

# The Irish Catholic

## POLITICAL ELITE MUST LISTEN AND NOT MARGINALISE

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## SMARTPHONES ARE ERODING THE BEAUTY OF CHILDHOOD

Breda O'Brien & Wendy Grace  
Pages 7 & 28

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# Veritas a 'huge loss'

Ruadhán Jones and Chai Brady

Publishers and authors have described the announcement that Veritas, the publishing arm of the Irish bishops' conference, is to wind down this year with the loss of 80 jobs as a "huge loss".

A "sustained business downturn" forced the hand of the bishops' conference, and the board made the "deeply regrettable" decision to wind down its operations as a restructuring process wouldn't "mitigate the challenges or sufficiently improve the commercial prospects of the business", Mr Queenan, Chairman of the Board said in a statement.

"Veritas is a part of the furniture in religious publications, it's really iconic, I think it's a shame... an enormous loss" author and social justice activist Fr Peter McVerry said responding to the news.

The closure is a "sad day" for the Church in Ireland and religious publishing, according to the publisher of Columba Books (also publisher of this paper) Garry O'Sullivan.

"Religious publishing was stronger when Veritas were involved and their offerings complemented the books that we publish and the newspapers we print," he said.

"The Church in Ireland is at a critical phase, we're transitioning slowly to a more lay-led Church, we need to cherish our current priests but we also need to replace them for a sustainable future Church and we need laity to step into new ministries in parishes in every diocese.

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## A Baptism down by the 'Bay'



Parents Conor and Sarah O'Dwyer celebrate the Baptism of baby Tadhg with Fr Aquinas Duffy in Our Lady Star of the Sea Church Brittas Bay, Co. Wicklow.

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# Parishes tackle 'significant challenge' identifying Catholic foster carers

**Ruadhán Jones**

Parishes and dioceses across the North are promoting foster care as the Health & Social Care Northern Ireland (HSCNI) has warned of "significant challenges" in identifying families from a Catholic background willing to foster or adopt children.

Some 45% of children in care are from a Catholic background, but there are not enough carers to meet their needs, the HSCNI have said.

Almost 4,000 children are in

care as of March 2023 – with 3,140 in foster care – the highest levels since the North's care act was introduced in 1995.

Given the lack of Catholic foster families, the HSCNI has partnered with the Church "to reach and recruit carers to reflect their identity", according to a joint statement to *The Irish Catholic* from Armagh archdiocese director of safeguarding Aidan Gordon and the HSCNI's Northern Trust recruitment coordinator Marie McTaggart.

The HSCNI is promoting links

with Catholic foster families so that children can maintain a sense of identity and faith through a connection to a local Catholic community, as well knowledge of Sacraments/Sacramental preparation.

The HSCNI are giving "specific consideration to the needs of Catholic children in the care system", Mr Gordon and Ms McTaggart said.

Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin has encouraged Catholic families to consider "opening their hearts and homes" to foster chil-

dren, as the Church seeks to promote the option.

"Unfortunately there are times when there are no available spaces left for foster care placements," the archbishop said in a letter to clergy of Armagh and Dromore.

"That is why I'm encouraging you today to reach out and support HSC NI Foster Care and to help find new families who may have some space and time in their lives to come forward and consider fostering.

"There are many struggles and

challenges which lead to children and young people requiring foster care: sometimes material poverty and hardship; or parental struggles due to relationship difficulties or addictions," he finished.

Fostering teams spoke at Masses across the North in January.

Mr Gordon and Ms McTaggart said "these partnerships will continue to work together to develop foster families in which Catholic children will continue to reflect and strengthen their sense of faith and identity".

## Veritas a 'huge loss'

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"This calls for a huge shift and it all involves communications and training and education. That's what Veritas was set up to do so there's a large hole opening up when they are gone."

He added: "Columba books is willing to assist the management of Veritas at this time and if parts of the business can be saved, we're open to seeing what we can do.

"I think a smaller Veritas might be salvageable, but I'm not privy to the internal accounts and workings of the business and I don't want to give false hope but if some shops and jobs can be saved, we should all look at that and see what can be done working together for the good of the broader Church in Ireland."

The director of Kildare-based publisher St Pauls, Fr Shinto Thomas Veleparambil of the Society of St Paul, told this paper the news is "really shocking".

"Veritas had established a very good relationship with the Catholic population across Ireland and they have been very good in supplying books, statues and any of those religious goods, and now all of a sudden they are going to shut down – it is really shocking," he said.

"When we look from the customer's point of view it is a saddening thing. I am also saddened to hear that it is going to close down."

The Irish bishops said all those affected by the closure are in their thoughts and prayers.

"We understand that Veritas has made this very difficult decision following a number of years of challenging trading conditions, but today's announcement brings especially sad news for Veritas employees as well as the many customers and friends of Veritas throughout the country and beyond," the bishops said in a statement.

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## Temperance Sunday



Students from St Joseph's Mercy Secondary School, Navan, filled the RTÉ studios with song on Sunday, as Fr Robert McCabe celebrated Mass for Temperance Sunday on February 12.

## Youth sex assaults show pornography's corruption – bishop

**Chai Brady**

The biggest danger to young people in terms of sexual abuse comes from their classmates, not "dirty old men around the corner", Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry diocese has warned.

Speaking on the Breaking Bread Catholic podcast, the bishop cited an analysis by the National Police Chiefs Council in England and Wales, released last week.

It found that 106,984 child sexual abuse offences were

reported in 2022 across all 42 police forces. Bishop McKeown highlighted that 52% involved reports of children (aged 10-17) offending against other children, with 14 being the most common age.

In the report the police blamed smartphone ownership, which allows young people to send nude photos and access hardcore pornography.

"We actually have so corrupted many of our young people in terms of pornography and so on that the biggest danger... comes from their

classmates, not dirty old men around the corner," Bishop McKeown said.

"That sort of level of cultural demeaning of human relationships, of self-respect, of ever hoping to be able to be master of who you are... to be integrated within yourself, that's been removed

from young people."

He added: "Jesus wants to say, 'you know you can do wonderful things with your life, you're not a prisoner of the past, you're not a prisoner of what's happened to you, or where you've been, or what you've done'... Jesus has a dream for you."

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# 'Step up' NI politicians and promote Catholics joining police says Supt

**Chai Brady**

Politicians in the North of Ireland must work against people stuck in the "dark ages" who want to stop Catholics joining the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), a superintendent has insisted.

The recent restoration of the North's Assembly is "reassuring" for communities, the Chair of the Catholic Police Guild of Northern Ireland, Superintendent Gerry Murray told *The Irish*

*Catholic*, who added there are "mammoth tasks to be taken on" including recruitment issues.

"What the Catholic Guild is looking for is for all our politicians to step up to the mark with regards to police recruitment and specifically coming from the Catholic, nationalist, Republican backgrounds – but we have a long way to go," Supt Murray said.

Currently less than a third of PSNI officers are Catholic, with just over a quarter (26.4%) being born in North-

ern Ireland. Supt Murray warned that since a PSNI data leak last summer, which saw private details of more than 10,000 staff made public, the recruitment situation has got worse.

He said that "one of the reasons the Catholic Police Guild was formed was to support the senior executive team within the PSNI with regards to recruitment".

"At the moment with regards to young Catholics coming forward, nationalist politicians need to support

not only the young nationalists, Catholics coming forward but the families who are left behind because there are some people who are still in the dark ages with regards to violence," he said.

"There are people within communities that wish to do violence against the PSNI and to stop normalisation, ie. the recruiting of young Catholics, nationalists, republicans into the police service."

This comes following First Minister Michelle O'Neill's decision to attend a PSNI graduation last week. It was the first time a Sinn Féin politician has attended such an event.

Supt Murray described it as "a significant step for a First Minister that is coming from a republican background".

He added: "It will give us a platform to encourage young Catholics into the Police Service of Northern Ireland."

# Education minister plans national survey to test waters for divestment

**Ruadhán Jones**

The Department for Education is planning a national survey of parents of primary and pre-school age children to test the waters for divestment in the primary sector.

This paper understands the survey on school ethos is slated to take place in March, with the department saying it wants a "strong process that has the support of patrons and local communities".

"A significant amount of work has been done by the department on the scope, logistics and practical arrangements for a survey of primary schools in rela-

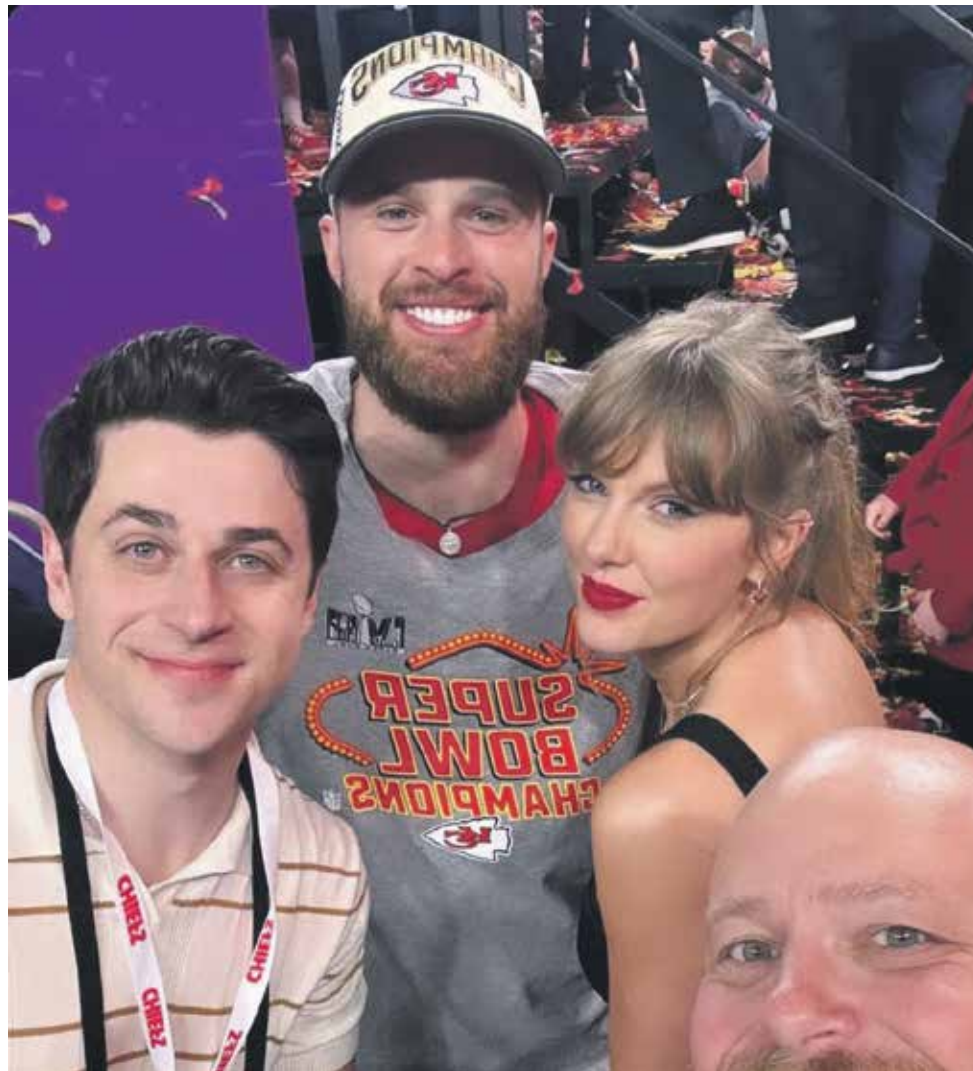
tion to reconfiguration," a department spokesperson told *The Irish Catholic*.

A pilot reconfiguration programme took place in 2022 and 2023, with sources indicating to this paper that it showed a majority support retaining the Catholic ethos of their local schools.

Just two schools, Cornamaddy National School in Athlone and St. Enda's Primary School in Whitefriar Street, Dublin 8, transferred from Catholic patronage to the local Education and Training Board.

The department said a review of the pilot scheme will be published early this year.

# Taylor Swift's traditional Catholic Super Bowl



**Jason Osborne**

Speculation has been stirred about pop-superstar Taylor Swift's Catholic future after she was pictured celebrating at the recent Super Bowl with two celebrity Catholics.

Ms Swift was pictured alongside Kansas City Chiefs' faithful kicker, Harrison Butker, as well as devout Disney actor, David Henrie. Both men are famously outspoken about their

adherence to traditional Catholic practice.

Ms Swift's new boyfriend, Travis Kelce, is one of the stars of the Super Bowl winning Kansas City Chiefs and so has become a regular at their fixtures, causing many to wonder whether she'll be influenced by the Catholic examples in their orbit.

Ms Swift describes herself as a Christian, having been raised in the Tennessee 'Bible belt' in the US.



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# Europe encouraged to do more than talk for suffering Nigeria

**Jason Osborne**

A Nigerian priest living in Ireland has welcomed the European Parliament's adoption of a resolution condemning violence targeting Christians in Nigeria that took place over Christmas but has said that action rather than words is needed.

Athlone-based Fr Innocent

Sunu of the diocese of Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria said that while he welcomes the international attention that a European condemnation of the violence brings, "we are left on our own to survive on our own...they [the European Parliament] do not do anything."

"They just leave us and then we're hanging on our

own to survive," Fr Sunu said. The attacks condemned by the European Parliament were carried out by gunmen on more than 160 villages in Nigeria's Plateau State, which resulted in the deaths of over 335 people, including at least 200 members of Christian communities, between December 23 and 25 2023.

"The politicians need to go

and see the destruction and the devastation caused by enemies of Christianity and enemies of good-living people...it's not about discussing what's happening in parliament or taking tea and coffee, it's about seeing your brother and sister and ensuring that things go well for them," Fr Sunu told *The Irish Catholic* newspaper.

Meanwhile, another Nigerian priest, Cavan-based Fr Yusuf Bamai, said that the complexity of the issues Nigeria is facing needs to be understood if they're to be combatted effectively.

"The situation is very delicate and complicated that sometimes, one has to be very careful in describing as a religious situation. The both

sides of religion [Christian and Muslim] are affected," Fr Bamai said.

"The truth of the matter is that we have a serious security problem, we have a political problem, we have also an economic problem. All of these factors contribute to making the crisis or the situation very complicated."

# Accord prepared 7,262 couples for Marriage across Ireland in 2023

**Brandon Scott**

New data from Accord, the agency of the Irish bishops' conference concerned with supporting the sacrament of marriage, shows that 7,262 couples were prepared for the Sacrament of marriage across

the island of Ireland in 2023, and the figure for 2022 was 7,470 couples.

At the annual blessing of the rings of engaged couples at the Shrine of St Valentine in Whitefriar Street Church on Monday, Bishop Denis Nulty, President of Accord, launched Accord's new mar-

riage preparation course, saying to engaged couples that he welcomes "all of you to the Shrine of Saint Valentine here in Whitefriar Street Church, in the heart of Dublin. Accord realises that, while our new marriage programme offers a significant pathway of preparation for couples, there will

always be a need for other supports."

The new Accord programme takes account of changes in society and couple's relationship expectations over the last 20 years. It incorporates the most up-to-date psychological understanding of what makes

relationships happy and fulfilling, while the Church's understanding of the nature of Sacramental marriage is clearly laid out and its spirituality is woven throughout the programme units.

In 2023, 32 people under the age of 21 were married in the Catholic Church along with 1,095 in the 21-30 age bracket, 2,262 in the 31-40 bracket and 278 in the 41-50 bracket.



At the shrine of St Valentine in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church Whitefriar St Dublin Bishop Denis Nulty Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin and President of Accord CLG blessed engaged couples Sinead O' Connor from Newbridge and Darren Larkin from Blessington along with Siobhan O' Shaughnessy from Cork and Kieran Davey from Dublin. Photo: John Mc Elroy

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Bishop Cullinan extends support to community after tragic death of young boy

Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore extended his support to the local community of Dunmore East in Co. Waterford after the tragic death of 6 year-old Matthew Purcell-Healy, whose body was found in a car in the early hours of last Thursday. Gardaí are currently probing if the schoolboy died by suffocation.

Inviting all members of the community to join in solidarity and support during this difficult time, Bishop Cullinan said: "The loss of a young life is a profound tragedy that deeply affects us all. As a community, it is important for us to come together in prayer and reflection to offer comfort and strength to the family and friends of the young boy who has left us too soon".

### Two deceased Jesuits named in Marmion abuse record

The narrative record, Fr Joseph Marmion SJ: His Abuse, the harm caused and Jesuit accountability, published on February 8 by the Irish Jesuit Order references Fr Paul Andrews SJ as being the subject of a complaint of child sexual abuse in 1991. This complaint was repeated in 1994. Fr Andrews had an important role in the story of Jesuit failures in relation to Joseph Marmion SJ. He was the person to whom was made, in September 1977 the first known disclosure that Fr Marmion had sexually abused children.

Fr Andrews was Director of St Declan's Special School from 1977 until the end of 1994. The Jesuit Order said it is necessary and right to communicate that another deceased Jesuit, Fr Dermot Casey SJ, who was Fr Andrews' predecessor as director at the school (1958-1977), has been the subject of 17 complaints of child sexual abuse. These complaints were received during the period 1975 to 2023 and relate to events dating from the 1950's through to 1977.

# 'Very difficult' for assisted dying committee to compile report

**Staff reporter**

It will be "very, very difficult" for the assisted dying committee to reach a unanimous position, the chair of the committee TD Michael Healy-Rae has said.

Mr Healy-Rae acknowledged that it might be impossible to agree on a unanimous position.

The committee held its last public meeting on Tuesday and its 14 members will now draft their final report, due to be published on March 20.

Committee member Senator Rónán Mullen said he hoped his fellow committee members will heed the "overwhelming feedback of medical people and especially those involved in the provision of palliative care", the majority of whom oppose the introduction of assisted suicide legislation.

"No credible medical representatives want a change in the law here, only a small and very unrepresentative group of activist doctors," Senator Mullen said.

He warned that changing the law to legalise assisted suicide is "fraught with dangers and difficulties", particularly for how it will affect the most vulnerable in society.



# Fasting is now the height of fashion

Just recently, Rishi Sunak, the British Prime Minister, spoke publicly about his weekly habit of fasting. He fasts for 36 hours each week, eating nothing between 5pm on a Sunday evening and 5 am on a Tuesday morning. (He drinks only black coffee and water during this period.) Rishi is a Hindu, and he made it clear that he undertakes this fast for religious reasons.

On foot of this disclosure, the health gurus rushed out information about how wonderful fasting is for



Mary Kenny

mental and physical health. You may, for example, choose a 12-hour fast, a 16-hour fast, a 24-hour or a 36-hour.

## Celebrities

Music celebrities such as Bruce Springsteen and Chris Martin regularly fast. Research is showing that fasting reduces chronic illnesses such

as inflammation and diabetes, and may stave off Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's.

One such guru, Steve Hendricks, author of *The Oldest Cure in the World: Adventures in the Art and Science of Fasting* claims going without food tackles epilepsy, hypertension, asthma and diabetes.

Fasting "re-sets" and

"repairs" the cellular system. It also brings mental health benefits.

## Trick

At this point I'm beginning to wonder – not for the first time – if the Catholic Church missed a trick by diminishing, almost to the point of erasure, the old rules about fasting, both as a preparation for Holy Communion, and as a practice in Lent and Advent.

As I so seldom hear anything about the fasting guidelines these days, I asked a priest to spell them out for me. "As far as I know," he said, "Ash

Wednesday and Good Friday are the only two days of Fasting and Abstinence. Anything else is voluntary." And many people are not expected to follow these regulations, and there is no enforcement.

The Irish were zealous practitioners of fasting back in the day: anxious questions about the exact times for fasting were a regular feature to the popular magazine *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, up to the middle years of the 20th Century. Country people would walk miles to early Mass on an empty stomach – fasting strictly from midnight.

These rules were relaxed,

or almost set aside, because they seemed so austere. And also because it was deemed better to suggest a voluntary choice rather than an authoritarian obligation.

## Centuries

But now it turns out that fasting is something natural that people have done for centuries, and are drawn to doing. A challenging discipline is something that many people find rewarding.

Psychologically, it seems the Church has missed out on maintaining a practice which has returned as the height of fashion.

**"I'm beginning to wonder – not for the first time – if the Catholic Church missed a trick by diminishing, almost to the point of erasure, the old rules about fasting, both as a preparation for Holy Communion, and as a practice in Lent and Advent"**

John Bruton was such an admirable person – and, as a political leader, he brought honour and esteem to Ireland – that I now feel remorseful for having distressed him back in 2016.

I was taking part in a radio discussion about Brexit, and, being familiar with areas of England where there was a strong Brexit vote, I was explaining that point of view.

But because I'm such a terrible woman for getting argumentative, I probably overstated the Brexit case – how fishermen from an island nation felt cheated and

impoverished by EU regulations, and how some voters just felt strongly about the question of national sovereignty.

"Ah, Mary, please," John remonstrated with me so gently, "don't be promoting Brexit." You could tell that he felt, quite personally, that the cause of Europe was important to him, and he believed Brexit was a great blow to Irish-British relations.

He was in many respects right – Brexit has caused no end of problems between Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain. Much more vexatious bureaucracy has been put in place for trade and

movements of goods – I have met with stinging charges and levies myself when moving personal possessions between Ireland and Britain.

But John was a very forgiving man, according to his lifelong friend, the obituarist Charles Lysaght, and I hope he forgave the exchange.

I saw him subsequently at a pro-life event where he spoke so caringly, so sensitively, and so sincerely about his commitment to the unborn child. An unusual politician, and a person of great integrity.

## 'Trolley dollies'



Fintan O'Toole in *The Irish Times* informed his readers recently that Irishwomen serving with Aer Lingus were disadvantaged because of the State's "marriage bar" which forbade air hostesses to wed.

He blamed the 'woman in the home' Constitutional clause for such discrimination against Irishwomen.

