially to those who were terminally ill in a number of countries. It has then been extended to those with a multiplicity of conditions most of which are not terminal, and could be treated.

In Oregon assisted suicide has been permitted for anorexia, diabetes, hernias and arthritis. In the Netherlands the already very wide criteria (including tinnitus) have been expanded to include babies under one year “born with such serious disorders that termination of life is regarded as the best option”. Children can request euthanasia from the age of 12, though they have to get the consent of their parents or guardians until they are 16, and parents must be “involved” until they are 18. Belgium permits euthanasia for children of any age.

In Oregon over 35% of those who have died reported being motivated by being a perceived burden on family, friends and caregivers.

Causes

Loneliness is one of the major causes of seeking assisted dying. In the Netherlands 77% of 39 Dutch adults with autism and/or intellectual disability gave loneliness as the main reason for choosing assisted dying. In Canada 20% of those opting for assisted dying did so because they were lonely. In Belgium over a period of two years 250 people chose assisted dying, not because they had physical illnesses but because of mental illness, loneliness addiction or despair. The answer to loneliness,

addiction, suicidal ideation, mental illness, despair should not be death.

What was unthinkable has become the norm in these countries.

These and many other major social developments such as mass migration, growing poverty and isolation challenge us as a people.

“The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity”

The work of religious orders in much of the developed world has changed. Where once religious orders played a fundamental role in establishing and running schools, hospitals, children's homes, etc, much of that role has been assumed by the State in many countries. Is there a future role for them, and if so what is it?

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis wrote that, “humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history: steps are being taken to improve people's welfare in a health care, education and communications. Yet the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. Diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It

is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity”.

Pope Francis identified many of the causes we need to espouse: “... in cities human trafficking, the narcotics trade, the abuse and exploitation of minors, the abandonment of the elderly and infirm, and various forms of corruption and criminal activity take place. ... Houses and neighbourhoods are more often built to isolate and protect than to connect and integrate.”

Humanity

I have seen and heard of the work of the Church across all the continents in dry, dusty, hot war-torn places and I have marvelled at what humanity can achieve with grace – whether it be religious sisters and brothers and lay missionaries providing education and health and other facilities to those who are less fortunate, often living in the most appalling circumstances, or the survival of a church at which the three priests were shot dead some years ago by a retreating army; the places of their deaths a few yards apart marked by three simple crosses; their church in which the people took refuge was set on fire so that hundreds died, unable to get out. Yet the church has been partially rebuilt and the people gather again to worship and thank God, despite all that they suffered.

To me that little church in Suai in Timor Leste is like an icon – the past and future of the Church is written in it.

The religious orders are still desperately needed in the world. Their challenge is to discern how to answer God's call, not just as his children but through the charisms which he has given them.

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Senator Rónán Mullen

A view from the Seanad



What to say when the visitors come knocking

It's a big year, electorally speaking. We've already had two referendums that proved revealing. We'll have the local and European elections on June 7. And Taoiseach Simon Harris may yet go to the country this October - if this Government's last budget is, as expected, of the giveaway variety, then Harris and Micheal Martin may see a post-budget election as the best chance of a rather stale act avoiding a drubbing and maybe even getting back into power.

One way or another, now is the time for you, the voter, to prepare your shopping list for the people who want to become your Councillor, MEP or TD.

Banish all negative thinking that suggests it doesn't matter what you say to politicians on the doorstep, that they'll just tell you what you want to hear and forget about it once they've got your vote.

Promises

Yes, some politicians make promises they never mean to keep. But the politician on your doorstep is your chance to let the world know what you are thinking. And not just that. The conversations you have with people you know will, in turn, influence what they say to the canvassers who come calling.

The future belongs to those who don't succumb to disappointment or frustration, who never give up, who keep themselves abreast of all possibilities, and who waste no opportunity to influence the culture around them.

As Christians, we are called to work for God's kingdom in this world and the next. "Thy will be done." This does not mean that we work for a theocracy, where our religious leaders govern soci-



Jesse Goodsell, a volunteer with Healthcare Rising, talks with a signatory for the Arizona for Abortion Access ballot initiative at the Burton Barr Central Library as the Democratic and Republican parties hold primary elections in Phoenix March 19, 2024. Photo: OSV/Caitlin O'Hara, Reuters

ety, or for an integralist situation where we try to enforce every aspect of the Church's social teaching through law, heedless of the views of any minority.

I haven't witnessed anyone pushing that theocratic agenda in my lifetime. But I see the opposite: Christians who succumb to a kind of fatalism that thinks the devil has all the best tunes here below, and so we should batten down the hatches and leave it to God to sort everything out in the end.

“It may be the Devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody”

We've been helped into this thinking by those on the hard left and ultra-libertar-

ian right who fight like tigers for their agenda. Maybe it's because they think this world is all there is. (Though some, I only say some, may be powered from below also.)

Should any of these activists accuse you of trying to 'impose your religion', you might ask, "Whose religion are you trying to impose?" Because as Bob Dylan tells us, "it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody".

Truthfully

Serving the Lord in politics, whether as a voter or as a politician is not about enforcing your will and desires on all comers. It's about truthfully working for the common good. Since every human being has infinite dignity as a child of God, our task is to build a civilisation of love, a culture of life where we each

will the good of the other.

There isn't room to write the manifesto here, but, for now, here are three things we should be saying to our politicians in the coming weeks:

Abortion: It has to be always top of our list, no matter how much RTE, the Government or the world tries to normalise it, 10,000 vulnerable innocent human beings are being deliberately killed in our country each year.

“Precautionary pain relief for late-term abortions is the least we should expect in a country that pretends to be civilised, not savage”

We've had nothing like this since the Famine. If people matter the way politicians always say they matter, then this can only be described as a holocaust. In the short term, there is no chance of repealing our abortion law.

But at a minimum every canvasser should be asked whether they would support a State policy of reducing the number of abortions, offering ultrasound in all cases where abortion is requested and practically support and encourage every woman to keep her baby.

Also, precautionary pain relief for late-term abortions is the least we should expect in a country that pretends to be civilised, not savage.

Education

Education: The reason why secularists want the Church to have no involvement in our education system is obvious. Education influences how people think. Secular activists believe that education should be in the hands of the State because, through NGOs and State appointments, they can access the curriculum and mould the next generation according to their values.

Transgender ideology is an obvious example. The Cass Report in Britain has now highlighted what many doctors and other

experts have been warning about all along: the danger of pushing puberty blockers at gender-confused children.

“Who is going to hold our Government to account over this?”

But our Department of Education has been enabling organisations like TENI (Transgender Equality Network of Ireland) and BelongTo to push social transitioning in schools. Who is going to hold our Government to account over this? This election gives parents a chance to do just that and push back against excessive State control of our Education system.

Asylum and migration policy: People are angry and scared about what the Government is doing. They worry that it is making commitments that the social fabric and economy cannot sustain. Hostility to asylum seekers or economic/poverty migrants is always wrong.

But it is also wrong to allow entry without documentation, to accept within the asylum process those who are not genuine refugees, to allow the exploitation of our system by criminal traffickers, and to create social ghettos around the country that undermine the local economy.

If some people with relatively more resources can reach our shores while people more deserving of protection languish abroad, that is injustice. Christians should insist on a sustainable and humane migration policy, showing firm resistance to unworkable or dishonest solutions.

The EU Migration Pact requires a national conversation before any further sovereignty is signed away. On this last point, if you are concerned about the EU Pact, now is the time to lobby your politicians because the Government wants to get this through, with minimum debate it seems, before the June elections.

“Christians should insist on a sustainable and humane migration policy, showing firm resistance to unworkable or dishonest solutions”

Ireland needs to institute 'catholicity' tests for Catholic colleges



We are selling young people short by not offering the fullness of Catholicism, writes Prof. Eamonn Conway

I worked at one of Ireland's teacher education colleges for 23 years. On two separate occasions I was also invited to serve on the inaugural advisory boards of centres established to carry on the legacy of service to Catholic education by Catholic colleges that had ceased to exist through incorporation into secular universities. I speak from this experience.

Teachers from Ireland are recognised the world over for their professionalism, their innate goodness and kindness, and their genuine interest in their pupils.

It was a privilege to teach so many of them knowing also that in many instances they were happy to work in Catholic schools.

It was also a privilege to teach a new generation of excellent principals and school leaders at postgraduate level whose personal commitment to Christian faith and Catholic principles, often in challenging cultural circumstances and with little support even within their own schools, was inspiring.

And yet, in the very institutions one has a right to expect it to happen, that is, in colleges and centres under Catholic patronage, these young teachers and future school leaders are not being sufficiently introduced to the treasures of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Vision

They are also not being invited to consider the Christian vision of the human person as one that can be enriching for them personally.

Neither are they being encouraged to adopt it as their underlying educational philosophy. On the contrary, too often a counter-paradigm, one underpinned by an instrumentalist and technocratic approach to education, often market-driven, prevails, even, as I say, in colleges and centres under Catholic patronage.

The wellbeing epidemic

we are experiencing in so many Western countries is related to the prevalence of this paradigm in society.

This is because it leaves questions of ultimate meaning unaddressed, questions that can only be suppressed at tragic personal cost.

Whereas previous generations may have experienced truth claims as suffocating, young people today are left wondering if there is anything that is true at all; anything 'out there' that is capable of bestowing upon their lives ultimate meaning and that is worth living from and for.

I fear we are selling young people and their teachers short in our Catholic schools by not having the confidence today to

live and impart the distinctiveness of Catholic education.

Removal

Recently, the INTO called for the removal of the Certificate in Religious Studies as a requirement to teach in Catholic primary schools.

Rather than view this as a threat could we see it as an invitation to listening and dialogue, in a synodal style, with all the stakeholders in Catholic education, even with those critical of it?

I was saddened to hear recently, for instance, that Catholic teacher education providers have an opportunity to meet with representatives of the Church in Ireland only very rarely, in

fact on only one occasion in the past three years.

“Where I now work, for instance, is currently undergoing its 10-year catholicity review being conducted by an entirely external panel”

Although the Grace data shows a trajectory towards decline in the religiosity of those working in Catholic schools, nonetheless I believe that many, perhaps even the majority would respond positively to such opportunities for dialogue.

There is something more that can be done. The Catholic university where I now work, for instance, is currently undergoing its 10-year catholicity review being conducted by an entirely external panel.

Though it is Church policy in Ireland to encourage ethos audits at primary and post-

primary levels I am unaware of any similar policy or practice applying to third-level Catholic institutions here.

As a Catholic college department head I was often required to co-operate regularly with reviews undertaken by diverse external bodies: the Teaching Council, the Psychological Society of Ireland, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the College's accrediting university, and so on.

Implemented

Findings were always implemented quickly. Over 23 years, however, not one review was ever conducted by an agency of the Church, internally or externally.

In fact, I know of one occasion when Catholic authorities were specifically asked to consider conducting such a review and adamantly refused.

The consequence is obvious: nowadays in educational institutions, whether we like

it or not, what isn't monitored or measured doesn't really matter.

This matter needs to be addressed. Ethos audits should not be considered merely as means of maintaining nominal control or of ensuring that Catholic education institutions are not "trading under false pretences" but rather as a way to guarantee that the richness of a genuinely Catholic approach to education is on offer among the plurality of approaches that can and should be made available in this country.

i Prof. Eamonn Conway is a priest of the Archdiocese of Tuam and Professor of Integral Human Development at the University of Notre Dame Australia. He is a co-founder of the Grace project and co-author of the recently published Grace reports on Catholic primary and post-primary schools in Ireland.

“Catholic teacher education providers have an opportunity to meet with representatives of the Church in Ireland only very rarely, in fact on only one occasion in the past three year”



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Facebook's Catholic problem



The tech giant has a surprisingly long history of suppressing Catholic speech, writes **Ian Dunn**

Facebook may not be the trendiest platform, but it remains incredibly popular. Every month, more than 3 billion people log in.

The company's grand mission statement is "to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together." Yet, when it comes to Catholics, the tech giant often seems to distance them.

This week, *The Irish Catholic* fell afoul of Zuckerberg's team. Two of our posts were accused of breaching 'hate speech' and 'violence and incitement' community standards.

The first post linked to an article with the headline 'Priest will continue blessing planes despite airport ban', published on April 11, and was flagged for potentially violating their standards for violence and incitement.

The second post, with the headline 'Catholic schools staunch on religious certificate requirements as INTO puts on pressure', also published in the April 11 edition of the paper, was flagged as potentially contravening their hate speech standards.

Restrictions

It is unclear what exact standards have been breached in either case, but it's not the first time Catholics have faced challenges on Facebook.

In 2022, the Catholic charity Aid to the Church



Photo: Pope Francis meets Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, during a private audience at the Vatican. Photo: CNS

in Need ran a campaign on the site, urging the UK government and the UN to help Christian and other minority faith women suffering from sexual violence. However, the social media giant banned the outreach effort.

“The restrictions were eventually lifted, but the mystery remained”

The charity says the ban cost the campaign thousands of signatures of support. As the petition has now been submitted to the government, it is too late to resume.

John Newton from the charity told Premier Radio at the time: "We have been battling for two months to get these restrictions lifted, with no clear reason for

their imposition.

"We had no idea what we were doing wrong and spent nearly two months asking Facebook to address this and explain the restrictions."

The restrictions were eventually lifted, but the mystery remained.

In 2020, the Facebook page Sancta Familia, the most popular Catholic Facebook page in the UK and Ireland, saw its traffic dwindle during Holy Week. John Patrick Mallon, who runs the page, is certain restrictions were imposed limiting who could see it, but he doesn't know why.

Scottish Bishop John Keenan of Paisley wrote to Facebook urging them to remove the restrictions, praising the value of the page and stating that restricting it was a threat to religious freedom. The restrictions were lifted, but no explanation was ever given.

Hearing

Also In 2020, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg faced questions from lawmakers about his company's censorship of Catholic content during his two-day congressional hearing. This followed the revelation that millions of Facebook users' personal data had been compromised.

Zuckerberg apologised and said that the company

had "made a mistake" in blocking a Catholic theology degree advertisement by Franciscan University of Steubenville when asked about it by Washington state Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

The ad, which featured a crucifix, was rejected by Facebook over Easter on the grounds that its content was "excessively violent" and "sensational." Facebook later apologised, saying the ad had been blocked in error and did not violate terms of service.

“One possibility is that an anti-Catholic group coordinated the reporting of the affected pages as spam, triggering an automatic action on Facebook”

In 2017, dozens of major Catholic pages in English, Spanish, and Portuguese were removed from Facebook simultaneously. They later apologised, but the website Churchpop speculated that the explanation of a spam malfunction was questionable.

"One possibility is that an anti-Catholic group coordi-

“The tech mogul presented the Pope with a model of a solar-powered glider, but given Facebook's increasingly unethical behaviour, perhaps it is Zuckerberg who is flying too close to the sun”

nated the reporting of the affected pages as spam, triggering an automatic action on Facebook," they wrote.

"Or, after being reported, an anti-Catholic Facebook employee in charge of reviewing spam reports took the opportunity to ban the pages.

"Another possibility is that a rogue employee who dislikes the Catholic Church used their authority to ban the pages, and when Facebook discovered it, they reversed the action."

Scandal

It's worth noting that as one of the world's biggest companies, Facebook has been implicated in numerous scandals, including conducting psychological experiments on its users, illegally selling their data, and failing to prevent its technology from being used to commit genocide and traffic images of child sexual abuse.

Perhaps Catholics should take a bit of persecution from such an organisation

as a badge of honour. While the above incidents are troubling, they don't prove a systematic bias against Catholics. However, they should serve as a reminder that while social media platforms offer opportunities to share the faith, logging on is more likely to incite a near occasion of sin.

In 2016, Mark Zuckerberg travelled to the Vatican and met Pope Francis. Zuckerberg spoke about how much he "admires [the Pope's] message of mercy and tenderness" and "how he's found new ways to communicate with people of every faith around the world."

Given that every incident mentioned in this article occurred after that meeting, it doesn't seem to have been a turning point for Zuckerberg. The tech mogul presented the Pope with a model of a solar-powered glider, but given Facebook's increasingly unethical behaviour, perhaps it is Zuckerberg who is flying too close to the sun.

“In 2020, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg faced questions from lawmakers about his company's censorship of Catholic content during his two-day congressional hearing”

UN Security Council risks 'doom loop'



Reform isn't enough to improve the UN Security Council, writes **Michael Sanfey**

Earlier this month the British Foreign Secretary and his French counterpart co-authored an op-ed celebrating the 120th anniversary of the Entente Cordiale, a diplomatic agreement between the United Kingdom and France.

"We have helped to forge a better world," they wrote in *The Telegraph*. Up to a point, Lord Cameron.

It's true that in terms of language, literature, science, sport, music and the arts generally, the world is heavily indebted to these two ancient nations.

Yet the ledger also contains entries of a more problematic



nature, such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration, the Suez crisis, and the decision to bomb Libya.

Listing various areas of constructive cooperation, the two ministers somehow managed to omit any reference to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Collective

France and Britain are permanent members of the UNSC, along with the United States, China, and the Russian Federation, known collectively as the 'P5' – each of which can wield a precious veto.

Read that again: as things

currently stand, in what is supposed to be the world's most important security guarantor – the UNSC – Britain and France are on a par with the US, China, and Russia.

It is fashionable to dismiss the UNSC as 'jammed up' and to allot all of the blame for that to Russia, and it is true that by invading its neighbour Ukraine in February 2022 while UNSC President-in-Office at the time, Russia did indeed make a mockery of 'global governance'.

In December 2023 during an event at the School of Transnational Governance in Florence, France's then Europe Minister, Laurence Boone kicked to

touch when asked whether it would promote a more geopolitical EU if the EU were to hold a seat on the UNSC.

She said that the UNSC was "largely paralysed" because of the Russia situation, also mentioning the attachment which EU Member States had to having a foreign policy of their own.

But the P5 status of these two by now middling West European powers undermines the credibility of the UNSC. Yes, they have nukes, but so do other countries in the world who are not on the UNSC, so that's not reason enough alone.

Summit

On September 22-23 of this year a major conference will take place at the UN in New York – the 'Summit of the Future – Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow'.

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".

Unfortunately if it sticks to this outline the summit is already destined to fail.

Mere 'reaffirmation' of the UN Charter will not suffice. Its provisions are such that it is a simple matter for a P5 member to block any proposal that would alter its own status.

In other words the biggest obstacle to re-constituting the Security Council... is the Security Council.

What should really give all UN members – and all thinking diplomats – pause for thought is the worry that if a concerted effort is not made to remake the system, a merely irksome vicious cycle could become an existential 'doom loop'.

A Carnegie Endowment report of June 2023 about UNSC reform noted that "International institutions are notoriously impervious to fundamental change. Once established, they create entrenched interests committed to the status quo."

The report went on to say that, this being the case, "transformational change in world politics is most likely in the aftermath of catastrophes, when a major crisis wipes the slate clean, weakens attach-

ments to existing arrangements, and encourage actors to consider novel norms, rules and frameworks".

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is such a glaring breach of international law that it – if the member countries of the UN are bold enough to seize it – offers a moment of recreation.

Solution

'Reform' of the UNSC just isn't going to cut it. A much more radical solution is required.

