

# The Irish Catholic

**ST BRIGID LIKE ST JOAN OF ARC CAN UNIFY AND REMIND THE NATION OF DIVERSE BUT ENDURING SPIRITUAL ROOTS**

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**GOVERNMENT SHOULD SUPPORT MOTHERS, NOT ERASE THEM**

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## World is on the brink of the abyss - Pope

Brandon Scott

Speaking this week of the many conflicts in the world Pope Francis has called for all parties to "immediately stop the bombs and missiles and end hostile attitudes. Everywhere." The Pope called for a "global ceasefire," because "we are on the brink of the abyss."

Since the war between Israel and Hamas began there have been fears of it mushrooming into a bigger conflict, particularly between the US and Iran.

The Pope expressed his fear of a military escalation across the Middle East, but said he entertains some hope "because confidential meetings are taking place to try to reach an agreement. A truce would already be a good result."

Pope Francis defined Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, as "a crucial figure" who "moves well" and tries to mediate.

He said he speaks by video call with the Holy Family Catholic Parish in Gaza every

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### Lá fhéile Bríde



Saoirse Kehoe and Mollie Kelly of Graiguecullen-Killeslin Parish, Co. Carlow, show off their handiwork after making St Brigid's Crosses.

'Fresh start' Stormont must urgently tackle NI issues says Primate

Exclusive

Chai Brady

It is time for elected politicians who know the North's "pressing problems" to govern, particularly after being led by London, the Primate of All Ireland has insisted.

The restoring of power-sharing institutions in the North offers "an opportunity for a fresh start and a new beginning", Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh told *The Irish Catholic* following the DUP's backing of a deal that will see the Stormont Executive back up and running.

"I think there will be a sense of relief felt by a lot of people today who are so anxious that we can have appropriate representation to deal with the very pressing problems that we have in the North at this time," Archbishop Martin said.

"Clearly the recent strikes brought to our attention the urgent need to deal with issues to do with pay within the civil service, within the health service, the huge waiting lists for people in our health services, the pressing issues within education, the massive problem we have at the moment within homelessness and housing in Northern Ireland, which often goes unmentioned."

The prelate highlighted the fact the Northern Ireland Assembly has not been functioning for almost two years, and that "we have also experienced the problem of being governed at a distance from Westminster by people who don't understand our situations, and it's very important now that locally elected Assembly members get an opportunity to do what we elected them to do".

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# World is on the brink of the abyss - Pope

## Hopes of ceasefire in Gaza

» **Continued from Page 1** day, adding that the "liberation of Israeli hostages" is a priority.

Regarding Ukraine, the Pope recalled the task entrusted to Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, the president of the Italian Bishops' Conference.

"The Holy See is trying to mediate an exchange of

prisoners and the return of Ukrainian civilians," said Pope Francis. "In particular, we are working with Mrs Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian commissioner for children's rights, for the repatriation of Ukrainian children forcibly taken to Russia. Some have already returned to their families."

# Viral video blasts Ireland's proposed hate speech bill

**Jason Osborne**

A challenge to the proposed Irish 'hate speech' law has come from a host of influential voices from across the world in a viral video that has been viewed millions of times.

The video, published by faith-based legal advocacy firm ADF International, features contributions from a number of influential commentators including CEO of the satirical US news website 'The Babylon Bee', Seth Dillon, author and journalist, Andy Ngo and Finnish MP currently being prosecuted for 'hate speech', Paivi Rasanen.

"In Ireland, parliament could soon pass a law that would put you in jail for inciting 'hatred' online or in person. 'Hatred', not defined in the law could be anything that the State decides" the video states.

A post accompanying the viral video states that "Now is the moment to act for Ireland," and asks viewers to join an open letter to Elon Musk asking that he keep X (formerly Twitter) a platform that welcomes free speech.

"It's incredibly important to exercise our free speech to defend against the degrading of this basic human right, which

belongs to everyone. This Irish 'hate speech' bill targets free expression with criminal penalties. We must send a clear message to the Irish parliament that censorship has no role in a democratic society. Free speech is broadly protected in international law, and the Government has an obligation to uphold this," said Irish Barrister and Legal Counsel for ADF International, Lorcán Price.

"In other parts of the world where similar 'hate speech' legislation has been enforced, we have seen innocent people dragged through the courts for something as

simple as a Bible-verse tweet, or affirming biological reality about men and women. Ireland should be a place where we can have important conversations about issues that matter to us – yes, even about controversial and sensitive topics. When these conversations are shut down, we all lose out," he said.

The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 has been described as being intended to combat "hatred", but offers no clear definition of what constitutes "hate". The bill is currently before the Seanad.

# Ukrainian chaplains meet in Poland to ask how to help war wounded

**Staff reporter**

Chaplains to the Ukrainian Catholic community throughout western Europe have met in Poland to address the biggest concerns facing the Ukrainian population in their

care.

Foremost among these are the ongoing physical, emotional and spiritual effects on those who've been displaced by the ongoing war in Ukraine, according to Fr Vasil Kornitsky, chaplain to the Ukrainian com-

munity in Ireland.

The meeting, which took place in the Polish city of Wrocław saw attendance from representatives of dioceses and exarchates of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Italy, Germany, France, Austria, Ireland, United Kingdom, Kazakhstan, Poland.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr Kornitsky said that he received a "great boost" from the meeting as it gave him a sense that he isn't alone in his efforts to minister to people facing a difficult situation.

"We were trying to figure out our needs, the needs of the people, but the biggest challenge that we face at the moment is healing the wounds of war," Fr Kornitsky

said.

"The war in Ukraine affects everyone differently and we see a lot of people who fled Ukraine and are here in western Europe, that the war still affects them in different ways. Many still have family members back home, they have a feeling of fear, uncertainty and guilt, for example – that they left their country and moved somewhere else.

"Even though people live in different countries and the governments help them in different ways, the challenges are the same. Their pastoral needs are still the same. The war has affected them and they have different wounds that need to be healed. We're trying to figure out how we priests help them."

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# 'Fresh start' Stormont must urgently tackle NI issues says Primate

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Church leaders met with senior representatives of all the North's parties in November. Archbishop Martin said that following the meeting "we got a strong sense that were this day to come everybody will put the shoulder to the wheel to try to make it work and certainly I – along I think with many people in communities, churches, faith sector, business sector, education, health,

social services – everyone will hopefully give a resounding encouragement to everyone across the community now to make this work".

Archbishop Eamon added: "I'm hoping that any remaining obstacles to getting the Assembly up and running will be overcome and that within days hopefully we will have a functioning Assembly again with the election of the necessary executives to make it work."

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# No 'right to erase' baptism records for Church defectors – DPC

Ruadhán Jones

Those who leave the Church have "no right to obtain erasure" of their Baptism records, the Data Protection Commission has ruled in a case of major significance across Europe.

At a time when churches are facing legal challenges under GDPR to erase the Baptism records of people who 'defect' – technical language for those who leave the Church – the DPC upheld Dublin diocese's right to retain personal data kept in Baptism Registers.

This means "data subjects" who have left the Church "do not have the right to obtain erasure of their personal data in the Baptism Registers," the DPC said in its judgement, made in February 2023, but released late last year.

The news comes as a relief to dioceses and parishes who have faced

demands from defectors to alter registers, under General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) that came in 2018.

Such demands could "render impossible or seriously impair" the life of the Church, Archbishop Dermot Farrell argued in submissions to the DPC's inquiry, as Baptism is the "gateway" to all other Sacraments.

Archbishop Farrell argued that, as a result, the diocese has "compelling legitimate grounds" to maintain baptismal registers regardless of the interests, rights and freedoms of the 'data subject'.

The information is "stored confidentially" and poses "minimal" impacts to the life of those who leave the Church, he said.

The continued retention of Baptismal data is "essential" for the administration of the affairs of the Church, Archbishop Farrell said.

The commission's

inquiry upheld Archbishop Farrell's arguments on grounds of legitimate interest, while recommending that "a supplementary statement could be added by the archbishop to the Baptism Register entry stating, 'No longer wishes to be identified as a Roman Catholic'".

Archbishop Farrell told the DPC that, although he believed that any such action would be unnecessary, it would be permissible for parishes to include such an addendum "as an alternative to erasure".

The DPC's judgement came after an inquiry into "numerous complaints" it received from people who left the Church and wanted records of their Baptism erased.

The DPC's decision could have major implications for churches within EU countries, all of which are subject to GDPR.

The Church in Belgium

is presently fighting an order to erase an entry in a baptismal register, amid a reported rise in "debaptism" requests.

A spokesman said that the Church had appealed a December 19 decision by Belgium's Data Protection Authority requiring the Diocese of Ghent to comply with an unnamed person's request to have the record of their baptism deleted.

The Church in Belgium cited the DPC's February ruling in its case, with Geert De Kerpel, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels saying "We were very surprised by the decision, as the data protection authority in Ireland had reached the opposite decision only a few months ago in a complaint against the Archdiocese of Dublin."

"So we think there are enough arguments to defend our position in court," he said.

## Chaplaincy 'safe space' for women prisoners report shows

Staff reporter

Chaplaincy provides a "safe space" for prisoners to share concerns and worries, an inspector's report for Mountjoy Female Prison has shown.

The report also raised concerns about the fact that there was only one full-time chaplain available to the women.

"The women welcomed the support provided by chaplaincy," according to the Inspection report from the oversight monitoring visit to Mountjoy Female Prison (Dóchas Centre) in Dublin during Covid-19.

"They saw it as a 'safe space' to share their concerns, worries and any issues they may have had in relation to the prison," the report continued.

The service was availed of

"as frequently as possible", the inspector noted.

However, with one full-time chaplain available to the women, the inspector raised concerns that this was "very limited considering the volume of work within the prison".

The service was augmented by a part-time volunteer, but they were unable to assist during Covid-19.

The inspection took place in 2020, but the report was only released at the end of January with certain parts redacted, having been submitted to the Department of Justice almost three years' ago.

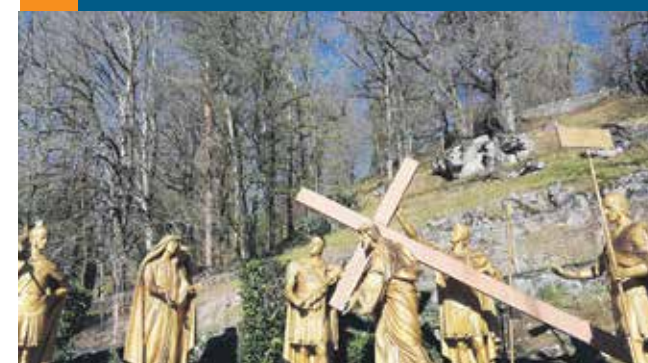
The report noted that the workload of chaplains increased during the pandemic as daily contact was being made with all of the women being cocooned or in isolation or quarantine.

## Catholic schools in the Kingscourt



Jackie Ward, Principal of Carrickleck School, Kingscourt, and school pupils Lily Monaghan and Meibh Hanratty are pictured after participating in the Catholic Schools Mass in Kingscourt, Co. Cavan.

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# Danish ethics council warns Ireland against legalising euthanasia

**Ruadhán Jones and  
Brandon Scott**

The Danish National Council on Ethics has warned the Oireachtas Committee examining assisted suicide against legalising euthanasia.

The council roundly rejected such legislation in Denmark, voting last year by a majority of 16 to 1 not to recommend its introduction.

Speaking to the committee on Tuesday, January 30, council

representatives told TDs and Senators they came to the decision to oppose assisted suicide “particularly based on findings of developments in broad regimes of assisted dying”.

Prof. Merete Nordentoft said in her opening statement that the ethics board did not believe “legislation can be developed which will be able to function properly” having reviewed the models of assisted dying in Oregon and the Netherlands.

She “expressed concern ... about

the ability to adequately monitor and restrict the practice and possible expansions”.

Their review had found that in Holland, which allows euthanasia and has no requirement for terminal illness, “the number of people who die through assisted dying is 10 times greater than in Oregon, which only allows assisted suicide and requires a terminal illness”.

She said the Council decided “an institutionalisation of assisted dying therefore risks threatening

the principle that we have the same claim to respect and dignity, regardless of how much we suffer and how high the quality of life is assessed to be.

“If we offer assisted dying, it says, directly or indirectly, that some lives are not worth living.”

“We argue that assisted dying risks causing unacceptable changes to basic norms for society and healthcare,” she told the Oireachtas Committee.

Meanwhile, Independent Senator

Ronán Mullen told the committee it is beyond him “how we could be considering an assisted death regime which will impact unequally on those coping with any kind of impairment”.

“The sooner this committee moves on to the positive agenda... of helping people to live well. That should be the business of this committee from now on,” he said.

“Let’s not be led into a bad situation by irresponsible legislators and healthcare czars.”

# ‘Concern’ as countries remove UN Gaza funding following terror ties report

**Chai Brady**

Trócaire has raised concerns following the decision by several donor countries to remove funding from a UN agency assisting Palestinians suffering in Gaza, after it was

reported several terrorists and Islamist militants were employed by the agency.

An Israeli intel report sent to the US stated that 10% of all UNWRA employees in Gaza have ties to terror groups, amounting to 1,200 individuals. The report said at least 12

employees were involved in the October 7 terrorist attack on Israel.

It also stated about half of the agency’s employees in Gaza have at least one close relative with ties to terror groups, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

In a statement to *The Irish Catholic*, Trócaire said that they are “gravely concerned” about the halt of funding to UNWRA “as this will result in a collective punishment of the people of Gaza who are desperately in need of this aid”.

Asked by this paper if

Trócaire had any concerns the partners they fund in Gaza may have been infiltrated by terrorists or militants, the overseas development agency of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference said it is not something it “has had concerns about or had to deal with in respect of our partners in Gaza”.

A spokesperson said: “The organisations we work with in Gaza are independent civil society organisations that are not linked to any political party.”

He added: “In terms

of the UNRWA situation, Trócaire’s position is very clear that any allegations of involvement in war crimes must be fully investigated and if those allegations are found to be true then the perpetrators must be held to account.

“We are also gravely concerned that several key donor countries have halted funding to the UN agency as this will result in a collective punishment of the people of Gaza who are desperately in need of this aid”.

# ‘Great joy’ for Capuchins as new brother ordained

**Staff reporter**

There was “great joy” in the Capuchin Friary on Church Street, Dublin as Bro. Antony Kurian OFM Cap. was ordained to the diaconate by Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell.

Any day when “we make

a profound commitment” is a day “rooted in hope”, the archbishop said in his homily for the ordination on January 28.

“Such a day – and Antony’s ordination to the diaconate is one such day – is ultimately not an end point, but in reality, a new beginning,” said Dr

Farrell.

In being ordained a deacon, Bro Antony put himself “in the prophetic service of Christ”, the archbishop continued, just as the order’s ultimate founder St Francis did.

“Prophetic Christian ‘hope is always essentially also hope

for others,” said the archbishop of Dublin, quoting Pope Benedict XVI.

The Indian-born Bro. Antony, who made his solemn profession in 2021, was joined by family, friends and his brother Capuchins for the great occasion.



Bro. Antony Kurian OFM Cap. is surrounded by friends and family after being ordained to the diaconate on Sunday, January 28.

# TD: Politicians can learn from ‘mighty’ religious

**Brandon Scott**

Aontú TD for Meath-West Peadar Tóibín, has hailed the “enormous work” being done by religious leaders in Ireland – including the work of a 94 year-old nun who was recently awarded an honour for a lifetime of humanitarian work – and insisted that politicians can learn from the actions of the religious at the coalface of social activism.

Speaking to Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in the Dail, Mr Tóibín said he recognised the “enormous work” religious leaders do “in helping the vulnerable, members of the Travelling community, victims of human trafficking,

those in prison, those who are homeless, those with addictions, those who are grieving and so on, and in terms of integration and working with many in our migrant communities”.

Mr Tóibín referred to the particular case of Sr Catherine Lillis, a Columban nun who was awarded the Oireachtas Human Dignity Award from the Ceann Comhairle for her efforts in combatting drug addiction and said that he finds it “very interesting to watch many within the political establishment, who are so hostile to those of the Catholic faith in particular, rely heavily on those religious people to pick up the tab in areas of Government neglect”.



# St Brigid has been rebranded for our time...

For some time now, we've been told that Ireland is becoming ever more secular, and thus, faith symbols must be removed from public spaces. Mother Mary Aikenhead may have founded Irish nursing, but her portrait no longer graces the hospitals she established.

## 1500 years

And yet, surprisingly, we now have a new public holiday – this weekend – to honour an Irish saint, Brigid of Kildare. And 1500 years after her



Mary Kenny

death, Brigid is everywhere for this festive occasion, with the full imprimatur of the State, and of those bodies and agencies which might normally rail against the presence of religion in public life.

But then, St Brigid has been somewhat "rebranded" for our contemporary age. She's no longer "the Mary of the Gael", as

was, but a healer, a Celtic goddess, a feminist, a peace campaigner and a symbol of folklore.

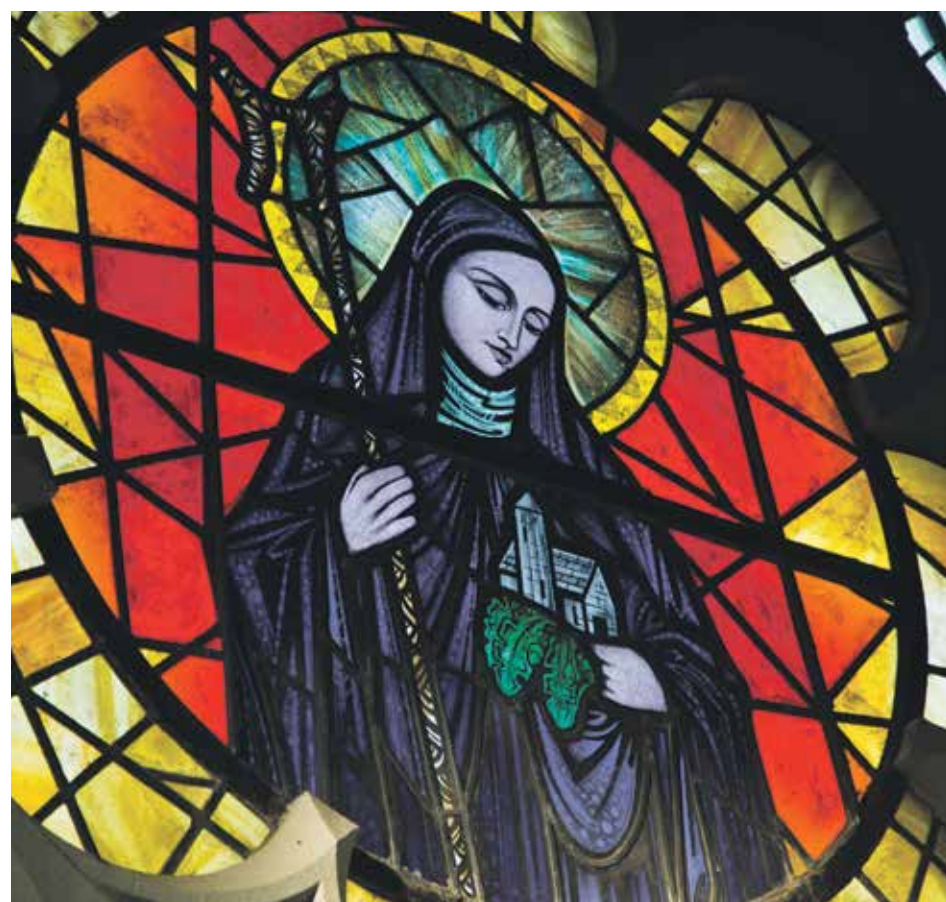
**“St Joan emerged from the glory of French history, and became ‘all things to all men’”**

The activities offered to mark St Brigid's feast range from making a St Brigid's cloak workshop to attending a creative art session to honour the holy woman; from the somewhat unusual, to walking a Brigid "Camino" in Kildare or joining a book reading session.

The possibilities are endless: even the Catholics have got in the act – the Brigidine nuns having celebrated at a Mass restoring a historic relic of Brigid which had been threatened by hostile forces from the Vikings to the agents of Henry VIII.

And surely it's a fine thing that Brigid has been publicly honoured as a national saint, even if there is an element of modern marketisation and re-invention of her image.

The French did this successfully with St Joan of Arc in 1920. After a long period of anti-clericalism, attacks on Catholic schools and enforced secularism, St Joan emerged from the glory of



St Brigid of Kildare is pictured in a stained-glass window in St Brigid's Church in Crosshaven, Cork. Photo: CNS/Cillian Kelly

French history, and became "all things to all men". She came to symbolise republican France and royalist France, feminism, faith, resistance, patriotism, war, peace, martyrdom and sacrifice. Her story was so big that it could encompass everything.

Similarly with Brigid: she can gather all the tribes under her cloak, and remind the nation of diverse, but enduring, spiritual roots.



An AI image of Brigid rebranded.

## A genial, beguiling man

Ivor Browne, the renowned psychiatrist who died recently aged 94, was married to my friend June Levine, and I came to know Ivor through June (or "Juno", as Ivor called her).

He was a genial, beguiling man, with a spiritual side – he certainly spoke about the soul. He and June were keen on Indian mysticism.

The end of his first marriage was painful for his first wife, Orla – who was the daughter of the great ballad singer Delia

Murphy. She really did not want Ivor to leave her, and felt hurt and sometimes bitter (Ivor subsequently spoke about this difficult time in interviews). It wasn't always easy on some of their children either.

I remember a mutual friend, Nuala Fennell, TD, who became Minister for Women, and had written a book about marriage breakdown, saying she felt torn by loyalties in this situation. "On the one hand, why should a wife have to agree to be divorced, without her con-

sent? That's unjust. On the other, who are we to deny Ivor and June the happiness of being together?"

I'm not sure that Dr Orla Browne, herself a successful medic, ever quite got over it all.

Ivor was also a controversial figure in the life of the disgraced priest Fr Michael Cleary. After the latter's death, Ivor publicly disclosed the truth about the paternity of Mike Cleary's sons, for which he was censured by the Medical Council. But Ivor said that the wellbeing of the living took precedence

over the reputation of a dead man.

Ivor's professional reputation is still quite controversial, I think. Many of his medical colleagues thought his approach to psychiatric care was a little too hippy-ish. He believed mental asylums should all be closed down. Yet prisons are now said to be full of the disturbed who need to be in psychiatric institutional care.

A complex man, and much loved by his patients.

I had a bout of ill-health last week, laid low by a disagreeable stomach bug. Once again, I reflected on the lessons that illness teaches us. It brings home how vulnerable the human body is to disease, and ultimately, death. The contemporary affirmation of "bodily

autonomy" strikes a sick person as ridiculous; when the body is poorly, the will has little control over this human frame. As you lie weakly in bed, you just submit to nature's course

We understandably fear ill-health but a period of sickness may,

paradoxically, be salutary. It can be a pause for reflection, and of acceptance of our limitations. It can also be a chance to appreciate the blessings of good health that we have enjoyed in past times. Small wonder that "Sláinte" in some form is the world's favourite aspirational toast.

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# Medical Council defends removing 'deliberate killing of patient' line from Guide

**Chai Brady**

Changes made to the Irish Medical Council's ethics guide for doctors is not "taking a stance or paving the way" for the introduction of legal euthanasia in Ireland, the council have insisted.

In the 9th edition of the IMC's Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics, the sentence "You must not take part in the deliberate killing of a patient" was dropped. It had been in the 8th edition which came out in 2016.

Responding to a query

from *The Irish Catholic*, the Medical Council said that the rationale behind the deletion was to keep the Guide at a "high level in relation to legislation and produce supplementary guidance where necessary rather than amend".

The IMC stated that the Guide is clear medical professionals must comply and operate within the law. "It is illegal for all individuals, including doctors, to take part in the deliberate killing of a person, or to assist a person to end their own life. The removal of this paragraph was not

the Medical Council taking a stance or paving the way for any possible future change, and should not be interpreted this way," the Medical Council said.