But I shared a London flat with four BOAC stewardesses (great fun!) and the British airlines also then insisted

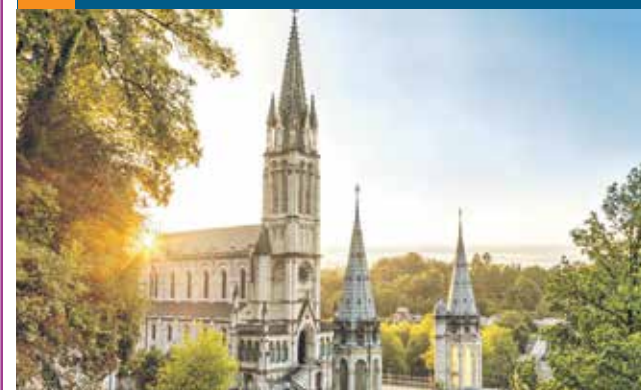
women be unmarried, under 26, and over 5 foot 6 inches tall.

The same bar against stewardesses being married applied in all the major airlines until the 1980s. Airlines even had the deliberate idea

of hiring attractive girls who would adorn the airline as 'trolley dollies'.

There was no 'Constitutional clause' driving the employment policies of the British Overseas Airways Corporation.

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# Dominicans celebrate 800 years of prayerful presence in Ireland

Jason Osborne

**T**he Master of the Dominican Order was in Dublin on Sunday to help commemorate the eighth centenary of the arrival of the Dominican Order in Ireland.

In 1224, three years after the death of their founder, St Dominic, and nearly eight years after the foundation of the Order in 1216, twelve members travelled from Oxford to Dublin, setting up a priory on the north bank of the Liffey where the Four Courts now stand.

There are now 125 Dominicans in Ireland, of whom 17 are young men currently in formation.

"Today, we thank the Lord for the gift of 800 years of Dominican presence and preaching here in Ireland. Mercy and compassion moved Jesus to do miracles. Mercy and compassion prompted the friars to venture to places far and near to preach Jesus, the Light of the world, lumen gentium, to accompany people so that, with the light of Christ, they may overcome what St Thomas Aquinas calls the twofold darkness of ignorance and sin," Fr Gerard Francisco Timoner, OP, told the hundreds in attendance at St Saviour's Priory on Dominick Street in the heart of Dublin city.

"Thanks to God's unending grace, our Dominican confreres brought and continue to bring the Gospel to countless persons here in Ireland and beyond this beautiful island. It is tempting to think that your endurance and growth as a province concretely indicates how much God loves you. To a significant sense, that is true. But the number of friars and the thousands of people you serve are an indication of how God provides, i.e. foresees, not your needs, but the needs of the Church and the world.

"The past 800 years are a manifestation of Divine providence, of how God provides for his people. God cares for you, God cares for his people through you," he said.



Dominican choir singing at the mass on Sunday to celebrate the 800 years of the Dominican Order in Ireland. Photos: John McElroy.



Dominicans passing a newly unveiled painting by artist William Nathans commemorating the arrival of the first Dominicans in Dublin in 1224.



Ceann Comhairle of Dail Eireann Sean O' Fearghail at the mass on Sunday.



A newly unveiled painting by artist William Nathans commemorating the arrival of the first Dominicans in Dublin in 1224 is viewed by Fr Gerard Francisco Timoner OP Master of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) and artist William Nathans.



Brother John Melvin, Brother Joseph Mary McGinty and Brother Philip Neri Mather (Dominicans).



Mary Clare O' Fearghail, Stephanie Enright, Fr John Harris, Gerard Enright and Geraldine Buckley.



Sr Mara Rose OP, Michael Kelly and Ger Gallagher.



## Breda O'Brien

### The View



# Pushback needed against smartphones which are eroding childhoods

**M**ost parents and grandparents will be horrified at the recent headlines declaring that almost a quarter of six-year-olds have their own smartphones. Given the prevalence and ease of access to internet porn, this seems crazy.

Some 30 years ago, a friend was horrified when her daughter was conducting an internet search for pictures of the Mona Lisa and was instead directed to porn sites. (No, I have no idea what the link is, either, and no desire to find out.)

Worrying as the online porn world is, with its casual misogyny and depiction of violent sexual practices like strangulation as normal, other issues are not so obvious but should also concern us.

As a teacher, since the introduction of the first iPhone and Android smartphones in 2007, I have seen a dramatic decrease in both attention spans and everyday vocabulary. There is also a large increase in anxiety and depression among teens.

### Screens

It seems too great a coincidence that it is not at least in part caused by being constantly buried in screens.

Even babies are using their parents' mobile phones. For example, a Canadian study six years ago found that by their 18-month check-ups, of a sample of 894 children, "20% of the children had daily average handheld device use of 28 minutes, according to their parents".

The more time a toddler spends with a handheld screen, the more likely they will have delays in expressing themselves verbally.

Given that self-reported time tends to be under-

reported concerning anything perceived by society as negative, probably toddlers are being handed phones as soothers for far longer than 28 minutes a day. Anyone who has seen a small child trying to swipe a magazine or pinch a picture to zoom in on it will know that far from being cute, it is an indicator of too much time spent with screens.

Of course, it is not just phones. Your child may not have a smartphone but if they have access to an iPad or other tablet, to a gaming console or even a laptop, they run the same risks.

**“On public transport, I have often seen babies and toddlers in buggies gamely trying to attract their parents' attention but failing miserably”**

There is also research emerging about the deleterious effect on children of their parents' smartphone usage. Children learn to relate to the world primarily through their parents acting as reliable and responsive communication partners. It helps a child to develop not only essential communication skills but also a solid sense of being valuable.

If parents are buried in a smartphone or other device, they miss so many essential cues. On public transport, I have often seen babies and toddlers in buggies gamely trying to attract their parents' attention but failing miserably. Some will immediately start to grizzle or complain. Other children just give up. The latter is more worrying as it indi-

cates that the child no longer expects consistent caregiver attention.

As for the amount of online bullying from middle childhood onwards, it is truly appalling. About ten years ago, I intercepted a communication to one of my teenage students, which was so filled with casual swearing and threats that I was shocked at the level of bullying.

The recipient said comfortingly, "You are more concerned about it than I am. That is just the way all young people talk to each other nowadays. It's not so bad".

It is tragic that such abusive language is normalised.

What are parents to do, aside from modelling better behaviour themselves and using their own smartphones less? They need to band together. There are heartening reports of primary schools around the country implementing voluntary smartphone bans, where parents are encouraged not to buy a smartphone for a child until secondary school.

However, the parents who do not comply affect every other child who comes in contact with their children. Some parents heroically resist buying a smartphone for their children but the children just hang over the shoulders of friends who are using them.

### Pouches

It is still better than letting them have their own. At post-primary level, many schools use Yondr pouches, a device that is also used at concerts. You put your phone into a bag that snaps closed like the tags on clothes in shops. The young people carry the pouches and there are sanctions for being found using a phone. There are stations to open the pouches at the end of the day.

Of course, creative young people do things like partially slitting the base of the bag so that they can still access their phones, or bring two phones to school, but it does dramatically reduce phone usage during the school day.

These are good initiatives, but more is needed. We have allowed commercial interests to erode our children's childhood. Until there is a concerted societal pushback against this, we are simply being like King Canute, vainly trying to hold back the tide.



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**“What are parents to do, aside from modelling better behaviour themselves and using their own smartphones less? They need to band together”**



# Dismissing people as racists and dog whistlers will push them to the far-right



Ireland is not full, but public services are creaking and the political elite will fuel community strife if it doesn't listen, writes **Michael Kelly**

There's a now iconic scene in the 1990s hit sitcom *Father Ted* where, after a series of mishaps and misunderstandings, the eponymous Fr Ted Crilly finds himself accused of being hostile towards newcomers to Craggy Island. "I hear you're a racist now, Father!" one parishioner shouts, in a bid to lend support, much to the cleric's obvious embarrassment.

Fr Crilly spent the rest of the episode over-compensating and welcoming all comers in a bid rehabilitate his reputation, even going so far as to show a video filled with subliminal messaging showing pictures of himself with the caption: "Fr Ted Crilly – definitely not a racist."

Looking back, the scene is hilarious, but 25 years on it also shows that the writers captured something of how destructive it is to have oneself wrongly and unfairly considered a racist.

## Assumption

The current debate on immigration is full of false assumption. Terms like racist, fascist, Nazi and far-right are thrown out at will in order to silence debates. It's a bit like the famous question in politics, "have you stopped beating your wife?"

Whether you answer 'yes' or 'no', you admit to having beaten your wife at some time in the past. In other words, the facts are presupposed by the question and form an entrap-

ment, because it narrows the respondent to a single answer.

Politicians in Ireland are adept at turning everything into a black and white choice worthy of Santa Clause's binary list. You are naughty or nice, welcoming or racist, open to immigration or a bigot.

**“I was speaking to a parish priest in Laois recently whose community has seen the population quadruple in a year. And yet there is still only one GP”**

At the weekend, Social Democrats leader Holly Cairns (yes, the same Holly Cairns who during the last conclave said she would get an abortion for every minute of television devoted to the papal election) was asked to comment on a poll showing



public disquiet about levels of immigration.

She described people expressing concerns that they couldn't get an appointment with their GP due to the massive influx of newcomers to a small village as "dog whistles" – by which the deputy means the use of coded language to garner support for a particular position. In other words, people are raising false concerns about GPs to secretly oppose immigration.

And yet, I was speaking to a parish priest in Laois recently whose community has seen the population quadruple in a year. And yet there is still only one GP. The same chronically ill parishioners who grumble about being unable to see their doctor, organised hampers for asylum seekers and refugees in the local community. They also ensured that each and every child got a present from Santa.

## Legitimate

The political elite is finding itself more and more out of touch with ordinary people on legitimate concerns around immigration.

According to a weekend poll, a large majority of people favour a "more closed" immigration policy to reduce the number of people coming to Ireland. That's according to the latest *Irish Times/Ipsos B&A* opinion poll.

But, before the NGO-sector start reaching for the smelling salts, they'd do well to actually listen to people. The same poll shows that voters' concerns relate to pressure on public services and housing, and a majority of people believe that immigration has been on balance a positive, the poll finds.

Almost six in 10 voters (59%) favour the more closed policy on immigration, with 16% backing a more open policy.

**“Large majorities agree that their concerns relate to services such as health and education and the pre-existing shortage of housing”**

A majority of those who express a view (48%) believe that immigration has been a positive for Ireland, with 35% saying it has been a negative. So, clearly a majority see immigrants not just as a statistic, but as our family members, friends, neighbours and vital workers in our public services and wider economy.

When asked about the prospect of accommodation for asylum seekers/refu-

gees in their local area, 69% say they would have "some concerns". Large majorities agree that their concerns relate to services such as health and education and the pre-existing shortage of housing.

These people are not racists, nor are they dog whistlers, they are the backbone of communities up and down the country and they deserve to have their voices heard and their legitimate concerns taken on-board.

## Challenged

Depressingly there are, of course, racists and xenophobes in Ireland and they need to be challenged. And they are being already. In fact, they are regularly defeated at the ballot boxes getting only a handful of votes. There is no appetite for that sort of rhetoric in Ireland, but if mainstream politicians continue to dismiss every concern that people raise, some voters will feel that they have no other option and nefarious actors will be there to take full advantage.

Irish people are good and welcoming people and will continue to be so in the future. But they also in a high-tax economy pay for, deserve and need access to vital public services.

If our politicians can't heed the lessons of history, at least look around contemporary Europe: the rise of parties once thought unelectable, is not so much a sudden lurch to the right but the cry of a people who have gone unheard by their political masters for too long.

If you want to push people to the far-right, go right ahead with the name-calling and sneering – if not, get a dose of humility and sit up and listen.

<b>Wendy Grace</b>		<b>Eilís Mulroy</b>	
<b>Maria Steen</b>		<b>Senator Ronan Mullen</b>	
<b>Martina Purdy</b>		<b>Michael Kelly</b>	
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**“The rise of parties once thought unelectable, is not so much a sudden lurch to the right but the cry of a people who have gone unheard by their political masters for too long”**



# We get the politicians we deserve



As local and European elections loom, pro-life supporters can play a part in influencing the outcome writes **Eilís Mulroy**

A recent *Sunday Independent* poll asked members of the public what were the issues of most concern to them and which will influence how they vote at election time. Issues like immigration, health and housing were top of the list. Topics such as drugs, poverty, and the economy also rated in voters' minds as relevant and important.

Abortion didn't feature on

the list but there's a reason for that - the polling company didn't include it as an issue in the list of options presented to respondents. Realistically, had it featured, it most likely wouldn't have been in the top tier of concerns for the general public. The reason for this is not that voters don't care about right to life issues but rather that they've been kept in the dark about the awful things that are happening under the new abortion law.

## Abortions

The vast majority of the public are unaware, for example, that there has been a massive increase in Irish abortions since the law changed. For every seven babies born today in Ireland, one baby has his or her life ended through abortion. What an unbelievably tragic statistic. The fact that €46 million of taxpayers' money has been spent on abortion provision in just 4.5 years and nothing at all on promoting alternatives, is a scandal voters deserve to hear.

The general public is also not aware of the research from UCC that showed that babies have been born alive after failed abortions (and it



Pro-life activists march to the Dáil.

is known that these babies did not receive any medical care but were left to die) nor are they aware that since the abortion law changed, there has been a huge increase in the number of abortions of Irish babies in Britain where an unborn baby is diagnosed with down syndrome. And voters certainly deserve to know about the excellent proactive legislative efforts of TDs like the Bill brought forward by Carol Nolan TD and others that sought to mandate humane foetal pain relief in the case of late term abortion.

On a more positive note, there are thousands of voters who are keeping abreast of what is happening and they can make a real difference at

election time. We only have to look at what happened in the 2020 General Election where all of the TDs who voted against the abortion legislation in the Dáil were re-elected. It shows the hidden power of the pro-life vote.

## Challenge

So rather than being discouraged about the pro-life issue not featuring in voters' minds to the extent we might like, our challenge as citizens who hold a positive pro-life worldview is to work to change that. For a start, we can make a point of voting for pro-life candidates at the next election and, better still, canvass for them. We can raise the pro-life issue with election

candidates coming to seek our vote. It's surprising the impact that can have.

I was heartened to hear this week from a friend about how her daughter who is in her twenties had raised the abortion issue with a Green Party candidate when he came to her door. When he told her he was in favour of abortion, she politely replied that there were going to be no votes for him in her house. It's a simple message that we need to deliver to political candidates and a message that will filter through to party leaders: We are in favour of protecting not ending human life and will only vote for candidates who represent that view.

Before every election the Pro Life Campaign runs a voter information campaign to encourage pro-life voters to support pro-life candidates and provides information on candidates' stances on right to life issues. This information is made available to voters well before election day. The local and European elections are in June of this year and the General Election is likely to happen not long after.

Looking at the current composition of the Dáil and Seanad, pro-life TDs and Senators are obviously in a minority but the courage and commitment they show makes them a strong and effective group. Think of what could be achieved though if more pro-life TDs and Senators were elected. If we make a point of speaking to family, friends and work colleagues and promote candidates who will speak up for life, pro-life representation in public life will undoubtedly increase.

## Vulnerable

There's a saying: We get the politicians we deserve. If we want politicians who will bravely speak up for the most vulnerable in our society, the unborn and older persons, we need to take proactive steps to make that happen.

Before the elections this year, commit to setting aside some time to support pro-life candidates in your area and pro-life parties in whatever way you can. Then watch the positive change it brings about.

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

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# John Bruton – Views of a compassionate statesman

**F**ormer Taoiseach John Bruton, who was laid to rest on Saturday at the age of 76, has been praised as a compassionate statesman

and a committed Christian. A regular contributor to *The Irish Catholic*, here are a selection of his views the defining issues in Ireland over the last decade.

## Former Taoiseach hits out at Simon Harris over abortion (2018)

It will not be a bright Ireland for the little babies who will have their lives ended before being allowed to see the light of a single Irish day

**T**he repeal of the 8th Amendment sits very uneasily beside the deep and genuine concern expressed in all quarters for the welfare of boys and girls after they have been born, and the strong laws we have passed to protect them. It also sits uneasily beside the expressions of concern about where and

how babies who died 50 years ago in Mother and Baby homes were buried. Where and how will the supposedly non 'viable' babies who will be aborted in Irish hospital be buried? What care will Church and State take to ensure that they are buried with dignity? Or will they be treated as mere hospital waste?

## Are we missing something? (2013)

Europe needs a renewed value system, if it is to mediate globalisation

**I**f the European Union is to positively mediate the consequences of globalisation, it must ask itself whether the values of more choice, and more material abundance, imported from economics, are sufficient to build a good society. I believe they are not, but I do not have the sense that that a dis-

cussion of alternative and better European values is yet taking place.

Govt didn't look at implications of same-sex marriage (2015)

The Government should have given the issue of same-sex marriage more thought before pushing ahead with a referendum

Mr Bruton said he felt

more time should have been given to look at the effects of same-sex marriage on children. "I wouldn't have moved so quickly, I think," he said. "Not that I think that we mightn't have arrived at the same destination, but I think maybe we could have had white papers and green papers and things like that

looking at the whole context here of the implications for children and the implications for the long run and what the institution is about, because to some extent I think a wedding's become a celebration of the individual, rather than the contracting of an agreement for the benefit of society."

## Brexit and the future of the European project (2016)

We must not allow the decision of English voters to destroy what Europeans have built over 70 years of patient statesmanship

**I**f the losers of globalisation and technological change are to be sheltered from misfortune, it is for the states, not the EU itself,

to do that. They alone have the power to raise the taxes for that, or any other, purpose. The UK has not in fact been particularly good at helping its citizens to

deal with problems arising from globalisation and technological change.

...

The referendum also tells us that the EU must

do a much better job defending itself against unjust attacks. It must no longer allow itself to be burdened with blame that belongs elsewhere.



John and Finola Bruton are pictured at a Pro Life Campaign dinner in 2018 with Eilís Mulroy and Senator Rónán Mullen.

## Good ends would not justify immoral means (2016)

The choice to use force in 1916 must be subjected to severe reappraisal

**T**he path of violence, started upon by Pearse and others in 1916, and followed from 1919 to 1923 by his imitators, was traversed at a terrible price. Given the value Catholics place on each human life, those who take life have the

primary burden of proof to discharge. It was for them to prove that no other way was open. I believe that test was failed. Home Rule, already law, could have led Ireland to the same position that Canada enjoys today, if that was the wish of the Irish people.

## Just what sort of 'Good Catholics' were our grandparents? (2021)

It was Irish families, not Irish priests as such, who banished unmarried daughters, when they became pregnant

**I**t is true that Irish society was shaped by strict – and sometimes unforgiving – notions of sexual morality which were inculcated by the Catholic Church. But this was not a particularly Irish, or even Catholic, thing. Victorian morality, and Victorian hypocrisy, was to be found on our neighbouring island, and further afield too. It just survived a decade or so longer here... It was cash-strapped Irish governments which, in the early years of the State, were content to allow religious orders to take on the responsibility for running reformatories, and other institutions to shelter people, whose families who could not, or sometimes would not, look after them.



# Why Ireland needs another John Bruton



David Quinn

In a sense, it was more than John Bruton who was being laid to rest last Saturday following his sad death. It was also the remains of Irish Christian Democracy because John Bruton was a proud Christian Democrat and the last properly Christian Democratic leader of Fine Gael, and our last Christian Democratic Taoiseach.

I can think of few other living Fine Gaelers who would still describe themselves as Christian Democrats. One is Gay Mitchell, but he has retired from politics. Terence Flanagan, Fidelma Healy Eames and Lucinda Creighton might also describe themselves as Christian Democrats but they all paid a heavy price when they defied the Fine Gael party whip in 2013 by voting against the abortion bill of that year.

**“So Christian Democracy intended to show that Christianity and democracy were compatible, in the same way Social Democracy tried to show that moderate socialism and democracy were compatible”**

That bill alone showed how far Fine Gael has drifted from its roots in Christian Democracy. The party also helped to push through a radical redefinition of marriage, its general tone towards the Church is hostile, it was instrumental in the repeal of the 8th Amendment in 2018, many of its TDs support euthanasia, and combined with Fianna Fail it is currently imposing gender ideology on schools.

## Contempt

Some of these changes must have pained John Bruton greatly. Fine Gael might say it was simply moving with the times, but it wasn't just that, there was an aggressiveness in how it did it. An attitude of contempt was shown towards the party's older, still Christian Democrat voters.

It is not even as though these moves helped Fine Gael electorally. In each election since it was returned to power in 2011, its vote has declined.



John Bruton was Taoiseach, leader of Fine Gael and Trustee of Friends of Europe

In any case, John Bruton was a Christian Democrat, and as a young man, would have been heavily influenced by the strong Christian Democratic tradition that then existed in many European countries, not least Italy and Germany. In the European parliament, Fine Gael belonged to the bloc of Christian parties that now call themselves collectively the European People's Party or EPP. It is still in that bloc, although it is probably the least Christian Democratic party in it.

When John died, I pulled from my bookcase a volume of his essays that was published by Currach Press in 2015 called *'Faith in Politics'*. It contained several reflections on religion and politics and society.

## Michael Fogarty

One of them was the Michael Fogarty Lecture and it was delivered in the House of Lords in 2012 at the invitation of Lord David Alton and the UK Movement for Christian Democracy. John argued for the right of Christians, as Christians, to engage in politics, and that they should not be required to leave their Christian beliefs at the door when entering the public arena.

But I had never heard of Michael Fogarty before, and so I looked him up. He was a leading Christian Democratic intellectual prominent in the middle of the last century when Christian Democracy was at its peak. In 1957, he produced a major book called *Christian Democracy in Western Europe*.

Christian Democracy arose as a response and a counter to socialism on the one hand, and liberalism on the other. It believed that socialism was too statist and collectivist, and that liberalism was too individualist.