What would really help would be if at least two-thirds of the membership of the UN General Assembly called for an international constitutional convention to take place from 2025-26 charged with conducting a thoroughgoing examination of the UNSC, not excluding its possible abolition.

i 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, working on a research project entitled *The Liberal International Order and Global Governance: Ramifications of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*.

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Make your input for life in the upcoming elections

A woman speaks at a March for Life event. Photo: Eilís Mulroy and PLC.



Eilís Mulroy

Three really important elections are set to take place in the coming months - the local and European elections in early June, and a General Election sometime this year or early next year, at the latest.

All three elections will determine who represents us for the next five years. It's why from a pro-life standpoint we have to do everything we can to help elect as many pro-life public representatives as possible - representatives who will boldly speak up for life and work together to bring about meaningful changes to reduce Ireland's rapidly increasing abortion rate.

Efforts

The efforts made between now and election day to encourage people to 'think pro-life' before they vote will play a big part in deciding whether more pro-life representatives are elected and whether real progress is made over the course of the next five years in shifting the focus away from the present government policy of promoting

abortion at every turn, to a situation where information is not withheld from women about alternatives to abortion but instead is actively encouraged.

“It's really important, as pro-life supporters, that we do our level best this year to make it to the march”

On Bank Holiday Monday May 6, the annual March for Life takes place in Dublin. It is perfectly timed to coincide with the upcoming elections which happen just one month later. Among the guest speakers at the march will be pro-life stalwarts Carol Nolan TD and Dr Calum Miller, a graduate of Oxford Medical School and well known media commentator.

The main focus of this year's march will be encour-

“Efforts made between now and election day to encourage people to 'think pro-life' before they vote will play a big part in deciding whether more pro-life representatives are elected”

aging voters across Ireland to vote pro-life. Having a massive turnout at the event is vital for getting the message to voters and focussing minds on the importance of voting pro-life on election day.

Word travels fast when an event is successful whether the mainstream media report on it or not. So it's really important, as pro-life supporters, that we do our level best this year to make it to the march and to encourage family and friends to come along with us as well.

Pushback

As the results of the recent 'family' and 'care' referendums showed, voters - many of whom are pro-life - are looking for answers and starting to push back against a political system that for too long has refused to listen to their concerns.

When people voted in the last Local Elections in 2019 and General Election in 2020, very little had come to light about what was happening under the new law. But so much has changed since then. We now know the stark and terrible reality of how the

new abortion regime is operating.

Irish abortions have increased from 2,879 in 2018 to over 10,000 last year, based on HSE replies to parliamentary questions regarding the soon to be published abortion figures for 2023.

There's the fact that an outlandish €46 million of taxpayers' money was spent on abortion provision in the first four years of the new law taking effect, with not a single cent of it being used to promote positive alternatives.

“We have to work extra hard to reach voters who would be inclined to vote pro-life if they hear the message about the importance of doing so”

Ordinary voters are reliant on us to inform them about these developments. They're certainly not going to hear about what's happening from RTÉ as we learned once again last week when the woefully one-sided RTÉ Investigates programme on abortion was broadcast.

We make the mistake sometimes of thinking that people who share our views on abortion will automatically vote pro-life, but that's not the case. But the reality

“It's a reminder how every vote counts and how the efforts we make in supporting good candidates - even if what we do is very small - could in the end make all the difference”

is with so many issues competing for peoples' attention - particularly at election time - we have to work extra hard to reach voters who would be inclined to vote pro-life if they hear the message about the importance of doing so between now and election day.

A few weeks out from each election, the Pro Life Campaign always publishes a comprehensive Voter Guide, featuring a list of all election candidates and where they stand on abortion and other right to life issues.

As well as serving as a useful guide to voters, having such a comprehensive list ensures that genuinely pro-life candidates are rewarded for their stance, while reminding candidates who support abortion that they stand to lose votes over their position.

Key

The key in the coming weeks is ensuring we maximise the number of voters who 'think pro-life' as they enter the polling booth come election day. If we do our job well,

we will see the results in the increased number of pro-life representatives elected.

In the 2019 Local Elections, an excellent candidate who was also staunchly pro-life, failed to get elected by a single vote. The person who got elected in his place, sad to report, was a strident pro-abortion campaigner. It's a reminder how every vote counts and how the efforts we make in supporting good candidates - even if what we do is very small - could in the end make all the difference.

A successful march on May 6 will help galvanise support in the critical weeks before the election, from the coverage it hopefully receives, to the encouragement it gives attendees to pull out all the stops for candidates who share our values on the pro-life issue. Let's hope it goes really well. It has an added importance this year with the three elections just around the corner.

i Eilís Mulroy is Chief Officer and spokesperson for the Pro-Life Campaign.

Investment, divestment needed urgently to safeguard Catholic education – report



The Church must act now to or else ethos will become invisible, Ruadhán Jones hears

An in-depth survey of Catholic schools in Ireland has highlighted stark issues regarding the continuing provision of Catholic-ethos based education in Ireland, saying there is a small window to act to safeguard its future.

While acknowledging the excellence of Catholic schools as institutions for education, and also the hard work and goodwill of staff and management, the Grace reports released on Tuesday suggests “a different picture begins to emerge” when ethos and mission-focus are considered.

One of the reports’ co-authors, Prof. Eamonn Conway, said the surveys show a “pattern of neglect” for formation around ethos and religious education that needs to be remedied urgently.

The data suggests there is “considerable positivity and goodwill toward Catholic education” in Ireland among Boards of Management (BOM), principals, teachers and staff, Prof. Conway told *The Irish Catholic*.

But “the window is narrowing very significantly in which we can act” as Catholic schools face a potential succession crisis due to a “trajectory of decline in levels of commitment” to the Faith, he added.

Imbalance

“Teachers in the age category 18-29 are becoming more and more removed from the Catholic faith,” he said. “For example, three out of 10 under 29 teaching at second level make it very clear they don’t witness to or support the Catholic ethos.”

For principals over 50, almost 90% say they are committed to the Faith, but it drops for under 50s to 56%, the Grace reports show.

Speaking in broad terms, the former head of theology at Mary Immaculate College said there’s a fifth of those working in schools who are

“very much on board” with Catholic ethos and identity.

There’s a further fifth who “aren’t on board at all” and there’s three fifths who are “open to it, but really do need to be engaged with, to be supported, to be cared for”, Prof. Conway said.

“There’s a pattern of neglect we need to remedy in terms of personal formation and in terms of formation professionally for roles like BOM, principals, teachers and so on.”

A second consideration is divesting Catholic schools, which Prof. Conway says we need to do quickly, warning that “we can’t maintain the number of schools we have, we don’t have the personnel”.

MIC Prof. Eugene Duffy, one of the reports’ co-authors, also believes the Church needs to “seriously engage with the divestment issue”.

“The project’s lead investigator, said that while divestment is difficult, ‘it absolutely needs to happen now’”

“If we don’t act now, we’re going to be pushed by demographic change,” he told *The Irish Catholic*, citing the declining commitment to Catholicism across the age brackets.

But it needs to be done in a serious partnership between the bishops and the Department of Education, Prof. Duffy added, “not in a piecemeal, ad hoc fashion”.

“We should be doing it as the Irish bishops’ conference or a Church to ensure there is a coherent plan to ensure if we do divest, we are getting good returns. For schools we retain, that means greater control over the curriculum and ethos and attention to RE.”

Dr Daniel O’Connell, the project’s lead investigator, said that while divestment is difficult, “it absolutely needs to happen now”.

“Dioceses don’t seem able to resource schools in their diocese or in any way help schools act out their Catholic ethos. Divestment needs to be

really engaged with in serious way,” the lecturer in religious education at MIC told *The Irish Catholic*.

As it stands, resources are “too far stretched”, with patrons looking after hundreds of schools. “They can’t engage in any serious structural, systemic way” around the implementation of ethos, Dr O’Connell said.

Equally, while he was pleasantly surprised by the positivity and openness of school personnel to Catholic education, Dr O’Connell said the age structure “will militate against people having capacity to take up leadership roles who have an understanding of and commitment to ethos as practice and belief in God isn’t there. Capacity is shrinking.”

“Look at younger generations – 77% of primary teachers respect ethos, but when you look at 18-29-year-olds, that drops to 55%,” he said.

Action

If action isn’t taken now in terms of divestment and resourcing, Dr O’Connell worries that ethos will become “invisible”.

“Whatever it’s like now, whatever capacity for articulating and acting on Catholic ethos there is, that is going to diminish and shrink in leadership of schools. It’s going to need intervention from the trusts,” he added.

Seriously investigating the possibility of divestment is just one of a number of recommendations from the Grace project based on their research.

Other recommendations include calling for investment in “significant training” for BOMs; for ethos to be a priority item on the agenda of each BOM meeting; for principals to be required to have a qualification in faith-based school leadership; and for all new members of staff receive substantial orientation on the school’s ethos on commencement of employment in a school.

Finally, the reports recommend “effective systems be put in place to advocate for Catholic education with government, the public, parents, teachers’ unions, and the media”.

For Prof. Conway, Chair of Integral Human Development



Catholic students attend Mass at St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry. Prof. Eugene Duffy said that the Church isn’t good at talking about how diverse Catholic education is.

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at Notre Dame Australia, the ultimate remedy is to take a whole curriculum and whole sector approach.

"This is where we're going to have to deal tough with the Government... we can't have a curriculum that is effectively secularist running alongside Catholic RE and relationships and sexual education (RSE)," he said.

"To communicate the Catholic education tradition, we need language and literature, we need history, we need science and religion and an understanding of science and faith that shows they are compatible."

In terms of the education sector, Catholic education has to be integrated across primary, secondary and third level, to take into account the need for good Catholic teacher education, Prof. Conway added.

"The treasury of the Catholic intellectual tradition requires a whole school approach and a whole sector approach to properly function," he said.

The Grace project, launched in All Hallows on April 23, is titled *Identity and Ethos in Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in Ireland, Exploring the Attitudes and Behaviours of Stakeholders*, and comprises six reports covering principals, BOM, teachers, religious education and more.

The project aims to establish "a clear baseline and a set of signposts" for the advancement of Catholic education at primary and secondary levels in the Republic of Ireland.

Other data raises questions about the beliefs and level of personal commitment to the Faith of self-identified Catholics

Two online surveys were distributed to Boards of Management (BOM), principals, teachers and school personnel at both primary and secondary level, with a number of follow-up interviews conducted.

The surveys received almost 4,000 responses, the majority from primary level, and 52 follow-up interviews were conducted.

Overall, 94% of those surveyed identified themselves as Catholic. However, other data raises questions about

the beliefs and level of personal commitment to the Faith of self-identified Catholics.

For instance, just 86% of respondents said they believe in God, while most self-declared Catholics do not attend Mass every week, though 60% do so at least twice a month.

Age plays a significant role in levels of religiosity, with the reports warning that the patterns emerging from this survey "indicate that the make-up of personnel in Catholic schools is becoming increasingly non-Catholic, and this trend is likely to continue over the coming years".

It continues, saying: "Catholic schools are operating in an increasingly secular environment, and whatever demand there may be for Catholic education, there is a declining pool of personnel from which to recruit the people who can give effect to it".

At BOM level, for instance, 95% of over 60s believe in God, but just 77% of under 40s express belief. The pattern is repeated across all school personnel, being most stark for teachers – 100% of teachers over 60 believe in God, but 35% of 18-29-year-olds do not.

For RE teachers, grading how important God is in their lives on a scale of 1-5, those aged 60+ give a score of 5 – but this drops to 3.5 for 18-29-year-olds, while only 48% of RE teachers attend Mass weekly. Less than 60% of RE teachers aged under 50 describe themselves as committed and practicing Catholics.

The report notes that teachers as a whole have "the lowest levels of religiosity" among those studied.

Sustain

So while the reports found that Catholicism has a "strong presence" in Ireland's Catholic schools, the data shows "several mismatches" between many Catholic values and the perceptions of God and personal religiosity of school personnel.

"Even if there is a sustained or possible increased demand for places in Catholic schools and/or an ongoing demand for Catholic education, schools are facing a declining and more diluted pool of Catholics from which to draw both voluntary and professional personnel," the reports warn.

They add that "a considerable body of work" needs to be done in order to support and sustain current and future personnel and "to redress the mismatches between declarations and deeds".

At primary level, 72% of principals report providing the opportunity to develop a personal faith in Christ as a central educational aim in their schools

As it stands there is "scant training or formation" made available to school personnel to ensure they are well informed and "very little investment in this work", the reports said.

The net effect of this is that while Catholic schools are "very comfortable" with certain elements of the Christian tradition, such as care for the poor and the environment, they are "less confident and less engaged in the explicitly religious dimensions of the Catholic tradition", according to Dr O'Connell.

Many primary school teachers are failing those who they were hired to serve: the children

A third of primary principals and 50% of teachers disagreed with the statement that faith development opportunities are offered to them, with 29% of second level staff making the same claim.

The director of catechetics for the Irish bishops' conference, Dr Alexander O'Hara has said meetings with key stakeholders in Catholic primary education "have recently been held to begin to address the need for continuing professional development provision (CPD) for teachers".

"Whether teachers themselves believe in God or not or are Catholic or not they are first and foremost called to be teaching professionals. And professionals are hired to teach the curriculum and serve their pupils. That should be their first priority."

Dr O'Hara also noted that the "religious education curriculum is in many instances not being taught in a comprehensive and professional manner. In short, many primary school teachers are failing those who they were hired to serve: the children".

His view is borne out by the data gathered by the Grace project. While principals are often confident about the level of attention their school gives to ethos and RE, teachers offer a different perspective.

At primary level, 72% of principals report providing the opportunity to develop a personal faith in Christ as a central educational aim in their schools.

But just 51% of teachers agree, while a fifth of teachers and other personnel (21%) actively disagree that this is a central educational aim. At second level, this rises to 45% of school personnel who don't

consider it to be a central educational aim.

When it comes to teaching RE, only 17% of teachers report that they provide it daily, with 40% giving it just two days a week. A third of teachers say they don't or rarely use curriculum and textbooks approved by the bishops.

"The attention given to patrons' programmes at primary level and RE at second level – particularly the second level senior cycle – is really suffering from neglect over a number of years, it's been directionless, it's been neglected for a long time," said Dr O'Connell.

He asked what is it that schools want Catholic students to know by the time they leave their school, saying at the moment it's very piecemeal.

Commitment

At primary level, religious education is meant to be taught half an hour every day, and while the MIC professor doesn't think it's realistic to teach five days a week, he said that "the patron needs to take responsibility for resourcing their programme and currently they don't".

Teachers get some training through their college education, "but there they are learning to teach 12 subjects, one of which is religious education – they need sustained help when they get into the classroom... they need continuing professional development at second and primary level".

Again, age proves a key determinant when it comes to commitment to witnessing and respecting the school's Catholic ethos.

"Commitment to Catholic ethos among teachers is on a trajectory of decline, dropping steadily at primary level and more dramatically at secondary level across the age cohorts," the reports warn.

For Prof. Eugene Duffy, there is a serious issue with the lack of accountability for schools over ethos and RE at all levels.

"There's very little accountability in the system," Prof. Duffy told *The Irish Catholic*, adding that what little that is there is poor.

"We can see it in that BOM aren't very diligent in addressing issues of ethos at their meetings – people aren't held accountable," he said.

The issue of ethos is neglected at BOM meetings as agendas are "crowded" with other important issues.

The reports also raised concerns about the level of oversight exercised by BOM, who leaned heavily on reports from principals to assess how

Figure 4.2 Relationship between age of principals and view/understanding of God

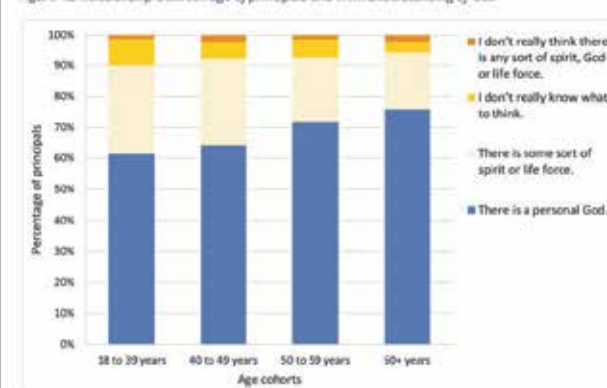


Figure 1.19 Percentage of teachers, by age cohort, who believe in God

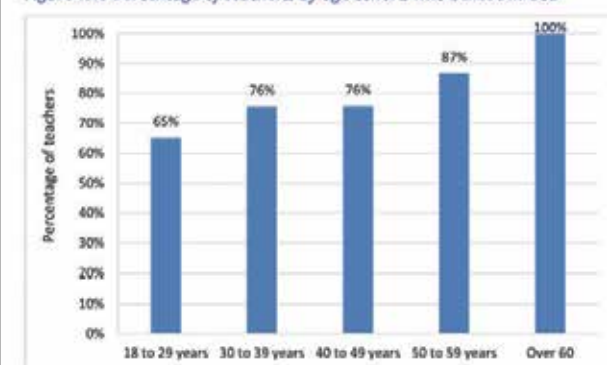


Figure 1.15 Level of importance of God in the lives of RE teachers – mean scores by age cohort

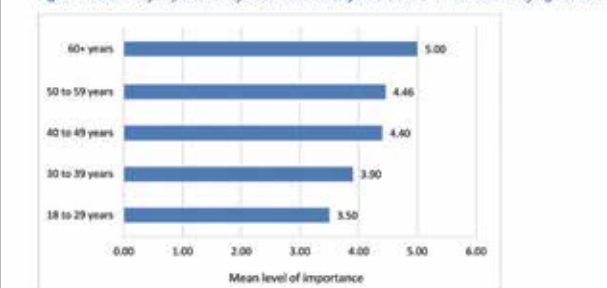


Figure 5.2 Frequency with which RE is taught as reported by primary teachers

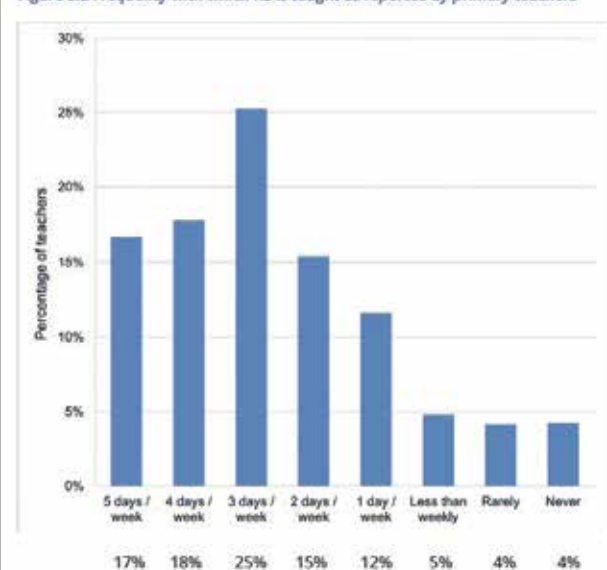
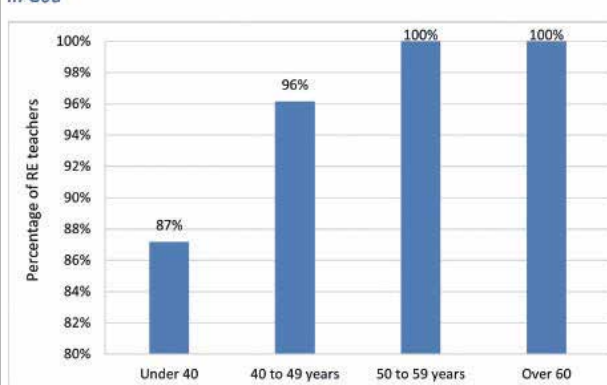


Figure 1.14 Percentage of RE teachers, by age cohort, who believe in God



Catholic schools are operating in an increasingly secular environment, and whatever demand there may be for Catholic education, there is a declining pool of personnel from which to recruit the people who can give effect to it



Students from Doon Convent NS who are to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation are pictured on retreat at Holycross Abbey.

well ethos was being implemented.