They added that similar changes were made to other topics that appear in the 8th Edition but are not included in the 9th edition. The council said: "The removal of these sections does not diminish the law that applies in these circumstances, and such amendments are not unusual from edition to edition. With the evolving nature of the practise of medicine and deliv-

ery of healthcare in Ireland, the Council will be regularly reviewing what additional support and/or guidance medical practitioners may require to supplement the guidance already available in the Guide, and to align with national health policy developments."

This comes after Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin, chairperson of the bishops' Council for Life, wrote to the Medical Council raising concern about the sentence's absence from the Guide.

He said: "I find myself wondering if this is an oversight, or is it the case

that the Medical Council has now decided that it is acceptable for doctors to take part in the deliberate killing of a patient? Even if assisted suicide were to be legalised, for example, that of itself would never make the killing of patients ethical."

Regarding the sections on Assisted Human Reproduction (47) and Abortion (48), which were in the 8th edition of the guide and disappeared from the 9th edition, Bishop Doran said: "This would seem to suggest that the Medical Council does not see these

very significant areas of activity as involving any ethical questions or risks. Is this simply because the law in these areas has changed. Have actions which were previously unethical and quite simply 'bad medicine' suddenly become ethical because they are now legal."

After receiving no acknowledgement or response from the Medical Council on the issues raised, Bishop Doran released a public statement. The Medical Council said they will respond to the bishop in "due course".

## Irish-African leaders have 'common bond' due to missionaries

**Ruadhán Jones**

Leaders of African nations have a "common bond" with Ireland due to the work of Irish missionaries, the Dáil has heard.

There are leaders "all over Africa" who have been educated by Irish missionaries, which

builds a "common bond that is really important", the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence was told.

"As any members who have travelled around Africa or countries elsewhere will know, you meet leaders and people

who have been educated by Irish priests and nuns, who have shared an educational experience with us," said Michael Gaffey, director general of development co-operation and the Africa division.

Mr Gaffey was addressing the committee regarding the "very

positive" uptake of a fellowship programme for students in developing nations funded by Irish Aid.

Although future African leaders are unlikely to be educated by Irish missionaries, Mr Gaffey said he hopes they can build on their work.

"By building our alumni network of the fellowships, as we travel around in future years, we will meet people who have had very positive experiences in Irish third level institutions and who have developed an affinity for our country and we for theirs," he finished.

## Charity calls on local authorities to ensure families get housed

**Staff reporter**

Focus Ireland have warned that despite the number of people in homelessness dropping in December, there was a 14% increase in homelessness over the last year.

Focus Ireland CEO Pat Dennigan said: "The fall in homelessness in December is very welcome and we hope this trend continues. However, it would be remiss of us not to highlight that this comes against the backdrop of an appalling increase of 14%

during the last year alone."

Focus Ireland attributed December's fall in homelessness to more effective efforts by local authorities in ensuring that families who are long-term homeless get a fair share of the new social houses coming on stream.

The charity said that the positive news of a drop in December is a direct result of the hard work of local authorities, approved housing bodies and front-line services, including Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association which have made their own significant

contribution.

Mr. Dennigan added: "Focus Ireland has repeatedly called on local authorities to be more proactive in ensuring that families trapped in homelessness get offered a fairer share of the homes that are coming on stream. The fact

that local authorities at last moved in this direction in December is to be strongly welcomed. However, it is essential that this approach is not just for one month but continues on a long-term basis."

### Religious youth...



Sr Eileen O'Connell OP, Secretary General of AMRI Ger Gallagher, Anne-Marie Whelan and Director of Vocations Ireland Margaret Cartwright attend a gathering of young religious in Dublin on Saturday, January 20.



Bro. Matthew and Sr Jacinta enjoy the gathering of young members of religious orders, organized by the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious in Ireland.

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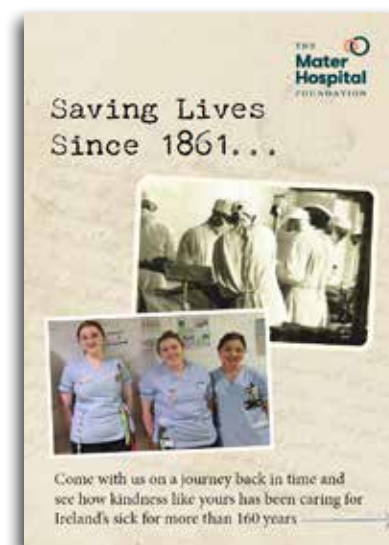
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## Rónán Mullen

### The View from the Seanad



# Irish children are the real losers as mothers and parents erased from Constitution

**A** 'No, No' on the two referendum proposals would be an appropriate response.

My Seanad colleague Michael McDowell was right to refer to this choice of polling day as a 'gimmick'. It might otherwise be harmless were it not that, in order to secure the vote for this date, the Government rushed, and effectively subverted, the normal parliamentary process that leads to the holding of a referendum.

That subversion is a serious matter, so much so that on its own it presents a substantial reason for voting No, No. Major changes to existing constitutional wording and the introduction of new concepts to the Constitution should never happen without proper scrutiny.

The Constitution is our basic foundational document that recognises our political and social institutions and what we value as a society. Changing it is a big thing, which is why the people get the final say. But there is a check-and-balance required. The question to be put to the people is meant to be properly debated first, and then passed as a piece of legislation by the Dáil and Seanad. This referendum was hurried through both houses in a matter of days so that various amendments could not be properly discussed.

One proposal seeks to remove the reference to a woman's contribution to society as homemaker. This would then be replaced by an amendment 'striving' to support care in the home. The other proposal is to recast the Family as recognised by the Constitution as being based, not just on marriage but on any undefined 'durable relationship', on the basis that the present definition is not expansive enough.

#### Sympathy

On first reading one might have sympathy with the proposals. The current reference to homemaking is perceived by some as sexist. There is a need for more support for carers. The definition of family can be

portrayed in an exclusive way as not representing all families.

But we are being asked to vote on what is before us, neither more nor less. And it is in considering this we need to be aware of what exactly is going on. Why has the Government failed to publish the results of a public consultation held last year on the referendums? Why did it dispense with pre-legislative scrutiny in the Oireachtas? Why minimal parliamentary discussion? Why the rush?

**“The Government has got rid of any reference to ‘woman’ or ‘mother’, and the proposed wording makes no reference to ‘father’ or ‘parent’”**

It's because these referendum proposals are deeply ideological in their origin and reach, and the Government is more confident of a fair wind in the media than in the Oireachtas where even a small number of noisy politicians can punch a hole in the Minister's argument.

An examination of the referendum proposals shows that the Government has engaged in classic 'bait and switch' political tactics, i.e. they proposed ideas that seemed reasonable, and then switched to



something much more controversial and far-reaching than was ever envisaged.

#### Reasonable

It would have been fair and reasonable to change the reference to mothers' duties in the home to one of 'parents' or to 'fathers and mothers', and to say that the State would undertake to support home-based parenting. That would have both modernised the Constitutional wording while respecting the core value of parenting in family life. But instead, the Government has got rid of any reference to 'woman' or 'mother', and the proposed

wording makes no reference to 'father' or 'parent'.

**“The recent Supreme Court decision in the O'Meara case shows that there is no real problem anyway”**

The carrot for this appalling change, and it is a poor one, is a proposed reference elsewhere to the work of family-based carers. This is an inadequate care-reference that pleases

nobody, certainly not those who give vital care to people with whom they have no ties of blood.

#### Foundation

And what of 'durable relationships' as a foundation for family? Here again, there could have been an adjustment to the Constitutional wording that acknowledged the importance of marriage as a bedrock for family life while also guaranteeing the rights of de-facto families, and especially the children of these families.

The recent Supreme Court decision in the O'Meara case shows that there is no real problem anyway. The Constitution places no obstacle to just provision for parents and children as cases arise. But our Government, led by its Green-libertarian element and urged on by insider NGOs funded by the taxpayer, wants more.

And so we have a proposal that any grouping of any number of people is to be seen as equivalent to a family based on marriage. The questions that arise are endless, not least how a marriage would fare in law when asked to share its resources with an unregulated 'durable relationship' (soon to

be also a constitutional family)? Even having to ask that question seems odd, but that is the nature of this pig-in-a-poke referendum.

**“The social science on marriage and its linkage to best outcomes for children is there for all to see”**

The reason the Constitution originally linked 'marriage' to 'family' was to provide stability for children. The social science on marriage and its linkage to best outcomes for children is there for all to see. But when did you last see this Government showing that it cared about what works best for children? For all the bluster about children's rights, it's really only about what the adults want. Family can be whatever you're having yourself.

**➤ Rónán Mullen is an Independent Senator and barrister.**

**“The Government rushed, and effectively subverted, the normal parliamentary process that leads to the holding of a referendum. That subversion is a serious matter, so much so that on its own it presents a substantial reason for voting No”**



# Women don't want to be forced away from their babies to put bread on the table



Maria Steen

Last week, *RTÉ* published a video explaining the forthcoming March 8 referendum. It began with black and white imagery of women engaged in menial housekeeping tasks, while the female narrator stated: "Can you imagine a time when Irish family meant a woman having to give up her job to stay at home and mind the children and other domestic chores while the husband or father went out to work?" The phrasing was clunky, but the implication clear: that Article 41.2 of the Constitution was an instrument of oppression. But did this provision force married women out of the workplace? Does it continue to tether us to the kitchen sink?

The marriage bar was a reality in Ireland; it obliged women who worked in the civil service to retire once married. However, it was in place long before the Constitution, and similar laws existed in the UK (which has no written constitution), the Netherlands, Germany, the US, Canada, and Australia. In other words, it was a widespread cultural phenomenon in non-Catholic countries. *RTÉ*'s predictable implicit claim that it was caused or copper-fastened by Article 41.2, or Catholic social teaching, is bogus at best, and misinformation at worst.

## Effects

What have been the effects of Article 41.2? Have women and mothers remained embedded exclusively within the domestic sphere? The suggestion is, frankly, preposterous. We have had two female presidents, a

female chief justice, a female Garda commissioner, many female Ministers; there is no evidence that women have been inhibited from achieving the top positions in the country. In fact, the Constitution twice refers to women and their rights as workers.

Women have scaled the heights in their careers. They even outperform their male counterparts in school and university. But is there something valuable in our Constitution as it stands, or is it, as the Government suggests, "sexist" and "outdated"?

Article 41.2 recognises the valuable work that women continue to do in the home. The truth is that, given the choice, and despite decades of social conditioning to the contrary, women remain stubbornly interested in domesticity, even down to the finer details that leave most men scratching their heads. Those who are mothers choose to work fewer hours outside the home than men. It seems to me that a provision in our basic law that recognises this fact is anything but "outdated".

The selfless work that women perform in their homes, the countless hours spent serving their families, and the incomparable motherly love they pour out on their children, are worthy of respect and gratitude. Article 41.2 gives them official acknowledgment and recognition, and exhorts the State to support mothers in their desire to spend more time at home with their children.

A Government that was really intent on supporting what women want would do well to consider the data from the OECD and CSO, which show the different working habits of men and women. Women change their work practices completely once they have children. A poll taken by the Iona Institute in 2016 found that only 17% of mothers of dependent children actually wanted to work full-time outside the home, while a

survey of 3,000 mothers a year later by the Irish Independent and Sudocrem found that only 6% wanted to work full-time outside the home.

While the feminists and women's right's campaigners say that the thoughts, priorities, and desires of women have changed since the coming into force of the Constitution, the reality is that the thoughts, priorities, and desires of babies have not changed at all. An article by Green Senator Pauline O'Reilly in 2017 in *The Journal.ie* recounted how then-Minister for Children, Katherine Zappone, commissioned a survey which found that only 1% of children wished to be cared for in a childcare setting: 99% wanted to be at home. Most ordinary women recognise this. We know it when our babies look at us. We also know that their babyhood and childhood is incredibly short-lived. While it lasts, many women would like to have the opportunity to give their attention to their own babies and raise them, without feeling that they have to return to paid employment just to put bread on the table.

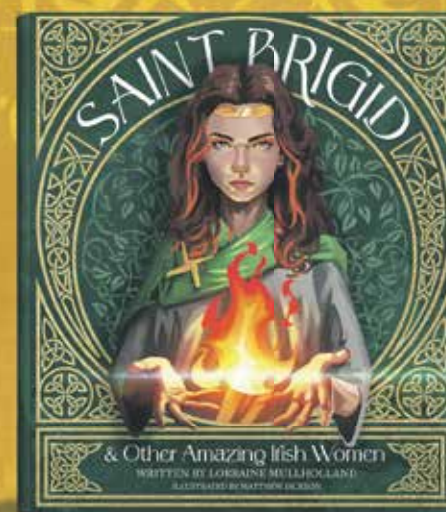
## Relic

It seems likely that the powers-that-be within *RTÉ* consider Article 41.2 a relic of a past to be remembered only so that it may be deplored. In other words, it must go. It also seems likely that this sort of bias may have skewed the coverage in the broadcaster's explanatory video. However, there are those of us who believe that it continues to serve an important function, still necessary in our contemporary culture, of holding the Government to account to support mothers, and paying tribute to the women whose selfless efforts on behalf of their families hold the fraying fabric of our society together with gentle bonds woven by love. Gratitude is never an anachronism. Those who value mothers and home should vote no.

**“There are those of us who believe that it continues to serve an important function, still necessary in our contemporary culture, of holding the government to account to support mothers, and paying tribute to the women whose selfless efforts on behalf of their families hold the fraying fabric of our society together”**

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# Ireland's 'role' if NATO went to war with Russia



We're back in territory we thought we had left behind forever, writes **David Quinn**

**T**he Russians are Coming, The Russians are Coming' was the name of a movie that came out in 1966. It was a spoof that played on American paranoia about Russia and communism. Of course, there was a Soviet Union at the time. In 1962, the world came close to nuclear war because of the Cuban missile crisis, and Soviet troops still occupied all of Eastern Europe. Ten thousand Soviet tanks were stationed in East Germany ready for a war with NATO if it came to that. So, paranoia about the Soviet Union was not entirely misplaced even if it did become irrational at times.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991. Eastern Europe was freed and so were a lot of former Soviet republics like the Baltic states, Muslim majority states in central Asia such as Kazakhstan and, of course, Ukraine.

It seemed a miracle when it happened. The greatest threat to peace in our time suddenly vanished. We shouldn't forget that Pope John Paul II played his part. The Polish pontiff helped to energise Polish nationalism. He spurred on the Solidarity movement and it turned out that the Soviet Union no longer had the will to keep the countries of Eastern Europe, or even the non-Russian Soviet republics under its thumb.

Pope John Paul said the communist tree was already rotten, but that he had given it a good shake.

## Russian threat

But now, the Russian threat has returned, and this is also hard to believe. Communism has not come back. Instead, it is more like old-fashioned 19th Century Great Power politics in which powerful countries seek to gain advantage over each other, through military means if need be.

The European Union, along with NATO, were supposed to put a stop to all that. The EU arose in the aftermath of World War II. The first intention was to draw Germany and France into an economic alliance that would give them no reason to go to war on each other again. (More accurately,



Flags of Ukraine and Soviet Union Photo: iStock/Racide

it would help to tame Germany forever).

The early version of the EU was called the 'European Coal and Steel Community'. Put the coal and steel into a new alliance of countries, then one big reason for fighting over resources would disappear.

Over time, the European Union developed. The more countries were absorbed into it, the reasoning went, the less need for war there would be. (Mind you, there was no Europe-wide war from the fall of Napoleon in 1815 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and that was without anything like the EU. There was simply a balance of power that lasted until it all went horribly out of control).

**“Russia invaded Ukraine because it doesn't want it joining NATO. I never believed this war was winnable by either side, and I still don't”**

Russia clearly still sees the world in Great Power terms. It still believes in spheres of influence. There has never been realistic talk of bringing Russia into the EU even though a great many of the countries it formerly dominated have been, including the three Baltic States, namely Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. That

means Russia feels isolated. We might see ourselves as no threat to it, but obviously it doesn't see things that way.

This was proven by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022 which broke every rule of international law. Wars of this kind are fortunately very rare now. Civil wars are much more common, including those that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia after the fall of communism.

But apart from Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's invasion of neighbouring countries like Iran and Kuwait it is hard to think of examples of one country invading another since World War II. The Korean and Vietnamese wars were basically civil wars fought with outside help.

Russia invaded Ukraine because it doesn't want it joining NATO. I never believed this war was winnable by either side, and I still don't. It is extremely unlikely that Ukraine can win back every square inch of its soil and it is equally unlikely that Russia can install a puppet government in Kyiv. Therefore, both sides seem condemned to a long-lasting and very bloody conflict.

## Answer

I don't know what the answer is. Neither side can properly beat the other as things stand. Western weapon supplies are running out reducing the odds of a successful

Ukrainian counter-offensive. The one last summer failed badly. Neither side seems to want to talk. Any concession to Russia is a defeat for international law. No concessions mean this drags on. In any case, Russia couldn't be trusted to keep a ceasefire. The outlook is extremely grim.

**“It seems we are now back in the sort of territory we thought we had left behind forever when the Soviet Union dissolved more than 30 years ago”**

Indeed, it is so grim that there is growing talk of an eventual Russian attack on a NATO country like one of the Baltic States. The commander of the Estonian army sees this as a real possibility. He wants NATO to rearm. He says: “The past few years have also made it very, very clear that NATO as a military alliance, a lot of countries, are not ready to conduct large-scale operations — meaning, in simple human language, a lot of NATO militaries are not ready to fight Russia”.

It seems we are now back in the sort of territory we thought we had left behind forever when the Soviet Union dissolved more than 30 years

ago.

What should Ireland do? If Russia ever threatened our sea lanes or our underwater cables, what could we do? The answer is nothing. Our armed forces are totally feeble. We would be totally reliant on others, starting with Britain, for protection.

## Appetite

But what is the appetite of Western voters today for increased military spending? I think it is almost non-existent, despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Countries close to Russia are increasing defence spending, and so is Germany, on paper at least. But voters in most Western countries will not tolerate higher taxes or reduced social welfare spending to boost their armies.

Nor will they tolerate in a million years a return to conscription, as some military voices are advocating.

Fortunately, a Russian attack on a NATO country seems extremely unlikely, unless America pulls out of NATO which I don't think even Donald Trump would do. An attack on one NATO country is an attack on all of them, including America.

The inability of Russia to defeat Ukraine surely shows that it lacks the strength to take on NATO. Whether this means we can relax is a point of contention.



# 14 schools receive 'Spirit of Catholic Education' award

## Staff reporter

To mark Catholic Schools' Week 2024 the Diocese of Down and Connor, paid tribute to the inspiring work within its schools, presenting

14 schools with the 'Spirit of Catholic Education Award'.

Students and staff from the schools received the awards on January 24, at a ceremony held in St Mary's University College, Belfast.

At nursery level, St Teresa's Belfast was the sole recipient. Primary schools receiving the award were: Creggan Primary, Randalstown; Mercy Primary, Belfast; Moneynick Primary, Randal-

stown; St Brigid's, Downpatrick; St Colman's, Kilkeel; St Joseph's, Crumlin; and St Mary's Aghlishnafin, Castlewellan.

Post-primary recipients were: Aquinas Diocesan Grammar,

Belfast; Blessed Trinity College, Belfast; De La Salle College, Belfast; Rathmore Grammar School, Belfast; St Louis' Grammar, Ballymena; and St Patrick's Grammar, Downpatrick.



Students and staff from Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast, receive their award from Joan McCombe of Catholic Schools Support Service who organised the awards ceremony.



St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick



St Teresa's Nursery, Belfast



St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena



St Joseph's Primary and Nursery School, Crumlin



Creggan Primary School, Randalstown



St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick



Blessed Trinity College, Belfast



Mercy Primary School, Belfast, students and staff receive their award from Aidan Donaldson (CSSS).



# We are Capuchin Franciscan Friars - Following St Francis, Joyfully Living the Gospel.

**A**s Capuchin Friars our call is to live, as best we can, the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Not an easy task, I hear you say and you'd be right. However, nothing worthwhile is ever easy. We live the Gospel in many ways: As brothers together in community, as Hospital and Hospice Chaplains, Confessors, Spiritual Directors, Retreat Leaders, Missionaries, as priests in parishes and even in a shopping centre.

St Francis gives us the framework for how to live our way of life and he called this fraternity. Fraternity means brotherhood - it means living, praying, eating, laughing, crying together in a way that allows others to encounter the Kingdom of God, when they encounter us. It's up to each individual Friar to put flesh on this charism and to bring it to life.

Capuchin Friars come from all walks of life and we all have our own unique vocation story and pathway. We are ordinary people seeking to do something extraordinary for Christ. There is often a common thread that runs through all vocations - a desire to serve Christ. As Capuchins we serve Christ by being brothers in the World; by walking alongside those the Lord has asked us to minister to.

If you feel that Jesus is calling you to be part of our mission and ministry and you'd like to know more about the Capuchin way of life, please contact us. Our Vocation director is **Brother Antony** and his email is [vocations@capuchins.ie](mailto:vocations@capuchins.ie) - we're very much looking forward to hearing from you. Visit our website: [www.capuchinfranciscans.ie](http://www.capuchinfranciscans.ie)

**Br Martin Bennett OFM Cap.**  
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# Hearing and responding to the call of religious life with an open heart



Fr Bryan Shortall  
OFM Cap.

**C**onsecrated life is the free and generous choice a woman or a man makes to follow God in the religious life, living with others in community and living the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The man who feels he might have a call to live his life in the Capuchin Order following the rule of St Francis of Assisi, is making a conscious choice to join a worldwide family of more than 11,000 brothers living on all five continents. Even as I write these lines, I'm wondering is it making sense? Is it making sense in our 21st century world? Why would someone decide to become a Capuchin Friar and live out their religious life as a priest or brother? The choice for religious life is not something that is understood by our world today which is geared in the main to those who will meet someone and marry and who hope to find their soulmate.

## Vows

The vows we take initially for a period of three years, and then eventually for life are meant to be life giving if lived well and will help us to live happy and joyful lives which should radiate our consecration to all the world. The profession of the 'Evangelical Counsels', or the vows, are how we consecrate ourselves to God following the rule of St Francis. The first chapter of the rule, which was written 800 years ago says this: "The rule and life of the lesser brothers is this: To observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, without anything of our own, and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Honorius and his canonically elected suc-

cessors, and to the Roman Church; and the rest of the brothers are obliged to obey Francis and his successors."

The vow of obedience challenges the Capuchin to be always at the service of the brothers in the person of the provincial minister and to be like Francis of Assisi who was a "pilgrim and stranger". From the fifth chapter of the rule of Saint Francis we read: "The brothers should appropriate neither house, nor place, nor anything for themselves; and they should go confidently after alms, serving God in poverty and humility, as pilgrims and strangers in this world."

Taking a vow of obedience to a religious way of life or a religious superior can be counter-cultural today as the world out there seems to preach a selfishness and to "look after number one".

**“When our consecration is well lived, despite the challenges of life, there is a deep-down joy that can only come from a relationship with Jesus Christ”**

Similarly, the vow of poverty challenges us to be poor, modest, humble, and content with little. Poverty can also mean putting our will to one side in order to do the will of God through the provincial minister and those who we are at the service of. Poverty doesn't make sense in a world where we are constantly reminded about the finer things of life and how much having them would make our lives better and more comfortable. The lifestyles of the rich and famous say nothing to the one who wishes to have little or embrace the simple life. Poverty also speaks against the temptation to have more and more power.

The vow of chastity allows us to be free to love all people and be at their service rather than have one partner. It means we don't choose marriage or relationships, instead Capuchins live in community as a family of brothers. Celibacy is challenging and it is



Fr Bryan Shortall OFM  
Cap. gives a blessing with  
a relic of Padre Pio.