It was also a response to the rise of democracy itself. The Church initially had a suspicious attitude towards democracy because popes and bishops had become too closely aligned with the ancient monarchies and also because what called itself 'democracy' was often extremely violent and anti-clerical.

So Christian Democracy intended to show that Christianity and democracy were compatible, in the same way Social Democracy tried to show that moderate socialism and democracy were compatible.

Social Democracy and Christian Democracy were not miles apart in some respects. Both supported workers and the welfare state, but Social Democracy was more pro-State while Christian Democracy believed (and believes) in subsidiarity, meaning the State should not step in to do something unless no-one else can.

**“In the present political conditions in this country, it is hard to see a way forward for Christian Democracy, and certainly not under that name”**

Christian Democracy is also far more strongly pro-family and pro-life, and obviously sees a much bigger role for religion in public life. Unfortunately, Fine Gael has ditched all these commitments, indeed it has reversed them.

## Funeral homily

The homily at John Bruton's very dignified funeral Mass was delivered by Fr Bruce Bradley SJ and given that the

the weeks before his death what the homily might say. No matter what, John would have heartily approved of it.

Fr Bradley noticed that the tributes to John after his death was announced, while very warm and appreciative, did not give proper attention to his Christian faith, something shared by his wife, Finola.

He told the congregation: "But anyone who knew him in a closer way realised that, underneath everything, he was a seriously religious man and this all-important aspect of his life and self-identity is largely missing from the public commentary. There is a temptation in our culture just now to ignore this aspect of people's lives, as if it were too marginal or too private and embarrassing to bring up in public or as having too little to do with the real world."

## Funeral coverage

The coverage of the funeral also marginalised this very important aspect of his life.

Could someone like John Bruton even become leader of Fine Gael today? What would he have done if was he the leader of a coalition Government that wanted to repeal the 8th amendment, with the support of many in Fine

Gael itself? We can be sure if it came to a referendum he would have voted 'No', and made clear to the public that he was doing so.

## Way forward

In the present political conditions in this country, it is hard to see a way forward for Christian Democracy, and certainly not under that name. Aontú ticks some of the Christian Democrat boxes and probably some of the rural Independents do also.

But the principles of Christian Democracy are as important as ever, that is, sympathy for workers, support for a well-run welfare state, subsidiarity, support for the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman and the right to life.

What we actually need is another John Bruton. Political and social conditions will need to change before such a person would be given a proper hearing by voters, but over the course of enough time, things can change. What will happen, for example, when we see in a few decades how rapidly our societies are ageing? We might become more pro-family and pro-life again. Then perhaps Christian Democracy, or something like it, can make a comeback.



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# Charles, the most Christian king

## Defender of the persecuted church and bridge to Islam

Britain's King Charles salutes as he departs Wellington Arch on the day of the state funeral and burial of Britain's Queen Elizabeth in London September 19, 2022. Photo: CNS/Toby Melville, Reuters



Ed West

In February 2015, soon after 20 Egyptian Christians and a Ghanaian were murdered on a Libyan beach by ISIS, the Coptic Church in Britain was contacted by a high-profile sympathiser.

The Martyrs of Libya had been working in Egypt's violently unstable neighbour because they were desperately poor, and British Copts were fundraising to support their families. So the Coptic Pope Tawadros II and Bishop Angaelos of London, the head of the British community, were reassured to receive a letter from the then Prince of Wales.

Prince Charles had first approached the Copts late in 2013, just weeks after the worst anti-Christian violence in Egypt in centuries; the events were

barely reported in the English-speaking press, and the Coptic community felt deserted by friends and vulnerable to enemies.

The Prince's private secretary approached the Egyptians, and in December that year he visited their home in Hertfordshire, along with a Jordanian prince. There Bishop Angaelos presented Charles with two Coptic icons as gifts for his newborn grandson George.

### Passion

One of the less well-known interests of the King, who has just had cancer diagnosed less than 18 months into his reign, is his great passion for the persecuted Church. It is far less publicised than his concern for the environment or architecture, but it goes to the heart of his character. Charles III is a most Christian king, to use the old French monarchical title, and perhaps the last.

Charles also donated to Aid to the Church in Need's campaign to help Iraqi and Syrian Christians, and after the Islamic State drove Christians and Yazidis out of the Nineveh Plains in 2014, was the most high profile individual to show public

support. In December that year he gave a video address for the launch of ACN's Religious Freedom in the World Report, and spoke of his "mounting despair" over events in Nineveh. The prince, who had also written to one of Iraq's bishops to express his "heartbreak" at events there, called it "an indescribable tragedy that Christianity is now under such threat in the Middle East — an area where Christians have lived for 2,000 years" and where "people of different faiths living together peaceably for centuries".

**“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair”**

In the last few weeks of 2014, the prince also made three visits to eastern Christian

congregations in London, joining in with the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic and speaking at length with the faithful. At the Syrian Orthodox St Thomas Cathedral in Acton, he ended his talk with the words of St Paul: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." Then, when he visited Jordan in 2015, Charles made a point of heading straight from the airport to meet Iraqi Christian refugees at the British ambassador's residence.

### Islam

Charles's support for the persecuted Church sits happily with a strong interest and fondness for Islam; he is not a crusader but a seeker of understanding and accommodation. In some sense he feels himself to be the protector of Britain's Muslims,

as monarchs of past empires have often been the defenders of minorities. Charles even started learning Arabic to read the Koran, as explained by Abdal Hakim Murad, a British convert to Islam (and a man as clever as brain pie).

**“He was also influenced by the eccentric bishop of Southwark, Mervyn Stockwood, whose interests included parapsychology”**

Charles is a deeply religious man, perhaps more so than his mother, arguably our most religious monarch since the Stuarts, even if it is rather esoteric. At the time of the succession to the throne, the theologian Theo Hobson wrote in the *Spectator* that this inter-

est in religion goes right back to his time studying archaeology and anthropology at Cambridge, something 'which deepened his interest in non-western cultures. His college chaplain, Harry Williams, encouraged him to take a broad view of religion and was the first to interest him in the thought of Carl Jung. He was also influenced by the eccentric bishop of Southwark, Mervyn Stockwood, whose interests included parapsychology. This acquaintance with 1960s Anglicanism gave him permission to be a spiritual seeker, without fearing a conflict with his destined Anglican role.'

### Philosopher

Charles was especially influenced by the South African philosopher Laurens Van der Post, who spoke of rescuing humanity from 'the superstition of the intellect' and of restoring the ancient's spiritual oneness with the natural world.

The prince was encouraged in this Jungian idea of the monarchy by the poet and mystic Kathleen Raine, and by the poet laureate, Ted Hughes,

**“Charles's support for the persecuted church sits happily with a strong interest and fondness for Islam; he is not a crusader but a seeker of understanding and accommodation”**



who spoke of its 'shamanic' power to unite the national 'tribe'. Of course this is compatible with traditional monarchism, but the pagan tinge has a freshness that appeals beyond conventional conservatives.

**“If literally nothing is held sacred any more... what is there to prevent us treating our entire world as some 'great laboratory of life'”**

This is indeed eccentric, and the prince's spiritual musings have often confused a population which treats religion with suspicion, in a country where even the England football manager - the 'other' impossible job - could be sacked for expressing unusual beliefs.

In 2000, the prince called for a new sense of the sacred in our dealings with the natural world, and with each other. He said that: If literally nothing is held sacred any more... what is there to prevent us treating our entire world as some 'great laboratory of life' with potentially disastrous long-term consequences.

Hobson cites the influence of René Guénon, a 'Frenchman who converted to Sufi Islam in the early 20th Century. It's basically Theosophy but with less of an esoteric aura'. In 2010 Charles co-wrote a book, *Harmony*, in which he called for a 'revolution' away from materialism towards traditional spirituality, which Max Hastings said in parts resembled 'the ravings of a Buddhist mystic'.

This inspires both amusement and suspicion in many of his subjects, as has his interest in Islam. As Hobson wrote: In the 1990s he began to speak of

Islam as especially worthy of respect, even suggesting that it exhibited what modern Christianity had lost, "a metaphysical and unified view of ourselves and the world around us". In another speech he suggested that more Muslim teachers in schools could teach us "how to learn with our hearts, as well as our heads". His Islamophilia was only slightly muted by 9/11, despite much right-wing disquiet.

Later, "He began to dial down the Orientalism, to put more emphasis on what the Abrahamic faiths have in common, and the danger of false interpretations of Islam. But his insistence on the core wisdom of Islamic tradition remained strong. Again, his Islamophilia should be seen in relation to his semi-detachment from Anglicanism and the role he felt this gave him. He felt that British Muslims were in need of reassurance from a representative of British tradition and that it could not come from politicians or bishops. It was a task for a different sort of spiritual leader, above the political fray and also above narrow religious allegiance."

### Orthodox

Despite this, Charles's deepest ties are with Orthodox Christianity. For his coronation he was anointed with oil from the Mount of Olives and blessed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch and the Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem. The king is known to be fond of reading Greek mystics, and there are Byzantine icons in The Sanctuary, the chapel in the grounds of Highgrove House, where he would often go to pray and meditate. At his marriage to Camilla there was a recitation of the Creed in Old Church Slavonic.

Charles's grandmother Princess Alice was an Orthodox nun and Righteous of the

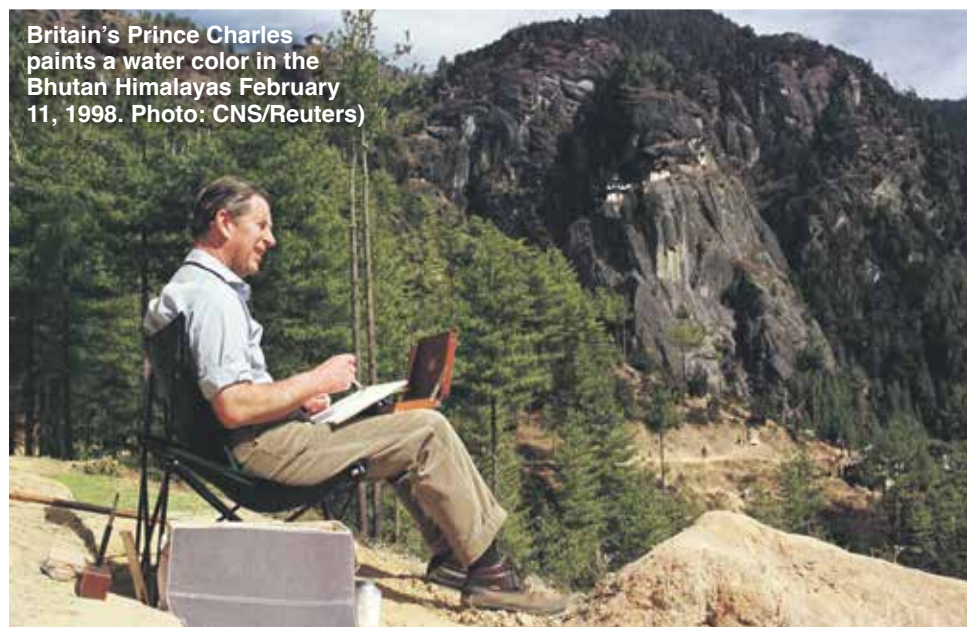
Nations for her role in shielding a Jewish family in wartime Greece. Alice, who endured both deafness and schizophrenia, was a woman of noted holiness and founded an order of nuns in 1949 after becoming a widow.

When Alice's youngest child, Philip, married the future Elizabeth II he had to join the Church of England, but maintained links with the Greek religion and there were rumours about his true beliefs. After the marriage, Alice was given a small Orthodox chapel in England until her death in 1969 when she was buried at a Russian convent in Jerusalem. Charles's great-aunts Alexandra and Elizabeth are also considered martyrs to the Orthodox faith after their murder by the Bolsheviks.

**“A few days after the death of Princess Diana, the king flew to the secluded monastery to escape from the widespread hysteria that overcame the country”**

Such is the king's attachment to the eastern Church that it's a not uncommon belief in parts of the Mediterranean that Charles is in fact Greek Orthodox. If this sounds implausible, it's known that at Highgrove Charles had visits from Ephraim, an Cypriot-born abbot of the ancient Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos, which Charles regularly visited. A few days after the death of Princess Diana, the king flew to the secluded monastery to escape from the widespread hysteria that overcame the country.

Britain's Prince Charles paints a water color in the Bhutan Himalayas February 11, 1998. Photo: CNS/Reuters)



Alone with Ephraim in the chamber there, Charles is rumoured to have made a 'spiritual commitment' to Orthodoxy. After one of his visits to Mount Athos, a monk was quoted in one newspaper saying Charles was 'Orthodox in his heart'.

### Schism

Perhaps, but it is more likely part of a desire to repair the schism within Christianity and the conflicts between the Abrahamic faiths. For Charles, Middle Eastern Christians are a bridge between Islam and Christianity, and their persecution makes any sort of deeper understanding impossible. As he told the Syrian Orthodox churchgoers in London, "At a time when so little is held sacred, it is quite literally diabolical that these symbolic bridges should be so destroyed".

Those bridges become harder to maintain as the realm he rules over becomes not just more secular, but repaganises. The Christian aspect of monarchy makes British society more intelligi-

ble to those of other religions, and as Bishop Richard Chartres wrote last year, quoting the political scientist Tariq Modood, the minimal nature of the Anglican establishment... may be far less intimidating to the minority faiths than a triumphant secularism.

But repaganisation is moving ahead, to the point where even the residual symbols of Christianity within the monarchy are slowly disappearing. The late Queen's funeral, and the king's coronation, felt like flickering embers of

the old faith, overtly Anglican events that are unlikely to be repeated by his successors. God willing the king will recover from his present illness, but in the fullness of time he may be remembered as the last Christian king. Or perhaps the first Greek Orthodox one.

*Ed West is the author of Wrong Side of History and this article, reproduced with kind permission, was first published on his Substack - got to <http://www.edwest.co.uk>*



Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of the Holy Family in London, then Prince Charles, and Olena Zelenska, wife of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, look at icons during the opening of London's Ukrainian Welcome Center at Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Family November 30, 2022. Photo: CNS

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# Out&About

## Honouring a holy woman



**LAOIS:** Portlaoise parishioners gather in force to celebrate the feast of St Brigid in St Peter and Paul's Church, February 1. Photo: Agnes Sasida.



**DUBLIN:** Pupils from the Dominican Primary School Dún Laoghaire, deputy principal Caroline O'Donnell and Mgrs Dan O'Connor of the Archdiocese of Dublin's Education Secretariat are pictured at the diocese's Laudate festival.

### IN SHORT

#### Sacraments must be celebrated 'validly' – bishop

The sacraments need to be celebrated “validly” as well as nicely, Bishop Kevin Doran has said after the Vatican released a new document on the importance of the celebrating the sacraments well.

*Gestis verbisque* (Deeds and Words), released by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), reminds “those of us who are called to celebrate the sacraments, of the need to celebrate them not only ‘nicely’, but also validly”, the bishop of Elphin said.

Dr Doran said it is good to be reminded that the words and actions used in the sacraments are not “just random”.

“They are carefully chosen by the Church to reflect the action of Jesus in his pastoral ministry, and to express his intention,” he said.

#### Maynooth seminarians visit Leinster House

The seminarians of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, accompanied by College Rector Fr Tomás Surlis and members of the St Patrick's College teaching staff, paid a visit to Leinster House on St Brigid's Day.

During their visit, the seminarians took part in a seminar organised by Senator Rónán Mullen, entitled ‘Faith and Politics – Promoting Spiritual Values in a Secular World’.

The seminar was chaired by Senator Mullen and the Maynooth group was addressed



**CORK:** Lynda Galvin, Knockea, Lyre, Clonakilty and Conor Gannon, Co. Waterford at St Mary's Church, Rossmore, are pictured with bridesmaids, groomsmen and celebrant Fr Tom Hayes Co-PP after celebrating their marriage. Photo: Dermot Sullivan

by journalist and *Irish Catholic* columnist Mary Kenny on the theme, ‘A balanced view of the history of Catholic Ireland’.

Former Irish Ambassador and Director of the DCU Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, Dr Philip McDonagh, spoke on the subject, ‘Faith, Poetry and Politics’ and Leinster House Chief Operations Officer, Michael Errity, addressed the group on the ‘Houses of the Oireachtas Service’.

The students and staff toured the building and met the Ceann Comhairle.

#### McVerry Trust appoints new CEO

Peter McVerry Trust has confirmed the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer. Niall Mulligan, the current National Secre-

tary of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, will take up the position in mid-April.

Mr Mulligan has worked within the charity sector in both the UK and Ireland since 1990, specifically in the areas of addiction, justice, homelessness, HIV and sexual health, suicide prevention, and poverty.

He has held senior management positions in some of Ireland's leading charities including the Simon Communities of Ireland, HIV Ireland, Samaritans Ireland, and most recently the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Welcoming his appointment, Chair of Peter McVerry Trust Deirdre-Ann Barr said “Niall has a demonstrated a strong track record relevant to the ethos, values and work of Peter McVerry Trust including a clear commitment to human rights and social justice. We look forward to working with him”.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**LOUTH:** Bishop Michael Router opens Armagh archdiocese's year of celebrations for the 1,500th anniversary of St Brigid's death with Mass and prayers at Faughart.



**DUBLIN:** Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD and Senator Rónán Mullen welcome a group of seminarians and guest speaker Mary Kenny on their visit to Leinster House.



**SLIGO:** Bishop Paul Dempsey joins the community at Lough Talt to celebrate Mass in 'the Lake Church'.



**DOWN:** Dana Rosemary Scallon is pictured with girl guides and their St Brigid's Cloak, created to mark the saint's feast day and displayed in St Patrick's Centre, Downpatrick.

## BELFAST

Annual Trócaire lecture takes place Wednesday, February 28, at 7.30pm, in South Belfast Quaker Meeting House, 22 Marlborough Park North, Belfast, BT9 6JH on the impact of climate change in Malawi. RSVP to Nicholas.hanrahan@trocaire.org.

## ARMAGH

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

## CLARE

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

## 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

Vocations to Diocesan Priesthood event to take place on Sunday, February 18, beginning with Mass at 12pm in the Church of Christ the King, Omagh, followed by a meeting at the Ulster American Folk Park at 1.30pm and dinner at the Mellon Country Inn at 4.30pm. Those interested please contact Fr Rory at 0749737015

## DOWN

Lectio Divina Group 7.30pm-8.30pm meet 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 7pm.

## KILDARE

A one night per week programme for Lent continues February 21 in Our Lady's Parish Centre, Leixlip, from 7.45-9pm followed by tea. The programme's theme is 'Living words - Keeping Scripture Alive Today', with a different theme and speaker each evening.

## 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.

## MAYO

Trained facilitators conduct a weekly Bereavement Support Group meeting at the Family Centre, Knock each Wednesday at 11am. There is also a special meeting for bereaved partners/spouses on the first Thursday of each month also at 11am. No bookings required.

## MEATH

Legion of Mary Navan meetings Monday and Tuesday at 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.

## ROSCOMMON

Lenten spiritual journey pondering St Mark's Gospel takes place February 20 after 11am Mass in Sacred Heart Church, F42YT51. To book, contact Assumpta in Roscommon Parish Office 090 662 6298.

## TYRONE

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

## WATERFORD

The Diocese of Waterford and Lismore is hosting 'The Chosen - Season 2' Zoom series on Tuesdays from 8pm-9.15pm, next date February 20. Each night includes a streamed episode of The Chosen (Season 2), followed by opportunity for group discussion and prayer. Visit waterfordlismore.ie to register.

## WEXFORD

A triduum in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes takes place February 9-11 at St Michael's Parish Gorey.



# Almost 400 Derry diocese students receive JPPII Awards

Ruadhán Jones

**A**lmost 400 young people from Derry diocese received the Pope John Paul II Award at a ceremony in St Eugene's Cathedral on February 7.

The guest speaker, Alexander McLean alongside Bishop Donal McKeown, patron of the Award, presented the Award to 381 young people from all over the diocese of Derry and beyond. Three people received the Papal Cross Award.

These young people came from 19 second level schools across the diocese and three second level schools outside the diocese. They represented 47 parishes in the diocese and 11 parishes outside the diocese.

Guest speaker Mr McLean is the founder of Justice Defenders (formerly African Prisons Project, or APP), which is based in Uganda and seeks to improve the lives of people imprisoned in Africa.

Mr McLean gave an inspiring account of his life, a spokesperson for the diocese said in a statement. He outlined how he saw the need for justice in a prison system in Uganda that lacked basic human rights and dignity.

"He inspired the young people of Derry to not let anyone diminish them and encouraged them to continue the great work that they did throughout their award especially with social outreach," the spokesperson said.

"Alexander's words and example shone through, and he finished his speech with a prayer from St Francis. The ceremony came to a close with the beautiful voice of David James," they said.



Students from Moville Community College enjoy the Pope John Paul II Awards ceremony. Photos: Stephen Latimer.



Students from Lumen Christi receive their JPPII Awards.



Students from Christian Brothers secondary school receive their JPPII Awards from Bishop Donal McKeown and Alexander McLean.



Gaelcolaiste Doire students receive their JPPII Awards at the ceremony in St Eugene's Cathedral.



Happy students from Loreto Grammer are pictured with their JPPII Awards at the ceremony.





Students from Loreto Grammer are pictured with their JPII Awards at the ceremony on February 7.



In recognition of their work for the local Christian community, students from Sacred Heart Omagh receive the JPII Award.



Scolí Mhuire students receive JPII Award from Bishop McKeown and Mr McLean.



Students from Moville Community College enjoy the Pope John Paul II Awards ceremony.



St Brigid's College Students at the JPII Awards ceremony.



Pictured at the JPII awards ceremony are students from St Conor's College.



Students from St Mary's Limavady receive their JPII Awards from Bishop McKeown outside St Eugene's Cathedral.



# Care of parents a 'gift' the Constitution must protect



Concern for a baby's development at the heart of 'woman in the home' clause, writes **Fr Brian Kavanagh**

**P**aragraph 1 of article 41.2.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann states a truth that needs to be acknowledged, re-iterated and emphasised.