However, there was a “gap of assessment” between the principals’ assessments and those of teachers and staff, Prof. Conway said.

“The numbers reporting little or no training in the areas of ethos are astonishing,’ Prof. Conway remarked”

“The principals are very positive generally about how good their schools are in terms of ethos, but the teachers are telling a different story. Yet it’s the principals who are informing the BOM,” he continued.

“The BOM is meant to hold the principal accountable, but who holds the BOM accountable?”

Ultimately, the buck stops with the bishops, who are responsible for oversight of Catholic education in their dioceses.

However, Prof. Duffy raised concerns about the role of the diocesan advisor (DA), who on paper has the role of evaluating the quality of RE provided in schools.

“Just 54% of DA’s visited primary schools pre-Covid and 50% visited secondary schools. The kind of assessment on part of the bishops and trusts is very poor,” Prof. Duffy said.

In addition, the DA’s have “very little teeth to do much”.

“In the old days, it was a diocesan examiner, who would examine RE in the same way as any other subject. It’s neither now, neither exam nor accountability – the systems of accountability are

poor,” he reflected.

The reports note that patrons and trusts appear not to be “proactive in communicating the primary importance of their ethos to the school communities; nor do they appear to demand accountability from them regarding the implementation of ethos-related issues, as the data from the survey indicate”.

But for both Prof. Duffy and Prof. Conway, it would be unfair to implement accountability if there isn’t formation on offer of sufficient quality.

“Before you hold them to account, you have to offer them training. The numbers reporting little or no training in the areas of ethos are astonishing,” Prof. Conway remarked.

Guide

In terms of official Church teaching, the Irish bishops’ conferences have released four, comprehensive documents on Catholic education, which provide a guide for assessing the effectiveness of Catholic schools in providing a faith-based education.

But there is a failure to communicate these documents and their contents, as well as more broadly to communicate the strength and distinctiveness of Catholic education.

For example, almost 90% of teachers at primary level are unsure or say they have not heard of the key document *Vision 8* – the bishops’ 2008 pastoral letter for Catholic schools – while 59% of RE teachers at second level haven’t heard of it.

“There’s nothing wrong with the documents themselves,” said Prof. Duffy. “They are there as a benchmark for performance, but that doesn’t happen, because there’s poor

accountability. The bishops are not following up with BOM on implementation methods and teaching of RE.”

“Overall, the Church is ‘poor at promoting what we have’ in terms of Catholic education”

To encourage more buy-in from schools and stakeholders, Prof. Duffy believes the bishops need to circulate drafts of the document and generally consult more widely with stakeholders.

Overall, the Church is “poor at promoting what we have” in terms of Catholic education.

“They could do better job in presenting what they do. Educate Together are good at talking about being inclusive and welcoming, but Catholic schools are far more inclusive, if you looked around the country, you would find more ethnic diversity in Catholic schools,” said Prof. Duffy.

From the perspective of education, the schools are “top the class” too, as recent reports show. But this must be matched by delivering a truly Catholic ethos, which is often “poorly articulated”, he added.

The Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (GRACE) project is an international research-based partnership between academics in universities and Catholic education bodies across three different continents. The universities are: Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Notre Dame University, Fremantle, Australia; RocheCenter for Catholic Education, Boston College; St Mary’s University, London; University of Glasgow; and the International Office for Catholic Education. The Grace reports were co-funded by the All Hallows Trust, the Presentation Sisters SE and NW, and the Irish Jesuits.



Pope Francis high-fives children at St. John Vianney parish on the far eastern edge of Rome, which he visited April 11, to inaugurate his ‘School of Prayer’ initiative in preparation for the Holy Year 2025. Photo: CNS.

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“Ultimately, the buck stops with the bishops, who are responsible for oversight of Catholic education in their dioceses”

Out&About

Spirited youth...



LIMERICK: The Confirmation class from Scoil Iosagain CBS Primary School, Sexton St, are pictured with Bishop Brendan Leahy and Fr Leo McDonnell PP St Michael's Church, Denmark St, after their Confirmation ceremony.



DUBLIN: Fr Conor McDonough OP films part of his 'Treasure Ireland' YouTube series outside St Patrick's Cathedral. Photo: Patrick Grant.



CARLOW: James Curran, Winnie Kennedy, Jack Curran and Imelda Curran are pictured outside Drumphrea Church on Friday, April 12, after Bishop Nulty celebrated Confirmation in the parish, assisted by Fr Pat Hughes. Photo: Winnie Kennedy.

IN SHORT

Statue of Jesus 'concerns' Green cllr

The statue of Jesus in Hardwicke Street had been inadvertently broken by Dublin City Council 20 years ago during renovation, locals told Dublin Live.

The replacement was provided by the Sisters of Charity, and the plinth was built by the council to replace where the statue previously been placed.

Green Party Cllr Janet Horner questioned whether the erection of the statue was paid for by Dublin City Council, saying she would have some concerns, and that spending public money on "these kinds of things" didn't "seem quite ideal" to her.

The video of her comments led to a back-

lash online, with many commentators pointing out that the reinstatement of the statue had been requested by local people.

Kilmore Mass consolidation to happen shortly

Talks over the consolidation of Masses in parishes across the Diocese of Kilmore are continuing, with the hope a clearer picture will emerge before the end of next month.

"There are no easy answers," said Bishop Martin Hayes, who has set a deadline of Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter.

The decision to share Masses between local communities to reduce the burden on priests comes at a time the Church faces

growing uncertainties due to lower attendances and expectations that the number of priests in the diocese will almost halve by the end of this decade.

Irish priest dies in Mexico

An Irish priest has died in Mexico after falling from a ladder while carrying out repairs to his home.

Fr Eddie Elliott, who was originally from Ringsend in Dublin, died on April 12 when he fell from a ladder while fixing the roof of his home in Actopan in the state of Hidalgo.

The 75-year-old was ordained at the age of 32 and was a missionary in Mexico for over 40 years with the Divine Word Missionaries.

He worked in many areas of Mexico from Mexico City to Actopan in the state of Hidalgo.

His family described him as "a very kind and thoughtful person with a wicked sense of humour".

Irish MEP's abortion vote 'chilling'

Irish MEPS' who voted to enshrine abortion as a 'right' in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights are "going down a path of relentless disregard for preborn human life", an Aontú candidate has said.

"The spectre of 12 out of 13 Irish MEP's voting en masse for this Bill is chilling. The determined, relentless effort towards unlimited abortion, for any reason, up to any gestation, continues," said Patrick Murphy, Aontú's candidate for Ireland South.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



KERRY: Kerry Chamber Choir, Messiah Orchestra and soloists perform in Holy Cross Church, Tralee, to mark the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the Dominicans in Ireland, on Sunday, April 14. Photo: John Cleary.



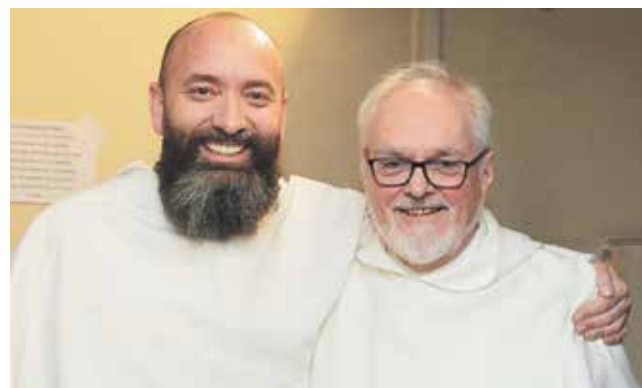
LIMERICK: Denis Barry, Principal of Scoil Iosagain CBS Primary School, Sexton St., is pictured with Bishop Breandan Leahy after the Sacrament of Confirmation was celebrated in St Michael's Church, Denmark St.



CARLOW: James David Curran is pictured with Bishop Denis Nulty after Confirmation in Drumphaea Church, Myshall Parish, on Friday, April 12. Photo: Winnie Kennedy.



LIMERICK: Members of Limerick Knights of St Columbanus are pictured at a recent meeting in Holy Family Parish, Southill, with their chaplain Fr Joe Hayes SJ.



KERRY: Fr David McGovern OP and the Prior of Holy Cross Church Fr Gregory Carroll OP enjoy celebrations at Holy Cross Church, Tralee, on Sunday, April 14. Photo: John Cleary.



LIMERICK: Declan Breen (centre) of the Knights of St Columbanus presents John Byrne with a long service medal of service to the Knights with Fr Joe Hayes SJ, chaplain to the Limerick Knights.

ARMAGH

Armagh parish Legion of Mary invites new members to join junior (7-11 years) and intermediate (12-17) groups on Mondays 6-7.30pm in SVP Centre, 1-5 Chapel Lane, Armagh.

BELFAST

'First Belong to God: On Retreat with Pope Francis', a talk by papal biographer Dr Austen Ivereigh, takes place in Belfast Jesuit Centre, Donegall St, Saturday, April 27 at 3pm.

CARLOW

Poor Clares in Carlow invite women aged 22-40 for a cuppa and a chat to find out more about the community's life on Saturday, May 4 from 2.30-4.30pm. Contact poorclaresvoc@gmail.com to RSVP.

CORK

Teen day retreat for ages 13-17 takes place Saturday, April 27, 11am-5pm, beginning with Mass at St Mary's Popes Quay. Lunch and snacks included, cost €15. RSVP to info@pureinheart.ie

DERRY

Coleraine parish picnic will take place at Chapelfield on Sunday, May 19.

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@knightsfstcolumbanus-omagh.co.uk

DUBLIN

Capuchin youth group for ages 18-35 meets every second Saturday at 2.30pm in the Capuchin Friary, Church St. D07 HA22. For more details contact youth.capuchin@gmail.com

FERMANAGH

St Peregrine novena of healing and hope takes place Sunday April 28 to Wednesday, May 1. Mass Sunday-Wednesday at 7pm in Holy Cross Church, Lisnaskea, and 10am Monday-Wednesday.

day, St Mary's Church, Maguiresbridge.

GALWAY

Vocations information session in Galway, Sunday, April 28, for the diocese of Clonfert and Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. Contact galwaypriesthood@gmail.com for more information.

The Poor Clares in Galway to host an online Q&A for young adult women who would like to know more about the Poor Clare way of life. Takes place from 7-8.30pm on Wednesday, May 1. For more information contact vocations@poorclares.ie

LAOIS

Rosary prayed in the Church of the Assumption, the Heath, Portlaoise parish, daily at 2pm and at 3pm on Sundays.

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 on Sunday, May 12, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock, at 6pm.

SLIGO

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

TIPPERARY

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

TYRONE

YouCat study for ages 16+ years takes place on Tuesdays in the Oratory, at 7 Main Street, Newtownstewart, starting at 6.30-7.30 pm. For further information contact 028 81661445 or email ardstraweast@der-rydiocese.org.

WATERFORD

Procession of Our Lady of Waterford takes place Saturday, May 18 at 3pm. Procession begins in St Saviour's Church, Bridge St, and concludes at Waterford Cathedral.

Relics of Polish martyrs are a reminder of suffering Christians

Chai Brady

Welcoming the arrival of the relics of two Polish martyrs to Thurles, Co. Tipperary, the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly has said there are many “courageous” priests who place their lives at risk for Christ and the relics are a reminder of Christians suffering for the Faith.

The relics of Conventual Franciscans, Zbigniew Strzałkowski OFM Conv. and Michal Tomaszek OFM Conv. arrived at the Church of St Joseph and St Brigid, Bohernanave, at 1pm on Sunday, April 21.

The martyred priests decided to continue to minister to their flock in Peru despite significant danger. They were abducted by terrorist group ‘Shining Path’ and killed in 1991 – they are the saints for all those who suffer because of terrorism. Their beatification took place in Chimbote, Peru, in December 2015.

In his welcome at the Mass, Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA told the congregation: “The Church today has many

brave and courageous priests, religious and lay people who are placing their lives at risk to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

“The presence of the relics will enable us to bring to our hearts and minds the many Christians in our time who are suffering as they witness to their faith,” he said.

He welcomed the many members of the Polish community from Irish dioceses as well as the Conventual Franciscan brothers who travelled with the relic to deliver it to the archdiocese.

Archbishop O'Reilly said: “The links between the Irish Church and the Polish Church stretch back in time. Our celebration today is a sign of our common faith and bond with our Polish sisters and brothers. It is their hope and, indeed, mine, that these bonds will be strengthened by today's occasion.”

Abbot of Glenstal Abbey Brendan Coffey, based in Murroe, Co. Limerick and Fr John Collins from the Diocese of Cork and Ross who worked in Peru and knew personally one of the martyrs, Fr Hajkouski, also attended.



Fr Dariusz Kaczyński OFM Conv. holding the relics for veneration.



The relics of Polish martyrs Zbigniew Strzałkowski and Michal Tomaszek, Conventual Franciscans, who were killed in Peru, 1991.



Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA pictured at the event.



Archbishop O'Reilly with the General Consul of Poland Maciej Wojcik accompanied by Fr Dariusz Gaczyński OFM Conv. and Fr Kamil Bachara of the Diocese of Cork and Ross.



Polish Filip Wiewiora with his Irish teacher Gerry Starr playing the bagpipes during the procession with the relics. Photo Edyta Wiewiora



The faithful venerate the relics of Polish martyrs who were killed in Peru in the Church of St Joseph and St Brigid in Bohernanave, Thurles, Co. Tipperary.



Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA pictured at the event.

THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

SYNODALITY COMES TO KNOCK: EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE

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US CARDINAL: SYNODALITY IS HARD BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE

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Cardinal Grech talks about a synod aesthetic and *Fiducia Supplicans* at Knock

Staff reporter

Speaking on last Sunday in Knock at the Synodality Explored conference, Cardinal Mario Grech said that the Church might be more efficient and clearer without synodality but that it would also mean the Church would be less alive without it.

Cardinal Grech also revealed that, contrary to previous important Vatican announcements, he was not informed about the publication date or the contents of *'Fiducia Supplicans'*, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's December 2023 document authorising non-liturgical blessings for same-sex couples and others in irregular situations.

Speaking to congregants at the event, Cardinal Grech addressed what he perceives is an overly rigorous application of Christian reasoning and this in turn leads to Christian life becoming “dry”. He urged the congregation to go further and rekindle the beauty of Christian life.

“Often, because of habit or because of difficulties, our Christian life becomes dry it loses its charm,” he said. “Often our life is governed simply by ethical reasoning, by law, norms. I remain faithful to my vocation simply because it's expected of me, because it is right.”

“This is already something to be appreciated, but I think that the Gospel today urges us to go further, to rekindle the beauty of our Christian life, the beauty of following Christ, the beauty of being together as Christians. Just like beauty, I don't know why. Yet in the same way that beauty attracts, so does



Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, is pictured with a Drumcondra family at Iona Road parish during his trip to Ireland.

the love of God. It steals our hearts.”

Cardinal Grech stressed the importance of aesthetics, with particular relevance to the Church's ongoing synodal process, saying that he may be treated as “a dreamer or an idealist” but that as challenging as synodality might be, there's always a beautiful result.

“I think that aesthetics should mark the synodal process that we are going through,” he said. “I might sound as a dreamer, or an idealist, but I think that a synodal

Church has to prioritise aesthetics.”

“I'm going beyond simply suggesting that we need to have beautiful liturgies and publications. As I said earlier, beauty guarantees neither efficiency nor efficacy. Yet we prefer the beautiful over the ordinary.”

“There is something that is lacking when beauty's absent. The same with the Church. Synodality is neither efficacious nor efficient, yet, like beauty there is something that is missing, whenever

synodality is missing. The Church might more efficient, clearer without synodality, but it will also be less alive. That is what beauty gives.”

“Why do we need beauty, why do we need synodality? We will never get a straight reply, but we know that, hard as it might it's always beautiful.”

Speaking in relation to the publication of *'Fiducia Supplicans'* last December, the Vatican's document on the institution of blessings for those who are deemed to be

in irregular relationships, such as members of the LGBTQ community, the Maltese prelate said he learned about the document “like everybody else when it was published”.

The cardinal stressed that he was not saying his office should have been consulted. Each dicastery, he said, “has the right and duty to communicate to the Church. It is normal practice of the Roman Curia”.

The dicasteries, he said, “are there to help the Holy Father to fulfil his mission”.

Asked whether the document will inform the second synodal assembly in the autumn, he said it had “nothing to do with” either the previous synodal assembly nor with the forthcoming second session.

Fr Eamonn Conway, who is a priest of the Archdiocese of Tuam in the west of Ireland, said it was his view that documents such as *'Fiducia Supplicans'* and *'Dignitas Infinita'*, the Church's document on human dignity, could be composed “in a more synodal key”.

Cardinal Grech: Church in Ireland must speak in 'prophetic voice'

Staff reporter

Cardinal Mario Grech, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, has called for the Church in Ireland to speak out with a more "prophetic voice" at a conference in Knock, Co. Mayo.

Speaking at 'Synodality Explored: Facing the Future Together', a two-day synodal conference organised jointly by Knock Shrine and the University of Notre Dame, Australia, on April 19-20, the Cardinal stated that "what the Church in Ireland really needs is a prophetic voice" and that "a Synodal Church is a prophetic Church".

The cardinal spoke about the need for a new missionary movement in the Church and that a synodal Church requires the participation of all the baptised who share in different ways in the teaching, sanctifying, and governing offices of Christ.

He stressed that there is no Church without bishops and that bishops are the authoritative overseers of the whole process of being a synodal Church.

Cardinal Grech was the keynote speaker on both days. Fr Declan Hurley, who served as Co-Chair of the National Steering Committee for the Synodal Pathway in Ireland, spoke on 'Being Synodal in

Dioceses and Parishes', while Julieann Moran, General Secretary of the Synodal Pathway in Ireland, presented on the Irish Synodal Pathway and the Universal Synod on Synodality, which is entering its Second Phase in Rome in October.

Ms Moran spoke of synodality as being a "long-haul journey" which is only beginning and that it is about the "very nature of the Church itself."

Echoing the words of Pope Francis she stated that this phase of the Synodal process is a time to plant dreams and visions while binding up wounds.

A pilot leadership training programme in synodal facilitation is currently being rolled out across Ireland with about 200 people to be trained in synodal leadership.