Capuchin friars in discussion.

something the world doesn't understand; however, it is not celibacy for nothing, it is celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.

## Direction

The three vows can only be lived by the Capuchin who tries to have a strong

prayer life, in private, and in common, and good spiritual direction. Also, the vows are best lived with a high degree of honesty and truthfulness. When our consecration is well lived, despite the challenges of life, there is a deep-down joy that can only come from a relationship with Jesus Christ. We are lucky we have some great beacons of hope in our Capuchin way of life to help us with their prayers like; Marco of Aviano, Laurence of Brindisi,

Felix of Cantalice, Crispin of Viterbo, Angelus of Acri, Leopold Mandic of Castelnuovo, Solanus Casey, and Pio of Pietrelcina.

## The call

The call to follow Jesus Christ in the Capuchin Order is no soft option and it takes maturity and dedication. It is not for everyone. It is God who calls, and it is God who will give the man the necessary gifts to step up. In today's world we are called to excellence,

whether in business, education, medicine, politics, sport, science, etc and it is critical that the ministers of the Gospel be second-to-none in the living out of our consecration in the name of Jesus Christ and his Church. Prayer is the raw material for the person to fuel the living of the vows. The Holy Spirit is at the centre of this call and will provide the wherewithal for the open heart to hear and respond to the call to religious life. Do not be afraid.

**“The brothers should appropriate neither house, nor place, nor anything for themselves; and they should go confidently after alms, serving God in poverty and humility, as pilgrims and strangers in this world”**



# A sister who soars the skies

**I**n March we celebrate International Women's Day. So today I want to tell you part of the story of Sr Nina Underwood MMM. I say part of the story because recently I read her account of being kidnapped by guerrilla fighters during a bloody civil war. But we will let that part of the story sit for another day.

Sr Nina is American, born in Boston, Massachusetts. She joined MMM after finishing school and thought she would be asked to do nursing. After all, we were Medical Missionaries of Mary, right? So after her First Profession of Vows she was asked to travel to Ireland to begin nurse train-

ing. This was back in the 1960s.

## Vision

This is when the vision and insight of Mother Mary stepped in. She saw the need of the Sisters, struggling to work in the Turkana Desert in northern Kenya. The distances were huge. Our MMM communities were dotted over the 32,000 sq. miles of desert. There was a famine raging at the time and Mother Mary decided that the only way to get around was by plane. That was the vision. The insight was choosing Sr Nina to train as a pilot. Nina is such an intrepid adventurer! Even to this day she will turn her hand to anything. There is no such thing

as "man's work" or "women's work". There is a job to be done, a problem to be solved and there is Nina taking up the challenge to fix it.

**“Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings”**

So, as a young 24-year-old woman, off she goes every day to Dublin Airport to train as a pilot. She gained her pilot's licence in 1967 and then headed off to East Africa. The plane she was flying was a gift by a donor in the U.S. Her training consisted of mechanics and servicing of the plane, i.e. oil changes, tyre repair etc. She flew in the desert for over twelve years. Taking to the sky on a daily basis was most often an emergency situation or visiting clinics, health centres, dispensaries and eventually the two hospitals which were established over the years. Every day was an adventure and sometimes there were hair-raising moments.



Every three months she took the plane to Nairobi for a complete service. They did not have a hanger for the plane in the desert.

## Pioneering

Such are the pioneering women of MMM. Nina

recently told me:

“I can say with gratitude and fantastic memories of pilot John Gillespie Magee Jr: ‘Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings; sunward I’ve climbed and joined the

tumbling mirth of sun-split clouds – and done a hundred things you have not dreamed of – wheeled and soared and swung, high in the sunlit silence, hovering there... put out my hand and touched the face of God!’”

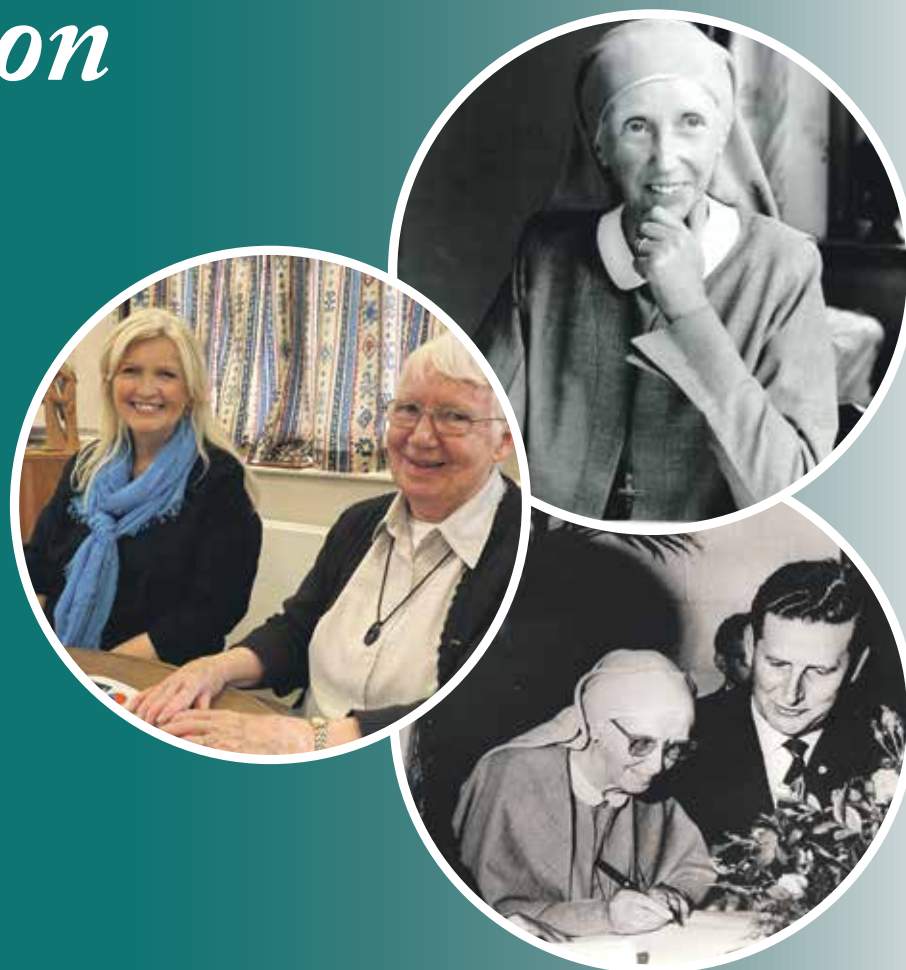
**“Our MMM communities were dotted over the 32,000 sq. miles of desert. There was a famine raging at the time and Mother Mary decided that the only way to get around was by plane. That was the vision”**

## Healing with Passion

The Medical Missionaries of Mary is an international group of Catholic religious women delivering services in the world of health, healing and medicine, promoting life and human dignity. We were founded in 1937 by Mother Mary Martin.

Currently we are collecting stories and images from those who knew Mother Mary who died in 1975.

If anyone would like to participate in this project, please contact Sr. Rita Kelly at 086 101 3367 or email: [mmm@mmmworldwide.org](mailto:mmm@mmmworldwide.org)



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*‘Rooted and founded in love’*



# Don Bosco – A legacy to inform the future



**Brandon Scott**

**I**nteract with most under a certain age without the advantage of perspective and you're likely to subscribe to the view that the past is a snarling beast, whose remnants continue to lurk our free and tolerant society with a menace that needs to be attentively fended off wherever it's perceived to be festering.

Go one further and boldly suggest that there was genuinely some veritable good contained in our past and prepare to face the indignant wrath of the ill-informed and incorrigible – the common social graces of the time.

But what those critics fail to remember is that some messages encapsulated in certain periods, messages which largely accord with the secular gospel of today, deserve to be recognised in their individual merits if they were truly com-

mitted to countering injustice, empowering the marginalised and dispensing mercy to those who aren't considered likely recipients – regardless of what era they occurred in or the auspices in which they were provided.

January 31 marks the feast day of Saint John Bosco, more popularly known as "Don Bosco" whose mere presence in the litany single-handedly elevates its altruistic dimension manifold. The Feast of Don Bosco is a commemoration of an Italian priest, educator and champion of poor and economically disadvantaged children.

## Reflect

It compels us to reflect on the works and deeds of the humanitarian saint and how his undying message is still being delivered by those who continue to abide by Don Bosco's ultimate goal as members of the religious congregation that formalised his social objectives, the Salesians – which currently boast over 15,000 members working in 134 countries.

Don Bosco originally began his work in Turin, Italy, in the mid-1800s by gathering poor boys and young men who had no place to live and little education. He established a place



A mural showing St John Bosco and children is seen in a courtyard of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Help of Christians in Turin, Italy.

called an oratory where these young people could gather and call their home.

He developed teaching methods based on love rather than punishment, a method that became known as the Salesian Preventive System. From among the young men at the oratory, he founded a religious congregation, the Salesian Society, which consisted of priests and brothers.

Don Bosco was a follower of Saint Francis de Sales' simple spirituality and philosophy of kindness and established the Society of St Francis de Sales in his honour in 1859—popularly known as the Salesians. Don Bosco established a network of organisations and centres to

carry on his work.

With the help of Sr Maria Domenica Mazzarello, Don Bosco founded a society for women, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, known as the Salesian Sister, dedicated to the care and education of poor girls.

Don Bosco also started with the help of many laypeople. In 1876, he founded a movement of lay persons, the Association of Salesian Cooperators, with the same educational mission to the poor.

## Resonance

The widespread resonance of Don Bosco's unwavering commitment to the transformation of young people's lives

through the medium of education meant that expansion to other regions of the world was inevitable and after there was a flourish of Salesian-run schools established in countries such as China, India, South Africa, Venezuela and the US by 1911, Ireland welcomed its first congregation in 1919 on the invitation of Dr Denis Hallinan, the Bishop of Limerick.

The timing of the invitation to develop the Salesians as a prominent educational force in Ireland can be interpreted as a posthumous tribute to the now-deceased Bosco, who would've marvelled at the fact that his vision was still blossoming in death.

Today, Ireland hosts approximately 40-45 members of the Salesians in five communities, maintaining schools in Limerick and Kildare. Despite the decrease in numbers, the religious are more active than before as to pastoral initiatives.

Supplied with the compelling facts, can we credibly say this legacy and holistic approach to the development of needy children be disregarded purely because of the times they were initially conceived? The only logical

answer to this question should be an emphatic no.

## Attitudes

Don Bosco's personal attitudes to inequality in society culminated in the Salesian's overarching goal to help young people who live in poverty – both materially and spiritually at a time when social taboos dictated that such mercies weren't in abundance across societies.

As we enter the 105th year of Salesian presence in Ireland, 105 years marked by tireless work and support of young people and their families, you will continue to find Salesians offering their support and guidance to some of the country's most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

From schools to youth clubs and homes for the homeless. From working as missionaries with street children to serving as chaplains in schools – the Salesians continue to offer joy in the face of despair, light in the midst of darkness and hope in climates where it is in limited supply. All of these acts, inherent in the mission of Don Bosco, are symbolic of a legacy which was cultivated by the past to inform the future.



## Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

The joys of consecrated life are profound. The reward of being part of a global community of believers, deeply immersed in a vocation of service to God and others, is immeasurable. Great joy is derived from deepening our spiritual life and the fulfilment of living according to values that promote peace, love, and justice. Consecrated life provides an opportunity to build meaningful relationships and serve as a living witness to the transformative power of the Gospel.

We are an international group of Religious sisters, apostles rooted in faith and hope, ready to risk it all for the Lord. As 'Women in Communion,' we live in international communities, passionately fulfilling the intense missionary dream of our founder, Father Augustine Planque.

Be part of our mission! Explore ways to get involved by visiting our website. Join us as we witness to the presence of God in our lives and strive to make a difference in the world.

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**One Heart, One Mission...**  
**Witnessing to God's Love in the World**



# Out&About

## Prepping the parish of the future



**DONEGAL:** The new members of the Conwal & Leck Parish Pastoral Council who were blessed and commissioned on Sunday the January 7 are pictured with Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ in St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny. Pictured (from left) are: Niamh Kelly, Mary Maguire, Elizabeth McCauley, Fr Damien Nejad, Siobhan Hannigan, Siobhan Foy, Adrienne McGlinchey, Hugh McCauley, chair Ciaran Maguire Chair, John Richard, Bishop McGuckian SJ, Richie Bagasala, secretary Anne Mulligan, Mhel Bagasala, Mary T. Sweeney, Msgr Kevin Gillespie and Fr Kizito Kalemeera. Photo: Róisín O'Callaghan



**LOUTH:** Newly-ordained Deacon Reverend Anthony Kerr is pictured with his parents Patsy & Esther Kerr, Proudstown, Navan following his Ordination by Bishop Tom Deenihan. The ceremony was celebrated on Sunday, January 21 in St Mary's Church, Drogheda (where Rev Kerr is currently serving on pastoral placement).



**BELFAST:** The Join the Dots Together Steering Group, Fr Gerry Clarke SJ, Anne Marie Duffy, Rev Cheryl Meban, Juanita Majury and Colum Og Marks are pictured with Dr Lorna Gold, guest speaker at a multi-faith event on climate change in Ulster University. Photo: Fr Brendan McManus SJ

### IN SHORT

#### People of faith 'key' to tackling climate change

People of faith are key to tackling climate change, a multi-faith gathering 'Join the Dots Together' in Ulster University heard.

Keynote speaker Dr Lorna Gold CEO of FaithInvest and chair of the global Laudato Si' movement tackled the "theory issues", highlighting the slow progress of fossil fuel elimination.

COP 28's reference to fossil fuels as the primary cause of climate change means "the genie is out of the bottle now and there can be no going back", she said.

She emphasised the importance of faith groups as major stakeholders in the planet

with billions of dollars invested in the global markets and owners of 12% of the world's land.

"People of faith are in a key position to change the narrative and to rewrite the future," she told the gathering.

The 'Let's Join the Dots Together' event was co-hosted by the Belfast Jesuit Centre, the Redemptorist Youth Ministry, the Diocese of Down and Connor, the Ulster University Chaplaincy and the Focolare Movement.

Participants included representatives from the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, Methodist Church and Presbyterian Church; the Inter-Faith Forum; organisations such as the Mothers' Union, Trócaire, Tearfund, Knights of St Columbanus; and civil groups

such as the Corrymeela Community, Fridays for Future and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful.

#### St Brigid 'a beacon of light' – Archbishop Martin

St Brigid is a "beacon of light" for society today, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin has said as the archdiocese marks the 1,500th anniversary of the saint's death.

A joint message with Bishop Michael Router described the saint as a "beacon of light" due to her commitment to compassion and spirituality.

"The planned activities during the year ahead aim at honouring the Christian faith

and values embodied by Saint Brigid and will reflect on the significance they have today," the bishops said in a statement.

"These values include spirituality, compassion, care for the poor, hospitality, care for the environment and the importance of education."

The bishops invited the public to join them in the year-long festivities to "deepen their understanding of who Saint Brigid was and reignite the Christian faith she did so much to establish and nurture during her lifetime."

St Brigid is one of the three patron saints of Ireland, along with St Patrick and St Columba. She died in 524 and her feast day is February 1.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**DERRY:** Mr McDowell, Mrs Flanagan and children of St Eithne's PS attend Derry Diocese' Catholic Schools Week Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral.



**DUBLIN:** Students and staff from St Mary's Baldoye welcome Minister for Education Norma Foley to St Mary's to officially open the school's new Admin Centre.



**AUSTRALIA:** Fr Gilbert (Boston College), Fr Eamonn Conway (Notre Dame) and Fr Paddy Connolly (Mary Immaculate) are pictured with Bishop of Ardagh & Clonmacnoise Paul Connell and Archbishop of Perth Timothy Costello following mass at the recent GRACE conference UNDA campus, Perth, Australia.



**SLIGO:** Bishop Kevin Doran presents the Benemerenti Award to Liam Finan, Michael Gilmartin and Patrick Somers, pictured with family and friends, in recognition of their many decades of commitment to the Sligo Cathedral Choir. Photo: Elphin diocese.



**BELFAST:** Rev Dr Allen Sleith, Minister of Hillsborough Presbyterian Church, Stewardship of Creation Agent for the Presbyterian Church and member of Eco Congregation Ireland and Sr Anna Byrne, member of Eco Congregation Ireland. Photo: Fr Brendan McManus SJ



**AUSTRALIA:** Ms Angela Mitchell, Director of Notre Dame University (USA)'s Alliance for Catholic Education and Irish delegation organiser for the recent GRACE conference, speaks with Archbishop Timothy Costello of Perth.

## ANTRIM

Novena to Our Lady of Lourdes in Moneyglass from February 3-11 at 7pm each night.

## ARMAGH

Adoration Chapel on Edward Street holds Adoration from 9am-7pm every day.

## CARLOW

Bishop Denis Nulty will lead a diocesan celebration of Evening Prayer for the Feast of St Brigid in the Cathedral of the Assumption, Carlow on February 1, at 7:30 pm.

## CAVAN

Nine Day Novena to the Holy Face of Jesus starts on Sunday, February 4, at 10am Mass and continues each morning until Monday, February 12, in Cavan Town parish.

## CLARE

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place Monday to Friday at Ennis Cathedral from 5pm until 7pm.

## CORK

An alpha training day for parishes and families takes place in Clonakilty Parish Centre on Saturday, February 3. To register visit [corkandross.org](http://corkandross.org).

Medjugorje prayer meeting every Wednesday night at 8pm in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Third Order chapel, Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay Cork.

## DERRY

Dungiven Lectio Divina Group meet on Wednesdays, from 7.30-9pm, in Dungiven Parish House, while St Canice's Prayer Group meets each Thursday in Dungiven Conference Room at 7pm and invites anyone who wishes to deepen their faith through shared Scripture, prayer and praise.

## DONEGAL

The Legion of Mary meet every Thursday in Raphoe parish at 8pm. All welcome.

## DOWN

Lectio Divina Group 7.30-8.30pm in St Dymphna's Room in Bangor Parish every Monday.

## FERMANAGH

St Michael's Parish Enniskillen hosts a Divine Mercy Holy Hour every Sunday at 7.00pm.

## GALWAY

Roundtower association to host conference on 'Our Lady, the Liturgy, the family and the crisis of modernity' with guest speakers Dr Joseph Shaw and Fr Philomeno James Mary in Galmont Hotel, February 10, at 9am. To register contact [info@roundtower.org](mailto:info@roundtower.org).

## KILKENNY

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available after Saturday evening Mass or any other time on request in Thomastown Parish.

## LEITRIM

Daily rosary at 6pm in St Joseph's Church, Leitrim Village.

## LOUTH

St Peter's Youth Group for teenagers 13-17 years old in Drogheda, meets on the first and third Friday of each month in the Family Room of Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Come along to encounter God, make new friends and have fun.

## MEATH

Legion of Mary Navan meets Monday and Tuesday 7pm in Community Centre (via red door beside Meals-on-Wheels) contact 046 902 3474. New members welcome. Junior Legion meets 7pm on Thursday, contact 086 367 1171.

## MONOGHAN

Monaghan Charismatic prayer group spring conference 2024 is on February 9-11 in Four Seasons Hotel for details contact Josephine on 087 931 8514 or Anne Marie 086 725 1770.

## TYRONE

Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Luárán's, Dungannon on Monday and Wednesday 10.30am-5pm.

## WATERFORD

'Come and See!' event celebrating Charismatic Renewal in the Church takes place Sunday, February 11, in the Tower Hotel, Waterford from 2-5.30pm. Includes prayer, music, Scripture, sharing, testimonies and healing ministry. Contact Síle 086 8590394.

## WEXFORD

A meeting scheduled to facilitate consultation on the proposed pastoral plan and pastoral areas for the diocese on Tuesday, February 6, at Blackwater Parish Hall. Meeting starts at 7.30pm.



# St Brigid a ‘strong woman of faith’ – Bishop Nulty

**Ruadhán Jones**

St Brigid, one of the three patron saints of Ireland, returned home to Kildare town 1,500 years after her death on Sunday, January 28.

Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty received the relic of a bone fragment from her skull, contained inside a specially commissioned silver representation of an oak tree in a red box.

It was brought to St Brigid's Parish Church for a Mass celebrated by the bishop to mark the saint's death in 524.

In 1283, three Irish knights departing to the Holy Land to fight in the Crusades dug up her remains and brought with them the relic of Brigid's skull. They were killed at Lumiar, outside Lisbon, and the relic remains there to this day at the church of St John the Baptist.

The Irish Provincial of the Brigidine Order, Sr Theresa Kilmurray, carried the relic from the Solas Bhríde outside the town to the church, preceded by a Garda escort, with three young women on horseback representing the three knights who brought the original relic to Portugal.



Sr Theresa Kilmurray of the Brigidine Congregational Leadership Team presents Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty with the relic outside St Brigid's Church in Kildare town on Sunday, January 28. Photos: John McElroy.



The three children, Elsa Mai Walsh (12), Evie Holohan (12) and Aela Twomey (12) from Kildare Pony Club, represent the Irish knights who brought St Brigid's skull to Lumiar in Portugal.



Theresa Kilmurray of the Brigidine Congregational Leadership Team carries the relic to St Brigid's Church in Kildare town on Sunday morning led by three students from local primary schools.



Bishop Denis Nulty removes the relic from its box and holds it high at the beginning of Mass.



Crowds gather to welcome the relic home to Kildare.





# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## A WAR AGAINST NIGERIA'S PEOPLE

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## CATHOLIC MISSION HAS TO COME BEFORE THE INSTITUTION

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# SECAM President explains how rejection of *Fiducia Supplicans* in Africa was handled

Walter Sanchez Silva

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, OFM Cap, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), recently recounted step by step how the rejection of the blessing of homosexual couples was handled on the African continent and at the Vatican.

In a recording of an interview posted on the French lay Catholic blog *Le Salon Beige*, the cardinal explained what happened in Africa after the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), headed by Argentine Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, published the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*, which allows the blessing of same-sex couples and couples in irregular situations.

### Reactions in Africa

“When on December 18, we received the document *Fiducia Supplicans*, signed by the prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and co-signed by His Holiness Pope Francis, it caused a shockwave in Africa. We didn't understand what was happening at the Church level. Furthermore, other churches that called us said: ‘We count on the Catholic Church to oppose this ideology. Now, you are the first to authorise the blessing of homosexual couples.’”

“All of you, all of you, have suffered for this. A lot. Everyone has suffered for this,” the cardinal lamented.

“The reactions began. And with all responsibility, I wrote to all the episcopal conferences of

Africa and Madagascar,” continued Ambongo, who is also the archbishop of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“The episcopal conferences wrote. I printed all the reactions from all the episcopal conferences. I made a synthesis in a document,” he said.

Ambongo said he then wrote a seven-page letter to Pope Francis not only as president of SECAM but also as “his adviser, member of the council of the nine cardinals who accompany the Pope for the reform of the Church.”

**“The Pope was very sad. I must say that he was the first to suffer from all the reactions that came from all over the world”**

He then travelled to Rome to meet with the pontiff, telling one of his private secretaries why he came and giving him all the documentation he had gathered: the reactions of the episcopal conferences, the synthesis, and his personal letter.

That same day the Holy Father received him: “The Pope was very sad,” Ambongo said. “I must say that he was the first to suffer from all the reactions that came from all over the world. He suffers for it because he is a human being. This doesn't make him happy.”

“I reached an agreement with him because I told him that the solution to this issue is no longer to send us documents with theological or philosophi-



Congolese Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa is pictured in a 2018 file photo. Photo: CNS/Baz Ratner, Reuters

cal definitions of blessings. The people are not interested in that. What is of interest now is a communication that reassures the people in Africa, that calms the spirits of the faithful. And he, as a pastor, was touched by this situation,” the African cardinal continued.