In 1937 when the Irish Constitution was ratified, it was the woman who stayed at home to mind each baby that was born into the family and today we'd have no doubt that it could be father.

However, the unwritten focus of the article is the care and development of the baby. Those who drafted this article may or may not have been aware of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his work in the area of psychoanalysis concerning the stages of the baby's development.

However, we are definitely aware of it now and the significance and the importance of parent-baby relationship is unquestionable.

Another perspective on this is how can the State support the woman and man in their close parental role in the love, care and development of the baby until aged three. It is only with this support that the common good can be achieved as is stated in Art. 42.1.1.

## Recognised

With the development of psychoanalysis, psychology, and psychotherapy it is now recognised that the woman, who can also be known as the 'primary caregiver', might not be the only primary caregiver.

In 42.1.1 we can under-

**“A new, different and respectful response to the present economic reality is that the State should pay the mother/father/primary caregiver to fulfil the 'duties' of loving, caring and nurturing the development of the baby”**



stand that in current times, the woman and her life within the home or the father and his life within the home are the first and primary caregivers in the first three years of a baby's development.

**“The mother/father/primary caregiver is the 'living' presence for the care, development and love of each individual baby”**

There is no doubt that during pregnancy the mother is the primary caregiver, but recognition of the other relationships and external impacts on the baby while within the womb needs to be acknowledged also.

So, rather than calling the language or concepts of this article as archaic or outdated, perhaps we need to add father and primary caregiver alongside woman to the article so

as to bring clarity and ensure the focus of the baby's care and development is upheld by this article.

Article 41.2 speaks of the life of the woman within the home and her role as mother. The mother/father/primary caregiver is the 'living' presence for the care, development and love of each individual baby.

The primary caregiver is responsible for the baby's foundational development, particularly with regard to the emotional, human, sensual, physical psychological, cognitive, intellectual, spiritual, social, linguistic dimensions.

At the core of all these aspects of development is the concepts of attachment and bond. John Bowlby (1907-1990) wrote extensively on the attachment theory, taking it up from Sigmund Freud and contemporary psychoanalysts, psychologists and psychotherapists.

## Emphasis

Psychoanalysis places particular emphasis on the first three years of a baby's development and with the advances in this area it is now timely to recognise the importance of early child development and the significance of attachment.

This attachment is an irreplaceable one-to-one emotional bonding experience between mother/father/primary caregiver and the baby.

The primary caregiver's

'life within the home' and the 'duties' carried out are crucial to the baby's first three years of development. The 'duties' are about the central place of creating the attachment and bond that the baby needs in the first three years and all the other oft-defined duties are secondary.

**“The love and attachment a mother/father/primary caregiver gives to the developing baby and child is a gift to the State”**

According to the 'Child Care Act 1991, Regulations 2016' the ratio of adult-child under one year of age is 1:3 (1:5 for one-two years; 1:6 for two-three years). While this ratio seems reasonable, it is not the same as the one-to-one care needed for the baby's development, particularly on the emotional, sensual, physical, human and personal level.

Sensitively, I ask: how can one person have an emotional bond with three babies as he/she carries out the survival needs of each baby? Can she/he provide a good caring service in the creche? Yes. Is the baby feeling, sensing and experiencing an emotional bond? Partially yes, partially no or

maybe not at all?

The love and attachment a mother/father/primary caregiver gives to the developing baby and child is a gift to the State.

The gift is one of “support without which the common good cannot be achieved”. The common good is the primary and long-term objective of care given to the baby, an objective that begins in the family of origin and then extends to the local community and the state as a term to refer to the citizens of our country.

## Proverb

As the African proverb says: “It takes a village to rear a child”. To state that the common good cannot be achieved without such support from the benefit of the primary care given to the child is inviting us in 2024 to ask how should the State be supporting the mother, father or primary caregiver.

Article 41.2.2 explains that the mothers, and in today's terms mothers/fathers/primary caregivers “shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour”.

We need to acknowledge, appreciate and value the labour and caregiving of the mother/father/primary caregiver since the 1937 Irish Constitution.

A new, different and respectful response to the present economic reality is that the State should pay the

mother/father/primary caregiver to fulfil the 'duties' of loving, caring and nurturing the development of the baby.

**“The State should be paying, giving tax credits or similar benefits to our primary caregivers for the first three years of a baby's and child's life”**

These 'duties' should be seen not only as a gift to the State, but also to the Family and Community, “without which the common good cannot be achieved”.

The sad reality about failure to impress the principle of the common good is that some of the recent parlance in Government circles is that there is a need for bigger prisons.

Human development and social interaction start on day one of birth, and we could also say during pregnancy, and modern psychoanalysis, psychology and psychotherapy will verify that the key foundation for a person's life is established in the first days, weeks, months and three years of life.

Every government, present and future, needs to value and appreciate the immense contribution that the mothers, fathers and primary caregivers are making by staying in the home caring, nurturing, and loving the baby and giving the baby the experience of attachment, bond and loving development for the first three years.

The State should be paying, giving tax credits or similar benefits to our primary caregivers for the first three years of a baby's and child's life and then from the age of three give families financial support through the Children's Allowance.

The Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) was initiated by the Government in 2019 which offers each child aged at least two years and eight months the first formal experience of early learning.

This is highly commendable but the 32 months or almost three years from day one of the baby's life still needs much more Government attention and support given for the mother, father and primary caregiver.

**Fr Brian Kavanagh, a priest in the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, has been a counsellor/psychotherapist since 2014.**



# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## GROWING IN HOPE

ASIAN WOMEN RECALL THEIR EXPERIENCES AT THE SYNOD

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## A PIONEERING PASTOR

THE REFUGEE BISHOP OF MYANMAR AND HIS BAMBOO ‘CATHEDRAL’

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# Bishop Alan McGuckian and Sr Denise Boyle on all things Synod

### Staff reporter

Recently elected Bishop of Down and Connor, Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ spoke with Sr Denise Boyle, an Irish Franciscan sister who is the Director of the Global Action Programme of Mercy International Association about the impact of synodality on the Church's mission, the role he played at the Synod in Rome as an elected member and his analysis of what the next Synod meeting in Rome will yield.

Bishop McGuckian shared with his Raphoe diocese Synod synthesis which had a focus on companionship, loneliness, youth – with brief mention of the role of women and LGBT.

At the October 2023 Synod the “emphasis on prayer was relentless”. Timothy Radcliffe OP likened the Church to a hen gathering her brood. The Synod will not change anything

– a statement giving hope to some and fear to others.

Conversations in the Spirit was a rigorous practice day in day out for 4 weeks. He said that it was exhausting. There were different topics and different tables each day. Each table voted on conclusions for their table on each topic. Back in Raphoe Bishop McGuckian set up Conversations in the Spirit and something really powerful came out of it.

Sr Denise asked if he could share an example where his opinion had been changed at the Synod. Bishop McGuckian found this a hard question. No, his opinion had not changed, but he had grown in compassion and respect. He found it hard to stay in dialogue, when so much was at stake. It was hard work. Some days he felt like staying in bed rather than going to another session.

Sr Denise asked about the involvement for the first time ever of women as voting participants. Bishop McGuckian said the female contribution was brilliant. Sr Denise asked should there be a movement to increase the number of women. Bishop McGuckian replied both yes and no.

Sr Denise asked about moving to a less hierarchical Church. Bishop McGuckian said that he sees the choice of the apostles by Jesus as foundational. Yet we must be open to development.

In response to a wide range of questions Bishop McGuckian responded:

1. At the Synod they moved to different tables for different topics. Bishop McGuckian was in the English language group.

2. Hot button issues did come up and were dealt with honestly.

3. His hope for the Synod is that it would grow co-responsibility.

4. Structures are important, but the key focus must be evangelisation.

5. Jesus founded the Church on the apostles.

6. He doesn't know where to look for the reports on women deacons.

7. We should start small. Invite one by one.

8. Asked about the role of women which featured very strongly in the Irish National Synthesis, Bishop McGuckian replied that he did not go to Rome to campaign for the Irish National Synthesis.

9. The Catholic tradition is the most precious thing there is.

10. The Church will move very slowly as it always does.

11. For the very big questions there will be a long, slow process.

# Leading Irish politician mentions Synod during Dáil session

### Brandon Scott

The leader of the Green Party and Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan, referenced the Church's synodal process as he paid tribute to late former Taoiseach John Bruton.

Speaking in the Dáil last Wednesday, the TD reminisced about Mr Bruton's life and political

legacy, describing him as “a Christian democrat”.

“He was a Christian democrat. I heard Dermot Farrell, his previous parish priest in Dunboyne who is now archbishop of Dublin, speaking about him very accurately on the radio this morning.”

Mr Ryan cited the words of Timothy Radcliffe OP, who was speaking at the Synod in Rome, to

characterise Mr Bruton's Faith. “A Dominican friar, Timothy Radcliffe, spoke at the start of the Synod on Synodality back before Christmas in Rome. He was referring to an Anglican philosopher who was talking about the Catholic Church. He says there is always the ‘and’.

“It is orthodox and creative, establishment and radical, rigorous and merciful. That might sound a bit high-brow but this comes from

a Christian democrat root tradition in my mind. I think John Bruton embodied that in the sense that he was conservative and compassionate. He was conviction-driven and collaborative. He was national, patriotic and international. And I think history will look at this ideas man and give real important attention to those last two ‘ands’, national, patriotic and international.”

NEXT WEEK: NUNS FIGHT MAFIA TO PROTECT WOMEN



# The refugee bishop of Myanmar and his bamboo ‘cathedral’



In an exclusive interview with *The Synodal Times*, **Paolo Affatato** spoke with Bishop Celso Ba Shwe of Myanmar who was driven out of his cathedral, which was attacked and then occupied by the Burmese army. Now living “as a refugee”, he is building a new ‘cathedral’ made out of bamboo in the forest.

“A community exists when there is a bishop with his priests and faithful who celebrate the Eucharist and proclaim the Word of God”. It exists even if the majority of the population is displaced and the land is torn apart by war. It exists, by God’s grace, even if the bishop himself is a wanderer, an outcast, driven from his cathedral, which has become an army base camp. These are the convictions of Bishop Celso Ba Shwe, these are the words the pastor goes on to say to comfort, console and encourage his faithful in the diocese of Loikaw, whose territory covers the state of Kayah, in eastern Myanmar. “Only the gift of the Holy Spirit, a strength that comes from above, sustains us and gives us the courage and hope to move forward in this painful situation”, says Bishop Ba Shwe in a moving account given to *The Synodal Times*.

“The Church in Loikaw”- he explains, “has not given up”. It has not been discouraged even though, since the military junta seized power in February 2021, the civil war has gradually intensified,



changing the face of the territory. Loikaw is one of the areas most affected by the clash between the army and rebel groups of the People’s Defence Forces, which have merged with ethnic militias traditionally existing in the border areas of Myanmar. The situation has generated massive flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs): people forced to leave their homes to find refuge in the forests, where they have begun to struggle to support themselves. Families took refuge in makeshift refugee camps - also set up by Catholic parishes. In order to “have the smell of sheep” - in the words of Pope Francis - to stay close to the people and share with them the hardships and sufferings of daily life, priests, religious and catechists have also temporarily left their churches to move to precarious places, in shacks, huts or tents where the displaced people live.

“In his prayers, the bishop had an inspiration: to build a wooden chapel in the forest, in a portion of land where so many families are camped”

Bishop Celso Ba Shwe was driven out of the cathedral complex, first hit, then occupied by the Burmese army. And he began a life “as a refugee”, travelling to the various areas and parishes of the diocese, celebrating



Photos above: A Catholic priest of Loikaw diocese celebrate mass in the open air and visits families of refugees and sick people in Loikaw diocese.





A school in the wood: sisters, priests and teachers have class with refugees children in the wood.



Bishop Celso is blessing and celebrating mass in the new "cathedral in the wood", built after that his Cathedral was occupied by the army.

the sacraments, visiting refugee camps, blessing and comforting families tried by war and destitution.

**“The important thing is to preserve the faith, the sacraments, the charity, the community”**

“The Lord has given me a time of forced itinerancy. Even with the pain of having to leave the cathedral, all the goods and documents of our local Church - we will not know what we will find when this is over - I welcome this grace with an open heart. The Lord allows me to meet so many people, to be close to people, to listen and to console”. He continues: “I live in absolute precariousness, in the gift I receive every day from my brothers, from the priests

and from the people I meet. It is an experience of deep faith in God's Providence, which takes care of me and all of us, and which I will never forget. It is a special time of closeness and love to God and neighbor”, he says.

In his prayers, the bishop had an inspiration: to build a wooden chapel in the forest, in a portion of land where so many families are camped. It was called the “new little cathedral of Christ the King”, a visible sign of a community that, in tribulation, gathers around Christ. That little bamboo church is the place where the Eucharist is celebrated and the Blessed Sacrament is kept. There the community gathers to pray. From there a charity radiates that becomes consolation, comfort for the displaced, humanitarian aid. “The important thing is to preserve the faith, the sacraments, the charity, the community”, explains Ba Shwe.

With him, the priests of the diocese tread often

rugged paths and cross very dangerous areas, travelling through territories where fighting continues. But they are aware that “people need our presence and encouragement in times of fear and uncertainty”, explains Fr. Paul, one of the priests in Loikaw. Of the 35 parishes in the diocese, more than half are deserted because the priests and nuns have fled with the faithful to jungle camps. Moreover, in giving spiritual comfort to the displaced, “priests and consecrated men and women can be falsely accused by the military of supporting the resistance, and thus arrested and put in prison”, the priest explains. But this is the mission today in Loikaw. And Catholics carry it out and live their “here and now” with faith and courage.

**i** Paolo Affatato is Asia editor in FIDES News Agency, contributor to L'Osservatore Romano and others

# Women at the Synod



Rosalia, the Burmese Catholic woman who attended the Synod in Vatican city.

**W**omen from Asia took centre stage at the Synod. For the first time they took part in the assembly, and they were a large group, as many as 12. A consecrated woman from Japan, Momoko Nishimura, was among the presidents delegated by the Pope. Then there were four lay women from Hong Kong, Myanmar, the Philippines and Malaysia, among the members suggested by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (Fabc), while other women were chosen and sent by their respective national Bishops' Conferences.

**“I carried in my heart my entire country, Myanmar, which is going through a historical phase of great suffering and conflict”**

Rosalia Minus Cho Tin, a Catholic laywoman actively involved in the pastoral council of St Mary's parish in Yangon, tells *Synodal Times* that she is very happy to have represented Myanmar: “The presence in the assembly, the experience I had in Rome in that synodal journey, day by day, was a real moment of grace for me. We brought the voice of the women of Asia” - she adds - “it was a great gift. The dimension of listening to each other, between people of different cultures and nationalities, was very fruitful. The presence of us women also made a special contribution and offered the original feminine perspective, an extra enrichment for the whole assembly, which was recognised by all present”, she recounts.

“The dimension of dialogue was very complete and profound; truly, in this way, space was left for the Holy Spirit. They were very special days, of spiritual growth and also of fraternity”, she notes.

She is keen to say that she was there on behalf of her community: “I carried in my heart my entire country, Myanmar, which is going through a historical phase of great suffering and conflict. At every moment I felt my people, our country and the entire Burmese Church beside me”. The time spent in Rome was a favourable time for her to feel and experience the universality of the Catholic community: “I prayed intensely for peace and justice in my country and I placed this prayer in the hands of the Apostles, Saints Peter and Paul in Rome. Pope Francis several times mentioned Myanmar, wounded and suffering, in his words and prayers. I felt the whole universal Church praying with us and for us. It was a deeply shared experience of faith”, she noted.

Now Rosalia Minus Cho Tin has returned to her community in Yangon where, she says, “we will continue to implement the teachings and synod style”. In the Pastoral Council of her parish, the woman, who is employed on the staff of the World Health Organisation in Myanmar, is in charge of administration and finance. She plays a very delicate role: this means that she enjoys the full confidence of the pastor and of the entire pastoral council. This is also a sign of synodality and empowerment of women: “I do my best and put my skills at the service of the community. Each of us does this, as in the parable of the talents. And the Lord accompanies and guides our path”, Rosalia concludes.



# Letter from Jerusalem

## Ashes and tough love as Lent begins



Justin Robinson

Under my window in Jerusalem's Christian Quarter, the men of the neighbourhood are gathering outside the cafés to sip their morning coffee, smoke too many cigarettes, scan the newspapers and talk about what's going on. There's much to discuss lately, but not a great deal to be done. Their shops are closed in the nearby *souk*. It's usually bustling; young men push their carts through its narrow alleyways at dizzying speeds, old women from the villages bring mint leaves to sell to passers-by, the smell of spices wafts through the air and bewildered tourists try to navigate their way through the labyrinthine bazaar. Sadly, not these days.

**“I'll be fascinated to see once again how the Christians of the other churches prepare for Easter”**

Jerusalem's lack of pilgrims and tourists meant I was able to steal some precious time alone in the Holy Sepulchre early this morning. It hasn't been since the pandemic that I was able to spend as much time as I wanted alone in Christ's empty tomb, and I'll never get over how much of a privilege it is.

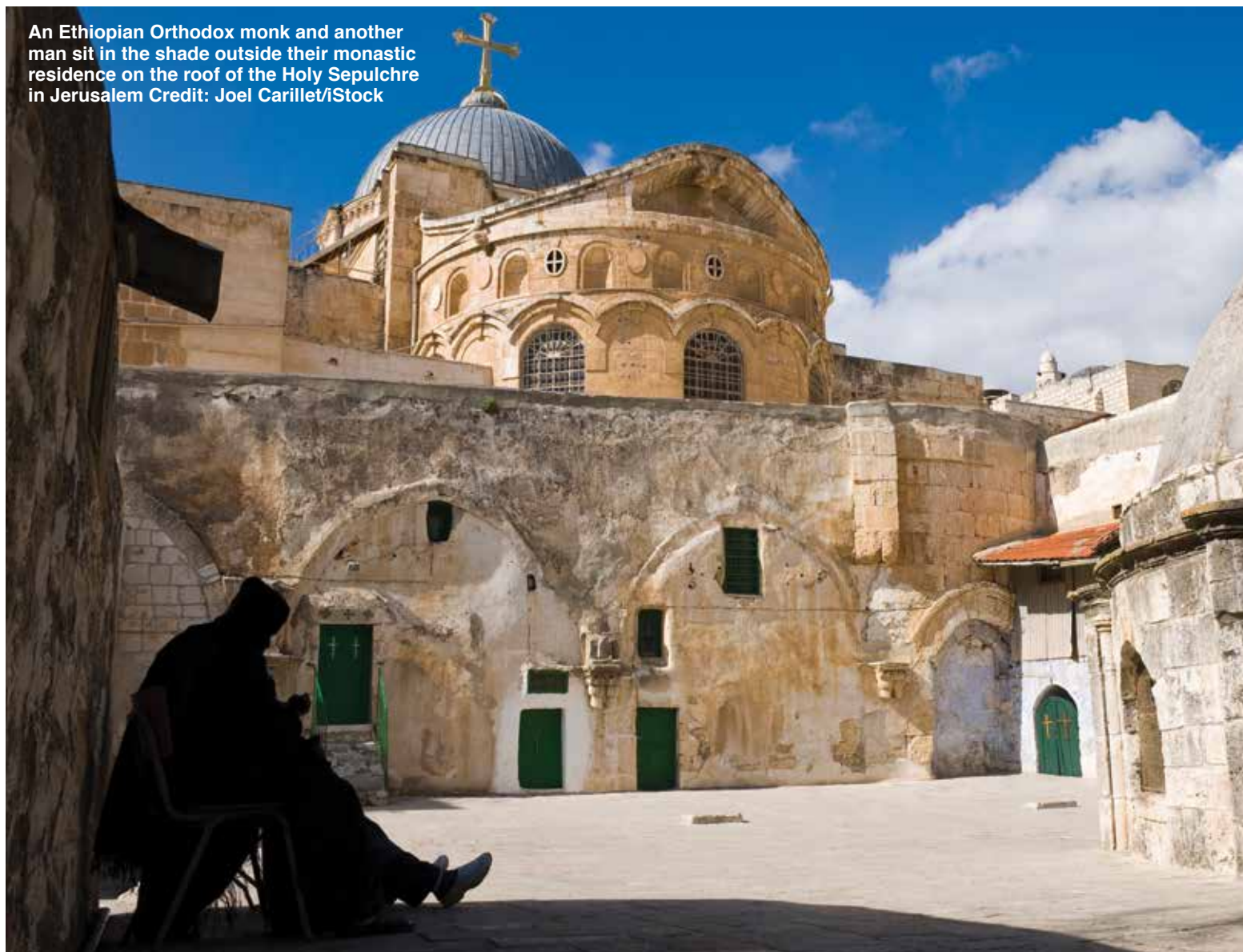
After thumbing my way through a list of people asking to be remembered here, I did a round of the basilica and nodded to the odd monk or friar who popped out from a side chapel. Jerusalem is small enough (and its Christian population even smaller) that we all seem to recognise one another.

### James

After paying a visit to the Catholic chapel on Calvary, I stopped to greet a man who is a familiar sight around Jerusalem. Barefoot, staff in hand, wrapped in white robes and a woollen blanket, James has spent years walking in the footsteps of Christ with the simplest of clothes, no possessions and a mission to share the Gospel.

Originally from Michigan, the

An Ethiopian Orthodox monk and another man sit in the shade outside their monastic residence on the roof of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem Credit: Joel Carillet/iStock



soft-spoken pilgrim depends on the generosity of others to live his remarkable – though often misunderstood – way of life. We talked about the situation in the Holy Land, and about our hopes that the upcoming season of Lent might be a time to bring some peace to this troubled place.