Fr Eugene Duffy spoke on 'Living the Synodal Experience' and Fr Dermot Ryan presented on 'Parish Pastoral Councils as Instruments of Synodality'.

There was a round-table discussion on 'Becoming a more Inclusive Church'.

The Open Forum and conversations were facilitated by Prof. Eamonn Conway, Chair of Integral Human Development at the University of Notre Dame Australia and an expert advisor to the Synod on Synodality.



Cardinal Mario Grech, key note speaker at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine, 19 April 2024. Photo Sinead Mallee



Fr Declan Hurley, Synodality speaker at the Synodality Conference at Knock Shrine



Cardinal Mario Grech, key note speaker at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Speakers Julieann Moran, Secretary General of Synodal Pathway and Monica Morley, broadcaster at the Synodal Conference, Knock Shrine



Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, celebrates Mass in Apparition Chapel 19 April 2024



Sr Josephine Enenmo, speaker at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Prof. Eamonn Conway, Fr Duffy, Nicola Mitchell, Cardinal Mario Grech, Julieann Moran, Fr Declan Hurley and Fr Richard Gibbons at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Participants at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine, day 2



Participants and speakers at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine, 19 April 2024



Speakers and participants at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Participants at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Participants at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine, day 2



Participants at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine with His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech



Cardinal Mario Grech with participants at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Prof. Eamonn Conway, facilitator at the Synodality Conference, Knock Shrine



Patricia McCarthy, Prayer Guides coordinator Knock Shrine with, Mairead Jennings and Aoife Devanney, Knock Youth Ministry team

Cardinal Gregory recalls time when Black Catholics could not study in US seminaries



Courtney Mares

As the Catholic Church's first African American cardinal was honoured at a US seminary in Rome, he recalled the legacy of faith and perseverance of Black Catholics in America, including at a time when they were not accepted by US seminaries.

Cardinal Wilton Gregory, the archbishop of Washington, received this year's Rector's Award at an April 11 banquet at the Pontifical North American College, where seminarians from across 99 dioceses in the US live while studying for the priesthood in Rome.

In an interview with *CNA* before the award ceremony, Gregory pointed out that in the 19th Century, African Americans who had a vocation to the priesthood were sent to study in Rome and then to serve as missionaries in Africa because at the time they were not allowed to enter US seminaries.

"Being in Rome reminds me also that Rome is the place that provided a seminary education and formation for Augustus Tolton, the first African American priest to serve openly in the United States," Cardinal Gregory said.

Venerable Tolton "came to Rome because Rome ... was willing to take him on as a seminarian when no other seminary in the United States would accept that".

Sainthood

Venerable Augustus Tolton, a former slave turned Catholic priest, is now on the path to sainthood in the Catholic Church. He studied in Rome near the Spanish Steps at the Pontifical Urban University, run by the Vatican's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, from 1880 to 1886,



Fr Augustus Tolton is pictured in an undated photo. Born into slavery in Missouri, he was ordained a priest April 24, 1886, in Rome and said his first Mass at St Peter's Basilica. Photo: OSV/courtesy of Archdiocese of Chicago Archives and Records Centre

when he was ordained in the Archbasilica of St John Lateran.

Tolton offered his first Mass in St Peter's Basilica on April 25, 1886. Some 134 years later, Pope Francis made Gregory the first African American cardinal in a ceremony in the same basilica in 2020.

“Even in times when we weren't respected, or understood, or honoured, we remained faithful”

"I know that the honour that was given to me by Pope Francis rested solidly on the faith of African American Catholics," Gregory told *CNA*.

"Even in times when we weren't respected, or

understood, or honoured, we remained faithful."

"And the fact that I can enjoy the office, knowing that it rests on the quality of goodness, faith, and charity of the African American community, humbles me deeply," the cardinal said with tears in his eyes.

Cardinal Gregory has led the Archdiocese of Washington since 2019. He said that navigating a US presidential election year as the archbishop requires prudence. "We're living in a very divisive moment, both in our political life in the United States, but sometimes also ... in our Church," he said.

Struggling

"In the United States, we're struggling with trying to be one people — one people with a common

purpose, a common future. And sometimes the rhetoric gets to be so hostile and so vitriolic that it causes us to step back and say, 'Is this really the nation that is the land of the free and the home of the brave?'"

The cardinal, who will be in Rome for the month leading up to the US election as a delegate in the Synod on Synodality, said that his task is "difficult, but not impossible".

“Cardinal Gregory recently made headlines for calling President Joe Biden a ‘cafeteria Catholic’ in an Easter interview on ‘Face the Nation’”

"As the archbishop of Washington, I have to focus on the fact that in spite of all of the differences that are at play, I have wonderful people in my

archdiocese. And people have great generosity and devotion to the country and to the Church."

Gregory recently made headlines for calling President Joe Biden a "cafeteria Catholic" in an Easter interview on "Face the Nation," explaining that Biden "picks and chooses dimensions of the faith to highlight while ignoring or even contradicting other parts".

Response

While he did not receive a response from the White House to the comments, the cardinal said that "the overwhelming response was positive" from the Catholics in his archdiocese.

"I respect the president. I believe that he is a sincere man of faith, I really do believe that. I would just ask that he would somehow find a way to better allow his personal religious convictions to engage in the public forum," Gregory said.

The cardinal pointed to the Vatican's recent declaration on human

dignity, *Dignitas Infinita*, as "a wonderful summation of the Church's moral teaching." Cardinal Gregory said that he hopes that the Eucharistic revival in the US will lead American Catholics to "draw closer together as a family of faith around the altar that Christ sets for us".

“His Eucharistic presence is a gift of unquestionable importance”

"The emphasis on the Real Presence also should generate the next question: If Christ is really present and I receive him in the Eucharist, what does that demand of me?" he said.

"His Eucharistic presence is a gift of unquestionable importance. But it's also a challenge that those of us who dine with him must live like him and have the same values that he expressed in the Gospels as his legacy of faith and love."

i Courtney Mares is a Rome Correspondent for Catholic News Agency.

“Sometimes the rhetoric gets to be so hostile and so vitriolic that it causes us to step back and say, ‘Is this really the nation that is the land of the free and the home of the brave?’”

Franciscan priest in Holy Land: War has become way of life



Palestinians inspect destroyed residential buildings in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip April 7, 2024, after the Israeli military withdrew most of its ground troops from the southern Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. (OSV News photo/Ahmed Zakot, Reuters)

Crux reporter

War in Gaza has become a “way of life”, according to a Franciscan priest in the Holy Land. On Tuesday, Israel sent tanks to parts of the northern Gaza Strip, while warplanes conducted strikes on Rafah in the south of the territory, killing and wounding several people, according to two local officials.

The Israeli offensive in Gaza has killed over 33,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and driven a third of Gaza’s population to the brink of starvation. It was launched in response to Hamas’ October 7 attack on Israel, which killed around 1,200 people.

War

“The Holy Land has been at war for almost seven months,” said Franciscan Fr Ibrahim Faltas, Vicar of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. It is a way of life, or rather an obligation to live the evil of war that no one can get used to,” he told *Agenzia Fides*. “About two million people ‘experience’ the suffering of lack of everything. These are people who will ‘experience’ the famine, the lack of care,

the lack of dignity in 2024,” he said.

Over the weekend, Iran launched a massive barrage of over 300 drones and missiles at Israel - in what is believed to be Iran’s first direct attack on the country. Nearly all of the weapons were intercepted by Israel and its allies, including the United States. However, a 7-year-old girl was severely injured, and a military base was slightly damaged by the weapons that made it through the defense.

“Children, in particular, are frightened and do not understand the absurd and reckless game played by adults”

Fr Faltas said the attack caused fear and despair for the Holy Land. “It was an

“The Israeli offensive in Gaza has killed over 33,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and driven a third of Gaza’s population to the brink of starvation”

attack that was unfortunately expected and once again brought the sounds and lights of violence to the Holy Land. Every people has the right to live in security, and in this constant game of violence and power, it is the most defenceless who suffer the tragic consequences of war,” the Franciscan told the Italian news service.

“On the night between Saturday and Sunday, who could have had the strength to hope? Fear and despair do not let you sleep, they cast their shadows over the future. Children, in particular, are frightened and do not understand the absurd and reckless game played by adults,” he said.

“I’m trying to understand the reasons of both sides. I don’t always succeed. I cannot justify the continued use of violence and hatred that destroys the lives of innocent people,” the priest added. Fr Faltas told *Agenzia Fides* the conflict in the Holy Land is

expanding, it is taking on more and more destructive features, and the ways of war are being used with ever more advanced technology.

“For years, the international community has turned a deaf ear to the need and possibility of ending hostilities in this tormented Middle East,” he said. He referred to the United Nations Security Council resolution approved on March 25 that called for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, as well as the unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas. “The decisions taken were not implemented and their implementation was not checked,” the Franciscan said.

Pope

Last Sunday, Pope Francis said he was following “in prayer and with concern, even pain”, the news about the Iranian attack of Israel. “I make a heartfelt appeal to halt any action that might fuel a spiral of violence, with the risk of dragging the Middle East into an even greater military conflict,” the Pope said.

“No one should threaten the existence of others. May all the nations instead take the side of peace, and help Israelis and Palestinians live in two States, side by side,

“Let us ask, let us plead, let us cry out in search of peace, without growing weary and without becoming accustomed to the evils of war”

in safety. It is their deep and legitimate desire, and it is their right: Two neighbouring States,” he continued.

“Let there be a ceasefire in Gaza soon, and let us pursue the paths of negotiation, with determination. Let us help that population, plunged into a humanitarian catastrophe; let the hostages kidnapped months ago be released! So much suffering! Let us pray for peace. No more war, no more attacks, no more violence! Yes to dialogue and yes to peace!” Francis said.

“Stopping now means stopping every form of revenge, every destructive action that primarily affects those who are not to blame”

Fr Faltas said the pope has taken every possible step to urge the parties to meet and build peace. “Together with him, the children, the innocent and the defenceless ask for peace and call on the irresponsible adults to stop, because the violence of the war has already spread to several fronts,” the priest told *Agenzia Fides*.

“Stopping now means stopping every form of revenge, every destructive action that primarily affects those who are not to blame. Let us join Pope Francis’s call for an immediate ceasefire and set about defining and implementing the two-state solution,” Fr Faltas said.

“Let us ask, let us plead, let us cry out in search of peace, without growing weary and without becoming accustomed to the evils of war,” he concluded.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Stories of 'scarred' Rwandan women must be told

● Women who were sexually assaulted, infected with diseases, and forced into exile, among other brutalities during the 1994 genocide against Tutsis, remain deeply scarred three decades later, and their stories must be told, a Rwandan-born Jesuit priest has said.

According to Fr Marcel Uwineza, telling the stories of the women, "who have endured deep wounds and carried heavy burdens all their lives", gives a voice to the women who, he said, "were practically silenced by the genocide".

In an April 14 interview with ACI Africa, Fr Uwineza, who serves as principal of the Nairobi-based Hekima University College, said that Rwandan women have wounds that manifest today as the country marks 30 years since the April 7–July 19, 1994, genocide against the Tutsis.

Cuba: Church offers to facilitate dialogue

● The deputy secretary of the Cuban Bishops' Conference, Fr Ariel Suárez, said that the Church is available to facilitate dialogue "if the different political actors" would agree to it in order to find a solution to the crisis in the country.

In an interview with NBC News, the priest referred to protests that once again shook the country, this time in March on the eastern end of the

island.

"In the protests of last March 17, this pain turned into a cry, in a cry that was heard and that has been accepted, shall we say, by all the levels of the country," Fr Suárez said.

The deputy secretary of the Cuban Bishops' Conference said that "at least everyone has agreed to consider that this cry reflected anguish, reflected desperation".

Planned Parenthood reports abortion increase

● Planned Parenthood's latest annual report shows an increase in abortions from the previous year, while also showing a decrease in health services.

In its 2022-2023 annual report, titled 'Above and Beyond', detailed its operations from 2021-2022, a window of time that included the June 2022 US Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation* that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and sent the abortion issue back to the legislature.

Planned Parenthood performed 392,715 abortions in 2021-22, according to the report – an increase of about 18,000 from the previous report. For every adoption referral in 2021-22, Planned Parenthood performed approximately 228 abortions.

Meanwhile, total cancer screening and prevention services – such as pap tests and HPV vaccinations – decreased by more than 6,000 since the previous report, from 470,419 to 464,021.

Catechist kidnapped and murdered in West Africa

● The pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) on April 19 condemned the kidnapping and murder of a catechist in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

In a news brief, ACN informed *ACI Prensa* that catechist Edouard Youbare was kidnapped on Thursday night by "terrorists", and his lifeless body was found near Zigni this morning".

According to other local sources, along with Youbare, who was a member of Saatenga parish in Fada Gourma, Burkina Faso, more people were kidnapped and murdered.

"We are heartbroken by the loss of Youbare. He served his community faithfully and his death is a devastating blow for the people of Saatenga," lamented Spaniard María Lozano, press and public relations director of ACN International.

"Catechists in Burkina Faso are on the front lines, risking their lives for the good of their people," she noted.

Scotland pauses sex-change and puberty-blocker drugs for children

Scotland's only gender clinic for minors is formally pausing the prescription of puberty blockers and hormone medications that are designed to facilitate gender transitions for children after a review commissioned by the English government questioned the efficacy of those practices.

This announcement effectively ends the practice of providing sex-change drugs and hormone medications to children in Scotland – just one month after England instituted the same ban.

Per the new policy, new patients in Scotland must wait until they are 18 years old to access those drugs or hormone medications. However, patients who are under the age of 18 and have already begun such remedies to facilitate a gender transition will have to stop.

"We are committed to providing the best possible clinical care for young people ... and [we] understand the distress that gender incongruence can cause," the announcement from the Glasgow-based Sandyford Sexual Health Service read.

"While this pause is in place, we will continue to give anyone who is referred into the Young People Gender Service the psychological support that they require while we review the pathways in line with the findings," the announcement added.

The National Health Services of Greater Glasgow and



A person holds a 'Trans' banner in this illustration photo. Scotland's only gender clinic for minors is formally pausing the prescription of puberty blockers and hormone medications. Photo: OSV News/Sergio Perez, Reuters

Clyde (NHSGGC), which is the publicly funded health care system that runs the gender clinic, formally notified its patients of the pause on Thursday, April 18.

According to a statement from NHSGGC, these remedies were paused because of the findings in the Cass Review: a comprehensive report on gender transition treatments for minors that was commissioned by the English government.

The report, led by Dr Hilary Cass, found that the rationale used to justify sex-change drugs and hormone alterations to facilitate sex changes in children is based on weak evidence and that the health risks it poses to children are unclear.

"The findings informing the

Cass Review are important, and we have reviewed the impact on our clinical pathways," NHSGGC Director of Public Health Emilia Crighton said in a statement.

"The next step from here is to work with the Scottish government and academic partners to generate evidence that enables us to deliver safe care for our patients," she added.

Dr Crighton also said the "toxicity around public debate" about treatments for children with gender dysphoria "is impacting the lives of young people seeking the care of our service and does not serve the teams working hard to care and support them."

Tracey Gillies, the executive medical director of NHS Lothian, emphasised the

importance of putting patient safety above all else.

"The Cass Review is a significant piece of work into how the NHS can better support children and young people who present with gender dysphoria," Dr Gillies said in a statement. "Patient safety must always be our priority, and it is right that we pause this treatment to allow more research to be carried out."

Researchers in the United States have also been studying the potential that puberty blockers could cause irreversible negative effects on children. A study published by the Mayo Clinic in March found that boys who take puberty blockers could suffer "irreversible" harm based on the effects the drugs have on testicular cells.

Biden in trouble with Catholic voters – Pew research

Incumbent US President Joe Biden, a Catholic, is battling a high unfavorability rating among his fellow Catholics, according to survey data released by the Pew Research Center.

According to the data, neither Biden nor his Republican rival, former president Donald Trump, are viewed favourably by a majority of Catholics surveyed, but Biden is the more unpopular of the two.

The findings were part of a presentation on 'Religion and Politics Ahead of the US Elections' by Pew's associate

director of research, Greg Smith, at the 2024 annual conference of the Religion News Association, which concluded over the weekend.

Included in the data provided by Smith, Pew's late February survey of 12,000 US adults found that only 35% of Catholics hold a favourable view of Biden while 64% have an unfavourable view of the incumbent president.

In contrast, this year's presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Trump, is viewed favourably by 42% of Catholics, while 57% hold an unfavour-

able view of the former president.

Trump's edge over Biden among Catholics is fuelled by white Catholics, a majority of whom (54%) hold a favourable view of the former president. Trump is considerably less popular, however, with Hispanic Catholics, among whom only 32% view him favourably.

As Pew reported earlier this month, the country's population of 52 million Catholics constitute 1 in 5 adults in the US. Among American Catholics, 57% are white, while 33% are Hispanic, Pew reported.

Church backs victims of Guatemala's 'bloodiest general'

A retired Guatemalan military commander – considered "one of the bloodiest generals in the history of Latin America" by survivors of the repression he oversaw – has gone on trial for genocide, offering a possible last opportunity for justice for aging victims of targeted attacks on Indigenous villages

during the country's armed conflict.

Manuel Benedicto Lucas García, former head of the Guatemalan army for eight months in the early 1980s, is standing trial on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity, forced disappearance and sexual violence.

Association for Justice and Reconciliation, an organisation assisted by the Archdiocese of Guatemala City's human rights office since 2008, alleges the retired general ordered "more than 32 selective and generalised massacres", along with "the destruction of more than 23 entire villages" in the Maya

Ixil region of western Guatemala, according to a pre-trial statement.

"From his position as Operational Commander of the Guatemalan Army, he identified the Mayan peoples of the country ... as enemies of the State," the statement continued.



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Spectacularly deadly



An anti-missile system operates after Iran launched drones and missiles towards Israel, as seen from Ashkelon, Israel, April 14, 2024. (OSV News/Amir Cohen, Reuters)

Belgian court overturns ban on conservative conference attended by German cardinal

Belgium's highest court ruled late last night that a conference upholding conservative values in the public square could go ahead in the country's capital after a Brussels district mayor had ordered police to shut it down yesterday.

Emir Kir issued the order to halt the National Conservatism conference that was scheduled to take place April 16–17 and that featured among its speakers the Vatican's former doctrinal chief, Cardinal Gerhard Müller. Police surrounded the venue on Tuesday, denying access to speakers and guests.

The conference, organised by the Edmund Burke Foundation, a public affairs institute, aims to promote conservatism as "inextricably tied" to the idea of nation, national independence, and the revival of national traditions.

The event has been held in various capitals including Rome, London, and Washington, DC, since its founding in

2019.

Among other speakers at this year's conference were Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Britain's former Home Secretary Suella Braverman, and the founder of the Brexit Party, Nigel Farage. The British politician called the attempted shut down "a disgrace" and accused the EU of becoming the "new form of communism".

Mr Kir said he made the decision because the conference's vision "is not only ethically conservative (eg, hostility to the legislation of abortion, same-sex unions, etc.) but also focused on the defence of 'national sovereignty,' which implies, among other things, a 'Eurosceptic attitude'".

His order also stated that some of the speakers "are reputed to be traditionalists" and that the conference must be banned "to avoid foreseeable attacks on public order and peace".