### Working with Fernández

The Holy Father put Ambongo in contact with Fernández, who agreed to work with him the next day at the DDF, “the most important dicastery from the point of view of the Catholic faith.”

“With the prefect, myself in front of the computer, a secretary writing, we prepared a document,” Ambongo said. “And we prepared the document in dialogue and agreement with Pope Francis, so that at every moment we called him to ask him questions, to see if he agreed with that formulation, etc.”

When completed, Ambongo said, “I signed the document as president of SECAM on behalf of the entire Catholic Church in Africa. And the prefect of the dicastery signed it, not the document that was made public, but the document that we keep in the archives. The document is titled ‘No to the blessing of homosexual couples in the Catholic Churches.’”

The cardinal clarified that, although the text appears to have been signed in Accra, Ghana, the headquarters of SECAM, in reality, he said, “I signed it in Rome.”

**“In Africa there is no place to bless homosexual couples. Not at all”**

“This is to express our position today in Africa and we do it in a spirit of communion, of synodality with Pope Francis, and with the prefect of the

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith: In Africa there is no place to bless homosexual couples. Not at all,” he stressed.

On January 11, SECAM published a five-page statement stating: “The Episcopal Conferences of all Africa, which have strongly reaffirmed their communion with Pope Francis, believe that the extraliturgical blessings proposed in the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* cannot be carried out in Africa without exposing themselves to scandals.”

### Individual blessings

Ambongo also stressed that, although Africa opposes the blessing of same-sex couples, it is necessary to “respect homosexual people because they are human beings. We should not look at them, treat them with contempt. They are creatures of God. And as creatures of God, if an individual homosexual asks for a blessing, we bless the person. We can bless him as a person.”

After noting that criminals can also be blessed, the cardinal pointed out that these blessings for individual persons are given “in the hope that the grace of the blessing can help them convert. And if we bless a homosexual, it is also to say that ‘your sexual orientation is not in accordance with the will of God and we hope that the blessing can help you change because homosexuality is condemned in the Bible and by the magisterium of the Church.’”

“We cannot be promoters of sexual deviation. Let them do it in their homes, but not in ours,” he said.

### Marriage, family in Africa vs. the West

Ambongo also lamented that currently in “the West, since they don't like children, they want to attack the basic cell of humanity, which is the family. If you destroy the family, you destroy society.”

The cardinal lamented that now in the West the meaning of marriage has also been lost and culture “is in decline,” something that also affects the economy. “Little by little, they are going to disappear. They will disappear. We wish them a good demise,” he continued.

The cardinal also denounced the action of international organizations such as the UN, UNICEF, and the World Health Organisation, among others, which condition their financing on the promotion of gender ideology, which does not recognise the natural sexual difference between men and women.

“However, our culture in Africa is not like that. Yes, we have many defects, but we cannot be reproached for homosexuality. You can find isolated cases, like those in Uganda,” he said, but “society doesn't work that way. That practice does not exist among us.”

**i** This story was first published by ACI Prensa, ACI Africa's Spanish-language news partner and is published with kind permission by ACI Prensa and its author. For original article see: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/256608/cardinal-explains-how-african-rejection-of-fiducia-supplicans-was-handled>

**NEXT WEEK: INTERVIEW WITH CARDINAL CRISTÓBAL LÓPEZ ROMERO, S.D.B., ARCHBISHOP OF RABAT, MOROCCO ON SYNODALITY AND NORTH AFRICA**



# A war against Nigeria's people

Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins of Lagos Archdiocese speaks exclusively to *The Synodal Times* about the plight of Christians, and Muslims in the war being waged on Nigerian people.



Luca Attansio

**A**t least 140 Nigerian Christians were killed (but some media report nearly 200, ed) and many missing in the run-up to the recent Christmas festivities. Attacks on 26 villages in Plateau State began December 23, led by suspected extremists among Fulani Muslim herdsman against Christian farming communities.

## Clashes

The clashes are the result of ethno-religious tensions on the one hand, and on the other the result of an increasingly serious climate crisis that pits whole swathes of populations against each other for the possession and control of land and water. Indeed the semi-nomadic Fulani herders have been attacking Christian as well as Muslim Hausa farmers for long time, accusing them of unlawfully taking possession of grazing lands crucial to their survival. Something that Christians reject as they appeal for protection from the group that is radicalised as thousands have been killed in recent years. According to some statistics Nigeria has continued to lead with regard to Christian persecution. To learn the details of the brutal attack and to understand the matter in more depth, *The Synodal Times* spoke to Mgr Martins, Archbishop of Lagos.

**Your Excellency, it was a brutal and very serious attack, the most serious in years. Several weeks after the dramatic episode, can you help us understand what happened and how it was possible that so many people could have died and been injured or disappeared? Do you think it was done all by Fulani herders or do you think there is someone else behind?**

Indeed, the crises in Plateau state goes all the way to the 1990s but the attack of December 24th 2023 is no doubt the most brutal and inhumane. That was a very sad day for Nigeria and all Nigerians. From information received



Archbishop of Lagos, Alfred Adewale Martins during a celebration of Mass in the Cathedral.

from different sources, close to 200 people were killed in over 20 communities in Bokkos, Mangu and Barkin-Ladi Local Government areas. Over 3,000 were reported injured, about 1,290 houses burnt down with about 10,000 residents displaced. These were innocent men, women, and children who were visited with extreme violence at a time when they were in the mood for commemorating the birth of the Prince of Peace; being mostly Christians. It is another big indictment on our security agencies as they continue to fail the citizens in protecting their lives and properties.

**Can you tell us what you think the origins and motives at the base of such a terrible massacre are? Is it more a religious kind of conflict or economical due to land possession and climate crisis? Or mixed?**

This is not the first time that Plateau State has been embroiled in what seems like a mix of ethnic, religious and economic conflicts. That it took place at the time that it did certainly gives it a religious connotation, that people were killed in the same fashion as it has happened before when their ancestral lands were taken over by their assailants, gives it an ethnic dimension and that it often involves conflicts between mainly Muslim herders and mostly Christian farmers, gives it a mixture of ethnic and religious connotation. It is very sad that no solution has been found to the sad situation. The concern is always there that there is an Islamic agenda for imposing a new culture on the world and that this is what is finding expression in the Nigerian situation such as the one in Plateau as we have had in Southern Kaduna and other Middle Belt com-

munities. There has always been a reference to a statement credited to the late Sir Ahmadu Bello (a conservative Nigerian politician who masterminded Northern Nigeria through the independence of Nigeria in the 60s and served as its first and only premier. He was also the leader of the NPC the ruling party at the time consisting of the Hausa-Fulani elite, ed) that the Quran will be dipped into the ocean; which is interpreted to mean that the intention and program of action is ensure that Islam will be imposed on whole country, from savannah land of the north to the rain forest of the south. The fact that

Nigeria was enlisted into the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) during the regime of military President Ibrahim Babangida continues to lend credence to the islamisation agenda that we are all concerned about in spite of official claims to the contrary. Many are convinced that those who perpetrate the atrocities we are dealing with now are Fulani people from nearby countries who were recruited to cause havoc and take over the land of the indigenous peoples who are predominantly farmers and mostly Christian or traditional religion practitioners by faith. Though no categorical statement has

been made by the authorities as to the identity of the gunmen of this particular incident, all fingers point at these foreign elements with their local employers, until it is proven otherwise. Plateau State is known to be made up of about 40 ethnic groups and there has always been tension between the various ethnic groups regarding the allocation of resources, access to political power, and concerns over religious dominance. The various criminal elements in these groups capitalise on these to form armed groups that seize on any little issue to bring horror to the people. According to the records since 1999, over 15,000 people have been killed in communal violence. In the year 2010 alone, over 1000 lives were reportedly lost in armed conflicts in the state. So, one can say that the conflicts in Plateau are multi-faceted and it is very regrettable.

**“As they say, God will not do for us what he has given us power to accomplish by His grace”**





Bishop Jude Arogundade of Ondo, Nigeria, visits a victim of an attack on St Francis Xavier Church in Owo on Pentecost Sunday June 5, 2022.

**“While it is good to condemn violence and pray for peace across the country, religious leaders should also teach their followers to understand that human life is sacred”**

**Governor Caleb Mutfwang of Nigeria's Plateau state asked that Friday Muslim prayers January 5 be dedicated “as special prayer days for lasting peace to return to the Plateau [region]”. Was it so? How was the reaction of the Muslim local and national communities?**

It is not unusual that when such situations arise, government declares days of prayers. Of course, Christians in their churches and Muslims in their mosques offer prayers for the stated intentions. However, we all know that prayers alone do not solve problems except they are accompanied with intentional proactive steps taken to deal with the situation. As they say, God will not do for us what he has given us power to accomplish by his grace.

In different form, Christian and Muslim leaders have been united in their condemnation of the violence and killings but we can only hope that the con-

demnations are followed up with actions that show seriousness in dealing with the situation. One gets a feeling that not all those who condemn the action in public are genuinely concerned with bringing it to an end. Indeed there are conspiracy theories that many of the religious leaders are scared to take action because of personal repercussion from the extremists. While it is good to condemn violence and pray for peace across the country, religious leaders should also teach their followers to understand that human life is sacred and that no one has the right to take the life of another human unjustly.

**The Nigerian church has been paying a very high blood toll for many years now, 2023 has been a terrible year. All over the country there are killings and kidnappings that made Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto say: “We may pretend that we are not at war, but**

**truly, a war is being waged against the Nigerian state and its people”. Is Nigeria, especially in some areas, at war?**

Judging from the frequent attacks and kidnappings going on, it is not out of place to say that we are at war. Of course, it is not conventional warfare, but guerrilla warfare being waged by criminal elements, by terrorists who have self-serving agendas that are not for common good. Politicians and religious bigots who have agendas that are definitely set by foreign interest are at war with the nation and its peoples. This is why we expect a new wave of action from the federal government led by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu that would convince people that there is the will to deal with the insecurity that has come to define the nation in the last couple of decades.

### Convictions

However, apart from religious leaders, government must also demonstrate the will to empower the security agencies to identify those responsible for these attacks and have the courage to ensure that they are prosecuted and made to pay for their crimes. The fact

that we have not had perpetrators of these crimes convicted before now is certainly a factor that emboldens them to continue on the same path. I was glad to hear recently that eight suspects concerning the Christmas massacre have been arrested by the Police Command in the state. We are all watching and waiting for them to be properly tried and convicted if found guilty. Arrests have been made in the past and nothing came out of them. We hope the same will not happen in this case.

**What are Christian leaders asking of the government and the international community?**

Christians continue to ask government to assure them that wherever they are in the country they are protected and given a sense of belonging in the affairs of their communities most especially in the northern part of the country. We are asking the international community also not turn a blind eye on the happenings and to persevere in beaming its light on the danger that is being posed to the free practice of the Christian faith in all parts of the country. Christians must not be made into an endangered

species or second-class citizens wherever they may be in a country that is an avowed secular country.

**How are the relationships with the Muslim communities? Are they active in condemning and taking initiatives against Boko Haram, Fulani or other violent groups?**

I believe that the regular people, who are in the majority among both Christians and Muslims, want to live in peace across Plateau State. So they are ready to work for peace because failure to bring about lasting peace will only compound their situation and lead to unending reprisal attacks. I understand that series of meetings are being held by representatives of the Christian and Muslim communities to find lasting peace. For instance, not long ago one such group, The Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) called for justice for all the victims of

the recent attacks in Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. I also know that the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs has always condemned such attacks. This is a lofty development that should be encouraged and emulated by all and sundry.

It is not only Christians that are victims of the violence and killings. Whatever, the motives of the evil people that carry out the attacks, Muslims in the communities are not spared also. Whether Christian or Muslim, violence or killing inflicted on any innocent person is condemnable and must never be condoned. That having been said, I gathered that the majority of those killed were in these attacks were Christians from various denominations. Of course, the communities are mainly Christian and so the killers are likely to take it for granted that they are all Christians.

**“Whether Christian or Muslim, violence or killing inflicted on any innocent person is condemnable and must never be condoned”**



# Catholic mission has to come before the institution



Steven P. Millies

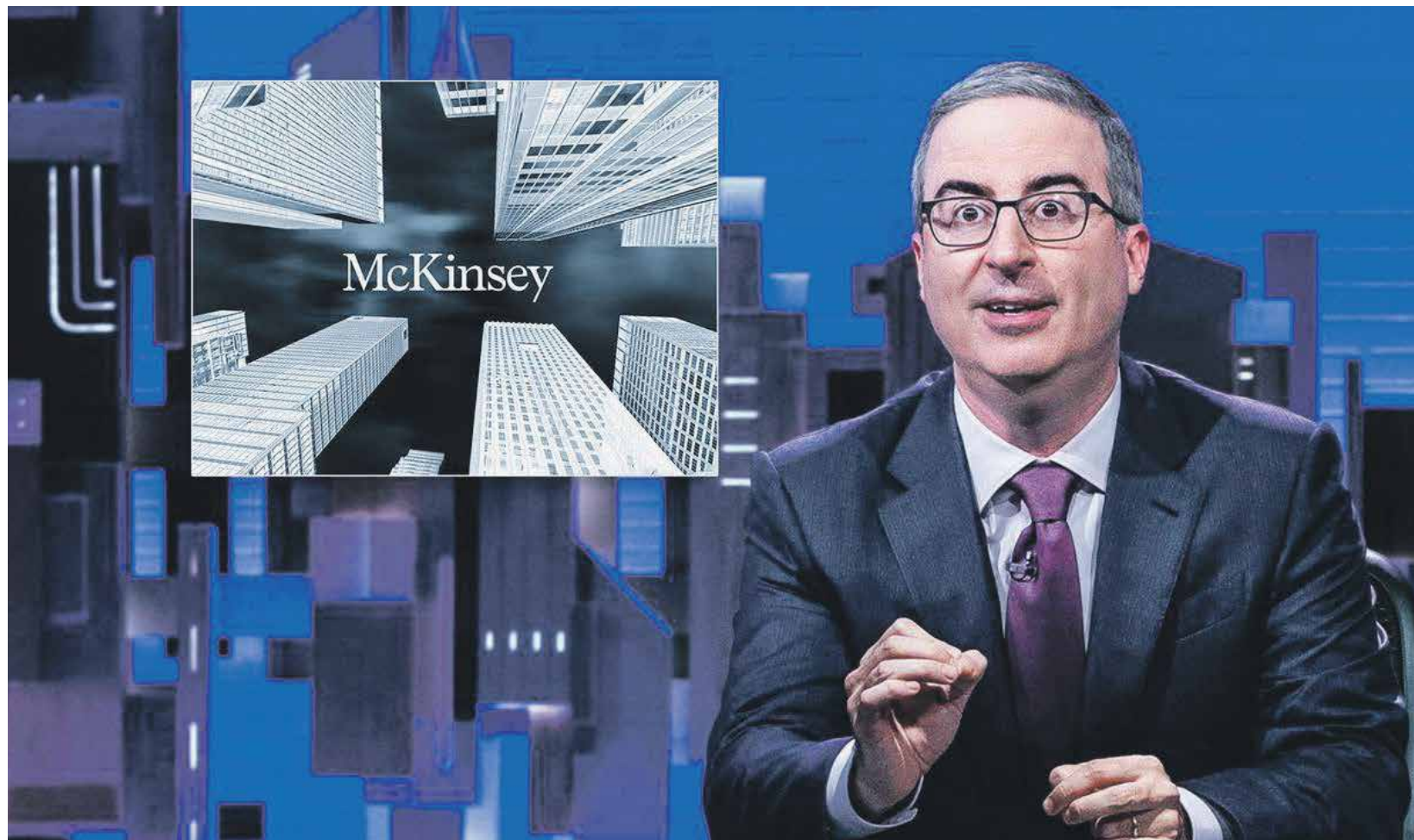
**N**ot long ago I was talking with a priest I know, a good man. He's the sort of priest anyone would want to be their pastor. We were talking about perceptions of the Catholic Church, and he asked me sincerely, "Do you think it's still spotlight?" Do most people really still think of sex abuse first?

I said yes, of course. But I was struck by how fixed his imagination was by the idea that the Catholic Church could have weathered the abuse crisis by now and moved on. He didn't say, 'But, it's been more than twenty years.' I know he understands the scandal well and its impact on people. It just seemed like his imagination could not capture how much damage the Church has taken.

**“That claim elicited more than a laugh from the audience. There was an audible, loud gasp of shock”**

I was thinking about that conversation recently while I was watching an episode of HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. The episode offered an unflattering, in-depth look at the management consulting industry generally, McKinsey & Company particularly. A feature of the report was how much McKinsey tells itself that it creates positive change in the world and how disconnected McKinsey's internal culture seems to be from the rest of us who might have more ambivalent feelings about them. A chasm separates McKinsey's perceptions of McKinsey from how the world outside sees them.

At one point, John Oliver quoted an unnamed person from McKinsey who said that only three great institutions remain in the world—the U.S. Marines,



the Catholic Church, and McKinsey. That claim elicited more than a laugh from the audience. There was an audible, loud gasp of shock. But the transcript of how that gasp came from the audience is important to understand why I'm talking about McKinsey—

JOHN OLIVER

There are only three great institutions left in the world: The Marines, the Catholic Church...

AUDIENCE

{gasp}

JOHN OLIVER

...and McKinsey.

It is worth going to find that clip and hearing the gasp for yourself. There was no mistaking which of the three the audience found more surprising to claim as a great institution.

It should shake up anyone still committed to the Catholic Church.

Now it could be easy to dismiss the prejudices of a New York City studio audience that showed up to hear John Oliver skewer a corporate target. The trouble is, once we do that we're saying that the Catholic Church, our great institution, has no power to reach that audi-

ence. That suggests all by itself that the institution is not so great.

We can go farther. My larger point is to illustrate by that audience reaction how truly, truly over it is for this institution, how much ground has been lost that's not coming back for as long as the Catholic Church keeps doing the same thing. And my friend the good pastor is like all those McKinsey folks who are so deeply embedded in their own institution that they can talk about their institution changing the world with a straight face, as though anyone outside trusts them like they think they do. It's an illusion, and it's necessary to cast that illusion off before we can rebuild.

## Pope Francis

I think that is what Pope Francis has been struggling for eleven years to do, to call us to cast off the illusion and to approach the world with a new invitation of accompaniment in humility. And just look at the resistance that idea encounters. This, I think, explains a lot of what we see in the Catholic Church when even my friend, the priest who loves Pope Francis, cannot open his imagination to see what everyone

outside the Catholic Church knows (and what some of us inside the Church, including the Pope also know): what the Church was is over.

Not the Church in the sense of its mission or its people, not the Gospel, not our creed or the Scriptures. Nothing essential. But the Church as an influential organisation, the internal culture, and the whole feudal style of it—that's gone, and it's not coming back. At least, it is not coming back if by "it" we mean an institution with any cultural influence to evangelise at all. We can be the "smaller, purer" remnant of a quaint medieval institution, I suppose. I know there are people who would be happy with that. But that's not the church's mission or our Gospel calling. That's worldly attachment to an organizational style.

**“We ascribe a lot of importance in Catholic life to elements of organization and style that are not essential”**

The Catholic Church needs to renew deeply. To do that, first we must open

our imaginations to see how so much of how we think about the Catholic Church is both not so central to its identity as we often assume it is and see that many of those things we cling to are what build barriers between the Church from the world it is meant to minister to.

## Contradiction

We ascribe a lot of importance in Catholic life to elements of organisation and style that are not essential. More and more, I think, the greatest obstacle in front of the Church is our imagining of what the Catholic Church must be. For example, penitence is essential; meatless Fridays are not. Ministry is essential; the disciplines of the priesthood are not. And I can go on. The list of what we insist "means we're Catholic" is very long, and the idea those things should pose "a sign of contradiction" against the world is a problem.

The problem is not confined only to those who resist Pope Francis, either. Lately I have come to think the bigger problem is the people who are listening to Francis but who love the Church so much they cannot abandon their nostalgic attachment to what the Church once was. They hold

us back more than Francis's critics.

**“The mission is very clear: Go and preach the Gospel to all nations. Everything stems from that proposition”**

Let me be very clear. When I talk about what we must cast off I'm not talking about Scripture, dogma, or any infallible proposition of Catholic faith. Mostly I'm talking about presentation and how we approach the world.

But so much has to change. So much ground and so much time have been lost. And, so many people.

The mission is very clear: Go and preach the Gospel to all nations. Everything stems from that proposition. Whether we will do it effectively or not in this time, it seems to me, depends on whether our commitment to the mission is greater than our commitment to elements of an institution.

**① Steven P. Millies, Ph.D. is Professor of Public Theology And Director, The Bernardin Center in Chicago**





# Letter from Rome

## Pope aims to build 'Assisi on the Tiber' to promote his spiritual vision



John L. Allen Jr

It was an otherwise quiet day on March 15, 2008, when an unemployed 77-year-old Russian man walked unannounced and unaccompanied through the main entrance to the Basilica of St Francis in the hillside Italian city of Assisi, quietly hoping to mill around and soak in the atmosphere.

Perhaps unfortunately for him, that septuagenarian Russian was quickly recognised as former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, and a group of Franciscan friars descended upon him in order to give him a guided tour of what's known as the *Sacro Convento*, meaning the Franciscan friary in Assisi, as well as the basilica devoted to the city's famous saint.

On the back of his experience that day, Gorbachev declared that while he remained an atheist, he had to admit that Soviet Communism had never produced anyone quite like the Poor Man of Assisi and his universal humanistic appeal.

**“The *sacro convento* in Assisi has been much more than a place where a handful of Franciscans live”**

Gorbachev is merely one in a long list of global notables who've been drawn to Assisi over the years, from Tariq Aziz, the Foreign Minister of Iraq under Sadaam Hussein and a Chaldean Catholic, to former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and even rock stars such as Bruce Springsteen and Patti Smith.

When Italian President Sergio Mattarella needed a platform in 2022 from which to address a nation still emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, not to mention stunned by the Russian invasion of Ukraine seven months earlier and fearful of the future, he too chose Assisi, which is what Italians always do when they feel a



People sit outside the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi as they attend the beatification Mass of Carlo Acutis in Assisi, Italy, in 2020. Photo: CNS/Junno Arocho Esteves

special need for comfort and reassurance.

### Pandemic

“We can only exit [from the pandemic] together!” Mr Mattarella said that day. “The difficulties aren't actually over,” he said, imploring St Francis to inspire a new commitment to “political love and service to our common home ... without which no plan can be realised for tackling such thorny challenges”.

Mr Mattarella's visit, which was carried live on national television, offered a reminder that over the centuries, the *sacro convento* in Assisi has been much more than a place where a handful of Franciscans live, just as the basilica is far more than simply a place of worship and a pilgrimage destination.

As an illustration of the dynamism of the place, Gorbachev's impromptu visit that spring day in 2008 wasn't an accident. He was in town to receive the *Lampada della Pace*, or ‘lamp of peace,’ a replica of the lamp that burns continually over the tomb of St Francis, given in an annual recognition that's more or less the Catholic Church's version of the Noble Peace Prize.

That award, and its attendant publicity, demonstrates that the complex in Assisi formed by the friary and the basilica amounts to a vital nerve centre for preserving and propagating the spiritual legacy of St Francis – a unique hybrid blending a shrine, an academic think tank and a K Street lobbying firm.

**“Put differently, the complex serves as a hub devoted not merely to preserving the memory of St Francis, but to making it relevant in the here and now”**

Put differently, the complex serves as a hub devoted not merely to preserving the memory of St Francis, but to making it relevant in the here and now.

This February 1, for instance, the ‘Hall of Peace’ in the *sacro convento* will host a symposium on Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which took its title from St Francis's famed *Canticle of the Sun*. Among other notables, the symposium will feature the president of Italy's National

System for Environmental Protection, as well as Franciscan theologians and environmental activists.