### Lent

Yes, Lent is about to begin, and I'll be fascinated to see once again how the Christians of the other churches prepare for Easter. Some of my Orthodox friends won't be eating any meat or dairy products for the entire period. “Forty days of hummus and bread” said one of them with a frown as we sat near Jaffa Gate recently. Another asked whether Valentine's Day falling on Ash Wednesday meant he should keep his table booked in a restaurant across town. Doubting his date would be happy with a simple salad, I advised him not to

**“This land – and Jerusalem in particular – makes you fall in love, it breaks your heart, and you're never the same again”**

mix love with ashes and to change his reservation.

This land – and Jerusalem in particular – makes you fall in love, it breaks your heart, and you're never the same again. You can't just walk away from it, because it inhabits you. It's the sort of place that you can love and hate at the same time: the place and its people grow on you, but the insidiousness of the injustice here grinds you down.

One never quite knows what might come next in the Holy Land. Only last week I was on a bus over in the Israeli side of Jerusalem

when I noticed an ultra-Orthodox Jew looking at me from under his black, wide-brimmed hat. Our eyes met a few times, and I grew a little nervous because there have been some cases of *haredi* aggression against Christians here lately. Eventually he leaned forward and said: “which denomination are you, Father?” I was stunned that he should talk to me, because *haredim* rarely engage with those outside their own community and usually only speak Hebrew or Yiddish. I spluttered a reply, and he began talking about the prophets in the Bible. Those sitting around

looked as surprised as I was, and our conversation went on long enough that we both missed our respective stops. It was a rare and privileged encounter, and I came away promising to swot more on the Hebrew Bible.

### Rare encounter

So, we never know what's around the corner in the holy city. Some things never seem to change, whilst other things come out of the blue and sometimes do so dramatically. Whatever happens, the locals beneath my window will probably still gather for a morning coffee and assessment of current affairs. With Lent about to begin maybe they'll be coming a little less often, if only for a while.

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





# Letter from Rome

## Muted reaction to papal letter hints at Catholic-Jewish strain



John L. Allen Jr

**W**hen I arrived on the Vatican beat more than 25 years ago, a bitter cross controversy at Auschwitz and tensions over the passion play in Oberammergau both were making global headlines. It was shortly before the release of John Cornwall's *Hitler's Pope*, reviving debates over Pius XII's alleged "silence" on the Holocaust, as well as Pope John Paul II's unforgettable 2000 visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

Taking it all in at the time, a veteran colleague looked at me and said: "Never forget, kid ... Jews is news".

His point was that whenever the Vatican and Judaism intersect, there's usually enormous discussion and great public interest, obviously owing to the checkered history of the relationship as well as the remarkable progress that's been made since the era of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

### Pope's Letter

All that means that what happened this past week requires explanation: A pope addressed an entire letter to Jews, and very few reacted, at least out loud. It's almost a "tree falling in the forest exercise" – if a pope issues a document and almost no one responds, did it really appear at all?

**“Many Israelis and Jews believe the Pope should be more explicit and forceful in condemning Hamas terrorism and in recognising that Israel is involved in a legitimate campaign of self-defence”**

To recap, the February 2 letter was addressed to Jews in Israel and dispatched to Karma Ben Johanan, a 41-year-old professor of Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and who's also engaged in teaching and research at the Jesuit-sponsored Gregorian University in Rome.

It seemed clear Francis's aim was to address tensions that have arisen in Jewish-Catholic relations since



Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Pope Francis embrace after visiting the Western Wall in Jerusalem May 26, 2014. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

October 7 and the onset of the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

"This war has also produced divisive attitudes in public opinion worldwide and divisive positions, sometimes taking the form of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism," the Pope wrote.

"The path that the Church has walked with you, the ancient people of the covenant, rejects every form of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, unequivocally condemning manifestations of hatred towards Jews and Judaism as a sin against God," Francis said.

In all fairness, it's not as if no one in the Jewish world responded.

### Message of healing

In the US, the American Jewish Committee put out a statement calling the letter "a transformative and appreciated message of healing during a strained moment in Catholic-Jewish relations," and describing it as "compassionate and welcome".

Malka Simkovich, director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies program at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a co-author along with Johanan of a November open letter to the Pope calling on the Catholic Church "to act as a beacon of moral and conceptual clarity" in defence of Israel and against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, likewise expressed gratitude.

"The Pope's letter expresses firm commitment of friendship between

the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and we are extremely grateful," Prof. Simkovich wrote in a social media post. "Thank you, @Pontifex."

In Italy, an appreciative note was struck by Walker Meghnagi, president of the Jewish community of Milan, who said he was "very happy that the Pope has responded to appeals for a consolidation of Jewish-Christian friendship after October 7".

Mr Meghnagi added that the rejection of anti-Semitism was especially important because "in recent months we've had several ugly signals on the part of certain important members of the world of the Church who expressed themselves in an offensive way towards Judaism".

**“This is hardly the first crisis to erupt in Jewish-Catholic relations”**

That, however, is pretty much it, at least in terms of overt public reaction from Jewish leaders. Given the usual torrent of discussion any papal move regarding Judaism unleashes, such restraint has to be called conspicuous.

### Israel's ambassador

Telling in this regard was Raphael Schutz, Israel's ambassador to the Holy See, who met Francis the day before the letter came out to present

him with a postcard by an Israeli cartoonist expressing the anguish of Israelis after the October 7 attack.

While Mr Schutz maintains a very active account on X, he did not post a reaction to the Pope's letter. The next day, however, he posted an objection to a different letter the Vatican released on February 4 to the organisers of a "Human Fraternity" prize, in which, among other things, the Pontiff expressed "gratitude" to Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Cairo.

Mr Schutz charged that El-Tayeb has made anti-Semitic statements about the conflict in Gaza, and said that, "Continuing the dialogue with him in a business-as-usual approach is wrong".

The fact of the matter is that many Israeli and Jewish leaders do not appear inclined to go out of their way to praise the Pope's letter, despite whatever appreciation they may feel for its contents – which suggests that post-October 7 tensions in the relationship with Catholicism won't be so easily assuaged.

Many Israelis and Jews believe the Pope should be more explicit and forceful in condemning Hamas terrorism and in recognising that Israel is involved in a legitimate campaign of self-defence. They've been offended by suggestions that Israel is engaged in "genocide" in Gaza, and want the Pope and the Vatican to clearly disassociate themselves from such rhetoric.

Moreover, they'd also like the Pope to rein in some other Catholic leaders, such as Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who, among other things, was seen wearing a Palestinian *keffiyeh*, or scarf, a symbol of Palestinian resistance, during a Christmas visit to Bethlehem.

Until those things happen, the hard truth is that at least some Israelis and Jews won't be in a humour to accentuate the positive vis-à-vis the Pope.

### Not the first crisis

To return to where we began, however, it's important to note that in the decades since Vatican II, this is hardly the first crisis to erupt in Jewish-Catholic relations. Anyone remember the fracas over a Holocaust-denying traditionalist bishop under Pope Benedict XVI, for instance? Or the 2000 beatification of Pope Pius IX? Or any number of other such episodes?

Yet under the (medically dubious, but poetically charming) notion that bones heal stronger at the break, generally the relationship has bounced back over time, as leaders on both sides redouble their commitments. We'll see whether the same thing is true here, but to the extent the past is prologue, there's at least some basis for optimism.

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





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Calls for US congress to investigate five aborted babies' fate

● Lawyers for Catholic pro-life activist Lauren Handy, who is facing a lengthy prison term for violating the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, are seeking to halt the destruction of the bodies of five unborn babies that Ms Handy recovered from a Washington abortion clinic in 2022.

In a letter to Rep. Jim Jordan, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Martin Cannon, senior counsel for the Chicago-based Thomas More Society, asked Mr Jordan to help stop the scheduled destruction of the remains and investigate their abortion deaths as evidence of a federal crime.

"I feel strongly that a congressional investigation is imperative here," Mr Cannon wrote.

Ms Handy recovered the remains of the unborn babies from a medical waste truck driver outside Washington Surgi-Clinic and believed they were the result of full-term abortions.

In the letter, Mr Cannon asserted that "the age and condition of the deceased newborns raise serious questions about whether they were legally aborted," and the body of evidence makes it "more likely than not that some babies" at the facility are "in fact born alive and left to die".

### Polish Church ministry for victims of abuse under political scrutiny

● The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation is in the middle of a political storm in Poland as the new government questions the funding its ministry for abuse victims received from the previous government.

Accused of having "no experience" in the field, the congregation's foundation didn't receive the last portion of funding – \$7.5 million – which the ministry's creators

said is "indispensable" to finish construction of a building and "start helping those abused both in society and in the Church".

Led by Sacred Heart Fr Michal Olszewski, the Archipelago – Islands Free from Violence project, as the ministry is called, is meant to be a safe haven and shelter for victims of abuse in families, institutions and in the church.

### Montreal archbishop challenges Canada's physician-assisted death law

● Archbishop Christian Lépine of Montreal has filed a challenge to Canada's law on physician-assisted death in a case that could have far-reaching implications for religious freedom, conscience rights, property rights and public-private partnerships.

The archbishop submitted a February 5 appeal to the Quebec Superior Court, asking for an immediate stay on application of a June 2023 amendment to Canada's Act Respecting End-of-Life Care, which states that "palliative care hospices may not exclude medical aid in dying from the care they offer".

Since 2016, Canada's law on "medical assistance in dying," or MAID, exempts from criminal charges doctors and nurse practitioners who either directly administer or prescribe medication to cause a person's death at their own request.

The law includes protocols for ensuring a patient requesting MAID is fully informed and freely consents. Archbishop Lépine is specifically seeking to protect the St Raphael Palliative Care Home and Day Centre in Montreal, established under the provision it would never administer MAID.

Archbishop Lépine told *The Catholic Register*, Canada's national Catholic newspaper, the case is "not only a matter of palliative care, it's a matter of freedom of conscience" for both individuals and institutions.

## Pope Francis canonises Argentina's first female saint, 'Mama Antula'

Pope Francis canonised Argentina's first female saint, María Antonia of St Joseph – known affectionately in the Pope's home country as 'Mama Antula' – in a Mass in St Peter's Basilica on Sunday.

Argentina's President Javier Milei sat in the front row to the Pope's right during the canonisation on February 11 and embraced the Pope at the end of the Mass.

Mama Antula (1730–1799) was a consecrated laywoman who promoted Ignatian spirituality, founding Buenos Aires' House for Spiritual Exercises at a time of widespread hostility to the Jesuit order.

Pope Francis praised the Argentine saint as "a model of apostolic fervour and boldness" for traveling "thousands of miles on foot through deserts and dangerous roads" to bring people to God.

"Brothers and sisters, God loves us ... and if we let him touch us, we too, by the power of his Spirit, can become witnesses of the love that saves," he said.

The Jesuit Pope from Argentina highlighted how Mama Antula persevered in safeguarding Ignatian spirituality after the Society of Jesus was suppressed and its priests expelled from South America.

"When the Jesuits were expelled, the Holy Spirit ignited in her a missionary flame based on trust in providence and perseverance," he said.

Pope Francis, the former archbishop of Buenos Aires,



Pope Francis and Argentine President Javier Milei share a laugh after the Mass for the canonisation St Maria Antonia de Paz Figueroa, known as Mama Antula, in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican February 11. She is the first female saint from Argentina. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

has said that he wants to visit Argentina in the second half of this year. Francis has not returned to his homeland since becoming pope in 2013.

The Pope met with the new Argentinian president for the first time briefly at the canonisation. Mr Milei, who called Francis an "imbecile" during his campaign, gave the Pope a hug after shaking his hand at the end of Mass.

The two had a private meeting at the Vatican on Monday before Mr Milei met

with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Pope Francis has said that he saw the meeting with Mr Milei on Monday as an opportunity to "start a dialogue" and indicated that he was not offended by the insults that Mr Milei had hurled against him before he was elected president, saying, "words during an election campaign come and go".

Mr Milei, who was raised Catholic, has recently embraced aspects of Judaism,

even suggesting the possibility that he could convert. After arriving in Rome from Israel on Friday, Mr Milei visited the Basilica of St Peter in Chains and posted a photo of himself looking at Michelangelo's statue of Moses inside of the church on Instagram.

After assuming office as president in December, Mr Milei issued a formal invitation for Pope Francis to visit Argentina in a letter signed on January 8.

## Nigerian bishops: Nigeria fast becoming a hostile killing field

Catholic bishops in Nigeria's Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province (IEP) are alarmed by the recurrent and "pervasive" security challenges in the West African nation, which they compare to a battlefield characterised by hostility and killing.

In a February 6 communiqué following a two-day meeting, the Catholic Church leaders at the helm of the Ibadan Archdiocese and the Dioceses of Ekiti, Ilorin, Ondo, Osogbo, and Oyo said: "All is not well, and positive change is needed."

"Our dear country Nigeria is fast becoming a hostile killing field. The ship

of the nation is foundering under the weight of pervasive insecurity, economic hardship due to hyperinflation, and the collapse of the naira [Nigeria's currency], cybercrime, high cost of food, lackadaisical governance and widespread corruption," the bishops said in their statement.

Life in Nigeria, they lamented, "is fast becoming an ordeal for millions of Nigerians because pervasive poverty, driven by the harsh environment, has driven many to desperation and even suicide".

The Church leaders called it "nothing short of hypocritical" to blame what the

Nigerians suffer today on changes in the world economy. "The truth is that often Nigerians are simply left to their own devices and left at the mercy of the most cruel and aggressive criminals by inept and selfish political and civil leaders," they said. "In all this, governments often seem weak or altogether absent."

Furthermore, they said, "any remedy now is even already too late for many Nigerians who have lost their lives to terrorists, hunger, kidnapping, and sundry disasters".

## Katalin Novák resigns as president of Hungary

Katalin Novák resigned as president of Hungary on Saturday amid protests over her decision to pardon a man last year who had been convicted of hiding a string of child sexual abuses in a state-run children's home.

"I issued a pardon that caused bewilderment and unrest for many people," Ms Novák said in a television address to the nation February 10. "I made a mistake."

A close ally of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Ms Novák,

46, who is a Calvinist Protestant, has been a champion for many in the Catholic Church worldwide because of her strong support for pro-life, pro-family policies. A mother of three, she was the first female president in Hungary's

history and the youngest person to ever hold the office.

Her unexpected resignation deals a major blow to Hungary's nationalist governing party Fidesz, which since 2010 has ruled with a constitutional majority.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
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## Ashes to ashes



A woman lies amid the remains of her burned house following the spread of wildfires in Viña del Mar, Chile, February 4, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Sofia Yanjari, Reuters

## Christian group decries arrest of US men in India on religion-related charge

A Christian group has decried the January 31 arrest of two US nationals on charges of religious conversion in a northeastern Indian state.

The allegation that John Matthew Boone, 64, and Michael James Flinchum, 77, “indulged in religious conversion is baseless and there is no truth in it,” Allen Brooks, spokesman of the Assam Christian Forum, told *UCA News* February 5.

Police in eastern Assam state detained Mr Boone and Mr Flinchum for participating in a religious event while in India on a tourist visa in Assam’s Sonitpur district.

According to the police, they were present at the inauguration of a Baptist Christian association. India’s visa rules

prohibit people on tourist visas from engaging in other activities.

“The building itself is incomplete. So, we have to say that they had come for conversion activities,” Madhurima Das, assistant police superintendent in Sonitpur, told the media after the arrest.

Mr Brooks denied the allegations. “It was not a prayer service. It was the inauguration of an office building,” he said.

The spokesman said the US nationals were invited as guests and there was a prayer service before the lunch.

“That (prayer service) might have been mistaken for religious conversion by the state administration,” ruled

by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, he observed.

Assam state, bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar, is headed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma whose government is against conducting missionary activities among the state’s tribal and socially poor Dalit people, who are grouped under Hinduism in India’s census.

At a recent function in Assam’s Dibrugarh district, Mr Sarma stressed the need for protecting “Indigenous faiths” from missionary activities.

Missionary activities can “result in a decline” in the tribal population, Mr Sarma said January 30.

Mr Boone and Mr Flinchum

each were fined \$500 and released January 31, according to Das, assistant police superintendent in Sonitpur.

Indian news outlets said that the US nationals were to be deported soon.

Groups affiliated with the prime minister’s party claim that foreign Christian missionaries visit India’s seven northeastern states, known for their diverse Indigenous population, as tourists to propagate Christianity by flouting visa norms.

In October 2022, seven German and three Swedish nationals were detained in Assam for allegedly conducting missionary activities.

## UK diocese denies asylum help for sex abuser accused of acid attack

The Catholic Church has strenuously denied helping a convicted sex offender to gain asylum in the United Kingdom where he allegedly went on to throw a chemical substance over a woman and her two children.

Abdul Ezedi, a 35-year-old Afghan, is suspected of throwing a corrosive substance over the three in London January 31. The woman, 31, suffered such “life-changing” injuries to her face that she is being kept under sedation in hospital.

Her two daughters, ages 8 and 3, are

being treated for burns, while Mr Ezedi also injured his own face in the attack.

In the following days, the Catholic Church was accused in the media of assisting Mr Ezedi to stay in the UK when it was rumoured that “a priest” provided him with a reference.

A government source told the *Daily Mail* February 6, however, the reference was in fact provided by a Baptist minister who presides over a chapel in a part of the city where Mr Ezedi lived.

The Diocese of Hexham and Newcas-

tle, where Mr Ezedi lived, said it did not assist Mr Ezedi beyond providing toiletries and food tokens through its Justice and Peace Refugee Project in Newcastle’s city centre.

The diocese said after that checking “local parish records and central records” and consulting clergy, it found no indication Mr Ezedi was received “into the Catholic Faith in this diocese, or that a Catholic priest of this diocese gave him a reference”.

## Vatican roundup

### Vatican and Italy agree to move paediatric hospital in Rome

● The Vatican and Italy signed a formal “declaration of intent” to move the Vatican-owned Bambino Gesù paediatric hospital in Rome to the campus of a now-closed Italian hospital by 2030.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and Alfredo Mantovano, secretary of the Italian prime minister’s Council of Ministers, signed the declaration February 8.

The hospital, currently on Rome’s Janiculum Hill next to the Pontifical North American College, would move several miles away to the site of the former Carlo Forlanini Hospital, which closed in 2015. Like the hospital at the current location, the new location would be given the status of “extraterritorial” Vatican property.

Mr Mantovano told reporters that after construction and remodelling, the new location would give the hospital at least four times as much space for patient rooms, clinics, offices and research labs.

While moving the hospital involves solving some complex legal and economic issues, the Vatican and Italy share a desire to provide the best facilities “for children with serious illnesses, their families and the doctors who want to care for them and for research,” Mr Montovano said, according to *Vatican News*.

### Cardinal Fernández: Vatican seeks to prevent using spirituality as means of abuse

● The Vatican’s doctrinal head told *OSV News* his office is working to “raise awareness and prevent” the use of Catholic spirituality as a means of abuse.

“Today we are more attentive than before to the possibility of mystical or spiritual elements being used to take advantage of people and even abuse them,” Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, told *OSV News* in a February 6 email.

The cardinal described such tactics as “false mysticism” and said the dicastery is “studying how to warn of the risks in time and how to stop them”. A number of high-profile

cases – including those involving ex-Jesuit priest Fr Marko Rupnik and L’Arche founder Jean Vanier – have illustrated how the Catholic Faith and its mystical tradition can be distorted to manipulate and coerce victims into sexual acts.

The cardinal told *OSV News* the dicastery is “now reviewing its norms on the discernment of supernatural phenomena and it will certainly be necessary to include some considerations related to the special gravity of these risks. I am particularly interested in this point, because it is a task that will also help us raise awareness and prevent (abuse)”.

### Pope Francis says Benedict XVI had ‘courage to resign’

● While memories of the shocking moment when Pope Benedict XVI resigned February 11, 2013, are still fresh for the German pope’s collaborators, it is Pope Francis who reflects on Benedict’s historic decision in a newly published book interview.

“He was a man who had the courage to resign and, from that moment on, he continued to accompany the Church and his successor,” the Pope told Javier Martínez-Brocal, Vatican correspondent of the Spanish newspaper *ABC*.

In *Pope Francis: The Successor. My Memories of Benedict XVI*, set to be published in Spanish April 3, the Pontiff told Mr Martínez-Brocal what it was like to live for a decade with the first pope emeritus in 600 years.

“Benedict and I had a very deep relationship and I want it to be known, I want it to be known without intermediaries,” Pope Francis said.



# Paris Archdiocese reveals grandeur of Notre Dame Cathedral's reopening



Caroline de Sury

**T**he reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral, scheduled for December 8, will be “six months of celebration and praise,” the archbishop of Paris said in a pastoral letter. The iconic cathedral will reopen five years and 10 months after the devastating fire in April 2019.

Archbishop Laurent Ulrich gave some details in his February 2 letter on what the reopening will look like, emphasising it will not be a one-day celebration but several months of joy.

The archbishop announced that “this celebration of the reopening of Notre Dame deserves an octave: from December 8 to 15, every day, we will have a solemn celebration with a particular theme”. But the festive “reopening” time will last until June 8, when Pentecost falls in 2025.

**“Believers or not, Christians or not, it is a landmark for all. This cathedral is there for everyone”**

That way, the archbishop said, “many will be able to say: ‘I was at the reopening!’”

“It must in fact be taken into account that the number of seats in the cathedral is not very large: Notre Dame is certainly not the largest church in Paris!” Archbishop Ulrich said.

## Procession

At the end of November, a procession will take place in the streets of the French capital to return the statue of the Virgin Mary to the cathedral. It is currently housed in the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, directly across the street from the Louvre Palace. The sculpture, called the Virgin of the Pillar, or the Virgin of Paris, dates back to the mid-14th Century. It was next to her, inside Notre Dame Cathedral, that the famous French poet and diplomat Paul Claudel suddenly converted to Christianity on Christmas Day in 1886.

The celebration of the reopening will start December 7, with representatives of the French state, which owns the cathedral, officially handing Notre Dame over to the archbishop of Paris – “the assignee which is the Catholic Church” – the letter said. The event will include the “awakening of the organ,” restored since the fire, followed with “liturgical celebration with blessing, a Magnificat or a ‘Te Deum,’ then vespers.”



Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris inserts the relics of Sts Denis, Genevieve and the relics of Christ's crown of thorns into the golden rooster in Paris December 16, 2023, prior to its installation at the top of the spire of the Notre Dame Cathedral. The rooster symbolises resilience amid destruction after the devastating April 2019 fire – as restoration officials also revealed an anti-fire misting system is being kitted out under the cathedral's roof. Photo: OSV News/Christian Hartmann, Reuters

The first Mass will be celebrated in Notre Dame December 8, the day when the new altar will be consecrated, highlighting the celebrative week. The sober bronze altar, with a flared shape reminiscent of a cup, was designed by Guillaume Bardet. Based south of Lyon, Bardet was chosen from among 70 candidates vying for the project. He also is in charge of the other pieces of furniture, baptistery, ambon, pulpit and tabernacle.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception will be celebrated in the reopened cathedral December 9, a day later than the actual feast. “We will have the joy of celebrating the Immaculate Conception, which the liturgy celebrates this year on December 9, due to the Second Sunday of Advent,” the archbishop wrote.

## Donors

The archbishop of Paris paid a special tribute in his letter to the generosity of all those who donated money for the reconstruction of the cathedral, whether they be “major donors,

exceptional patrons or modest donors”. The donors will be present at ceremonies, as well as firefighters, entrepreneurs and craftsmen, public figures, French and foreign bishops and other representatives of the French dioceses, the letter said.

“This festive season will be one for all Christian people, of all ages and conditions,” Archbishop Ulrich said. “The most precarious, the isolated, the forgotten will be at Notre Dame.”

**“Notre Dame is the ‘mother church of the diocese’ and a ‘source place for our faith’”**

“Believers or not, Christians or not, it is a landmark for all. This cathedral is there for everyone,” he added, mentioning all those he said are in his heart prior to the opening – especially youth from troubled outskirts of Paris and people suffer-

ing from traumas.

Archbishop Ulrich confirmed in his letter that the work is progressing according to schedule on the cathedral restoration worksite, and the craftsmen are working “with happiness, enthusiasm and understanding”. Inside the cathedral, the ground is still open due to archaeological excavations and for the creation of conduits for electricity, heating, protection and fire alarm circuits. At the end of the summer, diocesan teams will start setting up equipment and facilities for liturgical functions, for which they will need two or three months.

The Paris archbishop announced in his letter that the archdiocese will take advantage of the reopening period to propose a renewal of “catechesis for all on the sacraments” to “rediscover in depth” their meaning, often forgotten in today's society.

## Mother church

In a touching letter to his flock 10 months prior to reopening, the archbishop said Notre Dame is the “mother church of the diocese” and

“a source place for our faith”.

“You love it, I love it, we love it,” Archbishop Ulrich stressed.

“Then, amidst the jubilation that we can expect, and also the pride that naturally attaches to the work accomplished in this period of just over five years, the magnificent commitment of companies and their employees who have found exceptional professional accomplishment there, I would like us to simply know how to express our gratitude for a truly common work, to congratulate ourselves on this sense of the common good achieved together which produces so much more joy than when everyone only thinks about his own good,” the Paris archbishop wrote.

“Above all,” he concluded, “I would like us to give glory to God: ‘Non nobis Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam’ -- ‘Not to us, Lord, but to Your name give glory!’”

**Caroline de Sury writes for OSV News from Paris.**



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### The now-inconvenient Faith of historical figures

**Dear Editor,** Mary Kenny in her article on St Brigid's many adaptations by various elements in society refers to St Joan of Arc, who has suffered the same treatment [*The Irish Catholic* – February 1, 2024]. The great Pucelle of France has been adapted by some unlikely groups from war mongers to radical feminists.

Joan of Arc was a profound Catholic. Her extraordinary determination and

energy were a result of her visions. Like Bernadette of Lourdes or the Children of Garabandal, Joan was chosen as an innocent child of God to do great things at a time when France was being pillaged by English marauders who rode through hamlets terrorising the villages.

We, in Ireland, had similar experiences in the 1920s with the Black and

Tans. She once described the English as "a great people in their own country". When imprisoned in the tower she demanded to receive the Eucharist, which brought a priest to her. Her Catholic Faith was everything to her.

*Yours etc.,  
Cecil Roberts  
Rathmines, Dublin 6*

### Leaving judgment to God and praying for deceased's salvation

**Dear Editor,** Fr Bernard Cotter's comment about the minimalist funerals granted to priests "forcibly removed from ministry" was poignant [*The Irish Catholic* – January 25, 2024]. "Leaving judgement to God" is indeed the right response to the death of anyone; God alone knows the heart.

But leaving judgement to God is regularly flouted in modern funerals when the deceased is

"canonised" regardless of how they lived. The primary purpose of a Catholic funeral is to pray for the salvation of the deceased while commending them to God's mercy. The canonisation can come later after the formal Vatican decree has been published!

I don't want people presuming I'm in heaven but to pray for the repose of my soul.

*Yours etc.,  
Philip Lucey  
Kenmare, Co. Kerry*



### Inadequate and fierce attack on Pope Francis

**Dear editor,** Patricia Casey [*The Irish Catholic* – January 25, 2024] is very intent in her article in putting down Pope Francis because of his election as the Prefect for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith, Argentinian Cardinal Fernández.

She mentions two books on sexuality by him, dismissing them without giving a single quote (can sexuality not be spiritual, or in fact should be, one wonders on reading her dis-

missal, and knowing of the repeated éxtasis of St Teresa of Avila).

She also criticises his approach to dealing with a case of denunciation of sexual abuse to a priest at a time when he was an archbishop, again without any depth or talk on it.

Her criticisms are ill illustrated and the object of such seem to be to go straight after our present Pope. Is this her aim?

At a time when the Cath-

olic Church is the object of criticism from so many (mainly on issues like lack of ordination of women, the objection to abortion, to calling same sex union a marriage, to contraception, IVF, etc.), Francis is always putting Christ at the centre of our Christianity and opening up the Church to thought and dialogue within and with the outside.

And on issues of sex abuse, he showed in Ireland

and elsewhere his deep sadness and complete rejection, and measures are now well put in place to prevent it.

We also find many outside attracted to him and his friendly and dialoguing Christ-like style.

It seems to me inadequate to launch such a fierce attack on Francis with unfounded comments.

We do not need that.

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

### Cardinals, doctrinal differences and the Latin Mass

**Dear Editor,** Cindy Wooden's article on the Pope's 2023 [*The Irish Catholic* – January 4, 2024] needs to include the cases of Cardinal Burke and Bishop Strickland, and many other clergy who have been removed or demoted by Pope Francis. Are these papal rulings all about doctrinal disagreement or personal loyalty to the current occupant of the throne of St Peter?

Neither does she make any mention of the Latin Mass people: and their treatment under the current papacy.

Then the piece by Elizabeth Scalia 'My Catholic Wish List for 2024' [*The Irish Catholic* – January 18, 2024] gives us to understand that the problem around Cardinal Burke has been the alleged size and opulence of his Vatican apartment. Nothing about his support for the Latin Mass

people and doctrinal differences with Pope Francis. (Any reports I have read about Cardinal Burke show him far away from Rome and doing his job.)

These columnists should either give us the plain facts, warts and all, or give the task to others who will.

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

Catholics know what they are doing here

### The Irish Catholic

**F**ormer Taoiseach John Bruton's funeral saw a fitting send-off for a man well-known as an able and honest politician, "a man of integrity and truth," as current Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said.

However, those in attendance had their attention drawn by chief celebrant and homilist Fr Bruce Bradley, SJ, to an aspect of Mr Bruton's character that went deeper than his impressive, and generous, political service to his country. Fr Bradley spoke of that which Mr Bruton held more dearly than anything else: his Catholic Faith.

For those sitting in the pews on Saturday who are currently in office both north and south of the border, the emphasis Fr Bradley placed on the supernatural element of Mr Bruton's religious convictions must have sounded anachronistic, possibly quaint. Regardless of what they thought, though, they were certainly exposed to ideas that aren't often aired before the ears of modern Irish political or civil discourse.

Quoting Seamus Heaney, Fr Bradley said that 'the transcendent', is progressively missing from our conversation and our discourse, in Ireland. It has become "unfashionable to refer to matters of religion or speak of 'God', in a country traditionally and for many reasons steeped – at times oversteeped – in religion".

Having made reference to the increasing absence of God from the public square, Fr Bradley said that all who knew Mr Bruton closely recognised this "all-important aspect of his life and self-identity". Unfortunately, he added that it is largely missing from "public commentary" and that now there is a "temptation in our culture just now to ignore this aspect of people's lives, as if it were too marginal or too private and embarrassing to bring up in public or as having too little to do with the real world".

"John Bruton would have agreed with the Belfast-born writer of the Narnia Chronicles, C.S. Lewis, that 'Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance; if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important'. For John, his religion was infinitely important in the literal sense. Any account of what he was about without central reference to his Catholicism is seriously incomplete," Fr Bradley said.

As will be obvious to readers of *The Irish Catholic*, the central importance of the questions Christianity poses is a theme rarely touched upon maturely in modern Irish society. The idea that it is of such all-encompassing importance as to influence one's political behaviour or beliefs is all but taboo, with modern chants like "Keep your rosaries off my ovaries" and "Nun of your business" reflecting the present, prevailing attitude that religion has no place in the governance of a country.

Mr Bruton however, with a resume as extensive and impressive as he had, understood that faith is not the sort of thing that can be left at the door at the start of the work day. What's more, he understood that our work would be impoverished by such an approach.

"He was a Catholic in a deep and not at all sectarian sense. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, which he heard faithfully here in his local parish church in Dunboyne and in many other places, shaped and guided his journey, personally and professionally, through all the challenges of his life," Fr Bradley said.

"What I am saying might seem to have turned into a simple eulogy, after all. But its purpose remains essentially homiletic. Human beings are the words with which God tells his story, according to a wise saying quoted by the Belgian Dominican, Edward Schillebeeckx, in his book *Church: The Human Story of God* a few decades ago.

"John, as those who knew him best would probably confirm, was not perfect in every way. But, in all that has been described, he, as Marilyn Robinson might put it, 'knew what he was doing here'. John knew the larger journey we are all on. His life itself spoke that."

Fr Bradley spoke truth that modern Ireland needs to hear – Christianity at its heart is always an empowering force for politics, never a hindrance – and Mr Bruton's humane service to the State was a suitable example of this principle in action. He also spoke to the Catholic community here and its leaders in Maynooth, have confidence in knowing what you are doing here and give that confidence to your people. May those with eyes to see and ears to hear be attentive.

#### 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.



# Parents need to wake up to digital risks



Wendy Grace

**C**an you imagine leaving your six year old in a playground knowing there was a predator there waiting to groom them? Or bringing them with you to a violent over 18s film and asking them to close their eyes, hoping they might not see. Would you hand them a pack of 20 cigarettes because, well, everyone else has them and it just can't be helped. These are things that, for most parents, are unthinkable because our primary goal is to keep our children healthy, happy and safe. Why do we not parent our children with the same standards in the online world as we do in the offline one.

## Age six

Last week, a report commissioned by Kids, showed that 25% of six year olds own their own smartphone. That figure steadily increases to over 50% by the age of 8.

**They are addictive, because they are made that way, and the correlation between the amount of time spent on social media sites and the upward curve of self-harm and suicidal ideation is frightening"**

The same report showed the majority of parents don't feel confident in guiding their children in how to stay safe online. They also found that most children know they are spending too much time online, they are literally desperate for us to do our job and implement better boundaries.

Some people will be wringing their hands with greedy glee, ready to



capitalise on the fact they have unfettered access to vulnerable children online, whose parents don't truly understand what they are doing. I usually opt for "a mother knows best" attitude when it comes to most parenting choices, but seeing this data has made it clear that it's time for a bit of collective cop on when it comes to raising children in the digital age.

If you saw your child being approached by a stranger in your front garden you would be out to investigate in a flash, yet we know that 33% of children game with strangers, and have friends on their social media apps they don't know, and of those, 61% have been approached by a stranger online.

## Impact

There are now hundreds of peer reviewed studies which show the impact of access to screens on mental health, child development, socialisation, anxiety, depression ... the list goes on, and that's before we go into the impact of cyberbullying, online grooming, and exposure to hardcore pornography.

We can't simply shrug our shoulders and say 'the cat's out of the bag.' Yes our children's worlds are saturated with technology, but we have to be the ones to help them navigate it. In

order to do this we need to be equipped ourselves, and yet groups giving educational talks for parents in schools on this topic, repeatedly say parental attendance is low.

**It's no surprise then, that the trend in Silicon Valley, where much of this technology is made, is that those who design this technology don't allow their children anywhere near it"**

We have to face up to the reality that much of this is about a handy device that provides entertainment and distraction for our children. I get it, when my fifteen minute timer goes off all too quickly, and I've actually been able to get something done, I'm as disappointed as my 7 year old that screen time is up. But I know regulating and supervising this time is worth it.

It shouldn't be an inconceivable notion that we can take away, or restrict access to these devices if our children already have them. We, as parents, have to make hard decisions all the time to protect our children. In

watching families who have documented this process of going screen free, yes, you see a detox, protest and pain but then a transformation, a child once glued to the glowing babysitter, being a child once again, using their imagination, being present with friends and family, and having their well-being restored.

## Do you know?

Do you really know everything your child is seeing online? This is 24/7 porn in the pocket, a bully you can't get away from, constant critique, and an entire world that has access to your child.

Parental controls and blocking certain sites can only go so far. Your little digital native will always be a step ahead. In a nanosecond on the most popular platforms that your children use you can find unsuitable content. Extensive research in the UK from the Children's Commissioner found Twitter was the online platform where young people were most likely to have seen pornography, and the two teenagers who murdered Brianna Ghey at 13 years old were easily able to access the Dark Web, which enables someone to use the internet without being able to track activity.

You see, social media sites were not designed with

children's safety in mind. They want your children on these sites as long as possible. Smart algorithms have them exactly where they want them. They are addictive, because they are made that way, and the correlation between the amount of time spent on social media sites and the upward curve of self-harm and suicidal ideation is frightening. In the U.S. there is currently a class action lawsuit against social media companies for their "role in creating a youth mental health crises through their addictive services."

It's no surprise then, that the trend in Silicon Valley, where much of this technology is made, is that those who design this technology don't allow their children anywhere near it.

Children's brains with a developing prefrontal cortex, are simply not ready to navigate these devices. Adults find it hard to regulate their time online and what they consume, how can we expect our children to? Yes, I am pestered all the time by my kids about going online, the pressure can be relentless but if there was any other element in your child's life that had so many potential negative consequences you would do whatever it takes to manage it. So let's not be screen blind.

## Behaviour

It starts with me modeling behavior and putting the phone away. Then it takes a social, cultural, governmental and legislative recognition that a change is necessary. Social media companies need to be held accountable with more robust legislation in place to regulate age limits and privacy controls, and it's beginning to happen. Ireland's online safety regulator is finally drafting a legally binding Online Safety Code for social media platforms.

Communities can lead the way in supporting families in one of the most challenging aspects of modern parenting. For example, the 'It takes a village' initiative in Co. Wicklow saw primary schools and parents come together in a mission to protect children by introducing a no smartphone voluntary code. Suddenly there is strength in numbers and it becomes that bit easier to hold off on buying the phone. Seeing its success, the education minister Norma Foley is creating resources so other schools can follow suit. This approach has to include education and support for parents, but ultimately the responsibility for helping our children thrive in a digital world rests with us.

**Wendy Grace is MD at Compass Communications and a Broadcast journalist**



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, February 15, 2024

## Tuning into the Spirit

Does watching a Mass on TV provide spiritual nourishment?

Page 32



# Shields, symbols and saints: What is heraldry in the Catholic Church?

A chasuble bearing Pope Pius XII's coat of arms is displayed as part of an exhibit on the wartime pope at the Poli Art Gallery near the Vatican in Rome May 24, 2023. Photo: CNS/Justin McLellan

**E**cclesiastical heraldry is both familiar and mysterious.

Frequently seen in one form or another, coats of arms pervade our Catholic culture in numerous ways: on letters and newspapers, diocesan websites and social media pages, in Roman churches and diocesan cathedrals. Most Catholics, though, are unaware of the significance of this time-honoured practice.

Steeped in tradition, ecclesiastical heraldry is a regulated system of self-identification, adopted by the Church from medieval society, which operates as a science and an art form with its own rules and regulations.

A heraldic achievement, also called a coat of arms, is permitted lawfully for those who occupy



**Heraldry is an omnipresent but little understood aspect of Catholic symbolism, writes Michael Heinlein**

ecclesiastical office – for example, popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, monsignors, priests, and religious superiors such as abbots and abbesses. It's also permitted for ecclesiastical territories and institutions – for example, dioceses, religious orders, papal knighthoods, basilicas, cathedrals, parish churches, schools and other Catholic institutions. While heraldry runs the risk of being seen as haughty or pompous, in real-

ity it simply seeks to graphically herald (or announce) – in colour and symbol – who and what the bearer is.

### Ancient Egypt

The use of artistic elements to identify personages, locations and possessions first existed in pre-Christian societies. Pharaohs of ancient Egypt offer one of the earliest precursors of heraldic practices. Their various holdings

of goods and properties were identified with the symbols found in the cartouche, an oval symbol containing personal hieroglyphics with a distinct line at the bottom indicating royalty.

Likewise, the Book of Numbers provides evidence that standards and symbols were used by the tribes of the nomadic Israelites in early biblical times (see 1:2, 18, 52).

### Modern day

Modern heraldry finds its origins with the Battle of Hastings in 1066 – illustrated in the famous Bayeux Tapestry – when knights concealed by battle armour were first identified with decorated shields. Later developments incorporated the shield design into body coats, banners and even coverings for

horses. These coats of arms subsequently became synonymous with the knight's family, especially following the Third Crusade (1189–92). The shape and character of ecclesiastical heraldry are closely tied to these developments since the Church adopted many of the customs and traditions of the culture.

As feudal and belligerent Europe shifted into the structures of nobility and royalty, familial arms were used much as in ancient Egypt – to identify themselves and their possessions. Similar measures of personal identification were incorporated into items such as seals (often part of rings), which were legally mandated for use on documents and letters as a means to provide authenticity and prevent forgery.





Archbishop Bruno Heim was an expert on heraldry and wrote three books on the subject. He designed coats of arms for four recent popes.

This is the coat of arms of Pope Francis. The insignia borrows much from his former episcopal emblem. On the blue shield is the symbol of the Society of Jesus. Below it is a star and the buds of a spikenard flower, which represent respectively Mary and St Joseph. The papal motto is the Latin phrase *Miserando atque eligendo*, which means “because he saw him through the eyes of mercy and chose him” or more simply, “having mercy, he called him”. The phrase comes from a homily by St Bede. Photos: OSV News



Because noble status and property was inherited by the oldest son through primogeniture, the youngest son was typically offered for service in the Church. Familial arms continued to be used by those appointed to such ecclesiastical positions of jurisdiction and authority, although they were typically modified for ecclesiastical use by removing warlike symbols.

Many sources indicate that the first bishop known to do so was Guy of Vergy, bishop of Autun in the early 13th Century. A personal papal coat of arms – other than just the standard tiara and keys indicative of papal office – was first used during the pontificate of Pope Martin V (1417-1431). Use of heraldry by all ecclesiastical officeholders became a standardised means of self-identification beginning in the 17th Century.

## Identification

Because a coat of arms seeks to identify its bearer, each must be unique – like a passport or social security number. Therefore, offices and methods for documentation and legislation for both secular and ecclesiastical heraldry were established, the most notable and enduring secular example being the College of Arms established in England by King Richard III in 1484. Initial codification of heraldry in the Church coincided with widespread practice by the 17th Century through a system of ecclesiastical headgear developed by French heraldist and printer Pierre Palliot.

Although the jurisprudence of secular heraldry significantly weighs upon the Church's heraldic tradition, it was also shaped by the development of doctrinal, liturgical and canonical factors. The Church itself began to systematically regulate her heraldry in 1905, with Pope St Pius X's establishment of the Heraldry Commission of the Roman Curia, an office abolished in 1960 by Pope St John XXIII.

**“An equally significant aspect of heraldry's regulations is the centuries' old linguistic components governing it. In effect, heraldry has its own language”**

At the end of the subsequent decade, with the approval of Pope St Paul VI, three specialists published *Rubrica Araldica Vaticana* – the compendium of rules governing ecclesiastical heraldry today. Likewise, the Vatican Secretariat of State issued *Ut sive sollicite* in 1969, a brief instruction on coats of arms and other honorifics for cardinals, bishops and other prelates. Current scholarly interest in the field is reinforced by the laudable and exhaustive 2014 manual of ecclesiastical heraldry published by Cardinal Andrea Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo, a leading heraldic authority and designer of Pope Benedict XVI's coat of arms.

## Language

An equally significant aspect of heraldry's regulations is the centuries' old linguistic components governing it. In effect, heraldry has its own language.

Even today, the artistic rendering of a coat of arms is accompanied by a lengthy explanation written in blazon – heraldry's own language. Coming from a word from French for “shield,” blazon combines terms of Old English and French resulting in

a language with a distinctive word order, vocabulary and grammar. Blazon describes a coat of arms with such detail that it is possible to be artistically reproduced by anyone familiar with the lexicon. Coats of arms are described in Latin from the bearer's point of view, left and right for the viewer correspondingly are called “dexter” and “sinister”.

## Symbolism

A coat of arms for each ecclesiastical order, office, rank or institution contains several symbolic elements. External elements to the coat of arms describe what office and jurisdiction the bearer holds, while interior elements describe the bearer.

**“Male and female religious superiors are entitled to bear a coat of arms”**

Starting at the uppermost part, replacing the knight's helmet or monarch's crown on the crest of secular arms, most ecclesiastical arms are topped with a galero – a hat now only used in ceremonial depictions.