Prior to Mr Kir's attempted shut-down, political pressure had already

forced the organisers to cancel two other venues shortly before the conference had begun, after which they found a third hotel venue, called Claridge, located in Mr Kir's district.

Cardinal Müller told author Rod Dreher, who was also speaking at the conference, that the attempt to shut down the conference was "like Nazi Germany" and that the authorities were acting "like the SA" — Hitler's brownshirts who used violence and intimidation against opponents.

The Belgian court overturned Mr Kir's decision after the order was challenged by conference organizers with the support of ADF International, a Christian legal group that works to oppose threats to religious liberty.

Paul Coleman, executive director of ADF International, said that while "common sense and justice" had prevailed, the attempt to shut down the conference was a "dark mark on European democracy".

'I forgive whoever has done this': Australian bishop who survived stabbing speaks out

The Assyrian bishop who was attacked at an Australian church last week shared that he is "doing fine" and told his attacker: "You're my son, and you'll always be in my prayers". In what Australian police are calling a terrorist attack, a young male entered Christ the Good Shepherd Church on Monday

evening, April 15, and stabbed Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel. The bishop is a leader in the Assyrian Church, a branch of Eastern Christianity.

New South Wales police have the suspect in custody — a 16-year-old boy whose identity has not been released due to laws protecting minor offend-

ers.

The attack on Bishop Emmanuel was inadvertently livestreamed on his YouTube channel and came in the wake of a mass stabbing at an Australian shopping mall in the Bondi area on Saturday.

Vatican roundup

Ex-Jesuit, alleged abuser Rupnik listed in 2024 Pontifical Yearbook

● Fr Marko Rupnik, a priest dismissed from the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 2023 — accused since 2018 of having committed serious sexual, spiritual, and psychological abuse against at least 20 women in the Loyola Community that he co-founded in Slovenia — continues to appear as a Jesuit and consultant to the Vatican in the 2024 Pontifical Yearbook.

The information appears on page 1346 of the yearbook, where the list of the consultants of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments is published. The entry reads "P. Rupnik Marko Ivan, SI" The abbreviation 'SI' stands for 'Societas Iesu', the Latin name for the Society of Jesus.

Rupnik was dismissed from the Jesuits on June 15, 2023. The decision was made public in a statement noting that on more than one occasion he ignored the restrictions imposed by his superior and refused to respond to his alleged victims and to address his past actions.

Reports say star witness in 'trial of the century' confirmed in Vatican post

● According to reports in the Italian media, the erstwhile star prosecution witness in the Vatican's "trial of the century" for various financial crimes has been confirmed by Pope Francis in his role as an adjunct prosecutor for the Vatican's supreme court.

Assuming the reports are correct, some observers likely will be tempted to see the confirmation as a reward for the role Italian Msgr Alberto Perlasca played in the convictions of Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu

and eight other defendants, despite critical questions raised at trial about Msgr Perlasca's credibility and judgment.

First published by the Italian site 'Dagospia', the reports suggest that Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin has sent a letter to the Apostolic Signatura, the highest court in the Church's system of canon law, indicating that Msgr Perlasca "has been confirmed" in his role as an adjunct Promoter of Justice, meaning a prosecutor.

Kentucky Catholics say Pope Francis can be 'ambiguous' in his teaching

● A synthesis report on synod listening sessions conducted during the current interim period in the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, shared that priests and laity expressed frustration about a lack of clarity from Pope Francis, specifically in regards to *Fiducia Supplicans*. "[The frustration] was generally related to *Fiducia Supplicans* and the confusion and consternation it caused among the faithful regarding what was perceived to be an approval for the blessing of same sex unions," Bishop William Medley of Owensboro wrote in the synthesis report.

Published December 18, 2023, *Fiducia Supplicans* is a Vatican document that outlines the pastoral grounds for same-sex blessings. *Fiducia Supplicans* didn't exist through the early stages of the Synod on Synodality, which concludes at the end of October, therefore its publication adds another layer to the conversations.

Papal Foundation announces nearly €15 million in global grants, humanitarian aid

● The Papal Foundation, a US-based organisation that provides funding for Catholic projects around the world, announced on Friday the distribution of nearly €15 million in grants, scholarships, and charitable aid "to care for those in need and grow the Catholic faith around the world".

The group said in a press release that it would be distributing nearly €10 million in 2024 alone to more than 100 projects and recipients in several dozen countries. Among the beneficiaries include efforts at "providing for basic needs such as access to clean water", "constructing schools and renovating classrooms", and "translating Church teachings for evangelisation".



Letter from Jerusalem

Jerusalem Armenians fight for the future



Justin Robinson OSB

An Armenian flag fluttered atop a pile of rubble in the cool evening, a welcome respite from the khamsin storm which had oppressed Jerusalem with days of hot dusty clouds coming from the deserts of Arabia. Hundreds of people shared a delicious buffet meal in the shadow of the flag and rubble, seated in the sprawling Cow's Garden of the Armenian Quarter.

Today, the Cow's Garden – so-called for its past role as grazing land for cattle – is an enormous car park pressed against the city ramparts in the south west corner of Jerusalem's hotly-contested Old City.

In a land where everyone fights for an inch, a battle for the Cow's Garden titled 'Save the Armenian Quarter' is now underway led by an impressive group of young Armenians who call this city their home. One of their leaders is Hagop Djernazian, a twenty-something student of international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

We sit together at the meal surrounded by members of the Armenian community, clergy, diplomats, Palestinian allies, Israeli supporters and foreign well-wishers.

Protect

"We're here to protect our land" says Hagop as we eat delicious vospov kofte, a vegan dish which keeps the Lenten fast still underway for Orthodox Christians. "The church authorities signed this land away to a foreign company which is believed to be a front for Israeli settlers wanting to build a hotel here. Ottoman documents show this area belongs to the Armenian community, so the patriarchate had no right to give it away."

A number of cases are now before the courts, where Jerusalemite Armenians seek to cancel



An Ultra-Orthodox Jewish man walks past the entrance to the Armenian St James Cathedral in the Old City of Jerusalem. Photo: OSV/Debbie Hill

the deal. Despite initially signing the papers, the Armenian Patriarchate now also presses for its cancellation with claims of misrepresentation, corruption and a lack of knowledge about the geographic extent of the contract.

"We're eating in this car park tonight to maintain our presence and to highlight our culture"

It's more than just a car park, however. Five family homes, part of the Armenian seminary and

even the patriarch's own garden are set to be given away. Armed men and bulldozers recently arrived to take the land, sparking a massive confrontation with local residents who built a vast wall of twisted metal to act as a barrier against further appropriation.

"We're eating in this car park tonight to maintain our presence and to highlight our culture. Armenia is our ancestral homeland, but Jerusalem is our home and spiritual centre. We're fighting for our existence and that of future generations."

Leadership

In a fight which pitted deeply religious Armenians against their

own church leadership, Hagop sees the campaign as a spiritual struggle: "Christ struggled and told us to carry our crosses, and this struggle is a fight not only for our own survival but for that of the already threatened Christian community here."

Armenians have had an uninterrupted presence in the Holy Land for more than 1,600 years. The church, school and community centre are the pillars of community life for the few thousand Armenians living in Jerusalem's Old City, where many hold distinguished roles in the fields of medicine, education and government in Israel and in Palestine. They are famous for painted ceramics, with their handiwork used for street signs in the Old City and given as gifts to visiting dignitaries including Joe Biden.

After the Armenian genocide in 1915, many survivors walked to Jerusalem where they found

refuge in a monastery which today houses their descendants side-by-side with a community of Armenian monks. There, the tightly-packed Convent of Saint James has become the physical, spiritual and cultural hub of the community, a stone's throw from the Cow's Garden.

"This is the largest open space in the Old City of Jerusalem, and it's priceless. But it's not just about land or money: there's a status quo in this city, and this deal tips the balance which exists between all the communities"

Sarin Gejekoushian is the one of the community's youth leaders. The 24 year old is finishing a master's degree in law, and spoke to me about her fears for the future. "Our biggest challenge is to keep the Armenian community together in this place. We're small in numbers and at risk of further emigration to escape the difficulties of life in this land. It's our duty and priority as the grandchildren of genocide survivors to protect our Armenian heritage here in Jerusalem."

To an outsider, the fight for the Cow's Garden might seem like any other property deal gone wrong. I ask whether it's really just a car park, after all? As we tuck-in to delicious semolina harissa dessert, Sarin leans across the table to remind me of the significance of the Armenians' fight. "This is the largest open space in the Old City of Jerusalem, and it's priceless. But it's not just about land or money: there's a status quo in this city, and this deal tips the balance which exists between all the communities and gives away a significant proportion of our already tiny Quarter."

As the Armenians of Jerusalem gear-up for what looks like a lengthy battle, I left the meal feeling gratitude for my time spent in the Cow's Garden and for these extraordinary young people who gave me an insight into their community's long past, flourishing present and delicate future.

Justin Robinson OSB is a monk of Glenstal Abbey in County Limerick currently residing in Jerusalem.

"We're small in numbers and at risk of further emigration to escape the difficulties of life in this land. It's our duty and priority as the grandchildren of genocide survivors to protect our Armenian heritage here in Jerusalem"

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,
Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,
Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

Letter of the week

Dublin airport reversal on blessing ban welcome

Dear Editor, I'm delighted and welcome Dublin airport's decision to reverse the ban on the blessing of planes airside.

It's unfortunate that the initial announcement was

made at all. The sudden change, and then reversal in policy was bizarre, particularly considering the longstanding relationship between parish and airport.

Fr Des Doyle's remarks about the supportive relationship between the airport and the chaplaincy are reassuring. It's evident that both parties – or at least some in the DAA – value the continu-

ation of this tradition, which holds significance for many travellers and airport staff alike.

Yours etc.,
Eoin Boyle
Salthill, Galway

RTÉ should cover gap in care of pregnant women

Dear Editor, The RTÉ programme on abortion of Monday April 15 was intended to show a gap in the provision of abortion in Ireland.

I challenge RTÉ to produce a programme covering the whole area of the care of women during and after crisis pregnancies. That would need to show the gap of care by the State in helping women to continue with their pregnancy, and give birth to their children and look after them, and likewise of women suffering after an abortion.

It should likewise show the care given by NGOs, among them Gianna Care and Rachel Vineyard. Testimonies of women are there to be portrayed if the will is there in RTÉ.

Yours etc.,
Conchita Legorburo,
Dalkey, Co. Dublin.



Rearranging dioceses not in keeping with Church tradition

Dear Editor, The article 'Irish Church's restructuring lacks any semblance of synodality raises some major concerns [The Irish Catholic – April 18, 2024]. The establishment of the Irish diocesan boundaries in the year 1111 was a major synodality event with many bishops, priests and ecclesiastics participating. The contrast of that with the current reordering of Irish dioceses

is very revealing. In his book *The Early Church* Prof. Chadwick wrote: "Originally a bishop was freely elected by his people, and the voice of the laity was substantially more than a mere assent or testimony to fitness. But the liberty of the local congregation was not absolute, since the man they elected had to receive recognition from other neighbouring churches.

The bishops who came from the other churches to consecrate the candidate by prayer and laying on of hands gradually became more important than the local congregation." So, the recent rearranging of the Irish dioceses is not in keeping with the tradition of the Church.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell on Holy Thursday said "Many of the pastoral

approaches and strategies that worked for the Church in this land over the past two centuries no longer work in the 21st Century. In life, crises bring people to a sense of reality – in Church life it is no different". The Holy Spirit is needed to help the Church face up to these new realities.

Yours etc.,
Daithi O'Muirneachain,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

Think outside box to appreciate Christian obligation to the poor

Dear Editor, I thought that Mary Kenny's article 'Wealth and a tussle of conscience' was superficial in its treatment of wealth – at least from a Christian perspective [The Irish Catholic – April 18, 2024]. Her main issue with the accumulation of riches is that it "can trigger envy and discontent" in others. This shows little concern for the 700 million who live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 a day or the six million children who die annually from malnutrition before their fifth birthday.

St Pope Paul VI provided a master summary of Catholic Social Teaching in

Populorum Progressio: "He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 Jn 3.17). As St Ambrose put it: "You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich." No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.

The Gandhi principal says it all: If we

are to love our neighbour as our self, we are required to "live simply [and share generously] so that others may simply live". This sheds light on Jesus' many warnings about wealth such as "[I]t is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Lk 18:25).

We rich of the western world need to radically think outside the box if we are to appreciate our Christian/humanitarian obligation to the poor.

Yours etc.,
AP Breen
Bronx, New York

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.

Church must jump or be pushed into change

The Church in Ireland is facing a very well publicised crisis in vocations to the priesthood, one which the recently ended Year for Vocation was an attempt to tackle.

If we're not careful, our local Church could be facing a second vocations crisis – this time among the laity – and the window is narrowing in which we can act to safeguard the future.

Two reports, the Grace project's seminal study on Catholic schools in Ireland and a synodal submission from two Western dioceses, make clear that we are seeing a sharp decline in the number of active and committed Catholics. Volunteers, so necessary to helping parishes and diocese run their affairs and help with the Synodal project are becoming like hen's teeth and those who are paid to teach the faith increasingly don't believe.

Prof. Eamonn Conway describes it as a "trajectory of decline" in levels of commitment to the Faith, particularly obvious among 18–29-year-olds. For instance, three out of 10 under 29 teaching at second level make it very clear they don't witness to or support Catholic ethos.

For Catholic schools, the problem is clear – the pool of committed Catholics we can draw on to educate our children and lead our schools is shrinking.

While there is considerable positivity and goodwill toward Catholic education, its unique mission and identity will become invisible if we don't act now.

Acting means two things – divestment and investment.

Divestment is a hard sell, but the longer we wait, the harder it will get and the less favourable the political and social climate will be. If we don't jump now, we're going to be pushed.

As it stands, the Grace reports warn that "Catholic schools are operating in an increasingly secular environment, and whatever demand there may be for Catholic education, there is a declining pool of personnel from which to recruit the people who can give effect to it".

Investment should be easier, but it has to happen now or else it will be too

late.

There is goodwill toward Catholic education, but the Grace reports make clear that nobody seems sure what exactly the 'Catholic' part means.

Does it just mean being nice to each other? Or does it mean fostering in each student a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Many teachers agree on the first, but there's a split on the second, far more fundamental, belief.

If we want to take advantage of the goodwill, the bishops, religious and lay trusts running schools must provide ongoing professional and faith formation, as well as proper accountability about what is being taught.

Right now, there is "scant training or formation" made available to school personnel to ensure they are well informed and "very little investment in this work", the reports said.

The bottom line is that our Catholic schools are working well as education institutes, but ethos is left second-best when it comes to any crunch issues like scheduling and resourcing.

This has to change and the only way it will is by concentrating our professional and voluntary resources on a smaller number of schools, and properly resourcing our school personnel to deliver the best possible Catholic education.

For the Church in Ireland, the report touches on an issue we are all facing; a dwindling number of people to manage a bloated structure.

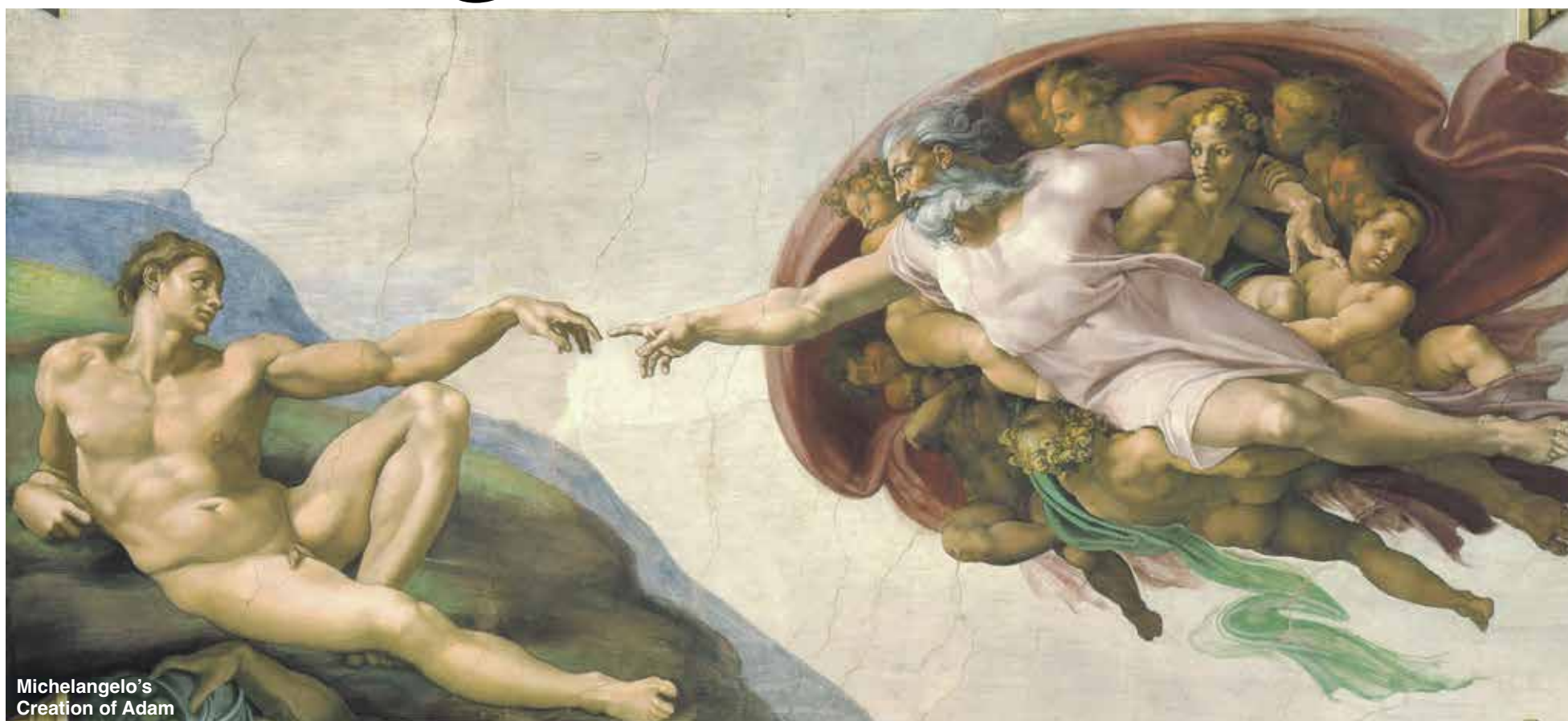
The synodal submissions from Clonfert and Galway warn that "The current context is one where volunteers are few and far between and this is coupled with a history or culture of a lack of adult religious education/catechesis". Sounds familiar doesn't it?

We want a Church with more lay leadership, but the reality is numbers in the pews are declining as quickly as vocations to the priesthood.

The future is as Benedict XVI predicted – smaller and more committed, with those who really want to be there left to do the work.

As with the schools, the Church needs to prune back and invest in what's left with confidence.

The hunger for God in Dublin



Michelangelo's
Creation of Adam



People are asking for reasons to believe, so let's give it to them, writes **Eoin McCormack**

Recently I attended a 'Meetup' event in Dublin city centre. For anyone unfamiliar with the concept, 'Meetup' is a social media platform for organising events and gatherings for people with similar interests.