### Darwin's Smile

That session comes on the heels of a January 18 visit to the *sacro convento* by famed actress Isabella Rossellini, who was in Assisi to promote her one-woman show ‘Darwin's Smile,’ in which she plays apes, dogs, cats, chickens and peacocks, in addition, naturally, to Darwin himself, in an effort to promote appreciation for nature and the emotional world of animals – all of which, Ms Rossellini said, falls under the spiritual mantle of the great saint who spoke to the wolf of Gubbio and who preached to the birds.

This background comes to mind in light of a January 19 personnel move by Pope Francis which, frankly, otherwise seems almost inexplicable.

On that date, Francis appointed Franciscan Fr Enzo Fortunato, previously head of the press office of the *Sacro Convento* in Assisi, to the brand-new position of director of communication for St Peter's Basilica.

Granted, Fr Fortunato is a well-known figure in the Italian

media world who's got a Facebook following approaching a half-million. Nonetheless, the question presents itself: Why in the world does a papal basilica need a spokesman, especially since the Vatican already has its own press office and an entire dicastery devoted to communications with hundreds of personnel at its disposal?

**“He seems to want to build an Assisi on the Tiber, transforming St Peter's into something like the *Sacro Convento*”**

The answer would appear to be that Francis wants something different out of St Peter's Basilica, beyond simply amplifying the institutional communication in which the Vatican already engages.

He seems to want to build an Assisi on the Tiber, transforming St Peter's into something like the *Sacro Convento*, meaning a nerve centre and mouthpiece for a particular spirituality – in this case, not directly that of Francis of

Assisi, but rather that of the pope named Francis.

That impression is reinforced by the fact that Fr Fortunato now joins the current Archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, a fellow Franciscan whose previous gig was the custodian of the *Sacro Convento* and the basilica in Assisi from 2013 to 2020.

In other words, the Pope's vision seems to be that while the Holy See Press Office and the Dicastery for Communications can handle the political and ecclesiastical messaging of his papacy, the spiritual broadcasting now will come from a team at St Peter's Basilica that is not part of the institutional culture of the Vatican, but which is entirely beholden to him and shaped by his own spiritual outlook.

Whether that vision will succeed, or whether it's simply a prescription for more confusion in communications, remains to be seen. What's for sure, however, is that it makes the new ‘Assisi on the Tiber’ a fascinating experiment to track.

**John L. Allen Jr. is editor of *Cruz*.**





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### China gains another Church and state approved bishop

● For the second time in less than a week, a Chinese bishop was ordained with the approval of both Pope Francis and the Chinese government.

The Vatican said Fr Anthony Sun Wenjun, 53, was ordained to the episcopacy January 29 in Weifang, about 320 miles south of Beijing. On the day of his ordination, the Vatican announced that the Pope had erected the Diocese of Weifang April 20, designating the Church of Christ the King in the Qingzhou district of the city to be the new cathedral.

April 20 also was the date that Pope Francis nominated Bishop Sun Wenjun "in the framework of the provisional accord between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China," the Vatican announcement said.

On January 25 Bishop Thaddeus Wang Yuesheng was ordained the bishop of Zhengzhou, also in accordance with the Vatican-China agreement, which was originally signed in 2018 and has been renewed every two years since.

### Religious sister severely assaulted in Colombia

● The brutal aggression and sexual assault of a nun on the outskirts of Medellín, the capital of Colombia's mountainous Antioquia province, has spurred outrage in the Church in Colombia, which is now demanding a full investigation into the attack and lamented the frequent acts of violence against women in the South American country.

The horror of the religious community began the evening of January 22 when a 31-year-old nun, whose name has not been released, failed to come to

the refectory for dinner and her colleagues went to look for her in a monastery in the rural zone of Medellín.

After almost an hour of searching, they found the sister in the woods near a ravine close to their house. She had been stripped of her habit, had her neck and hands tied with a chain, was disoriented and had exhibited several signs of assault, including of a sexual nature.

The nun was taken to a hospital and is undergoing treatment at an intensive care unit.

### US nitrogen gas execution decried by faith leaders

● The state of Alabama carried out the first known execution by nitrogen gas January 25 after the US Supreme Court rejected a final appeal by death-row inmate Kenneth Smith, whose death took 22 minutes according to witnesses.

The Associated Press reported that Mr Smith said in his final statement, "Tonight Alabama causes humanity to take a step backwards" and that Mr Smith appeared to remain conscious for several minutes as pure nitrogen gas was pumped into his lungs; he shook and writhed on the gurney for at least two minutes, followed by several minutes of heavy breathing until eventually breathing was no longer perceptible.

More than 100 Alabama faith leaders and community members – including some Catholic priests and religious sisters – delivered a letter to Alabama Republican Gov. Kay Ivey January 22 urging her in vain to call off the execution.

### Pakistan ends mandatory Islamic studies for non-Muslim students

● Pakistan is ending its mandatory study of Islam for non-Muslim children in first through 12th grade and implementing a new curriculum, one that will allow children to study the religion to which their families belong.

The new religious education curriculum, which was approved on January 22, creates education plans for seven minority religions in Pakistan, including Christianity.

The classes will be offered to non-Muslim students as alternatives to 'Islamiyat' classes, which are courses on Islam that had previously been required for all students.

## Pope Francis expresses closeness after church attack in Istanbul

Pope Francis has expressed his closeness to the small Catholic community in Turkey after gunmen attacked a church during Sunday morning Mass January 28, leaving at least one worshipper dead.

The shooting occurred just before noon at the Santa Maria church in the Sariyer district of Istanbul, and was reportedly carried out by two masked men according to eyewitnesses. Turkey's Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya posted a statement on X, formerly known as Twitter, saying, "We strongly condemn this vile attack".

The area where the attack happened is popular with Christians in the 99.8%-Muslim majority country of nearly 85 million people, being home to the Santa Maria Catholic church – known as the Italian church – a Greek Orthodox church and an Armenian Apostolic church all dating from the 19th Century. Istanbul is also home to the Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I, spiritual leader of the world's Eastern Orthodox Christians.

The Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said in a statement that "efforts continue to identify and capture the suspects who carried out the attack".

"The investigation is being carried out in a multifaceted and meticulous manner," Mr Tunc added.

Television images from state media showed police and an ambulance outside the church, which is in an area of Istanbul popular with



The Italian Santa Maria Catholic Church in Istanbul, Turkey, is pictured after two masked gunmen attacked the church during Sunday morning Mass, January 28, leaving at least one worshipper dead. Photo: OSV News/Dilara Senkaya, Reuters

the expatriate and diplomatic community.

Turkey's ruling AKP party spokesman Omer Celik said on X that the attackers took aim at a person during the Mass.

"Our security forces are conducting a large-scale investigation into the matter," he wrote.

"Those who threaten the peace and security of our citizens will never achieve their goals," he insisted.

Local media reported that others were injured in the attack, but this was not immediately confirmed by the authorities.

Speaking at the Vatican during his traditional Sunday Angelus address, Pope Francis expressed his support as details of the incident emerged.

"I would like to express my closeness to the community of the church of Santa Maria in Istanbul, which suffered an armed attack during Mass that caused one death and left several injured," he told thousands of pilgrims and visitors gathered in St Peter's Square for his blessing.

Authorities have not yet identified a motive for the attack. However, Turkish

security services have been engaged in operations against suspected Islamists in recent months.

In December, security forces detained 32 suspects over alleged links with the so-called Islamic State group, an extremist Islamic militant organisation which planned attacks on churches and synagogues, as well as the Iraqi embassy.

The group have carried out a string of attacks on Turkish soil, including against a nightclub in Istanbul in 2017 that left 39 people dead.

## Canadian cardinal to step aside after being named in lawsuit

Cardinal Gérald Lacroix of Québec has announced he will temporarily step aside from his duties, after he was named in court documents January 25 in connection with a class-action sex abuse lawsuit filed against the Archdiocese of Québec in 2022.

A January 26 statement from the archdiocese, issued in French, said that the cardinal would be "temporarily withdrawing from his activities until the situation is clarified". According to court documents, two incidents allegedly involving him reportedly occurred in 1987 and 1988

in Quebec City, when he was a religious brother.

He is accused of inappropriately touching a 17-year-old girl on two occasions. The woman has not been identified. The archdiocese statement said Cardinal Lacroix "categorically denies the allegations against him" and considers them "unfounded".

"In the coming days," the statement said, "he will send a personal communication ... which will be relayed to the media".

The allegations come a year-and-a-half

after Cardinal Lacroix's predecessor, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, was named in the lawsuit for allegedly assaulting a woman between 2008 and 2010.

Cardinal Ouellet has denied the accusations levelled by Pamela Groleau and has launched a lawsuit of his own against Ms Groleau, accusing her of defaming him.

In total, 147 alleged victims have joined the lawsuit against the archdiocese; abuse claims date back to 1940. Fifteen other people associated with the archdiocese have been named in the court documents.

## Catholics and Anglicans celebrate in each other's cathedrals

The Anglican-Catholic summit in Rome and England came to an end this week. In Canterbury Cathedral, the Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong called on the 50 or so bishops of both denominations to unite. "We Anglicans and Catholics are called to be partners with Jesus, individually and

together," said Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan in his sermon.

"The 12 apostles and the disciples were not called to form camps, work for their own missions or compete against each other," Cardinal Chow said.

The meeting of Anglican

and Catholic bishops from 27 countries began on in Rome under the motto 'Growing Together', with Pope Francis and Anglican Primate Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury also taking part at times.

During the week of meetings, the bishops made pilgrimages to holy sites in

Rome and Canterbury, which are important for the common roots of both traditions. In conclusion, they emphasised the importance of listening to and learning from each other, celebrating common ground and discussing ways to work together as partners in the Gospel.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
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## 'Where no one can hear you pray...'



Francesco Valsecchi poses for a photo next to the yellow and white flag of Vatican City State on Clipperton Island January 26, 2024. Mr Valsecchi and more than a dozen others travelled to this desolate coral atoll in the eastern Pacific Ocean as part of an international expedition for long distance amateur radio operators and listeners. Photo: CNS/courtesy of Francesco Valsecchi

## Report: 'Nones' now largest religious category in US

Religiously unaffiliated people, often referred to as "nones," now make up the largest religious category in the US, according to a new report by the Pew Research Centre.

Pew's new report, released January 24, shows that nones now account for 28% of the total US population, outstripping the next largest group, Catholics, who make up 20%.

The recent data is consistent with a long-term trend of Americans rejecting religious affiliation in growing numbers, with the percentage nearly doubling from 16% in 2007.

The rise of the nones has

resulted in not only lessened religious participation but also a decrease in civic engagement with nones being less likely to vote, do volunteer work, or have strong friend groups or community, according to Pew.

What is a 'none'?

Although nones do not ascribe to a particular Church or religious group and are much less likely to attend Church services, not all are atheists. Only 17% of nones identify as atheist, while 20% describe themselves as agnostic. The majority of nones, 63%, simply identify themselves as "nothing in particular".

Most nones, 69%, do still believe in God, though only

13% of them believe in God as described in the Bible. Additionally, 49% of nones say they are spiritual or that spirituality is very important to them.

On average, nones are younger than religious people with 69% being under the age of 50 versus only 45% of religiously affiliated people being under 50.

While atheists and agnostics tend to have attained higher levels of education than religious people, persons in the "nothing in particular" category tend to have less education, with 27% having graduated college compared with 34% of religiously-affiliated people

having completed college.

Most nones, 67%, cite disbelief and scepticism as their reason for not ascribing to a religion, according to Pew.

Just over half, 55%, say they are not religious because they don't like religious organisations or have had bad experiences with religious people, while 44% say they don't need religion or don't have time for it.

What do they believe?

Nearly half of nones, 43%, believe that organised religion does more harm than good while over half, 56%, believe that science does more good than harm.

## African cardinal: Letter clarifying same-sex couples' blessings calms Africa's faithful

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, or SECAM, has said that since the publishing of a letter clarifying the Church's position on the blessing of homosexual couples, "calm has returned" among the Faithful in the continent.

Cardinal Ambongo gave the remarks at a press conference on January 25 toward the end of the seventh joint seminar of the bishops from SECAM and the Council of European Bishops'

Conferences, or CCEE, held January 23-26 in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, under the theme "Synodality: Africa and Europe Walking Together".

"We have discussed the declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, with colleagues who come from Europe, because it has triggered so many reactions in Africa," Cardinal Ambongo said.

Because the document triggered sharp responses from the bishops' conferences across his continent, he explained, he wrote to all African conferences asking for their reactions.

After receiving the statements, the cardinal wrote a synthesis, then wrote a personal letter to Pope Francis and finally travelled to Rome and met with the Pope to discuss the letter.

"He then sent me to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith," the cardinal said.

In a January 11 statement he said the decision to not bless homosexual couples throughout Africa was made in agreement with the Pope and Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the doctrinal dicastery.

## Vatican roundup

### Vatican rules against former auditor general in wrongful termination case

● The Vatican has ruled against its former auditor general, Libero Milone, who sued the Vatican after claiming that he and his deputy, Ferruccio Panico, were forced to resign from their positions without just cause in 2017.

The pair's request for €9.29 million in damages from the Vatican for the termination of their contracts and its detrimental impact on their reputations was denied in a ruling issued by a Vatican tribunal January 25.

They were ordered to pay more than €100,000 in restitution to the Vatican.

Mr Panico died due to complications from a tumour in June 2023, but his estate continued the case against the Vatican and remained liable to pay the fees imposed by the court.

Mr Milone was hired in June 2015 to be the first auditor general of a new office responsible for auditing the books of any Vatican office and would report directly to the Pope.

After his resignation in 2017, he publicly stated that he was forced to resign because of a campaign launched against him by opponents of Pope Francis' financial reforms.

### Vatican lays out procedure and protections for whistleblowers

● Any Vatican employee, contractor or consultant to the Holy See will have a designated path for reporting suspicious spending, including a dedicated email address to send information to, the Vatican decreed.

In a document published January 24, the Vatican expanded on the procedure for reporting "anomalous activities" provided in the statutes for the Office of the Auditor General published in 2019.

The new document stated that reports may be sent to the auditor general's office regarding "anomalies in the use or allocation of financial or material resources, irregularities in the awarding of contracts or the conduct of transactions or disposals and

acts of corruption or fraud".

It added that whistleblowers may report "improper conduct that poses a threat or harm to the common good," such as "accounting irregularities, false statements; as well as conduct aimed at obstructing the submission of reports, violating related obligations of official secrecy, or discriminating against the reporter".

However, reports "should not relate to grievances of a personal nature" or "claims that fall under the discipline of the employment relationship".

The document specified that reports may be sent to a dedicated email address (sengalazionianomalie@urg.va) or via private letter to the Office of the Auditor General.

### Priest found guilty of 'corrupting a minor' by Vatican appeals court

● Fr Gabriele Martinelli, acquitted by the Vatican City criminal court in 2021 of sexually abusing a fellow seminarian, was found guilty on appeal of "corrupting a minor" and sentenced to two years and six months in prison.

Under Vatican law, like Italian law, both the prosecution and the defence can appeal verdicts. And a second appeal is still possible, so Fr Martinelli was not taken into custody.

Vatican News reported January 23 that the appeals court, led by Archbishop Alejandro Arellano Cedillo, upheld the earlier court verdict that Fr Martinelli could not be punished for acts that occurred prior to 2008 when he turned 16 and that there was not sufficient evidence to convict him of the charges of "aggravated rape and aggravated lewd acts" even after he turned 18.

Fr Martinelli, now aged 31, was accused of sexually abusing another seminarian at the St Pius X Pre-Seminary from 2007 to 2012.

The seminary, owned by the Diocese of Como, Italy, and operated by the Opera Don Folci religious institute, was located inside the Vatican walls until Pope Francis ordered it to move out while the initial trial was still underway.



# Canadian Church burnings tied to unproven discovery of unmarked graves

Quinton Amundson

According to the Catholic Civil Rights League's database, at least 85 Catholic churches have been set ablaze or vandalised since the unproven discovery May 27, 2021, of 215 suspected unmarked graves near the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

Police are investigating the latest victimised house of worship, St Gabriel Catholic Mission Church in Janvier, Alberta, destroyed by fire December 15. The church was not in use at the time.

Kamloops, which opened in the late 19th Century, was run by the Catholic Church until the federal government took it over in the late 1960s and operated it into the late 1970s. Certain declarations were made during 2021 tying the Church to the reported discovery of graves at the residential school, but the credibility of these declarations is apparently not holding up.

Over two years later, Philip Horgan, the Catholic Civil Rights League's president and general counsel, suggested that ill-advised comments by public officials, particularly Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and speculation-driven narratives have created an environment where crimes against Catholics are societally tolerated and justified.

**“It's unacceptable and wrong that acts of vandalism and arson are being seen across the country, including against Catholic churches”**

“It is sad,” Mr Horgan told *The Catholic Register*, a weekly newspaper based in Toronto. “If I could paraphrase the prime minister, when I think he suggested that some of the frustration by the folks giving rise to this was, quote, understandable. The reality is when we have a continued assertion of false claims of mass graves and missing children or speculation in the absence of better evidence, much of this criminal activity is likely to continue.”

On July 2, 2021, Mr Trudeau stated, “I understand the anger that's out there against the federal government, against institutions like the Catholic Church. It is real and it's fully understandable, given the shameful history that we are all becoming more and more aware of and engaging ourselves to do better as Canadians”.

But Mr Trudeau also con-



Pope Francis prays in front of a banner bearing the names of each of the 4,120 Indigenous children and the residential school where they died, in this photo from his visit to in Maskwacis, Alberta, July 25, 2022. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

demned vandalism and other attacks, saying, “It is unacceptable and wrong that acts of vandalism and arson are being seen across the country, including against Catholic churches”.

## Vandalism

Sixty-eight Christian churches were burned or defaced between June and July 2021. The crime wave ignited June 21 with the torching of Sacred Heart Mission Church in Pentticon, British Columbia, and St Gregory Mission Church, near Osoyoos, 40 minutes away.

Three days later Cowessess First Nation reported 751 unmarked graves near the Marieval Indian Residential School, and the Lower Kootenay Band claimed on June 30 that ground-penetrating radar identified 182 sets of human remains in unmarked graves outside St Eugene's Mission School.

Fury and judgement against the Canadian Catholic community increasingly smouldered as story after story with seemingly damning revelations were published. And each received intense mainstream media coverage. Angry graffiti messages were smeared on the outside of churches: “Colonizers,” “Kill-

ers,” “If you hurt and/or kill kids, (you) should be burned alive”. A slew of F-word epithets were among the many scrawled derogatory missives.

**“The results ‘will feed into a denialist narrative of what happened at residential schools’”**

“We have now had at least three actual excavations,” said Mr Horgan. “Pine Creek residential school, which is the Minegoziibe Anishinabe First Nation, where there was alleged to be 14 (unmarked gravesites) at the former Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church, which was no longer a church in use. It is used as a community centre. They did an excavation with the knowledge of the RCMP (Canadian Police), and as I recall from the press conference in late August, the Chief (Derek Nepinak) was disappointed that they didn't find any bodies.”

Multiple publications reported Mr Nepinak acknowledging the results “will feed into a denialist narrative of what happened at residential schools” and urged people to keep seeking the truth.

Mr Horgan also cited that in 2021 Nova Scotia excavators did not find the remains of 16 young people who attended the Shubenacadie Residential School. He added that 34 excavations on the Charles Camsell Hospital grounds in Alberta also have uncovered zero bodies to date.

No excavations sanctioned by any government or the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation have been conducted at the alleged unmarked grave sites near Kamloops Indian Residential School where all the fury began.

## Sceptics

Sceptics of the May 2021 claim that as many as 215 Indigenous children were buried there attempted a dig last July. Kimberly Murray, the special interlocutor for missing children and unmarked graves and burial sites, condemned these residential school “denialists”.

“Denialism is violence. Denialism is calculated. Denialism is harmful. Denialism is hate,” she said June 16.

Mr Horgan expressed concern over Ms Murray, the former executive director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, calling for

“legal mechanisms to address denialism, including the implementation of both civil and criminal sanctions” in her interim report last June. Some members of the government have expressed their support.

**“But this effort to portray these instances of missing children as an effort of cultural or other form of genocide I think is a huge overreach”**

“Let's suppress the historical record and investigations to discover the truth,” said Mr Horgan. “This is of great concern. It's not as if the Catholic Church has done much to address the hurt and pain. The Pope came to Canada in 2022, as you know, and they continue to engage the fundraising effort to try and address these things.”

“But when it comes to the actual underlying story, we're still met with ‘most kids went to residential school,’” he continued. “No. Of the 150,000 recognised by the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, it is roughly 30 or 32% of Indigenous children over a 100-year span. A slightly higher number actually went to day schools either on the reserve or in a community and the others didn't go to school. It is not as if the RCMP was picking kids up and taking them to schools. Parents were signing kids up.”

Mr Horgan wants to be clear that he is not calling to suppress other historical wrongs or to “overlook some elements of grave concern, which most Canadians have as Canadians are fair-minded people”.

“But this effort to portray these instances of missing children as an effort of cultural or other form of genocide I think is a huge overreach and is a slur against a lot of very good people who did incredible work over the past century,” said Mr Horgan. “While we may have the franchise on turning the other cheek, I think on the other side we also have to try and ensure there is a better telling of the actual facts.”

**Quinton Amundson is a staff writer for The Catholic Register in Toronto.**



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Urgent to find a system of evangelisation in Europe

**Dear Editor,** I read with great interest the interventions of my learned brother Prof. Tom Whelan. Fr Tom is very right that the local Catholics in these territories need the priests 'ten times more than we do'. I am very much aware that my brother being versed in liturgy knows more than I do that one of the pillars of liturgy is 'Sacrifice'.

It is because the priests are needed in their home countries that they can be sent to support Church in the west, not only in Ireland. The spirituality of sacrifice for what you need most is well expressed in the widow's mite (Mark 12: 41-44). Jesus was more pleased by the widow who had given the little pennies, though she needed it more than any other – so is the missionary approach to the west from the

young Churches. I don't want to call them mission territories because every corner of the earth, including Ireland, is a mission territory. In upholding this argument, I am sure that the priests who went from our shores for missions, were also needed here. You do not give what you don't need or the surplus, then the spiritual idea of 'donation' is contradicted.

Closing parishes and institutions is not the solution for the future, it is a negative approach. An Irish retired missionary priest feels that there is in fact no crisis of priests, but an unequal distribution. If we still resist the need for missionaries in our country, the Church will continue to shrink. The question should be asked as to why we have a crisis of vocations and of priests? While

the churches are being amalgamated, you see new housing constructions springing up! A priest is not only for administering a parish and sacraments, but I also think it is more than that. I want to make it clear that having priests does not rule out the need for a synodal Church whereby the laity is central in the running of the Ecclesia. All in all, I think my learned brother used professional and clerical lenses to advance what he thinks the laity need at this moment? We need to train the laity, but no doubt it is more than urgent to find a system of evangelisation in Europe not to lose the little we have.

*Yours etc.,*

**Fr Charles Lwanga Kaweesi OCSO**  
Portglenone, Co. Antrim

### A consistent life ethic on immigration

**Dear Editor,** I warmly welcome Archbishop Dermot Farrell's recent comments warning against polarisation and his strong condemnation of racism. Keeping the Archbishop's words in mind, it is important that those concerned about media bias on other issues do not simply dismiss concerns about the treatment of migrants as a 'liberal' or left-wing case. Many readers may feel, for example, that those who oppose abortion or euthanasia are treated extremely unfairly in the mainstream media. It does not follow that concerns about hostility to

those applying for international protection applications are invalid, even if these concerns come from these same media outlets.

When making judgements and decisions on the subject we should remember that 'migration management' has in recent years included actions that are not compatible with a consistent life ethic such as the treatment of migrants by Libyan authorities.