The unique and central part of any coat of arms is the shield. Most shields for cardinals and bishops are impaled – a combination of two parts often indicating occupation of an office – in which the arms of the bearer's diocese are seen on the left and personal arms are on the right. Examples of those bearing only their personal arms are titular bishops such as auxiliaries, some cardinals and officials in the Roman Curia or cardinals not ordained as bishops. Behind a bishop's shield is a processional cross denoting rank in the episcopate: One horizontal bar indicates a bishop or two indicates an archbishop.

The cross is replaced by a crosier for those with ordinary jurisdiction who are not bishops, such as abbots or the ordinaries of the Anglican Ordinariates. Because they occupy positions of jurisdiction, male and female religious superiors are entitled to bear a coat of arms, although the only one of those which might be impaled is an abbot's with the arms of his abbey.

Personal aspects of a shield also incorporate elements of the bearer's life, often depicting symbols representative of their particular devotions or patron saints, life events or genealogy. Additionally, below the shield is a motto chosen by the bearer, typically from Scripture.

Even a quick glance at a coat of arms, then, provides important information.

**i** Michael Heinlein is editor of Simply Catholic. Follow him on X (Twitter) @HeinleinMichael.



# The qualities of love: 6 ways to better understand an overused word



Carl Olson

**P**op quiz: How many commandments did Jesus give? It's a tricky question, since we know Jesus made clear he came to fulfil the law and that his teaching and actions were aimed at the completion – not the abolition – of the commandments (cf. Mt 5:17-20). But what commandments did he give?

## What is love?

The gospels record just one such commandment: "This is my commandment: Love one another as I love you" (Jn 15:12). The centrality and necessity of that love is evident. But what, exactly, is that love? Is it an emotion? A passion? Or something more?

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in *Deus Caritas Est* (*God Is Love*), his first encyclical, "the term 'love' has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings".

## Love is of God

First, true love is "of God" and is therefore a divine gift. As such, it reflects the nature of God, being holy, selfless and oriented to the good of the other.

## God is love

And that leads to the second fact, that God is love, as St John so famously writes in his first epistle. This love is bound up in the great mystery of the Trinity, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: "God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange" (CCC, No. 221). That is why St. John writes that "everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God," for there is only one source of authentic love: the Triune God.

## Love is a free gift

Third, love is a free gift; it cannot be coerced, manipulated or commodified. The greatest example of this is found in the Incarnation. God sent his son into the world, says St. John, "so that we might have life through him." Love is a gift, and so the lover initiates the life-giving relationship with the beloved: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as expiation for our sins."



**“Real love is enfleshed, and that is why the two greatest acts of love in the world are found in the marital embrace and in the act of dying for someone else”**

## Love is selfless

And that highlights the fourth quality of love: It is selfless and sacrificial. Such is the love of Christ for his disciples: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." This is the sacrificial love of the Bridegroom for his Bride, the church: "Husbands, love your

wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her" (Eph 5:25). Those who are united to Christ in love are not slaves but friends -- even the very sons and daughters of God by grace: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are" (1 Jn 3:1).

## Love is an act

A fifth characteristic of love is that it acts; it is not just an abstract concept, but a concrete action. If Jesus had merely spoken of love and not accepted the cross, what power would his words have? Real love is enfleshed, and that is why the two greatest acts of love in the world are found in the marital

embrace and in the act of dying for someone else.

## Love is for all

Finally, this love is for all people, not just for a tribe or a nation. The entrance of the Gentiles into the church demonstrated that the new covenant is universal, for "Jews and Greeks alike" as St Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:24).

"Love is the key to the mystery," wrote Archbishop Fulton Sheen, noting also that "no love ever mounts to a higher level without a touch of the cross".

**i** Carl Olson is editor of Catholic World Report and Ignatius Insight.



# How to find our true identity



**Sr Alicia Torres**

**W**ho am I? This question lurks at the core of every human heart. So often the real answer is blurred by responses we so readily grasp after, and yet time and again fail to satisfy. One response in particular, I think, gnaws at so many of us today: "I am important."

Of course human beings have inherent value. Created in God's image and likeness, our value is inestimable. Yet, when we focus too much on that value, we miss the big picture that our heart longs to see.

Consider the typical "getting to know you" questions. "What do you do?"

"Where did you go to school?"  
"Where do you live now?"  
"What do you do for fun?"

Such questions can fill an awkward silence and help us learn about a person, but they can also help evaluate that person's place in the social hierarchy.

Last year, I was invited to a networking event. As I waited to check in, the man standing behind me began to make conversation with me. He was kind and eager to meet people and make connections. But once I revealed by my answers to his questions that I wasn't in the "in crowd," he politely stepped away from the conversation.

## Fascinating

It was a fascinating experience for me. I wasn't offended and understood how eager the people at the event were to make the most of their experience and make as many connections as possible.

But it raised the question for me: "With whom are we ultimately trying to connect?"

A dear friend of mine was

recently describing a piece of art that had really moved him. It was an image of Jesus, sitting in the midst of a schoolroom surrounded by children. Some were close to Jesus, affectionate and intimate, while others were gathered round that inner circle, gazing with desire. Still others were far off, yet not outside the room. What he loved about the artwork was that he could identify with one little boy in particular, and how that child so evidently longed to be near Jesus.

**“What I want to know is if I am loved. And if it is true – that love is at the core of my identity – then all truly shall be well”**

I am important, but that means nothing unless I know I am loved.

The only way to confirm we are loved is if we know we are children of God. Because of this relationship, everything else in our world becomes true, good and beautiful. Our identity in Christ makes our accomplishments meaningful, our relationships enjoyable and our wildest dreams at least fun to think about, if not completely possible!

Our identity as children of God is confirmed and nourished above all in our celebration of the Eucharist. At the moment we make the sign of the cross, not only does the Mass begin, but as I sign myself, I am reminded of my identity – that I am made in the image of God, a trinity of persons bound in a relationship of self-giving love. As the Mass continues, I am drawn into deeper communion with the God who loves me, hearing his word, spoken for me, witnessing his offering, prepared for me at the hands of the priest, and gazing upon his hidden presence in a tiny white host, given, completely, for me.

He gives himself to me, and I, in turn, can give myself to him. In the end, I don't really want to know if I am important, and neither does anyone else. What I want to know is if I am loved. And if it is true – that love is at the core of my identity – then all truly shall be well.

And what about that big picture? The image that I see in my mind's eye, and that my heart is drawn to contemplate, is of a little girl smiling, cheerful, with rosy cheeks and a tiny brown teddy bear being held tenderly in the arms of Jesus, her head resting upon his heart. And that little girl is me. And when I can truly see that little girl, I know the answer to the question, "Who am I?" The answer is, "I am loved."

**i** Sr Alicia Torres is an executive team member for the National Eucharistic Revival, editor of the Heart of the Revival e-newsletter and a member of the Franciscans of the Eucharist of Chicago.

## Questions of Faith?

**Jenna Marie Cooper**



**Does watching a televised Mass provide spiritual nourishment?**

**Q: In the past few weeks, due to extreme weather, I've missed Mass a couple of times. My parish has a Facebook channel, so I watched the services there instead. I wasn't able to receive Communion. In talking to the priest, though, he said that in such situations, a person can receive invisibly or symbolically, and either way still be fed. Could you comment?**

**A:** Watching a livestream or pre-recorded Mass is not the same as attending Mass in person and receiving Communion. But given the circumstances you describe, it sounds like watching Mass online was still a good way to be spiritually nourished in that particular instance.

Most Catholics are aware of our 'Sunday obligation,' that is, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and certain major feast days that might fall on other days of the week. As Canon 1247 of the Code of Canon Law states: "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the Faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass." Sometimes this word "participate" is translated from the original Latin *participandi* as 'assist at Mass,' which underscores the idea that the lay Faithful are meant to be have a "fully conscious, and active participation" in liturgical celebrations (See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 14).

A true, fully conscious and active participation in the Mass is understood to require our literal, physical presence at the liturgy. Because of this, watching Mass on a screen would not fulfil the Sunday obligation.

That being said, the Church intends for all of our obligations to be rooted in common sense, and a foundational principle of the law in general is that nobody can be bound to do what is impossible. Therefore, if you are truly unable to attend Mass in person – whether that be due to inclement weather, illness, being at a great geographical distance from a Catholic church, etc. – then you are not bound by the Sunday obligation as long as these circumstances persist.

Yet even if you are unable, and

thus not required, to attend Mass, the commandment to "keep holy the Sabbath day" still applies, and in that case we should still do what we can to keep Sunday as an especially restful and prayerful day. In fact, Canon 1248, Paragraph 2 tells us: "If participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the Faithful take part in a liturgy of the word...or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families." My own thought is that attentively watching a broadcast Mass and devoutly following the readings and prayers would be very much in line with the personal prayer time Canon 1248 recommends for circumstances where in-person Mass attendance is not possible.

Similarly, the graces attached to receiving the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion is not something that can be replaced by an online broadcast. But there are many beautiful prayers in our Catholic tradition for a "spiritual communion," where we express our longing to receive Jesus at least spiritually, even if we cannot receive him physically in the Eucharist.

It should also be noted that Catholics are, strictly speaking, only technically required to receive Holy Communion once per year during the Easter season (See Canon 920). It is perfectly legitimate to attend Mass and refrain from receiving Communion. And there are some circumstances when a Catholic should attend Mass to fulfil the Sunday obligation but not partake in the Eucharist, such as when they have committed a serious sin but have not yet received absolution in the Sacrament of Penance, or when they have not kept the required one-hour fast before Communion.

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





# Praying the psalms



**G**od behaves in the psalms in ways that God is not allowed to behave in theology.

That quip comes from Sebastian Moore and should be highlighted at a time when fewer people want to use the psalms in prayer because they feel offended by what they sometimes find there. More and more, we see people resisting the psalms as a way to pray (or desire to sanitise them) because the psalms speak of murder, revenge, anger, violence, war-making and patriarchy.

Some ask, how can I pray with words that are full of hatred, anger, violence, speak of the glories of war, and of crushing one's enemies in the name of God? For others, the objection is to a patriarchal colouring in the psalms – where the divine is masculine and the masculine is too-much deified. For yet others, the offense is aesthetic. Their objection: “They’re bad poetry!”

## Not great poetry

Perhaps the psalms aren’t great poetry and undeniably do smack of violence, war, hatred of one’s enemies, and the desire for vengeance, all in the name of God. Admittedly, they’re also patriarchal in character. But does that make them a bad language for prayer? Let me suggest something to the contrary.

One of the classical definitions



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

of prayer says “prayer is lifting mind and heart to God”. Simple, clear, accurate. I suggest that the actual problem is that we seldom actually do this when we pray.

Rather than lifting up to God what is actually on our minds and in our hearts, we tend to treat God as someone from whom we need to hide the real truth of our thoughts and feelings. Instead of pouring out mind and heart, we tell God what we think God wants to hear – not murderous thoughts, desire for vengeance, or our disappointment with him.

## Truth not hidden

But expressing those feelings is the whole point. What makes the psalms particularly apt for prayer is that they do not hide the truth

from God but express the whole gamut of our actual feelings. They give an honest voice to what’s actually going on in our minds and hearts.

Sometimes we feel good and our spontaneous impulse is to speak words of praise and gratitude, and the psalms give us that voice. They speak of God’s goodness in everything – love, friends, faith, health, food, wine, enjoyment. But we don’t always feel that way. Our lives also have their cold, lonely seasons when disappointment and bitterness simmer or rage under the surface. The psalms give us honest voice where we can open up all those simmering feelings to God. Also, there are times when we are filled with the sense of our own inadequacy, with the fact that

we cannot measure up to the trust and love that’s given us. Again, the psalms give us voice for this, asking God to be merciful and to soften our hearts, wash us clean, and give us a new start.

As well, there are times when we feel bitterly disappointed with God and need some way to express this. The psalms give us voice for this (“Why are you so silent?” “Why are you so far from me?”) even as they make us aware that God is not afraid of our anger and bitterness; but, like a loving parent, only wants us to come and talk about it. The psalms are a privileged vehicle for prayer because they lift the full range of our thoughts and feelings to God.

## Why we struggle

However, there are a number of reasons why we struggle with that. First, because our age tends to eschew metaphor and taken literally, some of the images in the psalms are offensive. Second, we tend to be in denial about our actual feelings. It’s hard to admit

that we feel some of the things we sometimes feel – grandiosity, sexual obsessions, jealousies, bitterness, paranoia, murderous thoughts, disappointment with God, doubts in our faith. Too often our prayer belies our actual thoughts and feelings. It tells God what we think God wants to hear. The psalms are more honest.

## Full honesty

To pray with full honesty is a challenge. Kathleen Norris puts it this way: If you pray regularly “there is no way you can do it right. You are not always going to sit up straight, let alone think holy thoughts. You’re not going to wear your best clothes but whatever isn’t in the dirty clothes basket. You come to the Bible’s great ‘book of praise’ through all the moods and conditions of life, and while you feel like hell, you sing anyway. To your surprise, you find that the psalms do not deny your true feelings but allow you to reflect them, right in front of God and everyone.”

Feel-good aphorisms that express how we think we ought to feel are no substitute for the earthy realism of the psalms which express how sometimes we actually do feel. Anyone who would lift mind and heart to God without ever mentioning feelings of bitterness, jealousy, vengeance, hatred, and war, should write slogans for greeting cards and not be anyone’s spiritual advisor.

**“There are times when we feel bitterly disappointed with God and need some way to express this. The psalms give us voice for this”**



# Looking beyond Lent to the work to be done



Photo: The Temptation in the Wilderness, by Briton Riviere

Gn 9:8-15  
Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9  
1 Pt 3:18-22  
Mk 1:12-15

**W**as that it? This weekend, the first Sunday of Lent, we hear Mark's account of Jesus going into the desert before he begins his earthly ministry. But Mark doesn't tell us very much. He mentions Satan and angels, temptations and wild beasts. But that's about it. It almost feels anticlimactic.

## Interplay

Unlike the description of this event in the gospels of Luke and Matthew, Mark leaves out a lot – there's no dialogue, no dramatic interplay between good and evil. Here, it's one short paragraph in the life of Christ – just two sentences, almost finished

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon  
Greg  
Kandra



before it's even begun. How come?

**“The desert is an important part of the journey. But there is much more to come”**

You almost get the sense that Mark knew he had a bigger story to tell, and he wanted to get to it, so that Jesus could quickly set to work proclaiming his message: “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

The 40 days living amid

sand and stones were, in Mark's telling, a brief prelude – a preparation for something more.

And that may be the point.

As we embark on our own time in the desert of Lent, with fasting and almsgiving and prayer, maybe there is a quiet but insistent message here for all of us.

The desert is an important part of the journey. But there is much more to come.

## Mystery

Our own days in the Lenten desert are intended to draw us closer to the mystery of God's love for humanity – the sacrifice and suffering he experienced for our sake – and to make us pray more deeply, give more generously, live more intentionally and humbly. It is nothing less than a time to experience

more deeply our ongoing conversion as Catholic Christians.

So, we do without in order to reflect on what we need to do with.

**“As Scripture reminds us at the very beginning of this time: the kingdom of God is at hand. What are we going to do about it?”**

What can we do with the time we have been given?

What can we do with the blessings in our lives?

What can we do with our hearts, our talents, our resources?

As Scripture reminds us at the very beginning of

this time: the kingdom of God is at hand. What are we going to do about it?

Christ's first command in this gospel passage should sound familiar; a lot of us hear it on Ash Wednesday, as our heads are bowed and our brows are marked. It was also the cry of John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. “Repent!”

## Repent

It's a word to awaken our hearts and stir our consciences. Repent! These days should challenge us to ask how we can do that, and how we can do it better.

These are days we need to use constructively, to reconnect with the very heart of the Gospel and to rediscover the two great commandments – loving God and loving our neighbour. We give up, so we can give. Among other things, we come to

rediscover the poverty in our own lives and souls and seek to alleviate the poverty in the lives of others.

In Mark's gospel, the desert is more than a destination, or a block of time on the calendar. And the same could be said of Lent. It is an opportunity to plan for the next part of the journey. It is where we seek to reform our lives and reshape our priorities in the prayerful hope that when we leave the parched landscape we will be stronger, healthier, holier – ready to embrace and celebrate the blessing of Easter.

This Sunday, we notice what Mark doesn't say. But there's a reason for that. Jesus had work to do.

And, it turns out, so do we.

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



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Hope, encouragement and overcoming addiction

**S**ome radio shows I listen to in the line of duty, some I actually enjoy, and it's great when a show ticks both of these boxes.

I really enjoy a relatively new feature on **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk Monday-Friday) – it's the daily 'Afternoon Update' at 4pm when presenter Kieran Cuddihy chews the cud with two commentators, poring over the main stories of the day and some quirky ones as well.

Last Friday they fastened onto a criticism by Fr Declan McNerney from Co. Galway of our Eurovision entry. The performer Bambi Thug is 'non-binary' and we heard a recording of Fr McNerney's sermon, with him saying he didn't care about people's orientation but resented having it "slammed in my face". He has been much criticised for this in certain quarters.

Journalist Valerie Cox thought the story sounded like a *Father Ted* script but didn't seem to have a big problem with it – he was after all a Catholic priest speaking to a Catholic congregation that was there by choice. She also thought the song in question was "a frightful representation ... a dreadful song".

Another journalist Gina London, was more critical, taking issue as much, if not more, with the tone as distinct from the substance. She thought this wasn't the way for the Church to increase



Jonathan Roumie as Jesus in *The Chosen*, who spoke to Wendy Grace of Spirit Radio, says Jesus' message of hope is badly needed in today's media landscape.

numbers, wasn't inclusive enough as she believed the love of God required.

The subject of the upcoming referenda also came up and it was noted that in an *The Irish Times* survey, while most were likely to vote YesYes, the poll also showed that the more people were informed, the more likely they were to vote NoNo.

As often happens, both contributors were in favour of 'Yes' votes. On media panels, when several issues are to be discussed it's hard to achieve balance on everything, but at this stage, so relatively close to voting, and with campaigns under way, I would have thought there should have been balance on this issue if it was going to be raised.

This show also featured

an interesting item on a transgender issue. It seems that Park Run movement has decided to drop time and gender rankings – ostensibly to avoid people being put off by over competitiveness.

However, many felt it was because of how sometimes biological men who identified as women were topping the rankings in the women's section. Kieran Cuddihy spoke to Olympic athlete Mara Yamauchi who felt, understandably, that the Park Run self-ID policy was unfair to biological women and she thought that the race categories should be based on sex-at-birth.

She seemed eminently sensible, arguing that in sport and related matters, biological men in general had a

strong competitive advantage and should not be taking part in female categories.

Also on Newstalk, the **Pat Kenny Show** (Monday-Friday) has all week, been covering cocaine addiction. We heard from so many young men whose lives had been severely damaged by this addiction. Fortunately, we also heard from some who had, often on the brink of death, recovered and were now involved in addiction education.

It struck me as madness that we are considering the legalising or de-criminalising of drugs. One of the ex-addicts argued, in fact, for greater punishment for users and dealers. Obviously, he was also an admirable advertisement for medical and

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday, February 18, 1.15pm**

Claire McCollum meets Christians putting faith into action to care for the environment in different ways. Hymns celebrate the beauty of God's creation, including a performance from the Eden Project in Cornwall.

#### FILM: FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

**BBC Two Sunday, February 18, 1.40pm, also BBC Four Thursday, February 22, 10.05pm**

In pre-revolutionary Russia, a poor Jewish peasant must contend with marrying off his three daughters while anti-Semitic sentiment threatens his home. Frequently he talks things out with God.

#### MY COUNTRY, MY FAITH: IRELAND

**EWTN Friday, February 23, 10.30pm**

Fr Owen Gorman and his guest, Catherine Wiley, talk about the Catholic Grandparents Association.

rehab intervention.

Back to enjoyable media, **The Chosen** is a hugely popular TV drama series based on the life of Jesus, and recently the first two episodes of Season 4 landed in cinemas. For **Mornings with Wendy** (Spirit Radio, Friday) Victoria Johnston spoke to Jonathan Roumie, the actor who plays Jesus.

He feels the role to be both a privilege and a responsibility, and finds he is well settled into the role now. In the modern media landscape he believes people need stories of hope and encouragement, and Jesus is the ultimate hope and encouragement.

The life of former Taoiseach John Bruton was an

encouragement to genuine political leadership and his funeral received welcome and extensive coverage on the RTÉ News channel – a dignified event for State and Church.

Finally, it's always worth emphasising that religion and science are complementary rather than conflicting. We were reminded of this on **Witness** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday) when presenter Siobhán Garrihan spoke to Vatican astronomer and Jesuit Bro. Guy J. Consolmagno. He had an infectious and cheerful enthusiasm for both religious faith and science – another one for your listening back list.



Pat O'Kelly

# Music

## Centenary of a number of composers' births and deaths

**I**recently mentioned 2024 as a year for remembering the centenary of a number of composers' births or deaths. One such is Charles Villiers Stanford who was born in Dublin's Herbert Street on September 30, 1852 and died in London on 29 March, 1924.

### Ideals of Brahms

Stanford's music is akin to the romantic ideals of Brahms with whom he was a personal friend – they met in Bonn in 1873 – and also a dedicated devotee.

His Clarinet Concerto, dating from 1904, was heard at the NCH earlier this month while his Second Piano Concerto forms part of the NSO's programme there tomorrow –

February 16 – and at Waterford's SETU Arena on Saturday 17th.

### Carol McGonnell

The Clarinet Concerto brought the return of soloist Carol McGonnell to her native Dublin from New York where she is part of the clarinet faculty in the world-renowned Juilliard School of Music. Her performance was one of decided virtuosity as well as natural beauty.

With her constantly seamless phrasing Ms McGonnell conveyed natural grace and charm while the NSO, under Estonian conductor Mihhail Gerts, was no less sympathetic in its support. Here was musicianship of an ethereal quality all round.