This event, being advertised to take place in a café in Dublin, caught my attention because it was a discussion group on the existence of God.

Given the secular age in which we live where many people find the concept of talking about religion and faith in public a no-go area by any means, I was intrigued at the idea and pleasantly surprised to see the topic of God being proposed for the purposes of public dialogue.

When I arrived at the event, I must admit that I was somewhat expecting to be on the look-out for a small group of budding philosophers huddled in the corner of a café

ready to quietly discuss the big questions of philosophy.

To my bewilderment however, I arrived at the café to discover that the entire venue was rented out for the debate. In fact, despite there already being around 60 people packed into the café (and mostly young people for that matter) the event organisers had to turn people away from attending as the demand was so high.

Disaffiliation

On one level, it seems somewhat bizarre that at a time when religious practice rates are at their lowest and religious disaffiliation rates are at their highest, people were bursting to enter a Dublin café to discuss the existence of God.

On another level however, is it really that surprising? The desire for God is "written on the human heart" as the Catechism says, and while secularism can do its best to push the religious questions to the peripheries of the culture, the natural desire and yearning for ultimate purpose and meaning beyond the material cannot be taken away from the human experience.

Pope Francis consistently challenges us to reach out to the peripheries. In facing this challenge, we should not limit our understanding of this concept to a solely economic sense of the word.

In the culture in which we find ourselves today, many more people are now on the existential peripheries of life.

Our secular culture has driven a materialist-atheistic rationalism in which people

are struggling to come to terms with the bigger questions of life – 'Is there a God', 'Is there meaning to life', 'Why do we exist' and so on...

“A division has been drawn in our culture between faith and reason. Religion is presented and understood as irrational superstition”

Despite the fact we are now living in the most materially prosperous and technologically advanced age that has ever existed, we are constantly told that depression and anxiety rates are only rising.

The challenge therefore is to reach out to these existential peripheries, utilise the depths of our philosophical and theological tradition and provide people with reasons for faith, hope, and love.

A division has been drawn in our culture between faith and reason. Religion is presented and understood as irrational superstition.

But what the culture doesn't seem to understand is that faith is a necessary part of ordinary human existence. Atheist or theist, we practice acts of faith every day of our lives.

We have faith, for example, in our spouse's fidelity, we have no absolute evidence of it, but we have reasons which lead us to have faith in them.

Getting on a bus or plane, we have faith that the engine

works, and the pilot knows what to do to get us to our destination safely, we have not scientifically examined it for ourselves, but we have sufficient reasons to have faith in the mechanisms and the system.

But when it comes to God and religion, faith is very often presented as accepting things based on no reasons whatsoever. Of course, this is just simply not true, and 2,000 years of philosophical and theological enquiry gives us an abundance of reasons for our faith.

In the wider culture, similar occurrences to my recent experience at the Dublin café are becoming much more of a regularity.

Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson for example is filling out venues with thousands of people across the world discussing issues of faith, the Bible, meaning, responsibility and so on.

Demographic

Interestingly, much of his demographic is made up of young men, a demographic not often associated with Church attendance yet are lining up to listen to two-to-three-hour long lectures on the Bible.

In September of 2022 for example, Peterson sold out the 3Arena in Dublin which has a seating capacity of 13,000. Incredibly, his online Bible series on YouTube has also reached over 13 million views.

As a Church, this provides us a clear direction as to where to focus our catechesis. People are asking for reasons to believe – so let's give it to them.

In recent times, for whatever reason, we have evidently failed in our evangelical mission to provide such existential answers for people.

Popular social-media evangelist, Bishop Robert Barron, consistently says that we have dumbed down our intellectual teaching of the faith right at the time when individualism and relativism were becoming the dominant narrative.

For the most part, people who came to the discussion event in the Dublin café, were born and reared into Irish Catholic families, and educated in Irish Catholic schools.

“The single biggest deterrent for his coming to believe or practice the Christian faith was his religious education in an Irish Catholic school”

This should sound alarm bells for the Church in Ireland – why is it that our pews are empty, yet people are desperate to fill a café to discuss God?

How is it in a country where 90% of our schools remain Catholic, people feel ill-equipped to provide the very basic reasons for the basis of the Christian faith – Is there a God?

What is required therefore, is a fundamental reassessment of our faith formation and catechetical programmes across the board.

One memorable comment from a very bright and well-

educated young man state that the single biggest deterrent for his coming to believe or practice the Christian faith was his religious education in an Irish Catholic school.

While in English, Math and various other subjects the highest standard of intellectualism was expected he described his religious education experience akin to "drawing pictures about how much Jesus loves you".

Hiding

It was only after his formal education when he began reading Aquinas and Augustine that he came to realise the Church was 'hiding' a rich intellectual tradition with people who have wrestle with the big questions for millennia.

At the very least, we now have a framework from which to approach our contemporary catechesis and apologetics.

People are desperate for a much more rigorous presentation of the faith and with all the digital tools and various social media channels available to us, we now have the means by which we can "open the doors and the windows" of the Church as Pope John the XXIII state and communicate the wonderful depth and immens beauty we have in our Catholic tradition.

✎ Eoin McCormack is a Catechist and Pastoral Worker in the parish of Rathmines, Dublin. He holds a Licence in the Catechetical Sciences, an MA in Chaplaincy, and a Bachelor's in Theology from Maynooth

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, April 25, 2024

**A faith
founded on
love**

Deacon Greg Kandra

Page 34



Why Catholics make the sign of the cross

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

I used to make the sign of the cross casually as a nice gesture for beginning and ending my prayers. More than a decade ago, probably nudged by the Holy Spirit, I began to take it more seriously.

I began to sign myself more frequently with faith and reverence. I did not think much about it, but after a year I noticed that I seemed to be doing measurably better in my Christian life.

I was praying with more passion, resisting my bad inclinations somewhat more effectively and relating to others more kindly.



The Christian blessing is more than a nice gesture, writes Bert Ghezzi

When I asked myself what had produced these positive results, I decided the only thing I was doing differently was praying the Sign of the Cross more fervently.

Pretty good, I thought, for just signing myself reverently, and I realised that the Sign of the Cross is not merely a

pious gesture. It is a powerful prayer. So I studied about it in Scripture, the Church fathers and saints, and Catholic teaching.

In my study, I discovered six perspectives on the Sign of the Cross that revealed why making it opens us to life-transforming graces. I share

them here, confident that once you grasp them, you will make the gesture with more faith and experience its great blessings.

Mini-creed

The Sign of the Cross is a profession of faith in God as he revealed himself. It serves as an abbreviated form of the Apostles' Creed.

Touching our forehead, breast and shoulders, we declare our belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are announcing our faith in what God has done – the creation of all things, the redemption of humanity

from sin and death, and the establishment of the Church, which offers new life to all.

When we sign ourselves we are making ourselves aware of God's presence and opening ourselves to his action in our lives. That would be enough, wouldn't it? But there is much, much more.

Renewal of baptism

Christians in the 1st Century began making the Sign of the Cross as a reminder and renewal of what happened to them when they were baptised.

It still works the same way for us. When we sign ourselves

Pope Francis blesses himself with the Sign of the Cross. Photo: CNS



we are declaring that in baptism we died sacramentally with Christ on the cross and rose to a new life with him (see Rom 6:3-4 and Gal 2:20).

We are asking the Lord to renew in us those baptismal graces. We are also acknowledging that baptism joined us to the body of Christ and equipped us for our role of collaborating with the Lord in his work of rescuing all people from sin and death.

Mark of discipleship

At baptism the Lord claimed us as his own by marking us with the Sign of the Cross. Now, when we sign ourselves, we are affirming our loyalty to him.

“The same word named a shepherd’s brand on his sheep, a general’s tattoo on his soldiers, a householder’s mark on his servants and the Lord’s mark on his disciples”

By tracing the cross on our bodies, we are denying that we belong to ourselves and declaring that we belong to him alone (see Lk 9:23). The Church fathers used

the same word for the Sign of the Cross that the ancient world employed to indicate ownership.

The same word named a shepherd’s brand on his sheep, a general’s tattoo on his soldiers, a householder’s mark on his servants and the Lord’s mark on his disciples.

So signing ourselves recognises that we are Christ’s sheep and can count on his care; his soldiers, commissioned to work with him in advancing his kingdom on earth; and his servants, dedicated to doing whatever he tells us.

Acceptance of suffering

Jesus promised us that suffering would be a normal part of a disciple’s life (see Lk 9:23). So, when we mark our bodies with the sign, we are embracing whatever pain comes as a consequence of our faith in Christ.

Making the sign is our “taking up the cross and following” him (Lk 9:23). But at the same time it comforts us with the realisation that Jesus, who endured the crucifixion for us, now joins us in our suffering and supports us.

Signing ourselves also announces another significant truth: With St Paul, we are celebrating that our afflictions as members of the body of Christ contribute to the Lord’s saving



People dress as ‘devils’ during the *Endiablada* festival in Almonacid del Marquesado, Spain, February 2, 2018. The Sign of the Cross is an effective weapon in combatting the devil’s temptations. Photo: CNS/Reuters

work of perfecting the Church in holiness (see Col 1:24).

Move against the devil

When the devil sent Jesus to the cross, he mistakenly believed he had won a great victory. Instead, the Lord surprised him with an ignominious defeat (see 1 Cor 2:8).

From the first Easter morning through the present, the Sign of the Cross makes the devil cower and flee. So on one level, making the sign is a defensive move, declaring our inviolability to the devil’s influence.

But more importantly, the sign is also an offensive weapon,

helping us reclaim with Christ all that Satan lost at the cross. It announces our cooperation with him in the indomitable advance of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness.

Victory over the flesh

In the New Testament, the word *flesh* sums up all the evil inclinations of our old nature that persist in us even after we die with Christ in baptism (see Gal 5:16-22).

Making the sign of the cross expresses our decision to crucify these desires of the flesh and to live by the Spirit. Like tossing off a dirty shirt or blouse, making the sign

indicates our stripping ourselves of our evil inclinations and clothing ourselves with the behaviours of Christ (see Col 3: 5-15).

The Church fathers taught that the Sign of the Cross diffused the force of powerful temptations such as anger and lust. So no matter how strongly we are tempted, we can use the Sign of the Cross to activate our freedom in Christ and conquer even our besetting sins.

i Bert Ghezzi is the author of numerous books, including *The Sign of the Cross: Recovering the Power of the Ancient Prayer* (Word on Fire, 2021).

“Like tossing off a dirty shirt or blouse, making the sign indicates our stripping ourselves of our evil inclinations and clothing ourselves with the behaviours of Christ”

Dignitas Infinita – four kinds of dignity



Dualta Roughneen

In a document that covers an enormous amount of ground, the Church risks upsetting and assuaging critics on both sides of the societal divide as it addresses the fundamental issue of human dignity in the latest Declaration from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dignitas Infinita*.

What is the meaning of human dignity? It is such an elusive concept that it is impossible to nail down in a single sentence, yet it underpins the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundational document of the United Nations and the basis for the best attempt at a shared global understanding of humanity.

Dignitas Infinita, in its lengthy introduction, provides the background to the prolonged development of the Catholic Church's intersection into the area, emphasising that this has not been a rash or reactionary response to disturbing changes in the political understanding of human dignity since the UDHR's elaboration in 1948.

Instead, the Dicastery attempts to elaborate a subtler understanding of human dignity than the increasingly prevalent interpretation being promulgated by many human rights advocates that is better described as 'personal dignity' – recognising dignity only in its relationship with personhood – and only applying to a person capable of reasoning.

Dignity

The Dicastery understands human dignity as constituting four different types: ontological dignity, moral dignity, social dignity, and existential dignity.

The most important among these is ontological dignity, which belongs to the person as such simply because he or she exists and is willed, created, and loved by God.

Each human person has dignity irrespective of his/her

capacity for reason, encompassing all humans at the margins of the life cycle and society.

Moral dignity refers to how people exercise the freedom given by God, acting for or against a properly formed conscience. When acting against moral dignity, this may be considered 'undignified' – losing moral dignity but, irrespective of the evil carried out, they can never lose their ontological dignity.

Social dignity refers to the quality of a person's living conditions, often due to situations forced upon them that contradict their inalienable dignity, such as extreme poverty.

Existential dignity provides the distinction for situations frequently cited under the rubric of a 'dignified' life – often used to frame discussions that seek to erode or undermine the ontological dignity in everyone – such as discussions about the right to assisted suicide.

“The most significant part of the document is the elaboration of the Church's understanding of human dignity”

Why this framing and why now? Moving from an essentially doctrinal understanding of human dignity founded in 'the image and likeness of God', it is evident that the Dicastery is attempting to respond to the increasingly prevalent social or secular misrepresentation of dignity as something granted to the person by others based on their gifts or qualities, such that it could be withdrawn.

This has seen human dignity denied to those at the periphery of life to the extent that infanticide has been logically argued to be a legitimate action by some, and only those that are the paradigm of an acting person as falling under the protection of human rights.

Additionally, the flawed secular understanding of human rights that removes ontological dignity from our understanding sees “an arbitrary proliferation of new rights, many of which are at odds with those originally



A nurse and newborns are seen in the Hotel Venice in Kyiv, Ukraine, May 14, 2020, which is owned by BioTexCom, a surrogacy agency. Photo: OSV News/Gleb Garanich, Reuters

defined and often are set in opposition to the fundamental right to life”.

Undoubtedly the focus of the document will fall on the later sections of the document under the sub-heading 'Some grave violations of human dignity' where the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith responds to the more recent challenges to human dignity.

These cover the drama of poverty, war, the travail of migrants, human trafficking, sexual abuse, violence against women, abortion, surrogacy, euthanasia or assisted suicide, marginalisation of people with disabilities, digital violence, and the most recent arenas of cultural divide – gender theory and sex change.

Surrogacy, sex change and gender theory are the issues that have gained most headlines, however the most significant part of the document is the elaboration of the Church's understanding of human dignity.

Understanding

For some, the issues identified and the apparent deeper understanding of human dignity, offer a 'seamless garment' on the Church's position on social issues.

This may be both a good and a bad thing. Despite articulating four typologies of human dignity, a closer inspection reveals that all four are contingent on ontological dignity – that people are made in the image and likeness of God. All other dignities depend on this understanding.

The equivalent secular understanding was that human rights were universal,

inalienable and indivisible by virtue of each person's humanity.

This understanding has been eroded in recent years to narrow that understanding to personhood – the ability to reason and form a life-plan – removing human rights protections from those at the margins of life, whether near death or at the start of life, whether with reduced mental capacity or destroyed by addiction.

Dignitas Infinita attempts to demonstrate that human dignity is not a singular concept. It is not a theory to be manipulated to promote an ideological approach to contested issues in the political and cultural sphere.

“The challenge provided by the Dicastery is to the Church – clergy and laity – to uphold human dignity in all its guises and wherever it is threatened”

It encompasses all of human living – from being known in the womb, through Christ's affinity with “the poor, the humble, the despised, and those who suffer in body and spirit”, to those “who find themselves in disadvantaged conditions, such as abandoned infants, orphans, the elderly who are left without assistance, the mentally ill, people with incurable diseases or severe

“The Dicastery attempts to elaborate a subtler understanding of human dignity than the increasingly prevalent interpretation being promulgated by many human rights advocates”

deformities, and those living on the streets”.

The challenge provided by the Dicastery is to the Church – clergy and laity – to uphold human dignity in all its guises and wherever it is threatened.

This means responding to all grave threats – the drama of poverty, war, the travail of migrants, human trafficking, sexual abuse, violence against women, abortion, surrogacy, euthanasia or assisted suicide, marginalisation of people with disabilities, digital violence, and the most recent arenas of cultural divide – gender theory and sex change.

Clarity

While some on one side of the debate might bemoan the focus on the travail of migrants as the debate around immigration is reductively framed as a contest between open and closed borders, others will be made uncomfortable by the restatement of the Church's position on abortion, issues particularly divisive in Ireland.

The much-needed clarity provided by the Dicastery on surrogacy, gender theory and sex change offers a doctrinal explanation grounded in human dignity that will allow followers to articulate to themselves and to others

why these are such grave violations of human dignity.

In many ways, the Declaration tries to cover too much ground. Each grave violation deserves a Declaration of its own to fully articulate a Church position, but by bringing both the ontological, moral, social and existential issues of dignity together, it demonstrates that the Church is not bunkered in a merely individualistic understanding of dignity but also one that requires a social responsibility of each and every one of us.

On the other hand, creating the impression of equivalence between ontological dignity and the other three contingent dignities risks playing one of the other in the competing spheres of rights when they clash.

Creating equivalence between contingent issues such as migration, poverty and war which require a response based on context, resources and ability and prohibitions such as those on abortion and surrogacy, risks placing Catholics in the unenviable position of responding to accusations of being preoccupied by 'pro-life' issues rather than demanding socialist solutions to social problems.

“What is the meaning of human dignity? It is such an elusive concept that it is impossible to nail down in a single sentence”

Becoming true 'influencers'



Sr Anne Marie Walsh SOLT

“Your beliefs don't make you a good person. Your behaviour does.” This is a meme that floats around Facebook every so often, but the idea has been around from the beginning of time. It's been noted that the devil believes in God but is no better off for it. Just as being in the presence of Jesus, as the Pharisees often were, did not benefit them much either because of their obstinacy and hardness of heart.

We often find this division in our own souls. We may sincerely believe something and yet keep it sectioned off somewhere in our minds where it has no real influence over our everyday life or behavior.

Perhaps we say we believe things, especially regarding our faith because we have some vague notion that we are supposed to believe those things. Yet they don't influence our actions as they should.

Most of us would never want to be an occasion of sin for someone else. Yet we often are, if not by intent, then by carelessness and lack of awareness. This becomes, then, something to consider carefully in our own lives.

Awareness

A few examples can illustrate this. In our religious community, one unwritten rule from our founder is that we don't drink alcohol.

This is not because alcohol in and of itself is evil or sinful. But it is because we don't want to be a source of temptation to those brothers and sisters who have a weakness in this area.

Even before this, because alcoholism is generationally prevalent in my family, we had to come to the point where we agreed that there would be no alcohol at family gatherings.

There was a lot of resistance to this at first. Why should we suffer because someone else can't stop once they start? Yet the overreaction missed the point that if we can't come together and enjoy one another for a few hours without alcohol, we may have a problem also.

“Modesty means behaving in a way that does not become a source of temptation to others”

This principle applies as well to the whole area of modesty. In this, we are sadly ruled all too often by the world's norms and not by genuine concern for our own dignity and the dignity of others.

Modesty means behaving in a way that does not become a source of temptation to others. This is why we cover or veil ourselves in attractive or tasteful ways but in ways that are not suggestive or seductive.

We protect ourselves this way from the lustful eyes of others and the sinful overreaching that too much visible flesh can entice them into. If we want people to see our real person, we don't blind them with too much physicality, which they won't get past to the more essential things.

“In an age where influencers push worldly trends, our counter-witness must be as influencers that point immortal souls beyond this world to the eternity that awaits them”

At the same time, we dampen the possible temptation that would come from dressing more provocatively. Telling the Lord we just wanted to be attractive will not hold much weight in the light of the destruction that sin brings with it, even if it wasn't directly our own sin.