*Yours etc.,*

**Joe Curran**  
Artane, Dublin 5



## Calling for 'No' vote on referenda

**Dear Editor,** The wording of the first upcoming referendum in March is so vague that it relegates the traditional marriage and family to being just one of many imaginable combinations of relationships. That traditional marriage was instituted by God is no longer seen as important even though the preamble of the Constitution acknowledges God and his supremacy over everything. I say that for anyone

who believes in God and in the importance of the traditional family for society, a firm 'No' should be the response; and the shepherds should be calling for that at this point and not just leave the campaign to dedicated, pro-family lay groups.

However, and sadly, for decades now the shepherds have been pandering to people in all sorts of irregular unions with a fake pastoral charity that tries

to affirm them in their situations. True pastoral charity, by contrast, would instruct people on God's unique design for marriage and the family and point out to them gently and caringly the immorality of their situations so that they might be able to regularise them and be able to live in a state of grace.

The second referendum, then, reduces the mother in the home to being just another carer even though, to my mind, she is the most important person in society and is irre-

placeable. It is she more than any other person who moulds the next generation into being secure, capable, happy people of maximum benefit to both Church and society. Thus I would call for a 'No' vote on this also and instead demand that the state live up to the commitment at present in the Constitution to give mothers who wish to stay at home the salary they need to do that.

*Yours etc.,*

**Fr Richard O'Connor**  
Rome, Italy

## Upholding the dignity of every human life

**Dear Editor,** In her article 'Little acts of love will see us through the Blue Mondays' [*The Irish Catholic* – January 11, 2024] Breda O'Brien refers to the 'Repeal' referendum and the effect of its result on the morale of the people who uphold the dignity of every human life. She goes on to say: "I am immensely proud of the efforts family and friends made during the Repeal campaign. Yes, we lost but the rout would have been more comprehensive without the

courage of thousands of people."

With admirable humility she says nothing of the courage she herself displayed in the pro-life battles in a far-from friendly media atmosphere. In an increasingly secular society, we need to keep her final words in mind: "Ultimately, everything is in the hands of God. Let us be grateful that in him the victory is already won."

*Yours etc.,*

**Fr John Joyce SPS**  
Kiltegan, Co. Wicklow

### 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.

## The Irish Catholic Clarity needs to be found on NGOs and referenda

**A**ccording to the most recent figures, 164,922 people in Ireland are employed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a combined turnover of €13.9 billion. Some €6.2 billion of that comes from the taxpayer. To put that in perspective, NGOs – lobby groups, advocacy organisations and charities – employ roughly the same number of people as the agri-food sector in Ireland.

The Government spends almost as much public money funding NGOs as it does on housing, and more than the budgets of the Department for Justice and the Department for Transport combined.

That, perhaps, explains in part why Minister for integration Roderick O'Gorman was displeased – to put it mildly – at the suggestion in recent weeks that some State-sponsored organisations such as the 90%-state funded National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) were reluctant to support next month's referendum proposals. The NGOs, the minister insisted, would have to explain themselves.

Unsurprisingly, ultimately no explanation is necessary since, after the minister's intervention, the NGO-sector by and large has come out in support of both referenda.

There is no suggestion, of course, that the minister put direct pressure on the groups. But it does raise the interesting question as to how independent NGOs are when they rely almost entirely on the Government of the day to fund them from the taxpayers' purse. After all, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

There is a potentially more troubling aspect of the involvement of State-funded NGOs in political campaigns. The Supreme Court ruled in 1995 that it is illegal to spend taxpayers' money promoting one side or the other in a referendum campaign. To what extent are NGOs, many of whom wouldn't exist without State funding, actually free under the law to involve themselves in political campaigning without falling foul of the so-called McKenna Judgement?

It's clearly a thin line, and one that should be clarified by the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO).

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### Wealthy Ireland feels like Poor Ireland

Public sector unions can rightly be pleased with the 10.25% pay increase that they secured from the Government for their members late last week. Now, one in every three Euro raised in taxes is being spent on public sector pay and pensions.

The Government has, so far, been tight-lipped on long-awaited 'reforms' and 'efficiencies' that will be delivered by State employees in return for what is a generous pay award.

All too often, whether in education or in health, the public service being delivered is below what's being paid for it. As a caller to a radio programme put it recently, "we live in a very wealthy country, but it feels like we live in a poor country".

One much-needed area of reform is the spectacle of state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment in hospitals lying idle for sixteen hours a day and every weekend because the person who operate the machines only work from nine to five.

Who would be upset at their MRI appointment being scheduled at 7am or indeed 8pm if it means that they got this vital diagnostic scan much quicker than would've otherwise been the case?

There is room for a lot more creativity in the provision of public services.

The Government will also do well to take a cautionary pause and think back to the last financial crash that led to the loss of Ireland's economic sovereignty.

The trauma of that episode is still being felt, but many people think of the trauma of the banking crisis in isolation as if that was the only thing that brought the economy to the point of collapse.

A much under-reported aspect to the financial crisis was the disastrous consequences of a public spending splurge when property-related taxes dried up.

Banking debt from the crash was €64 billion whereas the overall national debt stood at €200 billion, meaning two thirds of the debt was accumulated through mismanagement of exchequer finances, including a huge expansion in public spending.

This time, the Government would do well to embrace the virtue of prudence when it comes to spending to ensure we don't have a repeat of the misery of the last financial emergency.



# St Brigid's two suitors, hagiographers and religious battles

Lorraine Mulholland

**W**e know about saints' lives through monks called hagiographers. Scholars say that you must bear in mind before you read the stories below, that hagiographers wrote about a saint's way of life, rather than history as we know it today.

One of St Brigid's seven hagiographers, for example, was St Cogitosus, who wrote the *Vita Sanctae Brigidae*, around 650 AD. He set out to emphasise St Brigid's purity, her love for the outcast, and her copious miracles involving lots of animals.

## Brigid's power

Indeed, most of the 80 different stories written in her lives show how supernaturally bountiful and powerful Brigid was.

Scholars also note that a battle was going on for supremacy in the Church in Ireland. Around the same time as Cogitosus wrote about St Brigid, Armagh was championing St Patrick. In the 7th Century, St

Muirchú and St Tírechán wrote about the legends of St Patrick.

While Armagh said Patrick was number one Irish saint, St Brigid's hagiographers set out to fight the case that Brigid was number one!

**“It is said that (her father) presented her with two suitors, one a king and the other a poet”**

Cogitosus's Life claimed Kildare to be the “head of almost all the Irish churches with supremacy over all the monasteries of the Irish and a paruchia (parish) which extended over the whole of Ireland reaching from sea to sea”.

On the agenda was proving how pure, and totally dedicated to God, St Brigid was. The stories below also emphasised Brigid's status by the high rank of her two suitors (this is despite being born a slave).

And in the process, we are also told about her

powers of prophecy and ability to procure exceptional miracles. What better person to have as number one patron saint of Ireland?



**“She prayed that God would make her ugly! All the better for focusing on her true destiny, a bride of Christ; spending her time serving God alone”**

Brigid was of age and her father presented her with potential suitors who he had chosen for her to marry. It is said that he presented her with two suitors, one a king and the other a poet. One rich in money, the other also of very high status in early Ireland.

## Dubthach

The poet was none other than Dubthach maccu Lugair. He became the top poet in Ireland, chief Ollam. He was also an expert lawyer in old Irish law, the Brehon laws.

But Brigid put her foot down and told him she couldn't accept his proposal. However, she put her gift of prophecy to good use and told him, “Go to the woods behind your house where I know for sure that you would find a beautiful maiden to marry! The maiden's parents will be very pleased to allow you to marry her”.

So, Dubthach the poet-lawyer followed Brigid's instructions, and everything happened as she had said. Dubthach at some point even became a Christian; Brigid probably had a hand in that too!

However, there is another version of the story and perhaps this is

about the king who came to woo her. What comes next is shocking – Brigid thought to God that she didn't care about how she looked.

She prayed that God would make her ugly! All the better for focusing on her true destiny, a bride of Christ; spending her time serving God alone. Well, the next morning, she awoke to discover her entire face swollen like a balloon.

**“The beautiful eye which is in your head will be betrothed to a man, though you like it or not”**

There is also a story that Brigid had brothers and that, at this, they were annoyed at the loss of a bride price (money paid by the groom to the bride's family).

While Brigid was outside carrying some firewood past a group of poor people, some began to laugh at her. A man named Bacene (some say he was her brother) said to her, “The beautiful eye which is in your head will be betrothed to a man, though you like it or not”.

Brigid's response was to push her finger into her

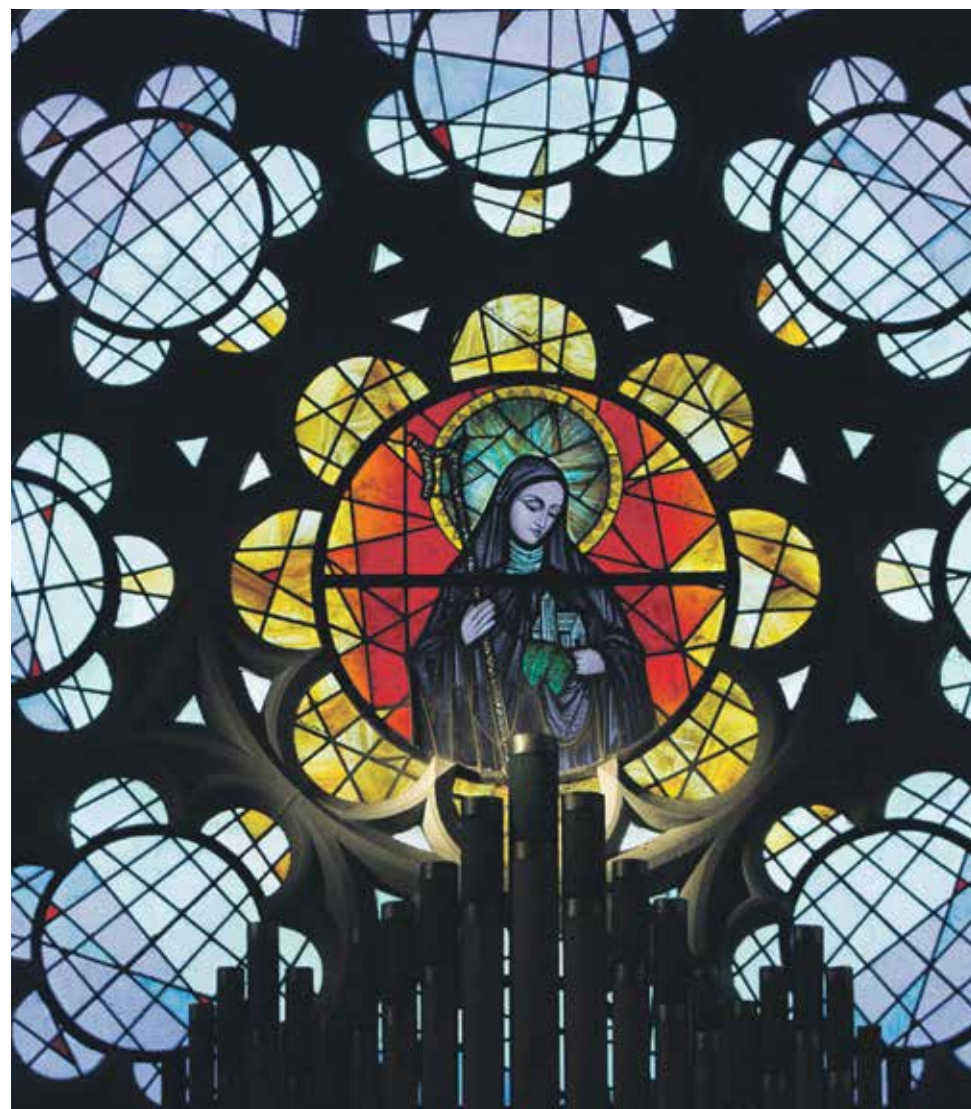
eye. She said, “Here is that beautiful eye for you. I deem it unlikely that anyone will ask you for a blind girl!”

Her brothers tried to help her and wash away the blood from her wound, but there was no water to be found. Brigid said to them, “Put my staff about this sod (of earth) in front of you”.

After they did, a stream came out from the ground. Then Brigid said to Bacene, “Soon your two eyes will burst in your head”. And it all happened as she said. Later, however, Brigid's eye was miraculously replaced. Once both suitors withdrew, Brigid got her good looks back.

Do the shocking stories make more sense now that you know about scholars' views on hagiographers and Kildare's battle with Armagh? At the end of the day, these are stories of faith. If you liked the two stories, you could read more of her traditional tales in my book – I don't spoil the fun in it by talking about hagiographers and religious battles!

**📖 Saint Brigid & Other Amazing Irish Women by Lorraine Mulholland and published by Columba books is available in store and online**



St Brigid of Kildare is pictured in a stained glass window in St Brigit's Church in Crosshaven, Co. Cork. Photo: CNS/Cillian Kelly.



## A crucial question

How can we call Mary 'Mother of God'?

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# The significance of Ash Wednesday

Christ's crucifixion is depicted in a chapel. Photos: OSV News

**A**mong the beautiful, meaningful and solemn ceremonies of the Catholic Church is the gathering of the Faithful on Ash Wednesday.

This special day begins our Lenten journey. It is the start of 40 days of prayer, penance and almsgiving as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. But why does Lent begin on a Wednesday, and what is the significance of ashes?

Ash Wednesday was added to the liturgical calendar well after the 40-day penitential season of Lent became the norm throughout the Latin Church. Lent, in turn, was universally established only after the early

## There are good reasons behind why Lent begins as it does, writes D.D. Emmons

Church sorted out the date of Easter. The issue was clarified at the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 where "all the Churches agreed that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon (14 Nisan) after the vernal equinox" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1170). The vernal (spring) equinox generally falls on March 21, thus the date of Easter in the Western Church can

occur anytime between March 22 and April 25.

### Springtime

The word 'Lent' is from an Old English term meaning 'springtime,' and by the 2nd Century the term was being used to describe the period of individual fasting, almsgiving and prayer in preparation for Easter. Among the Christians of the first three centuries, only

those aspiring for Baptism – the catechumens – observed a defined period of preparation, and that time lasted only two or three days.

The idea of Lent being 40 days in length evolved over the next few centuries, and it is difficult to establish the precise time as to when it began. Among the canons issued by the Council of Nicaea, the Church leaders, in Canon Five, made reference to Lent: "and let these synods be held, the one before Lent that the pure gift may be offered to God after all bitterness has been put away, and let the second be held about autumn". The language of this canon seems to validate that Lent, in some fashion, had by the 4th Century been established and accepted by the Church. While

the exact timing and extent of Lent both before and after the Nicaea council is unclear, what is clear from historical documents is that Christians did celebrate a season of Lent to prepare themselves for Resurrection Sunday and used a variety of ways to do so.

### Evolved

That Lent evolved into a period of 40 days in length is not surprising, as there are numerous biblical events that also involved 40 days. Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instructions from God for that number of days (see Ex 24:18); Noah and his entourage were on the Ark waiting for the rains to end for 40 days and 40 nights (Gn 7:4); and Elijah "walked 40 days and forty



nights to the mountain of God, Horeb" (1 Kgs 19:8).

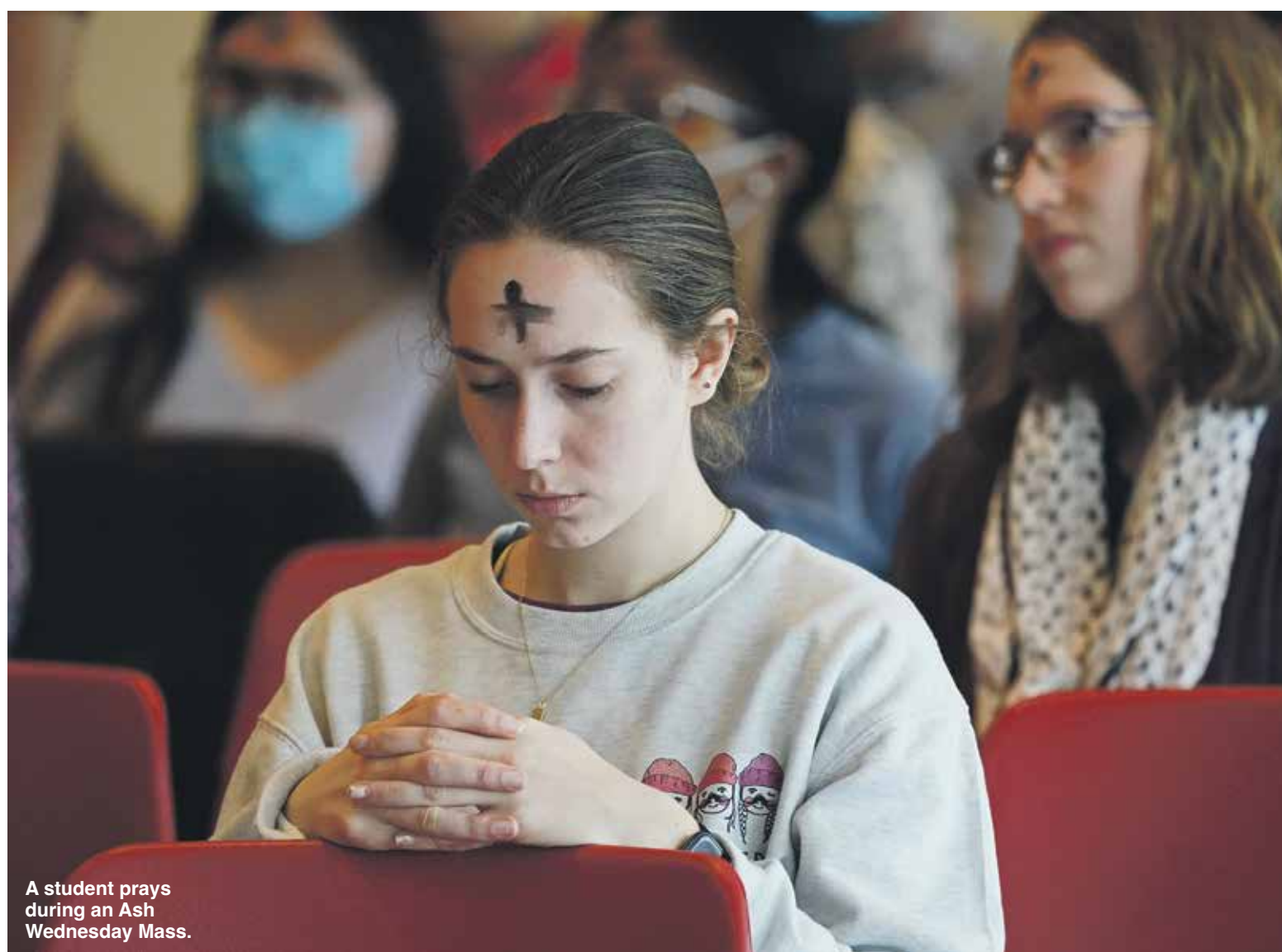
Mostly, though, the 40 days of Lent identify with the time our Lord Jesus spent in the desert fasting, praying and being tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1-11). "By the solemn 40 days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert" (Catechism, No. 540).

**“If you see a poor man, take pity on him! If you see an enemy, be reconciled to him! If you see a friend gaining honour, envy him not! If you see a handsome woman, pass her by!”**

There is, therefore, evidence that by the end of the 4th Century Christians were participating in a 40-day Lent before Easter. The dilemma now became how to count the 40 days. In the Latin Church, six weeks were used to identify the Lenten period, but one doesn't fast on Sundays, so six Sundays were subtracted and there remained only 36 fasting days. In the early 7th century, St Pope Gregory I the Great (pope from 590-604) resolved this situation by adding as fast days the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday before the first Sunday of Lent. Thus the Lenten 40-day fast, or the Great Fast as it was known, would begin on a Wednesday.

Initially, people fasted all 40 days of Lent. They ate one meal a day and only an amount of food that would sustain survival. But the Church taught, and people believed (then as now), that fasting is not about what we eat, it is about changing hearts, interior conversion, reconciliation with God and others. It's about living in an austere way, giving from our abundance to the poor. St John Chrysostom (347-407) explained it this way: "Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works! ... If you see a poor man, take pity on him! If you see an enemy, be reconciled to him! If you see a friend gaining honour, envy him not! If you see a handsome woman, pass her by!" (Homily on the Statutes, III.11).

The Church has long used ashes as an outward sign of grief, a mark of humility, mourning, penance and morality. The Old Testament is filled with stories describing the use of ashes in such a manner. In the Book of Job, Job repented before God: "Therefore, I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). Daniel "turned to the Lord God, to seek help, in prayer and petition, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (Dn 9:3). Jonah preached conversion and repentance to the people of Nineveh: "When the news reached



A student prays during an Ash Wednesday Mass.

the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes" (Jon 3:6). And the Maccabees army prepared for battle: "That day they fasted and wore sackcloth; they sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their garments" (1 Mc 3:47).

### Catechumens

Ashes were imposed on the early catechumens when they began their preparation time for Baptism. Confessed sinners of that era were also marked with ashes as part of the public penitential process. Other baptised Christians began asking to receive ashes in a manner similar to catechumens and penitents. Christian men had ashes sprinkled on their heads while ashes were used to trace the cross on the forehead of women. Thus the use of ashes as the sign of penance, in readiness for Easter, was becoming a Churchwide practice.

During the papacy of St Gregory the Great, the practice was further expanded and is mentioned in the 6th-Century Gregorian Sacramentary. Around the year 1000, Abbot Aelfric of the monastery of Eynsham, England, wrote: "We read in the books both



Cups containing ashes are seen prior to an Ash Wednesday Mass.

in the Old Law and in the new that men who repented of their sins bestowed on themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent, that we strew ashes upon our heads, to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten feast." This same rite of distributing ashes on the Wednesday that begins Lent was recommended for universal use by Pope Urban II at the Synod of Benevento in 1091.

So when we go to that early Mass on Ash Wednesday morning and receive the blessed ashes on

our forehead, we are repeating a sombre, pious act that Catholics have been undergoing for over 1,500 years. As *"The Liturgical Year, Septuagesima,"* by the Benedictine Abbot Gueranger, written in the middle decades of the 1800s, puts it: "We are entering, today, upon a long campaign of the warfare spoke of by the apostles: 40 days of battle, 40 days of penance. We shall not turn cowards, if our souls can but be impressed with the conviction that the battle and the penance must be gone through. Let us listen to the eloquence of the solemn rite which opens our Lent. Let us go

whither our mother leads us, that is, to the scene of the fall."

### Embrace

Like all those before us, we unhesitatingly embrace this invitation to sanctity, this time to turn away from sin. We are part of that great cloud of witnesses who through all the ages have donned the ashes, publicly acknowledging that we are Christians, Christians who have sinned and seek to repent. We acknowledge that "we are dust and to dust we shall return".

**i** D.D. Emmons writes for OSV News from the US.

**“Let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent, that we strew ashes upon our heads, to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten feast”**



# How can we call Mary the ‘Mother of God’?



Paul Thigpen

**I**s it legitimate to call Mary the ‘Mother of God’? Some Christians reject the title, saying it implies that God himself somehow has his origin in Mary. How could the Creator of all things, who depends on no one else for his existence, possibly have a ‘mother’?

To understand why Christians have called Our Lady by this title since ancient times, we need to take a look at the controversy that arose when prayers addressed to her in this way first became popular 16 centuries ago.

## Heart

From the very beginning of the Church, at the heart of the Faith she has proclaimed lies the insistence that her founder, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, is both God and Man. Jesus claimed for himself the very name of God revealed to Moses, “I AM” (Jn 8:58), and he assumed

divine prerogatives such as the forgiveness of sin (see Lk 5:18-26).

**“Was he, as still others imagined, a kind of hybrid, partly human and partly divine?”**

The apostles testified to this reality. St Thomas, for example, having known Jesus in his humanity, affirmed his divinity as well when he said to him after his resurrection, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28).