Carol McGonnell

Stanford's 2nd Piano Concerto has a deeply persuasive champion in Finghin Collins who chose the piece for his BBC Proms debut at London's

Royal Albert Hall in 2008. He has since recorded the concerto with considerable aplomb and dash for Claves on CD C1101.

Like Stanford's Clarinet Concerto his 2nd Piano Concerto comes steeped in a richly romantic wash.

### Ann Murray

Another Dublin-born artiste, mezzo Ann Murray, also returned to her native city to receive the latest in the NCH's Lifetime Achievement Awards on January 30. It was a deserved honour for one of our signal musicians.

However, for me the event, which drew a relatively small house, was a bit of 'a damp squib'. Seated casually in armchairs, MC/compère Seán

Rocks chatted with Ms Murray, whose career abroad has been far more extensive than many realise. From my usual balcony vantage point I heard little of it.

The music was principally Handel and Mozart, composers with whom Ann Murray has a particular affinity, performed by mainly young singers but whose connections to the diva were unclear. Persian-Canadian counter-tenor Cameron Shahbazi was totally engaging in an aria from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* while established tenor Robin Tritschler was intensely expressive in 'Where ere you walk' from *Semele*. Pianist Dearbhla Collins supplied various accompaniments, as did NSO members directed

by Peter Whelan.

Ann Murray, who holds an honorary doctorate from the NUI and a Bavarian Order of Merit award, is an honorary Dame Commander of the British Empire.

For those with a preference for chamber music, particularly the string quartet, then their appetites should be well sated at the NCH over the weekend Saturday/Sunday February 24/25. A series of eight events over the two days brings the visiting Carducci, Pavel Haas, Solas, Belcea and Modigliani ensembles in music by Smetana, Beethoven, Frank Bridge, Mendelssohn, Ravel and Dvorák among others. Check the NCH website – nch.ie – for details.



# BookReviews

## Reaching out to a troubled community more essential than ever



The sick, crippled and anguished waiting along the road for Jesus to pass, from an 1880s painting by JJ Tissot.

**Pastoral care for Loneliness: A New Apostolate,**  
by Matthew Fforde  
(Gracewing, £9.99)

Peter Costello

Sometimes a reviewer has to ask themselves, following the changing events of the days, whether some books deserve to be noticed again, to prevent them getting lost in the flood tide of new books which seem so often to carry away good books, only to wash up on the polluted beaches of the internet 'best sellers' that surely not many people would want to read.

### Publishers

This is especially true of smaller publications from specialised publishers. Last autumn this present title was indeed noticed, but at that time of the year the crush of 'books for the holiday' often casts small items into the shadows.

Matthew Fforde is the author of *Desocialisation: The Crisis of Post Modernity* (Gabriel Communications, 2009), which began the Cath-

olic social project to which this pamphlet belongs.

**“What brings the matter into closed focus is the seeming rash of couples being found dead in their isolated homes, dead by their own volition”**

I thought at the time that the book suffered from his too tight focus on a certain section of English Catholicism – and by English I mean English and not a synonym for British.

What he was appealing for was the excellent idea of a new Catholic apostolate of social care; but I wondered if those already active in this field, were not doing what should be done.

I felt that a wider social base was needed for what he was suggesting, not something just worked in the Catholic section of the community, but across the whole of society.

What brings the matter into closed focus is the seeming rash of couples being found

dead in their isolated homes, dead by their own volition. But even worse the remains of neighbours being found after months and even years dead in their own homes, which the social services have in the end to break into.

How often is it reported that the old man was 'loner', polite enough, but not one for company. How often do the neighbours say they thought he had gone off to supposed relatives in England.

Passing through many cities and towns, and even through country lanes, one sees houses closed up. One has to wonder about them. For other reasons, as we know, houses should not just lie empty in a housing crisis.

### Desocialised

Indeed, we do seem to have become desocialised in a very strange way. The fault is not the neighbours. There was a time when the parish clergy saw to it that they knew who lived along the streets and by roads of their parishes.

They compiled a *Liber Status Animarum*, a small book in which house by house the names of the families, the

details of the marriages, and other details were documented.

**“Nowadays we respect people's privacy, even to the extent of letting them die in the privacy of their own isolation”**

This is astonishing material that one cannot see any parish servant these days keeping.

The little registers have long passed into history; though I was surprised that some historians were unaware of their existence. If today such data were kept on a computer it would be officially regulated.

So nowadays we respect people's privacy, even to the extent of letting them die in the privacy of their own isolation. And society as a whole is the worst for it.

Read what Matthew Fforde has to say, and think about it, even act upon it. Something has indeed changed in society, and not for the best. It is not, of course, the Catholic community that needs an answer, but the whole of society.

Peter Costello



## A private reckoning of life today



Catholic novelist  
Lucy Beckett

**A Late Finding,**  
a novel by Lucy Beckett  
(Gracewing, £20.00 /  
€24.00)

Peter Costello

We seem to live in a time where Catholic culture has passed out of general public discourse, especially in fiction. The days of Fr Benson, Belloc, Chesterton, Waugh, Graham Greene and others are lost in the past.

Yet there must be a readership out there of people with a love of rereading, a true delight in the joys of fiction, but who find most of what is published inimical to them. Perhaps Lucy Beckett may be the answer to their needs, not to mention their prayers.

Lucy Beckett, we are told, is a novelist, historian and literary critic. She grew up in Yorkshire, was educated at Cambridge University, and with her husband, the musicologist John Warrack, has lived back in Yorkshire for nearly 50 years.

She taught for many years at Ampleforth College, and has written a number of books of different kinds. Her novels, however, though informed by her own life, are fictions.

She is best known for her historical novels, set in periods as different as the English Reformation, Wei-

mar Germany, the borderlands of Poland and Russia in World War One, France during the years of the Algerian war: all places and times that present great challenges to Catholics.

In *Grieving of Other Days* she provides an account of her current leading character Clare Wilson during Covid days. One of her readers, by the way, commented that: "The passages describing the central character at Mass and at prayer, and her thoughts about her faith, are beautifully written and most moving."

This new novel continues the life of Clare, a mingling of a Catholic consciousness with the actualities of the day.

Still affected by the loss of a child, Clare has just lost her oldest friend, but into this grim world there comes a new friendship with a man from the Balkans, and its recent war-torn life.

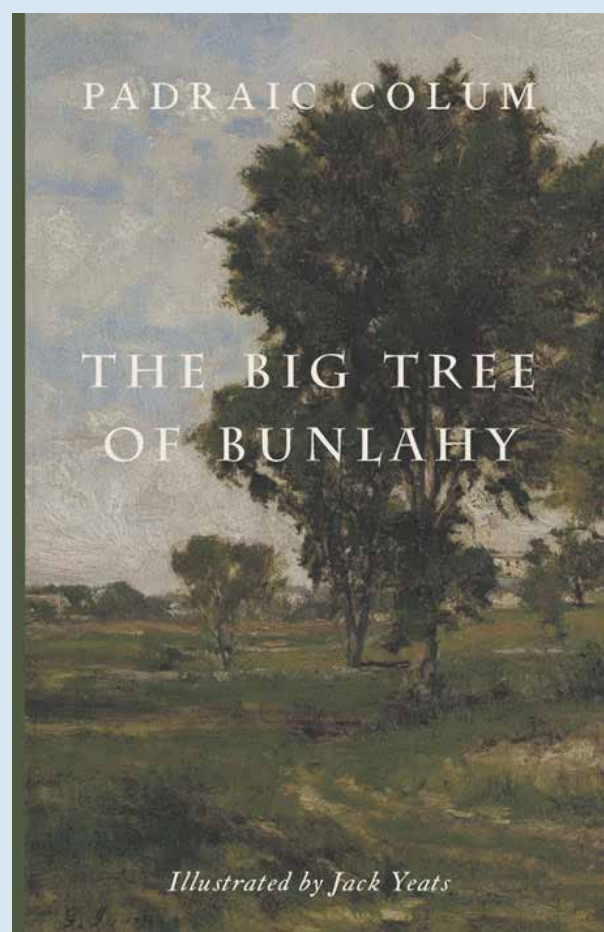
The novel comes with an encomium by Piers Paul Read, himself a writer that readers in Ireland should know more about. Though Lucy Beckett deals with some anguishing passages, she has also a great resilience founded in her faith which carries her through.

For a change of pace, and insight uncommon these days, Lucy Beckett is well worth seeking out.



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.

## The treasure house that is Cluny Books



The cover of a Padraic Colum novel from Cluny Media

Peter Costello

Many readers who find many of today's novels present them with a problem, will find many titles that they long to reread (which is the real pleasure of all reading), or have heard of, but which never come their way, which are hard to find in libraries, will be delighted by what they can find in the Cluny catalogue.

Cluny Media are based in Rhode Island and have a carefully conceived and carried programme to restore to circulation a long catalogue, now some 300 titles long, which are carefully edited and designed. The covers are especially striking.

But these books are hard to find on this side of the Atlantic. So be careful in ordering that the postage and packing does not come as a surprise to you.

Though the name of the company invokes the Continental monastic tradition, the logo of a scribe at work with his cat at his feet is directly derived from our own tradition and the famous 9th Century poem of 'Pangur Bán'. Among their titles are some very interesting Irish revivals, such as the works of Padraic Colum and Alice Curtayne.

Many of their titles due to the history of United States copyright law are in the public domain in the United States. But the company itself will better answer the individual queries of readers.

One of their staff tells me in fact that: "We are able to fulfill orders placed on our website from Ireland and the UK via an Amazon facility in the UK. Orders from across Europe are printed at different print-on-demand facilities so we are not actually importing any commercial inventory."

"Folks may also go through Amazon.co.uk directly however will miss out on our discount offers and can't see our catalogue as a whole as they can on our website."

To learn more about Cluny Media, the books they have in print, and their publishing agenda, visit [info@clunymedia.com](mailto:info@clunymedia.com). You will be glad you did.

## The World of Books

### Comments on the passing scene

# The long troubled history of Gaza, Palestine's oldest city

Peter Costello

Gaza, so much in the news recently, is one of the world's oldest cities, though one might not believe this from what one reads or hears about it today in the media.

Gaza, which lies 50 miles or so south-south-west of Jerusalem, was in antiquity a great Philistine city and fortress, often mentioned in the Scriptures.

The original ancient city is thought by some scholars to have been at the mouth of the Wadi Guhzzeh, a site affected by malaria in season.

The site on Tell-el-Ajjul, was dug by the pioneering British archaeologist Flinders Petrie, who revealed that it had been occupied from the Neolithic stone through the Bronze Age.

But this was abandoned and the city moved to a place three miles from the sea. Here the trade routes from Egypt, Petra and Southern Arabia had their only practical route to the north from Egypt into Syria to Damascus and onwards Mesopotamia.

### Classical

This was the route of frankincense and myrrh, for which there was an immense demand in ancient and classical times. The city was then a magnificent sight by all accounts, and was strongly fortified.

The oldest site in the city is the Tomb of St Porphyrius (347-420), who established Christianity in the city.

There is also what is traditionally said to be the tomb of Samson in the Abu al'Azm. His date is uncertain, but belongs to the period between the hero Joshua and the emergence of monarchy among the Jews; but like so many things in the early pages of the Bible his historicity is doubted by many scholars.

But he nevertheless remains a Jewish folk hero, ready to destroy himself in wiping out his enemies.

William Foxwell Albright, in his classic book *From Stone Age to Christianity; Monotheism and the Historical process* (first published in 1940 by Johns Hopkins Press, but later brought up to date in 1957) describes ancient Gaza in a chapter, 'When Israel was a Child' – that is to say, the original Israel.



Gaza in the late 1850s, photographed by the pioneering photographer Francis Frith

Copies are readily available online; so though outdated in some respects, it remains an essential book, especially on how history and theology is constructed in the Middle East.

**“The crusaders in their turn built another fortress there in 1149, which resisted the advances of Saladin from Egypt until 1187”**

It is one of those books which reveal in detail just how complicated and involved the history of Palestinian region, as seen by the archaeologists and scientific historians.

But alas many who write and speak about the history of Palestine speak from what might be called, on all sides, 'a prophetic point of view'.

This was the largest city in Palestine and Syria, eclipsing even Jerusalem. In the Bible it had figured prominently in the story of Sampson (Judges 16:3). It was seized by Alexander the Great 332 BC.

The crusaders in their turn built another fortress there in 1149, which resisted the advances of Saladin from Egypt until 1187. It was here that the Mamluks were finally over-come by the Turks who went on into Egypt and the Sudan.

The town, which lay about three miles from the coast, was captured by Napoleon, on his empire-creating expedition in his turn, in 1799.

But Napoleon was forced to retreat, and Egypt and Gaza came under British influence, eventuating in a protectorate of a sort which lasted down to Egypt gaining independence in 1922, after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after the Great War.

There were two battles between the British and Turks under Allenby on his way north to Damascus.

But the modern town by about 1900 was the seat of a Greek Orthodox and of an Armenian bishop. It then had a population of a mere 10,000 or so people.

### Prosperity

In the following decades Gaza returned to prosperity, partly due to its barley growing. The surrounding countryside was very fertile, and produced all kinds of fruits, pomegranates, oranges, dates and flowers, which were in great demand as far away as Constantinople.

By Victorian times there were some 500 looms at work producing cotton. The Arabs also produced large amounts of ashes used in soap making, though this was a declining industry due to the competition of imports from elsewhere.

Indeed Gaza in the eyes of one commentator in 1841 was little more than a large village. So it seemed there was the making of a truly prosperous community; but social and political turmoil since the 1950s have prevented an active local economy based on exports coming into existence and thriving.

At this time Gaza was a part

of Palestine. With three centres Gaza, Khan Younis, and Rafah. This are now an essential part of the so-called 'Gaza Strip' which was created as a result of the armistice between Egypt and Israel in 1949 – it was the only part of the mandate left in Egyptian hands and the ceasefire.

But it was never made a part of Egypt. The Muslim hope then was that Gaza could be made the centre of a Palestinian State.

Though its maintenance suited the Egyptians, as it prevented Palestine refugees pouring down into Egypt, much as those who had moved across the river Jordan into Transjordan were maintained in 'camps', rather than settled.

However, between 1948 and the time of the Suez crisis it saw a great deal of fighting between Egypt and Israel. Israel drove the Egyptians out of Gaza and Sinai in November 1956.

The UN acted to restore the Gaza Strip to Egyptian administration, and this was the situation when the war of 1967 broke out, from which the present crisis derives.

So it seems that Gaza, an ancient city placed on important cultural crossroads, continues to see conflict. But its history demonstrates just how complicated and interconnected the peoples and cultures of the region are. Gaza deserves the peace it once had, back in the 1850s, but which has been denied to it since the 1950s.



# Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4027 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)

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– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912



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## The Irish Catholic

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# Leisure time


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One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

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[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)





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## Crossword

Gordius 650

- Across**  
1 & 34a Definitive Biblical reference to a quotation (7,3,5)  
6 Former Iranian ruler's title (4)  
10 Drive-in lodgings (5)  
11 Head teacher (9)  
12 Portable explosive (7)  
15 Cowboy competi- tion (5)  
17 Female child (4)  
18 Chamber (4)  
19 Went out like the tide (5)  
21 Item of furniture, a stand with open shelving (7)  
23 Songbird (5)  
24 Indistinct image (4)  
25 Troubles (4)  
26 Peruses (5)  
28 A frame for climb- ing plants (7)  
33 Catalan city, home of Gaudi's La Sagrada Familia basilica (9)  
34 See 1 across  
35 Slippery creatures (4)  
36 It adds richness to soil (10)
- Down**  
1 Stay in a tent (4)  
2 Part of the day fol- lowing lunch (9)  
3 The claw of a bird of prey (5)  
4 Speedy (5)  
5 Cuticle (4)  
7 Aspired (5)  
8 The sacramental making of a priest (4,6)  
9 Shade of red (7)  
13 Curved structure (4)  
14 One who is self- preoccupied (7)  
16 More suitable or desirable (10)  
20 Game played on a snooker table (9)  
21 Speak sotto voce (7)  
22 Flow sluggishly (4)  
27 Spring month (5)  
29 Respond to a stimulus (5)  
30 Even, not sloped (5)  
31 No score in tennis (4)  
32 Ale (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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26		27					28	29		30				
						31								32
33										34				
35						36								

### SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 8

GORDIUS No. 649

**Across** - 1 Rack of lamb 6 Show 10 Paris 11 Nocturnal 12 Decline 15 Stays 17 Suds 18 Oath 19 Elver 21 Floated 23 Terse 24 Once 25 Aunt 26 Rivet 28 Odyssey 33 Dandelion 34 Tenor 35 Ever 36 Adam and Eve

**Down** - 1 Ripe 2 Carpenter 3 Ousel 4 Linen 5 Mock 7 Henna 8 Wall Street 9 Guessed 13 Idol 14 Esparto 16 Footbridge 20 Vengeance 21 Feather 22 Easy 27 Venue 29 Denim 30 Satan 31 Wind 32 Free

### Sudoku Corner

Easy

5				3			9	
	1				7			4
	7	6		5				
1	9							
7			2		6			9
						4	5	
				4		2	5	
6			5				1	
	4			1				8

Hard

1		8		5	9			2
9			4		6			
		7		1				
5							7	
	1	2				5	4	
	7							1
				4		6		
			1		2			7
7			6	3		4		9

Last week's Easy 518

4	9	6	3	2	7	5	1	8
3	8	1	4	5	9	6	2	7
7	5	2	1	6	8	4	3	9
9	2	4	6	8	1	3	7	5
1	7	8	5	3	4	9	6	2
6	3	5	9	7	2	1	8	4
5	6	7	2	9	3	8	4	1
2	4	9	8	1	6	7	5	3
8	1	3	7	4	5	2	9	6

Last week's Hard 518

9	3	6	4	2	7	8	1	5
5	8	2	1	9	6	3	7	4
7	1	4	5	8	3	9	6	2
1	9	8	2	6	5	4	3	7
4	5	3	7	1	9	2	8	6
2	6	7	8	3	4	1	5	9
8	2	9	6	5	1	7	4	3
3	4	5	9	7	8	6	2	1
6	7	1	3	4	2	5	9	8



## Notebook

Fr John Harris OP



# No Gloria during Lent

**The old Irish saying** warns us that “you’ll never miss your mother ‘til she’s buried beneath the grave”. During Lent the Church drops the Gloria from the Mass but it returns with great gusto at Easter. Last month I wrote about the ‘Silence of God’ and how this can be a great challenge to our faith. I remember reading the life of Charles de Foucauld and how when he found life difficult, the darkness of faith enwrapping him, he would pray the Joyous Mysteries of the Rosary. In my own life I find two prayers that help me through the darkness and doubt, the Creed and the Gloria. The Creed is an act of faith, which cuts through the darkness and doubts. The Gloria brings me into a different play and a thus a changed relationship with God, that of adoration.

In the act of adoration we



acknowledge that we are not God and that he is greater than anything we can ultimately understand in this life. Pope Benedict XVI speaking of the Greek understanding of adoration said: “It refers to the gesture of submission, the recognition of God as our true measure.”

## Expression

In the Gloria we are given the words by the Church in which to raise our minds to the full expression of our worship of God as Our

heavenly Father as “we praise you; we adore you; we glorify you; we give you thanks for your great glory”. This prayer brings us beyond our having to solve all the problems of the world and life and to be aware of our true relationship with God. The words of the prayer carry us to a place where modern humanity does not want to go. But it is to that place that the true believer must go.

Pope Benedict XVI speaks also about the Latin word for adoration as *ad-oratio* – mouth to mouth contact, a kiss, an embrace, and hence, ultimately love. “Submission becomes union, because he to whom we submit is love. In this way submission acquires a meaning, because it does not impose anything on us from the outside, but liberates us deep within.” Christian prayer always brings us to the person of Christ and the Gloria moves on, as it were, from the father to Christ, as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He who alone is the Holy One, alone the Lord, who sits in glory at the right side of

the Father praying for us, having mercy on us.

## Liturgy

Before “the silence of God” we have the words of the liturgy to give us words, to helping us to believe in love even when God seems absent. Even though there will be no Gloria in the liturgy during the 40 days of Lent it will continue to be a light for me and source of deep solace and hope.

## Our Lady of Lourdes and the rosary

During the apparitions in Lourdes, St Bernadette said that as she prayed the rosary the Lady threaded the beads through her fingers and bowed her head slightly at the Gloria. When I am praying the rosary my mind wanders, I bring it back by remembering that as I am praying the rosary, Mary is also with me threading her beads through her fingers with her loving gaze, just as at Lourdes when she prayed with Bernadette.

## 800 years in Ireland

Last Sunday we the Irish Dominicans marked the arrival of the Order to Ireland in 1224. The Master of the Dominican Order, Fr Gerard Timoner OP, celebrated the Mass in St Saviour's church Dominick St. Archbishop Dermot Farrell was present as were the provincials of our fellow mendicant orders: Franciscans, Capuchins, Augustine and Carmelites. The provincial of the Jesuits also joined us. We had a packed church. I am using this column to thank all those who were with us last Sunday for making the journey and in a particular way I want to thank all those who organised buses from the different priories around the country.



**“The words of the prayer carry us to a place where modern humanity does not want to go. But it is to that place that the true believer must go”**



## A bishop in southern India looks to The Little Way Association for vital aid for many suffering from flooding

Bishop Antonysamay 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.

### We need your help to provide food supplies, protective clothing, blankets, and nutritional supplements

“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.

### Please do help us to aid the recovery of the affected families and individuals, helping them to rebuild their lives.

“Your generosity, dear Little Way donors, will undoubtedly contribute to the alleviating of suffering and the restoration of hope in the affected communities. May God bless you.”

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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

## You can help repair a Mission Chapel

The Little Way Association has a long history of providing humble places of worship for far-flung parishes in mission countries. Nature can take its toll on these simple buildings, and we receive requests from priests for help with repairs.

We humbly ask that you allocate some of your kind giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities.

## MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

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