A third example has to do with anger. How many potential sins we can cause when we over-indulge our anger? Anger is a contagious emotion.

If we are not careful, we can incite anger in others, especially those who generally sympathise with us anyway. We can cause all sorts of gossiping, rash judgment, detraction, reputation destruction, and numerous other violations of charity.

Accountability

Imagine being held accountable for all the sins we have committed (and remember, Confession permanently wipes them away) but also for the sins we have caused others to commit.

These are areas that need to be examined; otherwise, we risk, as the Chinese proverb says, “burning false incense before a true God.”

There is no getting around the fact that we influence others for better or worse.

And today, being an ‘influencer’ has become a prize designation. In an age where influencers push worldly trends, our counter-witness must be as influencers that point immortal souls beyond this world to the eternity that awaits them.

This is to fulfill the real purpose of influence while preserving us from the guilt of causing sin in others.



An illustration shows a teenager looking over her Facebook page. OSV News/Reuters



Q: I have a confession question. I have heard that past sins, either venial or mortal, even after confessing them stay with you somewhat and only 'really' get dismissed after your soul is scrubbed clean by time in purgatory. So would someone with a very bad past who does a turn-around, goes to Confession and receives absolution, and leads a good life going forward still be 'responsible' for past sins?

A: There are many layers to your question, but the short answer is that we are truly and fully forgiven from our sins when we receive absolution after a good confession. However, sacramental absolution by itself doesn't necessarily resolve all the consequences of our sins. Canon 959 of the Code of Canon Law reflects this reality when it notes that one of the requirements for sacramental absolution is that the penitent be truly sorry for their sins and that they “intend to reform themselves” (or, as this is sometimes translated, that they have “firm purpose of amendment”).

In other words, forgiveness of sin from the sacrament of penance can only come about if the penitent is willing to do what they need to do in their life outside the confessional to bring their life into harmony with God's law.

On an observable natural level, it might seem fairly obvious that a sacramental confession does not automatically ‘fix’ all the negative aspects of a situation our sins may have caused.

For example, if a person were to confess intentionally inflicting major damage to someone else's property, that newly forgiven sin would still, in a sense, ‘stick with’ the penitent insofar as they would still be responsible for repairing the damage – and might even need to face secular criminal charges.

In a similar but less dramatic way, a person who confesses a tendency to lose their temper with their family members would still need to work toward improving the relationships that may have been injured by their unkind words or actions; that is, other people's hurt feelings do

not instantly go away as a result of their confession.

With respect to your question specifically, a person who repented after years of habitual sinful behaviour might still have a lot to do to resolve the problems their sins may have caused – though we can assume that this burden would be made much lighter by the grace of the sacrament.

The idea that sin has consequences' also extends to the idea of purgatory. God does not punish sins that he himself has forgiven through the sacrament.

But purgatory is not intended to be a form of divine punishment, strictly speaking. Rather, purgatory is meant instead to be a time of healing from the negative spiritual effects of our sinfulness.

Many sins have the potential to hurt other people (and sometimes also ourselves) in earthly or bodily ways. But all sin unavoidably wounds the soul of the one who commits it.

Even venial sins can make us less capable of loving God and receiving his love, and this spiritual damage does not necessarily go away just because the sin that caused the damage has been forgiven.

Purgatory is a state that God in his mercy gives to us so that our souls may be strengthened and purified so as to be made ready to enter into the full glory of Heaven.

That being said, there are things we can do on earth to heal our souls and hopefully shorten our time in purgatory. For one thing, a fervent prayer life can draw us closer to God, preparing us for a heavenly life in his direct presence.

And it has been traditionally understood that if we patiently bear the sufferings we naturally experience in this life, this can help us grow more detached from sin and the passing things of this world so as to set our hearts more firmly on God alone.

❗ 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.



Civility has left the building

Why do we no longer get along with each other? Why is there such bitter polarisation inside of our countries, our neighborhoods, our churches, and even in our families?

Why do we feel so unsafe in many of our conversations where we are perpetually on guard so as not to step on some political, social, or moral landmine?

We all have our own theories on why this is, and mostly we choose our news channels and friends to bolster our own views. Why? Why this bitter polarisation and nastiness among us?

Well, let me suggest an answer from an ancient source, scripture. In the Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament), the prophet Malachi offers us this insight on the origins of polarisation, division, and hatred.

Echoing

Echoing the voice of God, he writes: "Therefore, I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, since you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your decisions. Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us? Why do we break faith with one another?"

Isn't this particularly apropos for us today, given all the polarisation and hatred in our houses of government, our churches, our communities, and our families, where for the most part we no longer respect each other and struggle even to be civil with each other?



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

We have broken faith with each other. Civility has left the building.

Moreover, this afflicts both sides of the ideological, political, social, and ecclesial spectrums. Both sides have their particular ideological wings that are scornfully unsympathetic to those who don't share their view, paranoid about hidden conspiracies, rigidly uncompromising, and disrespectful and belittling of anyone who does not share their perspective.

“Someone once said, not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly”

And, for the most part, they preach, advocate, and practice hatred – believing that all this is done in service of God, truth, moral cause, enlightenment, freedom, or nationalism.

Someone once said, not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly. That's the case here. We need to name this. We need to say out loud, this is wrong.

We need to say out loud that none of this can be done in the name of love. And we need to say out loud that we may never rationalise hatred and disrespect in the name of God, the Bible, truth, moral cause, freedom, enlightenment, or anything else.

This needs to be named, irrespective of wherever we find ourselves amid all the divisive and hate-filled debates that dominate public discourse today.

Partiality

Each of us needs to examine himself or herself vis-a-vis our partiality, namely, how little we even want to understand the other side, how much disrespect we have for some people, how civility is often absent from our

speech, and how much hatred has unconsciously crept into our lives.

After this, we need a second self-scrutiny. The word 'sincere' comes from two Latin words (*sine* – without and *cere* – wax). To be sincere is to be 'without wax', to be your real self, outside of others' influence.

“Am I sincere or is my reaction predicated more on who my friends and colleagues are and where I get my news”

But that's not easy. How we picture ourselves, what we believe, and our view on most anything at a given moment is heavily coloured by our personal history, our wounds, who we live with, what work we do, who our colleagues and friends are, the country we live in, and the political, social, and religious ideologies we inhale with the air we breathe.

It's not easy to know what we really think or feel about a given issue. Am I sincere or is my reaction predicated more on who my friends and colleagues are and where I get my news?

At the core of my being, who am I really, without wax?

Given our struggle for sincerity, particularly in our present climate of division, disrespect, and hatred, we might ask ourselves, how much of what I am passionate about enough to generate hatred inside me, is really rooted in sincerity as opposed to ideology or my instinctual emotional or intellectual reaction toward something I dislike?

This is not easy to answer, understandably so. We are pathologically complex as human persons, and the quest for sincerity is the quest of a lifetime.

Journey

However, while on that journey towards sincerity there are some non-negotiable human and spiritual rules. The biblical prophet Malachi names one of them: "Do not show partiality in your decisions and do not break faith with each other". When we parse that out, what is it saying?

Among other things, this: You have a right to struggle, to disagree with others, to be passionate for truth, to be angry sometimes, and (yes) even to feel hateful occasionally (since hate is not the opposite of love, indifference is).

But you may never preach hatred and division or advocate for them in the name of goodness; instead, in that place inside you where sincerity resides, you need to nurse a congenital distrust of anyone who does proactively advocate for hatred and division.

“Do not show partiality in your decisions and do not break faith with each other’. When we parse that out, what is it saying?”

A faith founded on love



Pope Francis kisses a Ukrainian flag carried by a group of Ukrainian children attending his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican April 10. Photo: CNS

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 9:26-31
Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30,
31-32
1 Jn 3:18-24
Jn 15:1-8

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon
Greg
Kandra



The readings for this Fifth Sunday of Easter introduce us to someone we don't hear about very much. But he has a lot to say to us, especially now.

I'm talking about St Barnabas.

The reading from Acts describes how he took Paul under his wing – in part to protect him from frightened and suspicious Christians, but also to act as his mentor and guide.

Barnabas

So let's step back a moment. Just who was Barnabas? And why should we care about him? History tells us he was born into a wealthy Jewish family.

At some point, he sold his estate and became a follower of Jesus. Later, after Paul arrived on the scene, it was Barnabas who intro-

duced him to Peter.

Some scholars think Barnabas and Paul had known each other when they were younger and had studied together under the same rabbi.

“The name ‘Barnabas’ means ‘Son of Encouragement’, and encouragement is exactly what he gave to the growing community of Christians”

For several years, Barnabas and Paul worked together as missionaries. Barnabas was reportedly a prolific evangeliser, and some scholars believe he is the writer behind the letter to the Hebrews, the only epistle not attributed to a

particular author.

Paul and Barnabas eventually had a falling out over Barnabas' cousin Mark – the same Mark who wrote the gospel bearing his name – because Paul had doubts about Mark's dedication to the faith.

But by one account, when Barnabas was finally martyred, around the year 61, it was Paul who helped to bury him.

Despite any differences they may have had, Christian love prevailed.

Interestingly, 'Barnabas' was not his given name. Just as Saul became Paul, Joseph was known as Barnabas after he became a Christian.

The name 'Barnabas' means 'Son of Encouragement', and encouragement is exactly what he gave to the growing community of Christians – and, undoubtedly, to Paul, as well.

Today, Barnabas is the patron saint of Cyprus, where he grew up. But as a result of the way he introduced Paul to the Christians, and managed to foster mutual respect when there

was suspicion and mistrust, Barnabas is also the patron saint of peacemakers.

Today

Can anyone deny that we need his intercession today?

In the passage from John's Gospel, Jesus exhorts us to remain in him, like branches of a vine, and to bear good fruit.

And this Sunday's second reading, also from John, makes the message even more explicit: "Love one another, just as he commanded us."

In too many places today, that command is forgotten, or abandoned, or even mocked.

“The landmines are everywhere. So is the division and pain, the polarisation and contempt”

Our world is scarred by lands that are now synonymous with conflict

“Christ is the vine. We are his branches. We are fed by the fruits of his redeeming love, love that was poured out on Calvary and which we celebrate now”

and bloodshed. Places like Ukraine, Gaza, Haiti, Ethiopia.

Add to these the battles being waged in other places too; in our families, in marriages, in politics.

The landmines are everywhere. So is the division and pain, the polarisation and contempt.

Survey the landscape and you realise that we live in a world hungry for peacemakers. But they are far too few.

We need "sons and daughters of encouragement". We need to pray for more Barnabases to rise up and remind us what too many have forgotten, our fundamental call as Christians: We are a faith founded on love.

Christ is the vine. We are his branches. We are fed by

the fruits of his redeeming love, love that was poured out on Calvary and which we celebrate now, during this Easter season, because it is a love that conquered death, a love that conquered hate.

Let this be our prayer: that in the hopeful glow of Easter, we can live out the promise of the Resurrection and become witnesses to the Risen Christ by being in every way instruments of peace, encouragers of hope.

More than ever, each of us needs to be a Barnabas in the world.

i Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog 'The Deacon's Bench'.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Clashes between government and the governed

So many modern controversies involve clashes between conscience and state, between the Government and the governed, between conflicting world views.

Issues of Conscience v. the State were central to the Terrence Malick film **A Hidden Life** (Channel 4, Sunday) – the true story of Catholic conscientious objector Franz Jagerstatter in Austria during World War II.

Yes, it's long, and slow at times, with a somewhat unconventional narrative style, but it is beautifully shot and directed – very different from **The Sound of Music** which also dealt with resistance to the Nazis in Austria.

Jagerstatter was no campaigner, happy to spend the war farming and pursuing a relatively normal life in the beautiful Austrian mountains. But people who do evil often want the affirmation of others, or want to drag others down with them. And so, the last straw was when attempts were made to force him to swear loyalty to Hitler.

He faced a dilemma similar to that faced by St Thomas Moore – a dilemma dramatised so well in another film **A Man for All Seasons**. There were frequent discussions on what someone in this situation can do, when Franz chats to his wife, his local priest and his bishop.

In many ways it's a love story – Franz guided by his



Terrence Malick's *A Hidden Life* about Austrian martyr Franz Jagerstatter

love for God, but the film is not preachy, pious or sentimental. It's also the tender love story of Franz and his wife that gives the film a true human heart and lifts it way above philosophical and political considerations. August Diehl and Valerie Pachner are excellent in those lead roles.

I'm working my way through another true story that features conflicts between conscience and Government, between Church and State. **Under the Banner of Heaven** (Disney Plus) is a seven-part drama series about murder in a Mormon community in the USA.

It's rather removed from

the Irish experience but there are interesting explorations of clashes, theological and otherwise, between fundamentalist Mormons who rely heavily on traditions from the past (eg. polygamy and resenting intrusive government) and those who responsibly and kindly play their role in modern society.

One of the latter is Detective Pyrie, played sympathetically by Andrew Garfield. His colleague is a Native American and the culture difference is well played out. Unfortunately, at least one scene features relatively brief but gratuitous nudity, so it's hard to recommend it. As in this case such scenes often

happen in the first episode of a series – perhaps to draw attention or boost the age rating, but it's annoying and felt exploitative.

At the heart of many modern controversies is 'ideological capture', where an activist group or ideology gets effective control over a significant organisation. On **Newstalk Breakfast** (Thursday) Ciara Kelly interviewed Colette Colfer, lecturer in World Religions at the South-East Technological University.

Ms Colfer explained how the university had removed a reference in their gender identity policy in which refusal to use a person's preferred pronouns was to be

PICK OF THE WEEK

SUNDAY

BBC Radio 4 Sunday April 28, 7am

Comprehensive treatment of topical religious and ethical issues.

SUNDAY SEQUENCE

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday April 28, 8.30pm

Religious and ethical issues with a Northern Ireland flavour.

THE SONG OF THE LONGING HEART

EWTN Sunday April 28, 4pm

The hearts of composers and musicians are filled with the love of God as they seek to worship him through their craft.

considered "unlawful discrimination". Ms Colfer challenged this overreach and was now vindicated.

Universities, she said, should be a places of open conversation, of fostering debate rather than stifling it. She supported the overall aims of the policy, in that people should be treated with respect, but people shouldn't be compelled to use certain pronouns, it should be a matter of choice.

She explained how some staff shun her now, but she was willing to talk to people she disagreed with. She said some staff were afraid even to put certain views in an email. Once again **Newstalk** showed itself to be a place where diverse rational opinions get an airing.

Issues of opinion, fact, misinformation and disinformation were teased out all too briefly on **This Week**

(RTÉ Radio 1, Sunday). This all the more important with local and European elections coming up in June. Those concerned, like those interviewed on the programme, need to be more alert to such abuses whatever its source, whether from the right, the left, state actors from abroad, or, judging by the recent referendum experience, from our own Government.

According to this item Coimisiún na Meán is looking into the pre voting moratorium. As it does not apply to online news outlets social media, fake news can spread without being challenged in the last hours of an election or referendum. An example was given of fake audio being released in a recent election in Slovakia. We were told the desirable approach was to "analyse, detect, respond".

Music

Pat O'Kelly



The charm of Tchaikovsky's melodies

A recent NSO concert at the NCH had the orchestra's principal conductor Jaime Martín directing a Slavonic programme through music by Smetana (*Vltava*, a marvellous musical picture of that river as it flows through the Bohemian countryside and celebrating the composer's bicentenary this year), Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich.

Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* had Madrid-born Pablo Ferrández as its expressive cello soloist and in a brief introduction in the programme booklet he pointed out that Mozart was Tchaikovsky's favourite composer and that for him (Ferrández) the *Variations* "go through all the different characters that

the music has to offer. It is like a mini opera, as it travels from its classical theme to the melancholic, exhilarating and passionate. It really has a variation for every mood".

The soloist also mentioned the charm of the *Variations'* incredibly beautiful melodies as well as the work being among the most virtuosic in the cellists' repertoire making them (the cellists) feel like violinists at times.

Certainly Pablo Ferrández' elegant phrasing had an air of refinement that portrayed an earlier era and a kind of vocalise where one could imagine elegant pirouettes twirling through his beautifully etched performance.

Shostakovich's 10th Symphony dates from the autumn

of 1953 when the former Soviet Union was still adjusting to the death of its tyrannical dictator, Josef Stalin, in March of that year.

Composition

The four-movement piece has a lengthy *moderato* slow waltz to begin and this is followed by a highly concentrated *moto perpetuo scherzo* termed in one of the BBC's invaluable *Music Guides* as a "black march – the onslaught of the powers of darkness and death and where it is possible to feel that the music faces in two directions, the one affirmative, the other menacing".

Asked if he would consider issuing a programme note on the symphony, Shostakovich replied, "No. Let them listen

and guess for themselves". But later he did admit that the scherzo, and indeed the symphony as a whole, was about Stalin. Despite that, as often as I have heard the piece the idea of Stalin has never crossed my mind.

During Stalin's time use of the personal 'I' was almost exclusively reserved for him alone but with his passing Shostakovich felt he could reveal his own identity through the musical notes D, E flat, C and B in German which relate to his own initials D, S, C and H in Russian.

The four notes assume prominent positions in the *allegretto-largo* third movement where there is also something of Mahler, whose music Shostakovich held in

high regard, and a kinship to Russian folksong. The movement may also be a memorial to the Russian dead – over 50 million of them – in World War II and to other catastrophes the vast country endured.

The symphony's finale has a fairly lengthy andante introduction before reaching its boisterous and brilliant allegro conclusion.

Credit

Before I conclude I must refer to some exceptionally lovely woodwind playing during the NSO's performance especially from solo clarinet, oboe and cor anglais. This was a solidly satisfying account of one of the 20th century's symphonic masterpieces.



Dmitri Shostakovich. Photo: Deutsche Fotothek



BookReviews

Peter Costello



The papyrus book and the preservation of the earliest Christian voices

Papyrus: The Invention of Books in the Ancient World,

by Irene Vallejo, translated from the Spanish by Charlotte Whittle (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99 / €19.99)

Peter Costello

It is often said that, in the West at least, this is an age which does not value religion. But one class of people certainly do: the leading auctioneers of the world, in Europe and North America, who are quite prepared to sell off civilisation's most important relics for whatever they can get.

At the moment what has been well described as "one of the world's oldest books", the Crosby-Schøyen Codex, having been on view in Paris until this week, and soon will be in London, before being auctioned on June 11. The high estimate placed on it by Christie's is some US\$3.8 million (€3.6 million).

Alexandria

It was written on papyrus in the city of Alexandria, the leading place of learning in the world at the time, in the 3rd Century of our era (say about 250 AD). It was kept in the library of the Pachomina order at Faw Quibi, near Dishna, in Western Egypt.

It was hidden at a time of danger in a large jar during the Muslim invasion in the 7th Century. This jar was found by a Muslim in 1952, changed

hands several times before reaching an American university which in turn passed it on, ending up in the private collection in Norway which has now brought it to the market.

It is of an historical interest which deserves to be housed in a great international collection.

The main content is a version of the Book of Jonah; 2 Maccabees (5:27-7:105); and 1 Peter. It contains also a homily on Easter morning, but more importantly a text on the significance of Easter by Melito of Sardis now Izmir, a Bishop who died in 180 AD, and was later highly regarded by Tertullian and Jerome.