St John wrote in his Gospel that Jesus was “the Word” who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” and that this “Word was God” (Jn 1:1, 14). St Paul taught that in Christ “dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily” (Col 2:9).

When early Christians pondered these and other declarations of the apostolic witness, they wondered: How exactly was Christ both human and divine?

Was he, as some claimed, simply

God and only appeared to be human? Was he, as others speculated, a human to whom God attached himself in a special way, dwelling inside him? Or was he, as still others imagined, a kind of hybrid, partly human and partly divine?

Ultimately, in the light of Scripture and tradition, and led by the Holy Spirit, the Church concluded that none of the above answers is correct. The Council of Ephesus, an ecumenical Church council held in the year 431, resolved the issue. That council was provoked by a controversy over one particular question: Can we legitimately call Mary ‘the Mother of God’?

## God-bearer

One prominent archbishop, named Nestorius, began to preach against the use of the Marian title *Theotokos*, which literally means ‘God-bearer,’ or ‘the one who bore God’. Christ was two persons, he claimed – one human, one divine – joined together. Though Mary was the

bearer (or mother) of the human person in Christ, she was not the mother of the divine person (God the Son). So she could not rightly be called the ‘Mother of God’.

**“Christ is not a committee. The two natures belong to one and the same Person, the divine Son of God”**

After examining this teaching, the Church pronounced Nestorius mistaken. Christ was not a combination of two persons, one human and one divine. That would be close to saying that he was simply a man to whom God was joined in a uniquely intimate way – a man specially indwelt by God, like one of the Old Testament prophets.

Instead, the Church declared, Christ is only one divine Person – the second person of the Trinity. This single Person took our human nature and joined it to his own

divine nature, so that he possesses two natures (see Jn 1:1-3, 14).

But those natures don’t constitute two different persons. Christ is not a committee. The two natures belong to one and the same Person, the divine Son of God. And those two natures, though not to be confused, cannot be separated.

## Light

In this light, the Church concluded not only that it is correct to call Mary the Mother of God, but that it is important to do so. Mary conceived and bore in her womb the one Person, Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh. If we deny that she is the Mother of God, then we are denying that her Son, Christ, is God, come down from heaven.

For this reason, Catholics today follow the ancients in calling Mary *Theotokos*, ‘the God-bearer,’ the Mother of God. The apostolic witness is clear: As St Paul put it succinctly, “God sent his son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4).

**“Mary conceived and bore in her womb the one Person, Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh. If we deny that she is the Mother of God, then we are denying that her Son, Christ, is God, come down from heaven”**

**i** Paul Thigpen, PhD, is an award-winning journalist and the best-selling author of sixty books and more than five hundred journal and magazine articles in more than forty religious and secular periodicals.



# A Eucharistic Word: Tabernacle

Michael Heinlein

**W**hile praying in our pew after Communion during a recent Sunday Mass, our 6-year-old son decided to administer a pop quiz to his willing little sister. "What was the first tabernacle?" he asked. "I have no idea," she replied. "Mary, of course! Her tummy held Jesus for the first time," he answered. "But what was the second tabernacle?" she shot back. My son then looked at me, tables turned on him from trying to stump his sister to now being stumped by her. "Do you know?" he asked me.

**“When we recognise his presence, we are drawn to show reverence to Christ’s sacramental presence in our midst”**

Of course, I could have gone a variety of directions with this. But as I raised my eyes, I was drawn immediately to St Joseph in the creche, as we were still in the Christmas season. "St Joseph's arms were," I blurted out without much thinking.

That got me thinking, then, of what the subsequent "tabernacles" might've been. The manger itself? Maybe the arms of the innkeeper's wife? Maybe a shepherd? No matter who or what might've held Our Lord next, we know it was an unworthy place for the Lord of the universe.

But what of the tabernacles today? We have beautiful receptacles crafted of precious metals in churches and chapels. Our

tabernacles contain the Eucharistic species remaining after Mass, especially reserved for the sick and dying and for both public and private worship, and adoration outside of Mass. The glowing sanctuary lamp next to the tabernacle tells us Jesus is there. When we recognise his presence, we are drawn to show reverence to Christ's sacramental presence in our midst. By gestures and prayers we make clear our faith in his Real Presence and show him our love and devotion.

## Flesh and blood

As my mind wandered about tabernacles, I thought of how each of us, too, in a sense becomes a tabernacle. We are members of Christ's body by Baptism. We are temples of the Holy Spirit.

When we receive Holy Communion, Christ's body, blood, soul and divinity dwells within us just as the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us in Mary's womb at Nazareth so long ago. As the bread and wine lying in the altar are changed by the Holy Spirit into Christ's Eucharistic flesh and blood, so, too, ought we be changed by receiving the Sacrament.

But as the beauty and location of the tabernacle reveal what it contains, as the sanctuary lamp announces it is indeed the Lord, what heralds to the world Christ's presence in us?

Christ in us is holiness. And as with any saint, we come to know Christ dwells in them by how they live, by the evidence of virtue in their lives. This means ensuring that we do our part to allow God's grace to nourish and grow the gifts he's already given us. When struggles and difficul-

ties come, how do we respond? When life unfolds differently than planned, how do we react? When God wants us to be his tabernacle, what do we do?

**“But as the beauty and location of the tabernacle reveal what it contains, as the sanctuary lamp announces it is indeed the Lord, what heralds to the world”**

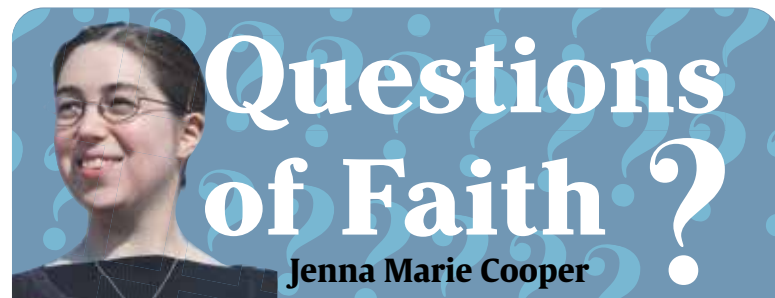
The short answer is, of course, is to live as Christ did. The Eucharist contains the grace we need to live Christ and give Christ.

The Eucharist is our roadmap to virtue, the blueprint for holiness. The Eucharist is the key to open up the tabernacle of our hearts and let Christ live in the world.

While I'm not sure what – or more likely who – was the second tabernacle, I know it's a calling for each of us. Will we stretch out our arms, open our hearts, give him room?

And what will be the effect? Will the world come to know Christ by our letting him make his dwelling anew in us? If we more faithfully accept our calling to be tabernacles in the world, might the world come to believe?

*Michael R. Heinlein is author of Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I. and a promised member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.*



## Why do Orthodox churches have a valid celebration of the Eucharist?

**Q: How is it possible that the Orthodox practice of the Sacrament of the Eucharist would ever be considered as the true body and blood of Christ from the Catholic perspective simply because of an understanding outside of the unbroken chain of apostolic succession?**

A: For context, let us review what we mean when we refer to the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Historically, we believe that the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church was founded with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven. As Jesus no longer physically walked the earth as he once had, he entrusted the continuance of his saving mission to the apostles.

The apostles, in turn, spread throughout the world founding local Churches (in some ways, the rough precursor to our modern dioceses), and ordaining their successors (early bishops) to take their places in the shepherding of these local Churches. Many of these local Churches developed their own distinct liturgical traditions and other customs influenced by local needs and culture.

Initially, the universal Church was one unified structure of local Churches under the ultimate oversight of the pope in Rome, who was the successor to St Peter as the leader of the apostles. But divisions and tensions began to arise even in the Church's first few centuries. Some of these tensions were at least officially resolved by the early ecumenical councils, which clarified disputed questions of Catholic doctrine. However, due to some complex religious and political conflicts, the year 1054 saw "the Great Schism," in which the pope excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, the bishop-leader of the local Churches in what had been the Eastern part of the Roman Empire – with the patriarch in turn issuing his own excommunication against the pope.

The Churches of the East which rejected the universal authority of the pope became known as the Orthodox Churches. Although there are some doctrinal differences between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox, for the most part disagreement on the role of the Holy

Father remains the major obstacle to unity between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

We as Catholics actually do believe that apostolic succession is significant and meaningful enough to allow for Eastern Orthodox Churches to have a valid celebration of the Eucharist. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us: "The Eastern Churches that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church celebrate the Eucharist with great love. These Churches, although separated from us, yet possess true sacraments, above all – apostolic succession – the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still joined to us in closest intimacy." (See CCC 1399)

Keep in mind that the apostolic succession in the Orthodox Churches goes hand-in-hand with our shared sacramental theology. That is, Catholics and Orthodox not only share belief in the Real Presence in the Eucharist, but also a shared understanding of the Sacrament of holy orders and thus the nature of the priesthood. This is in contrast to the various Western Christian communities we call "Protestant," because in addition to breaking communion with the Holy Father in Rome, the sacramental theology of Protestant denominations tends to be a fairly radical departure from what we believe as Catholics.

Similarly, there are other Catholic schismatic groups – with "schism" defined as a refusal to submit to the authority of the Holy Father, as noted in canon 751 of the Code of Canon Law – which nevertheless have a valid Eucharist due to apostolic succession, despite their ordinations and celebrations of the Eucharist being generally illicit. One contemporary example of this would be the Society of St Pius X.

But the Eastern Orthodox Churches are not to be confused with the many Eastern Catholic Churches. Eastern Catholics have different laws and a different liturgical tradition than Latin (aka "Roman") Catholics, but Eastern Catholics remain in full communion with the Holy Father.

*Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News.*



# Breaking faith with each other



**I**s this new or are we just more aware of it? Hatred and contempt are everywhere. They are in our government houses, in our communities, in our churches and in our families. We are struggling, mostly without success, to be civil with each other, let alone to respect each other. Why? Why is this happening and intensifying?

Moreover, on both sides, we are often justifying this hatred on moral grounds, even biblical grounds, claiming that the Gospel itself gives us grounds for our disrespect – my truth is so right and you are so wrong that I can disrespect you and I have biblical grounds to hate you!

Well, even a cursory look at Scripture should be enough to enable us to see this for what it is; rationalisation, self-interest and the farthest thing from Jesus.

## Jewish scriptures

Let's begin with something already taught long before Jesus. In the Jewish scriptures, we already find this text: "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?" (Malachi 2:8-10) Long before Jesus, Jewish spirituality already demanded that we be fair and never show partiality. However, it still gave us permis-



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

sion to hate our enemies and to take revenge when we have been wronged – 'an eye for an eye'.

Jesus turns this on its head. Everywhere in his person and in his teaching, most explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount, he challenges us in a radically new way, telling us that, if we want to go to heaven, our virtue needs to go deeper than that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. What was their virtue?

The Scribes and Pharisees of his time were very much like the church-going Christians of our time. They were sincere, essentially honest, basically good people, who kept the commandments and practiced strict justice. But, according to Jesus, that isn't enough. Why? If you are a sincere person who is honest, keeps the commandments and is fair to everyone, what's still

missing? What's still missing lies at the very heart of Jesus' moral teaching, namely, the practice of a love and forgiveness that goes beyond hatred and grievance. What exactly is this?

## Vengeance

In justice and fairness, you are still entitled to hate someone who hates you and to extract an appropriate vengeance on someone who has wronged you. However, Jesus asks something else of us: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour' and hate your enemy'. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. ... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what

are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5: 43-48)

This is the very essence of Christian morality. Can you love someone who hates you? Can you do good to someone who wishes you evil? Can you forgive someone who has wronged you? Can you forgive a murderer? It's this, and not some particular issue in moral theology, which is the litmus test for who is a Christian and who isn't. Can you love someone who hates you? Can you forgive someone who has hurt you? Can you move beyond your natural proclivity for vengeance?

Sadly, today we are failing that test on both sides of the ideological and religious spectrum. We see this everywhere – from the highest levels of government, from high levels in our churches and in public and private discourse everywhere, that is, people openly espousing disrespect, division, hatred, and vengeance – and trying to claim the moral high ground in doing this. Major politicians speak openly and

explicitly about hating others and about exacting revenge on those who oppose them. Worse still, churches and church leaders of every kind are lining up behind them and giving them 'Gospel' support for their espousal of hatred and vengeance.

## “Division, disrespect, hatred and vengeance are the Anti-Christ”

This needs to be named and challenged: anyone who is advocating division, disrespect, hatred, or revenge is antithetical to Jesus and the gospels. As well, anyone supporting such a person by an appeal to Jesus, the Gospels, or authentic morality, is also antithetical to Jesus and the Gospels.

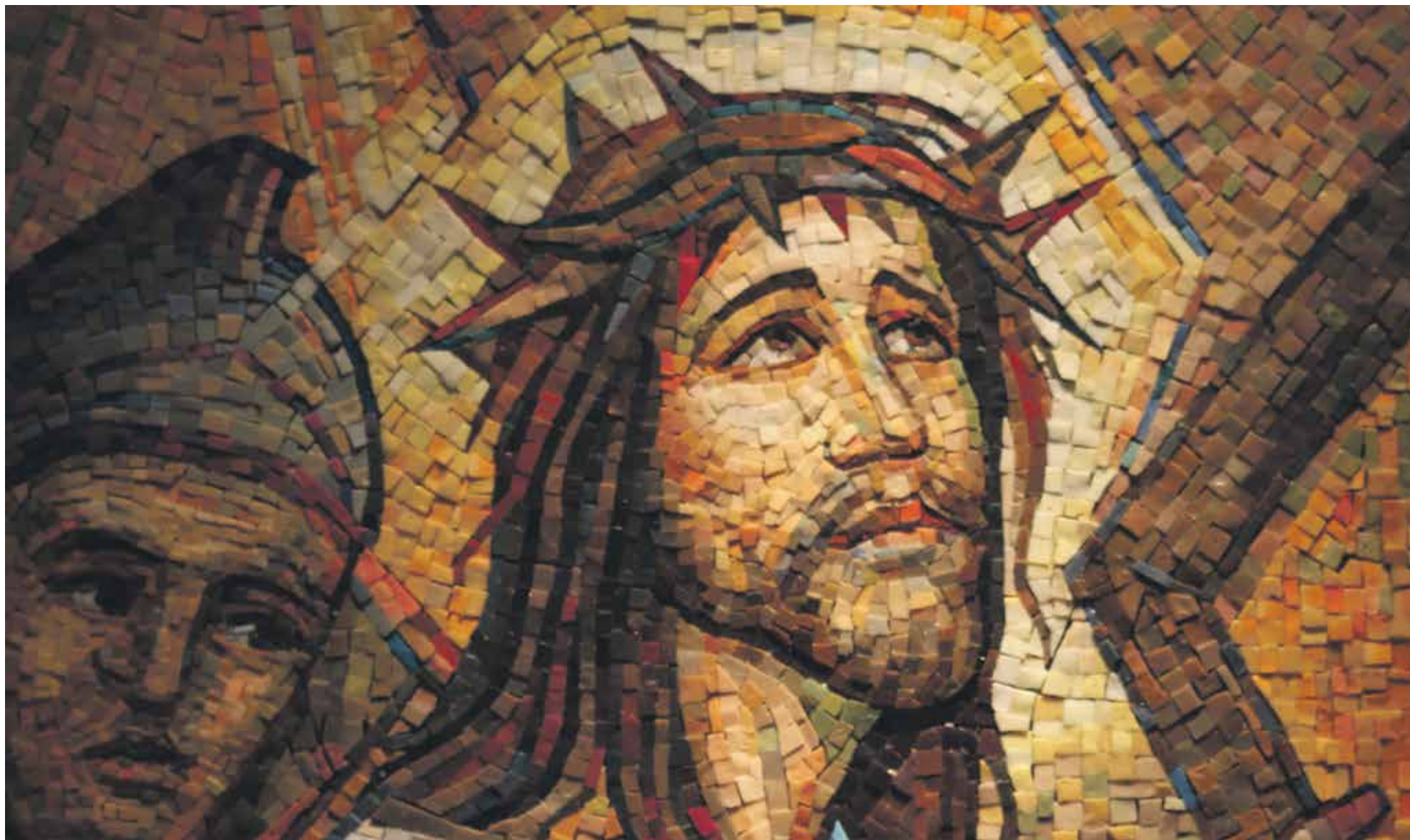
God is love. Jesus is love enfleshed. Disrespect, hatred, division, and revenge may never be preached in God's or Jesus' name, no matter the cause, no matter the anger, no matter the wrong. This doesn't mean that we cannot have disagreements, spirited discussions, and bitter debates. But disrespect, hatred, division, and revenge (no matter how deeply they may in fact be felt inside us) may not be advocated in the name of goodness and Jesus. Division, disrespect, hatred and vengeance are the Anti-Christ.

**“Can you love someone who hates you? Can you do good to someone who wishes you evil? Can you forgive someone who has wronged you? Can you forgive a murderer?”**



# What would Jesus do?

## Work, rest, pray, repeat



Jb 7:1-4, 6-7  
Ps 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6  
1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23  
Mk 1:29-39

### The Sunday Gospel

Deacon  
Greg  
Kandra



**W**e've all been there.

At the end of a long day, the phone rings, there's a knock on the door, the boss stops by your desk, or an email arrives.

"Can you help me with something?"

"Someone has called in sick."

"We need to get this out tonight."

And there goes the rest of your day. Four hours and two cups of coffee later, you're finally turning off the light to go home.

When I was working in broadcast news, every winter storm, power failure or plane crash halfway around the world could mean a long night or a lost weekend. It goes with the territory. Doctors and first responders

know it well. We saw that vividly during the pandemic, when the long shifts and gruelling demands made headlines and made heroes.

**“Jesus couldn’t bring himself to say ‘Enough. I’m outta here’. He didn’t punch a clock. And he didn’t turn anyone away”**

And now, this Sunday's Scripture readings make us ask: "Was it that way for Jesus?"

In the Gospel, Mark shows us a day in the life of the saviour of the world – a man on the job, arriving at a house

to heal Simon's mother-in-law. But that's just the beginning. Once that was done, "the whole town was gathered at the door". The sick, the possessed, the troubled of all kinds found their way to Capernaum. The Gospel doesn't mention it, but we can presume Jesus couldn't bring himself to say "Enough. I'm outta here". He didn't punch a clock. And he didn't turn anyone away.

### No escape

Even when Jesus was done, he wasn't really done. He "went off to a deserted place" to pray, but there was no escape. The apostles found him. "Everyone is looking for you," they said. What they didn't say (but may have been thinking) is: "Rabbi, come on. Pack up. It's time to get back to work."

It turns out the Son of God can't get a day off. How did he respond? Did he sigh, grumble, complain, file a grievance?

No. "Let us go ... For this

purpose have I come."

Among other things, this episode serves as a vivid reminder that Jesus wasn't that different from the rest of us. He toiled and he tired. He didn't just preach parables and cure diseases with a wave of his hand. He gave people time. He gave them himself. He needed to be present to people, to listen to them, to pray for them and to make their healing possible. He was called on repeatedly to give, sacrifice, surrender. It wasn't easy.

**“Jesus took time to get away from the madding crowds to sit and pray”**

At every Mass, we commemorate the ultimate sacrifice of Calvary, but how often do we think about Christ's sacrifice of daily living? The patience he needed to give time to others? The exhaustion of repeatedly confronting

so much hardship and suffering? The struggle of simply being human?

It is a struggle so many of us contend with, in ways large and small. But Christ's words to his apostles after a morning of prayer offer us another perspective.

"For this purpose have I come."

### Struggles

Put another way: He had work to do. He had a mission to fulfil. He came into the world to sweat with us, to bear with us, to struggle with us – and to help us endure our own struggles until, by God's grace, we are made new.

This reading would be a fitting passage for reflection on Labour Day, reminding us that Jesus also laboured. He did the work he was born to do – exhausting, demanding, sometimes relentless work that transcended daily life because it was the ongoing work of salvation, carried out with self-emptying love.

Most of us will never think of our daily lives that way. But this episode has something to teach us, and to remember: Jesus took time to get away from the madding crowds to sit and pray.

Out of that prayer came his declaration: "For this purpose have I come."

In times of weariness and stress, when the world and our work just get to be too much, may we remember Jesus the worker, the listener, the teacher, the healer – and may we remember, too, how through prayer and self-sacrifice he came to embrace what he was born to do.

The familiar question, WWJD, What Would Jesus Do, gives us this week a simple answer for facing the wearying hardship of daily life.

WWJD? Work. Rest. Pray. Repeat.

**i** Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog, 'The Deacon's Bench'.



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Essential that referendum reporting objective

So, referendum time has come around again. It's hard to deny the centrality of the process in a democracy. In a way it's the purest form, though you can't have referendums on everything – it's just not practicable. Because it's so important, it is essential that it be fair and transparent – treated with respect. Yet some referendum are never implemented (7th Amendment) and others are activated as soon as possible (8th Amendment).

Last week **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1, Thursday) covered the launch of the information campaign from the newly formed Electoral Commission. In Mary Regan's report we were told they would be sending out booklets to every house.

I'd suspect media debates will be more crucial, so it's all the more important that such debates be fair, neutral, objective and balanced. I preferred it when the official booklets from the now subsumed Referendum Commission set out the pros and cons, the arguments for Yes versus those for No.

I don't think there was any major public demand for these votes – the report said the Government was using it as a form of "constitutional catchup", to bring the Constitution into line with



The Electoral Commission begin their referendum campaign in Co. Sligo, meeting the artistic community in Hawk's Well Theatre.

"current day values" (who decides what they are?).

That begs more than a few questions. The report flagged issues relating to how the phrase 'durable relationships' would be defined – of course the courts will decide, not ministers trying to be reassuring, or the Electoral Commission, however well-intentioned.

I think Mary Regan was right when she said that the input of civil society groups would be influential. The National Women's Council (whose views only represent some women) regarded the language in

the current articles to be "sexist" and "stereotypical". Yet the Government could have just deleted the articles, or changed 'woman' in the home to 'parent' (thus achieving the holy grail of gender neutrality).

The issue was discussed on **Saturday with Colm Ó Mongáin** (RTÉ Radio 1). It was one of a few scheduled items, but as so often happens it was 2 to 1 in favour of a Yes vote. Michael McNamara TD was against it, though not on any principled objection to the content, but rather because he wasn't convinced of the necessity

of the measure, and thought wouldn't add anything to citizens' "legal protections".

Government spokesperson Minister Joe O'Brien of the Green Party favoured a Yes vote and sought to pare the referendum votes to their basics, but these were just his opinions – no knowing what future Supreme Court judges will make of it.

Jennifer Whitmore TD of the Social Democrats sought a Yes vote, speaking 'as a woman', but I felt her arguments were questionable. First of all, she maintained that the present article of the Constitution "essentially" said that woman's place was in the home. Panto-style I thought 'Oh no it doesn't'. She must have heard me and then said it doesn't "specifically" say that, but that's the message it gives out! With opposition like this who needs Government?

On **Anton Savage** (Newstalk, Saturday) conservative commentator Laura Perrins made the point that the vote would be undemocratic as it was the judges who would ultimately decide what the new articles meant.

She found the wording "incredibly vague", that it "undermines marriage" and was "bad for children". Referencing research studies, she said children had bet-

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday, February 4, 1.15pm**

In Newcastle upon Tyne, Rev. Kate Bottley hears how faith and compassion can support prisoners and ex-offenders in their journey to rehabilitation.

#### FINDING BRIGID

**RTÉ One Monday, February 5, 6.30pm**

Ireland celebrated its first public holiday dedicated to a woman in 2023. Siobhán McSweeney, of Derry Girls' fame, goes in search of the real St Brigid (Repeat).

#### YES, PRIME MINISTER

**BBC 4 Tuesday, February 6, 8.30pm**

Classic political comedy. Jim must recommend the appointment of bishops to the Queen but is not keen on the two offered by the Church.

ter outcomes in married families and that was what should be promoted, but without stigmatising other family forms.