So here we have Christians voices from a period a mere 150 years after the time of Jesus expounding the beliefs of the third generation of Christians about the Resurrection.

"This is part and parcel of the development and world-wide spread of the new religion"

The codex illustrates just how the spread of Christianity was dependent on papyrus, that is to say a form of paper created out of the material of the papyrus reed found along the Nile.

At the period when it was created in Alexandria these manuscripts were undergoing a change from the ancient form of rolls wound up on rods (like those we see in synagogues

today, and which would have been used by Jesus when he read the Torah in the synagogues at Nazareth or Capernaum).

The pages were by now being laid on top of one on another, and sewn at the side to make an approximation of our modern book. The present codex, though created in Alexandria, was created in an early monastery.

This is a key to the history that Irene Vallejo, a Spanish classicist and philologist turned author, tells in the book under view.

This is part and parcel of the development and worldwide spread of the new religion. Her book has been an international best seller. For it was written by a scholar who has learnt, like Umberto Eco and others, to make their ideas accessible to newspaper readers.

Result

The result, in a series of short chapters, tells with artful compression the whole history of the development of books, their content, and the nature of their readers down to modern times.

And this, all deriving from the Nile-side papyrus reed. So though on the whole not overwhelming academic, it is a wonderful read which is varied and insightful, and which many who already enjoy what books can provide will find an engaging read. It also provides a long view of what literary culture has been since late classical and early Christian times.

Sacred traditions on display in Dublin

Peter Costello

The codex now for sale was once a part of the Bodmer Hoard, some of the items of which are now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin.

A visit to the Chester Beatty Library in the precincts of Dublin Castle will reveal not only one of Ireland's finest museums, but also a treasury of early Biblical manuscripts especially early Christian papyri. Anybody with the slightest interest in learning how we got our Bible should visit it.

When the American mining magnate Alfred Chester Beatty moved to Ireland in the early 1950s, bringing with him his important private

library of Oriental and Biblical materials, he was warmly welcomed.

"Today it still devotes its space to exploring sacred traditions from across the East Asian, Islamic and Western regions"

He built a museum, on Shrewsbury Road to house the collection, which eventually passed into the ownership of the people of Ireland. The library moved from the cramped original building to the grand space it now has in Dublin Castle a quarter of a century ago.

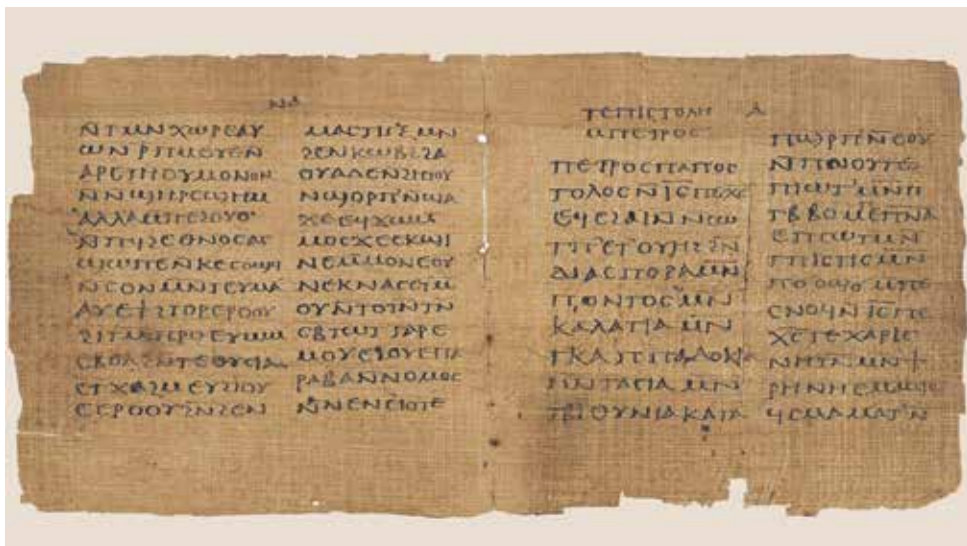
One of those who promoted the library and its establishment in Ireland was the contemporary Archbishop of Dublin Charles McQuaid. He was then engaged on a great church building scheme, seeing Ireland in the post-war world as a bastion of religious faith.

He was delighted that the biblical manuscripts would become a centre of biblical and early Christian studies among the leading institutions in the world.

Today it still devotes its space to exploring sacred traditions from across the East Asian, Islamic and Western regions.

Sacred

'The Sacred Traditions Gallery' on the next floor exhibits the sacred texts, illuminated manuscripts and



Pages from the Crosby-Schøyen-Codex. Photo: Christie's



Jesus reading from the rolls of the Torah, by JJ. Tissot.

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.



Fragmentary papyri in the Chester Beatty.

miniature paintings from the great religions and systems of belief represented in the collections – Christianity, Islam and Buddhism with smaller displays on Confucianism, Daoism, Sikhism and Jainism.

Though there are lavish exhibits of the Koran and Buddhist texts, very special attention is also given to the biblical papyri. The exhibition is called 'First Fragments' and explores "some of the

world's earliest surviving biblical papyrus books".

“This exhibition includes pages from some of the earliest surviving biblical papyrus books”

Dating from the 2nd to 4th Century AD, these ancient pages reveal a world of book

production and early Christian scholarship in Roman Egypt.

Histories

These papyrus fragments have much to tell us about the material histories of writing and bookbinding, textual histories of translation and transmission, and later object histories of ownership, publication and display.

Featuring some 80 objects from Roman Egypt, this exhibition includes pages from some of the earliest surviving biblical papyrus books alongside early Coptic bindings, ostraca (pieces of pottery used for writing), related papyrus fragments, illuminated Coptic manuscript pages and loans from the National Museum of Ireland.

i Chester Beatty, Dublin Castle Precinct, Dublin 2, D02 AD92 (Entrance off Dame Street) is open Monday to Friday 9:45am - 5:30pm; Wednesday 9:45am - 8:00pm; Saturday 9:45am - 5:30pm; Sunday 12:00pm - 5:30pm

Vatican mounts significant exhibit at the 60th Venice Biennale

Peter Costello

This is the year of the regular biannual art exhibition in Venice bears the title 'For-eigners Everywhere'. Opened on April 20 it runs until November 24.

This year sees a return to the original post-war format of national pavilions.

The result has been an increase of interest from many new countries outside Europe, especially in Africa, which will add a great interest to visitors, reviving something of the thrill that the events had in the past.

This year the Vatican is taking part. Their national pavilion, entitled 'With my Own Eyes', is installed in the most unusual venue of a women's prison (formerly a convent), where the actual prisoners act as guides. Pope Francis is due to make a visit to the show a little later.

Injustice

The Pope is well aware that since the days of Peter, Paul and other apostles and martyrs, prison has often been not retributive but has been itself a source of injustice. The exhibition aims to bring the nature of this injustice more into focus.

This is a very adventurous choice by the Vatican, moving to meet what might seem to be one of the most modern-

minded exhibitions in the world, to deal with it on its own ground and in its own terms, with the Gospel's view of the value of the individual person.

The intention of the outdoors pavilion is to "turn our eyes back to reality", by highlighting how the women inmates "have been engaged to help transform their lives and embrace universal values through art".

The Vatican exhibition will be hosted in the Giudecca Women's Prison formerly a convent devoted to the care of wayward young women – to illustrate the ability of inmates to welcome art to transform their lives.

“Seeing with one's own eyes gives vision a unique status, as it directly involves us in reality and makes us not spectators, but witnesses”

The project is unprecedented for the Venice Biennale, for the Pavilion is dedicated to the theme of human rights and people living on the margins of society, and seeks to draw the world's attention to those people who are largely ignored while fos-

tering a culture of encounter.

The Holy See Pavilion invites the viewer to take Pope Francis' words literally, to look others directly in the eyes, beyond their social status to encounter their humanity.

"Contemporary culture prefers to metaphorise sight," said Cardinal Mendonça, at a recent news conference in the Vatican. "But seeing with one's own eyes gives vision a unique status, as it directly involves us in reality and makes us not spectators, but witnesses."

Consolidate

During the conference, Cardinal Mendonça remarked of Pope Francis's visit to the Pavilion, that "It will be a historic moment as he will be the first pope to visit the Venice Biennale, which clearly demonstrates the Church's willingness to consolidate a fruitful and close dialogue with the world of arts and culture."

He added that it "aims to focus our attention on the importance of how we responsibly conceive, express, and build our social, cultural, and spiritual coexistence."

To those proposing a visit to north Italy it will be well worth a visit, even though Venice now charges a visitors' tax, and it's valiantly attempting to control the mass tourism that threatens the very culture it claims to admire.

The success of a universal call to prayer

Sacred Space: The Companion, created by the Irish Jesuits (Messenger Publications, €14.95 / £12.95)

Peter Costello

Sacred Space was created a quarter of a century ago by the Jesuit Alan McGuckian (now the Bishop of Down and Connor). To many at the time it seemed a strange and 'over-novel notion', too out of the way to succeed.

But succeed it did. What started simply enough 25 years ago is available in some 21 languages, and has over five million annual visits on the internet.

It is a great example of that very internet success which (like Wikipedia) have demonstrated the power for good that the internet can achieve, a positive feature that compensates for the damage of other aspects of the internet.

A historian might suggest that it was an obvious move for the Jesuits, and was a transformation and re-energising of the old Apostleship of Prayers that had faded away post Vatican II.

As well as the internet the Sacred Space was recreated in print, and its *Sacred Space: the Prayer Book* became a permanent feature of the annual New Year publishing round; it meant one did not even need a computer to benefit from the insights provided by Sacred Space.

Now there appears *Sacred Space: The Companion* which represents the distilled essence of what the site provides in an even more compact and accessible form.

A small application every day will leave a lingering effect that will last all day.

Bishop McGuckian is quoted as saying that "prayer always draws us into community and the website serves to strengthen the bonds of community for many, even in the apparent seclusion of their own room."

For decades there has been much talk of the decline of religion, the extinction of prayer, and the lack of candidates for the missions.

But Sacred Space might be regarded as the greatest, and perhaps most important, missionary endeavour of Irish Catholicism in this century. Not so much 'boots on the ground', as thoughts in the home.

Everyone who feels they have benefited from Sacred Space will like to have *Sacred Space: The Companion*. It provides a brief account of the story of Sacred Space so far, together with a wealth of round the year reflections and contemporary prayers by Irish Jesuits, including an introduction to Ignatian spirituality and materials for Advent and Lent retreats, this volume the publishers hope "will be a companion for whole year of reflection in the Ignatian tradition".



One of the installations in the Vatican exhibition.

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– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912


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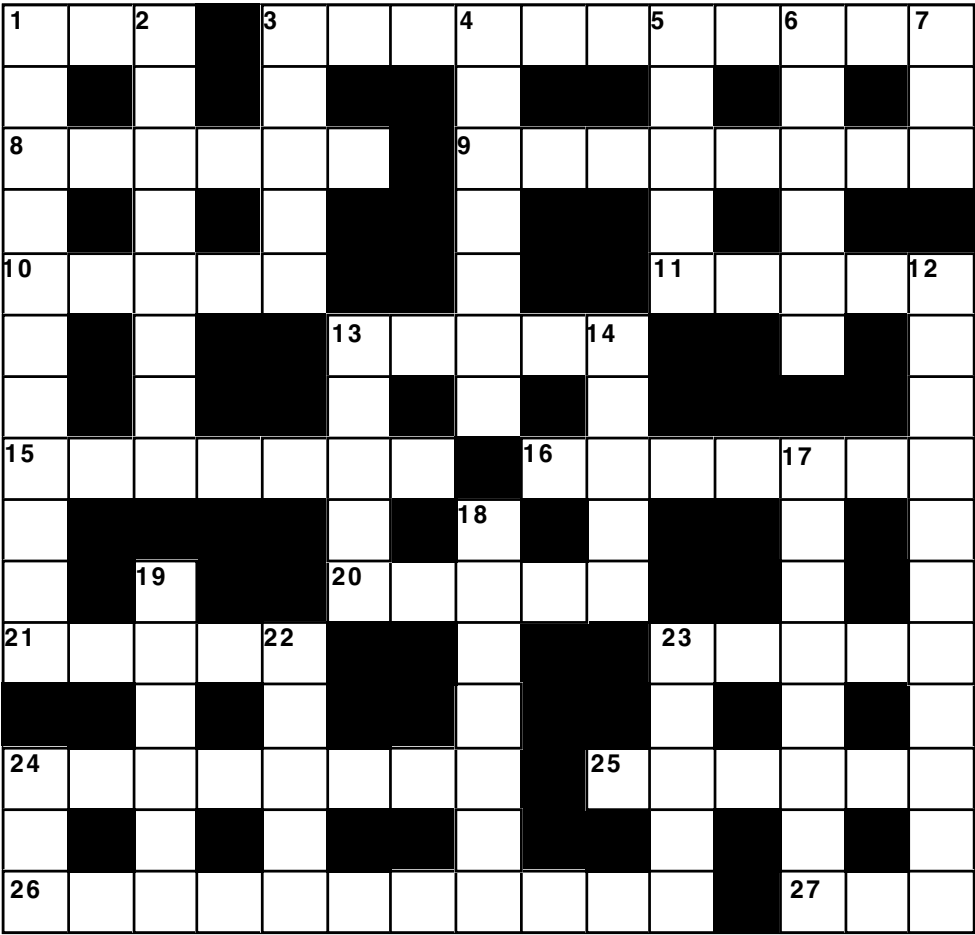
Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 660

Across

- 1 Damp (3)
- 3 Matter-of-fact, having no airs or graces (4-2-5)
- 8 Singers such as Domingo and Carreras (6)
- 9 Censer (8)
- 10 Showery (5)
- 11 Castles in chess (5)
- 13 Animal teeth (5)
- 15 The breastbone (7)
- 16 Mass political gatherings (7)
- 20 Pointed part of certain plants (5)
- 21 Sensational in a melodramatic way (5)
- 23 You may put one in a hot whiskey (5)
- 24 Height above sea-level (8)
- 25 Shed (4-2)
- 26 Voters place their votes into these containers (6,5)
- 27 Pointed tool for making holes (3)



Down

- 1 Toy gun which squirts (5-6)
- 2 Capable of being touched (8)
- 3 Classic horse race (5)
- 4 Zilch (7)
- 5 Mistake (5)

- 6 Narrow band of material (6)
- 7 Shade, colour (3)
- 12 Snack item comprising a banger in pastry (7,4)
- 13 Failing, imperfection (5)

- (5)
- 14 Discolouration (5)
- 17 Inability to sleep (8)
- 18 Underwater missile fired from a submarine (7)
- 19 Hansel's sister in the

- fairy tale (6)
- 22 As above; same again (5)
- 23 Skilful professionals in the kitchen (5)
- 24 White garment worn by a priest (3)

SOLUTIONS, APRIL 18

GORDIUS No. 659

Across

- 1 Immaculate Conception 6 Bolt 10 Wince 11 Tall order 12 Leopard 15 Barge 17 Iona 18 Oboe 19 Divot 21 Tadpole 23 Cater 24 Grin 25 Ache 26 Panic 28 Scythes 33 Ice-hockey 34 Turin 35 Nest 36 Last orders

Down

- 1 Iowa 2 Mangetout 3 Cheap 4 Later 5 Tilt 7 Older 8 Turpentine 9 Forbade 13 Aura 14 Dimples 20 Vertebrae 21 Tractor 22 Lazy 27 Needs 29 Crypt 30 Tutor 31 Skua 32 Ants

Sudoku Corner 530

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 529

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

Last week's Hard 529

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

Notebook

Fr John Harris OP



Catholicism is not another culture war

Entertainment isn't always life-giving.

Recently, after a funeral, I spoke with a man, he was probably in his late 30s or early 40s.

He was Irish and had been raised a Catholic. His story is all too common among our fellow Irish Catholics.

He had received all the sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. As a child he had gone to Mass with his parents every Sunday but had given that up as a teenager.

The funeral was a Catholic funeral of the parent of one of his work mates. The lady in question had been a very devout Catholic and had left strict instructions as to what was to happen and not happen at the Mass.

For instance there were to be no eulogies, no symbols of her life, the priest was to preach about Christian hope in the face of death.

All she wanted was a straightforward Mass. He said to me that for the first time in his life he had realised that

"Catholicism is a religion".

Up until that event he tended to see Catholicism as some kind of a cultural expression of Irishness. He never saw it as anything to do with God and a relationship with a living God.

His basic understanding of Catholicism was as a power struggle between the Church and the State, between the future and the past, between progress and the forces of the Church wanting to keep society in the dark ages.

Until this straightforward funeral there was nothing in this man's lived experience of the Church that spoke about the offer of life in Christ, the joy of the Gospel and the basic reality of being loved.

As he spoke with me I was trying to fathom how one could

be raised a Catholic and yet not realise it had anything to do with the divine reality that is Jesus and his offer of life and joy!

Faith

It is not about winning this cultural battle or other, it is not about this or that referendum.

Our faith is about living life with Christ, it is about experiencing his divine love for us, freeing us from a false sense of ourselves and being transformed into the person God has called us to be.

The example of that family burying their mother with a serene sense of right religion was a living testimony to that man, witnessing to him that the Christian faith is not about rules and regulations but about

having a relationship with the living God in Christ Jesus; Jesus giving meaning to life in the face of the great question, death.

There was no sense of trying to hide from the reality of death and that the sadness and loss was real but our faith carries us beyond into the mystery of God.

Maybe at times we try to make our faith too relevant within the confines of our passing culture. We try to cheapen our faith so that we won't have to face the cruel facts of life.

But what really amazed me after that funeral was the comment of a fellow priest who had also concelebrated the Mass. "Wasn't it refreshing to be at a simple funeral Mass, it was so life giving."

A simple funeral opened one man's eyes to the truth of Catholicism. Photo: CNS



Place of prayer

Fr Max Thurin, who had been a member of the Taizé community and later became a Catholic priest in Italy once wrote: Every church must be 'praying' even when no liturgical celebrations are taking place; it must be a place where in the restless world, one can meet the Lord in peace.

WhatsApp Group

A few weeks ago I was in Rome, when passing a number of street cafes, I was struck by the number of tour-

ists on their mobile phones. As we passed by a table of eight people, all different ages, all on their phones, I said to the company I was in "I wonder who they

are communicating with".

One of the people at the table overheard me, looked up and said to me "each other we are all part of the same WhatsApp group".



The Little Way Association



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The Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese were founded in Myanmar by Archbishop Mang Thang with the assistance of the late Miss Mary Dooan, founder of The Little Way Association. There are now 27 LWM priests, six major seminarians and 77 minor seminarians in various dioceses in Myanmar. Two LWM priests are now serving in Cambodia and four in Papua New Guinea, in tribal areas. Our Association has funded the Little Way Priests since their inception, especially with the costs involved in training and maintaining them as seminarians, paying for food, medical aid, clothing, housing and other needs.

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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 Eastertide 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.



"True glory is that which will last eternally, and to reach it, it isn't necessary to perform striking works but to hide oneself and practice virtue in such a way that the left hand knows not what the right is doing." - St Therese

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