She thought the current use of the word 'woman' was not sexist and should not be erased from legal documents. Currently the Constitution offered important recognition of all the unpaid caring work that women do – generally, she pointed out, the burden of caring falls mainly on women.

Karen Kiernan, CEO of the group One Family thought that the new wordings "might be mostly symbolic", and that it wouldn't take away from the status of

marriage, but would provide enhanced recognition for unmarried families.

She said that a Yes vote would be a strong signal to the Government to improve services. I'm not sure that the Government responds well to strong signals of a symbolic nature.

They have certainly failed to ensure compliance with the original article – failed to ensure that mothers will not be obliged to go to work by economic necessity. Maybe they fear a legal case being brought to give enforcement, at last, to this original article, and maybe that's one of the real reasons for this referendum.



Pat O'Kelly

# Music

## Impressive Irish composer celebrated

This year celebrates a number of composer centenaries, among them the anniversary of the death of Dublin-born Charles Villiers Stanford, who played an important role in music education in the UK where he was professor at Cambridge and a founder of London's Royal College of Music.

The NSO remembers him at the NCH tomorrow (February 2) when Carol McGonnell plays his clarinet concerto and on February 16 and 17 at both the NCH and Waterford's SETU Arena with Finghin Collins the soloist in Stanford's 2nd Piano Concerto. Dubliner Killian Farrell, general music director at the state theatre in Meiningen in Germany, conducts.

Born in Dublin's Herbert Street in 1852, Stanford came



Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford

from a well-to-do family. His lawyer father, John James, also a cellist and noted bass, sang the title role in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at its first Dublin performance in 1847. Charles mother, Mary, also had legal forbears and was an accomplished pianist.

Supervising her son's music lessons, Mary Stanford realised his precocious talent. Aged seven, he gave a recital of piano music by Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Ignaz Moscheles, then a popular composer. A march, written by Charles when he was eight,

was played in a pantomime in Dublin's Theatre Royal a short while later.

Charles' godmother, Elizabeth Meeke – a former Moscheles pupil in Leipzig – took charge of his piano lessons. Stanford later recalled she insisted on his sight-reading a Chopin Mazurka at the end of each lesson.

Acknowledging the need of a 'proper' education, Charles' parents enrolled him in the strict Henry Tilney Bassett School on Dublin's Lower Mount Street. Under English-born Bassett, the establishment enjoyed a considerable reputation with many past pupils securing lucrative posts in business and academia.

On his first visit to London when he was ten, Charles had composition lessons from

Tralee-born Arthur O'Leary then a professor at the Royal Academy of Music. Back in Dublin, Henrietta Flynn, another Moscheles pupil in Leipzig, replaced Elizabeth Meeke as his piano teacher while Stanford studied as well with Robert Stewart, organist at St Patrick's Cathedral and TCD music professor.

With his only son set on music as a career, John James Stanford insisted the lad should have a broader university education and Charles was sent, on scholarship, to Queens' College, Cambridge in 1870 carrying an impressive collection of compositions in his portfolio.

Immersing himself in college life, he quickly became assistant director of its musical society. As Stanford's attempts

to introduce women to its all-male ranks were firmly resisted, he set up a rival mixed-voice group in 1872. As its performances outshone those of the original society, a compromise was reached by joining forces under John Larkin Hopkins with Stanford as his assistant.

Organist at Trinity College, Cambridge, Hopkins appointed Stanford his deputy at Trinity whither the young man transferred in 1873, the year of his first visit to Germany. In Bonn he met Brahms, with whom he formed a lasting friendship, and by this time Stanford was being recognised as a classicist on the lines of Schumann and Brahms rather than a modernist, embracing Liszt and Wagner. To be continued.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Brigid of the Gaels – a lady of status and consequence



A powerful image of St Brigid from a stained glass window by Michael Healy in Loughrea Cathedral. Photo: Jozef Vrtiel.

**Two Lives of Saint Brigid**, edited and translated by Philip Freeman (Four Courts Press, €19.95 / £17.50)

Peter Costello

St Brigid was recognised from an early date as one of the 'Three Patrons of Ireland'. Born of the Celtic nobility, in Irish history and legend she has always held a premier place; and yet about her life and achievement there has always been, because of her early date, so soon after St Patrick, both confusion and controversy.

This has become even more so in recent times as her life and its significance in her own time and later has been reconfigured, even 're-imagined', in the light of modern attitudes and notions. And so there will, I suspect, be the wide interest of this book, published a week ago in advance of her saint's day.

It consists of two early lives of the saint, edited and translated from Latin by Prof. Stephen Freeman, an

acknowledged authority on the period, who is a professor at Pepperdine University in California, on the period.

### Cogitosus

The first text is by a priest of the period named Cogitosus, and the second is a slightly earlier text called the *Vita Prima*. These are in Latin: there are, of course, other lives of the saint in Irish.

Here they are published together for the first time, and will form an important addition to the printed materials available on early Christian Ireland for both scholars and the general reader. In his introduction Prof. Freeman lucidly describes their origins and previous publication.

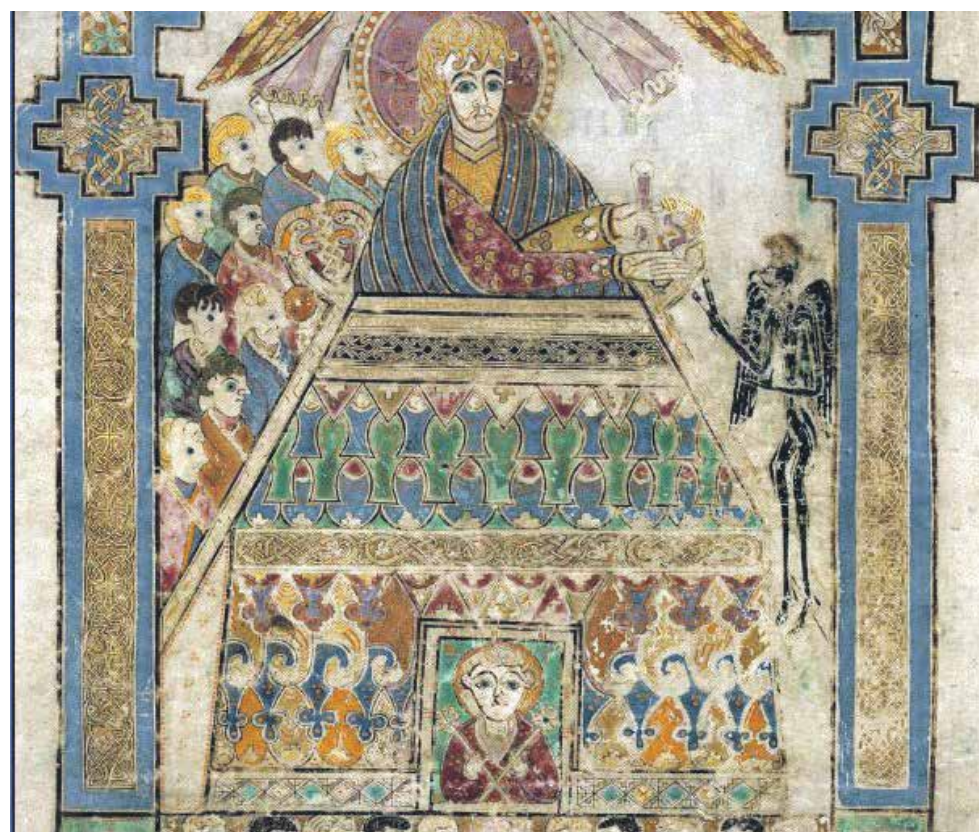
If the *Vita Prima* presents Brigid as a travelling saint, moving around the districts of Meath, Westmeath and Leitrim, and sometimes further afield, Cogitosius concentrates on Kildare and on Brigid's reputation vis à vis St Patrick; two views of great interest to historians for the light they may shed on early Christian Ireland

Two episodes in the books will be of special interest to ordinary readers though. The first is from the *Vita Prima*. A common peasant killed a fox which was allowed the freedom of the hall of a certain king. It was trained to perform tricks for the court.

**“Arriving at the palace she pleaded for the man. But the king was obdurate: it was a new fox, or death and slavery”**

The peasant was dragged before the king for his crime. He was threatened with death, his wife, sons

**“They seem not to have seen man as master of the world, but rather that humans and creatures shared together in the common creation of God”**



A wooden Celtic church from the *Book of Kells*.

and household with slavery, unless the king's loss was made good by another fox as clever as the first.

Hearing of this Brigid mounted her chariot and set out on the road to the king's stronghold. A wild fox jumped into the car and hid under the saint's cloak. Arriving at the palace she pleaded for the man. But the king was obdurate: it was a new fox, or death and slavery.

The wild fox came out from under her cloak, and performed tricks as well as the earlier one. The king was delighted. The peasant was released. The saint returned to her own place. But so did the new fox, which soon escaped from the king's hall “to the wild places and to its own den” (p. 123).

### Affinity

This is a reminder of the charming affinity of these

early Irish saints with wild creatures, which has often been commented on. They seem not to have seen man as master of the world, but rather that humans and creatures shared together in the common creation of God.

The other passage comes from Cogitosus a little later, in speaking of her shrine at Kildare.

**“A wonderful riot of colour and design, perhaps with echoes of the sort of pictorial thing we see in the Byzantine mosaics at Ravenna, except transferred to plaster and cloth”**

“And in that ancient place something new is born – a church growing in the numbers of the faithful of both sexes with a spacious floor and a ceiling towering above. It was decorated with painted pictures ... One wall is decorated with painted images and covered with linen wall hangings along the eastern side of the church” (p. 39).

This church, of course, was not the much restored Anglo-Norman one we see today at Kildare, but an earlier church probably of wood and much like the image of a Celtic church in The Book of Kells, representing the Temple in Jerusalem.

What must it have been like this primary church? A wonderful riot of colour and design, perhaps with echoes of the sort of pictorial thing we see in the Byzantine mosaics at Ravenna, except transferred to plaster and cloth.

### Disputed

Though the lives of these early Irish saints are disputed, about St Brigid there is more certainty. She must have been a very remarkable woman of outstanding talent, judging by the manner in which her character has imposed itself on the period.

Naturally enough many today have hailed her as an indication that Irish Christianity, whatever may have happened later, was a creation both of holy men and saintly women. Something we need to be reminded of in these more combative days



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.

# Francis Xavier: a saint in a hurry



St Francis Xavier on his death bed in the Far East.

**The Great Dreamer: The Life and Mission of St Francis Xavier,** by Brendan Comerford (Messenger Publications, €12.95 / £11.95)

Peter Costello

St Francis Xavier is among the most celebrated of the original body of Jesuits. He has been the subject of many biographies and devotional books in the past – the author mentions some of them on which he has relied in his preface – but in his new short biography Brendan Comerford wishes to introduce him perhaps to a wider and young readership unfamiliar with his legend.

The book is laid out in a straightforward way, following the life of the saint and its development after his early years, moving from place to place through Paris, Venice, Rome and Lisbon, till about a third of the way through he lands him in India and the City of Goa.

## Task

Francis saw his task as one of converting as many people as he could to the Christian faith – it was later said he converted more people than St Paul.

But he would baptise them and then move briskly onto the next place, moving ever eastward. He would leave others to undertake the more difficult task of building a Christian community in the distant shores of Asia. Francis called at so many places it is also like

leaving through the pages of Marco Polo.

His great goal was China and then Japan. He worked in China, but there the greater task was left to others such as Matteo Ricci, 'the wise man from the West'. In China the Jesuits adopted the dress and status of mandarins – it was the surest way for a teacher to get a hearing.

China, of course, had heard the name of Christ first from Nestorian monks who had crossed the continent of Asia to reach the Imperial Court at Peking. They were 'imperfect Christians' – somehow in the mind of Renaissance Catholics they did not count.

**“He became known as ‘the Apostle of the Far East’, that is to say China and Japan”**

But then on though the islands of Malaysia, from which so much of Europe's spices had come for centuries. And finally the way was open to Japan but the saint died without reaching that final goal on the offshore island of Sancian (now called Sangchuan) here he died in a hut that was not his own on December 3, 1552, a full decade after he had first arrived in the Indies.

The news was brought to Ignatius and the other Jesuits in Europe. Soon a popu-

lar devotion began, leading to reports of miracles and favours granted, and eventually to his canonisation. He was beatified on October 25, 1619, and canonised on March 12, 1622. He became known as 'the Apostle of the Far East', that is to say China and Japan.

Though Xavier failed, others eventually brought Christianity to Japan. The experiences of those early Japanese Christians, which recreated the Church of the martyrs, was evoked by the Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo, himself a Catholic, in his novel *Silence* (1966).

But writing this review there came into my mind the recollection of the Japanese Christian that Nikos Kazantzakis encountered on a voyage to the Far East in 1935. This elderly man, Kawayana San, fascinated the novelist, who could not understand what the appeal of Christianity was for the Japanese soul.

## Sacrifice

His new friend explained to him that, in contrast to Shinto or Buddhism, Christianity was based on the concept of sacrifice. That was something that the long centuries of Japanese culture understood very well. This cross-cultural encounter is described in the novelist's *Travels in China and Japan* (1964). Xavier, too, if he had landed in Japan, would have shared that

understanding of sacrifice.

**“He repeatedly makes the rash statement in his correspondence that an unbaptised adult is going to hell”**

Brendan Comerford is alert to the often dismaying nature of the heroic virtue of the saints. But in Xavier he finds aspects of imperfection that make him more human. He was headstrong and often imperious; he would not take advice, as Ignatius counselled those in a leadership role should do.

Also he is dismayed by Xavier's theological failings. It seems that on those continuous travels he never opened a book. Moreover, Comerford writes, "Xavier's too-quick theological formation in Paris was very unfortunate. His theology concerning the salvation of the unbaptised was woefully inadequate. He repeatedly makes the rash statement in his correspondence that an unbaptised adult is going to hell."

But then again, he was always cheerful in what must often have been conditions of great solitude and extreme loneliness when he completely lacked the support of comrades.

Altogether then a remarkable man, of whom Brendan Comerford gives a kindly and admiring appraisal. A book perhaps on which to begin what may well be a very trying year for us all.

## Tributes to some of the great and the good

Sean Lemass, creator of modern Ireland, from a painting by Maurice McGonigal.



**Homage: A Salute to Fifty Memorable Minds,** by John Quinn (Veritas, €24.99 / £22.00)

TP O'Mahony

Tim Pat Coogan, my former boss as editor of the Irish Press, singles out in his book *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, Sean Lemass and TK Whitaker as "hinge" figures between the "old" and the "new" Irelands that emerged in the early 1960s.

Lemass, one of the original architects of the Fianna Fáil policy of protectionism, had the insight to see that it wasn't working, and the courage to do something about it.

Whitaker in the Department of Finance supplied the means (a blueprint) by which the then Taoiseach could embark on a new departure. They were key shapers of the Ireland we live in today.

Lemass, who died in May 1971 at the age of 71, features only indirectly in this excellent collection of interview-profiles, having been chosen by Tony O'Reilly as one of his "heroes".

O'Reilly's contribution here comes from a 1987 radio series 'Heroes and Heroines', in which a guest spoke about three people they greatly admired (O'Reilly's other choices were Winston Churchill and Stephen Roche).

The former owner of Independent Newspapers was unstinting in his praise of Lemass: "If de Valera looked after what he considered to be the spiritual soul of his country, it was Lemass who knew that, essentially, bread had to be put on the table and he did it in a creative, open-minded, pragmatic way".

John Quinn, a former RTÉ broadcaster, pays homage to 50 people from various fields – the arts, education, politics, business, science and economics – so his book contains a rich mixture of material to savour and learn from.

Of the 50 personalities fea-

tured readers will have their own favourites. I was fortunate to meet some of them – two of which meetings were chance encounters on a train; Edna O'Brien on the Cork-Dublin express (she boarded at Limerick Junction with her son, Carlo Gebler), and the other with Seamus Heaney on the Dublin to Belfast train (I was getting off in Drogheda, he was going on to Dundalk to talk about a teaching job, and I still regret the fact that I never made notes afterwards).

I would meet Edna for a second time when she attended a dinner (arranged by her publisher) in Cork with a group of journalists who had covered the Kerry Babies Tribunal in 1984. We spent an entertaining evening with a charming woman whose beauty back then was still undimmed by time.

I particularly enjoyed the interview with Denis Donoghue, one of the world's foremost scholars of modern literature, who from an early age developed the habit of writing down words that struck him as interesting.

"No one told me what the difference was between good writing and bad writing. I kept lists and would write down words that I came across in my reading which were unfamiliar to me."

It was a habit I developed myself, though my self-learning was put to poor use alongside the achievements of Prof. Donoghue. Still, I found a certain reassurance in his admission that, prior to going to university, he was "largely self-taught".

What is surprising, or I should say disappointing, about the selection of 50 'memorable minds' chosen by John Quinn is the absence from it of any senior Church figure, whether bishop or prominent theologian – this surprising given the central role played by the Catholic Church in 20th century Ireland. That is a thought worth pondering.



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Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 648

Across

1 Dish comprising a set of cutlets presented together (4,2,4)  
6 Demonstrate (4)  
10 Capital on the Seine (5)  
11 Active in the night time (9)  
12 Turn down an offer (7)  
15 Remains (5)  
17 Soap bubbles (4)  
18 Solemn vow (4)  
19 Young eel (5)  
21 Rested on or in water (7)  
23 Curt (5)  
24 On a single occasion (4)  
25 Female relative (4)  
26 With which to secure one plate of metal to another (5)  
28 Epic poem by Homer (7)  
33 Common weed (9)  
34 Pavarotti was such a singer (5)  
35 Always, at any time (4)  
36 The first humans in the Bible (4,3,3)

Down

1 Mature, ready for picking (4)  
2 The trade of St Joseph (9)  
3 Variety of thrush (5)  
4 Material made from flax (5)  
5 Jeer, make fun of (4)  
7 Red hair-dye (5)  
8 New York business area (4,6)  
9 Estimated (7)  
13 Statue that is adored by heathens (4)  
14 Coarse variety of grass (7)  
16 Structure that facilitates pedestrians to cross a river, etc (10)  
20 Retribution (9)  
21 Plume (7)  
22 Simple (4)  
27 Location suitable for certain events (5)  
29 Material used in making jeans (5)  
30 The Devil (5)  
31 Gale or breeze (4)  
32 Gratis (4)

1		2		3		4		5			6	7		8
										9				
10						11								
	12				13		14			15				
16							17							
18										19		20		
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23											24			
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26		27					28	29		30				
						31								32
33										34				
35						36								

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 25

GORDIUS No. 646

Across - 1 Wallflower 6 Trap 10 Demon 11 Archangel 12 Started 15 Inter 17 Ebro 18 Apex 19 Claim 21 Vanilla 23 Ensue 24 Sing 25 Twin 26 Rifle 28 Threats 33 Coriander 34 Fatal 35 Side 36 Bad manners

Down - 1 Wade 2 Limitless 3 Finer 4 Orate 5 Each 7 Right 8 Pilgrimage 9 Tapioca 13 Tuba 14 Defiant 16 Make tracks 20 Aristotle 21 Veteran 22 Lair 27 Fired 29 Harem 30 Elfin 31 Idea 32 Plus

Sudoku Corner

518

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 517

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

Last week's Hard 517

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



# Confirmation: A ‘dead duck’ or powerful fire?

In last week’s notebook, Fr Bernard Cotter raised some interesting questions about the Sacrament of Confirmation [The Irish Catholic – January 25, 2024]. His reflections followed on from a recent meeting with parents of the candidates for Confirmation and parish personnel. The meeting seemed to lack any enthusiasm from the parents to such an extent that the person who chaired the meeting commented that the Sacrament of Confirmation was a ‘dead duck’. Fr Bernard asked in his column: “I wonder if the experience of other parishes has been similar?”

I am glad to report that a recent meeting with Confirmation parents in our parish went better than I expected. The teachers spoke, as I did as the priest of the parish, but it was something the principal said that caught the attention of the parents. She put it like this: “What unites us all here is our deep desire that the children stay on the right path. We – the teachers and the parish community – commit ourselves to helping you guide your children on this right path and away from the path that leads to destruction, sadness and despair.”

Specific examples of these dangers were named – drugs, pornog-

raphy, violence and gambling to name just a few. When the principal used this language of guidance along the right path and avoidance of the wrong path, a silence fell on the room. It struck a chord with the parents who obviously worry about their children and the dangers they are now exposed to. The conversation then followed about how the Sacrament of Confirmation and the preparation for it is precisely about leading our young people along the right path and keeping them there. We then went on to link the Confirmation pledge and the Spirit’s gift of courage to helping the young people say ‘No’ to certain things in order to say ‘Yes’ to something even greater. We connected the image of the right path to the image Jesus used of being ‘the Way’ and how we are called to be followers of ‘the Way’ of Christian discipleship.

The pleasant surprise about this meeting is that this connection with the parents and their deepest wish that their children be protected and cared for, emerged almost by accident, a surprise of the Holy Spirit. Like Fr Bernard, I too had concerns about meeting a group of parents who felt under duress to attend a meeting about something they had little interest in. Yet by the end of

the meeting, there was agreement among the teachers and parish personnel that it was one of the best parents’ meetings in a while. So perhaps all is not lost. Maybe Confirmation is not a ‘dead duck’ after all but a powerful fire that provides the wisdom, courage, truth and light that are so badly needed in our time. When we propose the gift of the Holy Spirit as helping families keep their children on the right path, we are pushing an open door.

## The mercy of St Brigid

There are so many stories and lives of St Brigid that it is difficult to talk with any degree of certainty about who she was. All the more reason to pay closer attention to the earliest surviving hagiography of Brigit that was written by the Kildare monk Cogitosus (c. 620-680), within 150 years of her death. In his account, Brigid is portrayed consistently as compassionate and merciful. She is a woman of charity “to the poor and to wayfarers...having given all away to the poor”. On one occasion when a man had suffered a grave injustice, we are told she was “moved with pity...filled with deep grief for the unfortunate man who had been unfairly condemned”. Cogito-



sus speaks of “the excellence of her holiness”, “her marvellous hospitality” and how “no poor person left her presence empty-handed”. He also writes of her charity and kindness to lepers and animals. The fruit of Brigid’s witness to mercy was unity. In his prologue to *The Life of Brigid*, Cogitosus refers to “this woman who drew to herself from all the provinces of Ireland inestimable numbers of people of both sexes”. All were “filled with admiration for the girl who was incomparable in her faith and in the merit of her good works” and that “people were drawn to her from all parts by the great fame of her vir-

tue and exceeding generosity”. Therefore, amid all the legends and myths, in the real St Brigid we find an outstanding example of a woman of mercy who drew people together and invited them to faith in the merciful Christ.



## A bishop in southern India looks to The Little Way Association for vital aid for many suffering from flooding

Bishop Antonysam of Palayamkottai in south-east India has written to The Little Way Association in the aftermath of severe floods which have ravaged parts of Tamil Nadu including his diocese. He says “Many groups of people, including expectant mothers, children, the disabled, aged and sick have been left in a state of acute distress. Many have lost their employment and daily wages, significantly affecting their food security and health. Households have been particularly badly-hit, losing essential items such as cooking vessels, clothing, livestock, and more.

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“These people are struggling to meet their basic needs. I reach out to you, on behalf of all our people, to request your compassionate response to my appeal for funds to be used for food supplies, protective clothing, blankets, and nutritional supplements. Our Social Service Society will implement the relief work and are well-equipped to bring relief to those most in need.

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Sadly, the mother of these three children has lost her husband. Her home has been severely damaged in the flood, leaving her in a dire situation.



“I rejoice to be little, because only children and those who are like them will be admitted to the heavenly banquet.”

- St Therese

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